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Fourth Graders' Responses To Literature:

Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Lizbeth Nastari

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ABSTRACT

FOURTH GRADE RESPONSES TO LITERATURE: STONE FOX BY JOHN REYNOLDS GARDINER

by Lizbeth Nastari

This thesis addresses the topic of literature discussions by fourth grade students. It examines the types of questions and responses given by six students during their discussion of the story, Stone Fox. It covers the principles that motivate students to read and discuss literature, specifically intrinsic motivation, ethical and social dimensions of learning, and constructivism.

Research on this topic reveals that students' abilities to critically discuss literature can be encouraged through various approaches by educators. Allowing students to choose specific literature may promote autonomy, encouraging students to become intrinsically motivated to learn. For ethical and social aspects of learning, educators can encourage individual text interpretations during discussions. Qualities such as patience and appreciation of other cultures may be introduced through discussions based on reading a variety of literature. Using constructivist approaches in literature discussions, whereby students perceive ideas differently based on their past experiences, may encourage livelier and richer discussions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the elementary grades students perform many tasks that are initiated and evaluated by the teacher (Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick & Rogers, 1989). The discussion of literature, for example, is usually led by the teacher in small or large groups. If we think of learning about literature as a discovery of ideas, where teachers ask critical and relevant questions about the literature, it seems that children should also be capable of constructing their own questions and responses based on what is important to them. When given choices about the selection of literature, students are capable of revealing their literacy and capability to argue, making connections, and acquiring new meanings from the literature (Samway, Whang, Cade, Gamil, Lubandina & Kansone, 1991).

Students may be motivated to discuss and may choose to read literature for different reasons. Their focus can be on (1) intrinsic motivation, e.g., students might choose a specific book because the subject matter is interesting to them; or (2) ethical and social dimensions of learning, e.g., students might select books based on their beliefs and attitudes of their peers; or (3) constructivism, e.g., students may have a desire to build upon their knowledge and construct meaning from their reading.

In intrinsic motivation, the question is "Why do we learn?" Studies have shown that while learning, students are more motivated internally than externally; external motivation, when the teacher chooses the book and discussion questions, hinders

students' desire to learn and be personally motivated to learn (Boggiano & Katz, 1991). In other studies, internal motivation, when the student chooses the book and discussion questions, has a positive correlation to students' enjoyment of school (Ryan & Connell, 1989, cited in Deci et al., 1991) and students' self esteem (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1981). It seems that students may have a more positive experience towards literature when given choices about the direction of their learning.

The social and ethical dimensions to learning, in other words, the content of our learning, may also have an impact on literature discussions and choices of literature among students. When students are given a choice in selecting literature, they choose books that interest them (Samway et al., 1991). The influences on their choices may include books their peers are reading, recommendations by teachers, studies into their cultural background, or topics addressing a specific social cause such as homelessness. Exposing students to a variety of literature and providing opportunities for discussion allows for students to test and formulate their own contrasting perspectives, gain a variety of decision-making tools, or become more aware of difficulties and concerns for other societal groups (Rasinski & Padak, 1990).

The idea of intrinsic motivation and ethical and social dimensions related to literature affects students' book choices and their realm of discussion, as well as the constructivist theory. This theory is based on the ideas of Piaget (Piaget, 1964). Moreover, the constructivist theory concentrates on how students construct their own meaning while learning. Piaget ascertains that children's mental development occurs in stages and learning is constantly being renewed and changed based on life experiences (Piaget, 1964). In relation to literature discussions, as children read more challenging

and varied books, they continuously test and perhaps change their ideas and their views of the world. They construct and make sense by being given the opportunities to address concerns relevant to their thinking and experiences. Studies have shown, however, that most literature discussions in classrooms are teacher-initiated and not much time is given to thorough and thought-provoking student-initiated discussions (O'Flahavan, 1988, cited in Tierney, 1990).

Exploratory Questions for Literature Discussion

This study explored how fourth grade students responded to one another, specifically the questions they asked during a literature discussion of the book Stone Fox, by John Reynolds Gardiner. The variable in this study was the fact that no teacher would be present to lead the students in their discussion. The focus was to observe whether students could critically analyze literature by asking one another higher level questions. (See the following "Definitions" sections for examples of factual, evaluative and interpretive questions.) The literature review focused on the importance of literature discussions and their influence on students' learning by promoting intrinsic motivation, ethical and social issues, and construction of knowledge.

In order to determine how childrens' discussions of literature affect their understanding of the text and how they relate it to other events in the world or their own lives, the following questions were addressed:

- 1) What kinds of questions did the students ask one another?
- 2) Which type of questions did the students ask one another more often?
- 3) What type of responses did the students have towards one another and towards the text?

These questions were important to explore because I thought they would reveal how well students would be able to guide themselves through a discussion without assistance from a teacher. As well, I was curious about how the students would relate to one another (their peers) without an adult present and whether their questions may be phrased differently because of this situation.

In the course of this study, I expected to find that students would become unmanageable, i.e., being able to focus on the task, since no adult was present at the discussion. In addition, I expected the students to ask more factual questions as opposed to evaluative and interpretive, since they would not have an adult present to guide them through higher level questions.

Definitions

1) intrinsic motivation: a process of learning that occurs from within the learner and is not dependent on external circumstances or rewards; e.g., students take initiative to learn about a recycling program because they desire to live in a cleaner world, as opposed to students getting involved in a recycling program because there are prizes awarded to the student who recycles the most newspapers (extrinsic motivation).

2) ethical/social dimensions of learning: learning that allows readers to think about and discuss the implications of the topic they are studying; e.g., students reading an autobiography of Abraham Lincoln might wonder why slavery ever existed and what the implications were for our society (ethical) and a discussion might ensue regarding whether slavery still exists in some form today (social).

3) constructivism: the process of learning whereby a student is continuously constructing new knowledge based upon previously learned knowledge; new discoveries may occur when a child moves into the next mental developmental stage, as described by Jean Piaget (1964):

- a) sensori-motor (0 to 2 years)
- b) symbolic thought (2 to 4 years)
- c) intuitive thought (4 to 7 years)
- d) concrete operations (7-12 years)
- e) formal operations (12 and up)

4) Literature Response Group: a group of individuals who discuss literature (novels, poetry, etc.) by comparing ideas, arguing the author's theme or relating personal experiences to incidences in the literature.

5) factual questions: questions that call for responses based only on the facts presented in the text (e.g., "What was Little Red Riding Hood carrying to her grandmother?")

6) evaluative questions: questions that elicit opinions of the reader (e.g., "What do you think Little Red Riding Hood should have done when she saw the wolf jump out of the grandmother's clothing?")

7) interpretive questions: questions asked to gain a deeper understanding of the author's intent (e.g., "Explain why you think the author chose a wolf to play the part of the evil character in the story.")

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The notion that children need instruction and prompting from the teacher when discussing literature is widely believed by educators (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Among educators, however, is an inconclusiveness regarding how we think children learn best (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992). This literature review looks at three dimensions of learning that affect the processing of literature in a discussion, including (1) intrinsic motivation (why children learn), (2) ethical and social dimensions (what children learn), and (3) the constructivist theory (how children learn).

Dimensions of Learning

The first of the three areas is intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the desire of the learner to gain knowledge, not because someone else asked or told them to learn the information, but because they were motivated internally. Students, for example, enjoy reading books about insects perhaps because they discovered an ant hill or bee hive. They desire to know more about their recent discovery. Intrinsic motivation reveals why children have the desire to learn certain information, in addition to helping teachers and parents tap into these areas to help make learning a positive experience (Watson, Solomon, Battistich, Schaps, & Solomon, 1989).

The second area which affects literature discussions is the ethical and social dimensions that surround the learning environment (Watson et al., 1989). The ethical

and social aspects address the content which children learn. A student's attitude toward literature and the discussion thereof can be affected by many aspects, such as peer or family influences. A student's choice of literature selection, for example, may depend upon books their friends are reading, or books their parents or teachers recommend. Important and relevant issues that arise in a student's life can also affect their choice of literature. For example, if a student is experiencing teasing or discrimination, they might be inclined to choose books dealing with this subject. Or perhaps if their friends are reading Nancy Drew or Hardy Boys' mysteries, a student might be inclined to read these books so they can discuss and recommend selections to their friends (Samway et al., 1991). The social and ethical implications surrounding a child's life can influence what they choose to read and therefore affect the content of literature discussions.

