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Literature circles and technology: a study of students' attitudes

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Abstract
Technology and collaboration are important to students in the reading classroom. This paper investigates students' reading attitudes after participating in a literature circle with technology. This study compared students' reading attitudes prior to participating in the literature circle with technology unit and after participating in the unit using a survey and interview of selected students. The selected students were to represent four categories: introverted, unmotivated, high achieving, and low achieving. The results suggest that students have positive reading experiences when using technology. Additionally, the results suggest that students' reading attitudes are more positive when they are able to collaborate with other students.
Literature Circles and Technology: A Study of Students’ Attitudes

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By
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and Recommendations</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Literature Cited</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Reading Survey</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Student Interview Questions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Discussion Director Role Sheet</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Summarizer Role Sheet</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Connector Role Sheet</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Vocabulary Wizard Role Sheet</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Technology and collaboration are important to students in the reading classroom. This paper investigates students' reading attitudes after participating in a literature circle with technology. This study compared students' reading attitudes prior to participating in the literature circle with technology unit and after participating in the unit using a survey and interview of selected students. The selected students were to represent four categories: introverted, unmotivated, high achieving, and low achieving. The results suggest that students have positive reading experiences when using technology. Additionally, the results suggest that students' reading attitudes are more positive when they are able to collaborate with other students.
Introduction

Mike, a typical chatty and off task student, strolls into his reading classroom, toting his worn-in literature circle folder and a novel with multiple sticky notes hanging out of the pages. "Online today, right?" he says to the teacher as more of a casual (not overly excited) statement than a question, while walking into the room. This student does not want to appear too overly excited or interested in reading class to his peers, but deep down, he is actually quite excited to be online and post his thoughts about the book he is reading.

"Yep, Mike. You are right," the teacher comments as she watches other students file into the classroom.

"Hey Jack, I think I figured out who the Laughing Man is," Mike says as he walks over to one of his literature circle group members.

"You think? I have an idea too," Jack responds excitedly.

Mike and Jack are not friends outside of the classroom. Mike is the too cool for school type and Jack is the quiet and smart type.

Watching the interaction from afar, the teacher, who is standing in the door frame, smiles to herself and thinks that she would never get Mike interested in reading. Mike was not a bad student. In fact, he performed quite well on multiple standardized tests, but he seemed uninterested in completing assignments in reading class and thus maintained a C average in the gradebook. On top of that, he rarely finished a book. The teacher had categorized him as a lost cause until the literature circle unit started. Now, Mike was thoroughly completing his reading assignment and actively participating with his group members. His grade was currently a B+. 
The bell rings, signaling the beginning of class. The students make their way to their seats as the teacher glances around the room, checking for absent students.

“Ok, so from the white board, you can tell that today you will be having your meeting online.”

“Yessssss, can our table get laptops first?” an eager student inquires.

“But that group got computers first last time, so I think it is our turn,” a second student reminds the teacher.

The teacher thinks to herself just how overjoyed she is knowing that her students want to get to work, and she has literatures and computers to thank! The behavior problems are few in the classroom. The students are engaged. She is not nagging them to start reading. The students are questioning the text and the author. How did she get so lucky?

This story could have taken place at any school. Teachers are always concerned with making sure that their students are engaged in reading. Teachers feel a sense of pride when their students look forward to coming into their classroom.

With the Iowa Common Core in place, many teachers feel the stress of teaching the standards in a rigorous manner. They realize that they days of “fun” units are over. However, literature circles provide a way for teachers to implement reading lessons into the classroom through lively student interaction, while utilizing technology along the way.

**Statement of Problem/Purpose of Study**

The goal of this study was to compare students’ attitudes towards reading prior to and after collaborating in a technology-based literature circle. This study
investigated whether the attitudes of several types of students were impacted by participating in a literature circle with technology. Four focal students were used in this study: a student with introversion traits, a student displaying unmotivated traits, a high achieving student, and a low achieving student. A survey administered both prior to and following student participation in literature circles, along with interviews of selected students were used to determine if the technology and literature circles impacted the students’ reading attitudes.

Research questions:

1. Do students’ attitudes and perceptions towards reading change as a result of participation in literature circles that include technology?

2. Do the reading attitudes and perceptions of students who tend towards introversion change as a result of participation in literature circles that include technology?

3. Do the reading attitudes and perceptions of students who tend towards being unmotivated change as a result of participation in literature circles that include technology?

4. Do the reading attitude and perceptions of high achieving students change as a result of participation in literature circles that include technology?

5. Do reading attitudes and perceptions of low achieving students change as a result of participation in literature circles that include technology?
Terms

Terms that will be used throughout this paper, and therefore need to be defined, include the following:

1. Literature circles: A small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have selected to read the same story, article, poem, or book. Group members meet face-to-face to discuss the selected text. Literature circles are also known as book clubs or discussion groups (Daniels, 2002)

2. Online literature circle: A literature circle that has all or part of the meetings online instead of face-to-face (also known as virtual literature circle)

3. Discussion board: Place on a course management system for students to write and respond to other students about a specific topic

The next terms are specific to the type of students that were used in the focal study.

4. Introverted Student: A student who is frequently focused more on internal thoughts and feelings rather than seeking out external stimulation

5. Unmotivated Student: A student who is frequently showing a lack of interest at school

6. High Achieving Student: A student who scored in the advanced category in reading on the Iowa Assessment

A Review of the Literature

This literature review will examine aspects of teaching related to the use of technology in the implementation of literature circles. One way to frame the review is by examining elements of the Iowa Common Core that pertain to these topics. The Iowa Common Core seeks to ensure that all students are college or career ready upon high school graduation. The Iowa Common Core identified six constructs which are vital for success in the 21st century: critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and productivity and accountability. Of the six constructs, critical thinking, collaboration, complex communication are related to this literature review. Collaboration is the belief that group synergy enhances productivity. Collaboration requires participants to interact in a meaningful way (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). Additionally, both technology use and speaking skills are present in the ICC from elementary school until high school in multiple content areas. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that their students have mastered these Iowa Core standards.

The following sections review professional literature on relevant topics related to using literature circles and technology in the classroom. The topics include authoritarian teaching, literature circles, technology, a combination of literature circles and technology, literature circles and achievement levels, and literature circles and introverted or unmotivated students.

