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An Exploration of the Influences of Literature Circles on Secondary Student Reading
Level

by

Tina Hamilton

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

An Exploration of the Influences of Literature Circles on Secondary Student Reading

Level

by


Tina Hamilton

This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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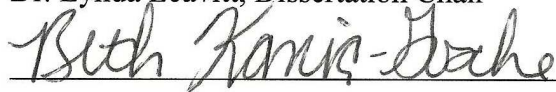
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Tina Hamilton

Signature:  Date: 10-4-2013

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Abstract

Literacy is a national concern in the United States. Many students are graduating from high school across the U.S. lacking the skills needed to be a proficient reader. The lack of college readiness skills in reading causes these students to be placed in remedial classes on the collegiate level. School systems that recognize the high percentage of students entering high school who cannot read at their grade level can implement early interventions and provide professional development opportunities for teachers in order to increase reading achievement. Due to the culture created at the secondary level that held teachers responsible for teaching content, covering the mandated curriculum, and making adequate yearly progress, instructing students while utilizing best practices in reading instruction often was not a practical consideration. The traditional approach to literacy is not enough. It is time for teachers to acknowledge that literacy in middle and high school must be taught across all contents to lay the groundwork for literacy skills that students need to thrive in college. This study explored the effect of implementing Literature Circles in a secondary Communication Arts classroom on reading comprehension. While extensive research on Literature Circles exists, most of it focuses on their use at the elementary and middle school levels, with few studies investigating their implementation at the secondary level. However, the research establishes Literature Circles as a proven practice to assist students in making gains in reading skills. The sample population consisted of five 10th grade classes participating in Literature Circles and one 10th grade class as a control group. By implementing Literature Circles at the secondary level, the results of the data did not support the hypothesis that secondary students reading comprehension increased through participation in Literature Circles. While this study did

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not prove statistically any significant gains from participation in Literature Circles, observable gains occurred through the higher level of student questioning and students responding with evidence cited from the text. By implementing a classroom infrastructure that supported Literature Circles, students collaborated effectively about a text and used textual support to justify their responses to questions and to derive meaning from the text. The research from this study will add to the current body of knowledge regarding the use of Literature Circles at the secondary level.

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Chapter 1: Overview

Background of the Study

Literacy is a national concern; for this reason, Gewertz (2010) claimed that many leaders in education believe that a “literacy revolution” is needed in order to prepare students to tackle the more complex material that they will experience in college, as well as to meet the demands of future careers. The reading scores on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test revealed that 67% of the nation’s fourth graders and 75% of the nation’s eighth graders scored at the basic level; in 2011 these scores remained unchanged. These results indicated that the majority of students would enter high school reading one or more levels below the ninth grade level. In the face of Senate Bill 319, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, educators are sensing the pressure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) by producing students who can read at a proficient level. This researcher believes that meeting the federal mandate expectation that 100% of all students exhibit reading proficiency by the year 2014 will be difficult.

In the 2006 article “Graduates Can’t Master College Text” by Manzo it was noted that students be on a proficient/advanced reading track in eighth and 10th grade, but by graduation they will not likely be prepared to master the complex reading tasks they will encounter in college. According to Manzo (2006), it is a known fact that reading is a critical core skill, and ACT makes the case that better reading instruction and rigorous standards for high school reading needs to be put in place. This information is based on the study, “Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Reading” by ACT (2006) which highlighted that only 51 % of students taking the ACT were

college ready. Also based on data from NAEP, this decrease in reading scores at the high school level shows that the problem is widespread across the nation.

One step toward meeting this expectation was the development of Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. These standards were developed under the direction of the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to address the lack of proficient readers and ensure that all of this nation's students are being held to the same expectations regarding reading. Forty-six states have adopted these standards, with the exception of Alaska, Texas, Virginia, and Nebraska (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2012). Amos (2013) stated that reading has been declining in the nation for two decades. However, Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) might put an end to the decline. Amos (2013) stated the standards for ELA are changing not only what students are reading but how they are reading. Fiction will no longer dominate the ELA curriculum on the elementary level under Common Core. There will be a 50-50 split, 50% nonfiction and 50% fiction. The expectation for secondary students is that 70% of their reading is nonfiction and 30% fiction. Although Amos (2013) claimed that this may appear to be a drastic shift, it is a shift that will put students on track for college or career texts. Teachers are going to have to challenge students to become more engaged with the text in order to glean meaning. The shift in ELA curriculum should improve NAEP and ACT reading scores. The 2009 NAEP reading data and the development of Common Core Standards prompted President Obama's administration to make the decision to fund research to explore how reading instruction is delivered in the classroom, initiating its Reading for Understanding Research Initiative (O'Reilly, Sabatini, Bruce, Pillariseth, &

McCormick, 2012). This researcher believes that the federal government's action sends the message to teachers that literacy is an issue that must be addressed in order to prepare young people to meet the arduous demands of college texts and the 21st century workplace.

Statement of the Problem

The Nation's Report Card (NAEP) clearly shows that action must be taken to address the lack of proficient readers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Gewertz (2010) claimed that after reviewing the final report of the Carnegie Corporation of New York's Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, experts are demanding more sound literacy practices due to the low level of skill demonstrated by students on national tests. The experts are urging school leaders in their capstone report "Time to Act" that they reorganize their districts to make literacy the cornerstone of its work (Gewertz, 2010). According to Gewertz (2010), school systems must engage students in reading using the Common Core Standards. The traditional approach to literacy is not enough. It is time for teachers to acknowledge that literacy in middle and high school must be taught across all contents to lay the groundwork for literacy skills that students need to thrive in college.

The problem is that we content teachers often don't really know what to do about this problem. With class sizes too large, with killer curriculum driven by higher and higher state standards, and with too many courses to prep, helping the struggling readers and writers in any class is tough. (Lewin, 2003, p. 1)

According to Tovani (2000), “Middle and high school literacy instruction is at a crossroads. Tomorrow’s citizens face greater reading demands than ever before” (p. 110).

Due to the culture created at the secondary level that held teachers responsible for teaching content, covering the mandated curriculum, and making adequate yearly progress, instructing students while utilizing best practices in reading instruction often was not a practical consideration. “Teachers have never been under more pressure. Pressure to perform. Pressure to cover curriculum. Pressure to meet standards. Pressure to ensure high scores on standardized tests” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 13). The content specialist attitude of secondary teachers, which Tovani (2000) defined as their “focus on content” (p. 20), causes many secondary teachers to fail to consider as a priority any material outside of their content area. This ultimately means that secondary teachers believe that their first priority is to ensure that the content is taught and that anything not pertaining to the content of their course constitutes a mere distraction. Such a belief ignores the need for secondary students to truly comprehend and make meaning of text. Robb (2003) argued, “If we (teachers) don’t change our instruction, we perpetuate the terrible cycle of ‘losing’ students” (p. 17). This ultimately means that instruction plays a key role when working with students to assist them in developing the reading skills necessary to manipulate texts and construct meaning.

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) posited that in order to understand struggling readers, educators must reflect back to when they were students to determine the various instructional methods that helped them to understand a text; they then can take that information back to their own classrooms to help their students make meaning of text.

According to Robb (2003), “If we want students to improve their reading and thinking, then teachers in grades 3 and above should help students construct meaning by modeling and teaching strategies and techniques that support learning to read while reading to learn” (p. 19). Some secondary educators would argue, however, that if students have not yet acquired the skills necessary to comprehend text by the time they finish elementary school, then upon reaching high school, their chances of achieving academic success will more than likely be limited severely. Goodwin (2011) supported this sentiment, stating, “Teachers often observe that academic problems surface in the upper grades as a result of faulty approaches in the early grades” (p. 89). Schmoker (1999) also supported the notion that acquiring skills in the early years is important, stating that, “In the lower grades, reading means acquiring the basic skills of decoding and comprehension. After students learn the basics of constructing text, they need to learn the art of mining the text for meaning” (p. 102). In other words, this is the difference between simply learning how to read and reading to learn. Lemov (2010) suggested that every teacher is a teacher of reading and that teachers should make it a priority to help students unlock the meaning of text because once they can read for meaning, they can do anything. Therefore, secondary teachers should work to ensure that they weave literacy instruction into the curriculum (Tovani, 2000).

According to the learning pyramid hierarchy developed by the National Training Laboratories (NTL) for Applied Behavioral Science in the 1960s in Bethel, Maine, there is a 50% retention rate of learned material when students participate in a discussion group, 75% when they learn by doing, and 90% when they teach each other (Wood, 2004). Literature Circles are small, temporary discussion groups of students who are

reading the same work of literature and who each agree to take specific responsibilities or roles during discussion sessions, include all three of these components (Daniels, 1994). These circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting. When a circle finishes a book, the members decide on ways to showcase their literary work for the rest of the class. Daniels (1994) stated that collaborative learning is an educational best practice that can increase achievement when students are allowed to participate in cooperative structures within the classroom. Literature Circles can serve as vehicles to assist students in progressing in reading due to their structure, which allows students to think critically, have a voice, and engage in a meaningful reading experience (Lin, 2004, p. 23). According to Daniels (1994), “Literature Circles turn reading instruction upside down in almost every dimension” (p. 6).

Background of Research Site

The researcher chose to address Literature Circles at the secondary level as a best practice in reading instruction. According to the Texas Education Agency (1996), research-based reading instruction allows children opportunities to both understand the building blocks and expand their use of language, both oral and written. “In literature circles, students are able to enhance reading skills, learn from each other, gain self-confidence, improve oral and written communication, discover important themes that run through literature, and have fun in a socially interactive environment” (Pitman, 1997, p. 19). The topic for this study evolved because the setting where the researcher is employed as a Teaching and Learning Facilitator needed a pathway to interweave literacy instruction into the Communication Arts classrooms in order to give students the

opportunity to delve deeper into texts and learn to manipulate them in order to glean meaning.

Based on her experience as a former secondary English teacher and Reading Specialist, the researcher believes that teaching students how to read and decipher text often is not a priority for secondary teachers in order to progress through the district's curriculum. At the school that served as the study site, the state assessment data aligned with the researcher's observations of a Communication Arts class; for the most part, students followed the lead of the teacher, who shouldered the responsibility for discussing the text thoroughly, which created more of a teacher-centered classroom. The students were not accountable for their learning, which in turn made students passive learners, because they did not have to work at understanding the text, because the teacher relieved them of that responsibility by giving them the information they needed to know. A review of the school's Communication Arts data from the past six years revealed that students scoring in the proficient and advanced achievement levels ranked the study site as one of the highest performing high schools in their school district. However, scores plummeted in the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years. Based on the Communication Arts state assessment data and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data, the researcher felt there was a disconnect that existed in the instructional practice at the secondary level. The data revealed that the students needed to take more responsibility for grappling with the text in order to understand the concepts instead of waiting for the teacher to point out pertinent elements. More recently, the school has started making gains and made adequate yearly progress in 2011 and exceeded the state average in the English II End of Course Assessment at the conclusion of this research in 2012.

Reading instruction in the study site's Communication Arts department served as the focus of this research. At the time of the study, the school had 441 enrolled students, 66% of whom were female and 34% male, with an ethnicity breakdown of 73% Black, 22% White, and 5% other. The percentage of students who qualified for free/reduced lunch was 81%. However, it is important to note that the Communication Arts department has had a history of high turnover of teachers due to retirement; these teachers often have been replaced by substitutes who were not designated as highly-qualified candidates, or by teachers who were part of an alternative teaching program. At the time of the study, only two teachers had been members of the department for three consecutive years. Despite the teacher turnover rate in the Communication Arts department, the researcher noticed that teachers took center stage in the classroom and more or less fed students what they needed to know instead of the students having to grapple with the text in order to make meaning. This type of instruction is not a research-based best practice, and the Communication Arts data explicitly indicates that this method is not working. The Texas Education Agency (1996) has stated that research-based reading instruction allows children opportunities to both understand the building blocks and expand their use of language, both oral and written. McMahon and Goatley (1995) claimed that educational reformers are questioning the traditional discourse patterns in the classroom that leaves the student in a passive stance and instead insists that teachers include peer-led groups where students are interacting with each other to put the students in a more active role in their learning (p. 23). "Once students have learned how to read, and move through middle and secondary school, reading is still regarded as a passive act of receiving someone else's meaning" (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 20). The social

interaction that takes place in a Literature Circle is a key component of its success. “To be able to verbalize the content, to listen to other modes of thinking, and to hear other perspectives all contribute to deepening comprehension” (Burns, 1998, p. 126).

Therefore, the researcher felt it necessary to identify a research-based instructional practice in literacy to get the momentum of reading to learn going in the Communication Arts department.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of implementing Literature Circles in a secondary Communication Arts classroom on reading comprehension.

According to Daniels (1994), Literature Circles are small, temporary discussion groups composed of students who are reading the same work of literature and who each have specific responsibilities during discussion sessions. The circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting; when the circle finishes a book, the members decide on a way to showcase their literary work for the rest of the class.

The assessment tool utilized to measure the effect of implementing Literature Circles was the SRI (scholastic reading inventory). The SRI was selected as the assessment tool because it is a research-based assessment of students’ reading comprehension ability and it provides both “criterion-reference and normed-referenced test results” (SRI, 2006b, p. 137). “SRI allows you to determine student reading levels, compare these levels to normative data, and gauge the effectiveness of instruction and/or intervention”(SRI, 2006b, p. 127). This inventory measures a student’s reading level using a Lexile measure, which allows the teacher(s) to chart the student’s growth over time. Also, in 2009 the National Center on Response to Intervention ranked the SRI as a

reliable and valid assessment to measure overall comprehension and as “an effective assessment to:

- Identify struggling readers.
- Apply as a universal screener and monitoring tool.
- Monitor progress toward AYP goals.
- Monitor effectiveness of instruction.
- Establish obtainable and realistic growth goals for students.
- Indicate expected performance on state tests.” (SRI, 2006a, p. 2)

Overview of the Methodology

This study utilized a mixed methodology consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Research Questions

Q1: Does the implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level increase reading comprehension, as measured by Lexile Scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

Hypothesis: There will be a difference in reading comprehension after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Null Hypothesis: There will be no difference in reading comprehension after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Q2: Do secondary students participating in Literature Circles score at a higher reading Lexile on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) than students not participating in Literature Circles?

Hypothesis: There will be a difference in reading Lexile scores after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Null Hypothesis: There will be no difference in the reading Lexile scores after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Q3: Does teacher fidelity of Literature Circle implementation impact reading achievement? (Teacher fidelity refers to teacher participants adhering to the schedule to allow student participants to meet within their Literature Circle groups once per week for 45 minutes.)

Q4: How do teacher observations by and conferences with the primary investigator assist in teacher fidelity of Literature Circles?

Q5: What are the views of secondary Communication Arts student and teacher participants?

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. The findings have limited generalizability because the sample population consisted of 10th grade students and teacher participants from one urban high school in the Midwest where the researcher was employed at the time of the study. The research also was limited to the secondary level, and the findings based on only one diagnostic. The survey given to student and teacher participants is non-standardized and has no reliability data associated with it. Another limitation was the school of study has certain criteria for students to maintain enrollment at the school. This means that Literature Circle student participants may be withdrawn if they fail to

meet the standards of academic progress at the school of study. Those standards are: 2.5 GPA (grade point average), 90% ADA (average daily attendance rate), and no discipline infractions.

In addition to the researcher being employed at the school of study, the study being limited in its scope and enrollment criteria, another limitation of the study is that the researcher did not spend two semesters with the same teacher participant. Although the student participants were the same, teachers have different styles of teaching as well as different class cultures which could possibly impact how the students perceive their participation in Literature Circle groups. Finally, the participant population included students who were receiving some type of intervention by the Title I Reading Intervention teacher, which could affect the results.

Definition of Terms

Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

Set of shared national standards ensuring that students in every state are held to the same level of expectations that students in the world's highest-performing countries are, and that they gain the knowledge and skills that prepare them for success in postsecondary education and in the global arena. (Kendall, 2011, p.

1)

Comprehension: “Comprehension means that readers think not only about what they are reading but about what they are learning” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 15).

Comprehension Strategies: “Good readers use the following 7 Keys to unlock meaning: create mental images, use background knowledge, ask questions, make inferences,

determine the most important ideas or themes, synthesize information, and use ‘fix-up’ strategies” (Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003, p. 5-6).

Construct Meaning: “Building knowledge and promoting understanding” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 15).

End of Course (EOC):

The Missouri Assessment Program assesses students’ progress toward mastery of the Show-Me Standards which are the educational standards in Missouri...

End-of-Course assessments are taken when a student has received instruction on the course-level expectations for an assessment, regardless of grade level.

(Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009, para. 1)

Explicit Instruction: According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007) teachers show kids how think when they read. During this modeling process teachers use a gradual release of responsibility approach (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 20-21).

Literature Circles: According to Daniels (1994), Literature Circles are small, temporary discussion groups of students who are reading the same work of literature and who each agree to take on specific responsibilities during discussion sessions.

Metacognitive Awareness: “to be metacognitive-aware of their own thinking and to use that awareness to strengthen and intensify their understanding of what they read” (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p. 37).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s

Report Card: According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), “It is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas” (para.1).