The third area affecting children's literature discussions addresses the constructivist theory (Piaget, 1964). The constructivist theory addresses how we learn; the individualness in our learning styles. How we learn affects how we respond to others and how others respond to us in discussions. Jean Piaget formulated the constructivist theory based upon the fact that one needs to "construct" meaning from a task, instead of merely being spoon-fed information (Piaget, 1964). Piaget's theory "stresses the importance of providing the children with situations in which they will actively participate in arriving at solutions. . .it is a danger when too much reliance is placed upon reading about something as a means of acquiring knowledge. . . .The teacher must create possibilities for the child to discover the structure of knowledge" (Stendler, p. 38, 1965).

Reading Instruction Approaches

Understanding and appreciating literature can occur in many forms in a classroom setting (Zancanella, 1991). For example, in the primary grades (kindergarten-second grade) children are often read to by the teacher or other adult. Sometimes stories are told through action and dialogue. In the intermediate grades (third-sixth), children begin to become more independent readers through reading books on their own. Discussions of character, theme and plot may be addressed as children progress through the grade levels and develop higher level cognitive skills.

The process of learning how to read in order to better understand literature has had widespread approaches. In the United States, reading instruction has primarily focused on the basic skills approach to teaching children how to read, an assembly line way of thinking, where reading is taught in discrete parts to acquire the whole product (Anderson & Pearson, 1985). For example, children learn the names of the letters and the sounds associated with them (phonics) and then begin to piece together sounds to form words. Also, basal series books, reading books which contain short stories or adaptations of longer novels, teach vocabulary, literary devices, phonics, and spelling as parts that make up the whole reading process. In recent years, however, educators have stated that when children learn to read, "it is in spite of, not because of, the basal's discrete-skills approach" (Watson et al., 1989).

Skills-approach reading instruction has not been wholeheartedly embraced by all educators. In 1985, The National Academy of Education, The National Institute of Education, and The Center for the Study of Reading combined their research on reading in America. Together they wrote a report called Becoming A Nation of Readers: The Report

on the Commission of Reading. This data, compiled from research across America, raised the issue that we were becoming a nation of adults who could not read or who would not read. Suffice it to say, our approaches to the teaching of reading and the methods of learning in our schools needed re-examination. If there were to be changes in the way educators approached the teaching of reading, and subsequently, the skills incorporated into the process (appreciation of literature), then educators thought there should be some different ideas to the approach of reading instruction.

The English-Language Arts Curriculum Framework that was published in 1987 by California's State Department of Education called for a "fresh look at literature as the core for teaching reading, speaking, listening, and writing" (State Department of Education, 1987, p. 1). Educators began turning to the concept of whole language, where reading, speaking, listening, and writing are taught through an integrated approach throughout the curriculum in a more meaningful and purposeful atmosphere. For example, while reading Charlotte's Web, students could act out sections of the story or recite their favorite part. Also, after concluding a book, students could pretend they are the main character and write a letter to the author critiquing the book. Literature can be enriching by offering a variety of responses to deepen understanding.

A Focus on Intrinsic Motivation: Why We Learn

Focus on a more integrated approach in the language arts area, as mentioned in the English-Language Arts Curriculum Framework, reveals that the teaching of reading is not an isolated skill. In other words, learning to read involves using many other skills including speaking, listening, and writing (Goodman, 1986). For example, when students read a story about Abraham Lincoln, they may incorporate speaking, e.g.,

reciting the Gettysburg Address, listening, e.g., listening to other students recite facts from Lincoln's life, and writing, e.g., composing a letter to Lincoln addressing the issue of slavery. Goodman states that students learn best when "language is whole and involves children in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs" (1986, p. 7). Whole language, a term used to describe incorporating all language skills together (e.g., after reading *The Ugly Duckling*, children write their own version, act it out, and make a book to display in the classroom), thus, is a paradigm shift from teaching reading, speaking, writing and listening as discrete parts (Goodman, 1986). The focus is on sensible, real, relevant, and purposeful activities in the learning environment.

Making learning real and purposeful makes sense. In an article called "Motivation and Education: The Self-Determination Perspective," Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991) conclude that

promoting greater self-determination...a sense of choice, self-initiation behavior, personal responsibility...is the avenue to attaining outcomes such as creativity (Amabile, 1979), cognitive flexibility (McGraw & McCullers, 1979) and self-esteem (Deci, Schwartz et al., 1981). (p.342)

Deci et al. cite research studies focusing on positive correlations between intrinsic motivation and achievement (Gottfried, 1985, 1990, cited in Deci et al., 1991), positive emotions in the classroom, (Vallerand et al., 1989, cited in Deci et al., 1991), enjoyment of school (Ryan and Connell, 1989, cited in Deci et al., 1991), and self-esteem (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinmen & Ryan, 1981, cited in Deci et al., 1991) (p. 332). Intrinsic motivation has a positive correlation with achievement in these studies. If students are given opportunities to select their own literature to read, the outcomes are positive and their achievement scores increase (Deci et al., 1991).

Another study concerning the importance of learning highlights the patterns in

students' achievement. Boggiano and Katz (1991) focused on achievement patterns found among students. Overall, they found that "children who have an extrinsic orientation [to learning] prefer less challenging activities, work to please the teacher and to obtain good grades, and depend on others to evaluate their work" (Boggiano & Katz, 1991, p. 46). Based on these studies, extrinsic motivation seems to hinder students' desires to learn and be personally motivated to learn. There is a need for purposeful and meaningful learning to help students focus on the value of education and learning.

Ethical and Social Dimensions of Learning: What We Learn

In addition to intrinsic motivation related to learning, there is also the content of learning as affected by ethical and social factors. In order to make changes towards the success that children can become readers as adults, issues regarding the substance we are teaching and the methods of instruction teachers are using need to be re-examined.

One particular study examined the content being taught to junior high school students and the methods by which five teachers approached the teaching of literature (Shulman, 1987, cited in Zancanella, 1991). Five high school teachers were interviewed eight times and observed while teaching literature eight times. Individual case studies were compiled from field notes, audiotape transcriptions, and written artifacts. Overall, there were many conflicts among the teachers concerning methods and content. The fundamental conflict was the issue between what Shulman, a researcher in the educational field, refers to as "content knowledge," what the teachers know about literature and its organization and "pedagogical content knowledge," subject matter knowledge for teaching (Zancanella, 1991). Shulman believes that "comprehended ideas must be transformed...to be taught" (Shulman, 1987, cited in Zancanella, 1991). In

other words, students will gain a deeper understanding of the literature if they can take part in discussions and formulate ideas which pertain to their focus. In the case studies, the emergent theme was that the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge was in conflict with the school's view of the instruction of literature (Shulman, 1987). Other conflicting issues included:

- *teaching literature as imaginative experience vs. teaching literature as a body of information about literature
- *teaching "reading" vs. teaching "literature"
- *teacher's interpretation vs. student's interpretation
- *form vs. content

Since teachers must adhere to certain state and district guidelines in the substance of their teaching, there is sometimes a conflict built into using their own methods. The five teachers in Shulman's study admitted that oftentimes, when considering a novel way to approach literature in their classroom, they had to think about the restrictions from school or county guidelines that would affect their approach to the subject matter. In addition, when teaching subject matter that will be tested later, teachers need to be given flexibility or be able to align state standards with the methods and content that teachers are using. If teachers are being asked to teach certain aspects of literature, in addition to helping create a love of reading in students, then the district and state tests that are administered to the students should not conflict with what and how they are learning in the classroom. Teachers must also be cognizant of the tools necessary to achieve literacy. For example, teachers may provide opportunities to critically discuss literature and give students a vocabulary that helps them develop their literature knowledge, e.g., knowing what it means to give a character analysis.

