HOW ARE SELECTED CONTENT AND SKILLS ADDRESSED IN STATE LITERACY STANDARDS SPONTANEOUSLY MANIFESTED WITHIN LITERATURE CIRCLES

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ABSTRACT

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Literature circles are powerful in classrooms because they allow students to discuss literature with their peers. Readers can choose to read literature aesthetically or efferently (Rosenblatt, 2005). Aesthetic response refers to readers connecting the text to their own background or experiences to create meaning. Efferent response involves students reading to gain information (Rosenblatt). Rosenblatt suggests that aesthetic response is often ignored in the classroom because teachers feel pressured to teach certain requirements, and they believe that having students respond efferently will better help them achieve those requirements.

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if aesthetic response in literature circles help students discuss topics identified in state standards. In this study, two seventh grade classrooms were observed as students participated in literature circles. Data were collected using observational field notes and a researcher-developed coding sheet that was based on state comprehension and literary standards.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine listening to a literature circle discussion in a classroom on the *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Students are discussing how boring life would be to never see any color, or how scared they would be when they suddenly began to see it. One student mentions that he has a friend who has color blindness and wonders if he would be scared if he began to see color. Another student mentions that he probably would not be scared because, unlike Jonas, he knows about the concept of color. These students are responding aesthetically to the novel they are reading. They are using their own personal experiences to create understanding of the text. Huck (2004) explains, “In the aesthetic stance our concern is for the experience of the reading itself, the feelings and images that come and go with the flow of the words” (p. 55). Reading aesthetically allows students to read for pleasure and create a deeper understanding of the text.

Rosenblatt (2005), an author who has written extensively on aesthetic response in the classroom, has researched and written many articles about aesthetic response and its use in the classroom; she suggests that a story is not merely marks on a page. A story is a complex process in which a reader has to match the marks on a page to the sounds for which they stand. According to Rosenblatt, “And we know too that the sounds of the inner ear really become words, part of the language, only when they call up the ideas or images that have become linked with these sounds in the child’s past” (p. 97). Aesthetic response allows students to connect personal experiences and thoughts with the text. Students are permitted to connect their feelings to the characters, and make personal decisions about the conflict.

Literature circles are the perfect opportunity for students to use aesthetic response in their reading. A student reading *Olive’s Ocean* by Kevin Heinkes (2004) may not have a good understanding of the story if he or she has never been on a family vacation to the beach.
However, another student in the discussion group who has been to the beach can fill in the missing schema for that student.

**Statement of the Problem**

Students are often asked to discuss a story by examining the main character or the plot. This type of discussion is very limited in focus and can become very prescribed. Literature circles were designed to allow students to interact with the text and have the freedom to express themselves with their peers. To teach students how to participate appropriately in literature circles and to teach them how to respond to the text, literature circle roles were developed. These roles were created to help students become comfortable discussing what they read, and to also give them topics to discuss in literature circles.

As a result of these roles in literature circles, students are given a job while they are reading, whether it be finding questions for the group to discuss, or identifying new words for the group to explore. Although roles are not a bad idea for students because they allow them to learn how to interact with the text, they can become efferent in that students are only reading to find a question or a new word they can bring up in the group discussion. Efferent response involves students extracting details and information from the story (Rosenblatt, 2005).

While efferent response is needed in the classroom, students should be allowed to delve deeper into the story to determine what personal meaning this story has or what personal connections they can make to the story. This type of personal response is called aesthetic response and is not used as often in the classroom (Rosenblatt, 1982). Students need to learn how to have conversations where they can share their ideas and feelings with peers. To be successful in the world, students need to practice the art of conversation. While important, having students discuss main character and setting does not allow them to share their individual emotions and
feelings. Beers and Probst (1998) found that students would like to discuss their feelings and emotions toward a book: however, often classroom teachers do not allow time for authentic discussion. The following dialogue from Beers and Probst depicts a conversation between middle school students who were discussing their frustration over not being allowed to discuss a book:

CG: I like talking about books, you know where like you just get to say what something meant to you.

NR: Yeah, but that doesn’t happen much. It’s like most of the teachers, like they think there is something they’ve got to get covered.

CG: That’s what always happens. You just get started wanting to say something that is like, like really important about something you’ve finally like figured out and then the teacher just cuts you off. Bam. You are done. Then you can’t ever remember what you were going to say. (p. 17)

Beers and Probst (1998) believe that talk is an important part of classroom instruction. In some situations, talk can be more appropriate than recitation, workbooks, or drill. Students need to learn how to reflect and think about what they read and hear. They need to learn how to explore other points of view and become critical thinkers rather than simply accepting everything they hear. Aesthetic response in literature circles provides students the opportunity to talk and discuss ideas with classmates. If students are simply asked to read information and identify details, they will not learn how to read critically, think critically, and make their own judgments. Beers and Probst state, “Unless, however, we learn to reflect and consider,[…] we are likely to be shaped inexorably by the culture rather than learn to build our visions of human possibilities rationally and humanely, drawing on but not mindlessly accepting what art, literature,
philosophy, science and politics have to offer us” (p. 16). Rosenblatt (1994) believes that aesthetic response and discussion will not only help students excel in the classroom, but will also help create better citizens who can think for themselves.

According to Rosenblatt (1982), aesthetic reading is the type of reading that is most neglected in schools today. She suggests that young children who learn language learn it aesthetically. If young children use experience to help them learn language, the same should be used to help students with reading. Young children often use aesthetic response when listening to a story, shouting out personal connections to the story during reading. Rosenblatt believes, “The child may listen to the sound, hear the tone of the narrative voice, evoke characters and actions, feel the quality of the event, without being able to analyze or name it” (p. 80). Too often, students are required to pull information from texts without being able to apply the text to their own lives.

Furthermore, aesthetic response may help students with comprehension because it will allow them to become involved in the book and think closely about detail. Rosenblatt (1982) argues that “we have seen that the aesthetic stance, in shaping what is understood, produces a meaning in which cognitive and affective, referential and emotive, denotational and connotational, are intermingled” (p. 79).

For example, Berne and Clark (2006) observed students in a ninth grade literature classroom as they participated in literature circles. Their discussions were transcribed and evaluated. The researchers found that many students used discussion in the literature circle to better understand the text. Their analysis found that most of the students used discussion about the text to better understand what they were reading. The researchers also tried to determine how
students used talk to help them better understand the text, in the literature circle discussion groups. Berne and Clark (2006) believe:

Looking within strategic talk across the groups, the most prolific strategic talk related to the strategies of interpreting (taking information and assigning it meaning) and either text-based questioning or its narrative analogue stating a confusion. In each group, there was evidence of some attention to contextualizing the story in time and place. (p. 680)

Research Question

Research is limited on whether using aesthetic response can help students better master state standards; therefore, this study focused on aesthetic response in literature circles and the integration of state literary and comprehension standards into literature circle discussion. To address this issue, this study focused on the following question: In what ways do literature circles allow for spontaneous manifestation of selected content and skills addressed in state standards?

Rationale

Aesthetic response has the potential to help students accomplish mastery of state standards because it will allow them to become involved in the literature, reflect on, and think closely about details. This study has several implications in the field of education. Many teachers believe that efferent response, reading text for the purpose of extracting details, rather than aesthetic response, reading text for enjoyment and making personal connections, should be used most by students because it will help them select and retain information directly related to state standards. However, most students are still struggling with mastery of the state standards even when they are using the efferent approach. During my student teaching experience, students participated in literature circles. The students were divided into groups and each group read The Giver, by Lois Lowry (1993). During discussion with peers, the students became involved in the
life of Jonas as they were reading, and were able to relate to some of his struggles. They were then able to complete a test identifying the main character and the conflict in the story. Students were never directly asked this during class, but through discussion and aesthetic response, students were able to identify these story elements. While completing the test that required students to identify the main character and the conflict, it may be viewed as an efferent activity; students were able to gain the information through aesthetic response. Not only were students able to recall the main character, but they were also able to relate to the struggles of the main character because of their aesthetic response.

Definition of Terms

Terminology that is helpful in understanding this study is defined in this section.

1. Literature Circles—“small, peer led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book” (Daniels, 2002, p. 2).

2. Aesthetic Reading and Response—“being concerned with the experience of reading and the feelings and images that come and go as the words flow, and then responding about the feelings and images that were brought up during reading” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 73).

3. Efferent Reading/Response—“reading in order to retain or pick out information, responding on the facts that were learned from the reading” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 73).

4. State Standards—“Clearly defined statements and/or illustrations of what all students, teachers, schools and districts are expected to know and be able to do” (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).
5. Fat Questions- higher level questions that require independent thinking on the part of the student in order to answer.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. A middle school in Northwest Ohio was the only school where literature circle groups were observed for this study. While it would be helpful to gather data from more schools, due to time restraints, two classrooms in one school were studied. Also, the researcher had intended to personally observe all literature circle discussions, but because of the schedule of the school, the researcher was not able to do so. Therefore, the researcher had to videotape one discussion and observe another in order to gain enough data. Also, this study focused on the benefits of aesthetic response. Even though efferent response is important and should be used in the classroom, this study focused on the topic of aesthetic response and its benefits in the classroom, because it is most neglected in schools (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Summary

Aesthetic Response has the potential to help students become better readers and critical thinkers. When students are responding aesthetically they are thinking critically about the text which helps them learn how to become critical thinkers. However, teachers usually feel pressured to teach state standards and do not have time to get to the powerful benefits of literature circles. Research is limited as to whether elements of state standards can be addressed in literature circle discussions. This study looked at whether or not students could discuss elements of state standards during literature circle discussions.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature circles are important in classrooms today. Many students are encouraged to respond aesthetically in literature circles, talking about their interpretation of the literature and the interactions that occurs as they read the text. This chapter discusses the effects of literature circle discussions and aesthetic response on comprehension and skills. Overall, this chapter will explore literature circles, the reader response theory, the Reader Response Continuum, the effect aesthetic response can have on student understanding in reading, why aesthetic response is not used more often, and state standards.

What are Literature Circles?

Daniels (2002) explains that literature circles are made of small groups of students who choose their own reading material and form groups with each person choosing the same book. The students meet on a regular schedule to discuss the book. Daniels states that discussion of the book is student led and is usually open ended. When circles finish a book, a project of some type is made to share the book with the rest of the class. The teacher serves as a facilitator during this time, and guides students in their discussions rather than giving students yes or no answers to the book (Daniels). The teacher will set up guidelines of the literature circle, but the students plan and operate the discussion.