Professional Learning Community: According to Schmoker (1999), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of teachers in departments, grade levels, and schools that encourage effective, collaborative teamwork and produce results.

Proficient Reader: “Proficient readers know what and when they are comprehending and when they are not comprehending; they can use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or deepen their understanding of a text” (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p. 22).

Reading Achievement: The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) defines reading achievement as, “expectations of student performance in relation to a range of text types and text difficulty and in response to a variety of assessment questions intended to elicit different cognitive processes and reading behaviors.” (para. 1).

Read Aloud: Harvey and Goudvis (2007) cited information by Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, that a read aloud serves many purposes: such as to reassure, entertain, inform, explain, arouse curiosity and inspire (p. 47).

Reading for Meaning: According to Silver, Dewing, and Perini (2012), reading for meaning is “a research-based strategy that helps all readers build the skills that proficient readers use to make sense of challenging texts” (p. 7).

Scaffold: According to Robb (2000), scaffolding during reading is when the teacher provides support of the reading process, before, during and after reading by allowing the students to observe them as they model how a strategy works (p. 84).

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI): “a research-based, computer-adaptive reading assessment program for students in Grades K–12 that measures reading comprehension on the Lexile Framework[®] for Reading” (Scholastic Reading Inventory, n.d., para. 1).

Strategic Learners/Readers: “These are readers who use the thinking and comprehension strategies we describe as tools to enhance understanding and acquire knowledge. They are able to monitor and repair meaning when it is disrupted” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 26).

Struggling Reader: These are “students who read below grade level” and “struggle with or cannot read a textbook written on grade level” (Robb, 2003, p. 16).

Student Accountability: According to Daniels (1994), student accountability occurs when teachers do not take center stage, which allows the students to take charge of their learning by developing questions and topics for discussion.

Teacher Facilitator: “In this classroom structure, the students are the ones making the choices, raising the questions, doing the talking, and making the meaning” (Daniels, 1994, p. 7). Teachers serve only as facilitators of this process.

Summary

The researcher responded to this nation’s poor literacy rates by attempting to increase the effectiveness of literacy instruction through the use of Literature Circles. Although this instructional method is commonly used at the elementary and middle school levels, Daniels (1994) shared how educators have incorporated Literature Circles on the secondary level and even within higher education settings. This study researched the effectiveness of Literature Circles at the secondary level to increase reading achievement. By implementing a classroom infrastructure that supported Literature Circles, students collaborated effectively about a text and used textual support to justify their responses to questions and to derive meaning from the text. The research from this

study will add to the current body of knowledge regarding the use of Literature Circles at the secondary level.

Chapter 2, the review of literature, will highlight how Literature Circles can improve the reading proficiency of students so that they are able to engage with complex texts and meet the challenges of post-secondary education in this dynamic global society. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design for the study. Chapter 4 provides the findings and analyzes the results of the study. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study with suggested recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School systems that recognize the high percentage of students entering high school who cannot read at their grade level can implement early interventions and provide professional development opportunities for teachers in order to increase reading achievement. According to the NAEP (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), 76% of the nation's eighth graders who took the test in 2011 scored at the basic level in reading, which is one point higher than the 2009 NAEP reading scores. These results indicated that the majority of students would enter high school reading one or more levels below the ninth grade level. Furthermore, students entering college had to take remedial reading courses.

Adams' (2011) article in *Education Week* noted a decline in the SAT scores for the class of 2011. Of the 1.65 million graduating seniors, the average SAT scores declined by three points in critical reading, two points in writing, and one point in math due to a lack of both preparedness and English fluency. As a result of the decline, the College Board stated that only about 43% of the class of 2011 who took the SAT "had a good chance of achieving at least a B- average in their first year of college" (Adams, 2011, p. 9) leaving 57% of those students unlikely to fare well academically during their first year of college. In the 2012 article "SAT, ACT: Most High School Kids Lack Skills for College," Marklein stated, "More than half of 2012 high school graduates who took a college entrance exam did not have all of the skills they will need to succeed in college" (para.1). Marklein (2012) cited results from the College Board that reading scores on the national college entrance exams, the ACT and SAT, declined between 2008 and 2012. According to Markelein (2012), the 46 states that have adopted the Common Core State

Standards (which are grounded in literacy) must make it a priority to have those standards in place if they are going to graduate high school students who are equipped with the reading skills necessary for the rigor of college. Stosky (2010) stated, “To remedy the deficiencies in what and how students learn in high school English courses, changes need to be made in our high school and college English departments and our education schools” (p. 25). The researcher believes that if the goal of secondary teachers is to develop students’ understanding of content and prepare them to meet the rigors of post-secondary education, then the current reading crisis must be addressed by implementing a research-based best practice in literacy instruction. Given the scope of this problem, solutions are urgently needed.

One potential solution is Literature Circles. The following literature review explores how implementing Literature Circles can increase reading comprehension at the secondary level. The literature review is based on the history of Literature Circles as well as four common threads that appeared repeatedly throughout the literature: student accountability, community of learners, the development of strategic readers, and motivating adolescent readers. These are the threads that seem to suggest that implementation of Literature Circles can lead to increased reading comprehension, which ultimately leads to gains in reading achievement.

History of Literature Circles

Literature Circles have been around for more than a decade. In the mid-1980s, Daniels along with 20 other teachers coined student book clubs as Literature Circles when they started with implementing peer lead discussion groups in their Chicago classrooms (Daniels, 2002, p. 1). According to Daniels (2002), Literature Circles

provided an opportunity for students to engage with their peers about a selected text.

“They shared responses with peers, listened respectfully to one another, sometimes disagreed vehemently, but dug back into the text to settle arguments or validate different interpretations” (p. 1). Literature Circles have evolved since Daniels and his colleagues began the work with their students. According to Rutherford et al. (2009), “the idea of literature circles is not new, but since the release of Harvey Daniels’ first book in 1994, literature circles have become a popular practice among teachers and a popular topic of research among educational researchers” (p. 44). Daniels (2002) claimed that there are many teachers today who have dropped the traditional method of teaching reading to involve their students in some type of small, peer reading discussion group (p. 1).

Rutherford et al. (2009) claimed that there are many reasons that Literature Circles are popular, but cited research by Clarke and Holwadel (2007) that attributed the success of Literature Circles to being transactional. “One reason is that book groups capture the belief that reading is transactional and that meaning is not just found in the text or reader’s head but also in the transaction between the text and the reader” (p. 44). Regardless of how teachers today have reinvented Literature Circles or renamed Literature Circles, Daniels (2002) stated that the definition of Literature Circles still remain the same for him and his colleagues. According to Daniels (1994), Literature Circles are small, temporary discussion groups composed of students who are reading the same work of literature and who each have specific responsibilities during discussion sessions. The circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting; when the circle finishes a book, the members decide on a way to showcase their literary work for the rest of the class.

Although many believe that Daniels “invented” Literature Circles, Daniels stated there is really no record of it, but peer led discussions has probably been happening for centuries (p. 30). However, Daniels (2002) claimed that first recorded “Literature Circle” happened in 1634 in the New World on a boat headed to the colonies based on information he researched by Laskin and Hughes in the Reading Group (1995), in which Bible studies with other women (p. 30). According to Daniels (2002) this continued amongst women with sharing of ideas during cooking and quilting. Sharing of ideas by women continue throughout present times. Literature Circles have evolved over the past decade into Adult Book Clubs (voluntary group of adults who meet to discuss a common read text), Publishers’ Support (publishers who promote texts to be read in book clubs and offer a reading guide as a support), Internet Book Clubs (readers from all over having a virtual discussion about a common read text), and even celebrity book clubs such as the Oprah Winfrey Book Club (Oprah recommends a book to be read by her viewers and discusses it with audience and viewers on her show) (Daniels, 2002, p. 3-5).

According to Daniels (2002) Literature Circles were recognized in 1996 by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Association of Reading as a best practice in literacy instruction (p. 7). As well as “this literature centered reading as thinking mentality is even reflected in some state standards and assessments” (Daniels, 2002, p. 5). The newly Common Core State Standards adopted mandates that students participate in collaborative discussions under the heading of Comprehension and Collaboration in the Speaking and Listening Standard 1 (SL.1) which states that students can learn from each other through academic conversations (Ryan & Frazee, 2012, p. 42). Also, under the Speaking and Listening (SL) standard, students are expected to evaluate a

speaker's point of view (SL.3) and cite evidence (SL.3) (Ryan & Frazee, 2012, p. 45-46).

The researcher believes it is apparent in the Listening and Speaking standard that

Common Core encourages such structures as Literature Circles as a best practice.

Daniels (2002) claimed that this progressive movement in literature instruction promotes life long readers, "all these activities are a long way from the old fashioned basal-driven, round-robin, drill-and-kill instruction of a generation ago" (p. 5).

The researcher understands that knowing the history of an instructional strategy is important but asserts that it is more important to know what a strategy is and the expected benefits of implementation of said strategy. Therefore, for the purposes of this study the term Literature Circles will be the most prevalent term used by the researcher to reference small, temporary discussion groups composed of students who are reading the same literature and the four accompanying threads even though authors of the various articles interchange with other terms such as "literature studies, book clubs, literature circles, literature discussion groups, and cooperative book discussion groups" (Daniels, 2002, p. 7).

Regardless of the term used to define literature circles, the basic concept behind this form of literacy instruction is the ability of the learner to choose and read a piece of literature and then within the structure of a small group cooperatively discuss the literature in critical, thoughtful, and personal ways. (Sanders-Brunner, 2004, p. 39)

Student Accountability

Various studies have documented the traditional teacher-centered classroom as an impediment to student learning. It has been suggested that students attain higher levels of

learning when they have a primary responsibility in the acquisition of knowledge. The structure of Literature Circles shifts the accountability for learning from the teacher to the students. As Lin (2004) noted, “Within each circle, students are in charge of their own learning” (p. 23). Other studies suggest that teachers should breakaway from traditional literature teaching methods and recommend that Literature Circles may be one way to break the cycle.

Although Literature Circles provide an avenue for student ownership of their learning, personal accountability is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Lin (2004) stated that the teacher first must model for the students and when it is apparent that students understand what it is they need to do, the primary responsibility of learning is then handed over to the students. Once students have assumed the accountability for their learning, their questions instead of the teachers’ questions should drive the learning and expand their insight. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) concurred when they claimed that implementing Literature Circles enables students to take the lead in their learning. In well-designed Literature Circles, each student must not only read the agreed-upon portion of the text but also execute an assigned role in order to engage as an active participant.

No matter how much teachers plan and hold students personally accountable for the work, there are times that a Literature Circle group may breakdown. When this occurs, student accountability does not absolve teacher responsibility. The teacher plays a critical role in the success of Literature Circles. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) asserted that it may be necessary for the teacher to take on the role of coach in order to ensure and/or maintain the effectiveness of the Literature Circle. As a coach, the teacher models how to create sustainability and keep the momentum of the Literature Circle group going

by asking questions that require the voice of each Literature Circle group member (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007, p. 26). According to Clarke and Holwadel (2007), Literature Circles should be modeled in a way that the students could easily emulate in order to have productive discussions. Once the Literature Circle gets back on track with peer led discussions that promote and encourage deep thinking, it is time for the teacher to retreat from acting in a coaching capacity.

Wilfong (2009) stated that an increased sense of ownership internally motivates students to be prepared for their discussion in their Literature Circles. Not only is there an increased sense of ownership, but students are empowered to have energetic, thoughtful discussions because the students are not isolated in text reading (Wilfong, 2009, p. 165). The researcher agreed with Wilfong (2009) that the feeling of empowerment and increased sense of ownership is what builds personal accountability. According to Daniels (1994), when students control the learning, the teacher's role shifts from lecturer or leader to observer or "quiet facilitator." Lloyd (2004) defined a quiet facilitator as a teacher who is removed from being the voice of learning to allow students to have the voice that dictates the learning. "The teacher can step back and become a facilitator while students take primary responsibility for the discussion" (Lin, 2004, p. 24). Literature Circles can help teachers to relinquish control of student learning while empowering students to discover how to delve deep and comprehend text (Lloyd, 2004).

It has been asserted that secondary teachers often unintentionally impede the development of students as readers because they quickly point out significant parts of the text and tell students what message the author is trying to convey. According to Lloyd (2004), teachers should gradually release responsibilities to the students. The teacher

must relinquish the role of being the purveyor of knowledge. In Literature Circles, however, “the teacher delegates authority to groups while holding them accountable for their learning or product. This means less direct instruction and a new role for the teacher as a consultant to groups” (Kagan, 1994, p. 1-3). The teacher does not create the questions for students to respond to a text nor does the teacher control the meaning students extrapolated from the text. Lloyd (2004) stated that through gradual release of responsibility, the reader (student) is then extended the invitation to become accountable for interpreting and gleaning meaning from the text. By gaining control of the learning process, students become personally invested in exploring and investigating the text in order to have a genuine conversation in which the discussion rests on them to ask questions that probe into the thinking of their Literature Circle group (Lloyd, 2004, p. 119-120). It is not just about empowering students, but about students’ self-discovery in a non-restrictive, self-directed learning activity.

Bond (2001) shared the same premise as Lloyd (2004) regarding the necessity for teachers to gradually release the responsibility for learning to the students in order to give them free reign. Bond (2001) theorized that the effective classroom was one in which the teacher created a culture that provided students the opportunity to set the agenda for discussion. This would be done through a gradual release process of the teacher modeling first how to think, ask questions, and to work with others in a group before expecting students to do it on their own. Once the teachers give students free reign, they are empowered to take charge of their thinking and facilitating their understanding when working in Literature Circle groups. Bond (2001) stated that gradual release is often difficult for teachers. A teacher can often be torn between being on the outside of the

group and wanting to scaffold instruction for the students in the group. However, in order not to impede on peer-led discussion, the foundation of Literature Circles, a teacher may have to take on various roles. The teacher participant role, according to Bond (2001), is often the most useful role. The participant role is one in which the teacher can become part of the Literature Circle group by taking on the persona of a student member and modeling the expectations of an engaged participant. According to Daniels (2002), students need to witness a demonstration of their teacher interacting with text and thinking about text. The author suggested that

Perhaps one element most grievously lacking in the experience of most American schoolchildren is regularly seeing a mature adult reader connecting with a book for the first time, constructing meaning, talking about the thinking process, and sharing here and now responses. (Daniels, 2002, p. 24)

Brabham and Villaume (2000) expressed their view of Literature Circles as effective means for students to ask questions and share while teachers take a backseat in the discussion, functioning as observers. Brabham and Villaume's (2000) view empowers students to take on the accountability for their learning. Literature Circles allow for intimate engagement with the text and it is the students' insights and inquiries not the teacher's that drive discussions (p. 278). Therefore, it is imperative to cease from the typical classroom discussion patterns in which the students respond to the teacher's questions. Brabham and Villaume's (2000) believed talk in Literature Circles is the infrastructure that supports a way to reposition accountability from the teacher to the students. Students become a major contributor as a reader of the text, in which case they develop and discuss their own questions and delve deeper into more critical thinking.

The roles delegated to students in Literature Circles give them the opportunity to maintain accountability for their learning while increasing the chances of having “dynamic discussions” (Bond, 2001, p. 577). According to Daniels (2002), “each of the roles was designed to support collaborative learning by giving kids clearly defined, interlocking, an open-ended tasks...the role sheets had two purposes: to help kids read better and discuss better” (p. 3). Lloyd (2004) cited research by Daniels (2002) on the meaning of Literature Circle roles, noting their “structure as a conduit for genuine discussions, as a temporary support to get the discussion groups started” (p. 115). When students feel empowered, they feel that they are a part of the process and are more willing to participate because their voices are being heard by the members of the group. According to Rutherford et al. (2009),

utilizing their specific roles, students have conversations that highlight their connections to the book, questions they have about the book, specific parts of the book they thought to be important or funny, and other important insights related to the book as defined within their specific roles. (p. 44)

Blum, Lipsett, and Yocom (2002) suggested that empowerment generates participation, a willingness to share ideas and be part of the decision-making process. Literature Circles shift the role of the classroom teacher to facilitator in which students are handed control of the learning: to be the ones making choices, asking questions, discussing and constructing meaning, and organizing themselves to complete specific tasks based on the various Literature Circle roles. When students are empowered they develop self-determination. Blum et al. (2002) defined self-determination as problem solving, decision making, and metacognition. Students with self-determination are responsible for

their education and are determinants of their actions. Literature Circles promote self-determination because students have to read with a focus and determine what is significant and why it is significant. The reader attaches personal significance when participating in Literature Circles, because Literature Circles empower the reader by allowing the reader to participate in the decision making process and the opportunity to make choices to become more skilled at expressing their interpretations of the text as well as seek clarification if meaning breakdowns when meeting with the Literature Circle. The scaffolding of instruction is not done by the teacher, but by the students participating in the Literature Circles due to the conversational structure it provides for students not the teacher to determine what is of value in reading. It is apparent that self-determination is a byproduct of Literature Circles since it used by the reader to develop a sense of personal accomplishment through promoting problem solving, decision making, and self-assessment.