Implications for the Classroom: Content

When educators realized that teaching reading comprehension was not isolated to specific skills but included a vast array of content and techniques, many teachers jumped at the chance to use a variety of literature to teach comprehension (Rasinski & Padak, 1990). Multicultural literature was integrated into classrooms and teachers were able to choose quality books, which made teaching and learning more interesting. Students could learn about other cultures and other viewpoints through literature. One specific study by Rasinski and Padak focused on the importance of literature for appreciation of other cultures. In essence, "because it tells the stories of human events and the human condition, and not simply the facts, literature does more than change minds; it changes people's hearts" (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 577). In the conclusion of their study, Rasinski and Padak stressed the important role of literature for students:

- *provides students with contrasts in perspective
 - *allows for decision-making and social action models (identifying, analyzing, and acting upon problems)
 - *directs activities towards social activism
 - *details the difficulties/concerns facing groups in society
- (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 578-579)

In addition, since there is emphasis on student action (e.g., students organize a school-wide essay contest on equality in America), students have the opportunity to become empowered by literature and the role they play in making decisions. In other words, "they share responsibility for their own learning" (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 580).

The main message of this study is for teachers to expose students to literature that "provides the impetus for acting in a positive fashion on awareness [of multicultural events and issues] and values [internal value system about multicultural events and issues]" (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 580).

Constructivist Learning: How We Learn

In addition to intrinsic motivation and the ethical and social implications of learning, there is a third area of learning which covers constructivist learning: how students construct their own meaning and apply the processes that are involved in how they learn. Several studies and articles have addressed this subject.

The first person to formulate the theory of constructivism was Jean Piaget, who studied the development of cognitive growth in children and adolescents. Piaget (1964) describes the mental development of children and adolescents as "a continuous construction comparable to the erection of a vast building that becomes more supple with each solid addition" (Piaget, 1964, p. 4). Learning occurs through the continuous creation of rules to explain what is observed. Piaget's research laid a foundation for later studies in the field of children's cognitive development. The theory of constructivist learning is significant to educators since it provides avenues towards helping teachers understand how children might construct meaning from their learning experiences.

The concern over our nation's diminishing reading achievement, as stated in Becoming A Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission of Reading (1984), caused educators to become more aware of the processes and approaches to learning in the classroom. Reading comprehension techniques were studied extensively. Over the last twenty years, educators have broadened their view of the definition of reading comprehension to more than one aspect. Reading speed, for example, was thought to be just one way of measuring reading comprehension. Now, reading comprehension may be measured by the students' response to a selection of literature or a students'

interpretation of the literature.

The views of educators regarding reading comprehension have broadened (Tierney, 1990). Three areas of focus point out how educators' views have changed. First, reading is considered to be a constructive process. Similar to Piaget's terminology of constructing meaning, the readers draw upon background knowledge to "construct" meaning and make sense out of what they are reading. Comprehension is strengthened through the use of background knowledge, in addition to the teacher "guiding the reader through the text...suggesting scenarios, predicting, identifying and empathizing with characters, and relating events and settings" (Tierney, 1990, p. 38). Through classroom observations, however, it appears that our educational system is falling short of providing opportunities for children to use their background knowledge to aid in comprehension. On the average, in most reading and writing classrooms, "fewer than ten percent of the ideas discussed are student initiated...most lines of thought are not sustained; usually less than a minute is spent developing or discussing an idea" (O'Flahavan, 1988, cited in Tierney, 1990). To add to the frustration of the students, most are expected to work by themselves, "with minimal input from peers to achieve understandings that are terminal rather than ongoing" (Tierney, 1990, p. 38). The impact of constructivism in the classroom, based on Tierney's work, is substantiated more on theory than on practice. In other words, teachers may believe they are spending a substantial amount of time developing ideas through discussions, however, they might be rushing or ending the discussions before students have time to construct their own meaning from the text.

Secondly, by the 1980's, constructivist ideas were "embraced" more fully with

the idea that reading and writing were thought to be connected (Tierney, 1990). The same processes that helped a writer write, also helped a reader read: evaluating issues, exploring possibilities, adopting various perspectives, experimenting with ideas, and discovering new insights (Tierney, 1990, p. 39). For example, when students read about Martin Luther King, they are exploring the impact this peaceful man had on our nation. If students are given a writing assignment about Martin Luther King, they are also exploring the impact they can have on others' lives by treating people with respect. The "reading as a writer" concept had a positive impact on the practices and definition of reading comprehension (Tierney, 1990). This new focus changed the classroom atmosphere: students were now using techniques and strategies such as brainstorming, self-questioning, visualizing, rethinking, and collaboration (Tierney, 1990). Prior to reading By The Great Horn Spoon, for example, students may brainstorm the story's plot. As they are reading the story, they may trace the ship's journey on a map, marking significant dates and dockings at sites along the route. This may be accomplished in groups emphasizing collaboration and discussion of ideas.

In addition to viewing comprehension within the context of the reading-writing connection and the importance of background knowledge, the third point of departure for comprehension strategies was in viewing reading as engagement. Readers were involved in the text when it was of interest to them, thereby "triggering their emotional involvements" (Tierney, 1990, p. 39). Recent research has verified that reading comprehension is heightened when engagement to the literature is ensued. The work of Rosenblatt, Harding, Benton, Jose and Brewer, and Sadoski et al. supported these findings, and at the close of the 1980's, literature engagement was supported as a means

for reading comprehension (Benton, 1983; Harding, 1937; Jose & Brewer, 1983; Sadoski et al., 1988, cited in Rosenblatt, 1978).

Educators could now focus on the reader taking a more active role in the literature process (Rosenblatt, 1978). Texts became more than words on a page after Rosenblatt's theories were revealed:

The two major functions of unique patterns and words which constitute the text...First, stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience-his experience with both literature and with life. Second, the text serves as a blueprint, a guide for selecting, rejecting and ordering of what is being called forth; the text regulates what shall be held in the forefront of the reader's attention. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 11)

Rosenblatt goes to great lengths to discuss and distinguish between efferent and aesthetic reading. Efferent is the designation given to the process of reading where the reader carries information away for a specific purpose. This response to reading would include reading for ideas to be tested or for retaining certain information. Rosenblatt notes that most reading taught in schools is in the efferent mode. Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, concerns itself with the experience of what is happening during the event of reading:

The reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text...the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time he must draw selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his response. Out of this the new experience, the literary work is formed. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25, 43).

Rosenblatt's discussion of transactional theory in her book helps educators realize and recognize the differences of interpretation of the text. Reading comes to life because "each reader brings to the transaction not only a specific past life and literary history, not only a repertory of internalized 'codes', but also a very active present, with all its

preoccupations, anxieties, questions and aspirations" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 144).

Literacy Achievement: Constructivist Learning

Comprehension strategies provide a foundation for readers to analyze and dissect literature. Readers are given the tools which enable them to become critical when analyzing literature. For example, readers can analyze and critique the relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist when they know these terms. Becoming literate then, would presumably mean putting those tools to work. The manner in which literature can be used in classrooms, however, will vary according to certain variables, such as teacher selection of materials, room environment, or student background.

Overall success of a second grade literature-based program versus a traditional program was the focus of one study by Morrow (1992). The purpose of the study was to determine whether reading and writing attitudes of students from culturally diverse backgrounds would change when taught through an approach that emphasized literature.

Morrow gathered data from nine second-grade classrooms, a total of 166 students. Black, white, Asian, and Hispanic were the cultural backgrounds, ranging from middle class to low SES, i.e., students receiving free lunches based on family income. Students were randomly assigned to three groups: Experimental 1 (school-based intervention and reading at home), Experimental 2 (school-based instruction), and one control group (same reading instruction from previous year). Measurement tools included standardized achievement tests, questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

Compared to a traditional approach (use of basal reader only), the literature-based program offered numerous opportunities for literacy achievement. The components in the literature-based program included:

1) Physical environment:

- *arrangement of furniture (cozy reading corners)
- *selection of materials (5-8 books per child, samples from multiple genres of children's literature; felt stories; roll movies; headsets with taped stories; author's spot with writing materials)
- *inviting, relaxed, attractive literacy centers (homelike setting including carpet and comfortable seating)

2) Teacher-guided activities

- *daily read-aloud sessions (stimulates language development, sense of story structure; verbal interaction between teacher and students)
- *Directed Reading/Listening-Thinking Activity (DR/LTA)-teacher provides a framework for organizing and retrieving information from a story (prereading questions, discussion, prediction, reading the story, post-reading discussion)
- *Retelling stories using props (felt stories, puppets, roll movies)-holistic procedure of assessing comprehension

3) Independent reading and writing periods (IRWP) - choices include

- *working alone or together; self-selection of materials; story expression (puppets, felt stories, listening to story); collaboration of ideas with others (Morrow, 1992, pp. 252-3)

Morrow concluded that the implementation of "regularly scheduled literature activities, i.e., creating original oral and written stories, storytelling with feltboards . . .with the opportunity to engage in periods of independent reading and writing led to a substantial increase in children's literacy performance" (Morrow, 1992, p. 271). For example, children in the two experimental groups scored statistically higher on all three comprehension measures, probed recall and oral and written retelling, than the control group. One of the other benefits of the program was the fact that children often worked together in groups, getting feedback and support from teachers as well as other students. Self direction was stressed to enable the students to become thinkers on their own, not relying on the teacher for the answer. Also, students increased their reading outside of the school setting. Students referred to reading and writing as "fun" when there were choices (e.g., whether to work alone or with others, choosing what to read and write). Morrow's study supports the idea that literacy achievement can increase

with these types of measures.

