The Effect of Literature Circles on the Reading Comprehension Scores of Middle School

Students with Decoding Deficits

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact on seventh grade students with decoding deficits who participated in novel-based literature circles on a reading comprehension assessment as compared to a similar control group. The post-test was researcher-designed utilizing seventh grade middle school language arts standards in reading comprehension. The test was based on reading selections separate from the novel used in the literature circle. The literary circle group's (n = 10) mean score (Mean = 10.20, SD = 2.82) on the reading comprehension test did not differ significantly from the control group's (n = 10) mean score (Mean = 8.40, SD = 1.84) [t(18) = 1.69, p = .11]. Although the study did not provide statistical evidence of the value of literature circles, there were limitations to the study. In addition, researcher observations indicated that literature circles can be a valuable component to reading instruction. Further research in this area should explore whether literature circles can improve reading comprehension when incorporated with more explicit reading comprehension instruction.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), focuses on Data-Driven Instruction, Common Core State Standards, and the transition from Maryland School Assessments (MSA) to the standards for Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).   This transition creates a change in our educators' toolbox for instruction; however, the high expectations and demand for success on high stakes testing continues. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has committed to accept federal mandates such as NCLB that increases the scope of learning and graduation requirements to gain Race to the Top federal funding.   The common core standards dictate the curriculum for students and will soon provide a basis for how teachers are judged by high stakes testing.

Unfortunately due to growing content requirements, teachers lack sufficient time to provide intensive instruction in reading comprehension to struggling students. Reading comprehension is a skill that transcends changes in education and is needed across all content areas for students to engage in learning.   Teachers try to embed reading comprehension into daily course work, the same as curriculum writers. However those students that have significant deficits (two to three levels below grade level) in reading comprehension are still struggling. Although the county in which this researcher is an educator has research-based supplemental reading interventions; due to funding they are limited to decoding. This researcher is seeking strategies which will help students with significant reading comprehension deficits improve their ability to access grade-level text through reading comprehension.

One reading comprehension intervention is the use of literature circles in which students play different roles in understanding the text (Daniels, 2002). Teachers can support reading comprehension using literature circles by modeling good reading strategies through discussion. Once teachers demonstrate the roles and responsibilities of students in literature circles, students earn the independence of accessing the book as a group using good reading strategies. These strategies are essentially the literature circle roles that have been provided by the teacher and provide scaffolding for the thinking skills needed to fulfill the role. Skills students can learn from literature circles include how to define unknown words using context clues, summarizing, connecting and predicting, collaborating with peers to understand text, and perseverance.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this experiment was to determine if the addition of literature circles would make a significant impact on reading comprehension scores over the period of one semester.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that the reading comprehension scores of seventh grade students, with below grade level decoding skills involved in literature circles over the semester, will not differ significantly from a control group with similar ability that did not have the opportunity to participate in literature circles.

Operational Definitions

Connector: A role in the implementation of the literature circle strategy in which the student makes connections between the book and their lives, and between the book and the wider world.

*Literature Circles***:** A literature circle is a small group instructional approach to support the development of comprehension, independence, and enjoyment. Literature circles allow students to have open natural discussions about books, similar to adult book clubs, in which the topics discussed are generated by the students. The goal of literature circles is to allow students to practice and develop skills and strategies of good readers.

Predictor: A role in literature circles in which the student makes predictions about the characters and plot.

Questioner: A role in literature circles in which the student develops a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reaction.

Reading Comprehension: Reading comprehension is the act of reading and understanding what is read. Operationally in this study, reading comprehension is defined as a score on a test requiring students to read fictional passages and to answer multiple-choice questions.

Summarizer: A role in literature circles in which the student prepares a brief summary of the day's reading, that covers the key points, main highlights, and the general idea of the reading assignment.

Vocabulary Builder: A role in literature circles in which the student determines the most important words to depict tone or mood. The student also selects vocabulary that is new so that the group can use inferences to grow vocabulary skills.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Reading comprehension is defined throughout educational texts and research as the act of understanding what is read.   Understanding what is read requires the engagement of students and is often lacking in struggling readers. Engagement is increased through the use of Literature Circles, by utilizing small group instruction, clearly defined student roles and focused discussion. Understanding reading comprehension, the need for engagement, and the use of Literature Circles are helping educators reach struggling learners.