Ketch (2005) shared the same philosophy as Blum et al. (2002) that conversation is the key that assist students in becoming accountable for their learning. According to Ketch (2005), when students are engaged in conversation, the teacher can take a step back, allowing the students to rely on their own comprehension and ability to think critically. The student takes ownership of the learning process when the teacher takes on the facilitator role. Ketch (2005) argued that teachers must prioritize daily discussion. Traditionally, “successful” classrooms were filled with rows of silent students staring at the teacher and copying notes. Although students appeared to be learning in those classrooms, it is a known fact that this type of learning was not transformational. In order for students to fully grasp content and “transition to a more complex meaning,” students

must be engaged in frequent conversation (Ketch, 2005, p. 10). The students are in charge of their learning and the conversation that takes place in Literature Circles helps the students to make sense of the world by understanding different perspectives as well as pulls the students into the lesson to explore and expand their insight on a deeper level (Ketch, 2005, p. 12). Clarke's (2007) view is in agreement with Ketch (2005), stating that Literature Circles give students a sense of ownership, inspiring them to have meaningful conversations with their peers and thereby pushing them to engage in higher-level thinking while improving their comprehension of text.

The researcher believes that it is imperative for students at the secondary level to be independent learners. The role of the secondary teacher is to prepare students for post-secondary education. Therefore, shifting the accountability for learning to the student should not be construed as the teacher's failure to take an active role in the students' learning. The researcher agrees with Lloyd (2004) and Lin (2004) that the teacher must instead step back and take on the role of facilitator and allow the students to take the lead. In this role, the teacher remains involved in the learning process, but from an observer's perspective. "The teacher is a passive participant, tracking students' involvement and understanding of the text" (Day, 2003, p. 4). By observing students as they discuss and question the texts while respecting the perspectives of others, teachers can assess students' true comprehension based on the types of questions they ask and how they use textual support when responding to text-related questions (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 107). The researcher believes that Literature Circles allow for formative assessment, informing the teacher of what objectives and skills he/she needs to re-teach in order for students to delve deeper into a text. If the students have mastered a particular skill, the

teacher then can decide how to push students further to using that skill at a more advanced level and which skill to teach next.

The article “Teacher-Watching”: Examining Teacher Talk in Literature Circles” by Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford (1999) focused on the role of the teacher when Literature Circles are implemented in the classroom. The article described four types of roles that a teacher can assume in order for students to reap the benefits of participation in Literature Circles. One role is the teacher as facilitator, a role in which the teacher mostly monitors and only prompts students with questions if they become frustrated (Short et al., 1999, p. 378). Based on the articles reviewed for this chapter, this role is most commonly referenced and utilized by teachers in Literature Circles studies. The researcher has the same belief as Short et al. (1999) that this role places the teacher as an equal as the students in the Literature Groups. By the teacher taking on the persona of a student, the discussion is not driven by the teacher. The second role is that of teacher-facilitator, in which the teacher gives additional information in order to clarify details or to get students to make meaning of the text (Short et al., 1999, p. 379). The researcher believes that this role can be disruptive because the teacher may become overly involved in the discussion and take the power away from the students. The third role is that of the teacher as re-stater of comments, which involves the teacher asking the student making the comment to repeat or go into greater depth if it appears that the other students did not quite understand (Short et al., 1999, p. 379). The researcher also believes that this role too can cause the teacher to become more involved in the Literature Circle than he or she needs to be. This role should be introduced when first modeling Literature Circles for the class and an expectation of the Literature Circle groups if for

some reason it appears as if members of the group do not quite understand what is being said and the comment needs to be rephrased with more depth. By allowing the students to make this type of discernment, the accountability for learning continues to be their responsibility. Therefore, there is no need for the teacher to take on this role. Lastly, the teacher may take responsibility for conversational maintenance. Teachers adopt this role if they believe a Literature Circle group needs help in maintaining order if, for example, discussion gets off topic, someone cannot hear, or it is time to move forward with the discussion (Short et al., 1999, p. 379). As with the third role of re-stater of comments, the researcher believes that this role of conversational maintenance needs to be the students in the Literature Circle group accountability to resolve or the student who is serving in the role of Discussion Director. Regardless of the type of facilitator role the teacher assumes, "The teacher's main job in literature circles is to *not teach*, at least in the traditional sense of the term" (Daniels, 1994, p. 25).

The researcher believes that it is important and necessary for the teacher to set the tone and direction for students as well as model how to have an effective Literature Circle discussion, but at the same time, the teacher must have an awareness of the type of role he or she assumes because it can have an impact on the student outcome. The researcher supports Lin's (2004) statement that teachers need to break away from the traditional way of teaching literature. The shift of learning from being the responsibility of the teacher to that of the students must happen if the underlying goal is for students to become invested in their learning. In order for this happen in an almost seamless way of students being empowered in the learning process, the researcher agrees with Lloyd (2004) that the teacher must employ a gradual release of responsibility. Therefore,

especially at the secondary level, teachers do not need to be in front of their classes providing direct instruction. Teachers should allow for daily opportunities for students to learn with peers in an infrastructure such as Literature Circles. Literature Circles challenge students to be accountable for their learning, have meaningful conversations with peers, and become self-determinant learners which will prepare them for the rigors of post-secondary education.

Community of Learners

In addition to empowering students to take responsibility for their learning, Literature Circles create a community of learners (Lin, 2004). As a community of learners students are able to teach and learn from each other, become better listeners as well as develop an understanding of text by respecting the multiple perspectives presented in the Literature Circle groups. In order for students to want to take the risk of sharing their often personal thoughts about a text, they must feel that the environment is safe and trusting. “Within these groups, relationships between peers are fostered, roles are outlined and described, and language becomes the vehicle for navigating conversations around literature, literacy, and learning” (Casey, 2009, p. 292). Casey (2009) utilized the organization of Literature Circles to become a learning club which, in essence, highlights how students work together in a unique social community to discuss texts. According to Casey (2009), this transformation of Literature Circles is a paradigm in which students are working in a smaller community from the larger classroom context to construct and deconstruct text. The various personal experiences that each member brings to the group are essential in shaping the conversation and become a catalyst for

learning. Their work in their unique, collaborative community of learning evolves and dissolves based on the reactions to the text and interactions with the text.

Samway et al.'s (1991) view on the community aspect of Literature Circles is similar to Casey's (2009) position in that Literature Circles provide an avenue by which students develop a sense of belonging and community, which then allows them to share their ideas freely. According to Samway et al. (1991) during this dynamic discourse students trust the group to appreciate their insight just as they gain new insight from others. "Difference is respected but views must be supported" (Samway et al., 1991, p. 199). The climate that Literature Circles offer is one that must be safe in order to allow students to talk about key issues in society that are difficult to discuss such as race and racism that may arise in a text. The talk will then come natural in such an environment. Having an environment that allows for natural talk is also an opportunity for students to grow in literacy by being able to fine tune their analyses.

The researcher is in agreement with Casey (2009) and Samway et al. (1991) that if talk is to flow in order for the students to have dynamic discussions in Literature Circles there must first be a sense of trust amongst members, respect for others' ideas, and a climate of safety. All of these must be present if students are going to truly become a community of learners. In a Literature Circle group that promotes a community of learners, students are able to utilize text in way to come to a new understanding about topics that are generally quickly skimmed over or skipped over due to its sensitive nature. However, Literature Circles becomes that outlet for students to feel free to share their ideas without any fear of recourse or judgment by other members of the group.

Burns (1998) asserted that Literature Circles create a positive shift in the classroom climate from the teacher to one that promotes collaboration and responsibility among students. Collaboration is a key instructional strategy that often falls under the auspice of cooperative learning. “Major reports from virtually every teaching field from the key professional societies and research centers, have formally defined collaborative learning as a key ingredient of best educational practice” (Daniels, 1994, p. 9). After much research, cooperative learning has been established as a high-yield strategy (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), meaning that, if used appropriately, students will make gains on high-stakes tests, such as state assessments. “Cooperative learning has an effect size of .78 (which means 27 percentile gain)...cooperative learning groups have a powerful effect on learning” (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 87). Daniels (1994) also confirmed that research dating back two decades showed that students made achievement gains when they worked together.

Literature Circles provide an outlet for students to no longer participate in the “individual act of creating meaning, but the social act of negotiating meaning” (Burns, 1998, p. 144) among members of the Literature Circle group. According to Burns (1998), this positive social interaction is key to success because students are working together to build a community of learners who share in the responsibility of creating meaning of text, hearing other perspectives, listening to others’ thinking, and verbalizing what is read as well as taking the risk to share ideas.

A study by Polleck (2010) also supported the idea that when teachers relinquish control of the classroom in order for students to work collaboratively, students can begin sharing their constructed meaning of texts. Polleck (2010) believed that the teacher must

convert from the traditional type of classroom to provide transformative spaces like that of Literature Circles. Polleck (2010) stated that a transformative space enhances the social and reading development and provides the forum for students to have conversations about texts. Based on Polleck's (2010) work, the framework is a three step process of transaction, interaction, and transformation. The first process of transaction is when the students individually engage with a text and make meaning of the text in isolation. Polleck (2010) referenced research on the Reader Response Theory by Roseblatt (1978), that transaction is where the reader and the text meet and the construction of meaning happens in an efferent and aesthetic manner. During the efferent process the reader reads to acquire information and comprehend the text whereas in an aesthetic process the reader construct meaning based on their prior experiences (Polleck, 2010, p. 52). This ultimately means that reading of text should not just be restricted to learning but to understand self. The second step of the process is interaction. It is only when the student begins to share his or her responses about a text with others does it become transformative. Daniels (2002) proclaimed support of Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory, "we take seriously the literary theory of reader response, which says that students cannot effectively move to the level of analysis until they have worked through, processed, savored, shared their personal response" (p. 23). In the interaction process, Polleck (2010) also highlighted research from Vygotsky (1978) that textual meaning is best constructed through a collaborative conversation. Students are working as one unit to create that discourse to learn from multiple perspectives and delve deep to make sense of a text. Regardless of where a reader is in the process, Polleck (2010) stated that both transaction and interaction must be merged in order to truly transform as

a reader. In order for the merge of transaction and interaction to happen, Polleck (2010) claimed that the teacher must relinquish control and allow for students to work in a collaborative setting on their own construction of meaning of the text and add to their own personal transaction so that they can have the types of conversations that provide transformative experiences.

Research by Clarke (2007) supported this finding, indicating that moving away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom gives students the voice they need in order to “create vibrant discourse communities,” interacting together allows them to become more critical thinkers and improve their comprehension of texts. Literature Circles are driven by the belief that learning happens when students are interacting. Students will be able to achieve the literacy and interpersonal skills needed for academic success when teachers reconsider and restructure the traditional classroom. When students are working together the thought process is higher than that of a teacher-led classroom when the teacher is in control of the discussion agenda and the questions to be asked.

Daniels (1994) emphatically asserted that readers need and love to talk. During the discussion component of Literature Circles, however, students also are encouraged to listen to and respect the multiple perspectives of their Literature Circles group members (Long & Gove, 2003). It first begins with the reader’s individual transaction with the text before being able to engage with others in a more effective manner. Long and Gove (2003) claimed that Literature Circles level the playing field by allowing equal opportunities for all members of the group to respond and support each other’s thinking. Students not only connect more profoundly with themselves but with each other because

they are able to explore and share without reservation in a way that is purposeful, reflective, and one that pushes their thinking (Long & Gove, 2003, p. 354). According to Long and Gove (2003), during this authentic learning time students become vested because they take the risk in sharing their thoughts and feelings as well as disagreeing in what is being discussed.

Conversation that is focused on reading provides a framework for talk. Ketch (2005) stated that when students hear others' points of view, their level of understanding increases. By allowing the perspectives of others to help shape their understanding of texts, students grow as readers. In Lloyd's (2004) experience, "Students shared their questions and the group listened and provided feedback. Students referred to the text to prove their points of view" (p. 22). The Common Core State Standards expect that students will utilize textual evidence as a means to support their responses to text (Ryan & Frazee, 2012, p. 7). Students do not always agree with each other during Literature Circle discussions, but Samway et al. (1991) described these disagreements and the ensuing discussions as critical components in allowing students to gain new insights and to become more motivated and knowledgeable readers. Ketch (2005) also claimed that "conversation is our connection to comprehension" (p. 9). The ongoing dialogue that occurs becomes a social inquiry because students are listening, composing meaning, refining meaning, and analyzing all the ways in which learning takes place. The conversation enriches knowledge through how thinking changes from before the actual conversation. Like Polleck (2010), Ketch (2005) referred to Vygotsky's view of learning as a social activity. Consequently, students need to not only have those internal dialogues when reading, but must be provided with the opportunity to share with others. It is in

those conversations that feedback, clarity, and strengthening of meaning is given that could not have been possible in isolation (Polleck, 2010, p. 53). Therefore, the teacher's responsibility is to promote ongoing learning by creating opportunities in the classroom that encourage students to participate in learning communities with their peers and to take the risk to share their ideas with others.

Beers (2003) firmly believed that talk about texts is more critical *during* the reading experience than after it. During conversation, students are unconsciously employing cognitive strategies to construct meaning, and through conversation, they are able to become deep, reflective thinkers (Ketch, 2005). Marzano (2007) declared that one benefit of students working in groups is the opportunity to digest new information from various reference points. "It allows each student to see how others process information, and it allows each student to see how others react to his or her processing information" (Marzano, 2007, p. 43). In this way, disagreements and discussions allow students to become more discerning readers as well more open thinkers.

According to research by Wilfong (2009), the discussion that Literature Circles promotes allows students to make meaning. "Talk in literature circles gave plenty of evidence of the children using language as a tool to think together" (Pearson, 2010, p. 9). According to Pearson (2010), if the Literature Circle discussions are effective, students not only gain insight through others' interpretations but also begin to understand themselves as readers. Pearson (2010) stated that it is an accepted notion that talk enriches students' interpretations in Literature Circles. The collaborative talk allows students to become engaged without the teacher present in collective thinking and contribute to joint construction of meaning (Pearson, 2010, p. 3). During the process of

joint meaning construction students are sharing their thought process with each other.

However, it must be noted that not all talk is beneficial to the learning process. Talk that is not beneficial is when talk may not flow, off task behavior may occur or the conversation in the Literature Circle may be superficial because it is dominated by one or two individuals (Pearson, 2010, p. 4). According to Pearson (2010) whatever the reason, group talk can fail if students are not aware of the ground rules for conversation or the types of talk they are engaging in.

Pearson (2010) focused the Literature Circle study around Mercer's types of children talk which is categorized into three areas: exploratory, cumulative, and disputational. Exploratory talk is when students are working together to reason and construct meaning. There may be times when ideas are challenged or counter-challenged. During exploratory talk responses are focused, and everyone has a voice. This talk has more than a social value, it adds to the reading experience. Students in this type of talk use language to articulate their ideas, use evidence to support their responses, and feel safe to voice their opinions. Then there is cumulative talk which is mainly social rather than cognitive which makes it different from exploratory. When students are having cumulative talk in Literature Circles, they are not questioning or making meaning of the text. There is no inquiry, and student responses are not critical in their thinking. The responses lack connection and are often random in nature. Since there is some type of unwritten code of mutual acceptance, students continue on in this talk of talk without any challenging of the validity of the responses. Lastly, there is disputational talk. Disputational talk is a non-cooperative type of talk in which the students in the Literature Circle groups refuse to view other's perspectives and consistently try to gain control of

the conversation. This type of talk can become problematic and a source of dissension amongst the Literature Circle group members. In disputational talk it is apparent that students are not aware or not adhering to the conversation ground rules which make for a dysfunctional discourse that does not lead to making meaning of text or building a community of learners. Although it is not the aim to over structure the discourse that occurs in Literature Circles, Pearson (2010) stated it is important to know the types of talk that can happen and encourage students to build a community in which students learn from each other.

A review of various studies by Mercer (2008) revealed that students who participate in collaborative learning are able to discuss topics effectively and enhance their problem-solving skills because, through discussion, students attempt to achieve some type of consensus. The highlights of Mercer's (2008) studies include the assertion that Literature Circles form the basis for students having powerful conversations about texts in order to develop the skills they need to grapple with more complex texts. Mercer's (2008) research is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) philosophy of social interaction and how dialogue impacts another person's learning and understanding. In the scope of his research to highlight the functional dynamics of dialogue, Mercer (2008) introduced the notion of various types of talk: exploratory, disputational, and cumulative. However, Mercer's (2008) research lends itself more to promoting exploratory talk in peer led groups. Exploratory talk is when students work together in an equitable manner to achieve consensus of meaning, open sharing to propose ideas, and explain reasoning. This type of talk promotes learning and understanding because it is focused and

sustainable, because students are self-regulated to work together to problem solve without teacher intervention.

