

IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION OF JUNIOR DIVISION
STUDENTS AS THE TEACHER-LIBRARIAN: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Abstract

As a teacher-librarian, I wanted to deepen my understanding of literacy. I planned an action research project to investigate:

1. How can I, as teacher-librarian, help improve reading comprehension levels of junior-aged students in my school?
2. What can I learn about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers?
3. How do I positively influence students' attitudes about reading?
4. How can I incorporate what I learn into my daily practice?

The ten students who participated in the study, received specific reading strategy instruction, through a balanced literacy approach, to improve their comprehension. These students shared a simplistic view about reading, and their ability to assess how they solved reading challenges was limited.

I determined that engaged students will persevere with reading tasks. Teachers must incorporate more checks for understanding and provide more opportunities to develop metacognition skills and critical thinking skills in their students.

Action research provided the opportunity to put theory into practice. It allowed me to gain expertise about literacy development and to identify my next steps to improve my practice.

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I would also like to thank the staff and students at my school for their support. They assisted my learning goals by being flexible, lending resources and engaging in informal discussions about my challenges over the course of the project.

To my few good friends who tirelessly edited my thesis proposals and drafts, I extend my gratitude for their encouragement, excitement, and grammatical expertise.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge my family, who has patiently allowed me the time to work on my thesis. They were invaluable to the success of this paper and I thank them for believing in my accomplishments.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I designed this action research study to investigate how I, as a teacher-librarian, could positively influence literacy development in my school. In my opinion, the teacher-librarian is a potentially excellent literacy resource for students and staff. I select the reading material for my library and plan the purchases needed to build a relevant and rich collection. Using a research model, I actively teach informational skills to all of the classes. When involved in team-teaching activities, I create opportunities to work with smaller groupings of children to enhance learning. These activities may contribute to our school's literacy achievement but it is difficult to directly determine my effectiveness. I think teacher-librarians are under-utilized in the area of literacy development, despite our knowledge of literacy goals across the grades. Consequently, I wished to investigate my practice, with the goal of enhancing my ability to contribute to student literacy learning.

This chapter provides an overview of the ensuing study, identifies the research questions, and addresses the significance of the project. It will provide important background material to equip the reader to understand the chapters that follow this one. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the structure of the written report.

Overview of Study

I conducted my action research study from October 2007 to April 2008, in the library of the elementary school in which I am the teacher-librarian. The school, situated in a suburban area of a mid-sized city, opened in 2005 and was well equipped for the 500 students enrolled. A small group of ten students who scored a D grade in their Grade 4 reading comprehension assessment were invited to participate in the study.

I investigated my ability to use teaching strategies effectively to improve reading comprehension levels in students. I decided to teach reading strategies that have been successful when used by well-known researchers. The balanced literacy approach is used in the classrooms of my school board; I chose to use this style of instruction with the small group because it would be familiar to them. The group met twice a week to see if I could improve their reading comprehension levels through modelled, shared and guided instruction of reading strategies.

Hannay, Wideman, & Seller (2006) describe action research as an interactive process. It starts with the teacher reviewing data about his/her students' performance and developing a question of the kind, "How can I change my practice to improve student achievement?" The teacher then develops and implements a strategy to attempt to improve results. Further formative and summative data is collected as the strategy unfolds, and the analysis of the data provides feedback about the effectiveness of the change in practice. The teacher records his/her observations and findings, draws conclusions that will shape future practice, and shares what he/she has learned with colleagues.

Research Questions

Questions arose as I read more about the reading process and planned my project. The following questions formed the basis of my study:

1. How can I, as teacher-librarian, help improve reading comprehension levels of junior-aged students in my school?
2. What can I learn about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers?

3. How can I positively influence students' attitudes about reading?
4. How can I incorporate what I learn into my daily practice?

As I planned and carried out the action research project, I referred back to these questions to guide my data collection methods and my observations about the effectiveness of the lessons developed for the ten students.

Significance of the Study

This is important research to complete at this time. Educators know that literacy rates must improve to better students' chances of future success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Currently, individual schools, school boards and the Ministry of Education are interested in how our junior-aged students can become effective readers. Today's student must be literate in order to "actively participate in the global community" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.3). The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat was formed specifically to increase student achievement in these areas. Improving literacy scores has become the mandate across all our schools in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

I believe all teachers in a school can positively influence student achievement and that teacher-librarians can play a significant role in literacy development. Our school community may also benefit from my study because improving literacy rates is our school-based objective.

Recently, there have been reports demonstrating the need to develop strong literacy skills. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published a report in November 2007 on the decline in voluntary reading, using data collected from several sources. The NEA concluded that adolescents and adults are

losing interest in voluntary reading and observed that “Poor reading skills correlate heavily with lack of employment, lower wages, and fewer opportunities for advancement” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 5). It appears that Americans are becoming less literate just as society’s expectations are increasing the need for strong levels of literacy. Pleasure readers are proficient readers; thus, voluntary reading is an indicator of a successful, literate future.

In Canada, 40% of adults struggle with literacy issues on a daily basis. This statistic has remained unchanged for the last decade (Canada, 2009). As technology advances in our workplaces, so must the literacy levels of our workers.

My action research focused on improving literacy development and helped me identify practical strategies that I can use as a teacher-librarian to contribute to literacy development. Action research uses data to improve practice (DeLong, Black & Wideman, 2005). In my school board and across the province, teachers and teacher-librarians are encouraged to collect data to inform our practice. The Ontario School Library Association (n.d.) has developed a tool kit to assist teacher-librarians with the collection of data (Henley, Bradbeer, Koechlin, Rosettis, & Thomas, n.d.). Since 2008, my school board has required that annual learning plans (ALPs) incorporate data collection to measure movement towards our professional goals.

Action research uses cycles of action, data collection and reflection to generate new questions about practice and areas for improvement. In my case, the periodic collection of students’ achievement results was used to help assess my effective teaching of the targeted reading strategies.

More importantly for me, my action research has afforded me some insights into successful literacy strategies, which I will apply to my daily teaching in the future. I believe that teacher-librarians have a role to play in supporting classroom teachers and their students in the development of literacy skills. This research project provides evidence to support this belief. It is my hope that my action research can serve as a case study to support the value of professionally trained teacher-librarians in Ontario elementary schools.

Overview of the Written Report

This research report is divided into five chapters. Chapter One has introduced the study and its significance. Chapter Two will outline the review of the literature that informed my study. Chapter Three describes the methodology, including the selection of students, the curricular program I used, and the data collection and analysis methods employed to develop the findings. The results for each student and for the group as a whole are described in Chapter Four. Chapter Five completes the report by drawing conclusions about what I've learned about my practice, and what I plan to do next in my teaching and for my professional development. The appendices include samples from my data to elucidate the action research process and the types of data collected during the project.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

As background to the action research study, I investigated literature related to general areas that were directly relevant to the major research questions: the reading process, balanced literacy, reading strategies, reading attitudes, and the role of teacher-librarians. This chapter will address literature pertaining to each of these areas, in turn.

Reviewing current literature and research related to the teaching of reading comprehension skills provided me with valuable information. I was able to use this information to design my action research project and to understand the data that emanated from it. In the program I developed for my ten students, I used concepts found to be successful in other educator's work and selected appropriate reading strategies to teach. I discovered that there was research to support both the teaching approach I used and the theory that emerged from my study, regarding how junior students comprehend what they read.

The Reading Process

There are many theories about how students learn to read. Marie Clay (1991) defined reading, "as a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced" (p.6). Based on my experiences with students in elementary school settings, I believe this statement is true.

In 1993, Louise Rosenblatt's theory also described reading as an interactive process. She used the terms aesthetic and efferent (nonaesthetic) reading. Aesthetic reading refers to the act of reading for enjoyment. It is important to foster reading for pleasure in elementary school-aged children because it can promote a life-long habit of

reading. “Another major goal of literacy instruction is to instil in students an appreciation of the value of reading” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 5).

Efferent reading is also important, particularly for junior-aged readers who must read for knowledge in the content areas, such as science and social studies. It occurs when the student is reading for a specific purpose; it is employed, for example, when reading non-fiction materials or analyzing a text in English class. “The distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic reading then derives ultimately from what the reader does, the stance he adopts and the activities he carries out in the relation to the text” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.27). Extracting relevant information from a variety of text forms and formats is essential for academic and personal success.

“Reading is a thinking process, is part of everything that happens to you as a person and comprehending a text is intimately related to your life” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p. 7). This definition reinforces Rosenblatt’s theory that reading comprehension requires the reader to interact with the text. The Ministry of Education for Ontario (2004) used a similar definition of the reading process in its latest publications: “Reading in the junior grades is an interactive, problem-solving process, with the primary purpose of making meaning” (p.61). I based my research on the concept that reading is an interactive, transactional process that requires the application of a variety of strategies for proficiency.

I focused my teaching on the six reading strategies outlined in *Classrooms that Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2007), using teaching methods suggested in *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Other documents, like *Education for All* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a), provided additional

practical suggestions for teaching and developing these key reading strategies in all students.

Balanced Literacy Approach in Teaching

Cunningham and Allington (2007) described balanced literacy as a structured teaching approach. Students first observe a skill and then are given time to practice, with guidance, until they can independently apply the skill to their reading or writing. This gradual transfer of responsibility from teacher to student is carefully planned using the following levels of teacher support: modelled, shared, guided and independent activities.

In 1998, the International Reading Association published a position paper supporting balanced literacy. Today there is even more evidence to support balanced literacy as an effective approach to teaching reading skills. Cunningham and Allington (2007) concluded, “The most effective classrooms provide balanced instruction” (p.7). Bukowiecki (2007) stated, “Teaching children how to read requires a balance of pedagogy, theory and practical classroom experiences” (p.65).

The Ontario Ministry of Education has committed resources to train teachers in balanced instruction methods since 1998. Thus, there is a great deal of support for the use of a balanced approach in the province. The Simcoe County District School Board has trained primary grade teachers in the balanced literacy approach for several years. Since 2005, teachers of the junior grades have also received balanced literacy instruction training.

Reading Strategies

Students need to use many complex reading strategies to develop into proficient readers in the junior grades. Farstrup (2006) indicated that many students who were good readers in the primary grades will nonetheless struggle to read in the junior grades if they don't learn the comprehension skills to deal with the more complex text formats, text features and genres they experience. The skill of reading becomes a more sophisticated process as students move through the junior grades.

