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The influence of book club conversations on reluctant or struggling readers

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The influence of book club conversations on reluctant or struggling readers

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Abstract

This qualitative case study reports the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading, and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. This study from a small, rural area in Northwest Iowa consisted of six fourth grade students and their teacher librarian who met in a book club over a four week time period during summer school. The students were taught different reading roles and utilized them throughout the discussion of the book. The researcher discovered five main themes in response to the research questions. Theme one is Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understandings. Theme two is Building Relationships Provide Safety. Theme three is Aesthetic and Efferent Responses Were Evident, and Theme four is Community Accountability Was Necessary. The students were able to build relationships that deepened their understandings, shared both aesthetic and efferent responses, and enjoyed the community accountability aspect. Students were excited to read the next chapter and take on a different role each day. They also became very interested in the other books in the series and couldn't wait to read the second book. Theme five is a need for student voice. Students shared their own stories, often with sensitive topics, that relate to the book. By listening carefully to students' own stories, the professional TL was essential to provide needed sensitivity and to recommend other books based upon their interest level and ability level, meeting the students' need to have a professional to hear their voice to help make these important connections to books.

THE INFLUENCE OF BOOK CLUB CONVERSATIONS ON RELUCTANT OR
STRUGGLING READERS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
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Titled: The Influence of Book Club Conversations on Reluctant or Struggling Readers

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study reports the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading, and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. This study from a small, rural area in Northwest Iowa consisted of six fourth grade students and their teacher librarian who met in a book club over a four week time period during summer school. The students were taught different reading roles and utilized them throughout the discussion of the book. The researcher discovered five main themes in response to the research questions. Theme one is Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understandings. Theme two is Building Relationships Provide Safety. Theme three is Aesthetic and Efferent Responses Were Evident, and Theme four is Community Accountability Was Necessary. The students were able to build relationships that deepened their understandings, shared both aesthetic and efferent responses, and enjoyed the community accountability aspect. Students were excited to read the next chapter and take on a different role each day. They also became very interested in the other books in the series and couldn't wait to read the second book. Theme five is a need for student voice. Students shared their own stories, often with sensitive topics, that relate to the book. By listening carefully to students' own stories, the professional TL was essential to provide needed sensitivity and to recommend other books based upon their interest level and ability level, meeting the students' need to have a professional to hear their voice to help make these important connections to books.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to an ancient philosopher, Rene Descartes (as cited in Hargreaves, 2018) “The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries” (para. 2). Book clubs can help to build conversations in the present day. A similar quote from a modern-day author, Kate DiCamillo, recorded during an interview with Book Browse on their website, emphasized, “Reading should not be presented to children as a chore, a duty. It should be offered as a gift” (para. 20).

Justification of Problem

According to data from the *School Library Journal* (Yorio, 2019), reading proficiency scores were lower in 2019 than in the 2017 study. Fourth graders actually dropped from 37% to 35%, and lower-performing students had the greatest loss between 2017 and 2019. Clearly, more work is needed in improving reading scores of lower-performing students; one way to possibly help improve this gap is to use book clubs. In Harvey Daniel’s (2002) book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, a book club is defined as a small group of students who work together to not only select a book to read but also to share in the discussion of the book. In an effort to shed light on reading performance, Furman (2015) explained that a reluctant reader is “someone who has not found an interest in reading or simply has no desire or interest to read, and who does not often see the purpose or worth in reading” (p. 2). He further emphasized the difference between a struggling reader and a reluctant

reader: “a struggling reader has difficulty reading and is often a reluctant reader because of it” (p. 2).

Standards

Both national and state standards advocate for the teacher librarian’s role in supporting students’ reading. The American Association of School Librarians [AASL] (2018) had six shared foundations that anchor their standards. One of these is *Engage*. “Engagement is the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that learners show when they are being taught” (p. 31), which shows one of the responsibilities of a librarian is to actively engage students in the reading process. AASL emphasized that, “Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” (p. 11). Additionally, given the strength of the mission statement from the AASL (2009) standards, the current 2018 version quoted from that mission, focusing on the essential skills all students need to know and how the teacher librarian [TL] can empower students to be “critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information” (p. 18). AASL also noted that the librarian needs to advocate for reading for pleasure. In addition to the AASL standards, the second of the Iowa School Library Program Standards (2019) also emphasized reading, “The TL (teacher librarian) is the catalyst in igniting passion for reading in every student and creating a culture of literacy in the school” (p. 3).

Importance of Book Clubs in Relation to School Success

Rowell (2015) shares four very important conclusions that were derived from the book club process adapted from Raphael and McMahon (1994). One of these conclusions is

that as a result of their participation in a book club, students developed a better understanding of how to synthesize information. A second result of the study showed that students achieved higher standardized test scores, and in relation to this, a third finding was that students were able to better recall the events of the books they had read. Finally, students were found to be able to demonstrate a higher level of writing over time.

Furthering the Research Directions of a Past Study

A study by Petrich (2015) depicted book clubs with fifth grade students, which resulted in “enhancing student’s love of reading and learning” (p. 7). It demonstrated how students launched conversations, which resulted in a feeling of community.

Conversations were encouraged every time students met in their book club groups and with the teacher informally throughout the process. In order to further understand the influence of book clubs, this study replicated Pietrich’s research with some adaptations.