Although research by Pearson (2010) centered around Mercer's three types of talk: exploratory, cumulative, and disputational, Mills and Jennings (2011) take the awareness of the types of talk to another level to encourage students as they become a community of learners in Literature Circles to consider the impact of the types of talk on their learning. Mills and Jennings (2011) believe in creating a culture of inquiry to enrich the nature of Literature Circle conversations. After researching and documenting Literature Circle practices for over five years, Mills and Jennings (2011) discovered six practices of inquiry: (a) dynamic and dialogic (personal and interpersonal); (b) multidisciplinary perspectives; (c) attentive, probing, and thoughtful; (d) relational and compassionate; (e) agentive and socially responsible; and (f) reflection and reflexivity (p.591).

All six of the practices of inquiry are used in conjunction in an effective Literature Circle with students having conversations. Students who constructed a discourse that was dynamic and dialogic were sharing and building on their personal understandings. They also respected and valued multidisciplinary perspectives in that through this inquiry of viewing other perspectives their knowledge grew and expanded. At this point of inquiry in the conversation, students were attentive, probing, and thoughtful. This means building on their knowledge through critically questioning in order to come to a deeper understanding of the text. Students then transitioned to a discourse of inquiry as relational and compassionate. They paid attention to each other and contributed to their own learning community by supporting each other as learners. None of the

aforementioned practices of inquiry can happen without students being agentive and socially responsible. This inquiry plays a central role in students knowing and following the rules and social norms of conversation, by respecting each other, and knowing how to work together in a manner that is aware of the boundaries and structure of the Literature Circle. Without the inquiry practice of agentive and socially responsible, Literature Circles can lose their impact because students are not following the routine which can distract from having engaging, thoughtful conversations about text. Lastly, and most important is the practice of reflection and reflexivity which brings everything together. Reflection and reflexivity allow students in Literature Circles to study themselves and their group members to get in touch with the process and make intentional decisions to deepen their understanding in order to grow. “In other words, students reflected (looked back) and then became reflexive (studied themselves to outgrow themselves). They moved from reflection on ‘what is’ and envisioned ‘what might’ be to make positive changes in their literature circle talk” (Mills & Jennings, 2011, p. 591). It should not be expected for the culture of inquiry to be created overnight in Literature Circles. Veering off track and off task behaviors can happen in Literature Circles; however, the teacher must make it possible for students to witness Literature Circles in action implementing a culture of inquiry. This can be done through demonstrations, professional videos, observations of Literature Circles, etc. It does not matter the path that is chosen to encourage students to have productive conversations in Literature Circles; the goal is to not give up when conversations breakdown. Teachers have to help students look beyond the surface to make discussions more productive and rigorous. Students need to build and maintain as a community of readers and notice the complexity of talk and its impact

on learning. Students need to be aware of not the “why” but the “how” and to focus on their actions and interactions to transform their understanding by utilizing the six practices of inquiry. By teaching students how to have purposeful talk, their use of inquiry will permeate into other settings.

Nichols (2006) asserted in the book *Comprehension Through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop* that the traditional model for education does not prepare students to meet the demands of the professional world or equip them with the skills needed to construct understanding in order to make sense of our dynamic society. Nichols (2006) stated that the traditional model of school was based on the industrial world. In the industrial world people were required to work independently with no need to think, but just do. Nichols (2006) cited Paulo Freire’s banking model of instruction, “Education thus becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 2). Since then the way of working together has evolved from working in silos to teamwork. With today’s successful employers relying on the collective intelligence of workers, they are placing a great emphasis on the communication skills and collaborative learning capabilities. Therefore, educators must rethink how they view dialogue and look at it as one of the most effective tools that can transform our classrooms into collaborative learning spaces.

Nichols (2006) stated that purposeful conversations happen when people are sharing together and combining their knowledge to create new knowledge. “The ability to construct ideas with others through purposeful talk or dialogue is essential” (Nichols, 2006, p. 4). The ability to engage in conversation with others is valuable. However, teachers must recognize that not all exchanges of discourse are purposeful “thoughtful

listening and responding. It is a time when participants collaborate and co-produce meaning” (p. 7), but rather limited to the chitchat level “loosely connected string of ideas with no particular focus other than enjoyment of a personal interchange” (p. 6) which does not suffice if teachers are going to prepare their students for the world. Teachers want their students to be able to engage in intellectual purposeful talk and to be able to problem solve when situations arise as well as create new knowledge in collaboration with others. Nichols (2006) claimed that to prepare students for purposeful talk, teachers must invite students to share their ideas and opinions. It is not something that should be done at a certain time of day or specific period of time, but should be present at all times. It is important that students know that purposeful talk is not just about reading, but the essence of learning.

The ability to work collaboratively is an essential life skill. The researcher believes that people do not occupy a world in which everything revolves around self. Ketch (2005), Lin (2004), and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) agreed that people can refine their own knowledge just by listening closely to the perspectives of others. Long and Gove (2003) believed that by engaging in a critical discussion with other students in Literature Circles, students are encouraged to think critically, question each other, and become more reflective. “Literature Circles allow children to apply their natural socializing tendencies in a productive manner, making learning meaningful and hopefully internalized for additional future learning” (Pitman, 1997, p. 4). Several articles in this section pointed to Vygotsky (1978) and the belief that social interaction is the key to learning. Vygotsky (1978) stated that the zone of proximal development between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development is determined through

work with peers or guidance by an adult. He further posited that educators must make every effort to provide a learning environment that is inclusive for students and affords them the chance to interact. “They learned to read by reading and from talking about their reading” (Samway et al., 1991, p. 204). Because Literature Circle discussions and questions are student-generated, Moeller and Moeller (2002) believed that real learning takes place because students are given the chance to work with their peers to “dig out the big ideas” without teacher assistance. “Social interaction is essential to language acquisition in literacy learners” (Patterson, 2007, p. 12). Vygotsky (1978) stated that an essential feature of learning is awakened when a child interacts with his peers in his environment. The opportunity to discuss a text with peers, a critical feature of Literature Circles, helps to increase comprehension. “The authentic conversations that occur encourage participants to express their opinions, raise questions and issues, and connect the text to their own lives” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 54). The opportunity for social interaction, Burns (1998) claimed, makes Literature Circles a means by which students begin to critically listen to others’ perspectives while transforming their own perspective, thereby deepening their understanding of texts. “But even more important than the benefits of efficient communication and tangible products, collaborative learning brings to our classrooms the long-neglected values of democracy, community, and shared responsibility” (Daniels, 1994, p. 10).

Collaboration is an important skill for students, not only so that they learn to respect the opinions of others and refine their own knowledge base, but also so that they can become truly reflective and critical thinkers. Allowing time for students to talk about text has been one of the most underused strategies in instruction (Allington & Gabriel,

2012). Students need time talk with peers about text so that they can analyze, highlight important information, and think about what they have read. Comprehension is not the only benefit of peer talking together about text. Clarke (2007) noted that effective discussion plays an integral role in helping students to develop the basic communication skills necessary for today's workforce. "Given the reality of the job-world, it is incumbent on schools to provide cooperative interdependent experiences in order to provide students with the interpersonal skills they will need for positive participation in economic life" (Kagan, 1994, p. 1:1). Literature Circles offer the opportunity for students to work with their peers to flesh out issues through problem solving and textual analysis in order to learn what they deem essential. This skill prepares students for post-secondary education and employment.

Strategic Readers

While making students accountable for their learning and creating a collaborative environment are important, developing strategic readers is the true focus of Literature Circles (Lloyd, 2004). Noe and Johnson (1999) stated that Literature Circles are valuable to teaching because they provide readers with opportunities to apply literacy skills and strategies (p. 1). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), the term strategic reading refers to thinking about reading in ways that enhance learning and understanding. The dictionary defines strategic as being "important in or essential to a plan of action" (Random House, 1988). Readers are strategic, and typically we think of strategic readers as proficient readers who have a plan of action that moves them towards their goal or purpose for reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 23).

Berne and Clark (2008) cited Keene and Zimmerman's (1997) definition of a strategic reader as one who not only knows strategies but can employ them at different points in order to understand a text. Beers (2003) stated that teachers spend a great deal of time testing comprehension and very little time actually teaching comprehension strategies. "We sometimes confuse explaining to students what is happening in a text with teaching students how to comprehend a text" (Beers, 2002, p. 40). On the other hand, as Daniel's (1994) noted, "Literature Circles do teach reading skills" (p. 187). The roles used in Literature Circles, are explicitly and implicitly taught and represent actual comprehension strategies. Baumann, Hooten, and White (1999) claimed that planned and unplanned instruction around comprehension strategies allow students to demonstrate an understanding of the use of the strategies and retain and transfer that knowledge to other contexts. They discussed three types of strategy lessons: elaborated strategy lessons (lessons that are detailed in which the teacher explains the strategy, models it, and provides guided and independent practice), brief strategy lessons (planned review of strategies previously taught), and impromptu strategy lessons (unplanned lessons that seize the moment when presented during reading). Berne and Clark (2008) noted that it is important for teachers to model comprehension strategies because it increases a student's metacognitive awareness about the strategy they are using as well as when to use a strategy (p. 78). "When teachers equip students with the abilities to access and engage their cognitive strategies, the potential for learning greatly expands" (Marchiando, 2013, p.16). Beers (2003) stated, comprehension is both a product and a process, something that requires purposeful, strategic effort on the reader's part—anticipating the direction of the text (predicting), seeing the action of the text (visualizing), contemplating

and then correcting whatever we encounter (clarifying), and connecting what's in the text to what's in our mind to make an educated guess about what's going on (inferencing) (p. 45-46).

The researcher is in agreement with all of the authors in regards to explicitly and implicitly teaching reading strategies. It is important for students to see how a teacher grapples with a text to construct meaning as well as what strategies the teacher uses to glean meaning and when meaning breaks down. "When teachers model 'thinking aloud' while reading, students can form a better understanding of how to apply the skills and strategies being presented to them" (Tankersley, 2003, p. 91). However, it is equally important to directly, explicitly teach comprehension strategies. It is important because students need to know the strategies they are using and why they are using them at different points in a text. "Students don't come to school with a strategy gene. Strategic thinking does not usually come naturally. Whenever you use a strategy, take the time to tell students its name and explain how it works and why it is important" (Silver et al., 2012, p. 5). By utilizing both methods of explicit and implicit teaching strategies, the teacher is preparing the student to become a true reader and to be able to effectively transfer their use of strategies across all content areas.

According to Daniels (1994), the various Literature Circle roles offer a strategic approach to help students make meaning of texts.

Among roles commonly assigned are: discussion director (developing questions to discuss), illustrators (drawing and/or sharing interesting sections of the text for reading aloud), literary luminary/passage master (identifying interesting sections

of the text for reading aloud), and connectors (making text-to-text and text-to-life connections). (Lin, 2004, p. 24)

Based on research by Lloyd (2004), comprehension strategies are the springboard to learning in Literature Circles. The strategies consist of questioning, summarizing, visualizing, determining importance, making connections, and making inferences. “The thoughtful, reflective reader will be able to question, infer, analyze, and interpret text and successfully negotiate meaning” (Lloyd, 2004, p. 116). Wilfong (2009) supported Lloyd’s (2004) research, stating that in order for students to master texts, they must be able to independently apply comprehension strategies to construct meaning from texts.

The *Discussion Director* role is a key in Literature Circles because this person keeps the discussion flowing by asking questions of the group. “This is the premier job in the circle because it is basically the boss of the group. This individual makes sure all the members in the group are present and prepared” (Saunders-Smith, 2005, p. 7). The goal of Literature Circles is to increase students’ use of critical thinking. Questions should encourage students to make inferences and make judgments about the text. Teachers can drive instruction based on these questions and students’ responses to them. “Questions lead me to unexpected places and keep me intrigued. For me, questions are the glue of engagement” (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 105). Also according to Keene and Zimmerman (1997), questioning is what makes us human. McKenna (2002) agreed that asking questions stimulates comprehension and allows teachers to gauge if students were able to construct meaning from a text. “Questions reveal far more about children’s thinking than do pat answers, hastily delivered” (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 135). Through questioning, one can analyze, get clarity, and explore new areas. Ultimately,

questioning is what leads learners to delve deeply into their thinking. “The Discussion Director had to develop four discussion questions, which could not be answered just by finding the ‘right’ passage in the book” (Burns, 1998, p. 125) and other Literature Circle members should not be literal but should cause students to make inferences and draw conclusions. This is because literal, or thin (skinny), questions involve basic recall in which the response is located in the text and reflects a “superficial understanding” (McKenna, 2002, p. 97) without requiring deep thinking. Thick (fat) questions, on the other hand, encourage learners to tap into critical thinking skills because they must respond to a question that has no right or wrong text-related answer. “Readers who are taught how to question the text can infer and clear up confusion better than those who simply decode words and accept ideas unchallenged” (Tovani, 2000, p. 81). Based on Tovani’s (2000) research on questioning, readers who ask questions improve their comprehension in the following four ways: “(1) by interacting with text, (2) by motivating themselves to read, (3) by clarifying information in the text, and (4) by inferring beyond the literal meaning” (p. 86). Tovani (2000) believed that student comprehension improves because students are accountable for their learning.

The *Summarizer’s* role is to provide Literature Circle members with a brief synopsis of the assigned reading. Students often find summary writing challenging because they have to be able to distinguish between main ideas and details and to “string the main ideas into a coherent account” (McKenna, 2002, p. 153). McKenna (2002) stated that summarizing is an effective comprehension strategy because it requires students to actively think and make decisions about what needs to be known and what does not, and to put that information into their own words. Keene and Zimmerman

(2007) claimed that summarizing is a tool that helps with comprehension. When students are asked to summarize, they must be able to give a succinct account of what they have read, and this ability is a characteristic of proficient readers. According to Marzano et al. (2001), summarizing is a high-yield strategy because in order to do it effectively, “students must delete some information, substitute some information and keep some information” (p. 30). Harvey and Goudvis (2007) declared that when a person summarizes, they extract the most important information and put it in words that will help us remember it (p. 179). The researcher believes that with the transition to Common Core State Standards, students need to be able to summarize effectively because the standards will require them to identify textual facts and organize them in a way that demonstrates their understanding of the text, eventually leading to synthesis.

The *Illustrator* is charged with creating a visual representation of a noteworthy part of the text to assist Literature Circle members with understanding its significance. Good readers create mental images (Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2003, p. 5). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), illustrating is a valuable monitoring tool. It functions like a movie playing in the reader’s mind, and if it becomes unclear or stops, the reader must go back and reread until the movie resumes. According to Zimmermann and Hutchins (2003), sensory images are critical in helping the reader to understand and remember complex text, and without them, “reading can be a blank slate” (p. 21). The *Illustrator’s* role, then, is critical in producing the movie that will facilitate comprehension and retention.

The role of the *Connector* is to make relevant connections to the text and share them with members of the Literature Circle group. “This member connects characters,

settings and actions to other characters, settings or actions in other books, movies or television shows or in his or her own life for the purpose of comparing or contrasting” (Saunders-Smith, 2005, p. 8). Oftentimes, making connections can be difficult for students due to their limited experiences and the fact that they often have not read an extensive repertoire of texts. Tovani (2000) claimed that connections encourage students to tap into their background knowledge, which results in students improving their comprehension as well as having a richer experience reading a text. According to Tovani (2000), there are three types of connections that a student can make: “(1) text to self (2) text to text (3) text to world” (p. 70). Text-to-self connections are personal experiences between something in one’s own life and the text being read. As Zimmerman and Hutchins (2003) suggested, “Often text- to-self connections carry a strong emotional charge” (p. 51), and those personal connections that evoke strong emotion help students to remember what is read. Text-to-text connections are made with a previous text, movie or television program, song, etc. Text-to-world connections are made between the text and the world at large. These connections offer an opportunity to connect the text to past or present historical moments, as well as to future events. Overall, connections allow students to have those “aha” moments and experience the text from another perspective.

The *Literary Luminary* is an integral role in Literature Circles. This person is charged with the responsibility of pointing out parts of the text that are critical to understanding it and must be able to clearly articulate why the selected part is so important and worthy of discussion. Research by Polleck (2010) highlighted Rosenblatt’s (1995) reader response theory, which posited that there is an “individual transaction between the reader and the text” (Polleck, 2010, p. 52). Once the reader

interacts with the text, meaning is immediately being constructed, eventually resulting in comprehension. Daniels (1994) stated that reader response theory must be taken seriously because students need to share responses amongst their peers in order to move beyond the literal level to analysis. Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening (2000) supported the notion that Literature Circles take students beyond the literal to learning critical thinking skills through reflective dialogue and questioning, which in turn helps to shape how students respond to the text. The thoughtful responses that students learn to give during discussions demonstrate that they are doing more than just understanding the text; they are internalizing it. Tovani (2000) explicitly stated that reading involves much more than simply decoding words. It is a “sophisticated” process that involves thinking and the ability to delve deep beneath the surface of the words on the page in order to construct meaning. “Comprehension means that readers think not only about what they are reading but about what they are learning. When readers construct meaning, they are building their store of knowledge” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 15).