To improve reading comprehension, students must learn to apply a variety of reading strategies. Cunningham and Allington (2007) summarized six strategies, based on Duke and Pearson's (2002) research. The following subsections describe each of Duke and Pearson's six strategies—prediction, think-alouds, using text structure, using visual cues, summarization, and answering and questioning. There is evidence to suggest that these skills are important and necessary reading comprehension skills (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Fountas and Pinnell describe the same reading strategies in their 2006 publication

Prediction. Readers need to ask questions about what they are about to read, and to relate what they read to their prior knowledge. Using prediction skills, such as looking at the illustrated cover or discussing the title of a work, can help readers to make a link to related works. This is important, as prior knowledge helps readers to make sense of new readings. By activating prior knowledge, students can make connections about the new information as they read it. This also helps readers to organize the content into a logical framework for learning.

Think-alouds. Think-alouds help readers to understand the thought processes of a competent reader. Proficient readers think aloud as they read to show how they make meaning of a text. For example, a teacher might say, “I think the author wanted me to see a picture in my mind when I read that paragraph.” This is an excellent way to teach students to make inferences as they read. Thinking about how one reads is an example of using metacognition skills to improve one’s learning. Think-alouds provide examples of an effective reader using metacognition strategies to solve problems. It also helps the struggling reader see that proficient readers are actively engaged in the text and are not simply reading the words.

Using text structure. Most readers understand the components of fiction better than the elements of a non-fictional text only because they have more experience reading fictional texts (Cunningham & Allington, 2007, p.126). Readers must be familiar with a variety of text forms and features to aid their comprehension of that genre of text. Understanding the components of a narrative form provides the framework for global understanding. For example, a student knows what to expect when reading a fairytale. There will be a clash between good and evil, and the plot will have a happy conclusion. Providing students with opportunities to work with adventures, mysteries, science fiction and other genres helps readers recognize the components of various genres, which aids in comprehension.

Students must also know how the features of a variety of text forms can be utilized to improve their understanding of the material. For example, students who can effectively use the index and glossary of a non-fiction text will complete a more thorough research project; students who know how to notice headings and skim read for pertinent

information, are better able to focus on specific questions. Being familiar with the structure of a text helps the readers to organize the information and improves their level of comprehension.

Using visual cues. Using a visual to facilitate understanding is another reading strategy that improves the reader's understanding of a text. Graphic organizers such as a Venn diagram (used for comparing and contrasting) or story webs (where ideas are placed in boxes or bubbles), all help a reader to "see" what he/she has learned. It helps a reader to relate to the text and improves comprehension levels.

Visualization cues may also be used to self-monitor for understanding. For example, a fluent reader should see a "movie" running through his or her mind when reading. If the movie or mind pictures stop, then the text is too difficult or the reader is not engaged. Seeing an image when reading is a useful self-check for readers to gauge the speed with which they read. Fluent readers are able to visualize as they read.

Fluency and comprehension are positively correlated (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p 62).

Summarization. The ability to retell the key points of a text in a logical sequence and hold these details in memory is an important comprehension strategy called summarization. Often these key points are needed later in the text to make sense of what is read. For example, a small but important detail may help a reader to solve the mystery in the novel (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p. 48). Being able to summarize information effectively is an invaluable skill for readers of all ages.

Questioning. Good readers ask questions about what they read, as they self-monitor for understanding. They ask questions of themselves, of their peers and of their

teachers. Pausing to ask questions is part of the reading process. The ability to make inferences about what one reads requires higher order thinking skills. Asking questions that start with *how* or *why* engage the reader. By asking questions of the text, a reader is actively responding with the material to incorporate the new material into his or her schema.

Students in the junior grades must be able to use and apply these reading strategies across a variety of texts to be proficient. Successful readers employ all six of these reading strategies to comprehend fully the world around them.

Reading Attitudes

In my role as teacher-librarian, I have observed that students have a wide variety of attitudes about reading. Students' perception of themselves as readers positively affects the effort they make to read and this may relate to their literacy development. Each year the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) surveys the Grade 3 and 6 students when they write the annual standards-based tests in Ontario. Grade 6 students say they read less than the Grade 3 students do each year. Boys say they read less and feel less competent than girls across the province (EQAO, 2008). I am always trying to find new ways to make reading attractive to the reluctant readers in my school. I include a variety of genres and formats so that reading is accessible for students. I encourage the use of a wide range of texts. Guthrie and Davis (2003) also noticed that students in the junior grades read less when they stated, "their intrinsic motivation for reading declined" (p. 61). Thus, it is important to recognize and observe the reading attitudes of students. Promoting a positive view about reading is an area where I feel I make a positive impact on the students in my school.

The Role of Teacher-Librarians

There is research to support the idea that trained teacher-librarians can make a difference in students' reading achievement. Most recently, in Syracuse, New York, Ruth Small (2008) found nearly a ten-point difference in grade 4 students' achievement in the English Language Arts test when there was a certified media specialist at the school. Lance (2002) indicated that trained teacher-librarians improve the test scores of students in the United States. In Ontario, a Queen's University study found a "positive correlation between the presence of a trained full-time teacher-librarian and students' reading enjoyment" (2006, p.8).

By collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, teacher-librarians can learn more about our practice and, thus, make better decisions about our teaching. It is no longer good enough to say teacher-librarians help students achieve. We need to provide the evidence that teacher-librarians make a difference (Todd, 2003).

Recently, Judi Moreillon reported that teacher-librarians can be co-teachers of reading strategies. In her work, she outlined how reading strategies are closely related to the research skills we teach in the library (Moreillon, 2008). Her case studies demonstrated how effective team teaching in literacy improved the students' achievement and also captured classroom teachers' and the administrator's attention.

I believe that a successful teacher-librarian is an agent of change. This "means having the language and knowledge to move beyond the library and into the wider school community. It requires familiarity with current research on teaching and learning to effectively facilitate the change process" (Harada & Hughes-Hassell, 2007, p.12). As an

agent of change I must keep current with new ways to teach effectively and encourage others to improve their literacy development.

Summary

The literature cited in this chapter informed development methodology for my study and helped me to understand some of the findings. Reading is an interactive problem-solving process to make meaning of the text. Balanced literacy is an effective approach to literacy development involving a gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the student using modelling, sharing, and guided and independent activities. The six reading strategies—prediction, think-alouds, using text structure, using visual cues, summarization, and answering and questioning—identified by Cunningham and Allington (2007) provide readers with skills to improve comprehension.

Attitudes about the reading process and perceptions about one's ability to read clearly affect achievement. This was important for me to understand, so that I could carefully look for changes in attitude during the research period. This directly relates to how I might make a positive impact on students.

I feel that teacher-librarians should be an integral part of the literacy team in their schools and contribute actively to the improvement of students' reading comprehension levels. To increase my capacity in this regard, I conducted action research with a group of ten junior-division students to refine my skills in the area of literacy development.

Chapter Three will describe in detail the methodology used to conduct this action research investigation. Chapter Three also describes the various kinds of qualitative and quantitative data I collected and used to chart results, in terms of both the students' progress and my personal growth.

Chapter Three: Method

My action research study involved working with a group of ten students to see if I could improve their reading comprehension levels through modelled, shared, and guided instruction of reading strategies. The students in my project attended a publicly funded elementary school in a medium-sized suburban community near Toronto, Ontario. The majority of students walk to school and there is a sense of community even though the school is located in a new subdivision. The school was in its third year of operation at the time of the project, so the facilities were up-to-date and there existed a positive working and learning environment for staff, students, and volunteers. Approximately 500 students attended the school, in grades Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8, at the time of the research. A small percentage (9%) of the students speak at least one language other than English at home.

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. It begins with an overview of, and rationale for, the action research and balanced literacy approaches that I employed to conduct the study. There is also information about the selection of participants, and how ethical considerations were addressed. A significant portion of the chapter describes the program I used with the students during the study and the process by which quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The chapter concludes with the methods used to analyse and verify the data.

Overview of the Methodology and Rationale

This section provides an overview of the two methodologies—action research and balanced literacy—upon which I based this study. Action research was the process that I used to study my own practice as a teacher-librarian working with a group of ten struggling student

readers. Balanced literacy was the approach to literacy education that I used to work with the group of students.

Action research. There are a variety of approaches to action research in the literature (Whitehead, 2000; Sagor, 1991). I elected to use two particular sources of information on action research in my study, Delong, Black, and Wideman (2005) and Hannay, Wideman, and Seller (2006), because these works were developed based on extensive interaction with teachers and administrators in Ontario classrooms and are well grounded in the Ontario school system.

I completed my study using an action research approach because it suited the investigation of my own practice as a teacher-librarian. Using data to inform the way in which I support students as a teacher-librarian is of interest not only to me as an individual, but also to other teacher-librarians. The action research model required me to reflect upon my practice and consider ways to improve, so that I could become a more effective teacher.

An action research method also suited my learning style. I like investigating new ways to improve my teaching; by focusing in on one aspect—reading comprehension—I was able to be reflective of my work and become more aware of my teaching practices. For example, through this knowledge creation approach I was able to make tacit assumptions explicit and to reflect on their continued relevance (Hannay et al., 2006). Some of these assumptions had developed during my years teaching in a junior classroom and needed a review to see if they were still relevant to Grade 5 students today. Moreover, I like to work from first-hand discoveries, as Whitehead (2000) suggests, and then look for research to provide perspective on my discoveries.

By creating a question or identifying a problem to solve, I created an authentic reason to learn about current reading comprehension research (Hannay, et al., 2006). I knew there were a

great many reading comprehension resources available to teachers. The action research approach prevented me from becoming overwhelmed by the mass of information; it allowed me, instead, to apply it to my area of investigation and, thus, to connect it to my daily practice.

There is a great deal of interest in, and emerging information about, the effectiveness of action research to improve one's practice (Sykes, 2002). Action research can be an effective approach to change, because the investigator focuses on a personal challenge. "There is a need for educators to take charge of their own professional learning" (Hannay et al., 2006, p.16). I see the benefits of this when I participate in the teacher-librarian meetings in my school board. We are a well-connected association of teacher-librarians who have created our own professional learning community thorough the use of an email listserv and after school meetings. Our focus for professional growth is based on the needs of the group.

Last year, I was part of a small group that my school board brought together to refine the delivery of literacy skills. This opportunity enhanced my research because it strengthened support for my involvement in researching effective literacy teaching practices in the school library. The administrators in my school board now recognize teacher-librarians as potential literacy coaches because of our knowledge and ability to team-teach with colleagues. Participation in this training strengthened my belief that a trained teacher-librarian can make a positive impact on the literacy achievement in his/her school. The training was so well-received that it has been expanded this school year to include more teacher-librarians. This kind of professional development, driven by those involved, is a valuable way to make changes.

Our school board is supportive of professional learning communities (PLCs). Being a part of the PLCs in my school and participating in literacy training with other teacher-librarians

at the school board level helped me refine my literacy skills. This kind of reflective learning enables me to use elements of the action research process in daily duties in the library.