This review of the literature is focused on understanding reading comprehension. The review is organized in three sections, *Reading Comprehension*, *Engagement*, and *Literature Circles*. Section One, *Reading Comprehension*, focuses on the components of comprehension as well as tools to build comprehension skills. The second section, *Engagement*, discusses the importance of engaging learners through a variety of strategies. The third section, *Literature Circles*, introduces a strategy which utilizes student-led discussion to increase engagement and teach reading comprehension. By the end of this chapter, the reader will be familiar with the literature that supports the importance of engaging young readers through student-led activities.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the minds ability to make links and ask questions regarding a particular reading event or text (Dorn & Soffos, 2005). Generally, direct reading instruction including decoding, fluency, and the processes of reading occur in grades K-3, and, as text complexity increases, the learner needs to be able to sift through several strategies in order to continue to derive meaning, requiring the need to continue strengthening reading skills. Students

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that require continued instruction receive different approaches to reading, focused on strengthening reading skills and, if needed, focus on explicit reading instruction.

As students reach the secondary level, there are three types of reading comprehension instruction used frequently. This does not include tiered interventions which focus on decoding and fluency. Whole class instruction (direct teaching with modeling), independent reading (independent student practice) and utilizing literature circles focusing on student led discussion (guided student practice with feedback) are the most common forms of classroom instruction used to increase reading comprehension at the secondary level (Marchand-Mantella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013.

In order to strengthen reading skills, educators focus on specific areas throughout the reading process to assist learners in accessing increasingly difficult informational and literary text. Franzak (2008) identified a consensus among researchers that the following skills are needed to strengthen the ability to comprehend: developing meta-cognitive awareness, identifying main idea and summarizing text, drawing on previous knowledge, actively questioning during reading, visualizing, making inferences, and synthesizing information from text using prior knowledge. Country-wide these areas are assessed as part of the language arts curriculum in grades six through eight, and are implemented now state-wide as part of the Common Core Curriculum.

Comprehension is part of explicit instruction in reading that should continue at the secondary level to ensure growth in reading. When working with struggling readers, explicit instruction is broken down into the areas of word study, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and

motivation (Marchand-Martella et al., 2013). Comprehension instruction is paramount as students continue to move toward more difficult texts at the secondary level.

Engagement

Engagement is the reader's commitment to attend to text, and is a great obstacle for struggling readers. Throughout classroom instruction, educators focus on student engagement in order to ensure learning. Educators ask often what does engagement look like, and how can we ensure that students are engaged? When focusing on reading comprehension, students are required not to just engage in class instruction but also engage in the text they are reading. It is the educator's responsibility to provide opportunities for engagement and develop engagement for students.

Since researchers agree that an important part of comprehension is engagement, we need to focus on how to engage our learners. Students report that when they are able to make their own decisions regarding texts, they are more likely to remain engaged (Burns, 1998). Engagement can be accessed in students in many ways such as making connections to personal experiences (also noted as part of the reading comprehension process), integrating different learning styles, socialization, and discussion. In order to be engaged, all students need to have equal opportunities to respond to text (Long & Gove, 2003). These researchers noted the following strategies necessary to teach text comprehension and engage students as the acts of ask, listen, honor, respond and encourage, which is similar to Daniels (2002), philosophy in literature circles. In addition, they agree there is a need to investigate, pose, and solve problems.

As educators agree that comprehension instruction needs to continue through secondary education and engagement is a key piece of reading comprehension, researchers continue to find

the strategies and instruction that will most successfully meet this demand. Many varieties of instruction incorporating student discussion to increase engagement occur daily in our classrooms, without the formality of a structure model. Of these models, literature circles appear in research as the most comprehensive in philosophy and practice. Literature circles utilize student-led discussion to increase engagement and teach reading comprehension.

Literature Circles

Daniels (2002) described literature circles as dividing students into groups to read fiction books introduced by the teacher to the whole class, utilizing student roles and guiding questions to discuss the story and eventually presenting books to the class in creative ways. Many have changed the way in which literature circles are practiced; however, the fundamental premise is small groups, student roles, and discussion. This strategy has been called book clubs, reading groups, student-led groups, reading circles, etc., but the act of teaching comprehension and student engagement remains constant.