Authoritarian Teaching

In traditional authoritarian teaching, the teacher selects the text, asks the questions and then evaluates the students’ responses (Ratz, 2008; Witt, 2007). When
this form of teaching is used, students often assume passive roles and are not actively involved in the learning process (Witt), which contradicts the Iowa Common Core’s philosophy of teaching. This authoritarian teaching often follows an initiation—response—evaluation (I-R-E) structure, meaning that the teacher initiates a question, students respond to the question, and the teacher evaluates the response (Certo, 2010; Ratz; Witt). To move away from this style of instruction, teachers can use literature circles to increase student engagement (Peowski, 2010). “Really effective teachers get their students to ask powerful questions” (Koopman, 2011, p. 27). This is when the classroom environment becomes less focused on the teacher’s questions and more focused on the students’ questions.

What are Literature Circles?

According to Daniels (2002), literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have selected to read the same story, article, poem, or book. Literature circles are also known as book clubs or discussion groups (Witt, 2007).

Literature circles are a non-traditional way of approaching literature. In this way of teaching, each student selects the text he or she will read from options presented by the teacher and reads the assigned text. Independently, the students reflect on that piece of text and meet at scheduled times with a group of students, responding to questions or thoughts written by their peers (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Kitsis, 2010; Ratz, 2008; Witt, 2007; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). Clarke (2007) believes that literature circles are an important classroom practice.

“Literature circles are an arena for students to explore literature together” (Witt, 2007, p. 179). It is not the teacher’s specific list of questions, but rather the
students’ insights and inquiries that create the discussion (Brabham & Villaumne, 2000). Literature circles have become more popular partly to get away from the traditional way of teaching, which views the students as passive learners. The goal is to replace this type of teaching with discussions because it typically focuses less on facts and more on the analysis, reflection, and critical thinking (Certo, 2010).

“Literature circles are an instructional practice that is driven by the belief that learning occurs through social interaction” (Clarke, 2007, p. 113). “Collaboration is at the heart of this approach as students reshape and add to their understanding while they construct meaning with other readers” (Stewart, 2009, p. 29). The Iowa Common Core identifies collaboration as one of the six universal constructs that is essential for students to succeed in future endeavors (Iowa Department of Education, 2012).

Another one of the six universal constructs supported by literature circles is critical thinking (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). Students in literature circles practice critically analyzing others students’ responses while enhancing their reader-response experience (Moreillon, 2009).

Quality literature circles contain a variety of readers’ perspectives and opinions about the book being read. After silently reading the text, students construct meaning from what they read (Dempsey, 2011). One of the reasons to use literature circles is so that readers are exposed to multiple interpretations of the text, especially those opinions that differ from their own. “Diversity of ideas is essential for quality discussion” (Witt, 2007, p. 180).
In addition, when students participate in quality discussions they can acquire new communication skills. However, Clarke (2007) also noted that teachers should be aware of the deeper layers of conversation that could happen in the classroom because of the critical issues being addressed in the book. Literature circles should be focused on the importance of deep level discussion in the literature circles. The creators of the Iowa Common Core expect students to engage in high levels of discussion based on the following standard: “engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly” (Iowa Department of Education, 2012).

Literature circles can be the avenue for students to work towards attaining other standards that are currently being addressed in the classroom through mini lessons (Moreillon, 2009). For example, Daniels (2002) suggests students can practice citing text (RL.6.1) and writing summaries (RL.6.2) and also work on literary elements (RL.6.5). All three of these skills are presented in the Iowa Common Core (Iowa Department of Education, 2012).

Literature circles are beneficial to use in the classroom, no matter the age or subject (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Certo, 2010; Daniels, 2002; Kitsis, 2010; Peowski, 2010). According to Witt (2007), literature circles are a way for students to learn through interaction and engagement. Iowa Common Core’s standards can be taught through the use of literature circles.
How to Set-Up a Literature Circle

Typically teachers begin a literature circle by presenting students with a predetermined number of books. The teacher will introduce each book by telling about the characters and plot, and then offer students a choice (by having them rank their preference) of which book they would like to read. The teacher will consider individual students’ reading ability and personality when forming groups of four within the class (Daniels, 2002). The literature circle group members set a reading schedule to follow (either during class time or outside of class). Essentially each member is reading the same preset number of pages per day and also taking notes to help him or her contribute to the upcoming meeting (Daniels).

The student may fill out a role sheet (such as discussion director, connector, summarizer, passage master, illustrator, vocabulary wizard, or others) to bring to the meeting in order to help elicit discussion (Kilbane & Milbane, 2010; Ratz, 2008; Stewart, 2009). The role sheets provide each student with a focus while reading the text. The job of a discussion director is to write open-ended questions to pose to the group members. Open-ended questions are questions that elicit conversation. These questions usually start with “why” or “how” and often times ask how the reader feels about a particular topic. When students are able to write and ask their peers open-ended questions, they can have deeper conversations about the text. A connector will make connections between the text and his life, another text, or the outside world. This role allows students to see the various connections that exist to different readers. Connections allow the reader to build his reading schema. The summarizer’s job is to write the main points or ideas of that day’s reading in approximately one paragraph.
A summarizer reminds the group members of the key parts of the text. A passage master will pick out different sections of the text that were confusing, interesting, or surprising to share with the group. The illustrator creates a sketch of that day’s reading. A vocabulary wizard will select and define words from the pages read to share with the group members.

The goal of assigning roles is not an automated reading of the role sheets, but rather a natural discussion, where students might only refer to their notes or role sheets in the course of conversation (Witt, 2007). The literature circle discussion should be focused on theme or main idea of the book. This will allow for deeper level discussion to happen as opposed to simply answering basic literal questions (Clarke, 2007).

However, some research has shown that role sheets can impede students’ conversations, as students get more wrapped up in completing a role sheet and sharing only that aspect rather than having a natural conversation and responding to one another (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). If roles are not used, the teacher might suggest the students have ideas about the book ready for when the group meets for discussion. Other research has shown that this use of roles is powerful because it gives a starting place for conversations (Daniels, 2002). In order for this level of discussion to occur, students must understand the discussion expectations and possibility and even see an example of a literature circle discussion (Ratz, 2008; Witt, 2007).

Students meet on a regular basis (depending on the length of the texts) as they work to complete the book. If role sheets are used, typically students switch roles for
each meeting, ensuring that they each get a chance to practice the different roles (Daniels, 2002). After the book is finished, the group shares highlights of their book, typically a culminating project (Daniels, 2002; Ratz, 2008; Witt, 2007). Culminating project ideas could range from reenacting a scene from their shared book, to creating a diagram about an important setting, to creating a puppet show, or possibly even creating a song related to the book (Daniels; Ratz). One purpose for the culminating project is to allow students to demonstrate their shared knowledge in a creative and relevant way (Ratz), and another reason is to get other classmates interested in the text they read (Daniels).