Rationale

Being able to read well affects so many different aspects of a child’s education and life itself. Recent assessments are showing that students’ scores are dropping (Yorio, 2019), and a child’s interest in reading has a direct correlation (Yorio, 2019). For this reason librarians and educators could use book clubs to increase reading scores and general interest in reading. In striking contrast to the known importance of the need to develop a strong reading culture noted above in the standard, the *2019-20 Iowa School Library Study: Enrollment Category Results* (2020) showed that in current practice, many teacher librarians were provided very little time to devote to reading support of students, having only 6.8 hours per week for this work in the best circumstance (90%ile) for example in

school sizes of 600 - 999 students and only one hour in less fortunate circumstances. To further illustrate this point, this means that one hour per week of time the TL has for this task must be divided by 600 students. Thus students in this situation would have six seconds per week, per student to focus on their reading selections with support from a teacher librarian (p. 5). Students, teachers, librarians, administrators, and parents will all benefit from a study of the book club and the focus on reading that it can provide for students.

Summary of Problem Statement

Although many strides throughout the years have been made to engage students in book discussions in which students improved in ability to synthesize information and to identify themes, research shows an ongoing need for more strategies to engage students in becoming life-long readers.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do book clubs help students begin to see reading in a more positive light?
2. How can a Teacher Librarian influence students' sustained engagement in conversations about reading?

Assumptions

The book club used in this study is designed to influence readers in positive outcomes; however, it is not a required element in their schooling but an optional opportunity to begin to truly explore the benefits reading has to offer.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading, and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. The previous studies reviewed here focused on the following areas: reading motivation, literature discussions, and the building of relationships to promote a positive reading culture.

Reading Motivation

Neugebauer (2013) commented, "Motivated readers choose to engage in reading activities more frequently, and with this increased reading practice they experience improved reading comprehension" (para. 3). This study focused on whether student motivation levels changed within the school day and out-of-school in the same day and if there was a gap between the two across many days. It was also the first to explore the difference in a student's motivation by using a "daily log" (p. 154). Neugebauer was curious to see if the "daily log" would provide insight into the two types of motivation to read: intrinsic and self-efficacy. He defined intrinsic as being motivated to read simply for the joy of reading itself, whereas, self-efficacy is wanting to read to improve his/her own self by accomplishing a task or activity. In the study, 119 fifth graders of mainly Latino and Caucasian background and 12% with individualized education plans from two semi-urban public schools in the U.S. completed the daily log and the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). The MRQ was used as a quantitative measure, both pre and post study, to examine curiosity, challenge, involvement, and reading efficacy across

contexts and time. The daily log collected information with two alterations: (1) it was changed to allow daily feelings (i.e., changed from “I am a good reader” to “Did you feel like a good reader today?”), and (2) a question was added to address the outside vs inside school feelings (i.e. “Tell us your feelings about reading outside of school/inside of school today”) (p. 8). The findings revealed that students were motivated to read digital media sources, websites, text messages, and emails outside of school. The MRQ indicated that students were also reading novels. The most important finding is that there was not a significant difference between the motivation to read in-school versus out-of-school, which basically suggested students can be motivated in each setting at different times with different activities.

While Neugebauer focused his research on the motivation to read inside and outside of school, Melekoglu’s (2011) study looked at motivation to read and its impact on reading gains for struggling readers with and without learning disabilities in two middle schools and one high school in Midwest, rural towns. Struggling reader was defined as students who struggle with reading by fourth grade and continue to be low achieving into middle school and high school; therefore, this study evaluated 38 students in grades 4-12 to see whether their “motivation to read significantly correlated with reading gains of struggling readers with and without LD (learning disabled) who were exposed to a structured, research-based reading program that was implemented 5 days a week“ (p. 4). The method used was the READ 180 program from Scholastic. This comprehensive reading intervention program was designed to use with both large and small groups with computer-assisted instruction on a daily basis. The Adolescent Motivation to Read

Survey (AMRS) was given to each student twice throughout the study. The Student Reading Instrument (SRI) was also administered at the end of the study to assess any growth. The study overall was considered to be a quasi-experimental one, where one group took a pretest-posttest design and had the same intervention, without having a control group. Results of this study indicated that students, both with LD and those without, demonstrated significant reading gains; however, changes in motivation scores of students with LD were not significant. These two studies demonstrated the need for further exploration of programming to support reading motivation, for example, book clubs and their impact on motivating students to read.

Literature Discussions

Petrich (2015) believed that too much time was being spent on technology and social media and not enough time was being given to people and conversations about books. He further explained, “If the text does not come alive through conversation, then the sense of community dwindles and the sense of purpose can be lost” (p. 1). The purpose of the study was to “foster and empower young learners to be intellectually and socially involved in each other’s learning through book clubs” (p. 1). This study utilized fifth grade students in one elementary classroom from a diverse school in the Midwest. The methodology consisted of both formal and informal conferencing each week with the students who participated on a volunteer basis. The conferences were centered on conversations, and after the conference the students were encouraged to share their thinking and learning on a Google form. Petrich also recorded observations in a journal, documenting the strengths and weaknesses in the book clubs. After coding and analyzing

the observations and feedback from students, he concluded, “book clubs enhanced student’s love of reading and learning through four different themes: (a) diverse perspectives deepened understanding; (b) building relationships provided safety; (c) aesthetic and efferent responses were evident, and (d) community accountability was necessary” (p. 7).