Literature circles are also used in the classroom because of the ability to use flexible grouping. Students in literature circles are allowed to participate regardless of their reading level (Daniels, 2002). Choices can be given on books that may be about the same topic but are at varying reading levels. Students then have the opportunity to discuss the book with classmates, which may help alleviate some confusion readers may have had when they were reading.
Moen (2005) believes that literature circles allow students to discuss books like adults discuss important topics in their lives, but they also hold students accountable for their own contributions. Moen says students are able to relate a piece of literature to themselves, another book, or to the world around them. Literature circles are made up of groups of students, but students should be assessed individually. Literature circles allow students to learn in the group, but still be assessed as individuals (Moen).

Saunders-Brunner (2005) explains that literature circle roles are often set up at the beginning to get students more comfortable with the concept. Roles allow students to focus attention to certain literary elements and aspects in the literature. The information that students find becomes the group’s discussion points (Saunders-Brunner). Saunders-Brunner adds that when different members of the group question something from the book or use the book to support a statement they have made, they must provide the readers the specific place in the text from where their idea came. Daniels (2002) identifies common roles that help foster discussion. These are “Connector, Questioner, Literary Luminary, Passage Master, and Illustrator” (p. 103). Once students become more familiar with the concept of literature circles, the roles will fade away and students will simply discuss the text (Saunders-Brunner). Roles are useful when students first begin literature circles because many students are not familiar with the idea of discussing text. Giving students a role will help students pick out information that they want to discuss (Saunders-Brunner). However, it is important that these roles fade away, and all students take on a variety of roles during discussion. Roles may stifle conversation if students believe they can only discuss those topics that relate to their role.

Another way that teachers can help students become more comfortable with discussing text is to give them questions to think about as they are reading. When students are just getting
started, it can be helpful to give them questions to think about while reading when students are in their literature circle groups. Students should not feel restricted to only read to answer these questions, but the questions will help guide them as they are reading. Connor (2003) explains that the following questions came from a group of students in literature circle groups, who were looking at the wordless picture book *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*, by Tom Feelings (1995). An example of questions that were given to high school students were as follows:

1. What do the paintings tell you about the Middle Passage?
2. How do the paintings convey the enslaved Africans' struggle for survival?
3. Why might Tom Feelings have chosen to use paintings instead of words to tell this “race memory”
4. What do the paintings express about the illustrator's personal feelings towards the Middle Passage? (p. 242)

What is the Reader Response Theory

Two ways to teach literature have emerged in classrooms. One technique is text analysis. In text analysis, students read to determine what the author intended for them to know (Hill, Johnson, & Noe, 1995). This technique can be compared to the efferent stance where readers read to identify the main character or the plot.

The other technique that has emerged is the Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1983). In this theory, the reader is encouraged to allow his/her thoughts and emotions to wander as he/she reads. The purpose for reading is to enjoy the literary experience (Rosenblatt). During Reader Response, students are pointed in certain directions by the text, and they rely on previous experiences with the text to interpret the author’s ideas (Piro, 2002).
Rosenblatt (1978, 1983) conceptualized reader response as a medium for cognitive and personal growth. Through discussion, students learn that literature study is not just an analysis of formal structures; it is a search for the author's intended meaning (Carico, 2001). In Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional view, the reader, the text and making sense of text are all part of a vital reading experience, not apart from it. Carico (2001) adds that if reading is seen otherwise, it becomes boring and cumbersome rather than meaningful. Using aesthetic response in the classroom will help students develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the text. One way that students can respond to text is through literature circles.

During Reader Response, evocation is required (Hill, Johnson & Noe, 1995). Evocation is a term that refers to teachers asking students to come up with a response that reflects their feelings and emotions (Hill, Johnson, & Noe). Reflection is also a component of Reader Response. During reflection, students are asked to think about their first reactions as they read the text. Students then think about what they have read, what other group members have said, and then re-read to make meaning out of what they have read. The reader response theory is one of the most significant roles in literature circles because readers rely on their own experiences and the experiences of others to create meaning in the text. (Hill, Johanns, Noe).

What Is the Reader Response Continuum

Rosenblatt (1982) argues that reading is considered a transaction between the text and the reader. The readers bring their experiences into whatever they are reading. Readers use their prior knowledge to make predictions, and if what they are reading does not fit their predictions, they revise it (Rosenblatt). Readers also decide their purpose for reading. According to Rosenblatt, “The most important choice of all must be made early in the reading event-the overarching choice of what I term the reader’s stance, his ‘mental set’ so to speak” (p. 73). Two
types of responses are used when reading text (Rosenblatt). These responses refer to the thinking that a student does as he or she is reading the text. Efferent response and aesthetic response are the two types of response that readers may have while reading. Efferent response refers to reading for information. Teachers use this type of response when they want students to come away from a text having picked out specific details (Rosenblatt).

However, aesthetic response refers to students using their own emotions and feeling to respond to literature (Rosenblatt, 2005). Aesthetic responses are considered to be notably more literary because the reader is able to "center upon her [or his] own transactions with the book and the images, feelings, sensations, moods, and ideas called to mind from her [or his] own reservoir of past experiences with language, literature, and life" (Cox & Many, 1992, p. 29). Aesthetic reading allows the reader's attention to be centered directly on what he/she is living through during his/her relationship with that particular text (Rosenblatt).

Rosenblatt (1998) believes that while reading, readers must decide if they are going to read efferently or aesthetically. Rosenblatt said that reading must fall at some point on a continuum; she states, “The stance determines the proportion or mix of cognitive and affective aspects of meaning that are brought within the focus of the reader’s attention. Any text can be read either way” (p. 893). Figure 1 is a model of the reader response continuum from Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt explains that when readers are reading efferently they are focusing more on cognitive tasks. When they are reading aesthetically, they are focusing on the aspects of sense. Most reading tends to fall in the middle of these two stances and both are used (Rosenblatt). This diagram portrays that both stances can be mixed and used while reading and responding to text (Rosenblatt).
Allowing students to use aesthetic response when teaching literature helps them interact with the book, making it more meaningful. Research (McLaughlin, 1994; Möller & Allen, 2000; Spears-Bunton, 1990) has shown that reader response is an appropriate instructional strategy to use when teaching literature because it encourages students to interact with the text and learn more about society, themselves, and others. Having students not only learn academic content in the classroom, but also learning about society, themselves, and others should be the goal of every educator. Aesthetic response gives students the chance to individually create meaning in the text.

The reader response theory builds upon the transaction between the reader and the text, and encourages students to identify explanations, form opinions, and create meanings based upon their own reading of a text. Connor (2003) explains that this personal connection between the reader and the text is the main focus of aesthetic response and the reader response theory. Rosenblatt (1994) argues that aesthetic response allows students to focus on the personal connection that is created during reading. Rosenblatt explains:

If on the other hand, the reader seeks a story, a poem, a play, his attention will shift inward, will center on what is being created during the actual reading. A much broader range of elements will be allowed to rise into consciousness, not simply the abstract concepts that the words point to, but also what those objects or referent stir up of personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes…Out of these ideas and feelings, a new experience, the story or poem is lived through. (p. 73)

Rosenblatt (1985) believes that responding aesthetically to text not only helps students create meaning in the text, it also helps them create understanding of the text. Aesthetic response activities and discussions can help students gain a deeper understanding of the text. According to Rosenblatt, both efferent and aesthetic response can lead to students understanding and retaining
information. One type of understanding or comprehension is efferent. Rosenblatt explains that, efferent understanding has been used for many years. According to Rosenblatt, Decartes’ view of the self, being separate from the object, has been used in the classroom for many years. Students are asked to find objective facts that are free from subjectivity. She adds that in efferent reading, when students are asked to narrow their attention to the concepts that they need to learn, students are reading simply to gain information and then take that information with them when they are done. Students may understand a concept, but they have not put any personal meaning into it or thought critically about it (Rosenblatt).

However, Rosenblatt (2005) believes a deeper understanding of the text can be brought about by using both efferent and aesthetic response. She adds that students will read text to search out details, but at the same time they will take those details and use them to create a personal connection with the text. Rosenblatt believes that understanding text is more than answering a list of questions, but is a continuous process of thinking. Harvey (2001) supports Rosenblatt’s ideas when he says that when good readers read, they carry on an inner conversation with the text which can lead to thoughtful, engaged reading that strengthens students' understanding, builds their knowledge, and helps develop their insights. Rosenblatt believes that text is not a generic object to which readers are exposed, but rather text is an event where the reader “draws on ideas and feelings stirred up by the words of the text; out of these is shaped the lived through experience” (p. 97). Aesthetic response helps students focus inward on what is actually being created during reading. This type of response allows a broader range of ideas, not only blatant ideas that the text points to, but also what the ideas stir up in the reader’s personal feelings, ideas and attitudes (Rosenblatt, 1982).
Carico (2001) believes the product of the reading depends not only on the text but also on the mindset of the reader. Carico explains “Literature study as a search for meaning may then become an enterprise of negotiation between text, reader and, often, the author” (p. 510).

Goudvis and Harvey (2000) listed the following strategies that active, thoughtful readers use when constructing meaning from text: making connections (personal, text to text, and text to world), questioning, inferring, visualizing, determining importance, synthesizing, and monitoring. Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005) believe learning how to read and understand text is a process that must be taught and it needs to be taught continuously. Students will not be able to understand what they are reading if they are not given strategies that will help them. According to Scharer et al., “Students do not first learn to decode and then become readers; they must be engaged in reading, thinking about, and discussing interesting texts from the beginning” (p. 24). They add that to be a strong reader, students need to think beyond the text. They can draw on their own knowledge and experience to make sense of what they are reading. Effective readers also make connections to their own lives. They imagine what the characters are feeling and infer what the author is implying as they are reading. (Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas).

Hill, Johnson, and Noe (1995) explain that students may also respond aesthetically to literature by journaling. Students may journal about what they notice about a character, details in the story about which they have questions or details in the story that personally touched them (Hill, Johnson, & Noe). According to Hill, Johnson and Noe, journaling allows students to have a discussion experience with themselves related to a story. It is important to keep written responses authentic. Hill, Johnson and Noe explain that questions like, “What do these characters have in common?” or, “How does this character remind you of someone you know?” allow students to
respond authentically while still understanding the concept of character development. Authentic
questions can help students focus more deeply on character, setting, plot, mood, and conflict by
triggering responses that students may not have originally considered (Hill, Johnson, & Noe).
While both types of response are important in the classroom, aesthetic response is most often
neglected and it can be a useful tool in helping students better understand or comprehend
information (Rosenblatt, 2005).