Technology

A second area that is both central to this research study and addressed in the Iowa Core is technology (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). The Iowa Common Core expects that students (even as young as kindergarten) will be utilizing technology in the classroom (Iowa Department of Education). Once students get into middle school and upper grades, the Iowa Common Core states that students should not only have a basic understanding of technology, but also use technology to create and demonstrate their knowledge of the standards and collaborate with others while doing so (Iowa Department of Education). Because of the Iowa Common Core demands, many school cultures will need to shift. And due to this change, the current generation of teachers will need to engage their students in collaborative assignments that integrate technology. For example, one sixth grade Iowa Common Core standard that is particularly relevant to this study states that students will “use
Students are hooked on technology. Research has found that many students spend about nine hours a day online - chatting, blogging, watching YouTube videos, or visiting online communities (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). With the use of technology increasing more and more each day, there has been a shift to utilizing technology in the classroom. The Internet has changed the classroom in quite profound ways (Bowers-Campbell; Peowski, 2010). The speed, ease of use, and collaborative nature of the internet environment is unique in the history of literacy. In fact, no other technology for reading and writing has been adopted by so many people in such a short time (Moreillon, 2009). It only makes sense for teachers to connect with students in the classroom through the use technology.

Creating an Online Community. The specific form of technology incorporated in this study is the online discussion board, especially as it is embedded in course management systems (CMS). There are multiple websites that allow teachers to incorporate technology into their literature circles. Teachers can use course management systems or other online resources, such as Edmodo (Edmodo, 2013); My Big Campus (Lightspeed Systems, 2013); or Blogger (Google, 2013) for online discussions. These websites are a way for students to collaborate virtually (Koopman, 2011; Moreillon, 2009). These websites allow students to organize, discuss, and present their ideas and responses to the literature circle text (Moreillon). On these websites, students are able to individually log in (once the teacher has created the account) and post a discussion question or comment about what they are
reading. Additionally the students can comment on their group members’ posts to create something that is similar to a written conversation. Similar to students bringing questions, comments, and connections to a face-to-face literature meeting, students are able to create an individual thread about their specific idea (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). This type of asynchronous discussion board compliments the design of a literature circle because it allows for process their thinking and then comment.

Online or virtual literature circles use the same philosophy as traditional literature discussions, but incorporate varying levels of technology (Kitsis, 2010). Students are responsible for reading their selected pages and discussing the text read. However, one difference is what happens after the students finish the reading assignment. Some teachers have chosen to utilize the philosophy of the traditional literature circle roles (discussion director, connector, summarizer, and vocabulary wizard) and require students to post on a discussion board the highlights of their assigned role sheets (Kilbane & Milman, 2010). However, some teachers opt not to use the role sheets when doing an online literature circle, but instead have students post comments and questions and respond to their group members’ ideas (Kitsis). With or without the role sheets, students engage in some type of online discussion in addition to (or in place of) the typical face-to-face meeting of a traditional literature circle. For example, students may meet once a week and post additional comments between meetings (called a hybrid approach) (Bowers-Campbell, 2011).
Positive Aspects of Online Literature Circles

Some teachers have worried that technology would isolate students and hurt the collaborative classroom atmosphere because the computers might create a disconnect in the classroom community (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). A review of research indicates the opposite. There are multiple benefits to using the online discussions, one of these being positive interdependence (Stewart, 2009). The online discussions foster interactions between students while also promoting active and collaborative learning (Bowers-Campbell). Students are able to pose questions and ask for clarification in a non-threatening way. Additionally students can seek out assistance comprehending the text by creating a question without getting help from the teacher (Larson, 2009; Stewart).

Virtual literature circles also create individual accountability. Students need to understand that their group cannot have an online discussion with only one group member posting, and since each group is composed of only a small number of members, there must be individual accountability (Stewart, 2009).

Bowers-Campbell (2011) found high levels of student engagement in the literature circles she studied. Each of the virtual literature circle groups in Bowers-Campbell’s study had nearly equal participation from all its members. Shy or introverted students voiced their opinions just as powerfully as more vocal students. The use of virtual literature circles is considered more democratic because it allows students who may not be heard in the classroom to vocalize their ideas (Koopman, 2011; Stewart, 2009).
Both Bowers-Campbell’s (2011) and Stewart’s (2009) research found that the online posts demonstrated that the students were not only engaging in the reading process, but also showing group harmony and negotiating meaning. “As they collaborated and negotiated with one another, they stopped trying to find the ‘right’ answer and started constructing meaning” (Kitsis, 2010, p. 53). Kitsis also discovered that students who were typically passive learners in her class were now critically engaging in the text. For example, one student, who typically did not complete homework, wrote a point-by-point analysis of a particular part in his literature circle book. Additionally, the students were making personal connections and relating the book to things happening in the world (Stewart).

Because discussion boards are asynchronous, they provide students with more flexibility. The discussion board (when compared to a face-to-face meeting) actually allows students more time to reflect before sharing their thoughts (Koopman, 2011). The groups had more opportunity to meet because they were not limited to just a set amount class time to discuss the book (Kitsis, 2010). Often times, students would have ideas about their book pop into their head while in another class or at home. A discussion board allows the students to post and comment at anytime, from anywhere (Koopman).

And in fact, a discussion board is a safe way to post or read a group member’s post and then walk away. This allows the student time to reflect and consider a comment before replying (Koopman, 2011), whereas in a traditional literature circle the student either does not answer the controversial question or answers but maybe
gets angry or defensive. For these reasons, the online threaded discussion can allow for less threatening discussions of controversial topics (English, 2007).

Bowers-Campbell’s (2011) advised that when using technology that both educators and students should be a significant part of the educational dialogue. Literature circles with technology allows for the difficult thinking and communicating to come from the students (English, 2007). Larson (2009) found through studying online discussion transcripts that her students were not just sharing ideas, but carefully considering multiple perspectives. Teachers may need to assist students in discussing controversial topics and also closely monitor the discussion board (Koopman, 2010). In fact, it is a life skill for students to be able to think critically and communicate complexly. The Iowa Department of Education (2012) identifies both of these as two of the six constructs. Within the critical thinking construct, students need to be able to thoughtfully question assumptions and suspend judgments while collecting evidence (Iowa Department of Education). Additionally, within the complex communication construct, students need to clearly communicate (through multiple modes) and also manage and resolve conflicts during a conversation (Iowa Department of Education).

Besides responding to controversial questions, students can also post clarification questions. Kitsis (2010) found that students honestly admitted their confusions about a text on the discussion board. Larson (2009) found that students posted questions in order to seek an answer or clear up a confusing portion of text.

In fact, Koopman (2011) reported that students who participated in an online literature circle thought more often about their discussions, questions, and their books
in general when compared to students who participated in a face-to-face discussion, who thought about their books only sometimes or never. Koopman also reported that students frequently checked the discussion board for new posts.