An essential part of making these literature circles successful is keeping students engaged through participation. The most common strategy among educators remains similar to Daniels original concept. However as we ensure comprehension is addressed at the secondary level, educators and researchers alike make the leap to using literature circles with informal text. The strategy includes a role for all students such as the questioner, the passage master, the connector, and the illustrator. These roles can be designed to fit all learners. For example, a student that is struggling to make meaning from text might begin as the passage master finding vocabulary that the group should be interpreting, and, as comprehension grows, will be able to take on a new

role. The key is that even students that are struggling readers are engaged and participate successfully in this model (Anderson, 2008).

Many researchers have designed studies to determine whether literature circles are successful. Anderson (2008) maintains that literature circles foster both oral and written language growth and Whittaker (2012) found that they increase reading enjoyment and hone literacy skills. Other researchers compared success in students with disabilities to the success of those without disabilities and found no significant difference (O'Brien, 2007). There has even been success in research studies using literature circles to derive meaning from grade-level textbooks (Wilfong, 2009). Most research finds that literature circles increase comprehension skills for struggling readers.

Summary

The use of literature circles is a successful strategy to engage students in order to increase reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to utilize several practices in order to derive meaning from text. Student engagement requires actively participating in the act of reading. Educators find literature circles a successful strategy for teaching students ways to actively engage in and comprehend text.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of literature circles on reading comprehension in a small group of middle school students with a deficit in decoding skills.

Design

This study was a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design utilizing a pre-test and post-test. The pre-test served to make sure groups did not differ prior to the intervention. The subjects were in pre-existing groups selected through purposive sampling within the school where the researcher is an educator. After a twelve-week intervention period with the experimental group participating in literature circles, the students completed a researcher-designed post-test assessing skills related to identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, and using context clues. The independent variable was whether or not students participated in literature circles. The dependent variable was the reading comprehension scores the students earned on the post-test.

Participants

The subjects in the study were seventh grade students in a public school in a suburban county in Maryland. Twenty-two percent of the school population receives free and reduced lunch; seven percent of the population receives special education services (Maryland Report Card, 2014). Of the population of 859 students, 24% of the population is African American and 55% of the population is white. Of the total population 6% are currently receiving reading

interventions for decoding. The parents of students that participated in literature circles were notified via a letter that was sent home by the school administration.

All twenty -five of the students in the study have decoding deficits that impact their ability to access grade level text as determined by the corrective reading screening tool (© 2014 McGraw-Hill Education Global Holdings, LLC. All Rights Reserved). The corrective reading-screening tool is a tool used by this middle school per teacher recommendation to determine if students qualify for a research-based reading intervention in decoding. The students screened demonstrated decoding deficits. The students, however, did not score low enough to qualify for the decoding interventions offered at the researchers' middle school.

The corrective reading-screening tool asks students to read aloud various passages, while the examiner measures for speed and accuracy. Students are not currently receiving any reading intervention outside of the general education classroom.   Students in both groups scored basic on the Reading Maryland State Assessment (MSA), in the spring of 2014. Students were selected to be in the literature circle group based on their ability to attend instruction during the period it was offered which was determined by their class schedules. Of the ten students in the literature circles group, six were male and four females and four African American students and six White students, of these students, seven receive special education services.   There were ten students in the control group, six males and four were female; five students were African American and five were white. In addition, the control group included six special education students that receive services in the general education classroom.

Instrument

The pre-and post-tests were designed by the researcher utilizing *achievementseries.com* which generated a random sampling of questions in the area of comprehension, based on the current common core grade level curriculum. The pre-test included four questions in each of the areas of identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, and using context clues based on readings from a grade level fictional text. Students were provided unlimited time to read two, one page fictional passages at the seventh grade level and answer multiple choice comprehension questions in the areas defined above. The assessment contained a total of twelve multiple-choice questions. There were six questions per story.

The post-test assessment included three brief (one page) fictional passages, and five multiple- choice questions in each area of context clues, main idea, and main idea. The increase in questions in the post-test was so that there would be more variability among scores. Five questions were asked per passage. No supports, including verbatim reading, was provided during the pre-or post-assessment. A rubric created by the researcher assigned a one-point value to each question on the assessment.

Procedure: Literature Circle Instruction

Of the twenty-five students that met the criteria for the research study, only ten students were available to meet during mastery period. These students were placed in the experimental group. None of the students recalled participating in literature circles in the past.   The students in the control group were participating in mathematical or science or history clubs during this time. Mastery period took place in between second and third period on Wednesdays and Fridays

for fifty minutes each during the school week. Mastery period is a time in which students are able to participate in various educational clubs.