How Can Literature Circles and Aesthetic Response Aid Student Understanding?

Literature circles allow students to discuss topics and ideas with their peers. Often times,
teachers give students a list of questions or ideas to talk about which will help further the
students’ understanding of the text. Students who respond and discuss books aesthetically during
literature circles can gain a deeper understanding of the text which can also help them understand
ideas like plot, character development and conflict. Martinez and Roser (1995) conducted an
investigation using a group of fifth grade students who read the book *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken
Mochizuki. Students responded on how they felt being picked last for a team. Being picked last
for the team was an issue that the main character faced in the book. In the discussion, the
students were willing and open about their feelings and discussed how their feelings connected
with the book. Martinez and Roser explains that the students were open about discussing
significant issues in their lives that connected with issues in the text. Students also connected the
book they were reading with other books they had previously read and made historical
connections as well. For example, one student compared the internment camp that the main
character in *Baseball Saved Us* was in with concentration camps (Martinez & Roser). All of
these connections were made through aesthetic response and discussion of the text.
Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005) claim that aesthetic response also allows students to bring their own emotions into the text. According to Scharer et al., neuroscientists have proven that reading comprehension is a complex and individually constructed process. Emotions can help organize the neuronal networks that are required to think, retrieve information that has already been learned, understand new information, and remember information.

Ratey (2001) believes that literature circles not only increase student’s comprehension of the story by allowing them to talk about it, they also help portray the theory that we read for meaning. According to Ratey, the role of emotion in increasing memory and comprehension is neglected in current literacy instruction, but is important in creating successful readers. Ratey found that neuroscientists have discovered that reading comprehension is a personal and multifaceted process. Scientists also found that when beginning readers read, they create networks in their brain to connect what they read to what they say. Emotions help to organize the networks that are necessary to process information, comprehend, and remember. Rosenblatt (1980) adds, “The matter of the reader’s focus during reading transaction is of paramount importance” (p. 97).

Berne and Clark (2006) claim that literature circles allow students to discuss topics with their peers, which helps clarify meaning. Berne and Clark collected data from a ninth-grade English class who were working in literature circles reading *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson. In this story, villagers randomly select an individual for ritual stoning. Tessie Hutchinson, a wife and mother, is chosen. Villagers and family members pelt her to death with rocks. Berne and Clark share the following conversation that occurred as Kristine, Austin, and Lee engaged in a discussion about the lottery participants.
Kristine: He threw rocks at his mother.

Austin: I know. He helped to kill his mother.

Lee: How do you know she was killed?

Kristine: Because that's the whole point of it. Why [else] would you throw rocks at someone?

Lee: To get them mad?

Kristine: Well, it wasn't fair that they were all upon her. They were all there.

Austin: Well...Tessie was right...it isn't right...it isn't fair.

Lee: Then she shouldn't come.

Austin: They all had to...they had no choice.

Lee: What about the family who didn't come?

Kristine: They had to have someone pick for them. (p. 674)

Berne and Clark explain that Lee was able to ask questions in his literature circle group to increase his understanding of the story. They believe that often students will co-construct meaning together in literature circle discussions.

Berne and Clark (2006) believe that some students may not be sure about an idea or a concept, but through the process of discussion and listening to other points of view, the students work together to develop a better understanding. Berne and Clark show, in the following dialogue, how students make meaning after talking with one another and looking back over the text.

Vera: I wonder if [Tessie] just stands there and gets thrown rocks, or if they run after her and throw the rocks, 'cause one girl said they would have to wait cause she couldn't run very well 'cause her leg hurt. So did they run after her, or did she just stand in the middle
and have them throw rocks at her?

Maria: I think that they had just crowded around her.

Vera: Yeah, but then that lady said that they would have to wait because she couldn't run.

Maria: I don't think she could run because the whole town was there. (p 675)

Berne and Clark conclude that Maria tries to explain the procedure of stoning, but Vera seems to be unsure of her explanation and looks back into the text to try and make meaning. Both students worked together to build comprehension of the story.

Berne and Clark (2006) found that co-construction helped students in literature circles gain a better understanding of the text. They also found that when students co-construct meaning they are strengthening their ability to comprehend information (Berne & Clark). Discussion groups aid comprehension according to Vygotsky’s sociocultural model of learning. Discussion can allow students to help one another, make meaning and fill in background information that students may be lacking. In discussion groups, students have the freedom to construct their own knowledge and help each other with comprehension of the text. Eeds and Wells (1989) conducted a study and found that students of different abilities participated in discussions and shared their ideas and insights. These students also changed their responses during the course of the discussion once they heard the comments of their peers. Almasi (1995) found, that when students participated in peer-led discussions, they participated in larger amounts of student-directed talk and questioning than when they participated in teacher-led contexts. In further findings, Almasi and her colleagues (Almasi, McKeown, & Beck, 1996) found that in peer-led discussion, students engaged in higher level thinking, had an increase in their motivation to read, and better comprehended the text after discussion.
Why is Aesthetic Response Not Used More Often?

According to Rosenblatt (2005), readers can decide which stance they are going to take when reading a text, or they may use both stances while reading. For example, Rosenblatt explains that, a poem could be read efferently or aesthetically. Readers could choose to read the poem efferently and analyze the meter, or they could read it aesthetically and create a poetic experience. Rosenblatt observed that the efferent stance is taught most by teachers throughout the child’s experience, and aesthetic response is neglected. She claims many teachers believe that the text alone is the aesthetic part of the reading instead of recognizing the readers’ part in reading aesthetically. Because many teachers feel pressured by state requirements, the learning environment has tended to lean toward a predominantly efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons & Fountas (2005) question whether teachers who feel pressured to follow narrow, short-term goals give up something important.

Rosenblatt (2005) explains that Piaget, whose work in the area of children’s logical and mathematical concepts became famous, popularized the idea of the efferent stance. Rosenblatt adds that Piaget placed emphasis on children encountering new things, and “decontextualizing” the new thing rather than using associations and feelings to determine what the unknown object was. Rosenblatt states that Vygotsky, another influential theorist, criticized Piaget’s theory and said, “the sense of a word to the individual was broader than its referential meaning” (as cited in Rosenblatt, p. 100).

According to Rosenblatt (1982), when students discuss aesthetically, they make connections, tell their favorite parts, examine illustrations and ask for help in clarifying areas of the reading that were confusing. Teachers rarely value this type of discussion and see it as a waste of time (Rosenblatt). However, Martinez and Roser (1995) explain that this type of
discussion plays an essential role in the growth of the literature circle discussion and student understanding. This type of discussion allows students to share first impressions, practice discussing with their peers, and allows them to consider a wide range of interpretations on a particular issue (Martinez & Roser, 2005). Rosenblatt adds that surveys and models have found that reading is a complex skill in which a person is trying to gain and interpret information. Most reading models deal with efferent response and neglect the aesthetic. Rosenblatt argues that allowing students to respond aesthetically gives them the chance to make personal connections with the text and grow in the area of interpretation.

What are State Standards?

The Ohio State Department of Education defines standards as “grade level indicators of progress (K-12), benchmarks that will serve as checkpoints at key grade bands, philosophies and guiding principles” (Ohio Department of Education, 2004, p. 5). Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed, educators have been under tremendous pressure to make sure students are taught state standards (Flowers, Browder & Delzell, 2006). According to Flowers, Browder and Delzell, “Methods of determining the degree of alignment between assessments and state content standards have become a priority since the passage of No Child Left Behind” (p. 202).

The standards help teachers develop instruction and assessment (Ohio Department of Education, 2004). According to the Ohio Department of Education the academic content standards set a clear expectation for students. Work becomes more complex as students advance through school, and the content standards provide direction for teachers at each grade level. However, how the material is taught is the decision of each school and district (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).
Content standards make up what students should know. Benchmarks are specific areas that are identified by academic content standards. A component of state standards are grade level indicators that tie into benchmarks and are what children should know and be able to do. Academic standards were developed to set up clear expectations for educators.

Summary

There is much research on the benefits of using aesthetic response and literature circles in the classroom. Aesthetic Response has the potential to help students become better readers and critical thinkers. When students are responding aesthetically they are thinking critically about the text which helps them learn to become critical thinkers. However, teachers usually feel pressured to teach state standards and do not have time to get to the powerful benefits of literature circles. Research is limited as to whether elements of state standards can be addressed in literature circle discussions. This study looked at whether or not students could discuss elements of state standards during literature circle discussions.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Understanding text is a critical component to reading. People need to not only be able to read, but also to understand what they are reading. Aesthetic reading and response allows students to delve deeper into the literature and apply their own understanding to the text. It is believed that students will better understand what they are reading, and will enjoy reading more if they are reading aesthetically. Students may also better understand the conflict or main character in a story if they can apply the conflict to something they have gone through themselves. However, aesthetic response seems to be less used in classrooms today (Rosenblatt, 1982). Because of state standards and requirements, educators are often more concerned with having students read for information and respond efferently (Rosenblatt, 2005). This study explored these issues by answering the following question: In what ways do literature circles allow for spontaneous manifestation of selected content and skills addressed in state standards?

Methods

Research Design

The methodology used in this study was observation. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) discuss participant observational case studies as “the major data-gathering technique and focus of the study is on a particular organization” (p. 55). The purpose of the observations was to see what state standards were brought out in discussion among literature circle groups, and how state standards were discussed in literature circles, efferently or aesthetically. The discussion was compared against the state standards that the researcher was attempting to study (see Appendix A).
This study consisted of observations of literature circles in junior high classrooms. Observation occurred in two separate classrooms. Participants were observed in their natural environment to give the researcher more accurate observations. Two literature circles in each classroom were observed. During observations, field notes were taken to record various discussion topics relating to state standards and aesthetic response. Field notes helped the researcher record accurate student quotes for data analysis. Discussions were videotaped and transcribed. The researcher created a coding sheet based on state standards that were used during observations (see Appendix B).

The data collected were mostly qualitative in nature. Rather than focusing on numerical data, qualitative research focuses on descriptive data. Qualitative research attempts to view situations and issues from the mindset of the subject; as a result, the research population will be viewed as individuals, rather than simply a number to analyze (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Participants and Classroom Context

A small middle school in northwest Ohio participated in this study. The school that participated in this study was a public middle school with grades six through eight in the building. Each grade level was made up of two teams of teachers. There were approximately 519 students in the building. Grade 6 had 169 students; grade 7 had 174 students, and grade 8 had 176 students. There were 38 teachers in the building, with a teacher student ratio of 1: 14. The student body was represented by four different races, with Caucasian students compromising 88% of the population. This school was chosen because of the geographic location and ease of access. The students were observed in language arts classrooms that have a block schedule of 90 minutes. Each classroom had approximately 28 students. This study looked closely at two seventh grade language arts classrooms whose teachers used literature circles. One classroom
started a new literature circles in January, and the other started literature circles in February.