Similar to Petrich, Bond (2001) was curious to explore the differences between a student-led book group versus a teacher-led one using fifth graders, too. However, the problem Bond was focused on was “grand conversations where students constructed and disclosed deeper meanings through dialogue” (p. 574). The purpose was to create student-led discussion groups instead of teacher-led so that students could express themselves more freely. Bond studied only one small group of fifth grade students, which consisted of three females and one male of diverse reading levels. At the beginning of the year, she modeled and had the class practice the five main reading roles that would be used in the book clubs: Discussion Director, Passage Master, Illuminator, Word Wizard, and Connector (p. 576). The students were given 20 minutes to read and 25 minutes discussing and journal writing. Data collection and analysis was completed over a four week time period in three phases: examining student journals, making field notes, and listening to and transcribing audiotapes (p. 577). At the end of the study, Bond concluded that the reading role of “Connector” was most often used by students, which aided the students and their classmates in “making sense of the text by linking their own lives and those of their peers to the characters and situations” (p. 582). Overall Bond discovered that fifth grade students could successfully lead book groups and demonstrate

critical thinking skills in discussions and journals. Both of these studies were centered around the importance of discussing the books and writing in journals to form connections; however, both emphasized the need for further study and to expand the number of students.

Promoting a Positive Reading Culture

Alghamdi (2015) conducted a study to discover if a book club used as a literacy tool could aid under-performing students and help to improve academic performance. In this study he wanted to “explore the use of a book club in a classroom of students underachieving in literacy and how it assisted them in their re-identification which ultimately changed their reading, writing, oral communication, and eventually critical thinking habits and perceptions” (p. 17). He also aimed to discover how a small group could become a learning community and if the social dialogue interactions of a book club affected and shaped learning. The students who participated in this study were a small group of seventh and eighth graders from Canada. This study used an “ethnomethodological approach, combining both phenomenological and narrative analysis” (p. 20). The qualitative approach allowed for both verbal and holistic information rather than numerical data or value. Findings “demonstrated that book clubs have direct and indirect positive outcomes” (p. 21). Findings also conveyed that students appeared to have a positive change in attitude both within the book club and within the large class community, and overall academic performance exhibited “significant improvement in all areas” (p. 23).

Similar to Alghamdi's study, Worthy's et. al (2002) study focused on the resistant reader and building community through the "human factor" of a reading club (p. 177). The problem in this study centered around reading attitudes plummeting in the upper elementary grades and the lack of voluntary reading taking place; whereas, the purpose of the reading club "discovered factors that influenced their participation in reading and, thus, to add to current research and practice about reading motivation" (p. 178). The main question the study focused on was, "What factors influence resistant readers to read on their own?" (p. 180). Twenty-four resistant readers in grades third through fifth were the participants in the study: ten girls and fourteen boys; these students attended a large, urban district in southwestern United States. The reading book club met twice per week for an hour each time. This particular study spent more time on individual tutoring, but did include group activities such as readers theater and book discussion groups. Students were encouraged and given time to talk with their peers about what they were reading. Data was gathered by interviews, book sharing sessions, researchers' logs of observations, and audio tapes transcribed. Worthy et. al described the use of "constant comparative analysis to develop grounded theory" for the data analysis (p. 185). Results of the study demonstrated increased reading achievement by a minimum of one grade level. "In case after case of students who overcame their reading resistance, the factor that was most salient was the human factor" (p. 188). The more time a tutor spent with their student and built a relationship with them, the better positive reading habits developed. These two literature studies focused on the resistant, struggling reader and how they benefited from the book club in positive ways.

Summary

A few of the literature studies focused on the student's motivation to read, but one revealed that students did not have a preference between the motivation to read in-school versus out-of-school; whereas, the other study showed that book clubs increased significant reading gains but very limited changes in motivation scores (Melekoglu, 2011; Neugebauer, 2013). Two additional studies centered around literature discussions in book clubs and the importance of discussing the books and writing in journals to form connections (Bond, 2001; Petrich, 2015). Specifically Petrich found four different themes that provide context for initial coding in the current study: (a) diverse perspectives deepened understanding; (b) building relationships provided safety; (c) aesthetic and efferent responses were evident, and (d) community accountability was necessary" (p. 7). Additionally, Bond's study contributed that students involved in book groups were able to lead book groups, engage in critical thinking about books, and most often demonstrated the role of Connector, in which they made sense of texts by seeing characters and situations in relation to their own lives. The final two literature studies discussed book clubs and how they could help improve the reading culture by assisting reluctant, struggling readers (Alghamdi, 2015; Worthy's et. al, 2002). To extend the work of the previous studies, this study aims to examine the effect book clubs have on a student's motivation to read and their impact on improving reading achievement through the use of literature discussions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Prior studies revealed a need to further analyze these sustained conversations in book clubs and how these clubs motivate young, struggling or reluctant readers to keep reading to improve reading achievement (Melekoglu, 2011; Neugebauer, 2013; Bond, 2001; Petrich, 2015; Alghamdi, 2015; Worthy's et. al, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. This study provides further insight into the use of book clubs to aid in these areas in response to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do book club conversations help students begin to see reading in a more positive light?
2. How can a Teacher Librarian influence students' sustained engagement in conversations about reading?

Research Design

The research used a qualitative case study design since "case studies are often used in exploratory studies to define phenomena worth studying further" (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 52). A case study is appropriate for this research study because it will help "answer how and why questions" (p. 52), and the conversations that will be observed in the book club will show "relationships that can be directly observed" (p. 52). Case studies are "intended to generate rich data concerning a particular case" (p. 54). Methods for

data collection for this research was a five question questionnaire, a focus group which allowed for conversations and the corresponding transcripts of the audio-recording of those conversations, and direct participant observation as their teacher and researcher.

Participants

The research participants consisted of one mixed group of six third and fourth graders from a small, rural town in Northwest Iowa and the Teacher Librarian, who was also the research participant observer. The group included six students with both boys and girls. These students were considered to be struggling readers identified by their classroom teachers and prior assessments..