Collaboration and Choice: Constructivist Learning

Another study focusing on literacy achievement supports collaboration and choice in the learning environment. Nystrand and Gamoran's hypothesis states that engagement in literature "involves the interaction of students and teachers...clearly underlying the social nature of instruction" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p. 269). Data were gathered from fifty-eight eighth-grade English classes in sixteen Midwestern schools for one school year. (English classes were defined as English, communications, literature, etc.) The communities from which the data were collected included one small-town and two rural schools, all white; four suburban, mostly white and upper-middle class; and nine urban schools varying in socioeconomic and ethnic make-up. The total number of students who participated in this study was 1041.

Student tests and questionnaires, teacher questionnaires, and classroom observations were the data sources. The observers were looking for two things: time spent in different types of activities (e.g., lecture, seatwork, discussion, etc.), and types of instructional discourse occurring (e.g., authenticity of student and teacher questions).

For clarification purposes, two types of student engagement were discussed: procedural and substantive. Procedural engagement referred to general classroom rules and regulations. Substantive engagement involved sustained commitment to the content and issues of academics. The study described how these types of engagement can have different effects depending on the student outcomes, and related this to data on literature instruction. These are the conclusions of Nystrand and Gamorans' findings:

- *students are more motivated toward academic tasks when their teachers ask open-ended questions; when teachers probe what students know and think
- *there is value in student responses if the teacher asks authentic questions; credits students with expertise worth sharing
- *teacher-learner dialogue raises student expectations; values thinking
- *teachers are key to creating classrooms where reciprocity is respected and possible (Nystrom & Gamoran, 1991, pp. 283-284)

In other words, there are certain aspects of literature programs and the environments in which they are carried out that determine success for the students.

Literature Discussions: Constructivist Learning

Presenting literature as a passageway to understanding more about the world has a powerful impact on students' views and beliefs. The methods of presentation are equally important. Discussion of literature becomes more important as we ask students to substantiate their viewpoints.

Eeds and Peterson's primary focus was to explain how to expand and deepen students' thinking about literature in their study of "teacher as curator" (1991). They stressed that teachers need guidance in knowing how to be an effective "curator"-literary leader-in order to help their students develop literary insights and aesthetic judgment" (Eeds & Peterson, 1991, p. 119). An effective curator might be someone who knows how to guide the discussion so students are thinking more critically about their reading. Eeds and Peterson suggest that teachers improve upon their discussion techniques by re-reading a book, using stick-on notes to highlight sections, and keeping questions in mind that would enhance explorations of the literature. They realize that many teachers are "products of traditional literature instruction" and thus need practice in these strategies (Eeds & Peterson, 1991, p. 120). By "being products of traditional literature," this could mean that most teachers were taught to use the questions from the basal to obtain the "right" answers from students, instead of venturing out and asking

questions the students have initiated. If teachers are going to be effective literary curators, Eeds and Peterson stress four factors to bear in mind:

- *Practice your own reading with "passionate attention"
 - *Practice writing with your students
 - *Listen carefully to what students say as they talk about a book (take notes)
 - *Trust the books, trust the students, trust yourself
- (Eeds & Peterson, 1991, p. 125)

Becoming a literary curator means risking and re-learning literary techniques that can enhance and deepen students' understandings.

Literature Study Circles: Constructivist Learning

Another technique to studying literature in depth focuses on literature study circles. Samway et al. (1991) capture the students' enthusiasm towards literature via the technique of literature study circles, a discussion technique used for improving in-depth discussion of literature. Samway worked with the teacher and students to try a different technique to the teacher's use of contracts and class sets of trade books. Each week, the teacher, Whang, offered six to eight copies of four or five books that she thought would interest and challenge her students to think critically about literature. Whang presented each book to the students with a "booktalk," describing each book in a few sentences. Students selected their choices and were given large blocks of time to read. When the students finished their book, they met with the teacher for 20 to 30 minutes to share initial responses to the book, e.g., favorite parts, comments on illustrations, etc. From the initial discussion, the teacher mapped out an assignment that would extend students' understanding of the author's style and content, e.g., "What do you think is the theme of the book?" or "How does the author draw you into the book?". One or two days later, a second discussion ensued focusing on literary elements, e.g., plot

development, narrator's style, etc. At the end of each session, the students and teacher processed how they thought the activity went. Reflection is important for the sole purpose of individual growth and learning to respect others' differences in responding to the text.

Using the literature study circles approach emphasizes reading and discussing unabridged, unexcerpted children's literature (Edelsky, 1988; Eeds and Wells, 1989; Peterson & Eeds, 1990, cited in Samway et al., 1991). The basic themes that emerged from the work of Samway et al. were:

- *change of attitude towards books and reading
- *more confident, engaged, and knowledgeable readers
- *influenced how they understood themselves and their membership in a multicultural world (expressed opinions, disagreed with each other, risked revealing a darker side of themselves)
- *influenced how they viewed themselves as readers (recognized weaknesses in their reading)
- *influenced how they regarded other types of reading programs
(Samway et al., 1991, p. 199)

Changes in attitude were measured by the students' responses after the study. Many of the students commented that they were not experienced readers before coming to Whang's class. They became more confident because they began to recognize their weaknesses. They were also able to compare past reading program experiences and analyze the differences. Although this study only suggests what this one group experienced, it reveals what students may enjoy most about reading programs in schools. They like to have choices, just like they would if they were in a democratic society as an adult, and they enjoy discussing literature, a social act. Overall, when students are given the opportunities to discuss what they feel is important and then are able to relate it to their own lives, they are being given opportunities to understand the world a little better. At

the end of the year, Whang's fifth/sixth grade students said they viewed themselves as experts and figured out a way they could be of service to other readers. One of the students recommended having a book recommending service. This is a reminder to educators that students want to be heard and their opinions acknowledged if this country desires to "become a nation of readers."

The Value of "Talk"

Literature response groups focus on the importance and value of "talk" which "helps us to construct ideas and represent experiences for ourselves and others....We use it to question, respond, reflect, and to propose outcomes and solutions...talk can help us think" (Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick & Rogers, 1989, p. 193).

Strickland and four Virginia elementary school teachers explored the "talk" during reading conferences with students and literature response groups. Data collection consisted of classroom observation, field notes, teacher logs, video tape and audiotape recordings over a two-month period in four classrooms. The findings of their investigative research included the following:

- *students focused on storyline, topic, authors, literary elements and literary devices, personal understandings, relationship to own lives
- *book comparisons (same author)
- *students viewed as experts/resources
- *interactional pattern of discussion rather than initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) sequence (Strickland et al., 1989)

Overall, Strickland found that "literature response groups helped students learn to interpret literature and extend their literary awareness. . .learned to use talk more effectively and to use it as a medium for learning" (Strickland et al., 1989, p. 200). For example, by using response journals to respond to what they were reading, students had a chance to meet with the teacher to discuss issues, as well as meet with groups of

other students, where they also had the chance to be the leader of the discussion. In addition to providing autonomy for their learning, it helped the students gain ownership of their own learning.

Another method of learning which is different from Strickland's approach is a study emphasizing writing. Austin points out that the Socratic method of learning allows a learner to discover meaning when "teachers hold back their opinions and beliefs to allow the learner to falter, to stumble, and to right himself toward discovery of meaning" (Austin, 1989, p. 185). The Socratic method, as described by Austin, helps students evaluate and process their own learning, and to ponder the contradictions and inconsistencies. This would come under the category of the constructivist theory.