Prior to participating in the study, both groups took a pre-test in their Language Arts class. The raw scores of the pre-test were compared using an independent samples *t*-test. The literary circle group's mean score (Mean = 4.10, SD = 1.60) did not differ significantly from the control group's mean score (Mean = 3.90, SD = 1.66) [t(18) = .27, p>.05]. Consequently, it was not necessary to control for pre-existing differences on the post-test comparisons.

The students in the Literature Circles read *Joey Pizga Swallowed a Key*, by Jack Gantos. This is a fictional chapter book about a sixth-grade student with Attention Deficit /Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The text is written at a Lexile level of 970, approximately a sixth-grade level (The Lexile Framework for Reading, 2014). The story is told from the perspective of Joey about his various mishaps which stem from his ADHD that get him into trouble both at home and at school. The story is humorous and is written in a way that students can relate and also invokes thoughts regarding relationships and expectations.

Students participating in Literature Circles began understanding the roles in Literature Circles before beginning the book. Students were broken into two groups, of five students in order to ensure everyone was able to participate in the discussion and reduce wait time. They were asked to pull a random role card out of a hat. Role cards included the name of the role and examples of the type of information needed. For example, the role card for the questioner included question stems. After each student chose his or her role card, he or she was asked to read the definition of the role and share in his or her own words what that student in that role is responsible for while reading and how that role participates in the discussion. It was explained

to the participants that discussion was the purpose for reading and that discussion would occur during every session. Students were told that their roles would change, throughout the reading, to give everyone an opportunity to participate in each role. Students participating in this group were able to earn pizza certificates by completing ten out of the twelve sessions that were offered.

Rules were set for the literature circles in order for students to understand what was expected of them. As a whole group, students began to determine the rules of their literature circles. This was done as a whole group because both groups were sharing the same room, and the rules needed to be respectful of all learners. Rules included:

Everyone must be prepared (come at lunch and read if they didn't read at home)

Only one person can talk during the discussion at a time

When given time to read, everyone must be quiet

Be respectful of others ideas (no laughing; everyone's opinion counts)

It's OK to be wrong, take a chance

There are several interpretations of roles for literature circles; some include many more roles then those used in this experiment. For the purpose of this research, the roles included vocabulary builder, summarizer, connector, questioner, and predictor. Each role brings an area of discussion to the group, the vocabulary building seeks new vocabulary, the summarizer briefly provides a summary, the connector encourages connections through the students' lives, the questioner asks thoughtful and open-ended questions, and the predictor makes predictions regarding the plot and character feelings and actions. Roles were determined by the researcher to align with the content areas of the test.

In addition to understanding the roles, students were then given an opportunity to practice their roles in pairs, with the exception of the illustrator as this role is assigned to one person that alternates between groups. The researcher read the first chapter aloud, and then asked students to skim through the chapter with their pair to find information from the text that would support their role in the group. Students were not asked to read any of the chapters on their own prior to Session two.

Sessions two through twelve followed a slightly different procedure since the students had already been introduced to the literature circles concept. At the beginning of each session, students were divided into two groups each at a small round table to facilitate instruction. Students then shared the information that they found for each of the roles, by beginning a literature discussion of the previously read chapter(s). After the discussion, students participated in a read-aloud. Then a brief period of time was provided for students to read silently one or two chapters. Before leaving the second session, students drew another random role from the hat for the next discussion. They were expected to finish their readings outside of the sessions. There were times in which the researcher chose roles for specific students, to ensure that they did not always have the same role, or to ensure that there was enough information prepared for relevant engaging conversation. There were also times when the researcher re-grouped students after discussion and provided another five minutes of discussion. After twelve sessions were completed, the two groups completed the post-test. Results were compared with an independent samples t-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The literary circle group's mean score (Mean = 10.20, SD = 2.82) on the reading comprehension test did not differ significantly from the control group's mean score (Mean = 8.40, SD = 1.84) [$t(18)$ = 1.69, p = .11]. (See Table 1). Consequently, the null hypothesis that the reading comprehension scores of 7th grade students, with below grade-level decoding skills, involved in literature circles over the semester will not differ significantly from a control group of similar ability that did not have the opportunity to participate in literature circles, was supported.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Post-Test Scores of Literary Circle and Control Group

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Literary Circles	10	10.20	2.82	1.69 (NS)
Controls	10	8.40	1.84	

(NS) = non-significant at p < .05

df = 18

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of literature circles for seventh grade students with decoding reading deficits. The null hypothesis was supported. Specifically, reading comprehension scores of seventh grade students, with below grade-level decoding skills, involved in literature circles over the semester did not differ significantly from a control group of similar ability that did not have the opportunity to participate in literature circles.