Balanced literacy approach. Balanced literacy is an instructional strategy in which students develop language skills through modelling, sharing and guiding stages. This gradual release of responsibility model, also known as multilevel instruction, allows students to practice specific strategies or skills until they achieve independence (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). In this action research study, my students' classroom teachers and I used a balanced literacy approach to help the students practice and review various reading strategies. I had the advantage of working with a small group of students. I focused my teaching on five of the six research-based comprehension strategies from Duke and Pearson's (2002) study. I used the think-aloud, visualization, text structure, questioning, and summarization strategies in an attempt to improve the students' reasoning scores. Students need a variety of strategies in their repertoire so that they can successfully handle a variety of texts. Teaching comprehension strategies in isolation is difficult, because they are all interconnected (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p.20). I felt that students had already had many years of practice with prediction, so I did not emphasize this strategy with them. I taught the remaining five reading strategies in individual mini-lessons so that the students could practice a skill in isolation; however, the students were encouraged to use any of the skills in their repertoire when solving a reading problem.

I used modelled, shared, and guided reading approaches to teach these strategies to the students. In the modelled lesson, I provided all of the input and demonstrated a skill while the students observed. I usually completed the shared lesson approach with an interactive read aloud, during which the students contributed and made predictions. Students then used what

they'd learned during the modelled and shared lesson to practice applying the specific reading strategy by themselves. At this stage, I offered support while the students independently practiced the selected reading strategy.

I worked through these key instructional approaches with my students in the small group setting. My action research used the balanced literacy approach to teach my students the key reading strategies, in an attempt to improve their reading achievement.

Working with a critical friend. A critical friend is a respected and trusted peer who can bring objectivity to my questions or add insight into potential obstacles that arise when conducting research in the form of critical feedback (DeLong et al., 2005). I chose a colleague who taught special education at my school. I valued her teaching style and I chose her to support me because of her experience as a classroom teacher in the junior division. I approached her because she was not directly associated with the students in my group and I could rely on her to assist me with the balanced approach of teaching comprehension strategies to junior-aged students.

This was the area where I felt the least comfortable because—unlike a classroom teacher—I had no training in the balanced literacy approach when I began the project. Our school has a strong sense of teamwork, so I received constructive comments and assistance when things were not going smoothly. My colleague was helpful when I was struggling to keep the students interested in reading. She offered some good suggestions and reminded me that the students need to be engaged in what they are reading. My conversations with her led me to build computer time into the study group's lessons, which improved student engagement.

Study Participants and Selection Process

I chose to work with Grade 5 students for three reasons. Firstly, that Grade 5 students are in the middle of the junior years and so they are familiar with the way the junior classroom operates. Secondly, the Comprehension, Attitude, Strategies, Interest (CASI) reading assessment is administered to students for the first time in Grade 4 and I wanted the students to have experienced the format of the CASI assessment before I worked with them. Finally, I felt that Grade 5 students are able to consolidate the new skills expected of them in the junior grades and that this would be a good year to reiterate the chosen reading strategies. The strategies were not new to them, but these students needed extra time to consolidate their reading comprehension strategies.

In my school, each junior division student completes the CASI assessment each term. Students read a passage and then answer questions about what they have read. The questions are designed to test the students' abilities in reasoning, communication, organization, and use of conventions (Doctorow, Bodiam, & McGowan, 2003). For my study, I used the reasoning section of the assessment as an indicator of the students' comprehension level. I derived my data from the CASI assessments, which were administered by CASI-trained classroom teachers. Thus, the students' progress, as I've documented it, should be consistent with other reading assessments administered in the classroom setting.

I used student report card grades and specific data from the CASI assessment to determine which students to invite to participate in the study. I focused on the reasoning scores from the CASI reading assessments to select my students. Students who scored a "D" on their last assessment in Grade 4 were considered for participation.

I had originally planned to select ten students who reflected the general population of my school; however, there were some limitations. The sample of Grade 4 students who wrote the CASI assessment at the school was small. Only 43 students wrote the CASI assessment in the spring of 2007. When I looked at the CASI scores from Grade 4, only male students had scored in the grade D range. I decided to maintain the “D” criteria and not to expand the size of the group to include female students. Further, the students chosen in the sample all spoke English as their first language, which did not truly reflect the general population of my school. I decided, with the help of my supervisors, that it would be better to select and work with the boys who’d scored in the D range than to exclude them because of their gender or their first spoken language. Thus, my sample of selected students did not truly represent the general population of my school in gender or in the languages spoken. The participants, however, did represent a variety of students who struggled with comprehension while reading. As this was the focus of the study, I accepted these changes to my original methodology.

None of the students, at the time of selection, required modified programming as stated in an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

In September 2007, I sent letters and made phone calls to the parents of students whom I wished to invite to be part of the study, and explained my project to them. Then I finalized my list of students based on the parental responses I received; one hundred per cent of the parents allowed their boys to participate in my research.

Thus, I began with ten male, Grade 5 students in my study. The students first met with me in October—the same week they completed their first Grade 5 CASI assessments—but I did not provide any direct teaching during the initial meeting. I collected their reading interest

surveys and inquired about their attitudes towards reading. These discussions would not have affected their CASI results. I met with all ten students every week until the week they completed their third CASI assessment in April 2008.

Ethical Considerations

While I was the intended subject of my action research study, the investigation required me to interact with students and, thus, the research proposal had to meet the Nipissing University's Ethical Review Committee approval. This action research project was approved in July 2007. The Ethics Review Committee for the district school board gave its approval in September 2007.

Working with students required ethical practices at all times. Communication between the students' parents and myself was open but not often used, because all of the students continued to participate fully in the project. I did call and speak with two of the boys' parents about halfway through the project, as the boys' participation waned. After these conversations, the two boys continued to come out of class and did participate in all tasks. Without the parental support, I feel that these two boys would have dropped out of the project in February.

Parental permission to allow the students to participate in my study was necessary. Even though I am a teacher in the school, conducting this research was beyond my regular duties with the students. In the parental information/permission letter, I emphasized that I was completing this thesis to improve my own practice and that the anonymity of all participants would be protected. Parents were informed that each student would be assigned an identification number during the investigation and that their names would not be used; that data would be securely

filed; and that all data would be destroyed when the thesis paper was completed. (Identification numbers have been changed to pseudonyms for this report.)

I followed the ethical considerations written in Delong et al.'s 2005 publication, as they mirrored my district school board's expectations. "It is necessary to respect and protect those who participated in the research" (DeLong et al., 2005. p. 52). Parents were able to withdraw their sons from the study at any time; however, none elected to do so.

The sessions benefited the students as their participation offered them additional literacy support during the school day. Since I had 100% participation, I believe that the parents saw this project as an opportunity to gain additional reading instruction for their sons.

Cooperation with my principal and the classroom teachers of the students was very important. The scheduling of the sessions occurred outside of the students' regular literacy classes and I considered the classroom teachers' needs when I designed the schedule. It can be very difficult to keep a consistent schedule in a busy school where the students are involved in many different events. I accommodated the student and classroom teachers' schedules without compromising the students' opportunity to learn in their regular classrooms and in other specially planned events.

It is important to state that I used only my personal planning time to conduct my students' lessons. I did not withdraw, remove or reschedule library time or divert resources away from the school community while completing my research.

It was also essential for these students to feel good about their participation. All of the students were familiar with me as the teacher-librarian and perceived the library as a welcoming place. The sessions were held in the library, where the students felt comfortable. Since all

students in the school visit the library during the week, the students did not feel like “special education” students coming out for extra help. They were eager to come out for their lesson times. Although the boys were aware that they needed to improve their reading skills they also understood that their participation would help teach me how to improve my practice.

I repeatedly told the students that I was learning from them. They understood that they were helping me to become a better teacher by letting me try out different lessons with them. Each time I worked with them, I respected their privacy and I showed my appreciation of their efforts to help me with this project.

I tried to plan novel and interesting activities into each session to encourage the students. For example, I used graphic novels and audiobooks to teach relevant reading strategies, and I selected non-fiction topics based on the students’ interests, to keep them engaged in the activities. Varying the tasks so students could work alone and with others helped to keep the sessions interesting.

Overview of Literacy Lessons

It is appropriate at this point to describe in some detail the program that I developed and used during the classes I held with my small group of ten boys. Fountas and Pinnell (2002) indicate that the explicit teaching of reading strategies works best in small group settings. Consequently, during the course of seven months (October to April), I explicitly taught five of the reading strategies, identified by Cunningham and Allington (2007) through a series of mini-lessons. I began the first term with the use of visualization, retelling, and text structure strategies; in second term, I focused on think-alouds and questioning approaches. Finally, I used summarization for the last term’s strategy focus. In the two years preceding the study on our

board-wide CASI results, students struggled to summarize the main idea from a text. I hoped that the students in my study would be using a variety of reading strategies independently by third term. This would support them while summarizing.

The Action Research Lessons Timeline, outlined in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, provides an overview of the action research project. The timeline depicts how I used the elements of the balanced literacy approach, and notes both when and by which teaching method (modelled, shared, or guided) the different strategies were taught. Each reading strategy became a focus for about a month. During that time, the lessons were designed to assist the students in their ability to understand and practice the desired strategy. This timeline also shows that the oral retelling, oral summarizing and visualization strategies were emphasized first; these are often taught in the early grades and, thus, the students were more likely to see success and achieve more independence. Additional reading strategies, such as questioning techniques, were practiced from January to April, to aid in the ability to summarize texts; when the group focused on text features, I incorporated think-alouds in my teaching strategy, in an attempt to improve the quality of their written responses.