Procedures

Data Collection

Data was collected through focus group conversations, participant observations of students during book club, and through an individual student questionnaire about their feelings toward reading given during the first and last focus group sessions. Wildemuth explained that “a focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (p. 242). Focus group questions were asked during each book club meeting. See Appendix A for the lists of focus group questions for each of the twelve meetings with the book club. By using the focus group, it allowed for conversations to take place, which is one of the main goals of this study. According to Wildemuth, “focus groups are a much stronger research tool if used in combination with other methods” (p. 243). Therefore, the focus group is supplemented with the

questionnaire (see Appendix B) adapted to a simple five questions for individual students' response given in print at the first and last focus group meetings and participant observation throughout the process. Wildemuth also expressed, "participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (p. 199). This method allowed for a better understanding of the group members and a deeper connection to them. Audio recordings and field notes of the focus group permitted for a more thorough participant observation. Field notes (see Appendix C) included the researcher's observation of the number of times a participant makes voluntary conversation contributions in which a student voluntarily added a comment to another participant's previous comment about books; the number of times a participant chose to "popcorn read" (a reading strategy that allows students to voluntarily read aloud for however long they feel comfortable by popping in when the previous reader stops, and with no one being forced to read); and how well they performed each different reading role of the six roles.

At the start of the book club, reading roles were assigned on a rotating basis. Bond (2001) used five reading roles (p. 575) that I adapted to six roles in the book club because I had six students. The six roles were: Discussion Director, Super Summarizer, Passage Predictor, Word Wizard, Artistic Artist, and Creative Connector (see Appendix D). These allowed for every participant to have ownership in the conversation. Each person in the focus group acquired a different role each day we met. As a culminating activity, the focus group discussed which reading role they enjoyed most and why. This

aided in the data analysis by providing six initial codes I used to code student conversation as well as my observations that I documented in my field notes.

Additionally, four different themes from Petrich (2015) provided four additional initial codes that I used to help to make sense of student conversations and my observations: (a) diverse perspectives deepened understanding; (b) building relationships provided safety; (c) aesthetic and efferent responses were evident, and (d) community accountability was necessary.

Data Analysis

Data from the focus group field observations, audio-recording transcripts (Appendix C), and reading questionnaire were examined using conventional qualitative analysis of content. I used the conventional qualitative analysis approach because coding categories and themes can be drawn both directly and inductively from the raw data. Wildemuth (2009) breaks down the qualitative analysis of content into eight steps. I used the constant comparative method to code, “because it is not only able to establish original insights, but it is also able to make differences between categories apparent” (p. 311). The eight steps of qualitative analysis of content provided me with a clear action plan while I analyzed data. Step one is to Prepare the Data. I prepared the data by using a simple questionnaire before the focus group began and designing reading roles for the participant conversation and observation in the focus groups. In the second step, Define the Unit of Analysis, it focuses on individual themes as the unit of analysis. The theme “might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a paragraph, or an entire document” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 310), and I began with four initial themes from the findings in the

Petrich (2015) study. During step two, I gathered all the data from the questionnaire, focus group transcripts, audio recordings, and observations. Then I identified big ideas and new understandings about their participation in the book club that I gained from all of these and classified it into themes. The themes that came from Petrich (2015) helped me code in Step 3, Develop Categories and a Coding Scheme. I developed a list of initial codes (see Appendix C). During step four, Testing Your Coding Scheme on a Sample of Text, helped me test the clarity and consistency of the category definitions. I looked at the data across the focus group transcript, the student questionnaires, and the field notes to identify themes that I coded similarly and differently, for example, I coded all conversations that related to the student's own lives similarly across data sources. Code All the text is step five. Throughout this phase, I noted a new theme emerged beyond the initial codes of Petrich (2015), such as allowing time for students' stories which related to another student's book connection, which was just previously shared in conversation. Step six, Assess Your Coding Consistency, was important to check for human errors in coding consistency, so I re-read the coding as a double check. During step seven, I Drew Conclusions from the Coded Data. This was completed by making inferences about my chosen themes, identifying relationships between the categories, and looking for possible patterns (p. 312). Finally, in step 8, Report Your Methods and Findings, it was important to strive for a balance between description and interpretation. Wildemuth emphasized, "an interesting and readable report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation, and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to understand the description" (p. 313).

Limitations

This study only looked at one small group of third and fourth graders throughout a summer school session. Another limitation would be the area in which the study was conducted, a small, rural town in Iowa with limited diversity.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. Findings from this qualitative case study using directed content analysis are presented within the two research questions and using four initial codes that derived from the researcher Petrich (2015) and a theme of student voice that emerged from the analysis.

Initial Codes

1. Diverse perspectives deepened understandings.
2. Building relationships provided safety.
3. Aesthetic and efferent responses were evident.
4. Community accountability was necessary.

These codes (see Appendix D) then aided in answering the research questions.

Research Question 1: Student Views of Book Clubs

Research question 1 asked, To what extent do book clubs help students begin to see reading in a more positive light? The following four initial codes emerged into the same final themes for this study. For each theme, evidence was gathered through analysis of the three data sources: focus groups, student questionnaires, and researcher field notes.

Theme 1: Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understandings

Throughout the twelve focus group meetings of the book club, students took on the six different roles to discuss each chapter. In the beginning, I assigned the roles on a

rotating basis, but eventually the students were allowed to choose the role they enjoyed best which influenced this theme of diverse perspectives deepened understandings. By giving this freedom of choice, the students were opening up and sharing more. Their conversations were leading to deeper connections from one another. The first example of this occurred after a student had presented his vocabulary word for being the Word Wizard. The word was “willies.” After the student told us what it meant “A strong feeling of nervousness or discomfort,” another student chimed in “Hey, like the bat flying in the lunch room this morning that made Mrs. Kelly scream!” This comment had the rest of the group laughing and comparing stories of things that gave them the “willies.”