Implications of the Results

The results of the study did not provide evidence that literature circles are effective in teaching reading comprehension strategies. Based on these findings, literature circles alone would not provide significant reading comprehension instruction needed to accelerate learning enough to bridge current deficits. There is a need for explicit reading instruction and research-based reading interventions to bridge the gap.

The researcher did, however, observe benefits to the literature circles that were not reflected in the outcome variable. When students had the outlet to discuss the fiction book, "*Joey Pigza, Swallowed a Key*" in literature circle, students were actively engaged and expressed excitement over switching roles within the discussion groups. At the end of each session, the groups would read aloud to start the next chapter. Students volunteered to go first and wanted to read long passages aloud to their peers. Students commented that they would like to continue with another book during the next semester. Behaviors noted throughout the study led the

researcher to believe one of the largest draws to literature circles was the small group size, as it allowed students more opportunities for discussion.

Instructors should consider their student's desire for student-led discussion when given a specific task within a group. Based on classroom experience, students were more engaged during this reading comprehension process than they typically appear in large class discussions in the general education classroom. Student comments led the researcher to believe they enjoyed ownership of the discussions and being given the option to determine which areas they wanted to examine more deeply. Through self-assessment they chose vocabulary to define and question the meaning of text.

In addition to the benefit of the small group environment allowing each student to participate more in discussion, students appeared genuinely interested in the main character of the novel. The researcher felt this connection was made because the character was a student that struggled in school and often was not viewed as smart by his teachers or peers. The students in the group have had similar experiences as they have struggled with reading and utilized behaviors and excuses to be removed from uncomfortable situations in the classroom. The researcher had more flexibility when choosing the book, as literature circles were not done during a time that took away from the standard curriculum.

There was no significant increase in reading comprehension scores based on adding literature circles to the students weekly instruction during the marking period; however, in time this strategy might encourage more reading, which would definitely increase reading comprehension skills. The students participating in the study struggle in reading per the criteria and thus have had little success in the past on classroom assignments related to reading

comprehension. They will require a variety of strategies to build their reading comprehension to a level in which they feel comfortable accessing grade-level materials. Literature circles are a strategy that is non-threatening and student-led, which are strategies for increased engagement in the classroom.

Theoretical Implications

This study has some relationship to theories about motivation and reading comprehension. By observation, student reading motivation increased through the use of a literature circle. The students in this study demonstrated motivation weekly; they came prepared engaged in conversation and sought to take on new roles. Literature circles used in this study was a strategy to motivate students to try to comprehend text. Other motivational factors included their connection to the text, the access to small group environment, and their opportunities to choose what they determined as relevant. Dorn et al., (2005) stated that reading comprehension is influenced by several internal factors including motivation. Use of literature circles in this study did not support this theory. Students were very motivated; however, there was no significant increase in comprehension skills noted on the post-assessment. However, there is the potential that reading comprehension skills could increase over time if students read more frequently.

Threats to Validity

The limitations of the sample used in the study poses a threat to the external validity of the study. This researcher used a convenience sample and subjects were not assigned randomly to groups. There could have been differences in the students that were related to the intervention groups' availability to participate in the literature circles. The researcher was able to compare

control and variable group students with similar race and gender, which scored at the same level on the corrective reading tool; however, they still varied up to fifteen points on the Maryland State assessment which is a more comprehensive indicator of reading. The study only enabled the researcher to generalize results to seventh grade low-achieving readers, most specifically those with decoding deficits.

An additional concern about the sample was its size. The sample was small which limited the power of the study.

There were multiple threats to the internal validity of the study. The researcher was unable to control the amount of absences or time missed from the literature circle instruction. Attendance varied between participants. The integrity of the intervention may have been impacted by student absences.

This researcher also could not control the language arts instruction the students were receiving in the regular classroom. Since the children were in different language arts classrooms, there could have been differences in instruction outside of the literature circles.