While teachers were able to create or interject questions and comments on the discussion board, students often responded more frequently to questions or ideas posted by their classmates as opposed to their teacher (Koopman, 2011). “Student-created prompts allowed for group ownership and a sense of socially constructed meaning that students found beneficial” (Bowers-Campbell, 2011, p. 559). The virtual literature circle allows students to take a more active role in the classroom.

Virtual literature circles offer other positive aspects for students also (Dobler, 2012; Kitsis, 2010; Koopman, 2011). Koopman found that students were more polite to their classmates in an online discussion than in a face-to-face discussion. When a rude comment is made at a meeting, it is likely that the teacher will not hear it, and thus the student will get away with being rude. In an online discussion, the students’ comments all have the author’s name. Additionally, students in Koopman’s study reported that there were no interruptions to their thinking by things such as sidetracked conversations or off task students (Koopman). Kitsis (2010) reported that her students asked a variety of questions ranging from simple to more deep critical thinking ones.

**Teacher Benefits**

Teachers might be hesitant to implement virtual literature circles because they don’t feel as technologically savvy as their students (Kitsis, 2010). However, the benefits clearly outweigh this reluctance. Kitsis found multiple positives to using the
virtual environment for literature circles. First, the teacher was able to listen in on each group's conversation. Additionally, the discussion board became a written transcript for the virtual meeting (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). Meanwhile, the teacher is not physically present; therefore the group dynamic did not change due to a teacher physically sitting in on the discussion. As a result of students interacting and getting feedback from each other on the discussion board, they needed less feedback from the instructor (Kitsis).

Teachers may be concerned about Internet safety; however, there are multiple secure websites to utilize for online literature circles. For example, each teacher's Edmodo page is a closed and private community, which can only be accessed when the class code is given to the student by the teacher (Dobler, 2012). Likewise, when using My Big Campus, only the teacher can add members to the class. Thus the teacher is able to monitor student posts and even delete anything that she finds inappropriate. Dobler found that students are quite alert to inappropriate comments made on the discussion board and will report their peers for posting comments that are not school appropriate. Technology allows for students to practice positively interacting and collaborating with their peers.

**Introverted Students using Discussion Boards and Possible Effects**

Introverted students typically do not speak up during classroom discussions. Studies conducted by Larson (2009), Lin & Overbaugh (2007), and English (2007) found that introverted students benefited from an online literature circle. Lin and Overbaugh's study found that introverts posted to a discussion board a total of 19 more times than extroverts posted.
English (2007) stated that typically 15% of students are able to respond to questions in a large group setting and are usually the more vocal ones. One of her solutions to this problem was to have students respond to an online prompt she supplied and then also reply to one classmate’s response. Both English and Asterhan & Eisenmann (2011) found that online posting takes away the social positioning of a classroom, which often inhibits some students from expressing themselves. Introverted students need to have options to have their voices heard. “In a traditional literature circle, students who are shy, struggling as readers, or linguistically diverse may hesitate to share ideas in group settings. The asynchronous message board discussion allows for extra thinking time before formulating and posting responses” (Larson, 2009, p. 647).

While discussion boards may have benefits in the classroom, claims for its advantages over classroom discussion are not without qualification. White (2009) feels that electronic discourse should not be a substitute for classroom discussion. He states that the advantages often claimed for electronic discussion, including wider and more thoughtful participation on the part of students and the opportunity for more insightful assessment on the part of the teacher, can also be gained through face-to-face discussion and carefully evaluated student writing.

One potentially troubling issue related to electronic discussion boards is cyberbullying. As educators recognize the demand for an increased use of technology with children, they should be aware of the issues that arise with its use. Cyberbullying, or harassment using electronic technology, has become a growing problem among students who have access to the Internet (Morgan, 2013). “The
tremendous access to information through technological advancements has created new opportunities for bullies. It is evident from recent tragedies resulting directly from cyberbullying that more needs to be done to protect students” (Morgan, p. 146).

In order to combat cyberbullying, teachers should initiate a classroom discussion about the appropriate ways to communicate with peers and also encourage the acceptance of others. Additionally, teachers need to respond immediately to cyberbullying even if the incident seems minor (Morgan, 2013). This will allow for the student being bullied (as well as other students) to feel supported and safe at their school, and for the bully to understand that the behavior is not acceptable.

Unmotivated Reader

“Finding ways to motivate and engage students in reading is an essential feature of adolescent reading instruction” (Boardman, et al, p. 26-27). Guthrie and Humenick (2004) identified the following instructional features that are critical to improving students’ motivation in reading: 1) student autonomy, 2) providing interesting texts, and 3) increasing social interactions among students related to reading. Thus, disengaged readers may be more likely to actively read when they are provided with choice (Guthrie & Humenick). Literature circles allow for the students to have a say in the text they are reading, while the teacher is still ensuring the students master the standards (Daniels, 2002). Witt’s study (2007) found that an unmotivated student in his classroom became more confident in his comprehension skills and suggested that this confidence resulted in the student being more motivated in the classroom atmosphere of literature circles. For some students, using technology also motivates them (Edwards & Rule, 2013).
Literature circles and achievement levels

In order to help students succeed in the classroom, literature circles can be used so that students are reading a book that is at their reading level (Shana, 2009). Essentially the students can be flexibly grouped so that they are not frustrated with the difficulty or assigned a book that is not challenging for them. Daniels (2002) argues that mixing students in heterogeneous literature circles can also work. Literature circles are self-paced which offers a way for teachers to readily differentiate instructional materials. For example, a labeled special education student who reads 70 words per minute could have enough time to complete the reading with an adult prior to the next meeting. The student is then able to come to the discussion with interesting connections and a different perspective of the book.

Literature circles work well for those students who are talented and gifted in reading. Typically gifted students are highly developed in one or two areas, but may be limited in other areas such as street smarts, cultural knowledge, or people sense (Daniels, 2002). "They [literature circles] show how heterogeneous, diverse student groups- including mainstreamed special education kids- can work together effectively" (Daniels, p. 27).
Methodology

Setting

This research study took place in a middle school located in a rural Iowa town of approximately 7,000 residents. The researcher is a sixth-grade Language Arts and Reading teacher in this school, and the study was conducted with her students. The school district contains approximately 1,600 students. The middle school contains approximately 350 sixth through eighth graders. The minority population totals 40%, with 20% being Native American and 20% Hispanic. The district is composed of 40% low socioeconomic status, as measured through free and reduced lunch qualifications.