Action Research Lessons Timeline Continued

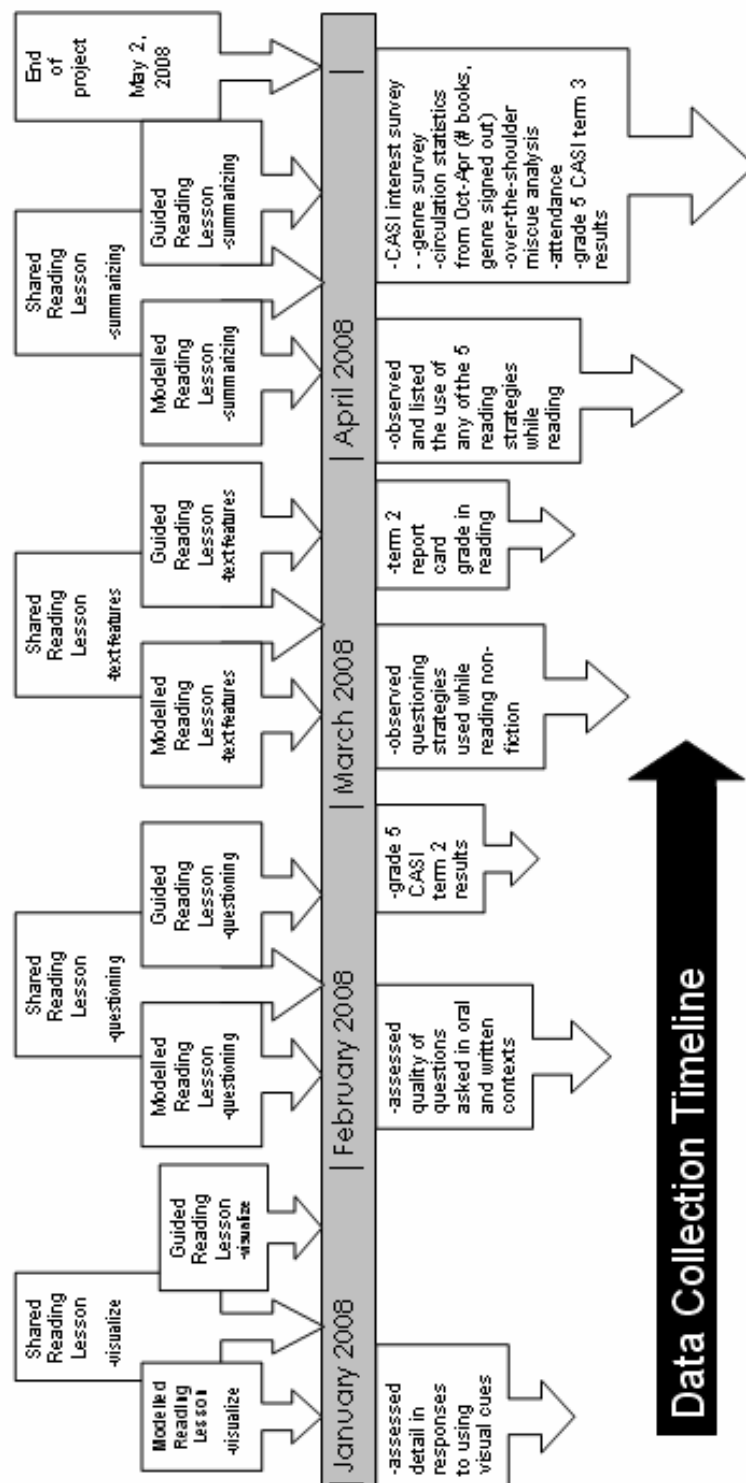


Figure 3.2. Action Research Lessons Timeline Continued

From October 9, 2007 until April 21, 2008, I saw the students twice a week for a 20-minute session during the participants' Grade 5 academic year. The ten boys were divided into two smaller groups—a group of four and a group of six—based on their classroom assignment. Classmates from one classroom participated from 2:35 to 3:00pm each Monday and Wednesday, and the selected students from the other Grade 5 class participated at the same time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Classroom teachers administered the CASI assessments at the end of each term, after which I made adjustments as needed to my teaching strategies, based on the students' progress.

I provided a variety of text formats so that the students were able to practice their reading strategies with greater flexibility. I wanted the students to become familiar with several kinds of texts. We used fiction and non-fiction materials in a variety of formats. Students read along with books on CD, and read from chapter books, graphic novels, magazines, website articles and a newspaper (current event style articles for junior-aged students). I selected topics to encourage engagement in the activities, based on the interests indicated on the boys' reading inventory surveys.

These learning opportunities occurred in the library, during class time. I felt that before or after school sessions would have reduced the students' willingness to participate, because they would have felt that they were being penalized for their weak reading skills.

A typical lesson began with the students gathered at a horseshoe-shaped table in the library. When introducing a new strategy or reading the

day's selection, I would model a specific reading strategy. The next time the boys came, we would use a shared reading approach to highlight the same reading strategy. For example, when focusing on the strategy of visualization, the boys and I would read together and then they would draw a picture of what they saw while reading. Eventually the boys were asked to read on their own, in a guided reading lesson, and I supported them in their attempt to complete the task. Providing an oral retell of a specific text, after using a specific reading strategy, was an example of what they might complete in a guided reading lesson.

A sample literacy lesson, developed for one of the weeks of the project, is included in Appendix A. This sample lesson is an adapted guided reading lesson; the boys read for themselves, after being reminded to employ the strategies that effective readers use to increase their understanding of the text. I assessed their reading behaviours and compared their written output with notes they had jotted down in earlier lessons, looking for signs of improvement. Finally, the boys provided an oral summary of what they learned from the reading.

Appendix B provides an example of some of my anecdotal comments, which were often written directly on the lesson page. After the lesson was over, I would reflect back on the successful aspects of it and attempt to change the approach if the students were inattentive or unsuccessful. I recorded each student's attitude and ability to complete the tasks in my learning journal after each lesson. If the students asked for clarification or did not engage in the

task, I planned another way to teach the skill. This demonstrates the reflective nature of the action research process and how it allowed me to consider the effectiveness of the lessons.

All the resources for the preparation and implementation of the study were available in the school. No specialized software or equipment was required. I had a series of guided reading materials that matched the reading level of the students in my study. I reviewed a variety of recommended reading comprehension strategies, organized them within the framework of the strategies and planned a variety of mini-lessons to reinforce the specific reading strategies being modelled and practiced.

Data Collection

This section describes the data collection process used during my action research project. Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 provide a graphic illustration of the process: The Data Collection Timeline runs below the list of lessons (under the line indicating the months) and when and what type of qualitative and quantitative data was collected.

Qualitative data. I collected a variety of qualitative data about the students' learning during the course of the study. These include reading interest surveys, genre inventories, and notes in the learning journal I kept during the project.

Reading interest surveys. The boys completed reading interest and attitude surveys in their first session with me in October and again during their

last session in April. I used the reading attitude and interest survey from the CASI assessment package (Doctorow et al., 2003). This information was used to organize the students' responses about their attitudes toward reading and their knowledge of genres and formats of texts. Appendices C and D provide samples of the surveys used.

Genre inventory. The boys completed a checklist of the genres they liked and disliked during their first session with me in October and again during their last session in April. This genre inventory was the same one that classroom teachers gave to their students as part of the CASI assessment (Doctorow et al., 2003). A sample of the form is included in Appendix E. I hoped the format would be familiar to the students; we read it together to assist with its completion. I used the interests they expressed in October to guide my selection of materials I would use to teach the reading strategies during the sessions.

Learning journal notes. Throughout the study, I kept a learning journal to record the progress of my developing research. I concur with Delong et al. (2005) when they state that the purpose of a journal is to record memorable observations, aid in reflection on the research as it unfolds, and help revise and improve actions for the future (p.39). The journal included my predictions, plans, implementation notes, data analysis, tentative conclusions, and other thoughts about the research and its development. I also kept observational notes in my learning journal about the students' individual efforts and interest levels as we completed the activities.

Quantitative data. I collected a variety of quantitative data about the students' learning during the course of the study. These include students' library circulation statistics, CASI assessment results, report card grades, over the shoulder miscue analysis results, and school attendance records.

Students' circulation statistics. I summarized the boys' circulation statistics (taken from the school's circulation software) in October and again in April. I observed details about each student and about the group in general. I made note of the types of genre chosen, the number of books signed out, and the number of times a book was renewed. I asked the boys to look through the list of items they had signed out and to cross off any book/item if they had read less than half of it. Based on this information, I calculated the percentage of books read versus the number of books signed out in October and again in April.

CASI assessments. Each term, the students completed a CASI assessment under the supervision of their classroom teacher. I looked at the students' scores in the reasoning section for signs of change in their comprehension skills, and recorded the levels achieved.

When I wrote my thesis proposal, I did not know that a revised CASI would be implemented in the fall of 2007. The students' scores in May 2007 were with the previous version of CASI and the CASI results from October 2007 were assessed based on the revised version of CASI. The classroom teachers of the students in my study went to the revised CASI assessment workshop in September 2007. I accompanied them to determine the

differences between the older test and the revised version. The length of the test was reduced to make the marking easier and the assessment categories were adjusted. The reasoning questions remained the same. Thus, the results from the spring 2007 CASI assessment and the fall 2007 CASI assessment should be comparable for the purpose of my action research.

The results of the fall 2007 CASI assessment provided me with baseline data for my project. The same classroom teacher administered all CASI assessments, thus there was consistency in the scoring. The two Grade 5 teachers at my school also scored the CASI assessments together so I believe that there was consistency in the scoring for all students.

Report card grades. I accessed the students' report card grades for reading in each term. The grades provided a formative assessment on students' progress so I could adjust my teaching strategies after each term.

Over the shoulder miscue analysis. I used the over the shoulder miscue analysis method (Davenport & Lauritzen, 2002), to assess each student's reading fluency and comprehension levels. I used a form adapted from Davenport and Lauritzen (2002) to assess the students in October and, again, at the end of April to determine if there were any changes in the way the students read passages. While the students read the selected passages, I calculated the percentage of uncorrected errors they made that affected meaning.

School attendance. I recorded each student's attendance, in school and in my project, at the end of the study. I compared these results with the individual's attendance over the same time from the previous school year to see if there was a positive correlation between a student's attendance and his level of improvement. Cowans states that good attendance improves achievement (Cowans, 2008). I wanted to see if I could confirm this hypothesis. I recorded the data as a percentage of the number of school days attended.

Data Analysis

This section describes how I analyzed the data collected during the study. Data analysis was accomplished in two stages. I conducted informal

data analysis on an ongoing basis, as the data were collected over the course of the study. Formal data analysis occurred after the student program and data collection ended in April 2008.

During formal data analysis, I compared changes in the quantitative data for individual students from the beginning to the end of the project (DeLong et al., 2005). To analyze the qualitative data I used the data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing methods described by Miles and Huberman (1984). Throughout the process, I used triangulation to verify the findings and conclusions.

Quantitative data. Whenever possible I calculated each student's quantitative results (CASI results, report card grades, etc.) as a percentage, for ease of comparison. I entered this quantitative data into a table for each student, so that I could see the evidence of improvement for each student. From these tables, I summarized the data to create a description of the evidence of improvement for each student. Then I transferred the data to spreadsheets, so that I could see patterns across all of the students in the group.

Qualitative data. Data reduction is the process of coding and assembling the data to identify patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1984). As I gathered qualitative data from observations, inventories, and student responses and activities, I looked for patterns. Most of the observations I made about the students centred on their reading or non-reading behaviours. I also recorded the comments students made—both at the end of the weekly

exercises and at the end of the project—about their reading interests and perceptions of reading.