Both classroom teachers completed one literature circle in the fall.

Procedures

Two seventh grade language arts classes were observed as they participated in literature circles. The entire class periods were observed, watching the mini lesson and literature circle. Field notes were taken during observations by the researcher. Two groups in each classroom were randomly selected to be observed for a total of 4 literature circle groups. Due to time constraints, one group was observed by the researcher and one group was videotaped. The group that was observed by the researcher and the group that was videotaped rotated each session so that each group was observed with the researcher actually sitting in the group, and each group was videotaped.

A coding sheet was created based on Ohio State content standards and skills. The data was used to take field notes during observations. The researcher listened to the discussion of the students and made notes on the coding sheet. The researcher recorded each question that was asked by students and then wrote down each student response. The researcher used the coding chart to write down the questions and responses of each student while watching the videotapes also. All students questions and responses were written down. Then the researcher looked at the coding sheet to determine which students responses or questions discussed elements of state standard topics. Student responses that addressed elements of the state standard topics were written down in the coding chart according to the standard that was addressed in the discussion.

Data Collection

Since the researcher was interested in studying how state standards could be spontaneously manifested in literature circle discussions, this study used two modes of data
Observations were made of students participating in literature circles in two classrooms in grade seven. A coding sheet based on state literary and comprehension standards was used to assess their discussions (see Appendix B). The researcher observed to determine whether aesthetic response in literature circle discussions helps students also discuss state standard topics. Some of the standards that were used to observe discussion had two parts; during discussion, students only had to discuss one section of the question for it to count as being touched on in discussion. For example, the students in classroom two may not have determined a purpose for reading but did discuss reading comprehension to better understand the text, therefore, standard (a) was counted as being addressed. Once all observations were completed, the researcher reviewed field notes to search for areas in observation that need clarification.

Two language arts classes in grades seven were observed as they participated in literature circles. Two separate classes in the same grade level were observed. Classroom one was observed three times and classroom two was observed twice. This gave the researcher the opportunity to see how different teachers set up literature circles and if the literature circles arrangements affected the discussions in each class. The entire class period, which was 55 minutes, in classroom one was observed. The researcher observed the mini lesson and literature circle. Forty-five minutes out of the total 90 minutes in classroom two was observed, rather than the whole period due to scheduling conflicts. Classroom two would meet for 45 minutes in the morning and 45 minutes in the afternoon. The entire literature circle sessions were still observed. Field notes were written during each observational session. While observing, the researcher looked for the integration of aesthetic response and the elements of state standards in the literature circle discussions. Each class was observed during the month of January and the first
half of February. Specifically two literature circle groups in each classroom were observed. Notes were taken as observations occurred and detailed narrative field notes were written after observations.

A coding sheet was also created that contained the Ohio Department of Education’s standards in the areas of comprehension and literacy that the researcher was intending to study (see Appendix B). The coding sheet helped provide information concerning aesthetic response in the literature circles and the connection it had with the state standards. The researcher listened to the discussion and used the coding sheet to record how the discussion related to state comprehension and literary standards. The frequency of questions, aesthetic or efferent, was also recorded on the coding sheet by tally marks. Field notes were written based on observations. Observations focused on how aesthetic response in literature circles tied with state standards. Any questions that arose during observation were recorded and the researcher asked the classroom teacher these questions in order to clarify observations.

The data that were collected was in the form of narrative field notes and observations using a coding sheet. Field notes taken during observations included important phrases students said in literature circles and events that occurred that the researcher thought was important. The coding sheet expanded field notes in determining if aesthetic response in literature circles could include discussion of state standard topics.

Data Analysis

Data from interviews and observations were analyzed. After observations were complete, the coding sheet and field notes were analyzed to see if the elements of state standards were addressed during aesthetic response to literature. Analysis of the observations were typed into a Word document (see Appendix C). The dialogue of each student during literature circles was
studied. One coding sheet for each student in the literature circle was used during literature circle observations. The researcher was interested in analyzing how aesthetic response to literature in literature circles connect with state standard indicators. The coding sheet that contains specific comprehension and literary state standards helped the researcher determine if aesthetic response helped students discuss the elements of state standards. A completed coding sheet from a student in classroom two is found in Appendix D. The results of the discussion were analyzed to see the connection between aesthetic response in literature circles and the elements of state standard topics mentioned during discussion. Each standard was color coded so that the frequency of their use would be easy to recognize. The researcher was interested in studying how often the elements of the state standards identified were mentioned during discussion in regards to aesthetic response.

The researcher also looked at the state standards used in response to see if some standards were used more than others. The frequency counts were also analyzed to see how often students asked aesthetic or efferent questions. The frequency count allowed the researcher to see if the type of question asked affected the amount of discussion and amount of state standard topics addressed. Also, students in classroom one were given questions by the classroom teacher to discuss during a literature circle observation. The researcher also analyzed how many aesthetic questions came from students in this classroom opposed to aesthetic questions from the teacher. Questions that could be answered directly from the book were considered efferent, while questions that could be answered from student prediction, emotions, or experiences were considered aesthetic.

Notes taken during observations of literature circles and teacher instruction were recorded into a Word document. The frequency of the element of state standards addressed
during literature circles were recorded into a Word document. Students signed a letter giving their permission to be observed. This letter stated that results would be kept confidential and observation sheets and video tapes would be discarded as soon as the study was over (see Appendix E). A parent letter was also mailed out informing parents that any information gained in the classroom during observations or recordings was confidential, and would be discarded as soon as the study was over (see Appendix F).

Summary

This research study was designed to examine how aesthetic response in literature circles impact students discussing state standard topics. State standard topics like main character and plot are considered to be more efferent, but the element topics can be addressed not only during efferent discussion but through an aesthetic response to literature. Observations were used to examine how aesthetic response is used in literature circles and its tie to state standards. Consentng students in a public middle school in Northwest Ohio participated in a research study that investigated the integration of aesthetic response in literature circles and state standards.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Literature circles allow students to gain a deeper understanding of literature and practice the art of discussion. Even though research has explained the benefits of implementing literature circle discussions in the classroom, there is little research on literature circle discussions evoking certain state standard topics. Because of the requirements that are placed on teachers to teach state standard topics, literature circles and their benefits are often ignored in the classroom. This study examined whether the element of state standard topics could be addressed during literature circle discussions.

Results

The purpose of this study was to discover if state standard topics could be integrated into literature circle discussions. This study attempted to answer the following question: How are selected content and skills addressed in state literacy standards spontaneously manifested within literature circles? Consenting students in a small middle school in northwest Ohio participated in this study. This study looked closely at two seventh grade language arts classroom whose teachers use literature circles. Classroom one started literature circles at the end of January; the other began using literature circles in February. Two literature circle groups in the classroom were observed each Thursday. The time of observations varied due to weather delays. Observations lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. Each literature circle group was comprised of approximately five students. The observations served to generate data on how selected content and skills addressed in state literacy standards were spontaneously manifested within literature circles. Chapter 4 contains the results and analysis of how state literacy standards were spontaneously manifested in literature circle discussions.
This research study began by creating an observation chart to use while observing literature circles (see Appendix C). The coding sheet was analyzed according to the discussion of the students and then by recording the number of times each standard was used during discussion. Field notes were taken during observations. After observations, the frequencies of each standard were recorded and then frequency counts were tallied. Then, the researcher looked at what elements of the standards were addressed most often during discussion and which ones were hardly addressed.

**Results from Classroom 1**

The students in classroom one were reading *The Acorn People*, by Ron Jones. One day during the week the students would read the book together as a class, and each Thursday the students would meet in their literature circle groups to discuss their reading. Each student was given a role; there was a “question director,” a “cool connector,” a “passage finder,” an “artful artist,” and a “wacky word finder.” Students usually met in their literature circles at the beginning of the class period. The researcher randomly selected the two groups that were observed and observed the same two groups each week.

A total of 20 students in this classroom had permission to participate in this study. Ten students in classroom one making up two literature circles were randomly selected and observed during this study. The classroom was observed three times for 45 minutes each, however during the first observation students were only reading and did not discuss the book. Actual literature circle discussions were observed twice.

During observations, the researcher noted that students would begin discussions as soon as the class period started. The students sat facing each other at long tables in their groups. One group sat at each table. The tables were placed end to end with two tables in a row, and there
were two rows in the classroom. Group discussions usually lasted 5-10 minutes. The classroom teacher walked around and monitored discussion while students were in their literature circle groups. For the remainder of the period the students worked on writing activities that pertained to what they had read. The students in classroom one were creating a postcard that was to be written from the point of view of one of the characters.

Observation 1

During the first observation the students were reading the first two chapters of the text. The classroom teacher had planned on having students discuss the book in their literature circles that particular day, but was behind and so the students were reading as a class. The students took turns reading aloud the entire class period. During the observation several limitations to using literature circles in the classroom were noted. The class could only read the books during the class period because there were not enough for each student in every class period to take home. Also, the classroom teacher wanted to use different books for the literature circles but noted that he/she “was a new teacher and did not know of multiple books that would fit the different abilities of his students.” Finally, because only one book was being read in the classroom, it had to be read aloud by the teacher and students in class because of the different reading abilities of students, which takes away from classroom instruction, and time set aside for literature circle discussion.

Observation 2 (Group 1)

During this observation students entered the classroom and sat in their literature circles. Group 1 began to discuss the book immediately. Group 1 met for approximately 10 minutes. There were five students in this group. The following is a depiction of their dialogue.

Student One/Question Director: Why do you think they talk about the mafia?
Student Two: What is the mafia?

Student Three: I know, I have seen the Godfather and they all had the acorns which was a common bond and they were chasing people like the mob.

Student One: How do the characters feel and how would you feel?

Student Two: If I was disabled I would feel bad because I was different.

Student Four: I would feel angry because people would think I couldn’t do anything but I could.

Student Three: I would feel out of place.

Observation 2 (Group 2)

Group two started their discussion as soon as the class period started. Group two met for approximately 10 minutes. There were four members in this group. The following is a depiction of their dialogue.

Student one/ Question Director: Does anyone have someone in their family like the characters in the story?

Student two: My grandma, she has cerebral palsy.