The *Vocabulary Enricher's* role is to pick out unknown or interesting words that members of the group may need to know in order to better comprehend the text. “This individual records vocabulary words he or she thinks members of the group need to understand” (Saunders-Smith, 2005, p. 7). Research by Blachowicz and Ogle (2001) suggested that while reading helps to develop vocabulary, in order for students to develop general vocabulary knowledge, they should be the ones to choose which words to investigate further because they tend to pick words that are at or above their grade level, whereas teachers often pick words that students already know. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), vocabulary can be organized into three tiers. Words in the

first tier mostly consist of basic, high-frequency words (e.g., book, man) that rarely require instruction. Words in the second tier are non-specialized words that can cross domains (e.g., graph, plot). Finally, third-tier words are content-specific (e.g., ecosystem, theme). Teachers need to understand the three tiers of vocabulary and push students toward learning words in the second and third tiers. Although the *Vocabulary Enricher's* role may appear simple, this person is highly accountable for helping to develop the vocabulary knowledge of Literature Circle members. "Vocabulary is a foundation for improved literacy" (Silver et al., 2012, p. 65). It is well known that an impoverished vocabulary accounts for many students' struggles with comprehension. According to The National Institute for Literacy (2007), vocabulary knowledge is essential to promoting comprehension and communication, and "because word identification is one of the foundational processes of reading, middle and high school students with poor or impaired word identification skills face serious challenges in their academic work" (p. 15). Therefore, whether students learn vocabulary intentionally or incidentally through the extensive reading accomplished in Literature Circles, the end result is better vocabulary development.

Students incidentally learn many skills through Literature Circles, the most important of which may be how to read strategically. According to Berne and Clark (2008), struggling readers benefit from literature discussions because they facilitate the development of the comprehension processes. According to Ketch (2005) readers need to be able to practice the use of strategies in authentic ways such as through conversation (p.9). The researcher believes that Literature Circles is the vehicle which affords them the opportunity to get the practice needed. "Conversation is the comprehension

connection” (Ketch, 2005, p. 12). Daniels (1994) noted that Literature Circles teach reading skills in an implicit manner as students work together. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) explained that because learning is socially constructed, teachers must create classrooms that provide time for interactive opportunities and cooperative learning activities because through such environments, learning is scaffolded for students. The roles in Literature Circles actually mirror six of the seven cognitive strategies that have been noted to increase comprehension and develop proficient readers. According to Marchiando (2013), “the roles are not intended to limit students’ thinking to one particular cognitive strategy at a time but instead are simply intended to mirror the thinking that readers truly do (or should do) while reading a text” (p. 15). As Lloyd (2004) stated, students who are strategic readers can apply the strategies to texts while monitoring their comprehension. Berne and Clark (2008) noted that students who are strategic readers can take on more challenging texts and better discern what the text is saying. Daniels (1994) highlighted a study conducted by the University of Wisconsin in which cooperative grouping, similar to that of Literature Circles, in high school Communication Arts classes resulted in students who “scored twice as far above the test mean” (p. 48). Another study of eighth grade students in Chicago showed that those who participated in Literature Circles scored, on average, 10% higher than those who did not on a city-wide reading assessment (Daniels, 2002).

Motivating Adolescent Readers

In addition to the benefits of encouraging students to be accountable for their learning, enabling students to develop collaborative relationships, and putting students on track to be strategic readers, Literature Circles also motivate students to read. Based on

findings of a research study that was reported in the Los Angeles Times, the single most important indicator of success of person is whether they read for pleasure (Reynolds, 2004, p. 5). Researchers state that students lose interest in reading and lack motivation to read in middle and high school and view reading as chore (Howerton & Thomas, 2004; Early, Fryer, Leckbee, & Walton, 2004). “As students enter the intermediate and middle grades their motivation to read for pleasure and their attitude toward reading begin to decline. As a result, they do not choose to read” (Rutherford et al., 2009, p. 43). Tovani (2000) claimed that students may disconnect from reading because “by ninth grade, many students have been defeated by test scores, letter grades, and special groupings. Struggling readers are embarrassed by their labels and often perceive reading as drudgery” (p. 9). According to Tovani (2000) once students take on a negative attitude about reading they avoid it and begin to view it as not been worthy of their time (p. 9). Despite the undesirable attitudes of students toward reading, secondary teachers have immense amount of material teach, so students must acquire the motivation to read and to read on their own (Tovani, 2000, p. 13). In addition to the curriculum to be covered, “every year the demands on students to pass a standardized assessment increase, yet students are less enthusiastic about reading-the main skill required to be successful” (Howerton & Thomas, 2004, p. 77). Regardless of why a student has walls built up against reading, the researcher deems it is important for teachers to work to break the walls down to positively influence students of the importance of reading in order to reverse the trend of the decline in reading. “As educators it is our responsibility to find texts and practices that can motivate and cultivate the skills of all of our students” (Lloyd, 2006, p. 31). Whittingham and Huffman (2009) believed one way to rid students of their

apathetic attitude toward reading is to introduce a book club (p. 130). According to Whittingham and Huffman (2009), the idea of a book club would have students to view it as social event instead of the same routine typical routine in the classroom (p. 131). Rutherford et al. (2009) are in agreement with Whittingham and Huffman (2009) in that Literature Circles is an exciting instructional practice that would get students involved with the text in a meaningful and enjoyable way (p. 44).

Rutherford et al. (2009) considered Literature Circles as a best instructional practice to increase motivation is that Literature Circles promote social interaction and freedom of choice in selecting text (p. 45). Buzard, Jarosz, Lato, & Zimmermann (2001) claimed that students are set up to fail and fall into the reluctant reader category when there is lack of material that is of interest, lack of appropriate level texts, and lack of meaningful instruction (p. 29). According to Buzard et al. (2001) motivating reluctant readers is a realistic problem that exists at the national, state, and local levels (p. 21). “Choice is a proven motivator for reluctant readers who seem to need even more motivation. Offering a variety of content to students so they can easily move to an area or topic that interests them reduces the risk of disengaging the student with text they personally find uninteresting” (Veto, 2006, p. 21). Evans (2002) also stated that choice in books influenced participation (p. 58). In an article that highlighted the success of her classroom with Literature Circles, Carpinelli (2006) stated that one way to improve students’ attitudes about reading and motivate them to read is to allow them choice in what they read in Literature Circles (p. 32). Carpinelli (2006) claimed that she did not have to do anything because students were motivated themselves because they were enthusiastic about the books they were reading (p. 33).

Allowing students to have choices in the classroom promotes a sense of ownership and pride in their efforts as literate individuals. As students feel this sense of ownership, they begin to develop more intrinsic motivation that assists in developing more positive attitudes toward reading-hopefully reading beyond the school door. (Rutherford et al., 2009, p. 44).

According to Lloyd (2004) students who have a choice in what they read, invest in reading (p. 120). “When students are not given choices in reading selections they are not invested in reading the book, which makes the task not authentic” (Buzard et al., 2000, p. 21). By empowering students’ choice in selection of text they are more likely to want to discuss it on a deeper level and share their opinions in a book club which in turn leads to greater motivation and reading not just for class but for enjoyment (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009, p. 131-132).

The researcher is in agreement with the literature that stated students often do not have a choice in the texts they read which at times means students can end up reading materials that is of no interest which forces them to tune out and not read the materials at all. According to Buzard et al. (2001), “Materials are often picked for students with little thought for relevance to their lives and interests” (p. 28). Buzard et al. (2001) claimed as a result of not reading books of interest, students either fail or become bored (p. 28). While teachers are bound to the district’s curriculum, they must somehow find ways to think outside the box and bring texts into the classroom that are of interest to the students. The first thing that a teacher needs to do at the beginning of the year is give a reading survey to his or her students to determine what topics or genres are of interest. Daniels’ (2002) first key ingredient in Literature Circles is student choice of texts. According to

Daniels (2002), “one of the gravest shortcomings of school reading programs is that assignments, choices, texts to read are usually all controlled by the teacher” (p. 18-19). “Young adult literature offers students the chance to read about characters, conflicts, and situations they relate to more quickly. When we want students, especially our reluctant readers, to read we need to give them the literature that most appeals to them” (Beers, 2003, p. 275). However, teachers should not just bring in books on topics or genres that students indicated are of interest to them and expect students to just pick them up and start reading. To assist students who fall in the unmotivated to read category to even make a selection about books, teachers have to be able to bring in the right book and sell the book to the students (Beers, 2003, p. 290). Beers (2003) indicated seven suggestions that can hook students on books and make even the most reluctant reader try. The suggestions are as follows: (a) read aloud, (b) read and tease, (c) create book jacket bulletin boards, (d) take students to your school library, (e) create a good books box, (f) know your students’ interests, and (g) talk about the authors (Beers, 2003, p. 290-296).

Not only is allowing for choice motivating for students, Literature Circles offer an outlet for students to just talk about books. According to Evans (2002) the instructional context of Literature Circles has motivational aspects because students take ownership of their learning, because Literature Circles is the forum in which their voices can be heard (p. 64). Students who are talking freely about books are actively engaged, not just passive participants in the reading process. McMahon and Goatley (1995) claimed that educational reformers are questioning the traditional discourse patterns in the classroom that leaves the student in a passive stance and instead insists that teachers include peer-led groups where students are interacting with each other to put the students in a more

active role in their learning (p. 23). “Once students have learned how to read, and move through middle and secondary school, reading is still regarded as a passive act of receiving someone else’s meaning” (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 20).

According to Noe and Johnson (1999), offering students the opportunity to meet and talk about a book is one of the biggest benefits of Literature Circles (p. 2). Noe and Johnson (1999) attributed this benefit to the fact that students are actively involved as readers in Literature Circles, and they rely on their own interpretations and ask questions instead of taking on a passive role as the teacher guides the discussion and calls on students to assist with making meaning of the text (p. 2). “Instead of looking at reading as receiving the meaning in texts, reader-oriented theories regard reading as the creation, in concert with texts, of personally significant experiences and meanings” (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 24). Many adolescents by nature are social beings. Literature Circles provide the opportunity for students to be able to interact with peers to discuss a common read text and is a motivating factor for students to read because they play a role in the decision making process of what topics or questions will be shared and discussed (McMahon & Goatley, 1995, p. 24). Blum et al. (2002) stated that the repositioning of the talk to students whereas the students are setting the agenda and determining what is of value in the reading causes students to be engaged in their learning (p. 101). “If readers are encouraged to develop personal responses to such literary works, they may exhibit increased engagement and motivation” (Franzak, 2006, p. 214).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 76% of the nation’s eighth graders who took the test in 2011 scored at the basic level in reading, which is one point higher than the 2009 NAEP reading scores (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2009). These results indicated that the majority of students would enter high school reading one or more levels below the ninth grade level. But in order to address the lack of proficient readers on the secondary level, teachers must first get all students to read. The literature suggests that teachers must do everything possible to motivate their students to read, because being able to comprehend what is read leads to academic success in school.

According to Beers (2003), unmotivated readers are one of four types of aliterate students (p. 279). Beers (2003) defined an unmotivated reader as a student who has a negative attitude toward reading and are the most difficult to help to connect to reading because he or she sees no value in it. However, it takes effort to connect unmotivated readers to books, but one way is to work from the students' interests (p. 279). "With Literature Circles, students are able to make several of their own decisions, which is motivating to many reluctant readers and gives students a feeling of control over a part of their learning" (Burns, 1998, p. 124). Literature Circles is one instructional technique to get away from the traditional method of teaching literature to offer students choice in selecting stimulating texts that they can connect to and a means to interact while exchanging ideas about a text. Many teachers look to Literature Circles as a way to engage students in self-directed literary experiences (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007, p. 21). The social interaction that takes place in a Literature Circle is a key component of its success. "To be able to verbalize the content, to listen to other modes of thinking, and to hear other perspectives all contribute to deepening comprehension" (Burns, 1998, p. 126). Logan and Johnston (2009) asserted that attitude toward reading not only influences independent reading, but possibly reading achievement (p. 199). By honoring

voice and choice, Literature Circles is a pathway to motivating students to read and to experience reading success as well as become lifelong readers.

Summary

In order to address the decline in reading, 46 of 50 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, standards that are thoroughly developed to assist teachers with equipping students with the reading skills necessary for the rigors of college and career texts. “Analyzing spoken messages, communicating with a variety of audiences and integrating oral, visual, and graphic information are the key skills in the Common Core’s Speaking and Listening strand” (Ryan & Frazee, 2012, p. 42). The body of literature investigating Literature Circles indicates that they provide “the kind of practice that helps to develop thoughtful, competent and critical readers” (Lin, 2004, p. 25). Marchiando (2013) believes Literature Circles is a key strategy to assist teachers into transitioning to Common Core State Standards (p. 19). This benefit likely is due to the collaborative nature of this strategy, as “Theorists in social constructivism believe that textual meaning and connection is best constructed in collaborative forums” (Polleck, 2010, p. 53). Although there has not been substantial research on the use of Literature Circles at the secondary level, many articles have been published on their use at the elementary and middle school levels. The authors appear to lean toward the use of Literature Circles in instructing students on how to comprehend texts. The researcher agrees with Wilfong’s (2009) and Lloyd’s (2004) claims that students must become a “master of text.” When students are masters of texts, as they must be in Literature Circles, they learn to independently apply comprehension strategies to construct meaning. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) highlighted research by Almasi (1995) showing that

Literature Circles “can increase comprehension, improve high level thinking and foster quality responses” (p. 21). The literature surrounding Literature Circles indicates that educators should strongly consider implementing them among their repertoire of strategies to transform students into strategic readers.

Literature Circles can serve as the vehicle for students making meaning of textbooks, which often are written in challenging language, and can help students begin the process of comprehending the various texts that make up the district’s curriculum. Pitman (1997) concluded her research by stating, “In literature circles, students are able to enhance reading skills, learn from each other, gain self-confidence, improve oral and written communication, discover important themes that run through literature, and have fun in a socially interactive environment” (p. 19). According to Block and Pressley (2002), instruction in a collaborative small-group setting helps struggling readers to build confidence because “less self-regulating students can observe the strategic and interpretive processing of more capable peers” (p. 344). While implementing Literature Circles in the classroom initially may be time consuming, the end result of students understanding and being able to discuss the text is worth the extra time it takes to train them in the Literature Circle roles until they can collaborate independently without having to rely on these roles when they analyze a text. Daniels (1994) stated that implementing Literature Circles in the classroom promotes learning by doing and that the incidental learning of various reading skills is practiced, reinforced, and strengthened through collaborative student effort. Regardless of the stage of reading students are in, the literature sends a message that students must be given an opportunity to work with peers to build their reading skills by reading deep and critically on their own in order to

grow in their literary experiences. After researching this form of collaborative learning, the researcher firmly believes that Literature Circles are the best way to assist students in making gains in reading proficiency at the secondary level.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The consistent use of Literature Circles is a research-based practice that has the potential to enhance student literacy. The researcher believes that Literature Circles can help high school students develop a sense of empowerment by being accountable for their learning, deepen their understanding of text through collaboration, and, most importantly, develop themselves as strategic readers. While extensive research on Literature Circles exists, most of it focuses on their use at the elementary and middle school levels, with few studies investigating their implementation at the secondary level. However, the research establishes Literature Circles as a proven practice to assist students in making gains in reading skills. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) stated that there is research to support that Literature Circles, “can increase comprehension, improve high level thinking and foster quality responses” (p. 21). Daniels (1994) highlighted a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin in which high school students in Communication Arts classes who participated in “true” cooperative grouping, which has a design similar to that of Literature Circles, “scored twice as far above the test mean” (p. 48). Another study of eighth grade students in Chicago who participated in Literature Circles scored 10% higher than other students in the Chicago area on a citywide reading assessment (Daniels, 2002, p. 8). The relevant body of research supports the hypothesis that implementing Literature Circles produces more proficient readers, regardless of the grade level.

Research Setting

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of implementing Literature Circles in a secondary Communication Arts classroom on reading comprehension.

Literature Circles sometimes also are referred to as book clubs, literature studies, cooperative book discussion groups, and reading circles, among other names. According to Daniels (1994), Literature Circles are small, temporary discussion groups of students who are reading the same work of literature and who each agree to uphold specific responsibilities during discussion sessions. The circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting. When the circle finishes a book, the members decide on a way to showcase their literary work for the rest of the class.

This study was conducted at a magnet high school in a large, unaccredited, urban school district in the midwest region of the United States. Although the school is part of a district that has lost state accreditation, the school itself has been accredited through the North Central Association since 1904. The students enrolled there at the time of the study were required to apply and had to meet certain requirements, such as a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5, no disciplinary infractions, and an average daily attendance rate of 90%, in order to be considered for admittance. At the time of the study, the school had 441 enrolled students, 66% of whom were female and 34% male, with an ethnicity breakdown of 73% Black, 22% White, and 5% other. The percentage of students who qualified for free/reduced lunch was 81%.

The school has experienced challenges with enrollment, and its current enrollment of 441 categorizes it as a small secondary school. The 2010 school year was the first year that enrollment decreased to around 550 students, which occurred because the new administration wanted to start small to build big. In other words, the administration wanted to limit enrollment to students who were truly interested in the theme of the school and who met the requirements to be admitted into the program and maintain their

slot in the school. Enrollment in prior years had approached 800 students, a considerably high number due to the school's status as a magnet school. Both students and their parents/guardians sought placement at the school because it seemed a better alternative than the neighborhood comprehensive high school in terms of academics and safety.