Coding the data allowed me to condense it onto summary pages for each student. I then used descriptive and analytical coding techniques (Morse & Richards, 2002) to compare the summary pages. Descriptive coding helps to gather data into categories. I gathered my data into general categories based on how the data was collected: quantitative items, reading interest, genre interest, anecdotal notes about students, and perception of self as a reader. I displayed these findings in spreadsheets. The analytical coding occurred as I began to see patterns in the data. For example, all of the students in the study defined reading in a similar way, so this became an additional category. The categories developed as I analyzed the data. This process resulted in themes and patterns across the ten students.

During the analysis process, I made notes to myself (Miles & Huberman, 1984) regarding the themes identified during coding and possible connections among them. Using these approaches to data reduction and data display, I was able to draw relevant conclusions about the way the students read and about how I taught the reading skills to them.

Verification of Findings

I used three methods to attempt to verify the results of the study and increase the robustness of the conclusions. I used triangulation, compared qualitative and quantitative data of different kinds to generate conclusions, and used independently collected and evaluated data (including the CASI

assessment) to reduce the possibility that my biases and expectations would affect results. I also compared the CASI results of my students with results of other students who were achieving in the “D” range at the beginning of the study to attempt to identify similarities and differences in achievement.

Triangulation. During the study, I used triangulation to verify findings and conclusions. Triangulation is the process of comparing data collected by multiple methods and from multiple sources (Gall, J., Gall, M., & Borg, 2005, p. 320). I collected and compared a variety of qualitative and quantitative data in an attempt to assess student progress and my own teaching success. For example, if data from one source showed student improvement, I looked to see if other kinds of data demonstrated a similar result.

Independent data. Independent data, which I could not manipulate, helped to reduce the impact of my potential biases on the results of the research. For example, when I administered a survey, I used standard survey questions created by CASI. Similarly, I used the Grade 5 CASI reasoning results as baseline, formative, and summative data to determine student successes and challenges. I used this assessment because the students’ classroom teachers evaluated the students’ results each term. I had no opportunity to bias the marking of these reading assessments. I also collected report grades and attendance details for each student, as these independently created data were possible additional indicators of change in academic achievement.

CASI comparison. Another way to verify my work was to compare my students' CASI assessment results with ten other students in the Grade 5 classes who also scored D grades in reading in September 2007, but who were not part of my action research project. The purpose was to see if the students in my group improved at a greater rate than the other "D" students who did not work with me.

Summary

This chapter described how I conducted my action research study including how I selected the students and conducted the program for them. The methods used during this action research project have enabled me to see patterns of strength and weaknesses in the way I teach reading comprehension skills to students in the junior grades. I have explicitly summarized the types of data and the method of collection I used during my project. I have also outlined how I analyzed the data to produce the findings and conclusions described in Chapters Four and Five of this report.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter describes the findings of the study emanating from analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, which I collected before, during, and after the teaching sessions with my students. My action research project was designed to focus my teaching practices and refine those skills related to literacy instruction, specifically in the area of reading comprehension.

I also wanted to use statistical data to quantify and give me confidence in the validity of my findings. I decided that one indicator of my teaching success would be an improvement in my students' reading grades.

This chapter is organized into three major sections. The first section provides a summary of data pertaining to each individual student, tracking their learning as the project progressed. The following section describes findings that pertain to the group of students as a whole, focusing on what I learned about improving the reading comprehension of struggling junior division readers. Finally, the last section is a summary of the findings that relate to the original research questions.

Findings Pertaining to the Individual Students

This section provides an overview of each student and his or her development in reading during the course of the study. Pseudonyms are used

throughout to protect the identities of the students. The quantitative data for each student is summarized into a table and areas of noted improvement are identified with an asterisk. The findings for each student from the quantitative and qualitative data are then presented in the paragraphs which follow the table. The students' observed reading behaviours are described and examples are provided to demonstrate their reading attitudes and self-perception as readers.

Alan. Alan enjoyed coming out of class to participate in the library activities with me. He was often the first to arrive and he was an enthusiastic participant. He presented as a quiet and thoughtful student who appeared sensitive to criticism from his peers. He responded very well to positive reinforcement and praise from others. Alan readily attempted all tasks. He was often easily distracted by others, and this sometimes interfered with his learning.

Table 4.1

Data Collection Summary for Alan

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				100	
☒ In school	93			94	*
reading report grade	62	65	68	-	*
CASI level	1	1	2	2	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		53.8		70	*
# genre		4		5	*
miscue errors (%)		50		47	*

*indicates improvement

Table 4.1 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Alan's reading attitudes and achievements.

Alan showed improvement in many areas over the course of the project. His attendance in school and his reading grades on successive report cards improved, and he maintained a reading comprehension score of Level 2 on his CASI assessments. Alan read 70% of the books he signed out compared to only 53% of the books signed out the year before. He slightly increased his reading of a variety of genres during the project. Alan made

somewhat fewer errors that affected meaning during his over the shoulder miscue analysis assessments.

By the end of the project, Alan stated on the reading interest survey that he enjoyed reading non-fiction materials. “It is easier to read than fiction.” He also stated that he only likes to read things that “interest” him. He retold more content with greater accuracy in April than in October. Alan provided more details in the correct sequential order during his October assessment. Alan believed that he was a “good reader” but did not offer a reason why he thought this was true. He continued to enjoy reading fiction of the fantasy genre in graphic novel format throughout the research period.

Some concerns noted about Alan’s progress related to his ability to comprehend and communicate clearly about what he reads. He had difficulty organizing his thoughts on paper if there was no oral discussion beforehand. He required my support to complete written tasks. For example, he often needed my encouragement to start his first couple of sentences to confirm he had the right idea. Alan preferred to be read to when performing a reading task but rarely followed along or visually tracked the text as others read. He believed a good reader “reads every day” but felt that “reading is boring.” He expressed that he was not a good reader because he did not read a lot. He stated simplistic reading strategies to solving reading problems. For example, “I just skip the word if I don’t know it.”

Sean. Sean enjoyed being a part of “Ms. Jensen’s group” as he would race to the library to see what we were doing next. He was an enthusiastic

member of the group. Sean was pleasant and got along with the others boys in the group most of the time. He appreciated one-to-one attention and worked well independently when he felt competent to complete a task. Sean could become easily distracted when asked to complete written work.

Table 4.2

Data Collection Summary for Sean

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				91.7	
☒ In school	100			94.6	
reading report grade	58	58	62	-	*
CASI level	1	1	2	1	
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		22		100	*
# genre		1		2	*
miscue errors (%)		73		33	*

*indicates improvement

Table 4.2 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Sean's reading attitudes and achievements.

Sean showed improvement in most areas from October to April. He improved his reading grade on his report card. Notably, Sean stated that he read 100% of what he signed out compared to just 22% from his previous year's circulation statistics. He read books from two genres instead of only one before the study. Sean's April miscue analysis assessment showed substantial improvement—a score of 33% errors that affected meaning compared to his October score of 77%.

From the anecdotal comments made in my learning log, I noticed that Sean was able to generate ideas and put them into a written response more effectively when an oral discussion occurred immediately after a reading session. At first Sean chose books beyond his ability, but he soon began to select material at his reading level. Sean reported on the reading interest survey that he enjoyed reading humour and non-fiction genres. He learned to slow down his reading to improve his understanding and he made fewer errors during the miscue analysis assessment.

Some of the reading challenges Sean demonstrated were in the area of fluency. He lacked fluency when reading and seemed to struggle with grade-appropriate vocabulary. This greatly affected his ability to understand what he read. He learned almost exclusively through oral communication. Often, he would guess at an answer incorrectly, as he neither stopped nor slowed his

reading to check for understanding. As well, Sean did not visually track as others read to aid comprehension. He experienced difficulty taking notes and summarizing what he read. Sean would often highlight random words, as he could not determine the important or key words in an informational paragraph. He stated that he found “reading instructions hard.” He believed that a good reader “reads thicker books” but felt that “reading is boring.” “I don’t read at home, only for school.” Sean stated that he simply “sounds out words” as his only reading strategy to solve reading problems. Sean did not believe that he was a good reader because he could not understand everything he read. He stated, “I learned facts with Ms. Jensen.”

Bob. Bob always demonstrated a positive attitude about being part of the study. He stayed on task even when others were exhibiting distracting behaviour. Bob was cooperative and quietly began all tasks. He would often ask for help when it was required. Occasionally Bob would misunderstand oral instructions, but when redirected, he would redo the assignment until it was completed. Because he was keen to complete tasks on time, Bob sometimes rushed through activities, leaving out details just so he could be the first student to finish. Bob responded very well to individual attention and positive reinforcement.

Table 4.3

Data Collection Summary for Bob

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				94.4	
☒ In school	85			97.5	*
reading report grade	62	58	62	-	
CASI level	1	1	1	2	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		75		77.8	*
# genre		1		2	*
miscue errors (%)		64.7		88.2	

*indicates improvement

Table 4.3 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Bob's reading attitudes and achievements.

Bob showed improvement in some areas during the course of the project. His attendance at school improved during the school year and his report card reading grades improved over time. Bob also achieved an improved score of Level 2 on the reading comprehension component of the CASI assessment. He stated that he read slightly more of the books that he signed out of the library and Bob read books from a couple of genres by April

instead of reading exclusively from one genre, as he did at the beginning of the project.

Improvement was seen in the qualitative data, as well. Bob stated on his reading interest inventory that non-fiction material seemed easier for him to read than fictional texts. He read with success, if the reading passage was divided into small chunks of information. He showed more understanding of the text if an oral discussion, with others or with me, followed the reading session. Bob's attitude about reading improved during the project time. He stated, "I learned a lot of cool stuff with Ms. Jensen."

Bob's reading comprehension levels were adversely affected by his lack of fluency. He lacked fluency when reading and seemed to struggle with grade-appropriate vocabulary. Often he would substitute an unfamiliar word with another word that began with the same initial consonants without stopping to check whether it made sense. Bob rarely slowed down his reading pace as he attempted to decode. He did not visually track as others read to aid his comprehension. Bob had great difficulty taking notes and summarizing what he read, as he did not seem to know which words were important. Bob would highlight more words than needed and some of his jotted notes were plagiarized from the informational passage because he could not decipher key words or phrases. He stated that a good reader "reads thick books and reads a lot," but felt that "reading is boring." He rarely read at home and never for pleasure. Bob stated that he simply "sounds out words" as his only reading

strategy to solve reading problems. He said he was a good reader because he could sound out words.

There was some inconsistency in his choice and stated preference of genres read. He did not follow the ranking outlined on the genre inventory form. He stated that he enjoyed reading humour and adventures, yet he signed out only non-fiction books at the beginning of the project. He showed no self-monitoring when reading during the miscue analysis passages. He made more errors (88.2%) that affected his understanding of the passage in April than he did in October (64.7%). He also admitted, "Sometimes I miss stuff in class."