Student three: I don’t know anyone who is retarded.

Student one: Do you think handicapped people are more tired than regular people?

Student two: Yes, because they have to work harder to do things than normal people.

Student one: I think so because if they were in a wheelchair that would be hard to get around, like when they were going up the mountain.

Student one: How would you feel if you were handicapped?

Student four: I would be jealous of people who could run.

Next, the artful artist drew a picture of the campers being brought up the mountain.
Most of the members of this group were distracted by the camera and appeared to be off task; the actual discussion of the group was only about 5 minutes.

After the literature circle discussions, the classroom teacher explained the post card project and students began working on it. At the end of the period the one student from each group went around and read out loud one of the connections that they had made in their discussions. The following connections were made:

Group 1: I think the craft part is important; it made me think of when we made crafts at 4-H came and I made a pillow.

Group 2: At the beginning of the book when all the campers came, it was chaotic; it is like our first day at Camp Palmer.

Group 3: I remember the loud speaker at our camp played Taps too.

Group 4: This part made me think of when we did arts and crafts at 4-H camp and I liked it.

Group 5: The dreams he (Ron) had are like Saw II when they had dreams of disembodiment.

Observation 3

This class period started off with students getting back into their literature circle groups. The classroom teacher had given students a list of topics to discuss in their group. He passed the questions out to each group and instructed them to answer three or four questions in their discussion. The following is the list of questions that were given to students to answer by the classroom teacher.
1. On page 34, Counselor Ron talks about the climb up Lookout Mountain. Read the paragraph as a group from, “I pondered the condition…to seek?” to the end. Explain it in your own words and possibly make a connection to its meaning with your lives.

2. Analyze the beginning of the paragraph of the paragraph on page 36, “Everyone seemed…” to “convenience ramps.” Explain the importance of this discovery. What does this tell us about the characters?

3. Describe what happened to Benny on his journey up the hill (pg. 39). What was the solution?

4. In your opinion, what were Aaron and the rest of the Acorn People doing when they scrolled and hung name tags for every item at camp?

7. What was Mr. Bradshaw’s treat to the camp members and their parents? Why was this such an awful choice? How did counselor Ron feel (a quote would work well here).

8. Like the surprise and wonder of finding the sky, revolution can’t be planned. It happens when you least expect it.”(pg. 53). What was the revolutionary act at Camp Wiggin? Who was the revolutionist? What did the act accomplish?

Observation 3 (Group 1)

Group one met for approximately 20 minutes. The group started the discussion by talking about the following questions.

Student one/Question Director (asked teacher’s question): On page 34, Counselor Ron talks about the climb up Lookout Mountain. Read the paragraph as a group from,
“I pondered the condition…to seek?” to the end. Explain it in your own words and possibly make a connection to its meaning with your lives.

Student Five: It means to succeed you have to work and work just like if you want to go to college.

Student one/Question Director (asked teacher’s question): Analyze the beginning of the paragraph of the paragraph on page 36, “Everyone seemed…” to “convenience ramps.” Explain the importance of this discovery. What does this tell us about the characters?

Student Two: It means handicapped people don’t get to do many things but are capable of doing what they want.

Student one/Question Director (asked teacher’s question): Describe what happened to Benny on his journey up the hill (pg. 39). What was the solution?

Student Five: Benny couldn’t make it up the mountain so they tied themselves together.

Student two: Well he was the first one in the wheelchair and he stopped, then the children had to help him.

Student Two: I wonder what is wrong with Benny; I think it sounds like he is paraplegic. (looks in text) Oh, it says Benny has polio.

After the students were done discussing the text, they worked on their postcards from the previous day.

Observation 3 (Group 2)

Group two met for 20 minutes. The following is a depiction of their dialogue.
Student one/ Question Director (asked teacher’s question): In your opinion, what was Aaron and the rest of the Acorn People doing when they scrolled and hung name tags for every item at camp?

Student Five: They were making Bradshaw happy

Student Two: No, they are making fun of him because it says he (Bradshaw) labeled the rocks and stuff so they would remember.

Student One/ Question Director (asked teacher’s question): What was Mr. Bradshaw’s treat to the camp members and their parents? Why was this such an awful choice? How did counselor Ron feel (a quote would work well here).

Student Three: He shoved a movie about swim safety and they didn’t like it because the kids were perfect and were not handicapped.

Student One/ Question Director (asked the teacher’s question): “Like the surprise and wonder of finding the sky, revolution can’t be planned. It happens when you least expect it.” (pg. 53). What was the revolutionary act at Camp Wiggin? Who was the revolutionist? What did the act accomplish?

Student Two: The revolutionist was Ron because he was mad. No, Mrs. Nelson because she tore the labels off the trees and rocks. (Describe and analyze them being back to like they were before they felt normal)

Student One: The act accomplished them being back to like they were before; they felt normal.

After discussions were finished, the students began working on their postcards from the previous day.
After discussions were written down, the researcher analyzed what standards were used and what types of questions were asked. To determine if a question was literal or aesthetic, the researcher looked at the question to see if it could be answered directly in the text or through student opinion and personal connection. If a question could be answered directly from the text it was determined to be literal. If a question could be answered only with student opinion or personal connection it was determined to be aesthetic. Eleven questions were asked in classroom one and eight of them were aesthetic. Out of the eight aesthetic questions, four were from the classroom teacher. During discussions in this classroom, the standard that was used most often was "making meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text."

For example, in group two, student one asked, “if the group thought handicapped people were more tired than regular people.” Student two responded, “yes, because she thought they had to work harder than normal people to do things, just like when all the campers were trying to get up the hill.”

The content standard “applying self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension” was addressed four times during the discussions. Group two’s discussion shows how this standard was addressed during the literature circle.

Student One/Question Director (asked the teacher’s question): Describe what happened to Benny on his journey up the hill (pg. 39). What was the solution?

Student Five: Benny couldn’t make it up the mountain so they tied themselves together.

Student Two: Well he was the first one in the wheelchair and he stopped, then the children had to help him.

Student Two: I wonder what it wrong with Benny, I think it sounds like he is paraplegic.

(looks in text) Oh, it says Benny has polio.
Students “analyzed or described the elements of character development and identified the elements of plot” twice during discussion. An example of a character development discussion is as follows,

Student One/ Question Director: How do the characters feel and how would you?
Student: Two: If I was disabled I would feel bad because I was different.
Student Four: I would feel angry because people would think I couldn’t do anything but I could.
Student Three: I would feel out of place.

One group mentioned that counselor Ron had dreams of disembodiment just like in the movie Saw II. This was an example of students using elements of plot in their literature circle discussion.

Students also analyzed the importance of setting twice. When cool connectors were sharing their connections, student two responded, “I think the craft part is important; it made me think of when we made crafts at 4-H came and I made a pillow.” Also, student one responded that, “At the beginning of the book when all the campers came it was chaotic, it is like our first day at Camp Palmer too.”

Results from Classroom 2

Students in classroom two were reading The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin. This class would meet on Thursday morning and read the book in their groups and then work on their jobs. Each student was given a role: “question director,” a “cool connector,” a “passage finder,” an “artful artist,” and a “wacky word finder.” On Thursday afternoons, the group would come back to class and discuss the book based on their jobs. Students would enter the classroom and sit with their literature circle groups. Usually students needed to finish reading or finish filling out their
job sheets before discussion began. The students in each literature circle sat in groups of five. Eight desks sat facing each other in a row, four on each side, and there were three rows of desks in the classroom. There was also a little room adjoined to the classroom where one group would meet. The two groups observed were randomly selected by the researcher.

A total of 25 students in this classroom had permission to participate in this study. Ten students in classroom two were randomly selected and observed during this study. This particular classroom was observed two times for approximately 45 minutes each. Group discussions usually lasted 20 minutes; however students were usually completing their reading or job sheets during this time as well. While students were filling out their job sheets, their teacher reminded them to use “fat questions.” During both observations one and two, students were either reading, filling out job sheets, or discussing the text for the entire period. The classroom teacher walked around to monitor discussion as students were in their literature circle groups.

Observation 1 (Group 1)

Group one met in the classroom and worked on their job sheets, finished reading the text, and discussed the book for approximately 20 minutes. There were five students in this group. The group started off the discussion with the cool connector who said this part of the text “made me think of my dad when he gets mad when I don’t do things he wants me to do”. Then the question director started the discussion. The following is a narrative of their dialogue.

Student One: Why do you think her mom made her change?

Student Two: She wants her daughter to stick out, and not be normal.

Student One: Why do you think Angela is acting weird? Explain.

Student Three: She thinks she isn’t important without Denton.

Student Two: It doesn’t sound like she likes him.
Student Four: I think she is being forced to because she is under age.

Student Two: Yeah and when she sits next to him she won’t look at him.

Student One: What do you think the clues are going to say when they put them together?

Student Four: A phrase.

Student Two: America the Beautiful.

Student Four: Why do you say that?

Student Two: Purple, mountain, amber, grain.

Student Four: Yeah it could be. Was this book written before or after the song?

The students then looked at the copyright date, and then went to ask the classroom teacher when the song was written.

Observation 1 (Group 2)

Group two met in the classroom and worked on their job sheets, finished reading the text, and discussed the book for approximately 20 minutes. The students sat in a room that extends off the classroom at a small table facing each other. There were five students in this group. The question director started the discussion. The following is a narrative of their dialogue.

Student one/ Discussion Director: What if he never told the people about the twins? You know how the killer has a twin.

Student two: She wouldn’t be crazy.

Student one / Discussion Director: Who is the murderer?

Student Three: Grace.

Student Four: I don’t think she is because she is too lady like.

Student Three: I think she wrote the will.

Student Four: Yeah that is why she is so clueless!
Student Five: I think it’s Turtle.

Student Two: She couldn’t do it; she is nine.

Student One (discussion director): What do the clues mean?

Student Two: The clues are Shakespeare paragraph.

Student Five: I think they make a sentence.

Observation 2 (Group 1)

During this observation the students sat in the classroom at one of the tables. The group met for approximately 20 minutes. During that time group members were finishing up their job sheets and discussing the text. The following is a narrative of their questions.

Student One/ Discussion Director: How does Sydell know what to write in polish?

Student Two: She was the secretary and had to know different languages.

Student Three: Maybe she lived in Poland.

Student One/ Discussion Director: On page 67, When Mr. Hoo suggested they give Ms. Pulaski a larger share of the inheritance, would you?

Student Two: I would give it to him because either way you win.

Student Four: I would give it to him anyway.