Participants and Researcher

Participants consisted of forty-one sixth graders, all of whom were drawn from the researcher’s classes. At this school, there are 104 sixth graders and two sixth grade literacy teachers. The researcher teaches three of the five sections, while the other teacher instructs the two other sections, which have all of the English Language Learners. All of the identified special education students are a part of the researcher’s class. The researcher has taught for five years and used literature circles (without technology) the past three years. The students have 110 minutes of literacy class five days a week.

At this school, the sixth grade floor has one computer laptop cart and two iPad carts available for teachers to check out for student use. This is a total of 94 devices for students. Prior to the start of the unit, the students in the researcher’s classroom used these devices approximately two to three times a week.
The sixth grade participants in this study were drawn from three classes. The first class included 17 participants, six of whom were boys and 11 girls. The second class included 11 students, three of whom were boys and eight were girls. The last class had 13 participants, six boys and seven were girls. Of the 41 participants, nine were identified special education students, and eight of these nine had a reading and/or writing goal.

**Data Collection**

A reading survey was sent home for students to complete privately. The survey consisted of ten questions (Appendix A) about students' reading attitude. Students then returned the survey to the researcher’s co-teacher, who had agreed to assist in the data gathering. The same survey was administered by the co-teacher at the end of the unit.

In addition to the surveys, the researcher took field notes during the unit. The researched included student behaviors and group participation in the notes. Also, interviews (Appendix B) were conducted with four participants – an introverted student, unmotivated student, high achieving student, and low achieving student – at the close of the unit. Survey items were constructed so that results could be used to identify pools of applicants who fell into introverted and unmotivated categories. From these pools, one introverted student and one unmotivated student were randomly selected by the co-teacher to be interviewed by the co-teacher. In addition, students’ Iowa Assessment Reading Comprehension scores were used to identify high and low achieving students, and one student from each of these pools was also randomly selected to be interviewed.
The Unit

The unit began by having students prepare for the literature circle unit. The researcher told the students that they would be independently reading a book and meeting face-to-face and online to discuss that book. Students watched video clips of other students meeting in literature circles and then debriefed the elements of a literature circle. Conversations focused around the positive things that the students saw happening in the literature circles as well as the negatives. For example, the students noticed that it was important that all students read the assigned pages and come to the meeting ready to contribute to the discussion. The students brought up that they would be working collaboratively without a teacher; thus they needed to work hard to stay focused.

The class also brainstormed expectations for how their literature circle should operate. Students agreed that there should be “no hogs and no logs,” meaning that each student should have equal participation without one student controlling or one not doing any work. Another expectation was that the students would not interrupt each other while talking.

The researcher gave students suggestions about how to sustain a conversation and ways to appropriately interject their thoughts into a conversation. Posters were hung in the classroom with phrases such as “I can see how you would think __________, but I also think that __________________.”

Once the students were able to see a functioning literature circle and understand how one works, class time was spent learning about each role (discussion director, summarizer, vocabulary wizard, and connector) that would be used by the
students. To teach the first role, discussion director, the students read the short story “What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?” and practiced writing open ended questions with their discussion director sheet (Appendix C). Some of the questions that the students wrote included: “Why does the mom not allow her son to talk to the homeless man? Would you try to help a homeless man if you saw one? Explain.”

The following day the students were given time to practice discussing some of the open-ended questions they had written about the story. The students practiced discussing using their role sheet as only a guide. The researcher discouraged students from reading directly off their role sheet, but encouraged them instead to listen to others and engage in a more authentic conversation, looking at the role sheet only as needed. The researcher led a discussion about the things that went well during the practice literature circle and things that they thought needed some work. Many students mentioned that they listened to their group members and everyone was able to share. A negative comment was that the students felt like they didn’t know what to say when they ran out of questions that were written on their papers.

The researcher introduced the next role, summarizer (Appendix D), to the students at the beginning of the next class. The students read the folktale “Owl” and then recorded details regarding setting, characters, and plot of the story. Using that information, each student wrote a short paragraph telling only the main points. The students were then taught to use the website Fodey.com, a site that generates text in newspaper-like format (Foley, 2013) and post their summary to My Big Campus on their group’s page. The students had utilized My Big Campus so little instruction was
needed about how to navigate the site. Time was given for students to look at their group member’s summaries.

The following day, the third role, connector (Appendix E), was introduced to the students using the story “Duffy’s Jacket.” Prior to this literature circle unit, the students had been introduced to three types of connections (text to self, text to text, and text to world). The researcher reviewed the types of connections and examples. After reading the story, the students wrote four connections on their connector role sheet and handed it in. At the beginning of the next class, the students were grouped to practice a brief literature circle using their connector sheets. Again, the students shared in writing with the researcher how the literature circle ran. Students made comments such as “we didn’t get to share everyone’s connections; we had the same connection; we were respectful and took turns.”

The last role, vocabulary wizard (Appendix F), was introduced by the researcher using a nonfiction text from *Time for Kids*. The students read the article and recorded words to share that were unique or unknown and then wrote student friendly definitions. Students were then taught to use the website: ifaketext.com to create a text message conversation about the selected vocabulary words. The last part of this role was for the students to post this text message on My Big Campus.

Time was spent talking to the students about how to respond to another student’s post online. The researcher required that the students post their job/role sheet and respond to a minimum of two other group members. Responses such as “I agree” or “great job on your vocabulary words” did not count. The researcher modeled appropriate responses, such as “I thought that the author was showing that
the character was _______ when the he _________” or “Why do you think that the author used the word that you picked instead of ______?” The researcher showed the students that quality responses actually start a conversation between the person who posts and other members of the group.

The following day, each class created its own expectations, with teacher guidance, for literature circles, thus giving the students ownership. For example, if students were not done with their reading and role sheet for the meeting, one class decided that the students should not be allowed to participate and also have a lunch detention. Another expectation was that the students should not read ahead of that day’s pages so that they would not accidentally spoil an upcoming event in the book.

After expectations were set, the researcher introduced seven books to the students by giving a brief summary of each book and also showing a book trailer. Book trailers are short videos that encourage students to read the book – similar to a movie trailer, except about a book. The students heard and saw a little about each book and were then asked to rate their interest in the books from their top choice to their lowest pick. The books to choose from were as follows: *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (Curtis, 1995); *Al Capone Does My Shirts* (Choldenko, 2004); *The Bully* (Langan, 2007); *Crash* (Spinelli, 1996); *Rules* (Lord, 2006); *Becoming Naomi Leon* (Ryan, 2004); and *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009). All of the books were selected because they contained a dynamic character and were also high-quality pieces of young adult literature.

After the books were introduced, the researcher organized the groups to three-to-five members per group, depending on students’ book choices. During the
following class, each group met to set their reading schedule and specific meeting roles. The only guideline given was that they had 20 days to finish the book. This averaged out to about 8-15 pages per day for each student. The students rotated between the four roles.