Murray. Murray eagerly entered the library for our sessions and was a good listener throughout the lessons, even if he did not like the reading material on a given day. He was cooperative and participated well in oral discussions. He readily began tasks after the instructions were given. Sometimes Murray would rush through a task so that he could be the first student to complete it.

Table 4.4

Data Collection Summary for Murray

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				97	
☒ In school	93			97	*
reading report grade	62	58	68	-	*
CASI level	1	2	3	1	
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		66		70	*
# genre		5		4	
miscue errors (%)		7		61.5	

*indicates improvement

Table 4.4 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Murray's reading attitudes and achievements.

Murray showed some improvement in a few areas from October to April; his attendance in school improved and his report card grade for reading showed steady improvement. He also made some progress answering some aspects of the CASI assessment comprehension questions. Murray read more of the books that he signed out than he had before the start of the project.

From observations made and recorded in my learning log, I observed that Murray demonstrated a good level of fluency when reading. He was able

to extract the important information into coherent jotted notes and to use headings to organize these notes. He could retell the important points from fictional and informational texts. Murray was very successful at navigating websites and seemed able to skim read well for pertinent information. Sometimes he would visually track the text while others read or while he listened to an audiobook or an e-book to aid his comprehension. Murray stated that he enjoyed reading fable, mystery, and humour genres.

Murray's level of engagement was the primary area of concern. His reading interest survey stated that he chose "easy books" and it had "been years since he enjoyed a book." He said he was a non-fiction reader but, by the end of the year, he had signed out more fiction than non-fiction materials. Murray showed very little self-monitoring for understanding while reading the passage selected for miscue analysis. He made more errors (61.5%) that affected understanding of the passage in April than he did in October (7%). He said was a "pretty good reader but I can get better." He also stated it took him a long time to read. When asked to write down his thoughts, he had difficulty with the organization even though he could provide an accurate oral retell. Murray enjoyed reading books by the same author. He did not expand his genre choices over the duration of the project. As he stated, "I read what interests me."

Kris. This student would enter the library noisily and seemed genuinely happy (always smiling) to have been selected for the group, but he did not choose to complete many tasks. Kris had difficulty beginning and

completing tasks and often distracted his peers, as well. He missed several lessons because of absences due to an illness and so there are fewer observations about his reading behaviour.

Table 4.5

Data Collection Summary for Kris

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				83	
☒ In school	90			92	*
reading report grade	68	65	72	-	*
CASI level	1	2	3	3	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		55		72	*
# genre		2		2	
miscue errors (%)		38.9		0	*

*indicates improvement

Table 4.5 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Kris's reading attitudes and achievements.

Kris showed improvement in several areas from October to April despite his display of many non-reading behaviours. His reading grades gradually improved over time and his achievement on his CASI assessment greatly improved to a Level 3. He read more of the books that he signed out

of the library. During the miscue analysis in April, Kris made no errors that affected the meaning of the passage. This was an improvement compared to the 38.9% meaning errors recorded in October.

Kris also gave qualitative statements that indicated improvement. He could briefly address some reading strategies. Kris said that he used the “5 finger check” to determine the appropriateness of a book for himself. He stated that he enjoyed reading humour and non-fiction media about war and sports. By the end of the year, he was reading non-fiction materials exclusively, and he was choosing books that were at his reading level. He read more of the books he signed out of the library than he did the previous year. By the end of the project, Kris demonstrated an improved ability to self-monitor for understanding, based on his miscue analysis assessments.

Kris stated, “I can read okay but would like to read more. I am a good reader. I’m not a big reader.” When asked to describe his ability to read, Kris described his reading strategies in simple ways. He said he “sounds out words” and uses the “skip it” method to solve reading problems. About his participation in the study, Kris stated that “I learned a lot from this. I learned about Sadako and paper cranes, a lot of things from Ms. Jensen.”

Some areas of reading remained difficult for Kris. He had to be engaged in the material to complete the tasks. “I read what interests me.” He read with some fluency but rarely adjusted his reading pace when decoding text that was more difficult. He did not visually track to aid comprehension while listening to an audiobook or to other students reading aloud. Kris had

some success taking notes, yet struggled to summarize important concepts from the reading material. He also understood more if an oral discussion followed a reading session, even though he said, “I don’t like to talk about what I read.” He stated that a good reader: “I read a lot and use other words.” He meant that good readers have a larger, more sophisticated vocabulary. Kris said that he reads at night but also he said that he does not like to read at home.

Ed. Ed was a quiet and positive member of the group. He was a good listener and attempted all activities. He worked more slowly to complete his tasks but demonstrated a good effort. In November, I discovered that this student had an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for language. As a result, the expectations in the classroom were reduced to support his slower processing rate of language-based tasks. Others in the group, whether working independently or with a partner, could distract him.

Table 4.6

Data Collection Summary for Ed

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				100	
☒ In school	98.5			99	*
reading report grade	65	68	68	-	*
CASI level	1	1	2	2	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		100		0	
# genre		6		0	
miscue errors (%)		38.9		60	

*indicates improvement

Table 4.6 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Ed's reading attitudes and achievements.

Ed showed improvement in some areas from October to April. He made steady progress in his report card grades for reading and he continued to show improvement in his CASI assessments.

There were other qualitative indicators of his improvement in the area of reading. Ed said that "good readers remember what they read and read lots of things. Reading is important and reading is interesting." Ed was able to extract important information into coherent jotted notes and to retell the important points from fictional and informational texts. When encouraged, Ed

used visual cues, tracking while others read or while he listened to audiobooks or e-books to aid his comprehension. He stated that he liked listening to others read. Ed also stated that he enjoyed reading poetry and adventures. Books about animals and crafts were his favourite non-fiction materials.

At first glance, his circulation data in Table 4.6 makes it appear as though he had reduced the amount of reading and the kind of genres he read during the course of the project. Ed was the only student in the group who did not sign out more books. When I asked him about it, I learned he had selected reading materials from home and from his own classroom. Thus, he had continued to read throughout the year, but did not obtain his books from the school library. Since he did not sign out any books, I could not measure the change in genres that he read during the project period. The genre inventory indicated that he enjoyed many more genres than he recorded in October. The reading interview and the genre inventory thus contradicted the circulation statistics' data. I felt that he showed improvement in these areas.

Ed continued to struggle with fluency when he read selected passages. He showed very little self-monitoring for understanding when reading during the miscue analysis passages. He could describe some simple reading strategies. "I sound it out into smaller parts" was one of his methods. Ed made more errors (60%) that affected understanding of the passage in April than he did in October (38.9%). He said, "I'm not a good reader. I would like to read a bigger book."

Steven. This student greatly enjoyed being included in the project. Steven often visited me in the library at other times during the school day to speak about the project. He missed some lessons because of absences. He had difficulty beginning and completing tasks and was easily distracted by his peers. Steven enjoyed positive feedback from others and often asked for help when it was required. He was extremely motivated to complete work if he could use a computer to complete the task.

Table 4.7

Data Collection Summary for Steven

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				86.8	
☒ In school	79.7			92.81	*
reading report grade	55	48	58	-	*
CASI level	1	-	1	2	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		42		37	
# genre		2		2	
miscue errors (%)		20		10.5	*

*indicates improvement

Table 4.7 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Steven's reading attitudes and achievements.

Steven showed improvement in some areas over the course of the project. His reading grades on his report cards steadily improved over the period. He achieved a better grade on the CASI assessment he completed in the second term.

Improvement was seen in the qualitative data, as well. Steven had some success finding the salient information in informational texts but he struggled to organize his notes into a coherent summary. He understood more of what he read if an oral discussion followed a reading session. Steven showed more self-monitoring when reading during the miscue analysis passages.

Appendices F and G demonstrate the over the shoulder miscue analysis of Steven in October and April, respectively. When reading, he made fewer errors that affected his understanding of the passage in April (10.5%) than in October (20%). He said, "It takes me a long time to read things." About his participation in the study he said, "I need to read more slowly to understand better." These comments show he was thinking about how he read, and demonstrate his improvement in the area of metacognition skills.

Steven's level of engagement varied in relation to the topics and formats of the reading materials. He said that he read at night and read only things that interested him. He also said that he chose his reading material by the number of pages it had. I inferred this to mean that Steven chose shorter books over longer ones.

Steven still struggled to employ several effective reading strategies. He did not visually track as others read or while listening to an audiobook or e-book to aid his comprehension. “I sound it out” was his simple explanation of the reading strategy he used in October. He stated that he enjoyed reading humour and non-fiction texts. By the end of the project, Steven stated that he was interested in reading a wider selection of genres in his genre inventory, although he did not sign out more from the school library. He often signed out more books than he actually read. He stated that he only read 37% of the books he signed out of the library during the study period. Thus, he still struggles to select appropriate reading material. He first stated, “I’m a good reader” in the October interest survey. By April he was saying that, “I want to get better on reading strategies.”

Darryl. Darryl presented as a quiet and positive member of the group. He was a good listener and attempted all activities. Others in the group, whether working independently or with a partner, could distract Darryl. Early on in the sessions, he would avoid written tasks by asking to go to the washroom or by misplacing his pencil. When he felt comfortable with a task, Darryl began immediately. Occasionally he missed sessions because of poor attendance. For example, Darryl was absent for his last CASI assessment, hence it is not available for review.

Table 4.8

Data Collection Summary for Darryl

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08
attendance (% of time in class)				
☒ in project				86.8
☒ In school	79.4			92.8 *
reading report grade	55	58	55	-
CASI level	-	1	1	-
circulation statistics				
# books read (%)		22		36 *
# genre		1		2 *
miscue errors (%)		46.7		10 *

*indicates improvement

Table 4.8 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Darryl's reading attitudes and achievements.

Darryl showed improvement in some areas from October to April. Darryl's attendance greatly improved. He stated that he read 36% of the books he signed out, compared to 22% in the past year. Darryl also signed out books from two different genres by the end of the study, rather than only one, as was the case in October. He showed more self-monitoring for understanding when reading for the April miscue analysis than he did in

October. Only 10% of Darryl's errors affected understanding of the passage, compared to 46.7% of his errors in October's assessment.