There were also instrumentation concerns. The assessment utilized in the study was not norm referenced. It was created by the researcher utilizing the language arts curriculum standards in comprehension of fictional text. In addition, it may not have been sensitive to all aspects of reading comprehension. It may also be that the literature circle would have helped the reading comprehension of that particular text. As the outcome variable test was not based on the book, any reading comprehension benefits from the literature circle instruction needed to generalize to novel texts. Finally, the passages students read for the post assessment, were

different than the text of a novel. Comprehension skills used in a novel vary compared to those used in a brief passage, which would threaten validity of the post assessment.

Connections to the Literature

Utilizing literature circles with seventh grade students that have a deficit in decoding strategies did not increase reading comprehension skills in this study. Although the students did not demonstrate greater reading comprehension skills than control students that had not received the intervention, the literature circle students were engaged, volunteered to participate, and wanted to continue with another novel after completing the study. Long et al., (2003) proposed that literature circles are valuable because they give the students the power to select what they discuss and opportunities to interpret their reading in cooperative groups. They found students demonstrated investment and enthusiasm when using literature circles. Student behaviors and comments proved this to be true within this study as well.

Research has shown that literature circles include many embedded reading comprehension strategies. Marchand-Mantella, et al. (2013) reviewed successful comprehension strategies that readers use to understand the context of what has been read. These include activating prior knowledge, making connections, monitoring comprehension, questioning and summarization. Similar to Marchard-Mantella, et al. (2013), students in this study were able to activate their prior experiences in the classroom, and make connections to the character within the story. In addition, specific roles in literature circles are dedicated to questioning and summarization comprehension strategies, in a safe environment, so that students did not feel threatened and literature circles value both peer monitoring and self-monitoring when addressing text as well.

Anderson (2008) reported that literature circles foster both oral and written language growth and Whittaker (2012) found literature circles increase reading enjoyment and hone literacy skills. The post-assessment from this study did support the increase in literary skills seen by Whittaker (2012); however, observations by the researcher supported increased reading enjoyment by students.

Most research including Anderson (2008), Wilfong, (2009), and Whittaker (2012) found that literature circles increase comprehension skills for struggling readers. Thus, the current study had outlier results that may have been due to validity issues.

Implications for Further Research

Additional research could further exam the impact of literature circles on the reading comprehension scores of different sets of students. For example, a study could use students from different grades and comprehension levels.

Further research could also include the use of explicit comprehension instruction embedded into the literature circle process, which may increase the likeliness of positive achievement results.   The reading comprehension performance of students in literature circles with increased explicit comprehension instruction could be compared to the performance of students participating in more traditional literature circles.

Future research could also assess comprehension of the specific texts used in the literature circle. For example, there could be two groups of students with reading difficulties reading a novel. One of the groups would use literature circles while the other group would follow standard curricular instruction. The researcher could then compare the results of a

comprehension assessment specific to the novel.   This would alleviate the need for students to generalize skills to demonstrate success on the post-assessment.

Further research could include non-fiction, poems, and academic texts. With the exception of Wilfong (2009), the researcher was unable to locate much research on literature circles used with content specific texts. However; these reading strategies may make a significant impact on the reader's ability to process, evaluate, and synthesize information from these texts. Given more time for students to access literature circles in different genres may present a more favorable result on student success as well.

Researchers might also study the increase of student motivation and self-esteem utilizing this technique as studies have noted, both have led to more student success.   Future researchers may include the use of a self-assessment rating scale on motivation and/or engagement, to determine if there is an increase in motivation during reading circles.

Summary

In the study, seventh grade students with deficits in reading decoding participated in literature circles while reading a grade level fiction novel. Students' demonstrated significant interest in the verbal discussion that occurred throughout the study, shared that they connected to the character in the story, and reported they would be interested in participating in literature circles in the future. Although the researcher noticed significant engagement and motivation, post-test data did not provide evidence demonstrating that the children in the literature circles had better reading comprehension than control students on a reading comprehension test not specific to the novel.

Although the study did not provide evidence that literature circles improve general reading comprehension skills, researcher observations indicated that literature circles are still valuable. Many students that participated in this group struggle in the classroom, demonstrating off-task, or avoidance behaviors. However, the researcher did not experience the same behaviors during the research study. Many were enthusiastic about the activity. As educators strive to find strategies to improve reading comprehension, they may still consider literature circles as one component of intervention. Literature circles provide an enjoyable opportunity to facilitate student discussion to analyze and synthesize text. This will hopefully lead to greater motivation, academic engagement, more reading, and consequently better reading comprehension skills.

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