Open Ended Questions

One more study emphasizing literature discussions demonstrates the importance and reasons for open-ended questions. Wolf's case study traced the types of responses her child (Lindsay) made over a four-year period regarding response to various versions of Hansel and Gretel. Wolf points out that recent research findings by Heath and Bruner argue that "fitting the child to a set pattern reveals little of the condition of worlds that is a vital part of what it means to be literate (Bruner, 1983; Heath, 1983, cited in Wolf, 1983). Children are capable of both creative and critical interpretations of literature when given opportunities to act out, think, and talk about stories" (Wolf, 1991, p. 388). At first, Lindsay responded through acting out her responses (dramatization). As the year progressed, Lindsay moved to more verbal responses. An emphasis was not placed on "right" answers but on interpretation of the text through re-reading and analysis. In the conclusion of her case study, Wolf reminds us that

comprehension studies of individual children over time (Butler, 1980; Craso and Craso, 1983; White, 1984) suggest that those who are read to at an early age and who are given opportunities for discussion, critically analyze stories quite early. These children build hypotheses, compare characters, events or settings, and reflect on affect and motivation. They recognize story genre and use their knowledge to explain what has happened and predict what will come. They follow the trail of story...according to their own needs. (1989, p. 394)

Dialogue Journals/Literature Logs: Constructivist Learning

A 1991 study deals with how the second language learner acquires knowledge. The purpose of de la Luz Reyes' study was to identify the benefits of using two tools, dialogue journals and literature logs, to improve the literacy of second language learners.

Ten bilingual students, five girls and five boys, with a median age of 12.1 years, were selected as case studies for the project. Spanish was their primary language. For the purposes of the study, the students wrote in dialogue journals and literature logs daily for twenty minutes, from which the entries were collected for seven months and then analyzed. The main difference between dialogue journals and literature logs is that the students select the topic upon which to write in the journals, whereas the log assignment is dictated by the teacher. Observations of the students took place throughout the year as the study was being conducted. The observers were looking for the social context in which writing was occurring in the classroom.

In addition, the students received daily mini-lessons and chances to conference with peers or individually on their writing. The teacher also provided daily Reading Enrichment periods, where the teacher read poetry aloud and the children wrote biographies. Analysis of the data focused on five issues: emerging themes and the effect on the writing length and complexity; language used by the student and teacher; codeswitching, switching back and forth between two languages; positive/negative self-concepts and attitudes towards school; and writing skills.

Overall, at the end of the study, de la Luz Reyes found that the students did not improve in their use of writing conventions through the journals or logs. The ineffectiveness was rooted in not incorporating appropriate social, cultural, and linguistical adaptations with popular instructional programs. The use of dialogue journals and literature logs appeared to have hindered the second language learners growth in constructing meaning and the movement towards higher literacy.

Summary

With researchers and practitioners in the state of California evaluating reading in a more open-ended approach, they have found that educators must recognize the movement towards increasing students' awareness of the important role that literature plays in their lives. In the last twenty years, educators have been moving away from the "assembly line" approach of teaching reading, to a more eclectic approach that includes choices for students.

To create a school as a caring community of learners, three constructs have been identified: a focus on intrinsic motivation (why we learn), on the ethical and social dimensions of learning (what we learn) and on constructivist theory (how we learn).

Studies that focused on intrinsic motivation, the reasons why we learn, helped develop several ideas: (1) having choices and a sense of responsibility to one's own learning promoted students' achievements in school; (2) self-determination, responsibility, and choice associated with learning provides opportunities for students to be more creative and flexible in their cognitive thought processes, and have a more positive self-concept; and (3) creative teaching styles that incorporated these characteristics, with no excessive control, helped students become more intrinsically

motivated.

The ethical and social dimensions of learning focused on why students choose certain types of literature and what factors influence their decisions. Based on content in learning, educators have a personal approach to teaching that will affect the outcome of the learner. Overall, even though each teacher's style is unique and personal, the majority of the literature content being taught in the classrooms is focused primarily on what happened in the story, not on individual interpretation or attitudes towards the story. State and district guidelines might limit teacher's awareness of ways to develop children's thinking and may be one of the reasons for teachers "teaching to the test" and not allowing themselves to be free with their teaching style. For example, if the state test focuses heavily on grammar usage, the teacher might spend more time on worksheets dealing with identifying nouns and adjectives rather than using literature to emphasize how nouns and adjectives are used in the story they are reading.

Exposing children to multicultural literature also expands their learning about other cultures' ethical and social dimensions. Through listening to and reading multicultural literature, students can learn tolerance, patience, appreciation, and friendship, for example, and allow these qualities to carry over into their own lives, their school environment, their community, and ultimately their world.

The third construct, constructivist learning, is supported by studies that focus on the process of learning. Piaget, the father of the constructivist theory, maintains that learners are continually constructing new knowledge with each new experience. Therefore, it is possible for students to perceive ideas differently based on their own experiences. Likewise, that is how it is in a classroom of students coming from many

different environments.

Educators must recognize three constructs of learning to be successful in fostering students openness towards discussion of literature and to create a "nation of readers": intrinsic motivation, ethical and social dimensions, and the idea of the constructivist theory. In light of the above findings and research, it appears that students can greatly benefit from literature discussion groups.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Most students find it relatively simple to recite facts from memory. However, fewer students are taught the skills that incorporate analyzing and critiquing issues and concepts. In the study of literature, students learn how to explain the plot on a simple level, e.g., introducing the plot, characters. Fewer students are given opportunities or instructions on how to critically analyze literature, e.g., explaining the mood of the book and how it affects the protagonist. This research study analyzed fourth graders' abilities to critically discuss the book Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner.

The reason I choose to delve into a study dealing with literature discussions was to see if students could manage discussing literature without the aid of a teacher directing their questions and responses. I was curious to see whether, first, they could manage on their own, and second, whether they could respond to one another with deeper level questions (more often with evaluative and interpretive questions as opposed to factual questions).

Subjects

Subjects included six fourth grade students enrolled in a Santa Clara County School District. Ethnic make-up of the students was white, Hispanic and Asian. The socio-economic level of the students consisted of low to middle income. The students' ages ranged from 9-10 years of age.

The process for choosing the subjects for this study was done by random

stratification selection. First, the subjects were divided into two groups by gender. Then, within each gender group, the subjects were divided into three subsequent groups according to their reading scores on a standardized test. (The reading scores were gathered from the previous school year since current scores were not available.) Subjects were organized by three groups of reading scores: low (0-50%), medium (51-80%) and high (81-100%). At this point there were six groups from which to choose subjects: female/low, female/medium, female/high, male/low, male/medium, male/high. One name was then randomly selected from each group to make up the final pool of subjects for the literature discussion group.

Instruments

I analyzed the questions the students asked one another using the three main types of questions from the Great Books discussion series: factual-questions where the reader can point to the answer in the story; evaluative-questions that elicit opinion of readers; and interpretive-questions to gain a deeper understanding of what the author means (Great Books Foundation, 1992). I used a chart to display the questions asked by each student in the group of six (see Appendix C). When analyzing the students' responses on the chart, I was only looking at the questions they asked, not their responses towards one another. For example, even though Student C appears to have responded frequently in the scripts, Student C did not engage in asking as many questions as the other members of the group. Also, students A and E show no record of responses because they did not ask questions, even though they participated in the literature discussions.

Procedure

A pilot test was administered one week prior to the actual literature discussion

session, whereby the students read the poem "The Dirigible," by Ralph W. Bergengren. The reason for administering the pilot study was to familiarize the students with the setting for the literature discussion. I also wanted the students to practice being comfortable in front of a camera and cassette recorder. In addition, the pilot study was administered to see how the exploratory questions for this study could be analyzed, therefore clarifying a system for the responses during the Stone Fox discussion. One week after the pilot study was administered, the students came to the literature discussion session having read Stone Fox. Both the pilot study and the Stone Fox session were videotaped and audiotaped to clarify the students' responses when I was gathering pertinent data for this study.

I only told the students that they would need to read the poem and Stone Fox, and come to the literature discussion session ready to discuss the poem/book with the five other classmates. The students were given minimal instructions for the literature discussion because I was interested in the types of questions they would ask one another without the teacher guiding them through the text. The format was an open forum with no guide (e.g., teacher). I was in the room at the time of both discussions; however, I was not a part of the discussion and did not tell them when they had completed the discussion, giving them the freedom to choose when to close the discussion. The reasons I did not participate are twofold: one, I was interested in seeing how students discussed literature without the teacher's guidance; two, I was curious to see how students responded to one another without an adult present in the discussion.