The observations and notes made in my learning log indicate that Darryl also showed improvement in the qualitative data collected. While Darryl did not like to talk about what he read (as he stated on his reading survey), talking nonetheless helped Darryl to clarify his understanding; he was better able to complete tasks after engaging in an oral discussion about the reading material. This contradicts Darryl's statement, on his interest survey, that he did not like to discuss what he reads. He said that, "good readers read every night." He was able to extract the important information into coherent jotted notes. Darryl could retell the important points from fictional and informational texts. He chose more reading material appropriate to his interest and reading level by the end of the project. Darryl stated that he enjoyed reading and reads at home. He preferred to read fictional material in the fantasy and humour genres, but expanded his choice of formats and genres during the project. Darryl moved from picture books to chapter books and increased his interests to include adventures and sports-related non-fiction. When asked what he had learned from the sessions, Darryl stated, "I learned about the Globetrotters and a lot about history. I'm kinda a good reader."

Darryl struggled with his reading comprehension in several areas. Organizing his work into a written response was difficult. He liked listening to others read and listening to audiobooks, but he rarely used visual tracking (following along) to aid his comprehension. He did not communicate how he

solved reading problems. He said, “I’m a good reader because I’ve read books for good readers.” Darryl read only what interested him; when his interest waned, so did his level of achievement.

Kevin. This student was a reluctant participant for most of the sessions. He was eager to be part of the group and liked being excused from class, however, once he arrived, Kevin had very few positive comments to contribute to discussions. In January, Kevin suddenly decided to quit participating. After I spoke with him and talked with his parents by phone, Kevin returned to the sessions; however, he did not put forth his best effort to complete tasks. Kevin was easily distracted by others and would behave in various ways to avoid completing assignments. For example, he would often ask to use the washroom immediately after being assigned an independent task. Sometimes he would rush through a task so that he could be the first student to complete it.

Table 4.9

Data Collection Summary for Kevin

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				89.5	
☒ In school	93.6			92.8	
reading report grade	68	68	72	-	*
CASI level	1	2	2	1	
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		60		88.9	*
# genre		3		5	*
miscue errors (%)		36.4		19.9	*

*indicates improvement

Table 4.9 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Kevin's reading attitudes and achievements. Kevin showed improvement in some areas from October to April. His report card grades in reading improved over time. He signed out a wider selection of genres during the year and he read more of the books that he took home. He showed better self-monitoring for understanding when reading during the miscue analysis assessments. In October, 36.4% of the errors made affected his understanding of the passage, but only 19.9% of this type of errors were made during the April assessment.

Improvement was seen in the qualitative data, as well. As recorded in my learning log, I noticed that oral discussions about the reading material, both before and after his reading attempt, helped Kevin to clarify concepts. While Kevin did not like to talk about what he read (as he stated on his reading survey), talking nonetheless helped Kevin to understand the reading material. He said, “I think I’m fluent. I want to read more often.” When encouraged to slow down and “see a movie running in your head,” he was able to recall more content.

Some of Kevin’s reading behaviour showed that he continued to struggle to understand what he read. His reading interest survey in October stated that he enjoyed fiction “because there are easier words” than non-fiction, but by April he had changed his mind and stated, “non-fiction is easier than fiction.” He often read at a pace that was too rapid for his level of comprehension. Often, Kevin’s jotted notes were simply lists of single, unrelated words. These notes lacked organization and made providing an accurate retell from informational and fictional texts very difficult. He stated that he enjoyed all of the opportunities to use the computer, but his navigation of websites was poor. Often, Kevin needed assistance to find the right passages to read. He rarely tracked visually to aid comprehension while listening to audiobooks or to classmates reading aloud. Kevin described “skipping a word” as his reading strategy for handling a reading problem. He stated that he enjoyed reading fiction and sports-related non-fiction materials. He said that “reading is boring” and that he reads “only for school,” which

contradicted his October statement, “I read every night.” Kevin stated that “good readers read every night.” When asked what he learned from the project he said, “I learned nothing.” When asked what do you know about yourself as a reader he wrote “2b a good reader.”

Greg. This student was a reluctant participant for most of the sessions. He was eager to be part of the group and enjoyed the attention of being a selected member. Initially, Greg seemed to be very positive about the project, but his enthusiasm diminished. At one point, he decided, of his own accord, to quit. After a discussion with me and a phone call home to his mother, Greg decided that he would return to the project. Greg missed only one lesson. He could easily distract others from the task at hand. Sometimes he would rush through a task so that he could be the first student to finish. He was viewed as a leader in the group because he appeared fluent when reading and offered responses during oral discussions.

Table 4.10

Data Collection Summary for Greg

data collected	06/07	10/07	03/08	04/08	
attendance (% of time in class)					
☒ in project				97.4	
☒ In school	93.6			92.8	
reading report grade	72	72	68	-	
CASI level	1	3	2	3	*
circulation statistics					
# books read (%)		72		68	
# genre		6		6	
miscue errors (%)		41.7		50	

*indicates improvement

Table 4.10 displays the quantifiable data collected from October 2007 to April 2008, regarding Greg's reading attitudes and achievements.

Greg's October CASI score showed a significant improvement over his preceding one; as this assessment was administered early in the project, it is unclear whether the project contributed to his improvement. Greg demonstrated no improvement in other quantitative measurements of his reading ability and attitude from October to April.

Greg did show improvement in some areas, as can be seen in the qualitative data. He thoroughly enjoyed leading and participated fully in oral

discussions, which contradicted his reading interest survey statement that he did not like to talk about what he read. Greg successfully made text-to-text and text-to-self connections. He enjoyed all opportunities to use the computer; this kept him engaged in the project. Greg stated that he enjoyed reading fiction (horror) and sports-related non-fiction material. He was often able to scan for information, and he knew how to use headings to organize his oral responses. It was obvious that Greg had a lot of experience with website navigation at home.

There were many times when Greg's lack of fluency inhibited his ability to comprehend what he read. His initial reading interest survey stated that he preferred fictional texts to non-fictional texts; by April, however, he had changed his mind and stated the opposite, "Non-fiction is easier than fiction." He often read at a pace that was too rapid for his rate of comprehension. Greg's jotted notes contained extraneous information and this made it difficult for him to concisely summarize the material. For example, when reading non-fiction, Greg would simply list the statistics given. He also failed to show an improvement in his self-monitoring for understanding during his miscue analysis assessments. He made errors that affected his understanding of the passage 50% of the time in his April assessment, compared to his score of 41.7% in October. As a result, Greg's retells lacked detail when given immediately after reading the passage.

Greg was engaged in the reading tasks only when the topic interested him. Thus, he was very much on task when we used the Globetrotters as our

shared reading material but he did not want to participate when we read historical fiction. Greg mentioned that he chose his reading material by its genre. His genre inventory showed no change in the range of genres read and his circulation statistics remained the same for the duration of the project. Greg noted that he “reads out of interest.” In October, he stated, “I’m a good reader because I like long novels. I want to read more often and check out more books.” and, “Ms. Jensen is a good reader because she’s a librarian.” By April, he wrote in his reading interest survey that “reading is boring and I’m an alright reader.” He also stated that he reads for pleasure outside of school. When asked what he learned from the project he said, “I did not learn anything from Ms. Jensen.”

Findings Pertaining to the Group

This section will detail the findings related to the group as a whole. Although interest and participation levels sometimes waned, 100% of the students remained in the project until its completion. All of the boys mentioned at one time or another during the study that they enjoyed coming out of class to assist in my research. Although they seemed happy to be part of the group, this did not always translate into a positive work ethic when there was a task to complete.

The boys shared similar attitudes and patterns when it came to the process of reading. At the beginning of the study, I immediately classified these students as reluctant readers based on my “professional judgement.” I later saw that the boys were not always reluctant to read; their hesitance

depended on the task presented to them. For example, the boys were engaged in reading activities when allowed to read non-fiction material on the Internet. As I collated the data, I discovered that I could categorize these findings about the boys' reading behaviours into six areas. Thus, the following observations and descriptions apply to all of the students in the study. These boys shared similar reading behaviours and reading attitudes. They also shared a narrow view of the reading process and an inadequate understanding of the reading genres available to them. I also noticed that they showed a limited ability to use metacognition skills to effectively solve reading challenges.

Students' definition of reading. The students in this study all described reading as a physical or mechanical activity. This perception is very limiting. When asked what good readers do, participants mentioned that they could read quickly or "read thick books." This is very much the perception of reading held by students in the primary grades. It was surprising to me that students who have had six years of school would think of reading in such a simplistic way. They had not yet internalized reading as a tool for understanding the world around them. These students may use reading as a tool to discover things of interest to them, but they did not connect this to their role as readers in an academic setting. Many of these boys could easily navigate through a website about their favourite sports team with success, yet they did not mention this as something that successful readers do.

Reading attitude. The act of reading was not a regular habit for any of the students in the sample. Some mentioned that they read at home, yet this

seemed inconsistent with their behaviour at school. All of the boys at the beginning of the project signed out many books that they were neither interested in nor capable of completing. Many students purposely did not select books to match their interest or ability at the beginning of the project. The boys also needed to renew their books more often at the beginning of the project because they were not making the time or the effort to read on a regular basis. Some of the boys, like Murray, preferred to stay with the same series of books, often below their reading ability, to make reading easier. Reading was considered boring and was an activity forced upon them only at school.

Genre. The boys had a limited range of genres from which they chose to read. Fantasy, sports, and humour were among their favourites; none of the students knew the difference between a fable and a folktale at the beginning of the project. Upon observing their circulation statistics for an entire school year, Bob and Sean noticed that they read a limited range of genres and recognized that they might try some new ones this year. Most of the boys stated that they enjoyed non-fiction more than fiction. All but one student increased his appreciation for different genres during the project time; however, I felt that the students did not have a lot of experience with a variety of genres when compared to the experiences of avid readers. This lack of breadth in what they chose to read also contributed to a disinterest in reading. These boys seemed to have a poor understanding of the genres available to them.

Fluency. Most of the boys lacked fluency when they read aloud during our project. “Fluency—the ability to read quickly and with expression—is also related to how much you read” (Cunningham & Allington, 2007, p.12). Often, the boys read at a rate that was too fast for their level of comprehension. Their reading sounded mechanical, like a robotic voice, and the boys struggled to retell the main idea afterwards. They did not slow down their rate of reading when they encountered difficult words, like effective readers do. The students felt that reading was hard work and did not see the aesthetic value of reading. They did not like to read, so they did not practice their reading skills in an effort to increase their proficiency. Often, the boys selected material above their reading comprehension level and then found it very difficult to continue. Abandoning a book is a good idea if it is not the right choice, but then it is important to find another suitable book. After repeatedly selecting and failing to complete “hard” books, it is easy to see why the boys might want to give up on reading.

Metacognition skills. These students have been exposed to a wide range of reading strategies in their school careers, yet when asked to describe how they handle reading challenges they provided extremely simplistic reading strategies. All of the boys claimed that they sound out words even though they know that the use of phonics is often an unsuccessful method. They seemed to lack the maturity that junior readers require, and were unable to clearly articulate how and why they read. The boys in the sample did not

apply many of the reading strategies they had seen in class; they seemed unable to apply these strategies independently.