The next day, the students began reading their selected books. Time was given in class to read the pages and take notes to help them complete their assigned role sheet. The students had a meeting every other day. Meetings alternated between face-to-face (traditional literature circle meeting) and online meetings (using My Big Campus). Students met face-to-face five times and online five times. For example, after reading days 1 and 2, the students met for their face-to-face meeting. After days 3 and 4, students posted their role sheet online and were given 24 hours to make two comments on other group members’ posts. Some students made comments during class time and others chose to make their comments outside of the school day. Then after days 5 and 6, the students met face-to-face for a second time. This pattern continued until the books were finished (day 20).

Upon finishing the book the students completed a culminating project. A rubric was presented to the students, showing what learning targets needed to be present in the project, but the students had a choice of how to present the book. Some projects included book trailers, posters, character trading cards, or power point presentations. Four days were allotted for students to complete and present their projects.
After presentations were finished, the researcher’s co-teacher administered the same reading survey to the students during class time. Lastly, the four interviews (as described previously) were conducted by the co-teacher.
Results

This section will cover the results gathered from the study. It includes data from the pre-literature circle reading attitude survey, the post-literature circle reading attitude survey, and four students’ interviews.

The pre-literature circle survey (Appendix A) was a set of 10 statements given to the students about their attitudes on topics/ideas related to reading. Next to the statement, the student responded by marking one of the following choices: 4 - completely agree, 3 - agree, 2 - disagree, or 1 - strongly disagree. The same survey was given to the students at the completion of the unit. Table 1 lists the pre-literature circle survey and post-literature circle survey mean scores for the 41 respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Literature Circle Survey Mean Score N=41</th>
<th>Post-Literature Circle Survey Mean Score N=41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have access to many types of reading materials.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading helps me think for myself.</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading makes me feel good about myself</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I hope to be a reader my entire life.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reading helps me to identify or relate with people who are different</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have a choice in what I read.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reading is important to me.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My peers help me to better understand what I read.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Technology can help me learn.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I like sharing my ideas about a book/story in the class.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Survey Results

Overall results. The same statements received the highest and lowest scores across the pre- and post-surveys. The highest mean score on the pre- and post-survey was received by Statement #6, “I have a choice in what I read.” The lowest mean score on the pre- and post-survey was received by Statement #10, “I like sharing my ideas about a book/story in class.”

All of the mean scores on the post-survey statements increased, except one: “Reading is important to me.” This mean score dropped from 3.33 to 3.26. However, on average the mean scores increased 0.20 from the pre-survey to the post-survey.

Analysis of pre-survey results. Significant findings from the pre-survey included the following:

- Seventy-six percent of students agreed or completely agreed that reading helps them think for themselves. The remaining 24% disagreed that reading helps them think for themselves; no students completely disagreed.

- Eighty percent of students completely agreed or agreed that reading helps them to identify with or relate to people who are different from them. The remaining 20% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that reading helps them to identify with or related to people who are different than them.

- One hundred percent of students agreed or completely agreed that they have a choice in what they read.

- Eighty-eight percent of students completely agreed or agreed that reading is important to them. The remaining 12% disagreed that reading was important to them. No students strongly disagreed with the statement.
• Eighty percent of students completely agreed or agreed that their peers can help them to better understand what they read. Eighteen percent of students disagreed with the statement, and one student completely disagreed with the statement.

• A combined total of 97% of students either agreed or completely agreed that technology can help them learn. Fifty-eight percent of students completely agreed with the statement, while 39% of students agreed. One student disagreed with the statement. No students completely disagreed with the statement.

• Sixty-eight percent of students completely agreed or agreed that they like sharing their ideas about a book or story. The remaining thirty-two percent of students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement.

**Analysis of post-survey results.** Post-survey results and the degrees and types of changes from the pre-survey results included the following:

• Ninety percent of students (37 of 41) agreed or completely agreed that reading helps them think for themselves. The remaining 10% (four students) disagreed that reading helps them think for themselves and no students completely disagreed. This was an increase of 14% (six students) when compared to the first survey.

• Ninety percent of students (37 of 41) completely agreed or agreed that reading helps them to identify with or related to people who are different than them. The remaining 10% (four students) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed
that reading helps them to identify with or related to people who are different than them. This is an increase of 10% (four students).

- One hundred percent of students agreed or completely agreed that they have a choice in what they read. This is the same combined total as the pre-unit survey. However, on the second survey 34 students completely agreed with the statement, while 33 students completely agreed with it on the pre-survey.

- Eighty-five percent of students (35 of 41) completely agreed or agreed that reading is important to them. This number decreased by 3% (1 student) when comparing it to the pre-unit survey.

- Eighty-five percent of students (35 of 41) completely agreed or agreed that their peers can help them to better understand what they read. The remaining 6 students disagreed that their peers can help them to understand what they read. This number increased by 5% (2 students) compared to the pre-unit survey.

- Sixty-six percent of students (27 of 41) completely agree that technology can help them learn. This is an increase by 8% (three students) who completely agreed with the statement. Twenty-seven percent of students (21 of 41) agreed that technology can help them learn. Three students disagreed with the statement. No students completely disagreed with the statement.

- Seventy-three percent of students (31 of 41) completely agree or agree that they like sharing their ideas about a book or story. This is an increase of 5% (two students) who agree or completely agree with the statement. The
remaining 27% of students (10 of 41) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement.

**Analysis of Field Notes**

During the literature circle unit, the researcher observed the literature circles and took notes. Most of the student comments and behaviors fell into one or more of the three categories described below, A Sense of Community, Engagement, or Connections. The students' actual names are not used, instead each individual is identified as Student A-J.

**A Sense of Community.** Students enjoyed collaborating with other students. For example, Student A said “This is cool – being able to read the book I choose and work with other students” (Fieldnotes, 12/7/2012). By the end of the unit, the researcher saw the students working more comfortably with their group members when compared to the beginning of the unit. Student B noted “It’s really helpful to be able to talk to my friend from 1st hour about the same book. Even though we are in different literature circles, we still talk about the *Rules* (the book) because it’s so good” (Fieldnotes, 12/18/2012). Although these two students are not in the same class, they were reading the same literature circle book. Students extend their learning when they reflect and discuss the book with a variety of students and outside of the classroom time.

Student C commented on the social construction of meaning that occurs during literature circle, stating “We figured out why Sal got punched today” (Fieldnotes, 12/4/2012). This comment refers to an important part of the plot line of their book. Besides recognizing this key detail, the student spoke in the plural (we),
showing that the idea was one that came from a group discussion. A final example of a comment that demonstrated the sense of community was shared by Student D: “We have more ideas to talk about and we didn’t all get a chance to share” (Fieldnotes, 12/7/2012). After the 15 minute meeting time was up, the researcher noted the sigh of frustration when the students learned that meeting time was over. Generally, the students enjoyed working with each other and sharing ideas.