Both the pilot study and the discussion of Stone Fox were carried out in a regular classroom during school hours. The six subjects were the only students in the room

during the discussion and I sat to the side, out of sight of the group. Five of the six students had prior experience with book discussions in previous years at the school. They were guided through factual, evaluative and interpretive questions during Great Books discussion sessions by a teacher or parent volunteer. Subsequently, they were somewhat familiar with the format of literature discussions.

Limitations

One limitation is the small sample size used for this study. Thus, one cannot generalize the research findings to the general fourth grade student population. Also, as the sample population is not diverse, external validity may be questionable.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the types of questions students ask one another during discussion of literature. It was anticipated that students would ask a range of three different types of questions: (1) factual, questions where the reader can point to the answer in the story; (2) evaluative, questions that elicit opinions of the readers; and (3) interpretive, questions asked to gain a deeper understanding of what the author means. I expected the students to focus mostly on factual questions since I did not anticipate their asking more critical questions in the category of evaluative and interpretive questions.

Compilation of Data: Pilot Study-"The Dirigible"

Data were compiled from two sessions. In the first session, the discussion of the poem "The Dirigible," the six students asked a total of 7 questions: 1 factual (14%), 2 evaluative (29%), and 4 interpretive (57%) (see Appendix D).

Examples of the three types of questions follow:

Factual: D: "What do you think it looks like, an airplane?"

B: "It says an airship. What does he mean...a ship or...?"

C: "A plane, like a space ship."

A: "That's true. He says up here, he says it's an airship. Down here he

says the fishes are staring at him."

Evaluative: B: "You don't know what it is cause if it just is a what, what is it?"

D: "It could be an object."

B: "It could be anything."

C: "It could even be a chair."

Interpretive: B: "What was he (author) thinking when he was writing this poem?"

C: "He could have been thinking...like I don't know. He could have been thinking..."

A: "Maybe it happened to him in a dream, or something."

B: "Yeah, like the next day...like that night he had a dream and the next day he wrote about it."

Pilot Study Evaluation

Based on the pilot study of the discussion of the poem "The Dirigible," students asked evaluative and interpretive questions more often than factual. It appeared from this particular session that these students were interested in the opinion of their peers and the author's intentions as it relates to the poem. Moreover, they may be clarifying their own ideas by gathering information from other students. Self esteem is an issue at this age level and students may also want the verification that their ideas seem worthwhile. I also noticed that the students rarely disagreed with one another's opinions,

or if they disagreed, their opinions were not voiced. "Yeah" was a common response to others' remarks. When an evaluative or interpretive question was asked, the discussion ensued for a longer period of time when compared to factual questions. I did not allow the students to see the title of the poem prior to the discussion, since I wanted them to use their interpretive skills. Thus, they had to base their interpretation of the poem merely on the words (no pictures). I believe this also played a role in allowing more evaluative and interpretive questions.

Compilation of Data: Stone Fox

In the second session, the discussion of Stone Fox, students asked more evaluative questions (see Appendix C). With a total of 15 questions, 4 were factual (22%), 6 were evaluative (42%), and 5 were interpretive (36%). Following are examples of the three types of questions from the Stone Fox discussion:

Factual: A: "Stone Fox wants to win, because he wants...he wants to win, so he can pay the lands back for his people and Little Willy wants to win it, so he can pay the taxes for his grandfather."

F: "So his grandfather won't feel sick."

A: "When Searchlight dies, the Stone Fox pulls out a gun and says, 'Anybody crosses this line, and I'll shoot um.'"

Evaluative: F: "Why do you think Stone Fox started off in the race very slowly, then he started charging ahead?"

D: "Well, maybe he had been saving..."

F: "He might have been saving energy for his dogs."

B: "Cause maybe he thought maybe...hey you know if he goes fast and I start going slow, I can save all my energy enough to go zooming ahead."

Interpretive: B: "What do you think the author was thinking of naming it Stone Fox?"

F: "Why did he name it that?"

B: "He could have named it..."

F: "Could have named it Searchlight."

D: "Yeah, when I first saw the title "Stone Fox" I thought, Oh, it's just a stone with the...in the shape of a fox."

Stone Fox Evaluation

The students' discussion of Stone Fox led to some interesting discoveries. Since the text was longer than the discussion of the poem in the pilot study, students were able to extend their discussion of certain topics. For example, when the students were discussing their favorite parts of Stone Fox, there was a reciprocal conversation between two students focusing on why they enjoyed reading Stone Fox. The discussion included a personal story of how difficult it was to stop reading the book at bedtime because "it was an interesting book. . .and who would think Searchlight would die?" Another example of extended discussion includes the focus on why Stone Fox started off in the race very slowly, then started charging ahead. Another personal story ensued

describing how the student saves their energy when running track, doing gymnastics or playing soccer: "I save my energy so I can go (shows fast motion with hands)." The students were advising one another on how to save one's energy: "Like if you are in soccer and somebody puts it way over there you got to run. You shouldn't use all your speed, then run out of kicking speed. Slow down a little." Based on this section of the discussion, these students appear to enjoy relating personal experiences to the characters' experiences in the book. The ethical and social dimensions of learning, whereby students are learning how to relate and get along with their peers and test new ideas in the company of peers, is evident based on the students' discussion of Stone Fox.

Switching Topics

In addition to extension of topics during the discussion, the students also seem to switch discussion topics rather rapidly. At one point, they are involved in a discussion of Stone Fox's reason for starting off slowly in the race, then one student stops in mid sentence and another student breaks in with "How about a good title?" Another instance of switching topics includes the discussion of the author's ending to the story. The discussion is deepening whereby students are giving reasons why the author ended the book on a sad note. Then a student relates the sled's sharp turns:

E: "Yeah, cause like at the end, I was thinking something bad might happen. Cause something..."

B: "Somebody would fall or something. It was surprising to me..."

A: "It was neat how Little Willy had a small sled so he could take sharp turns."

B: "Yeah."

A: "Quicker than other people. I just loved that."

The reason for switching directions in the middle of a discussion might be a case of nervousness. Taking into account that this was a foreign setting (e.g., being videotaped and audiotaped with no other students in the room except six), the students may have felt awkward. Perhaps they felt nervous to keep the conversation moving along, therefore they switched topics when there was a lull in the conversation. It may also be evident that the students' minds were working ahead of the present discussion, and they wanted to say what they had to say before they forgot their important point.

Exploring The Authors' Intentions

In addition to extending discussion and switching topics suddenly, students were also deepening their thinking when discussing why the author named the book Stone Fox.

B: "I wonder why he named it that, Stone Fox, instead of Little Willy or Searchlight?"

A: "Because Stone Fox comes in like the beginning of the book."

B: "See, this author is different from all the other authors. He had a sad ending and sad beginning , and he...maybe he thought that like all those other authors..."

F: "Maybe he wanted to be different."

B: "Yeah, that's what I'm going to say. Maybe he was, like, he thought that you know all the other authors have happy endings, happy beginnings, and the main character is the same. So, maybe when they saw this book..."

A: "He could have been saying to himself...I want to be different. I'll be different.

D: "He didn't want to be the same, yeah."

B: "If he just wants to be different, it was his choice because it was his book."

The students appeared to have a desire to know what the author's intentions were when he was writing the book. They were constructing their meaning based on other books they have read (e.g., other authors have happy beginning and endings) and comparing their ideas to this book.

Overall, most of the six students participated and were fully engaged in discussions. There were a variety of questions and responses, with the most appearing in the evaluative category, the next least in the interpretive, and the least from the factual. Students seem to enjoy relating personal experiences to the characters and incidences in the book. They also tried to interpret the author's intentions of the story's content, and brought in former experiences with books to try to understand the content and format.

Summary of Research and Findings

The present exploration of literature responses revealed that students are capable of deepening their understanding of literature through discussion with their peers. In deepening their understanding, they were able to go beyond factual questions and responses and move towards evaluative and interpretive strategies in their discussion of the poem, "The Dirigible," and the book Stone Fox.

The purpose of the present study was to analyze fourth graders' responses to literature. The exploratory questions addressed three ideas:

- 1) What kinds of questions did students ask one another?