Another great conversation that led to deeper understandings centered around the part in the story where Sam’s locker was emitting an awful smell. The Discussion Director asked, “What do you think was causing the bad smell in Sam’s locker?” All the students were chiming in with different answers of things that smelled terrible. Student D said “Maybe he took some food from the cafeteria, you know, when he was eating lunch, and thought he could finish it later, and he left it in there overnight.” This led to Student C exclaiming “Hey, that’s not fair, we can’t take milk or food out!” This statement shows that she is making a connection to her own life which helps deepen her understanding of the story. Student B responded with, “Maybe someone else snuck out the food and put it in his locker.” Finally, Student A, who asked the original question, responded with, “I don’t think Sam (the main character) put whatever smelled in his locker himself. I think everything’s coming down on him, like picking on him.” At this point all the other group members agreed that it wasn’t Sam who left something in his locker, but someone else.

A third example of how different perspectives deepened understandings transpired around a small disagreement in the group on the size of the janitor's closet in the story. There was some confusion amongst the group, so I told them to go back into the story and reread that particular page together. Student C said "I thought it was small because closets are usually small, but then it said that the janitor grabbed a hold of the swinging light bulb and tugged it twice." Student A interjected, "That's what moved the wall! The janitor tugged twice. It was a secret wall!" Student D added, "It also says that the janitor stepped through the wall. You can't step through a wall unless it wasn't there." Needless to say, the students were excited about a secret door and room once they understood what actually happened. The book club conversation helped to clear up misunderstandings the students had.

Finally, this theme emerged when students were completing the post questionnaire (see Table 1). Student B shared with me "Reading can sometimes be hard, but when I heard other people's answers in our group, I started to understand some things better." In the post questionnaire, three students' answers did not change on question two: "Reading is hard." However, the other three changed their answers from "sometimes" or "usually" to "a little" or "depends on the topic." This showed that being able to share with others and have a conversation about the story, improved their overall understanding.

Table 1

Comparison of Pre/Post Reading Questionnaire

Students	Question 1: “I like to read.”	Question 2: “Reading is hard.”	Question 3: “I like to read out loud.”	Question 4: “It is hard to remember what I read.”	Question 5: “I love to pick out new books to read.”
	Pre Post	Pre Post	Pre Post	Pre Post	Pre Post
A	4 4	2 2	5 5	1 1	5 5
B	4 4	3 1	3 3	3 1	5 5
C	3 3	4 1	0 2	3 2	4 4
D	4 4	3 3	4 4	3 3	5 5
E	4 4	3 3	4 4	5 3	5 5
F	2 2	4 1	0 2	4 2	2 2

Research Theme 2: Building Relationships Provide Safety

Forming a book club in a school setting where the students already know each other often provides for feelings of general safety, but whenever a person starts to work in a new group, there may be apprehension and reluctance to share certain ideas until one truly feels they are accepted. Before the book club actually started, I worked with the students on the different discussion roles. I choose a few simple, easy picture books to practice each of the six roles with. This allowed for the students to start building those group relationship skills. Therefore, by the time the book club officially commenced, students were already feeling a sense of safety in the small group of seven. One example occurred at the very beginning of the book. Student A’s job was to be the Creative

Connector. She said “I did text to self cuz some people tease me and in that picture on page 5 they are teasing him (the main character) for having to wear the orange hall monitor sash.” This statement clearly demonstrates her high level of trust that she has in the group to share something so personal.

The Artistic Artist role influenced the second example of this theme. Art work can be very personal and private, and some students don’t necessarily enjoy sharing what they have drawn. This may be because students can be very critical of their own drawing abilities. Student F, who preferred this role over the others, had drawn a picture of a scary part in the current chapter. This then launched an interesting conversation about scary things or things that scared us in general. Student B said “A school at night (like the one in our book) reminds me of a haunted house.” She was making a natural text self connection, like any good reader should do, without even being asked. Her statement then led into a discussion of haunted houses. Student F, who initiated this discussion with his drawing and normally doesn’t share a lot, actually said “I don’t like snakes.” This statement alone really demonstrated his trust level in the group to share something so personal.

A third example of this theme materialized toward the end of the book club experience. The students were discussing if the main character should trust the janitor. It was quite enjoyable to sit back and let them converse without having to say anything myself. The students had built a trusting relationship with one another to allow them to share their thoughts freely without being judged. Student E, who was not always present for the book club said “He (the janitor) doesn’t seem nice like our janitor, Jim.” Student C

added on “Yeah, the one in the book gives off a creepy feeling.” Student A replied, “But he (the janitor in the book) was trying to help Sam (the main character) fight the monster under the stage until it sent him in the room at the back and locked the door.” Student D said, “The janitor was trying to train him (Sam) to fight the monster with that one machine he made, too.” Student F, who doesn’t talk a lot, finally added, “I still think Sam and his friends should be careful of the janitor.”

The fourth example of this theme comes from question three on the Reading Questionnaire (see Table 1): I like to read out loud.. In the post questionnaire, two students’ answers showed improvement from “not at all” to “a little.” The building of relationships in the small group possibly allowed for these two students to feel more comfortable with reading aloud during the “popcorn reading” time.

Research Theme 3: Aesthetic and Efferent Responses Were Evident

Throughout the first two themes I shared many student responses that would be classified as aesthetic and efferent, defined as pleasant or positive and branching, spreading, or deviating respectively. As mentioned in theme two, the efferent responses really began to show as the students became more comfortable with each other. An example of one of these conversations took place when the Discussion Director asked “Would you want to be a hall monitor?” Student A immediately answered “NO! I don’t want to be yelled at by other kids.” Student D added “I don’t want others to not like me. Like you might have friends, but like usually people don’t like you if you are telling everybody what to do and where to go.” Even though these responses seem negative, they were not said in a derogatory manner, and the responses were honest.