**Engagement.** “When do we get to start the next book? Are we going to have the same group for our second literature circle?” (Fieldnotes, 12/18/2012). This comment was made by Student E on the day after the unit concluded. The students were already ready to start the next literature circle book. Student F exclaimed “This looks like fun!” (Fieldnotes, 11/15/2012) after the researcher modeled how to create the fake text using the vocabulary wizard role sheet. The students were equally excited when they learned about the newspaper clipping generator (fake newspaper summary site). In fact, the students first posted a practice text message on the class discussion board for everyone to read. The researcher walked the room, helping students create their posts and noticed that they were eagerly reading everyone’s messages and replying to each other.

**Connections.** Students were often able to connect their reading to other aspects of their lives. For example, Student G posted on the discussion board “This part reminds me of the way kids act at our school dances. I bet that is the way other kids feel, too.” The student related the character’s inability to make a decision to her own life and possibly other kids’ lives as well. Student H wrote back to Student G “After reading that part, I feel a little bad about being mean to my little brother. I
mean I guess Byron was only kidding, but still.” This student’s post suggested that he was relating the teasing that was happening between two brothers in his book to the relationship that he has with his siblings. Student I (a group member of Student H and Student G) commented back to him: “Yea, I don’t think you should be mean to a little bro. I am the little guy and I hate it when he teases me.” Again, the students were relating the book to their lives (Fieldnotes, 12/2/2012). A final example of connections came from a response to the book Crash, when Student J wrote that it “reminds me of the story we read about the boy getting pushed into a locker. Crash had it coming to him” (Fieldnotes, 12/13/2012). Earlier in the school year, the students read a short story about bullying happening at school. This student was able to think about the consequences that boy had in the previous story and predict and then connect those ideas to the literature circle book.

Analysis of Interviews

As described in the methods section, four students were interviewed at the completion of the unit (unmotivated student, introverted student, high achieving student, and a low achieving student). After the interviews were video taped the researcher reviewed each multiple times. Important generalized findings from the interviews are below.

All students who were interviewed said that they preferred participating in a literature circle as opposed to reading a book independently. The students’ reasons were that they could ask their group members questions about the book and share connections. This collaboration made reading more enjoyable for all four of the
students. In fact, all of the students said that they look forward to reading another book as a literature circle (Interview, 1/9/2013).

Three of the four students said that they preferred the face-to-face meeting as opposed to the online meeting. All mentioned that they liked being able to actually have a discussion and physically talk to someone about the book. Student K who preferred the face-to-face meetings said that she felt limited about how much to say during the online meeting (Interview, 1/9/2013). This student is quite talkative and frequently participates in the large group setting. She would be the student whose voice gets heard; however, the Student L, who preferred the online meeting, stated that he was more comfortable writing his ideas instead of verbalizing the ideas. This student said, “I am kinda shy so sometimes the face-to-face meetings were awkward, but the online meetings fit my personality” (Interview, 1/9/2013).

All four students said that they enjoyed using the technology. Student L said that it was the best part of the unit (Interview, 1/9/2013). This student struggled with work completion due to lack of effort, but during the literature circle unit his work completion improved slightly.

However, two of the four students said that they did not read all of their group members’ posts during the online meeting. The reason being that they felt it was time consuming. Interestingly though, the low-achieving student said that she was more willing to share on the computer because she was more comfortable, but she found it harder to understand others’ ideas on the computer. Student M also said that when she forgot what was happening in the book, she was able to go back and look at posts
from previous discussions to help her review the book (Interview, 1/9/2013). For the low-achiever, the technology seemed to aid in her comprehension of the book.
Discussion and Recommendations

The original purpose of this study was to determine if students' reading attitudes changed as a result of participating in a literature circle with technology. The researcher hoped to discover whether students felt that working collaboratively and using technology helped them to enjoy reading and learning more.

Results from this study suggest that these students already felt that their peers could help them to better understand what they read. Results also suggested that the students already felt that technology could aid in the learning process for them, which is what the Iowa Department of Education (2012) is expecting. However, these study results were slightly unexpected. Because many of the pre-unit survey responses were noted as “agree” or “completely agree,” the mean scores were all higher than expected on the pre-unit survey. Thus, the results after the unit were not as discrepant as originally expected.

The pre-unit survey results suggest that students already had some positive attitude about reading. For example, 100% of students felt that they had a choice in what they read prior to being able to have a say in the literature circle book that they would be reading. However, the students’ positive feelings towards reading grew as a result of participating in literature circles with technology. In fact, when comparing the pre-unit survey to the post unit survey, nine of the ten statements showed that students had more positive feelings towards reading after participating in a literature circle with technology. Additionally, the four interviews along with the researcher’s field notes also suggest that literature circles have a positive impact on students’ reading attitudes similar to what Witt (2007) found.
The comments from the four interviews, field notes, and other research by Peowski (2010) and English (2007) suggest that a literature circle with technology is a valuable teaching strategy for the classroom, no matter the students’ abilities or interests. For example, the low-achieving student stated during the interview that she was able to use the posts that she and her group members had written about the book in order to help her better comprehend it. The student stated that she would reread these posts to help remind her of what was happening in her book.

The shy student noted that he felt more comfortable asking questions to his group members online rather than in the face-to-face meeting. The student elaborated by explaining that previously he often times just would not even ask the question that was in his mind because he was insecure about what other students would think. Like English’s (2007) research found, the online discussion board acted as a security blanket for this student.

The high-achiever valued her group members’ ideas. She stated that she was able to hear others’ opinions about the book, which allowed her to more critically examine the text compared to if she would have read the book on her own – a skill that is valued in education today (Iowa Department of Education, 2012).

The unmotivated student made comments that suggested he was more engaged in the classroom during the literature circle unit. For example, he stated that creating the fake text messages was fun. He also said that he enjoyed class more because he was able to use an iPad or computer to get online. Similar to what Edwards (2012) found, the simple act of using technology seemed to motivate this student.
The researcher noted that students were taking on more of a leadership role in the classroom; the researcher's role became more like that of a guide, rather than the authoritative figure as Ratz (2008) noted in research. The researcher had guided the students in creating behavioral expectations for the groups, and now the students were clearly following their created expectations.

Students openly expressed their disappointment when their group members were not prepared for their meeting. Often times, there was a sigh of worry from the students as the researcher walked the classroom checking that role sheets were completed before the students transitioned into their meetings. When the researcher came to a student who was not finished, her/his group members let out a groan of disappointment.