The study site also has been known to have high teacher turnover and continuous substitute teachers in core content area classes. Although teacher turnover has declined since the 2009-2010 school year, finding permanent district teachers to fill core content area positions has remained a challenge due to those positions being filled by teachers who are part of a national program that contracts with urban school districts. Those teachers tend to stay for the two years mandated by their contracts and then leave to pursue their original career goals. However, some of the teachers taking part in the program stay beyond the two-year contract.

The school also has faced challenges making adequate yearly progress (AYP). A review of their state assessment data from the past six years revealed that student scores at the proficient and advanced achievement levels ranked the study site as one of the highest performing high schools in the district, even though set targets were not met. However, scores plummeted in the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years. Even though AYP targets were not yet met, the school began to make gains and finally made AYP for the first time in its history in 2011 and at the conclusion of this study in 2012, the school of study surpassed the state average on the English II End of Course assessment.

Despite its challenges, the school has maintained its momentum of success by remaining consistent and establishing high expectations for enrollment in the magnet

program, as well as having buy-in from students, parents, and teachers. The recognition bestowed on the school by their making AYP became the catalyst of increased school spirit and a drive to do whatever it takes to continue on the path of academic success.

Background of Researcher

The researcher worked as a secondary English teacher in an urban/suburban school district in the Midwest, considered as such due to its position on the border of the city and county limits, as well as its urban population within a diverse suburban area. The researcher then worked for five years as a Reading Specialist in the same district before taking a position as the Teaching and Learning Facilitator at the study site. The researcher worked at the study site at the time of this study and for five years prior, during which time she witnessed the school shift from being considered one of the lowest performing schools in the district to progressing and achieving recognition. The position offered her much opportunity to partner with teachers and support them by providing research-based instructional strategies and methodologies.

The researcher's passion for literacy drives her actions in her personal and professional life. While never having struggled personally with literacy issues, she understands the importance of literacy and the consequences of the lack thereof. She has witnessed her college peers and her classroom students give up because they could not understand the text. She also has served on interview teams that eliminated candidates from consideration due to their inability to express or their lack of knowledge pertaining to how they planned to assist students in becoming more proficient readers who could derive meaning from texts. Statistics show that young people entering college have to take remedial courses that do not count toward their degrees. According to The National

Center for Public Policy and Higher Education: Southern Regional Education Board (2010) every year in the United States, nearly 60% of first-year college students must enroll in remedial English or Mathematics courses, which they do not earn college credit. As a lifelong learner and educator, the researcher hopes that literacy in the U.S. can become a past challenge that is no longer an issue.

Student Participants

Tenth grade students were selected to participate in the study because the state's End of Course (EOC) assessment in English is given to all students enrolled in 10th grade Communication Arts and the researcher wanted to utilize a literacy strategy to assist in continuing the momentum toward achieving AYP in Communication Arts. Groups consisted of students from five different class periods. Students from one of these classes served as the control group, which was selected by the fall/spring teacher participants. This population differs from those in most other studies on Literature Circles because it consists of secondary students. The majority of the research on Literature Circles involves students at the elementary and middle school levels. The researcher visited all tenth grade Communication Arts classes at the end of the first week and during the second week of the school to explain the study to the students and to give students parental permission forms to participate in the study. Parental permission forms were also given to 10th grade parents at Open House by the researcher and fall teacher participant. As stated in the parental permission form, students' identities will not be revealed; instead, student participants will be identified by numbers and teacher participants by pseudonyms.

Table 1

Experimental Group Characteristics

Experimental Group Characteristics

Subgroup	Number	Percent
All	73	100
Male	14	19
Female	59	81
Lunch F/R	54	74
IEP	9	12
ELL	2	1
Asian	2	1
Black	56	77
Hispanic	2	1
White	13	18

Note: F/R-Free and Reduced; IEP-Individualized Education Plan; ELL-English Language Learners.

Table 2

Control Group Characteristics

Control Group Characteristics

Subgroup	Number	Percent
All	11	100
Male	5	45
Female	6	55
Lunch F/R	11	100
IEP	2	18
Black	10	91
White	1	9

Note: F/R-Free and Reduced Lunch; IEP-Individualized Education Plan.

Teacher Participants

The research study was conducted using two teacher participants. The researcher met with both teacher participants to explain the study and invite them to participate in adding to the body of knowledge of utilizing Literature Circles on the secondary level. The Communication Arts teacher participated in the fall study, and the World History teacher participated in the spring study.

The Communication Arts teacher participant was a new teacher at the school. Before accepting the position, this teacher participant taught at a charter school. The teacher participant had less than five years of teaching experience and had received certification through an alternative route.

The World History teacher participant had taught in the school's Social Studies department for approximately two years and had taught previously in the school's Communication Arts department. This teacher participant, who had less than five years of teaching experience, had received certification through an alternative route but continued to teach after the two-year commitment.

The Fall Implementation Process

The 10th grade Communication Arts teacher participant received Literature Circles training by the researcher at the beginning of the school year and support by the researcher throughout the study. According to Daniels (1994), "In order to tap the power and potential of literature circles for their classrooms, teachers need to experience the activity for themselves" (p. 193). Therefore, the training consisted of the researcher modeling the Literature Circles roles during class time for the teacher participant using various short stories that the students were working on in the classroom. The researcher modeled the following six most commonly used roles:

- (1) Discussion Director (develops critical questions to discuss with group members/Literature Circle leader)
- (2) Illustrator (draws and/or shares interesting or important sections of the text)
- (3) Literary Luminary/Passage Master (identifies interesting or important sections of the text for reading aloud)

- (4) Connector (makes text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world/life connections)
- (5) Summarizer (provides a brief synopsis of the agreed-upon section of the reading)
- (6) Vocabulary Enricher (identifies unknown, interesting, or important words to enrich the vocabulary of the group members).

Each training session lasted for 90 minutes, the same amount of time as each class period during the second week of school. Three roles were modeled and practiced during each session, incorporating one of the chosen texts. Although only one 10th grade teacher participated in the study, all Communication Arts teachers were invited to take part in the Literature Circle training.

After training the teacher participant, the researcher acted as a co-teacher to assist the teacher participant in effectively implementing Literature Circles in the classroom for each experimental class. Before the initial training for students began, the researcher and teacher participant asked each participating class if any of the students had any experience with Literature Circles. Students with any such prior experience were used as experts to assist the researcher and teacher in training the other students. Day (2003) recommended that Literature Circle roles be explicitly taught and modeled for students. Due to the school's schedule, it took one week to model all of the roles. Each day of training focused on three Literature Circle roles, incorporating a variety of short texts. The 90-minute class period was divided into increments, allotting 15 minutes for reading aloud from the assigned text and 25 minutes for the Literature Circle groups to practice each role that was introduced in class and the remaining time was designated for sharing information with the class. During the share out time, the fall teacher participant and researcher conducted formative assessments to make instructional decisions regarding the

best way to implement Literature Circles. Every student in each class period experienced, modeled, guided, and independently practiced each Literature Circle role. Each student also received a resource packet from the researcher that explained each role in great detail. Once students truly understood how to work effectively in Literature Circle groups, they no longer had to rely on the role sheets. Indeed, as Daniels (1994) noted, “role sheets are supposed to be a temporary training device, not a permanent classroom fixture” (p. 186).

The content of each training day is listed as follows:

DAY 1: Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Vocabulary Enricher

DAY 2: Illustrator, Connector, Summarizer

DAY 3: Putting it all together-Literature Circles practice groups

At the conclusion of the student training period, the teacher participant divided each class into groups consisting of five to six students each so that they could experience what a “real” Literature Circles group would be like through a fishbowl demonstration. “A fishbowl demonstration can be highly effective even if your students have little prior experience to draw on. In this case, the participants may offer a more authentic demonstration that gives you lots of material on which to comment” (Noe & Johnson, 1999, p. 54). Before beginning this fishbowl practice session, the researcher and teacher participant reviewed the protocol for engaging as an active and collegial participant in a Literature Circles group. The protocol consisted of respecting each other’s perspectives, participating in friendly debate, not interrupting the speaker, sharing leadership (everyone doing their part), and debriefing to ensure understanding of the assigned reading and discussion.

By providing instruction that focused on turn taking procedures and on the types of contributions students could make during their conversations as well as providing opportunities to lead their own discussions about books, the teacher expanded the repertoire of discourse patterns about school subjects. (McMahon & Goatley, 1995 , p. 32)

Next, each student decided what role he or she wanted to practice first within the individual groups. For groups with only five members, it was suggested that whoever chose to serve as the illustrator should be the one to take on an additional role. The Literature Circle groups were each given the same short text to read to practice their assigned roles. The groups took turns practicing so that all of the other students in the class had an opportunity to observe the Literature Circles in action and use the critical friends approach to offer feedback. The researcher and teacher participant also provided feedback to each group regarding their strengths and opportunities for growth.

At the end of student training, the fall teacher participant and researcher met to develop a schedule for the implementation of Literature Circles in the classroom. The district's recommendation was "to reduce the amount of instruction time used" in order to respect the district's directive, the fall teacher participant and the researcher decided that Literature Circles would take place at least every other Friday for six months because the school used an ABC block schedule, with Friday class periods lasting only 45 minutes. Daniels (2002) stated "in order to work most effectively, Literature Circles must be regularly scheduled-not as an occasional 'treat,' but continuously throughout the school year" (p. 21). Also, at the conclusion of each scheduled Literature Circle day, the class would debrief together. Fridays previously had been reserved for independent reading

time because they had been designated as a day for teachers to re-teach and conference with individual students. The other days served as opportunities for the teacher to model and instruct the students as a whole class. The students participated in three newly formed Literature Circle groups when reading the novels *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Night* by Elie Wiesel, teacher-selected poems from the *Poetry Outloud* anthology, and other short texts assigned by the teacher.

The fall teacher participant and the researcher also decided that the structure of the Literature Circle groups would be heterogeneous. Marzano et al. (2001) favored heterogeneous over homogeneous grouping because low-ability students perform poorly when working with other low-ability students. Daniels (2002) claimed “this regular mixing of student groups is also important because Literature Circles offer a model of detracking, of how heterogeneous classrooms can work” (p. 26). The groups were formed based on the students’ SRI Lexile reading scores grade level equivalency, thus ensuring well-balanced Literature Circle groups that would allow struggling readers to advance by watching and listening to how more proficient readers interacted with text. After modeling Literature Circle groups for each experimental class, the fall teacher participant formed the Literature Circle groups with each group having at least two to three students who scored in the basic or below basic category on the SRI. The number of groups depended on each experimental class size. Each experimental class consisted of five to six Literature Circle groups with some groups having a member assume the Illustrator role in addition to their assigned role.

The Spring Implementation Process

With the shift of the literacy focus from fiction to nonfiction texts due to transitioning to Common Core State Standards, the researcher thought it was important to work with students in a core content area other than Communication Arts in order to observe them dissecting informational texts. For that reason, the researcher decided to work with the World History teacher during the spring semester before Spring Break for the school of study. The student participants remained the same, but the control group, teacher participant, and content area changed for the remaining months of the study.

The 10th grade World History teacher participant already had experience with Literature Circles, so the researcher provided only a brief review at the beginning of the spring semester and offered continued support for the duration of the study.

The researcher modeled the same six Literature Circle roles for the spring teacher participant as were used in the fall, employing various nonfiction articles chosen for the students' Literature Circles. Each student participant training session involved only a quick review of Literature Circles and group protocol because the majority of the students had participated in Literature Circles in the fall. Given their experience with Literature Circles by this point in the study, they did not need to rely on role sheets.

At the end of the review of Literature Circles, the spring teacher participant and researcher met to develop a schedule for the classroom implementation of Literature Circles using nonfiction texts mainly articles selected by the spring teacher's student worker. The same schedule was chosen for the spring semester as had been used in the fall semester for the same reasons, with the exception of Literature Circles occurring every Friday in rotating classes due to the number of weeks left in the school year.

Because the students had already experienced participating in Literature Circles, it was decided by the spring teacher participant and the researcher that they would be able to handle the responsibility of collaborating in their Literature Circle groups without being assigned roles. The students read news articles on various topics, such as high-stakes testing and dating in the world that were chosen by student workers and fall control group students that were scheduled in a spring experimental class.

The Literature Circle groups used a heterogeneous structure because the spring teacher participant and researcher thought it would be best for the less proficient readers to continue to witness what proficient readers do as they dissect informational text. The Literature Circle group members were somewhat changed from the fall due to students class change in the spring. However, each group consisted of at least two students that scored at the basic or below basic category.

At the conclusion of the study, the student participants and the fall and spring teacher participants received a Likert-scale survey that consisted of six questions regarding their views of Literature Circles. The Likert-scale survey for the student participants (Appendix B) consisted of six questions based on literature and the researcher's experience that focused on the students' perceptions of how Literature Circles assisted in improving their ability to become proficient readers. The questions were designed using a seven-statement continuum (strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). The Likert-scale survey for the two teacher participants (Appendix C) consisted of six questions that focused on the teachers' perceptions of how the students worked in Literature Circles and their own consistency of implementation. This survey also included a seven-statement continuum

(strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree).

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods design, which consists of both qualitative and quantitative research. The independent variable for the study was Literature Circles, and the dependent variable was reading comprehension.

Qualitative

The Literature Circles groups were observed using a modified walk-through form (see Appendix A) created by both the researcher and teacher participant. According to Daniels (1994), reading gains should be realized if Literature Circles are implemented correctly and consistently. The observation form used for this study was modified so that observations for purposes of the study and for purposes of evaluation would not be confused. The walk-through form traditionally used for observations was the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) fourth cycle observation form developed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff with input from district leaders and educators throughout the state of Missouri. The purpose of this form was to evaluate the effectiveness and extensiveness of instructional methodologies and strategies, as well as the depth of knowledge levels employed in the classroom. In order to maintain alignment with the district's and school's goal for observations, the modified form consisted of depth of knowledge level, cooperative learning, and student engagement. After developing the modified form based on conversations with the fall teacher participant regarding what should be included in the form, the researcher shared it with the teacher participant for input and edited it according to the agreed-upon version of what components should be included. The form included the following three

components: (a) cooperative learning -- students performing their assigned roles and collaborating with each Literature Circle group member, (b) depth of knowledge (DOK) level -- writing down the types of questions asked in each group to determine if the students were asking higher-level DOK questions, and (c) student engagement -- ensuring that the Literature Circles met and that the students did not stray from the task at hand. After each observation, the researcher scheduled a time to meet with the teacher participant to discuss the observation and create a plan of action. The form was used in each class based on the agreed-upon Literature Circles schedule.

Quantitative

Blankstein (2004) stated that “The value of any instructional practice should be judged according to its results” (p. 155). Each student participating in the study was required by the school to take the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) as a pre-assessment in the fall and a post-assessment in the spring to determine if any reading gains were realized. The SRI was selected as the assessment tool because it is a research-based assessment of students’ reading comprehension ability and it provides both “criterion-reference and normed-referenced test results” (SRI, 2006b, p. 137). “SRI allows you to determine student reading levels, compare these levels to normative data, and gauge the effectiveness of instruction and/or intervention” (SRI, 2006b, p. 127). This inventory measures a student’s reading level using a Lexile measure, which allows the teacher(s) to chart the student’s growth over time. Also, the National Center on Response to Intervention ranked the SRI as a reliable and valid assessment to measure overall comprehension and as “an effective assessment to:

- Identify struggling readers.
- Apply as a universal screener and monitoring tool.

- Monitor progress toward AYP goals.
- Monitor effectiveness of instruction.
- Establish obtainable and realistic growth goals for students.
- Indicate expected performance on state tests” (SRI, 2006a, p. 2).

The updated version of the SRI had been used at the study site for the three years prior to this study. In the researcher’s role as Teaching and Learning Facilitator, SRI data were utilized to assist teachers in identifying students who required targeted instruction in order to become proficient readers. SRI data also served as reliable indicators to inform the teachers and administrative team of which students would likely score at the proficient/advanced achievement levels. The school’s EOC data from the three years prior to this study has aligned with SRI data.

Data Collection

During the study period, the participating students were required to take the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), a computer-based reading assessment measuring comprehension based on a Lexile level that is converted to a projected grade level equivalency. The SRI was used as a pre and post assessment to track the literacy growth of the students participating in Literature Circles. The SRI assessment scores also were used to ensure that the Literature Circles groups were heterogeneous based on reading levels. As Daniels (1994) noted, “Literature Circles automatically mix kids up in constantly shifting groupings, so that everyone gets to know and work with everyone, without the usual rigid classifications of high, low, or middle” (p. 72). Heterogeneity was particularly important in this study because the Literature Circles incorporated texts from the 10th grade curriculum as opposed to texts decided on by the group members themselves, as is traditionally the case in Literature Circles at the elementary and middle school levels.

Throughout the duration of the study, the researcher observed the Literature Circles at their scheduled times in each of the teacher participants' classes and provided resources to maintain their momentum. The observation forms were used to determine if students were growing as readers based on their discussions and their engagement within their Literature Circle groups. The researcher kept anecdotal notes on the types of questions asked by the Discussion Director and raised during the time allotted for the Literature Circles, as well as how the students responded to those questions.