2) Which types of questions did students ask one another more often?

3) What type of responses did the students have towards one another?

Exploratory Question #1

In response to the first question, students tended to address one another with questions regarding the opinion of their peers, e.g., "Why do you think Stone Fox started out slow, and then went quickly?" They also posed questions dealing with the reasoning of the author's intent, e.g., "I wonder what the author is thinking about in this poem?"

Exploratory Question #2

In relation to question two, based upon the students' discussions and the tallying of their responses, students asked more interpretive and evaluative questions rather than factual questions of one another. They appeared to be interested in their peers' opinions of Stone Fox and "The Dirigible" as well as the author's intent in the subject matter of the story and poem.

Exploratory Question #3

In their responses to one another, the third exploratory question, the students seemed to give their opinions readily and tended to agree with one another more often than disagree. They also referenced the literature to make a point about their favorite part or to substantiate a fact made in the discussion.

Summary

In this study of fourth graders' responses to literature, I found that students can develop and discuss issues without direct assistance from an adult teacher. They were able to manage themselves well and critically discussed literature together. This is an example of a novel way to teach literature, allowing students to be guides in the

discussion process with more of an open format. The value of talk gives students chances to "question, respond, reflect and to propose outcomes and solutions" (Strickland et al., 1989, p. 193). In the hurriedness of a school day, time for reflection and discussion must be planned into the schedule to demonstrate to students that it is a valuable tool for later in life.

In addition, literature discussion circles "help students learn to interpret literature and extend their literary awareness...and to use talk more effectively and to use it as a medium for learning" (Strickland, et al., 1989, p. 200). When given these opportunities for discussion, students are capable of furthering their learning of the text as well as learning about themselves and how they might handle situations similar to characters in the stories they read. When these discussions are open-ended, in other words, where no specific questions are asked by a leader of the group, it may allow students "opportunities to test hypotheses, weigh the consequences, and express both logical and symbolic understandings of stories" (Wolf, 1991, p. 389).

As an educator, it is very important to allow time during each day for students to discuss literature. This valuable time for reflection and discussion of literature can give students' autonomy over their learning, a sense of belonging to a group which may facilitate their social development, and a feeling of competence whereby students are constructing and building their knowledge base.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This study analyzed fourth graders' responses to literature, specifically related to the poem, "The Dirigible" by Ralph W. Bergengren and to the book, Stone Fox, by John Reynolds Gardiner. In carrying out this study, I wanted to find out how students discussed literature without the direction of a teacher's questions and facilitation.

Prior to the study, I addressed three exploratory questions:

- 1) What types of questions would students ask one another?
- 2) Which types of questions would students ask one another more often?
- 3) What type of responses would the students have towards one another?

The students' questions during the discussions were analyzed according to three main types of questions: factual-questions where the reader can point to the answer in the text, evaluative-questions that elicit opinions of the reader, and interpretive-questions asked to gain a deeper understanding of the author's intent in the text. These responses were then tallied and totaled for the analysis of the results (see Appendices D and E).

In carrying out the literature research for this study, I organized my findings into three main constructs of learning: intrinsic motivation (why we learn), ethical and social dimensions of learning (what we learn), and constructivist theory (how we learn). This organization enabled me to focus on the content of the students' questioning strategies during their literature discussions.

I felt that these three constructs of learning were important in analyzing

students' responses in a literature discussion. The three constructs may reveal how educators can better approach the teaching of literature. Perhaps students may become more excited about literature when they have more choices about book selections (intrinsic motivation), when they can talk about books with their peers, (ethical and social dimensions of learning), and when they realize that what they are currently learning builds upon their previous experiences with literature (constructivism).

Students learn when they are motivated, whether it is an interest in bugs or because they want a "good" grade. Students, however, are more intrinsically motivated to learn in an environment where the focus is on sensible, real, relevant and purposeful activities (Goodman, 1986). This helps students focus on the value of education and learning. For example, if Stone Fox were the book of choice by all the students in the discussion (e.g., they had a desire to read about dog sled races), the content of their discussion may have been richer and more relevant.

The content of learning, the ethical and social dimensions of learning, affects how students analyze and view the wider part of their world. The content of literature opens up opportunities for students to discuss, analyze, and interpret the author's ideas. As well, it provides students with contrasts in perspective, decision-making skills, ideas for social activism, and details concerns facing various groups in society (Rasinski & Padak, 1990).

Constructivism focuses on how students learn. Theories from scholars such as Piaget describe learning as a continuous creation of rules to explain what is observed (Piaget, 1964). Students learn at different rates and discover these "rules" at various times. Therefore, in viewing literature discussions among students, it is important to be

mindful of these differences so as to explain the responses and questions directed toward one another.

Upon conclusion of this study focusing on fourth graders' responses to literature, the following important issues surfaced:

- 1) How would the students' ages affect the depth of the literature discussions?
(i.e., comparing fourth graders to sixth graders)
- 2) If the students were allowed more time to discuss the literature, would it affect the outcome of the results? Or if students were given more sessions with breaks in between, would this allow them to return to the next session with more thoughts about the literature?
- 3) How would the depth of literature discussions compare if a longitudinal study was carried out, comparing the literature discussions from the beginning of the year to the end of the year?
- 4) How would the results be different if the students were given a choice about the selection of literature to be discussed?
- 5) How does the size of the group affect the outcome of the discussions?
(e.g., six students vs. four students)
- 6) If students are able to choose the other members in their literature discussion group, how does the comfort level of the students working with one another alter the content of the literature discussion?

The study that I have carried out is the tip of the iceberg for analyzing the factors affecting the richness and depth that students can gain from literature discussions. The

important factor is in allowing students the opportunities to discuss literature, in whatever forum. Hence, they can develop an intrinsic motivation for learning, gain a deeper appreciation of the world through the ethical and social dimensions of literature discussions, and through constructivism, build upon their previous knowledge and construct their personal meaning from literature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

"The Dirigible" Discussion Script

Pilot Study-November 9, 1993

The only real airship
That I've ever seen
Looked more like a fish
Than a flying machine.

It made me feel funny,
And just as if we
Were all of us down
On the floor by the sea.

A big what above us
Was taking a swim,
And we little fishes
Were staring at him.

Ralph Bergengren

B: Um. I wonder what the author is thinking about in this poem. It's really interesting.

What do you think he's thinking?

D: It's like. . . what do you think it looks like, an airplane? It looks like a ship.

B: It says an airship. What does he mean, a ship or. . .

C: A plane, like a space ship.

A: That's true. He says up here, he says it's an airship. Down here he says the fishes are staring at him.

B: It's wierd. It's really interesting. It made him feel. . .made him feel funny. What was he thinking when he was writing this poem?

E: Yeah.

C; He could have been thinking. . .like I don't know. He could have been thinking. . .

A: Maybe it happened to him in a dream, or something.

B: Yeah, like the next day. . .like that night he had a dream and the next day he wrote about it.

E: Yeah.

B: So maybe it's combined with different things. The water, maybe, in the air he's combining them.

D: Um, okay, are we done?

B: No.

C: I wonder how he was. . .what he was thinking when he said the little fishes were staring at him?

B: Yeah, and a big "what" above us was taking a swim?

F: It's like a big. . .

D: I have a book. . .

F: It's like a big unknown fish or something.

D: I have a book, that "what" is just an object.

B: I know it could be anything. "What" could be me, could be you, could be teacher, could be a playground, could be a tree, a flower, a home, a dog or cat.

E: Yeah.

B: I know. You don't know what it is cause if it just is a "what", what is it?

D: It could be an object.

B: It could be anything.

C: It could even be a chair.

B: It could be anything, I mean. . .

F: Something that the people can understand what it is.

B: No. See you don't know what he means. If he was here to tell us, then we would know.

C: He probably really did have something strange happening.

E: Like maybe he was dreaming he was on the bottom of the sea, and he's looking up at a boat or something.

C: Yeah, and like maybe he meant a whale.

B: We don't know what he's thinking because his. . .because he doesn't tell. . .because he doesn't tell us in the poem. . .he doesn't tell what he's thinking.

D: Yeah. The floor he sees is called the bed. You don't sleep on the floor.

C: Really, no, well sometimes you do.

E: Nah.

C: We're done.

B: No, a title.

C: Thinking.