Another excellent example of showing aesthetic and efferent responses happened when the Word Wizard for the chapter picked the word “wounded.” After sharing its meaning and the sentence she had written about the time she had been wounded, the other students began conversing about times they too had been wounded. The conversation itself definitely deviated away from the book at this point, but it was first initiated by an event that occurred in the story. These personal connections the students were creating through their conversations was something every reading teacher dreams of.

My favorite conversation that would be considered aesthetic and efferent happened toward the end of the novel. One of the students noticed the other pictures of books in the series listed at the back of the book. All the students immediately flipped to the back and began discussing all at once which book they thought they would like best (based on the picture and title). I then proceeded to tell them that this author had written 20 books in this series, to which every single one squealed in excitement. During this same day, the Discussion Director asked “On a scale of 1 to 10, how much did you like the book if 10 means: Wow! It’s great!” This started a very aesthetic conversation about the book overall. Three students gave it a 10, two students said 9, and one student said 7. The other students asked why she gave it a 7, and she replied “It wasn’t long enough!” Student B said “That’s why you check out the next book in the series.” Student E said “I can’t wait to read *The Locker Ate Lucy*, which is the second one.” The group then started discussing how the locker could eat Lucy.

Question four on the Reading Questionnaire (see Appendix B) states “It’s hard to remember what I read.” During the pre-questionnaire (see Table 1) three students

answered with a three, “sometimes,” and one student answered with a five, “all the time”. However, after the book club was over and the post questionnaire was given, the three students moved their answers to ones, “depends on the topic,” and a two, “a little”. The student who originally answered with a five moved to a three. This possibly could be explained by the aesthetic and efferent responses others had shared in the group, which aided in a better understanding of what had been read.

Research Theme 4: Community Accountability Was Necessary

Community accountability first began to take shape when I was teaching the six different roles. I explained that each of them would be responsible for knowing how to complete each role at least twice throughout the book club. By assigning the roles on a rotating basis in the beginning, this created a sense of fairness and acceptance by all. The last two weeks of book club, I allowed the students to choose whatever role they felt the most comfortable with. I was utterly shocked to discover that the students didn’t just keep choosing the same one. The students were encouraging one another to take on one that may have been empty because a person was missing that day or if two people really wanted to do the same role. This meant that there were a few days that some of the students were doing two roles. They chose to do this on their own because they wanted to be accountable.

Another instance where community accountability was evident occurred on the following day after a student’s absence. The group felt they needed to give a short summary of what the person had missed, and this was usually done by everyone else in

the group; it truly seemed like everyone wanted to add something to the conversation. This showed a true sense of community accountability.

Research Question 2: The TL's Influence on Engaging Conversations about Reading

**Research Theme 5: Student Voice Requires a Professional Librarian Listener /
Facilitator**

Throughout the book club one important element to reading success became apparent. This was the need for student voice to aid in their understanding of what was read. This would require a professional librarian who can listen and facilitate the conversation. This was shown multiple times by the students when they entered the classroom each morning. They each wanted to start talking about the novel before book club began. One day Student A asked "Do you think our school is haunted?" I immediately asked why she was asking this particular question. She said she was talking about our book club book to her mom the night before. Her mom said that supposedly an old janitor's cart could be heard going up and down the hallway at night in our school. This is a great example demonstrating that students need adults to share and discuss events in the book that could relate to their own lives..

During the book club, I noticed students were eager to share a story or event in their lives that may be similar to one I had shared or another group member had shared. The small group allowed a place for this sharing by each individual student. In a classroom filled with 20 or more students, this type of sharing is not possible due to the amount of time it would require. Participant observation in this study also showed that students often shared sensitive information, which required that a professional who is

also familiar with the book club (this was the teacher librarian leader of the book club) is the best person to handle this type of information correctly, meaning that professional facilitation can take place to give sensitivity to the students and also show knowledge of the book that can further students' reading interest. A great example of this occurred when a student was sharing information about what it feels like to be bullied. Books cover a vast array of sensitive topics that a student can connect to. A student shared an example of bullying they experienced and this allowed the teacher librarian to listen and privately recommend additional books with characters who navigate through similar challenges. This demonstrates that a professional teacher librarian can recommend other novels that not only are about this topic, but ones that are also tailored to fit their reading level.

Hearing that student voice better informed the professional librarian in this study, who also reads reviews of books and decides which books on certain topics may need to be added to the library collection. The students in the book club were struggling readers. By listening carefully to a student's story, the TL continued to recommend other books based upon their interest level and ability level, meeting the students' need to have a professional to hear their voice and make these important connections to books.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study reports the TL impact on reluctant readers' sustained engagement in conversations about reading, and the impact the participation in the book club has on a student's motivation to read. This study from a small, rural area in Northwest Iowa consisted of six fourth grade students and their teacher librarian who met in a book club over a four week time period during summer school. The students were taught different reading roles and utilized them throughout the discussion of the book. The researcher discovered five main themes in response to the research questions. Theme one is Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understandings. Theme two is Building Relationships Provide Safety. Theme three is Aesthetic and Efferent Responses Were Evident, and Theme four is Community Accountability Was Necessary. The students were able to build relationships that deepened their understandings, shared both aesthetic and efferent responses, and enjoyed the community accountability aspect. Students were excited to read the next chapter and take on a different role each day. They also became very interested in the other books in the series and couldn't wait to read the second book. Theme five is a need for student voice. Students shared their own stories, often with sensitive topics, that relate to the book. By listening carefully to students' own stories, the professional TL was essential to provide needed sensitivity and to recommend other books based upon their interest level and ability level, meeting the students' need to have a professional to hear their voice to help make these important connections to books.