Data Analysis

The SRI pre-assessment in the fall and post-assessment in the spring was used to assess whether students made improvements in their reading Lexile scores that could be attributed to their participation in Literacy Circles. The district has mandated that all student data be included in the study and that only the average of student participants' scores be reported for both pre and post-SRI. The mean, median, and mode from the SRI pre-assessment and post-assessment were calculated for the 10th grade fall/spring experimental and control groups participating in the study, viewed in terms of the entire sample population. These student scores serve as a predictor for reading comprehension, as verified through a statistical analysis of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) utilizing a z -test. The characteristics of the experimental and control groups also were separated into subgroups consisting of (a) ethnicity, (b) free/reduced lunch status, (c) special education, (d) gender, and (e) English Language Learners (ELL).

This study utilized a mixed methodology consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Research Questions

Q1: Does the implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level increase reading comprehension, as measured by Lexile Scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

Hypothesis: There will be a difference in reading comprehension after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Null Hypothesis: There will be no difference in reading comprehension after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Q2: Do secondary students participating in Literature Circles score at a higher reading Lexile on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) than students not participating in Literature Circles?

Hypothesis: There will be a difference in reading Lexile scores after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Null Hypothesis: There will be no difference in the reading Lexile scores after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

Q3: Does teacher fidelity of Literature Circle implementation impact reading achievement?

Q4: How do teacher observations by and conferences with the primary investigator assist in teacher fidelity of Literature Circles?

Q5: What are the views of secondary Communication Arts student and teacher participants?

Summary

The aim of the study was to implement a research-based best practice in literacy instruction, Literature Circles, into secondary level Communication Arts classes and to assess their effect on literacy skills. According to Daniels (1994), “Literature Circles turn reading instruction upside down in almost every dimension” (p. 6). All of the student participants completed a pre-assessment in the fall and a post-assessment in the spring in order to measure growth in reading as a result of participation in Literature Circle groups. The potential advantage to study participation was that students at the secondary level who participated in Literature Circles showed growth in reading skills, especially struggling readers. This sends a clear message to secondary teachers that they do not have to be reading teachers in order to teach reading. However, the fidelity of this research study was in the hands of the teacher participants adhering to the set schedule for implementing Literature Circles.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

This mixed methods study focused on the effect of implementing Literature Circles at the secondary level on reading comprehension. This chapter includes the measurement of change in reading comprehension after the implementation of Literature Circles, as well as a comparison of the average scores of students in the research group who participated in Literature Circles versus those in the control group. These student scores served as a predictor for reading comprehension, as verified through a statistical analysis of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) utilizing a *z*-test. The researcher also investigated whether or not the consistency of Literature Circle implementation impacted reading achievement and if observations by the researcher and conferences between the teacher participant and the researcher help to encourage consistency. Lastly, this chapter includes a report of the student and teacher participants' views of Literature Circles based on a Likert-scale survey that consisted of six questions.

Participants

The population investigated in this study included two teacher participants and 71 10th-grade students (60 students in the experimental group and 11 in the control group) at a magnet high school in a large urban area in the Midwest. The Communication Arts teacher participated in the fall data collection, and the World History teacher participated in the spring data collection. A complete data set of SRI scores were collected from 60 of the 73 student participants selected for the study because 13 students (18%) lacked either a pre-assessment or post-assessment SRI score. In an effort to maintain the accuracy of

the results, the data from these 13 student participants were eliminated from the final analysis, thus yielding a participation rate of 82%.

Research Questions

RQ 1

Does the implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level increase reading comprehension, as measured by Lexile scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)? The researcher collected pre and post-SRI data for all 10th-grade students and entered the scores into an Excel spreadsheet to calculate the descriptive data. The school district requested that the researcher report the average SRI scores for both fall and spring student participants.

Table 3 provides descriptive data: mean, median, and standard deviation, of the student participants pre- and post- assessment SRI Lexile scores.

Table 3.

Descriptive Data for Experimental Group's Pre and Post SRI Assessment

Descriptive Data	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
Mean	1050.117	1089.217
Median	1051	1122.5
Standard Deviation	231.5168	196.1137
Minimum	216	475
Maximum	1447	1504
Count	60	60

According to Table 3, the mean Lexile score based on the SRI for the fall semester was 1050.117. The SRI (2007) Technical Guide states that the “SRI is designed to measure a reader’s ability to comprehend narrative and expository texts of increasing difficulty” utilizing the Lexile Framework, a metric system that measures a reader’s

ability in Lexiles (p. 9-10). The mean Lexile score for the fall semester student participants' fell within the Grade 9 - Grade 10 range, which suggested that majority of these student participants were reading at grade level when the study began.

Table 3 shows the mean Lexile score based on the SRI for the spring was 1089.217, which falls in the Grade 10 (1025-1250) - Grade 11 (1050-1300) range. This result suggested that the student participants were reading at grade level and above. As noted in Table 3, the calculated mean Lexile score of all student participants was at or above grade level. The mean SRI Lexile scores for the fall (1050.117) and spring (1089.217) suggests that participation in Literature Circles statistically shows no difference.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no difference in reading comprehension after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile scores achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

After comparing the z -test value of 0.998 to the critical value of 1.96, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the data does not support a statistical difference, or a statistical increase in reading comprehension levels following implementation of the use of Literature Circles at the secondary level.

RQ 2

Do secondary students participating in Literature Circles score at a higher reading Lexile on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) than students not participating in Literature Circles? The researcher collected pre and post SRI Lexile data for students participating in Literature Circles and students in the control group. Table 4 shows the

SRI scores based on Lexile levels for the pre- and post- assessment of participants in the control group.

Table 4

Descriptive Data for Control Group's Pre and Post SRI Assessment

Descriptive Data	Pre- Assessment Control Group	Post-Assessment Control Group
Mean	951.6364	961
Median	934	932
Standard Deviation	196.3249	170.1229
Minimum	609	712
Maximum	1330	1244
Count	11	11

A descriptive comparison of the data listed in Tables 3 and 4 reveals that students who participated in Literature Circles experienced a larger increase in reading comprehension than students who did not participate in Literature Circles. Little difference was found between the mean Lexile scores of students who participated in Literature Circles pre-assessment (1050.117) and post-assessment (1089.217) and those in the control group pre-assessment (951.6364) to the post-assessment (961). As indicated previously in the results pertaining to Question 1, the mean Lexile score increased from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment for students in both the experimental and control groups. However, a descriptive comparison of these means show there is really no difference between the pre and post SRI scores.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no difference in the reading Lexile scores after implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level, as measured by a comparison of pre and post-Lexile achieved on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

In comparing the z -test value of 0.119 to the critical value of 2.228, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the data does not support a statistical difference in the change in reading Lexile scores between the pre and post assessment between students participating in Literature Circles and those not participating in Literature Circles at the secondary level.

RQ 3

Does teacher fidelity of Literature Circle implementation impact reading comprehension? The researcher and the teacher participants met to develop a schedule for the implementation of Literature Circles. As one of the conditions for the approval of this research, the district requested a reduction from the original amount of instruction time spent in Literature Circles. In order to adhere to this directive, the researcher and both teacher participants agreed that Literature Circles would occur on Fridays because the school used an ABC block schedule, and classes on Fridays lasted only 45 minutes.

In the original research design, the researcher and the fall teacher participant were to meet on 13 consecutive Fridays for Literature Circle implementation. However, of the 13 Fridays, the teacher participant was absent one day, and on three other days, the teacher participant taught a different lesson than originally planned and decided to reduce the amount of time spent in the Literature Circles. On one Friday, the researcher could not observe due to work obligations, and on yet another Friday, the researcher could not observe for the entire 45 minutes.

The spring schedule included meetings on only 11 Fridays due to End of Course Assessment testing during April. Both the spring teacher participant and the researcher fulfilled all 11 Friday commitments of Literature Circle implementation. However, on

two Fridays, the researcher could not observe for the entire 45 minutes. The researcher believed that deviations from the schedule were justified due to factors outside of the researcher's control.

RQ 4

How do teacher observations by and conferences with the primary investigator assist in teacher fidelity of Literature Circles? As stated in Chapter 3, the observation form utilized for this study was developed by the researcher and the teacher participants agreed that the observation form was acceptable for use in this study. The observation form included the following three key components: (a) cooperative learning -- students performing their assigned roles and collaborating with each Literature Circle group member, (b) depth of knowledge (DOK) level -- writing down the types of questions asked in each group to determine if the students were asking higher-level DOK questions, and (c) student engagement -- ensuring that the Literature Circles met and that the students did not stray from the task at hand. These components were selected in order to maintain alignment with the district and school of study goal for observations. The form was utilized by the researcher in each class based on the agreed-upon Literature Circles schedule. After each observation, the researcher met immediately with the teacher participant or scheduled a time to meet with the teacher participant to discuss the observation of the Literature Circle groups. The researcher shared anecdotal notes on the Literature Circle groups that were observed as well as a plan of action to maintain the momentum if the observation notes included a lack of participation and engagement amongst the Literature Circle group members.

Table 5

Fall and Spring Observation Results

Fall & Spring Observations			
	Cooperative Learning	Depth of Knowledge Level (DOK)	Student Engagement
Fall	8	DOK 2-3	4
Spring	11	DOK 2-3	10

As stated in Question 3, of the 13 scheduled Literature Circle dates for the fall, only 8 of those days were Literature Circle implementation days in which the researcher was able to observe. The notes from the fall observations of Literature Circles revealed students asking and responding to questions posed by the members of the group. After reading the short story, “Thank You Ma’m” by Langston Hughes, a few student questions were: “Why was a 12- year-old out late at night?,” “Why would Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones take Roger to her house after he tried to steal her purse?” Also while reading the novel, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, a few questions that were posed were by students were: “Since Okonkwo is such a leader, why doesn’t he work with his son instead of criticize him for being worthless and lazy?,” “Why would the other village just give over their own people instead of go to war?,” “How could Okonkwo be so heartless and kill a kid he raised as his own?” These few questions show that student participants were asking the questions on the DOK level of 2-3; furthermore, asking questions that encourage their Literature Circle group members to make inferences and make judgments. Based on the notes by the researcher, there were little to no DOK level 1 questions; however, Table 5 indicated that student engagement occurred 4 out of the 8

times that the Literature Circles were observed by the researcher. Information collected in the anecdotal notes indicated that student engagement started to flounder toward the end of the fall implementation process. It was noted that not all Literature Circle members were completing the assigned reading, reading was completed but members were not prepared to perform the assigned Literature Circle roles, and there was more “chit-chat” type of talk than focusing on the assigned text.

Table 5 displayed a difference between the fall and spring observations for consistency in implementation of Literature Circles and student engagement, but similar for DOK levels. As indicated in Table 5, all 11 of the scheduled Literature Circle days occurred as scheduled by the researcher and spring teacher participant. The DOK level indicated that students continued to ask DOK level 2-3 questions in the spring and little to no DOK level 1 questions. A sampling of the questions asked by students in response to articles read during the spring observations include: “Would this be called cheating?,” “Do the ends justify the means?,” “How would you feel if our school would have done this during EOC testing?,” in response to an article, “China Students use Intravenous Drips for Exams” from *The China Post*. Another news article, “Gift Cards for Students’ Good Scores on Standardized Tests” from WUSA, a CBS affiliated television station in Washington, D.C., students posed the questions: “Where does the money come from?,” “Why give incentives for students incentives to do what they are supposed to do?,” and “Why is it okay for parents but not teacher?” These types of questions fall in the DOK level 2-3, because the questions cause the students to think critically to make an inference and draw conclusions. Student engagement for the spring indicated that students were engaged 10 out of the 11 times. The increase in engagement from the spring to the fall

may be due to the students in the spring did not assume the Literature Circle roles and instead of reading novels, the students read newspaper articles. The novel read in the fall, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe had a grade level equivalent of 5.9. However, when text complexity components such as the African culture and historical events are factored in, the grade level equivalent of *Things Fall Apart* increases. The novel, *Things Fall Apart* is a more difficult read than the newspaper articles read in the spring. “Newspapers readability range from fifth to college level” (Johns & Wheat, 1984, p. 432). According to the researcher’s anecdotal notes, spring student participants encouraged participation of all Literature Circle group members by asking a student who was not actively involved in the discussion their thoughts on a question and even having members that did not read the article to remove themselves from the group and join them after the article was read. The accountability shown by the spring student participants had a positive impact on the engagement. Despite the differences between the fall and the spring, although statistically reading comprehension did not improve, student engagement increased.

This question proved difficult to answer because of the various factors that may influence the consistency with which teacher participants implemented Literature Circles. As stated in the results pertaining to Question 3, the spring teacher participant more consistently implemented Literature Circles than the fall teacher participant. A person’s perception would be that fidelity of implementation of a strategy is improved during a scheduled observation. According to Marshall (2012), when teachers have a scheduled observation, they generally make sure that the best of teaching and learning is taking place (p. 19-20). However, even with observations and conferences, fidelity of implementation was lacking in the fall. The results from Question 3 revealed that even

with the best intentions of following a set, agreed upon schedule, things can happen that may cause one to deviate from the schedule.

RQ 5

What are the views of secondary Communication Arts student and teacher participants? Students and teachers participated in a Likert-scale survey that measured their perception of Literature Circles at the conclusion of the study in the spring. Thirty of the 60 student participants returned their surveys, and both (2) of the teacher participants returned their surveys. The Likert-scale survey for the student participants consisted of six questions that focused on the students' perceptions of how Literature Circles assisted in improving their ability to become proficient readers. The questions were designed using a seven-statement continuum (strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree).

According to the results obtained from the 30 student surveys, almost 50% of students enjoyed participating in Literature Circles and felt that collaborating with peers on texts assisted them with comprehension. However, a number of students noted an indifferent attitude toward Literature Circles and their impact on the students' ability to truly comprehend a text.

Table 6

Student Participants' Survey Results

Student Participant Survey Questions							
Student Participant Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed participating in Literature Circles.	5	5	5	9	2	1	3
My participation in Literature Circles helped me to comprehend the assigned text.	2	9	5	9	1	2	2
I would like to participate in Literature Circles in my other core content area classes.	4	5	1	7	5	5	3
My participation in Literature Circles empowered me to be accountable for my learning.	4	2	7	9	2	4	2
My participation in Literature Circles helped me to develop the necessary collaborative skills to discuss texts with my peers.	3	6	6	8	3	2	2
I feel as though I am a more strategic reader through my participation in Literature Circles.	2	5	7	7	3	3	3

Note: The number of students surveyed=60. The number of surveys returned=30.

Although the Likert-scale survey was developed for students to rate their personal opinions about their growth towards becoming strategic readers, the researcher encouraged students to write comments as well. Eleven student participants wrote a comment on their survey. Of the 11 comments, there were five positive, four negative, and two neutral. Some of the comments included: "Literature Circles gave the opportunity to discuss the topic with my peers and had a positive impact on my reading improvement;" "I don't think Literature Circles are bad, they just need topics that deal with our daily lives and affect us teenagers;" "I like Lit. Circles because I understood the text more and I'm able to get my questions answered;" "They never really worked out; little class participation;" "I already knew how to do all of this;" and "I would have answered better if they were productive."

The Likert-scale survey for the two teacher participants consisted of six questions that focused on the teachers' perceptions of how the students worked in Literature Circles and their own consistency of implementation. This survey also included a seven-statement continuum (strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). Teachers were also encouraged to write their own personal opinions regarding Literature Circles.

The two teacher participants responded affirmatively to the question, "I plan to continue implementing Literature Circles." This response conflicted with the response to the first question in which the teacher participants stated that their students did not appear to enjoy participating in Literature Circles.

Table 7

Teacher Participants' Survey Results

Teacher Participant Survey Questions	Teacher Participant Survey Questions						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My students appeared to enjoy Literature Circles.					1		1
My students appeared to comprehend the assigned text when participating in Literature Circles.			1	1			
I plan to continue implementing Literature Circles.			2				
I followed the Literature Circle implementation schedule.	1						1
I had to re-teach students how to participate in Literature Circles.	1	1					
I remained in a facilitator's role during Literature Circles.				1		1	

Note: The number of teachers surveyed=2. The number of surveys returned =2.

The fall teacher participant chose not to provide additional comments on the survey; the spring teacher participant stated, "If we had started Literature Circles in the fall, they would have been more successful. The students enjoyed working collaboratively, but had difficulty adjusting to the Literature Circle structure. I love using nonfiction texts with Literature Circles, however!"

Summary

An analysis of the data from the z -test did not support the hypothesis. The researcher found some findings difficult to discern due to the nature of the research question, such as those involving the consistency of Literature Circle implementation by the teacher participants and the effect of observations and conferences with the teacher participants. Student engagement improved in the spring not necessarily comprehension statistically. However, according to the student participant Likert scale 50% enjoyed participating in Literature Circles despite 25% of the student participants who indicated an indifferent attitude on the student participant Likert scale. Similarly, the teacher responses were conflicted with the student responses; they noted that they enjoyed Literature Circles and would continue using this instructional method, but the students noted a lack of enjoyment.