Interestingly, the students naturally moved into their unassigned meeting areas, another example, of the students' growing independence. Never were the groups assigned a place to meet in the classroom, but each time they gathered at the same location for each meeting.

The students held each other accountable for their actions. If students had not posted online, their group members were questioning and nagging them to get the assignment done. At the beginning of the unit, on average three students per class were not prepared for the meeting. However, by the end of the unit, there was on average two, sometimes only one, student(s) that was not prepared for their meeting.

Students were mature and respectful during meetings, both face-to-face and online. For example, the researcher noted that students were consistently making eye contact and waiting for others to finish their idea before interjecting in the face-to-
face meetings. Additionally as Bowers-Campbell (2011) found, when a student posed a different perspective about something online, generally the students disagreed respectfully, recognizing the ideas and opinions of others instead of using slander. For example, one student wrote this on the discussion board, “Ya, maybe Catherine with just go to the dance like you said, but I really think that she is a much better person and will go to Jason’s party instead. What does everyone else think?”

During their meetings, the researcher witnessed students negotiating meaning of the book. The students talked through different parts of the book, offering interpretations and inferences to their group mates much like Bowers-Campbell’s (2011) students. For example, students in one group (that was reading the novel *When You Reach Me*) relied on their group mates to better understand the novel. Because this book had multiple interpretations of different characters and scenes, the group mates often discussed the book even outside of meeting time. One student posted on the discussion board that he thought the book’s character the Laughing Man was the future Marcus and represented that time travel was possible. Another student posted that he thought Marcus was just a mean person who punched Sal. The other group members would diligently read the posts and make comments on their opinions for each post.

As the researcher floated the room during meeting time, she heard quality discussions about the text and saw students asking each other meaningful questions to aid in their comprehension of the text. Like Ratz (2008) found in her room, “literature circles can be slightly chaotic, but the classroom is full of life when deep discussion about a text occurs in an authentic way” (p. 42).
Students also learned that when they were communicating via online posting that they had to do more explaining and be very clear with what they were trying to express. The researcher witnessed students responding to students’ posts with comments such as “I don’t understand your connection. Tell more.” A few times, students actually got out of their seats to go ask a group member what they meant when they posted on the discussion board.

While utilizing technology with students can pose its challenges, students are more engaged when technology is included in the learning. The researcher believes that Peowski’s (2010) statement about teens needing to be engaged and empowered online can be supported by implementing literature circles with technology. As Ratz (2008) and Witt (2007) suggest, students learn collaboratively. Literature circles can be used with any text, fiction or nonfiction. Literature circles are beneficial to all types of readers (Daniels, 2002).

Recommendations

It is recommended that this study be replicated with a few changes. First, the participants have little exposure to or basic knowledge about using technology in a classroom setting. However, it is recommended that the teacher and students have daily access to technology if wanting to do a literature circle that has an online component. Because the participants in this study were already using iPads and computers prior to the start of the unit (a few times a week), the results may have been skewed. Also, this study could be replicated with a control group – one that participates in a literature circle with technology – and a second group that does have the technology aspect. The results of the two groups could be analyzed.
It is also recommended that teachers start a literature circle unit by explaining that the students will be collaborating and learning together while reading a book. The students need to know that they will have individual responsibility to their group. The students also need have and understand their purpose or reason for coming to their face-to-face or online literature circle meeting. The researcher used role sheets to ensure that the students had ideas about the book. Using roles sheets allowed the students to have their ideas directly in front of them and readily available for discussion. It can be hard for students to have natural conversations about a book, thus the role sheets can benefit the students by prompting ideas for discussion. Additionally, it is suggested that the teacher give direct instruction to students about how to participate in an online discussion (ie, how to navigate the discussion board, create a post, and appropriately reply to a post).
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Peowski, L. (2010). Where are all the teens? Engaging and empowering them online. *Young Adult Library Services.* 8(2), 26-28.


Adolescent Literature Cited


Appendix A: Reading Survey

6th Grade Literacy Survey

Name: ____________________________

Class period: _________________

Directions: Please circle the number that best matches your opinion to the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>4- completely agree</th>
<th>3 - agree</th>
<th>2 - disagree</th>
<th>1- strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have access to many types of reading materials.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading helps me think for myself.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading makes me feel good about myself.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I hope to be a reader my entire life.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reading helps me identify with or relate to people who are different than me.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have a choice in what I read.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reading is important to me.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My peers help me to better understand what I read.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Technology can help me learn.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I like sharing my ideas about a book/story in the class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Describe yourself as a reader. Tell about your likes and dislikes.
2. Tell me about your thoughts in being a part of literature circles with technology. What did you like? What did you not like?
3. Did you find it helpful in working with your peers while learning? Explain.
4. What are your thoughts about meeting face to face with your group compared to having online discussions? Did you prefer one way over the other? Why?
5. Were you more willing to participate online than you might have been in class? Explain.
6. Did the online discussion help you to like reading more than you might have without it? Explain.
Appendix C: Discussion Director Role Sheet

Role Sheet
Discussion Director

Name ________________________________
Book ______________________________

Meeting Date ______________________
Assignment: Pages ____ to ____

Discussion Director's duties: You lead and guide the conversation for the day's discussion. You need to come prepared with open-ended questions related to the reading for the day. Be sure to go beyond basic facts and consider the underlying issues of the reading. YOU facilitate discussion today and ensure everyone participates.

Questions for discussion:

1. ________________________________

2. ________________________________

3. ________________________________

4. ________________________________

5. ________________________________
Appendix D: Summarizer Role Sheet

**Summarizer**

Directions: Your job is to write a summary of the pages (or story) you read.

1. Brainstorm the following to help you.

   Who:

   What:

   When:

   Where:

   Why/how:

2. Write your summary below.

SUMMARY
Appendix E: Connector Role Sheet

Role Sheet
Connector

Name _____________________________
Book _____________________________
Meeting Date ______________________ Assignment: Pages ___ to ___

CONNECTOR'S DUTIES:
Your job is to write connections to the reading. Think about what you have experienced or heard about that seems to be connected to the reading. Use your personal experience or what you know from others to provide these connections and explain them.

Text-to-Text (connecting book with another book or movie)
Text-to-Self (connecting book with a personal experience)
Text-to-World (connecting book with something that happens to many of us or outside world/larger population)

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

4. ________________________________________________________________
Appendix F: Vocabulary Wizard Role Sheet

**Vocabulary Wizard**

Directions: Your job is to find and define 4 vocabulary words. You may pick the vocabulary words for any of the following reasons. The word is *unique, funny, unknown, surprising, or confusing.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page/Paragraph</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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