Student One/ Discussion Director: What question would you ask if you were in their discussion?

Student Five: Who did it?

Student Two: No. No one would confess.

Student Three: That is what I would ask too.

Student One/ Discussion Director: What do you think the hints mean?
Student Two: I think maybe they are trying to spell all the people’s names, because they said it’s not what you have its what you don’t have. So the name they don’t have is who did it.

Student Three: Yeah! That could be it.

The group moved up to bulletin board where they have been putting clues from the story up to try to find the names of the characters in the words they have up on the board.

Observation 2 (Group 2)

Group two was made up of five members. The students sat facing each other at a small table in a room that was adjacent to the classroom. The students in this literature circle did not discuss the text; instead, they discussed their weekend plans and events that had happened prior to class.

After discussions were written down, the researcher analyzed what standards were used and what types of questions were asked. To determine if a question was literal or aesthetic, the researcher looked at the question to see if it could be answered directly in the text or through student opinion and personal connection. If a question could be answered directly from the text it was determined to be literal. If a question could be answered only with student opinion or personal connection it was determined to be aesthetic. Students in classroom two asked 10 questions, all of them being aesthetic. The classroom teacher allowed students to discuss their own questions freely, but they were reminded to use “fat questions.” During discussion in this classroom, the standard that was used most often was "making meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text." An example of this is as follows;

Student 1: What do you think the clues are going to say when the put them together?

Student 4: A phrase.
Student 2: America the Beautiful

Student 4: Why do you say that?

Student 2: Purple, mountain, amber, grain.

Student 4: Yeah it could be. Was this book written before or after the song?

The students in the group then proceeded to look at copyright date, then went and asked their classroom teacher when America the Beautiful was written. Another example from group two is as follows:

Student 1: Who is the murderer?

Student 3: Grace.

Student 4: I don’t think she is because she is too lady like.

Student 3: I think she wrote the will.

Student 4: Yeah that is why she is so clueless!

Student 5: I think it’s Turtle.

Student 2: She couldn’t do it. She is only nine.

The standard that asks students to “apply effective reading comprehension strategies, including summarizing and making a prediction using information in the text, between text and across subject areas,” was used six times. An example from group two is:

Student One: What do you think the hints mean?

Student Two: I think maybe they are trying to spell all the people’s names, because the book said it’s not what you have it’s what you don’t have. So the name they don’t have is who did it.

Student Three: Yeah! That could be it.
The group them moved up to the bulletin board where they have been putting clues from the story. The students tried to look at the clues and find the names of characters in them. Students identified the elements of plot and established a connection between an element and a future event two times. An example of students “identifying elements of plot” is as follows:

   Student One: Why do you think Angela is acting weird? Explain.
   Student Three: She thinks she isn’t important without Denton.
   Student Two: It doesn’t sound like she (Angela) likes him.
   Student Four: I think she is being forced to because she is under age.
   Student two: When she (Angela) sits next to him she won’t look at him.

Students described and analyzed the elements of character development twice. A good example of students analyzing character development was in the previous discussion about Angela and Denton. Also, the students in classroom two addressed the element of the standard where students need to “determine a purpose for reading, and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text” once. An example of this was mentioned previously where a student thought that Turtle in the *Westing Game* was the killer. Her group reminded her during discussion that she was only nine and probably could not have killed Mr. Weston.

Discussion of Results

After transcribing the discussions of each group from both classrooms, it was found that certain standards were used more often than others. Of the eight standards identified, all of them were used. Table 1 on the following page depicts the eight standards that were during literature circle discussions from both classrooms. The standard that was used most often was “Making
meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.” This standard was used 12 times during discussions.

Table 1

Standards Observed in Classroom One and Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Classroom 1</th>
<th>Standards:</th>
<th>Classroom 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of the element of standards addressed (observation 2)</td>
<td>a. Determine a purpose for reading, and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text.</td>
<td>Frequency of the element of standards addressed (observation 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Make meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.</td>
<td>LC 1/ I</td>
<td>LC 2/ II</td>
<td>LC 1/ 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension.</td>
<td>LC 1/ I</td>
<td>LC 2/</td>
<td>LC 1/ II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LC 2/</td>
<td></td>
<td>LC 2/ II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Description</td>
<td>LC 1/</td>
<td>LC 2/</td>
<td>Task Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe and analyze the elements of character development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. Make meaning through responding to a variety of questions related to text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the importance of setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Describe and analyze the elements of character development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the elements of plot and establish a connection between an element and a future event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify the elements of plot and establish a connection between an element and a future event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Classroom 1</td>
<td>Standards:</td>
<td>Classroom 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of standards addressed (observation 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of standards addressed (observation 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Make meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.</td>
<td>LC 1/ I LC 2/ I</td>
<td>a. Determine a purpose for reading, and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text.</td>
<td>LC 1/ 0 LC 2/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension.</td>
<td>LC 1/ II LC 2/ I</td>
<td>b. Apply effective reading comprehension strategies, including summarizing and making a prediction using information in the text, between text and across subject areas.</td>
<td>LC 1/ III LC 2/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe and analyze the elements of character development.</td>
<td>LC 1/ I</td>
<td>LC 2/</td>
<td>c. Make meaning through responding to a variety of questions related to text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the importance of setting</td>
<td>LC 1/ I</td>
<td>LC 2/</td>
<td>Describe and analyze the elements of character development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the elements of plot and establish a connection between an element and a future event</td>
<td>LC 1/ I</td>
<td>LC 2/ I</td>
<td>Identify the elements of plot and establish a connection between an element and a future event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key: LC 1= literacy circle 1, LC 2= literacy circle 2, I= number of times the elements of standard addressed in student discussion.
The state standard that has students “apply effective reading comprehension strategies, including summarizing and making a prediction using information in text, between text and across subject areas” was mentioned six times during student discussion. Having students “apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension” was mentioned four times. The standard that asks students to “identify the elements of plot and establish a connection between an element and a future event was mentioned four times, and describing the elements of character development” was addressed three times during observations. “Analyzing the importance of setting” was addressed two times, and “determining a purpose for reading and using a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text” was mentioned one time.

Most of the literature circle discussions did not last long enough for deep discussions to take place; however certain state standard topics were addressed more often than others. Standards that required a deeper level discussion to take place were not addressed as often because that type of discussion rarely took place in the discussion that was observed. Discussions seemed to only last a few minutes with students giving short answers and then moving on to the next question. Even though the responses of the students were not long, some were thoughtful and aesthetic, and touched on state standard topics. The questions of the students were thoughtful.

Classroom one addressed state standard topics 15 times during observations. Eleven questions were asked, eight of them being aesthetic. Of the eight questions that were aesthetic, four of them came from the classroom teacher. The discussions that took place during observation one and observation two in classroom one were both approximately five to ten minutes long. However, the classroom teacher’s questions evoked less discussion than the
student led questions. The classroom teacher also shared that “he felt literature circles were not successful and would not do them again.”

Classroom two addressed the elements of state standard topics 23 times during discussions. Even though classroom two asked 10 questions which was one less than classroom one, classroom two was still able to discuss state standard topics 23 times. While filling out their job sheets, students were reminded by the classroom teacher to use “fat questions.” All of classroom two’s questions were aesthetic.

Summary

This chapter presented the data that was collected throughout the investigation to see if selected content and skills addressed in state literacy standards were spontaneously manifested within literature circles. All of the standards that were used to observe literature circles were used during discussions. It was interesting to see the difference in the discussions of the groups in the two classrooms. Certain standards were used more than others, with students making meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions addressed the most. The following chapter will discuss the implications of this data and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementing literature circles in the classroom can be hard for teachers because of the freedoms that they give students. However, research has shown that literature circles are an effective strategy to use because they allow students to construct deeper meaning with the text, and also teach students how to work in a group. Unfortunately, literature circles are often not used in the classroom because of the pressures from administrators and the government to teach a certain amount of skills each year. Literature circles are often seen as a great tool, but a tool that there is limited time for in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to determine how selected content and skills addressed in state literacy standards could be spontaneously manifested within literature circles. This chapter summarizes the results from this research study. This chapter also contains conclusions drawn from the data. Recommendations for implementation and future research are provided.

Summary

Literature circles were designed to allow students to interact with the text and have the freedom to express themselves with their peers. Literature circles allow students to interact with the text, and also discuss topics and ideas with their peers. Literature circles can give students a life long love of literature and can also help them learn to think critically and discuss critical issues in the text. This study examined if state standard topics could be addressed in student literature circle discussions. The researcher created a coding sheet to use during observations. The coding sheet had a list of state standards that the researcher was interested in studying, and students questions and responses were recorded on the chart depending on which standard a particular question or response had addressed. Afterwards, all of the questions and responses were transcribed. Questions and responses were color coded depending on what standard had
been addressed. Questions were also marked as to whether they were efferent or aesthetic. The researcher then determined that state standard elements had been used in discussion, and found some were used more than others. The researcher tried to determine why certain state standard elements were addressed during discussion and came to five main conclusions.

Conclusions

The results from the observations brought forth five main conclusions from the study. Conclusion one was that the role the teacher takes in classroom management is critical in determining how literature circle discussions will be run. Conclusion two was the types of questions asked significantly impact classroom discussion. Conclusion three was that there was a reason certain standards were addressed more often than others. Conclusion four was that literature circles allow students to negotiate meaning and clarify understanding through discussion of the text. The final conclusion is that there needs to be a clear consensus on the definition of literature circles.

Teacher’s Classroom Management is Critical to Literature Circles Running Smoothly

Good classroom management is essential to literature circles running smoothly. Daniels (2002) explained that during literature circles, the teacher is the facilitator not the director, and it is up to the students to plan and operate the discussion. If students are not used to working in groups, they will stray off task and the literature circle will not be effective. Because literature circles create an open environment where students are encouraged to discuss and not restricted by the classroom teacher, excellent classroom management is required so that students will be able to handle and stay on task in this environment.

The teacher in classroom one was new to the building, but had taught at a private school for a few years before. This teacher shared that he was struggling with classroom management.
The teacher in classroom two was also new to the building, but had taught three years prior in a public school setting and was not struggling with management. The teacher in classroom one shared that he only modeled the process of literature circles one day. According to Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005) who believe that learning how to read and understand text is a process that must be taught continuously, the concept of literature circles and how they operate should have been modeled more. Students will not be able to understand what they are reading if they are not given strategies that will help them.