Overall, the outcome of this study indicates the need for secondary level teachers to discard the content area specialist attitude and embrace the idea that all teachers must be teachers of reading if they are to help students to become successful both in academics and in life. While it can take a few weeks to become accustomed to implementing any new strategy, consistency and fidelity of implementation are key in understanding the true potential of a strategy. Chapter 5 will discuss the results of this study as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

Literacy is a national concern; for this reason, Gewertz (2010) claimed that many leaders in education believe that a “literacy revolution” is needed in order to prepare students to tackle the more complex material that they will experience in college, as well as to meet the demands of future careers. According to the NAEP, 76% of the nation’s eighth graders who took the test in 2011 scored at the basic level in reading, which is one point higher than the 2009 NAEP reading scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). These results indicated that the majority of students would enter high school reading one or more levels below the ninth-grade level. Furthermore, many students entering college had to take remedial reading courses. The Nation’s Report Card (NAEP) clearly shows that action must be taken to address the lack of proficient readers on the secondary level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Daniels (1994) stated that collaborative learning is an educational best practice that can increase achievement when students are allowed to participate in cooperative structures within the classroom. Literature Circles can serve as vehicles to assist students in progressing in reading due to their structure, which allows students to think critically, have a voice, and engage in a meaningful reading experience (Lin, 2004, p. 23). The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of implementing Literature Circles in a secondary Communication Arts classroom on reading comprehension. This chapter provides a summary of the study as well as conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. It also presents a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for the school of study and future research.

The focus of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of implementing Literature Circles at the secondary level on reading comprehension. This study utilized a mixed methods design, which consists of both qualitative and quantitative research. The independent variable for the study was Literature Circles, and the dependent variable was reading comprehension. The purpose was to measure any change in reading Lexile scores based on the pre and post SRI Lexile scores of students participating in Literature Circles in comparison to students in the control group pre and post SRI Lexile scores. As well as evaluating if fidelity of implementation has an impact on reading achievement and if observations and conferences between teacher participant and primary investigator assists with fidelity of implementation, and lastly, surveying the views of Literature Circles by student and teacher participants.

Interpretation of Results

After implementing Literature Circles at the secondary level, the results of the data did not support the researcher's claim that secondary students reading comprehension increased through participation in Literature Circles. While this study did not prove statistically any significant gains from participation in Literature Circles, observable gains occurred through the higher level of student questioning and students responding with evidence cited from the text. The notes from the fall observations of Literature Circles revealed students were engaged in exploratory talk as well as asking and responding to questions posed by the members of the group. After reading the short story, "Thank You Ma'm" by Langston Hughes, a few student questions were: "Why was a 12-year-old out late at night?," and "Why would Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones take Roger to her house after he tried to steal her purse?" Also while reading the novel,

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe, a few questions that were posed by students were: “Since Okonkwo is such a leader, why doesn’t he work with his son instead of criticize him for being worthless and lazy?,” “Why would the other village just give over their own people instead of go to war?,” and “How could Okonkwo be so heartless and kill a kid he raised as his own?” These few questions show that student participants were asking the questions on the DOK level of 2-3; questions that encourage their Literature Circle group members to make inferences and make judgments. Also, the student participant survey results showed that 50% of students enjoyed the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers when reading a complex text. “When students have an opportunity to learn in a way that best meets their needs and enables them to be successful, they are more positive about the experience” (Pitton, 2005, p. 93).

The original research design consisted of a schedule of 13 Fridays during the fall semester and 11 Fridays during the spring semester. Of the 13 scheduled Literature Circle dates for the fall, only 8 of those days were Literature Circle implementation days in which the researcher was able to observe. However, both the spring teacher participant and the researcher fulfilled all 11 Friday commitments of Literature Circle implementation. Despite having a schedule for Literature Circle implementation, there were factors during the fall and spring semesters that created considerable deviations from the schedule. The question may arise if the deviations from the schedule lowered the validity/reliability of the results of this study and due to the observational data collected the researcher agrees that there are limitations but the results are valid and reliable. A comparison of the pre-assessment Lexile score mean of 1050.117 and the post-assessment Lexile score mean of 1089.217 revealed a noticeable increase.

Therefore, if all 13 Fridays instead of 11 were utilized for Literature Circle implementation during the fall semester the researcher believes the student participants' Lexile scores might have been higher.

Research Question 4, *How do teacher observations by and conferences with the primary investigator assist in teacher fidelity of Literature Circles?* This was a challenge to determine results, because it was difficult to discern whether teacher fidelity had an impact on the reading comprehension of the student participants. Factors such as incorporating other research based instructional practices and student participants enrolled in a reading intervention class may have influenced the SRI results. However, it is difficult to conclude if teacher fidelity had an impact on the SRI scores for student participants. To check for fidelity of implementation the researcher followed the calendar schedule that was decided upon by both teacher participants and the researcher.

Once in the fall/spring teacher participant's class, the researcher had the opportunity to observe if Literature Circles were truly being implemented. The researcher did note that Literature Circles on the secondary level looked different in the fall and the spring due to the student participants' familiarity with Literature Circles. In the fall, the student participants utilized Literature Circle roles for three weeks. However, students needed to assume the roles again in week 5 due to lack of student participation/engagement in Literature Circle groups. In week 7, fall student participants were able to drop the roles altogether. In the spring, the student participants did not utilize Literature Circle roles. The researcher noted that the student participants wanted to move to a Socratic Seminar style instead of separate Literature Circle groups. The researcher and the spring teacher participant decided together that after the students met

in their Literature Circle groups first to discuss the news article, then students could move toward a Socratic Seminar since the students expressed that they wanted to be part of a larger discussion. Information collected in the researcher's anecdotal notes indicated that student engagement started to flounder toward the end of the fall implementation process. This may be due to deviations from the Literature Circle implementation schedule. However, the accountability shown by the spring student participants had a positive impact on the engagement. The increase in engagement from the spring to the fall may be due to the students in the spring did not assume the Literature Circle roles and instead of reading novels, the students read newspaper articles. The novel read in the fall, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe had a grade level equivalent of 5.9. However, when text complexity components such as the African culture and historical events are factored in, the grade level equivalent of *Things Fall Apart* increases. The novel, *Things Fall Apart* is a more difficult read than the newspaper articles read in the spring. "Newspapers readability range from fifth to college level" (Johns & Wheat, 1984, p. 432).

Despite the differences between the fall and the spring, although statistically reading comprehension did not improve, student engagement increased. Although this study was limited in scope, the results from this study indicated that more research is needed regarding the implementation of Literature Circles at the secondary level.

Recommendations for School of Study

According to Tovani (2000), secondary teachers should work to ensure that they weave literacy instruction into the curriculum. As outlined in the literature review, Literature Circles, a well noted reading strategy on the elementary and middle school level, not only develops the student as reader, it is a strategy that builds the student's

collaborative skills as well as encourages the student to take on the accountability for his or her learning (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). Therefore, educators at the secondary level regardless of the content area taught, can address this lack of reading proficiency by researching best practices in reading instruction and seeking professional learning opportunities to better equip themselves in the implementation of best practices in reading instruction.

A recommendation for the school of study is a school-wide literacy initiative on the secondary level should be developed to support the efforts of the secondary teachers in moving students to a higher level of reading proficiency so students become college and career ready. Lemov (2010) suggested that every teacher is a teacher of reading and that teachers should make it a priority to help students unlock the meaning of text because once they can read for meaning, they can do anything. *The 2006 Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy Report* by Biancarosa and Snow (2006) addressed the need for schools on the middle and secondary level to change the climate to improve adolescent literacy by putting place some type of infrastructure to better support teachers in the area of literacy (p. 13). This will allow teachers to assist students in acquiring the reading skills necessary to serve them for a lifetime.

Equally important to a school-wide literacy initiative, is on-going, job embedded training to improve student learning and increase student success in the identified literacy strategy implementation. Professional development is an important piece before implementing any new strategies. It is critical to highlight the guiding principles behind a strategy and to make sure that those principles are made known to teachers during

training. The teachers should also experience the identified strategy themselves in order to really know how to implement the strategy. According to Podhajski, Mather, Nathan and Sammons (2009), increased knowledge changes the delivery instruction and improves student academic outcome. Therefore, it is important to ensure that teachers as well as administration receive on-going training in strategies to be implemented in the school in order to positively impact student achievement.

Lastly, a recommendation for the school of study is to include an accountability piece associated with SRI Lexile score. By having an accountability piece such as assigning a letter grade with the SRI lexile score, students might have made a greater effort to take the SRI seriously instead of looking at it as another meaningless test.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results of this study suggested that of the 60, 10th grade students who participated in Literature Circles and the 11 students who were part of the control group that there were little to no difference in gains made in reading achievement based on the Lexile scores from the pre to post SRI assessment. By being limited in scope in sample size in terms of 10th grade student participants and 10th grade students in the control group, one recommendation for future studies would be to acquire data from a larger sample of students. Suggestions also include increasing the sample size to include students from more than one grade level. The additional data may reveal much needed literacy information as it pertains to students in upper level secondary grades regarding their preparedness to take on the rigors of a college text or be placed in a remedial reading class.

In addition to increasing the sample size to include students from more than one grade level, another recommendation for future research would be to include other urban school systems. Results from this study consisted only of 10th grade students in a Midwest urban magnet high school, results could be strengthened if a larger amount of data was collected throughout the Midwest.

A third recommendation for future study would be to keep the research limited to one teacher participant for the duration of the data collection. This study included a separate teacher participant for the fall and the spring. Although both teacher participants followed the construct of the study to the best of their ability with slight deviations during the fall semester, each teacher participant taught different core content areas and had their own unique style and enthusiasm for their students' participation in Literature Circles.

A fourth recommendation would be to add a winter assessment. The original design of the research only consisted of a fall and spring; pre and posttests to determine reading growth based on the Lexile score. However, since the study had two teacher participants, it would have been ideal to have the fall (pre) test to indicate where the students started before working with the fall teacher participant, a winter (mid) test to know where the students were before transitioning to the spring teacher, and the spring (post) test to have the final reading growth results. The researcher believes by having this data it would have given more information for the interpretation process as well as possibly give more information to the fidelity of implementation.

Another recommendation for future studies of implementing Literature Circles on the secondary level is for the teacher participants to explicitly teach reading strategies. According to Daniel's (1994) "Literature Circles do teach reading skills" (p. 187) and

represent actual comprehension strategies, a teacher can adequately prepare his/her class with becoming more accustomed to participating in Literature Circles by teaching questioning, summarizing, visualizing, determining importance, making connections, and making inferences. Baumann, Hooten, and White (1999) claimed that planned and unplanned instruction around comprehension strategies students demonstrate growth and are able to retain and transfer that knowledge. They discussed three types of strategy lessons: elaborated strategy lessons (lessons that are detailed in which the teacher explains the strategy, models it, and provides guided and independent practice), brief strategy lessons (planned review of strategies previously taught), and impromptu strategy lessons (unplanned lessons that seize the moment when presented during reading). In Biancarosa and Snow's 2006, *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy Report* listed direct, explicit comprehension instruction as a key instructional element for effective adolescent literacy programs. The report highlighted five approaches: comprehension strategies instruction (instruction that explicitly gives students strategies), comprehension monitoring and metacognition instruction (instruction that teaches students to become aware of their understanding when reading), teacher modeling (teacher using read alouds to model how to use a strategy), scaffolded instruction (teachers giving support to students practicing strategies and employing gradual release), and apprenticeship models (teachers engaging students in content centered learning) (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 13-14). Although explicitly teaching reading strategies was not part of the study's original design, the fall semester teacher participant taught the essential strategies throughout the week to the students. The researcher is in agreement with Baumann et al. (1999) and Biancarosa and Snow's

(2006) *Reading Next Report* that whatever approach is utilized, strategy instruction must happen in order for students to demonstrate reading growth through their ability to transfer the use of strategies in other content areas. It is the researcher's belief that is why the students no longer wanted to be in a "traditional" Literature Circle, but instead wanted to move toward a more Socratic Seminar style type of class during the spring semester.

Additionally, more time to participate in Literature Circles might have resulted in greater student participation. The scheduled design of the study only permitted students participation in Literature Circles on Fridays in which the class time was only 45 minutes versus other days of the week, in which the scheduled classes were 90 minutes. Daniels (2002) firmly stated "Literature Circles are not a spontaneous activity...by definition Literature Circles require planning, preparation and readiness...we need two to three hours a week-time fore reading, for writing in reading logs, for meeting in small book clubs, and for gathering as a whole class to share responses and monitor the development of our conversations" (p. 81). However, this was the school district of study decision to limit the students participation time. Daniels (2002) recognizes that it may be difficult to get the time needed to have a Literature Circles on the middle and high school level, but the time is needed at least at the beginning of the implementation process (p. 259). Regardless, it would have been more beneficial for the students to have more time to work together in Literature Circles so that they could effectively collaborate and engage in more critical thinking about the text. Being able to have a collaborative discussion is one of the English Language Arts CCSS Speaking and Listening Standards and the purpose of CCSS is to have students college and career ready.

Equally important is to allow students to have a choice of texts. In the original design, the researcher and the teacher utilized the grade level novels indicated in the curriculum. Daniels (2002) first key ingredient in Literature Circles is student choice of texts. According to Daniels (2002), “one of the gravest shortcomings of school reading programs is that assignments, choices, texts to read are usually all controlled by the teacher” (p. 18-19). Daniels (2002) suggests that when beginning Literature Circles, teachers should allow from students to choose from a few texts until they get a handle on the structure of Literature Circles (p. 19). The researcher believes that students may have indicated a more rewarding experience with Literature Circles on their student participant surveys if they were able to select their own texts to read in their Literature Circle groups.

Not only are the previous recommendations for future study needed, but also to have different types of student groups for Literature Circles in addition to heterogeneous groups. Literature Circle groups could have been based on gender, possibly having a male Literature Circle group and a female Literature Circle group. This would have allowed the researcher to examine not only the impact of reading achievement of students in Literature Circle groups, but to have data on gender specific Literature Circle groups. It would have been interesting to track the SRI data from the pre-assessment to post-assessment on the gender specific Literature Circle groups because there is significant gender study research as it pertains to how specific genders approach various reading. Prior experience with Literature Circles is another variable that could have impacted results.

Lastly, a recommendation for a two year study from ninth to 10th grade and comparison of those SRI Lexile scores. By implementing a two-year study in which

students participating in Literature Circles in ninth grade and again in 10th grade may provide stronger results of the impact that Literature Circles may have on students' reading achievement based on the SRI Lexile scores. Daniels (2002) stated several times in his book *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, that Literature Circles can be difficult at first. Although, Daniels was referring to the elementary and middle school student, it can be difficult for a secondary student as well. By extending the study to two years from one year, the researcher would be able to observe the transformation of students moving from specified Literature Circle roles to students interacting in an engaged, collaborative discussion with peers in which the discussion takes on a life of its own free of roles. This did indeed happen during the spring component of the study, but what is more important is if the students can continue having that type of established discussion on their own.

Summary

Literacy has and continues to be a national concern in the United States. According to Marklein (2012), students are graduating from high school across the U.S. lacking the skills needed to tackle a college level text. Students are not equipped with the literacy skills necessary will be at a disadvantage and not be able to meet the challenges in this global economy. In order to address this known fact, this study focused on implementing in Literature Circles at the secondary level and analyzing its impact on reading achievement. In an era of accountability and the realization that the nation's youth are underperforming in the area of literacy there must be a shift in literacy education to get students on track for college (Amos, 2013). Common Core State Standards (CCSS) sponsored by the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has taken the lead in addressing this issue to better prepare our students to be college and career ready so they can compete in a global society. With that said, CCSS has been adopted by 46 states. It is important to note that the CCSS is grounded in literacy not just in English Language Arts, but in all core content areas and technical subjects. As a student progresses through the grade levels, each literacy standard increases in level of complexity (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012, para.6) to ensure that by the end of Grade 12, students are able glean meaning from a text, effectively cite evidence, participate in text-based discussions in order to be ready for the rigors of a postsecondary education. Although, Literature Circles is just one of many strategies to address the literacy concern, it proves that there must be a shift from the belief that teaching reading is limited to elementary level.

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Appendix

**Literature Circles Observation Form
(Anecdotal Notes)**

DATE:

TEACHER:

CLASS PERIOD:

Literature Circles Group #_____

Cooperative Learning:

Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level of questions:

Student engagement:

Student Participant Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed participating in Literature Circles.							
My participation in Literature Circles helped me to comprehend the assigned text.							
I would like to participate in Literature Circles in my other core content area classes.							
My participation in Literature Circles empowered me to be accountable for my learning.							
My participation in Literature Circles helped me to develop the necessary collaborative skills to discuss texts with my peers.							
I feel as though I am a more strategic reader through my participation in Literature Circles.							

Teacher Participant Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree
My students appeared to enjoy Literature Circles.						
My students appeared to comprehend the assigned text when participating in Literature Circles.						
I plan to continue implementing Literature Circles.						
I followed the Literature Circle implementation schedule.						
I had to re-teach students how to participate in Literature Circles.						
I remained in a facilitator's role during Literature Circles.						

Vitae

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