E: The Airship Under The Sea.

All: Yeah. The Airship Under The Sea. Okay, we're done.

Appendix B**Stone Fox Discussion Script**

November 16, 1993

B: Well, I think it is interesting, because why would he name the dog Searchlight? I think that . . .it's kind of weird he named it Searchlight.

F: He has a white spot the size of a half dollar on his head.

B: I know that, but. . .um, cause it's weird. He could have named it Spot. He could have named it. . .

A: It's all black with a little white spot.

D: Yeah, it. . .because he looks after the house.

F: Because he. . .maybe he's more efficient and reliable.

B: Maybe he thought that he didn't like that name Spot. He liked the name Searchlight instead of Spot. He liked. . .he's got. . .maybe he liked that name.

F: He chose the name.

B: Yeah, because it was odd.

D: Odd.

B: Um, let's see. It was kind of sad when I read about the. . .first chapter when grandpa was ill and Searchlight dies.

E: I think it was sad at the end because Searchlight dies.

A: Searchlight dies.

B: That was like, well, let's see, here's a picture. What do you think. . .what do you think the author was thinking of naming it Stone Fox, by John Gardiner?

F: Why did he name it that?

B: He could have named it. . .

F: He could have named it Searchlight.

E: These dogs were the best that ever was.

B: That really happened. It was kind of like, like. . .so it was like sad in the front and the end. You think it would just be sad cause when I opened the book and I started reading, and it came out at me like this isn't. . .is this going to be in the back or the front. And I think not all stories have happy endings. And that was kind of weird. It was different that he had it in the front, a sad. . .a sad beginning and he also had a sad ending also. Maybe he was sad at that point while he was writing this book.

D: Yeah. When I first saw the title "Stone Fox" I thought, oh, it's just a stone with the. . .in the shape of a fox.

B: I thought maybe when I opened the book, and I saw. . .it began Stone Fox. And I saw. . .I looked at. . .I thought that was going to be. . .going to be happy times. You would think something good would happen. It turns out, nothing happened.

A: Stone Fox wants to win, because he wants. . .he want to win, so he can pay the lands back for his people and Little Willie wants to win it, so he can pay the taxes for his grandfather.

F: So his grandfather won't feel sick.

A: When Searchlight dies, the Stone Fox pulls out a gun and says, "Anybody crosses this line, and I'll shoot um."

E: No, I think the man says that.

F: What do you think Clifford Schneider thought when he saw Searchlight? He's like, Oh

God.

B: Why would you try. . .I think he was kind of glad that Searchlight died.

D: Yeah, because he wanted to win.

B: He really wanted to win. He didn't care.

A: Stone Fox really wanted to win.

B: Yeah. And he probably. . .either. . .he really wanted to win. They both really wanted to win. And I really. . .I just wanted. . .and when I saw this title, Stone Fox. . .this looks like a happy book.

All: Yeah

D: And on the cover, it shows a dog.

A: Yeah, but that's wierd about the story is, that they're racing down a street.

E: Yeah.

A: The streets aren't very long.

D: Only this one was.

A: Five miles over and five miles back.

F: Ten miles long.

A: Yeah.

F: National Bobsled.

B: I think it was an interesting book to read. I had fun reading it.

E: Yeah.

A: What's also weird, is Little Willy went through the whole race with a swollen eye.

B: Yeah, one of my favorite chapters was "Searchlight".

C: Yeah.

B: I always thought that the reason. . .I enjoyed all the chapters, but I really liked "Searchlight." That's my favorite chapter. I really enjoyed reading this book.

A: The race is exciting.

B: Yeah, I know, cause he thought. . .

A: Cause. . .at the. . .the chapter of the race. . .

B: You never. . .

A: It ends, and then the finish line.

B: You never suspect. . .

A: And so you don't know what's going to happen. So, you just have to keep reading it. You just get too excited. So then you have to find out.

B: One night I was reading the book, and my mom said, "Put it down. You have to go to bed now." And I said, "Mom, I don't want to put it down," cause I wanted to really. . .I was almost at the end of the book. And I said, "Mom, I don't want to put it down." Because I really wanted to read the rest, cause, you know. . .it, it was a really interesting book. And who would think that Searchlight would die?

All: Yeah.

B: You would think that he would probably win. Yeah, I was thinking Seachlight will win.

A: Most authors. . .most authors would probably make it happen.

B: Maybe he just wasn't having a very good day today. Maybe this man. . .maybe he thought. . .

F: Maybe he made a book in two days.

B: And maybe he thought, like maybe I'll surprise some people. So maybe they will really want to read my book, and see what happens.

E: Yeah, cause like at the end, I was thinking something bad might happen, Cause something. . .

B: Somebody would fall or something. It was surprising to me. . .

A: It was neat how Little Willy had a small sled so he could take the sharp turns.

B: Yeah.

A: Quicker than other people. I just loved that.

F: Why do you think that Stone Fox started out slow, and then went quickly?

B: It was really interesting.

F: I read it in one whole day.

D I almost dropped it in my soup.

F: Why do you think Stone Fox started off in the race very slowly, then he started charging ahead?

D: Well, maybe he had been saving. . .

F: He might have been saving. . .he might have been saving energy for his dogs.

B: Cause maybe he thought, maybe. . .hey, you know if he goes fast and I start going slow, I can save all my energy enough to go zooming ahead.

A: He saved the dog's energy to go all the way over, and then on the way back, he started to go.

B: When I run on the track or go somewhere, I save my energy. If I play a soccer game, I save my energy so I can go (shows fast motion with hands). That's what I do, like Stone Fox did. That's what I do sometimes in a soccer game, in the the track, stuff like that. That's what I do.

A: In a soccer game when you are not playing, you've got to rest.

D: Yeah, like if the ball goes say over there (points).

A: So when you go back in. . .

B: Yeah, so you can score ten thousand points.

F: Like if you are in soccer and somebody puts it way over there, you've got to run. You shouldn't use all your speed, then run out of kicking speed. Slow down a little. But, then if somebody is after it you should. . .

D: How about a good title?

B: No, we already have Stone Fox. Can we make another title? Okay, what would be another one? Maybe Searchlight?

A: Yeah, Searchlight. That sounds interesting.

B: Little Willy.

F: Yeah.

D: The Big Race.

A: Searchlight.

F: The Sickness. Grandfather was sick.

B: Could be any of those names.

C: Stone Fox. I wonder why he named it that?

A: Cause Little Willy is pretty much the main character.

C: Yeah.

B: I wonder why he named it that, Stone Fox, instead of Little Willy or Searchlight?

A: Because Stone Fox comes in like the beginning of the book.

B: See, this author is different from all the other authors. He had a sad ending and sad beginning ,and he. . .maybe he thought that like all those other authors. . .

F: Maybe he wanted to be different.

B: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. Maybe he was. . .like. . .he thought that you know all the other authors have happy ending, happy beginnings, and the main character is the name. Maybe he wanted to be a little different than most characters. So, maybe when they saw this book. . .

A: He could have been saying to himself, "I want to be different. I'll be different.

D: He didn't want to be the same, yeah.

B: If he just want to be different, it was his choice because it was his book. . . um.

(Pause about one minute while students leaf through the book.)

B: How about chapter four, where he goes. . .you know, you can hear the boy?

A: He opens his arm.

B: He points a gun at Searchlight. I like that chapter also. All you guys liked the book?

Yeah, it was really interesting, too. I'm serious, I didn't want to put it down.

D: I can't wait for the movie.

B: Oh, God.

C: I wouldn't mind reading it again.

F: I read it twice.

C: You did!

B: You did!

F: Yeah.

A: My grandma read in this box over there, there's Stone Fox in paperback, and when I left this book at home, I went over here and picked up that book.

B: On chapter four. . .see because he, he hears a voice and he opens the door, and points a

gun at Searchlight.

F: He was scared.

APPENDIX D**Literature Response Group Chart****Pilot Test****"The Dirigible"**

	Types of Questions		
Students	Factual	Evaluative	Interpretive
A			
B		1	3
C			1
D	1	1	
E			
F			
Totals	1	2	4

APPENDIX E**Literature Response Group Tally Chart****Stone Fox**

	Types of Questions		
Students	Factual	Evaluative	Interpretive
A			
B	2	3	3
C	1		1
D	1		
E			
F		3	1
Totals	4	6	5