*Types of Questions Significantly Impact Literature Circle Discussions*

Aesthetic questions allow students to discuss more because these questions are open ended and left up to student interpretation. An explanation for the difference in the amount of the elements of standards mentioned is the different types of questions that were asked in each classroom. Eleven questions were asked in classroom one with eight of them being aesthetic and three of them being efferent. Students in classroom one addressed the elements of selected state standards 15 times. Also, the students in classroom one were given questions by their classroom teacher to answer during discussion rather than using their own literature circle roles to guide the conversation. This was probably due to the fact that discussion during the previous literature circle observation was so short. However, as Almasi (1995) found, when students participated in peer-led discussions, they participated in larger amounts of student directed talk and questioning than when they participated in teacher-led questions. This same finding was found to be true in this study as well. The students seemed to treat the questions from the teacher as recitation. Students need to be able to freely discuss their own questions during literature circles. They would find an answer to the question and move on rather than discussing it as a group. Out of the eight aesthetic questions from classroom one, four were from the classroom teacher. It can be a
good tool to give students higher-level questions to think about during discussions, but they should not be limited to answering only those questions. Students need to be able to create higher-level questions on their own.

Students in classroom two asked 10 questions; however all of them were aesthetic. These students were free to discuss the questions that they came up with on their own, but were reminded to use “fat questions” by their classroom teacher. These students addressed the element of selected state standard topics 23 times. As Rosenblatt (1994) has explained, aesthetic questions allow students to bring in their own emotions and opinions toward the text, which lead to more discussion. Efferent questions tend to only have short, simple responses.

Both aesthetic and efferent questions were discussed during literature circle discussions. This matches with Rosenblatt’s (1998) reader response continuum where she found that readers focus on both cognitive or efferent tasks and aesthetic tasks while reading or discussing a book. The focus of the reader can shift back and fourth between the aesthetic and efferent while responding to literature. The teacher in classroom one asked both aesthetic and efferent questions when he gave students a list of topics to answer in their literature circles. He was having them experience these two continuums.

Students were able to use aesthetic questions and response to make connections with the text. Connor (2003) explained that this personal connection between the reader and the text is the main focus of the reader response theory. One student shared that “this part made me think of my dad when he gets mad when I don’t do things he wants me to do.” This student’s response matches the findings of Rosenblatt (2005) when she found that text was not a generic object that readers are exposed to, but it is an event where the reader draws on feelings, ideas, and experiences in order to live the experience of the character.
Rosenblatt (1982) found that most reading models deal with efferent response and neglect aesthetic. However, in both classrooms that the majority of questions and responses discussed were aesthetic. Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005) questioned whether teachers who feel pressured to follow short narrow, short-term goals give up something important. The classroom teacher in classroom one shared that he believed his literature circle groups were not effective because they did not last long enough. Even though students used aesthetic questions and still addressed elements of state standard topics, he believed that the time could be used a better way, like in whole group instruction. One could speculate that the reason the teacher in classroom one said he would not use literature circles again in his classroom was because of the fact that he thought they were a waste of time because they were not long enough, and he thought that he could use classroom time in a better way for students to learn state standards.

There was a Reason Certain Standards Were Addressed More Often than Others

All of the eight standards that were used to observe students were addressed, with students discussing the elements of state standard topics a total of 38 times. Most of the questions that were asked during literature circles were aesthetic, which led to more peer led discussion of state standard topics.

The standard that was mentioned the most was “making meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.” The element of this standard was addressed 12 times. It is reasonable that this standard was the one most used because literature circles were set up to help students create meaning by discussion with peers (Rosenblatt, 2005). In the study that Berne and Clark (2006) conducted with the book The Lottery, they found that students were able to ask questions in literature circle groups to increase understanding of the story. Berne and Clark believe that students often co-construct meaning together in literature
circle discussions. This same process was observed during discussions where students were able to correct each other when they were drawing the wrong conclusions, and discuss ideas when they were unsure of the text. For example, when one student thought that Turtle from *The Westing Game* was a murderer, members of his group explained that Turtle probably was not because she was only nine years old. Berne and Clark concluded the same thing when they found that co-construction helped students in literature circles gain a better understanding of the text. They also found that when students co-construct meaning they are strengthening their ability to comprehend information (Berne & Clark).

The standard “applying effective reading comprehension strategies, including summarizing and making a prediction using information in the text, between text and across subject areas,” was mentioned six times. Most of the aesthetic questions involved students making predictions based on their own understanding of the text.

The standard mentioned the least overall was “determine a purpose for reading, and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text.” This was probably due to the fact that the classroom teacher usually set the purpose for their reading, and the comprehension strategies that were taking place in each student were internal and were not able to be observed by the researcher.

There was a difference in the amount of standards used in each classroom. Classroom one addressed state standard topics a total of 15 times during the three observations. Classroom two addressed the element of state standard topics a total of 23 times during the two observations.
Literature Circles Allow Students to Negotiate Meaning and Clarify Understanding Through Discussion of the Text

The discussion among students in literature circle groups allowed students to create meaning and clarify understanding. Students corrected each other when they were drawing the wrong conclusions. An example of this that was observed in classroom two when one student thought Turtle from *The Westing Game* was a murderer. Members of his group explained that Turtle probably was not the murderer because she was only nine years old. Another student in classroom one did not know what the mafia was and was not able to make the connection that the book made between the campers in the story and the mafia. The students in the group were able to explain what the mafia was and the connection between the campers and the mafia. Harvey (2001) found that when good readers read they carry on conversations with themselves and the text that leads to understanding. This process was vocalized to others in the literature circle discussion groups. Strong readers think beyond the text, and draw on personal experiences and personal knowledge to make connections and clarify understanding (Scharer et al., 2005). This process was observed during literature circles as students shared their understanding with members of their group who were having trouble understanding parts of the text. Students who asked questions in literature circle groups to increase understanding of the story were similar to the ninth grade students Berne and Clark (2006) studied. In this study, students were reading *The Lottery* and were relying on their group members to clarify understanding. This same process was observed by the researcher in literature circle groups.

There Needs to Be a Clear Consensus on the Definition of Literature Circles

Because literature circles take a while to set up, and need to be implemented a specific way in order to be effective, there needs to be a clear consensus among teachers as the definition
Literature circles can be effective if they are used properly. Both classroom teachers believed they were implementing literature circles in their classroom, but there was a different approach used in each classroom. Classroom teachers need to take on the responsibility of learning how to properly implement literature circles.

**Recommendations**

*For Teacher Educators*

Teacher educators need to instruct students on the appropriate practices of literature circles, and how to make them effective. Teacher educators should discuss the importance of a good management plan so that literature circles will be effective. Teacher educators should emphasize the importance of higher level questions in the literature circle process, and how these questions can allow literature circles to run smoothly. Educators also need to discuss the idea that literature circles can allow students to discuss the elements of state standards. Literature circles allow students to create meaning with the text and discuss the element of important standards like plot, character development, and setting. Teacher educators should also explain the benefit of allowing students to construct and negotiate meaning that comes from implementing literature circles in the classroom. Finally, teacher educators need to explain the definition of literature circles and how they are operated in the classroom so there will be a clear consensus on how literature circles are run.

*For Teachers*

Teachers should be encouraged to use literature circles in their classrooms because of the benefits that research has found. Though the discussions that were observed did not last long, during that short time students were still able to construct meaning while discussing selected
state standards. The benefits of literature circles should outweigh the prep time that is required to organize them and allow them to work properly.

Literature circles need to be modeled continuously just like any other strategy that is taught. Students are given a great deal of freedom in literature circles, and they need to understand how to work in that setting. It may be a good idea to start out the school year with a whole class literature circle where the teacher is part of the circle and takes on different roles in the group. The teacher will be able to model how the roles should work, and how to operationalize the literature circle. It would be ideal if literature circles could be started in early grades and implemented each year so that students get used to the idea of discussing books with their peers. However, if literature circles are modeled correctly from the start, students should still be able to be successful no matter what grade literature circles are introduced. The benefits of literature circles should be explained to students so that they do see this time as an opportunity to freely talk free with their friends, and to make connections to the texts they read.

Classroom teachers also need to be educated in how to organize instruction for literature circles, and how to group students. A good management plan needs to be in place before literature circles are started in order for them to be effective. Classroom teachers also need to know how to manage and monitor the learning that is taking place in literature circles. Students also need to learn how to think critically and come up with higher-level questions. If students are only asking efferent questions, their discussion will not last long and the element of state standard topics will not be addressed as often, which may lead to teachers dropping the whole idea of literature circles. However, if students can create good aesthetic questions that require students to rely on their own opinions, backgrounds, and make predictions, then students will discuss ideas like plot, character development, and setting. Classroom teachers need to model
how to create higher level questions for their students. Literature circles can help students gain a life long love of reading with opportunities to, and still discuss state standard topics in a more open ended environment.

Classroom teachers need to be informed of the benefits of implementing literature circles. Many teachers may not know that students can discuss the elements of state standards while in literature circle discussions. Teachers should explain to students the benefits of literature circles helping them construct meaning. Many students may not realize that discussing a book with their classmates can help them better understand the text. Classroom teachers also need to know the true definition of literature circles in order for them to be consistent.

Teachers who are new to a building or unfamiliar with the process of literature circles should have the opportunity to be involved in some type of pre-service or inservice meeting that will explain how literature circles operate. District sponsored professional development days could focus on literature circles to allow teachers to become more familiar with the topic. Another way for teachers to become more familiar with the instructional practice of literature circles is for them to become involved in adult literature circles. Teachers can also co-plan, co-teach, and observe other literature circles in action to become more familiar with the process. Observing other teachers who implement literature circles will also help them become more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of literature circles.

Recommendations for Teacher Candidates

Teacher candidates will need opportunities to observe modeling of grouping options. After teacher candidates have had experience planning lessons using various grouping options, they should be encouraged to develop their own plans for literature circles.
Sustaining talk in the classroom and participating in literature circles discussion groups would allow teacher candidates to gain a better understanding of literature circles. Teacher candidates also need to learn effective management plans in order for their literature circles to be effective. Teacher candidates also need to learn how to design questions that engage students in higher level questions, and how to teach students to come up with higher level questions on their own. Teacher candidates should be instructed in how to determine which elements of state standards can be addressed in literature circle discussions, and how to build on the elements of the standards that are addressed. Teacher candidates also need to learn the benefits of using literature circles in the classroom, how discussions can help students negotiate and clarify meaning in the text. Also, teacher candidates need to be taught what literature circles truly are and how they operate.