Conclusions

While doing research for the literature review in chapter two, four different themes from Petrich (2015) provided four initial codes that I used to help to make sense of data from student conversations and my observations. This section offers reflection on those themes. The first theme was Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understanding. Many different student conversations were observed and recorded that displayed this theme as listed in chapter four. Students come from many different backgrounds, which can be used as an asset when discussing a book. The more students that contributed to a conversation strand, the better overall understanding occurred.

Theme two centered around Building Relationships to provide safety. Students first have to feel safe before they are willing to share ideas or important information. Spending time on relationship building among the book club group of students provided the safety to allow honesty and trust to take place while sharing. Students who are willing to open up and make connections to what they have been reading have taken a great leap into becoming a better reader.

The third theme was aesthetic and efferent responses were evident in the conversations taking place. The more comfortable students became with the different roles as is consistent with the findings of Bond (2001) as summarized above in the chapter two literature review, the more they were willing to converse. Even when a conversation spiraled away from the original question, this was still a good thing because the students were still connecting to the idea that originated with the book.

Theme four was about community accountability being necessary. No one likes to do all the work in a group; therefore, this final theme allows for the sense of fairness, which most children want and need in their lives. If children feel that the work is divided fairly, then they are more than likely to do their part to the best of their ability. They are even willing to do extra if someone is missing. This was shown by my students in my book club. When someone was absent, they had no problem sharing another role or even doing two in order to make sure every role was filled. They were also willing to summarize what the student had missed when he/she returned. They did not want that student falling behind or not understanding the next chapter. These four themes definitely answered my first research question: To what extent do book clubs help younger readers see reading in a positive light? A book club's conversations can have substantial impact on keeping readers interested and enticing them to read more. As shown in chapter four findings, the students in the book club couldn't wait to read the next book in the series and were willing to partake in another book club with me.

My second research question related to the role a teacher librarian has to these sustained conversations with students about what they are reading. This is one of the responsibilities of a librarian to actively engage students in the reading process. AASL emphasized that, "Reading is the core of personal and academic competency" (p. 11). Given the strength of the mission statement from AASL (2009) standards, the current 2018 version quotes from that mission, focusing on the essential skills all students need to know and how the teacher librarian [TL] can empower students to be "critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information" (p. 18). AASL

also noted that the librarian needs to advocate for reading for pleasure. In addition to the AASL standard, the second Iowa Library Standard (2019) also states, “The TL (teacher librarian) is the catalyst in igniting passion for reading in every student and creating a culture of literacy in the school” (p. 3). Therefore, if a TL would hold book clubs or engage in longer conversations with students about the books they are reading, he/she could have positive and uplifting results for the library and the school district itself.

Worthy’s et. al (2002) study concluded, “In case after case of students who overcame their reading resistance, the factor that was most salient was the human factor” (p. 188). Most people would agree that children can learn more quickly if someone else is helping them. Reading is no different. If there is another human to have conversations with about the book he/she is reading, it is much more likely for the said student to continue to read. The TL is just the human to make this equation be a success. In fact it states in the second Iowa Library Standard (2019), “The TL (teacher librarian) is the catalyst in igniting passion for reading in every student and creating a culture of literacy in the school” (p. 3). The more time teacher librarians can spend with their students and build a relationship with them, the better positive reading habits will develop.

The final conclusion resulting from the second research question about the role of the TL in the book club experience is that the TL role is instrumental in all aspects of the success of a book club as evidenced through the data. As noted earlier in chapter one, the AASL also noted that the librarian needs to advocate for reading for pleasure. It is the TL’s job to help create experiences, like a book club, to make this possible. I asked the students on the final day of book club if they would be willing to be in another book club

with me. Every single student shouted, “Yes!” As a TL, it is the job of the TL to ask those engaging questions that will lead into exciting conversations about what the student is reading. If a reluctant reader enters the library looking for a book they have to read for a class, the TL could offer to read it with them and have conversations about it. If a TL sees that two or more students like a similar genre, they could ask them to form a book club with them during their study hall or recess time. Conversations are the key to success! The more a TL can get students talking about what they are reading the more likely they will continue to enjoy the activity.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for practicing teacher librarians were derived from this research analysis of student’s conversations during a book club. First and foremost, a TL should not be afraid to implement book clubs. They are a fantastic method for helping all types of readers. Book clubs can be the catalyst for those important conversations that may be missing from the school library. Book clubs can be held at about any time of day. If it is upper elementary, then after school may be the best option. If the TL is in a middle school or high school position, then it is best to see if there is a study hall where students are sitting around doing nothing. My second recommendation is to get to know the students and what they prefer reading. Start asking more in-depth questions. A TL could also read the same book as a reluctant reader to be able to ask more questions directly related to the book. Finally, a TL needs to be more observant of what different students are reading. If a TL can find a genre that many students seem to gravitate to, one should pull a few books in this area and display them with a catchy sign, “Book Club Coming to

a Library Near You!” The more a TL advertises the book club, the more interest may be gained. Finally a TL should keep numbers small in book clubs to allow for the building of relationships for safety. This will also allow great conversations to take place.