For Research

Additional research should be done to continue this study. It would be interesting to study more literature circle groups in different schools and grades and see if the results were the same. The researcher could see how long discussion among students in other classrooms lasted and how students were able to discuss the elements of certain content standards. Studying a group of students in a school where literature circles are implemented in early grades and carried on throughout the grades, versus a school where literature circles are only started in the junior high may be an interesting study as well. If this study is replicated in the future, all observations should be made in person rather than videotaping or audio taping. Students tended to stay on task more when the researcher was sitting there, rather than when they were being videotaped. Also, a short period of time should not be allotted for this study. Because this study depends so much on
the schedule of schools, and school schedules can change suddenly, there should be a prolonged
time allotted to this study.

When conducting this study, researchers should look to see what the management plan of
the classroom teacher is, and if it is effective. Researchers also need to look at the types of
questions asked, and if the classroom teacher is encouraging students to use aesthetic questions.
The elements of the standards that were addressed should be studied in order to determine their
importance and connection with literature circles. Researchers should look closely at the
questions and responses of the students, and determine if the discussion allowed students to
negotiate meaning and clarify understanding. Finally, the researcher should see how literature
circles are operated in each classroom that is studied, and determine if there is consistency within
each classroom.

Summary

Often, the benefits of literature circles are ignored because of the large amount of content
that needs to be taught throughout the school year. In answering how selected content and skills
addressed in state literacy standards could be spontaneously manifested within literature circles,
this study found that these standards were addressed by students in the literature circles. In order
for literature to be effective in the classroom, teachers need to have excellent classroom
management, teach students how to create higher level questions, and teach students how to
work in a free student centered environment. Literature circles allow students to address
elements of state standards during discussions, and clear up confusion over the text that students
may have.
REFERENCES


Figure 1

Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum Reading and Writing Events

Figure from Rosenblatt, L. (1998). Readers, texts, and authors. Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society, 4, 885-921.
APPENDIX A.
STATE STANDARDS USED WHILE OBSERVING
Appendix A:

Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self Monitoring Strategies
a. Determine a purpose for reading, and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text.
b. Apply effective reading comprehension strategies, including summarizing and making a prediction using information in text, between text and across subject areas.
c. Make meaning through asking and responding to a variety of questions related to text.
d. Apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension.

Reading Applications: Literary Text Notes
a. Describe and analyze the elements of character development.
b. Analyze the importance of setting.
c. Analyze the importance of setting.
APPENDIX B.
CODING SHEET
## Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self Monitoring Strategies</th>
<th>Description of the Event</th>
<th>Frequency Aesthetic/ Efferent Response</th>
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APPENDIX C.
EXAMPLE OF CODING OF OBSERVATIONS
Observation Chart

January 25

Students read *The Acorn People*

Observed problems with Literature Circles in the Classrooms

1. The class can only read books during class because there aren’t enough for each student in each class period to take home.
2. New teachers have not read enough novels to be able to use different books for different reading abilities.
3. Using the same book in each class, the students need to read it out loud so that students of differing abilities can read and understand the text.
4. Literature circles need to be started in early grades so they will be more effective and students can sustain discussion longer.

Feb. 1

Group 1:

Students discussed *The Acorn People*

Student One: Why do you think they talk about the mafia? A

Student Two: What is the mafia?

Student Three: I know, I have seen the Godfather and they all had the acorns which was a common bond and they were chasing people like the mob.(d) (e)

Student One: How do the characters feel and how would you feel? (analyze the elements of character development) A

Student: Two: If I was disabled I would feel bad because I was different

Student Four: I would feel angry because people would think I couldn’t do anything but I could.

Student Three: I would feel out of place.

Group 2

Students discussed *The Acorn People*

Student one: Does anyone have someone in their family like the characters in the story? E

Student two: My grandma, she has cerebral palsy.

Student three: I don’t know anyone who is retarded.

Student one: Do you think handicapped people are more tired than regular people? A(e)

Student two: Yes, because they have to work harder to do things than normal people.

Student one: I think so because if they were in a wheelchair that would be hard to get around, like when they were going up the mountain. (C)

Student one: How would you feel if you were handicapped? A

Student four: I would be jealous of people who could run.

Next, the artful artist drew a picture of the campers being brought up the mountain.

Connections students made:
Student Two: I think the craft part is important, it made me think of when we made crafts at 4-H came and I made a pillow. (Analyze the importance of setting)

Student One: At the beginning of the book when all the campers came it was chaotic, it is like our first day at Camp Palmer. (Setting) too.

Student Five: This part made me think of when we did arts and crafts at 4-H camp and I liked it.

Student Four: The dreams he had are like Saw II when they had dreams of disembodiment. (elements of plot)

Feb. 8 (Questions were given by the teacher)

Group 1:

1. On page 34, Counselor Ron talks about the climb up Lookout Mountain. Read the paragraph as a group from, “I pondered the condition…to seek?” to the end. Explain it in your own words and possibly make a connection to its meaning with your lives. A
   Student Five: It means to succeed you have to work and work just like if you want to go to college. (c)

2. Analyze the beginning of the paragraph of the paragraph on page 36, “Everyone seemed…” to “convenience ramps.” Explain the importance of this discovery. What does this tell us about the characters? A
   Student Two: It means handicapped people don’t get to do many things but are capable of doing what they want. (describe and analyze the elements of character development)

3. Describe what happened to Benny on his journey up the hill (pg. 39).
   What was the solution. E
   Student Five: Benny couldn’t make it up the mountain so they tied themselves together.
   Student Two: Well he was the first one in the wheelchair and he stopped, then the children had to help him. (d)
   Student Two: I wonder what it wrong with Benny, I think it sounds like he is paraplegic. (looks in text) Oh, it says Benny has polio. (d)

Group 2:

9. In your opinion, what was Aaron and the rest of the Acorn People doing when they scrolled and hung name tags for every item at camp? A
   Student Five: They were making Bradshaw happy
   Student Two: No, they are making fun of him because it says he (Bradshaw) labeled the rocks and stuff so they would remember. (d)

10. What was Mr. Bradshaw’s treat to the camp members and their parents? Why was this such an awful choice? How did counselor Ron feel (a quote would work well here). A
    Student Three: He shoved a movie about swim safety and they didn’t like it because the kids were perfect and were not handicapped. (c)

11. “Like the surprise and wonder of finding the sky, revolution can’t be planned. It happens when you least expect it.” (pg. 53). What was the revolutionary act at Camp Wiggin? Who was the revolutionist? What did the act accomplish? E
Student Two: The revolutionist was Ron because he was mad, no Mrs. Nelson because she tore the labels off the trees and rocks. (Describe and analyze them being back to like they were before they felt normal)
Student One: The act accomplished them being back to like they were before, they felt normal. (elements of plot)

2/15/07 Students reading *The Westing Game*
Classroom 2 (students read in the morning, then get in groups and discuss in the afternoon. Then read together as a group.
Students are reading The Westing Game
Group 1
Connections- This part made me think of my dad when he gets mad when I don’t do things he wants me to do.
Student 1- Why do you think her mom made her change? A (character development)
Student 2- She wants her daughter to stick out, and not be normal

Student 1- Why do you think Angela is acting weird, explain. (b) A
Student 3- She thinks she isn’t important w/o Denton
Student 2- It doesn’t sound like she likes him
Student 4- I think she is being forced to because she is underage
Student 2- Yeah and when she sits next to him she won’t look at him. (character development, plot)

Student 1- What do you think the clues are going to say when the put them together? (b) (c) (plot)
Student 4- A phrase
Student 2- America the Beautiful
Student 4- Why do you say that?
Student 2- Purple, mountain, amber, grain
Student 4- Yeah it could be, was this book written before or after the song? (students look at copyright date, then go ask teacher when the song was written)

Group 2
Student 1- What if he never told the people about the twins, you know how the killer has a twin. A
Student 2- she wouldn’t be crazy

Student 1- Who is the murderer? (b) (c) (plot) A
Student 3- Grace
Student 4- I don’t think she is because she is too lady like
Student 3- I think she wrote the will
Student 4- Yeah that is why she is so clueless!
Student 5- I think it’s Turtle
Student 2- She couldn’t do it, she is nine (plot, creating understanding)
Student1- What do the clues mean? (plot) (c) (b) A
Student2- The clues are Shakespeare paragraph
Student 5- I think they make a sentence

Group 1 Friday (2/16/07)
Student 1- How does Sydell know what to write in polish? A (c) character development
Student 2- She was the secretary and had to know different languages (b)
Student 3- maybe she lived in Poland

Student1- On page 67 When Mr. Hoo suggested they give Ms. Pulaski a larger share of the inheritance, would you? A
Student 2- I would give it to him because either way you win (c), character development
Student 4- I would give it to him anyway

Student 1- What question would you ask if you were in their discussion? A
Student 5- Who did it
Student 2- no, no one would confess (c)
Student 3- That is what I would ask too

Student 1- What do you think the hints mean? (c), (b) (plot) A
Student2- I think maybe they are trying to spell all the people’s names, because they said it’s not what you have its what you don’t have. So the name they don’t have is who did it.
Student 3- Yeah! That could be it.

(Group moved up to bulletin board where they have been putting clues from the story up to try to find the names of the characters in the words they have up on the board)

Group 2
* Did not discuss book at all, talked about weekend plans instead.
APPENDIX D.
SAMPLE COMPLETED CODING SHEET
### Appendix D

**Student 1**

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APPENDIX E.
STUDENT LETTER
Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Jaime Wisniewski and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University. I am currently conducting research on literature circles discussions in Junior High Classrooms. This study is examining the use of aesthetic response, allowing students to discuss their feelings and attitudes toward literature, in literature circle discussions. There will not be any risks for participants of this study. Benefits of this study include allowing students to read and discuss their feelings toward literature. Discussing the book may also help students better understand what they are reading as well. I am asking permission to observe your child as they participate in literature circles in their classroom. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if you wish to remove your child from the study they can be removed at anytime. The students who participate in the study will be videotaped during literature circles. The videos will only be viewed by the researcher and will be kept in a locked box during the study. The videos will help me as I am collecting information about literature circle discussions. After the study is over, the videos will be destroyed. No real student names will be used in the research report. You may be provided with a copy of the signed consent form if you wish. If you have any questions you may contact me at 419-966-2623 or at jaimew@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Cynthia Bertelsen at 419-372-4249, or at berels@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study. I thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Jaime Wisniewski

Please sign below if I have your consent to research your child.

_________________________________________ Date  __________________________

576 Education Building
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0248
419 372-READ (7323)
Fax 419 372-8265
reading@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX F.
PARENT LETTER
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