For future research, I would recommend teaching the discussion roles ahead of time. This provides for a smooth transition into forming those good conversations. One may also need to teach some dictionary guidance on what to use for a definition and what to avoid. After students have a good understanding of the roles, I would recommend that the TL limit the number of times he/she jumps into the conversation. This would allow the students a chance to more freely express their opinions. The study would most likely get more accurate results if a higher number of students could be observed, but this means that multiple book clubs would need to be taking place at about the same time. This study could also be repeated in another school to see if similar results would occur.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of the novel so far?
2. What events make this story seem real?
3. What events so far make this story seem unrealistic?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with five being the best, how do you like the story so far?
5. How can you relate to any of the events in the story?

APPENDIX B
READING QUESTIONNAIRE

Use the line graph below to answer the questions.

Choose which number you would be on the scale

below and write it on the blank line after the

statement.

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Not at
depends on topic
a little
sometimes
usually
all the time

1. I like to read. _____

2. Reading is hard. _____

3. I like to read out loud. _____

4. It is hard to remember what I read. _____

5. I love to pick out new books to read. _____

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT OBSERVER FIELD NOTES CATEGORIES

	# Voluntary Conversations Contributions	# Popcorn Readings & Examples	Roles in Discussions Voluntarily Assumed & Examples	# Struggles with Understanding a Role & Examples
Student A	21 Student A was always listening to her classmates and connecting to their ideas.	18 Student A enjoyed reading and did a great job adding different voices for the characters.	In the beginning, she signed up for artistic artist as her favorite, but volunteered as a creative connector twice word wizard once.	2 Had some difficulty with the super summarizer and asking good questions as discussion director.
Student B	10 Student B was a good listener, but didn't always contribute to every conversation.	12 Didn't popcorn read as much in the beginning but as the book club progressed, so did the popcorn reading.	Student B signed up for artistic artist and word wizard in the beginning, but also chose passage predictor and discussion director as roles on her own.	Had difficulty with the super summarizer role and asking good discussion questions.
Student C	16 Student C loved to tell us stories. She always wanted to share something with the group, not everything always connected,	12 Read at least once each time the book club. Struggled with words, but truly didn't let that bother her.	Originally chose artistic artist as her favorite role, but also chose to do word wizard and passage predictor.	Struggled with the super summarizer role and making logical predictions.

	though.			
Student D	18 Enjoyed being a part of the discussion. Always wanted to share a story.	16 Liked to read out loud. Would help others if they struggled with a word.	Student D really enjoyed being the discussion director or artistic artist.	Needed the most help in writing good questions.
Student E	12 Enjoyed discussing with the group, but wasn't there all the time.	8 Loved to read out loud whenever she was present.	Artistic Artist was Student E's favorite, but was willing to try other roles, even though she struggled with them.	Needed help in writing good questions and forming logical predictions.
Student F	8 Didn't always contribute, but when he did his answers were relatable or consistent with what the book said. He didn't usually start the conversations, but occasionally would add if something became interesting to him.	6 Did not like to read out loud unless it looked like a fairly easy part. He would only read for a sentence or two.	He mainly chose to do the roles that allowed him to draw images. He then explained the picture he drew, which was accurate in relation to the story.	Didn't like to write. Preferred to draw. Asking him questions, drew out some answers. Struggled with making predictions.

APPENDIX D

INITIAL CODES AND EMERGING THEMES

Adapted from Petrich (2015)

Data Sources	Summary Notes from Focus Groups 1-12	Summary Notes from Student Questionnaires	Summary from Field Notes
Theme 1 - Diverse Perspectives Deepened Understandings.	The more the students made connections and the conversation was flowing, the better the understanding of certain happenings in the chapter: janitor's closet, stage, locker smelling, being teased.	Three students in the group of six changed their score on the questionnaire for the better, which could show that reading wasn't as hard as they originally thought when it was done in a group where conversations were taking place.	I really thought that students would choose creative connector more than they did. However, this didn't stop their understanding of the story because they were still discussing the story in other conversations. Students did not like the super summarizer job as well as the others. They also struggled with writing good questions when they were the discussion director.
Theme 2 - Building Relationships Provide Safety	The more comfortable the students became with each other and the TL, the more they were able to open up and share things that normally they would have kept to themselves.	Two students started choosing to read out loud more and improved their questionnaire score throughout the book club experience. This could be contributed to the building of	Students would accept help from another student correcting them on a word they read incorrectly. Students listened to one another and didn't interrupt.

	Examples of this: teasing, what things scared us, and even being able to read out loud.	relationships providing safety and a sense of belonging and trust.	
Theme 3 - Aesthetic and Efferent Responses Were Evident	The further into the book club we progressed, the more the students branched out and made connections to each other's connections.	On the questionnaire, it showed that 4 students improved their feelings on question 4 about it being hard to remember what they had read. This could be contributed to the aesthetic and efferent responses that were shared throughout the book club.	Students were always excited to read the next chapter. Students willing shared whatever role that was theirs that day, whether it was part of the rotation or one they were able to choose themselves.
Theme 4 - Community Accountability Was Necessary	Students didn't like to see a role not being chosen if someone was missing. Students were always willing to explain to the student who had been gone what had happened in the chapters they had missed.	A question or statement could have been added to help provide more evidence of this theme. An example could be: All people in a group should be responsible for helping.	I was pleasantly surprised to see the students taking on more than one role if another student was missing. I also noticed that students chose more than just their favorite role and learned to like a few others.
Theme 5-- Student Voice Requires a Professional Librarian Listener / Facilitator	I particularly noticed that whenever I shared a connection to the book, at least one or more students wanted to share a connection to my connection.	A question related to having conversations would be nice to add to the survey the next time I do a book club.	Students need to be heard. They want a chance to share their stories. Student voice is easier to hear in a small group setting.