Behaviours. Many of the boys demonstrated behaviours that made reading more difficult. Absenteeism interfered with the flow of the lessons for Kris and Darryl, and this created gaps in their learning.

These students also showed a high level of activity and distractibility, which made it difficult for them to focus on the mini-lesson objectives. For example, the boys quickly dismantled the mechanical pencils that I had given them to use during the first session. As a group, these boys were highly distractible and were quick to get off task when asked to read independently or with a partner. The boys seemed to be moving all of the time and required movement to remain interested. I quickly realized that they would need opportunities to move around during the lessons, if they were to stay on topic and remain focused.

At the beginning of the project, Darryl and Sean attempted to avoid beginning written tasks by asking to go to the washroom. This avoidance behaviour reduced when the boys felt capable of the task.

To maintain their level of engagement and their focus on tasks, I began a behavioural plan whereby the boys could earn computer time if they stayed on task and made a good effort. This worked very well as it greatly reduced the amount of time spent interfering with their peers at the beginning of a work period. They knew that they would be rewarded with five minutes of

free computer time at the beginning of the next session if they followed through with the tasks.

The “free” computer time also acted as an incentive for the boys to arrive on time to the lessons. Alan and Steven, for example, would leave class at the same time as their classmates but would arrive five minutes later than their peers. They had to come to the library from a classroom upstairs or from a portable classroom outside. To increase the speed of their arrival, I implemented a rule that the five-minute time would begin with the arrival of the first student. This greatly encouraged the boys to arrive on time and arrive together. This helped the flow of the lessons, as I then had all of the boys assembled at the start of each lesson.

Most of my findings regarding the students in my study were grouped into the six categories discussed above. Based on my findings, I developed a list of six characteristics of ineffective readers: they see reading as a physical or mechanical activity; they have not developed the habit of reading; they read within a narrow range of genres; they demonstrate limited fluency when reading aloud; they demonstrate limited metacognition skills; and they have difficulty maintaining behaviours conducive to reading. I was surprised to discover that all of the students were impeded by the same characteristics, because I did not recognize the patterns until I analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data. The fact that all of the boys exhibited all six of the traits led me to my definition of a struggling reader, as described later in Chapter Five.

Findings Pertaining to the Research Questions

The additional findings discussed in this section relate to my first three research questions. The analyzed data helped me to understand how I, as teacher-librarian, might improve students' reading comprehension levels. The findings also provided me with a fuller understanding of how struggling students read. This helped me to attempt different approaches to teaching the targeted reading strategies to struggling students. Finally, I learned more about students' reading attitudes and how I might make a positive influence on their reading behaviour. Some of the patterns I noticed in my research confirmed others' research as discussed in Chapter Two.

Reading comprehension. In this section, I will discuss the findings related to reading comprehension that were collected during the project. This relates to my first action research question: How can I, as teacher-librarian, help improve reading comprehension levels of junior-aged students in my school?

Report card grades and CASI assessments. The students' classroom teachers graded and recorded marks for the students' reading grades and the CASI assessment. I collected this data as a quantitative measure of the boys' reading achievement. The findings are summarized for each student in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 respectively.

Figure 4.1. Report Card Grades

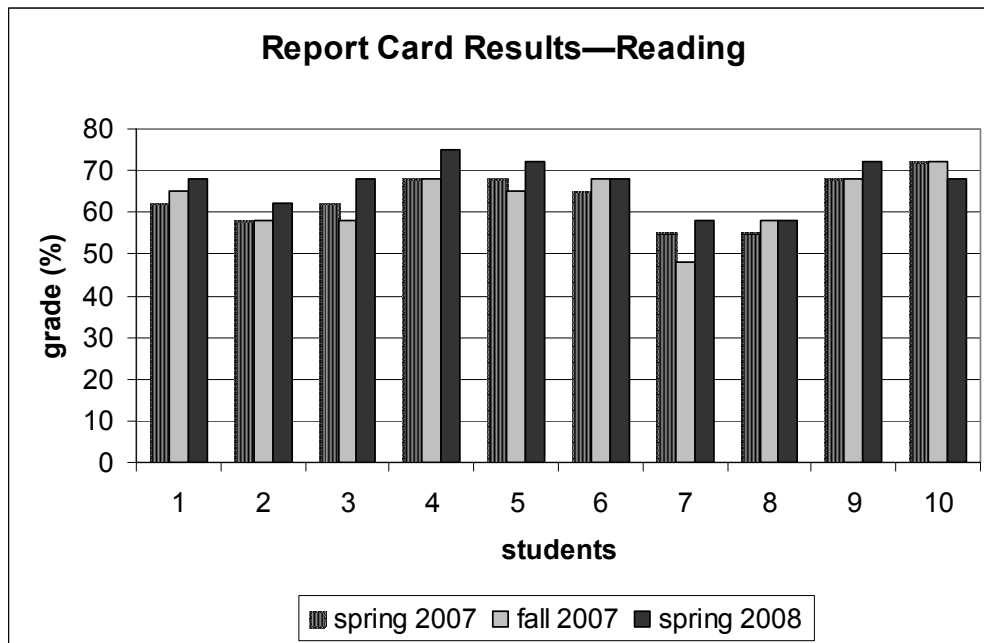


Figure 4.1 displays the grade each student received on his report card for reading. All but Greg showed improvement in their reading grade on their March 2008 report cards, compared to their Grade 4 reading grades. Seven of the students made improvements in their reading grades from November 2007 to March 2008 during the time that they participated in the action research study.

Figure 4.2. CASI Scores

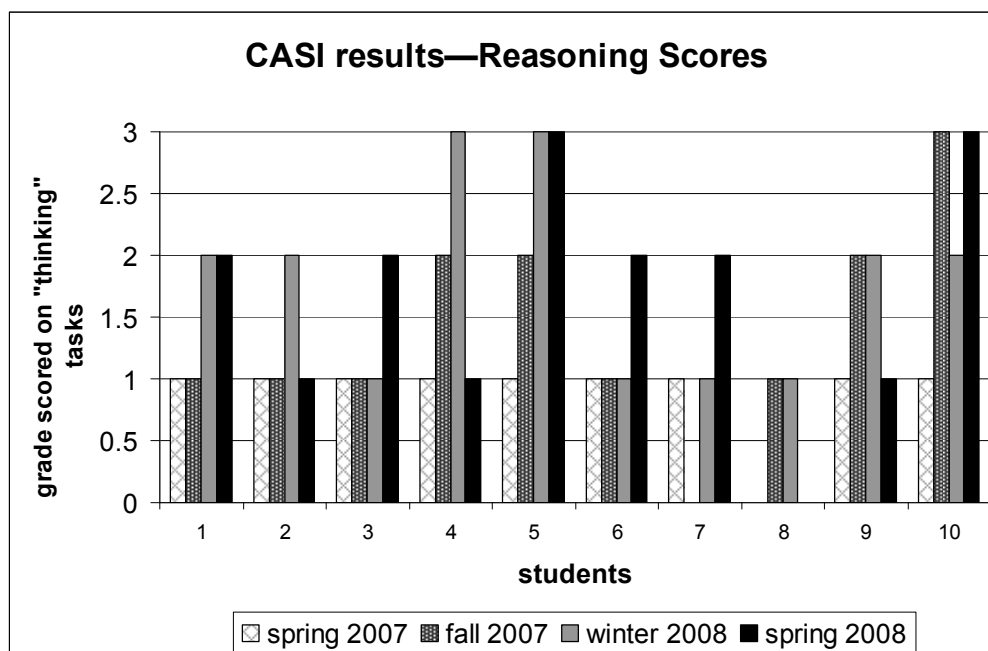


Figure 4.2 shows the students' reasoning scores from the CASI assessment given by their classroom teacher each term. Six of the ten students in my study improved their reasoning scores on their CASI assessments between October 2007 and April 2008. These independent findings indicate that the students' reading comprehension improved during this time.

When I compared the students in my study with other Grade 5 students there was not enough evidence to conclude that the students in my group had improved any more than the students who were not part of the Grade 5 study.

Reading strategies. In this section, I will discuss observations from my learning journal. These have afforded me a deeper understanding of struggling readers, which is invaluable for my professional development. They relate to my second action research study question: What can I learn about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers?

Lack of fluency—checking for understanding. During the miscue analysis assessments, Bob, Steven, Sean, and Darryl did not stop to check for understanding when they lost the sense of what they were reading. They continued along at a rate of reading that was too rapid for their rate of comprehension. They read quickly but without expression, and did not adhere to punctuation cues. Bob, for example, simply substituted another word that started with the same letter but was not similar in meaning. I was surprised that they continued reading even though they had lost the meaning of the passage. It is also important to note that these students did not ask for help when they missed a word. It seemed like reading was merely a mechanical activity for these students. They did not associate reading with a need to think about what they were reading. This finding confirms Fountas and Pinnell's (2006) earlier finding that a lack of fluency hinders comprehension.

Visualization strategies. I taught the students the visualization technique of “seeing a movie in your head when you read.” A few of the boys were able to use this strategy to slow down their reading pace and, thus, make more sense of what they read. Kevin and Ed were able to improve their comprehension level during the miscue analysis assessment by using this method. They also stated at the end of the project that they needed to slow down when they read. This shows that the boys were able to recognize the visualization technique as a comprehension strategy.

Students' attitudes. In this section, I will discuss areas where the students' attitudes about reading varied. These findings relate to my third

research question: How can I positively influence students' attitudes about reading?

Timely feedback. It is interesting to note that Alan, Sean, Darryl, and Greg's level of engagement increased when they received positive feedback immediately after completing a task. The boys attempted to write more and speak more in the discussions when given positive feedback. Conversely, Alan and Steven were affected if they received criticism from the other students. In one case, Alan could not settle down to focus on the task and failed to complete the assignment because of the negative feedback he received.

Oral discussion. Seven of the boys were able to complete a written retell of a passage independently after we talked about the passage as a group. These same students were not capable of completing the task without the oral discussion. This oral discussion or "accountable talk" seemed to help organize their thoughts and clarify what they had read. Greg and Kris said that they did not like to talk about what they read, even though they were more successful when they engaged in an oral discussion before writing. This supports Rosenblatt's theory that reading is an active process, and that one must interact with the text to comprehend it fully (Rosenblatt, 1993). This interesting finding will be discussed further in Chapter Five, as its discovery relates to implications for my practice.

Use of technology. Five of the boys showed engagement to initiate and complete tasks when they were able to use technology. Reading along with a book and CD helped with the comprehension of the material. The CD also provided an example of fluent reading. The computer is another tool I used to maintain engagement. For example, the completion of the reading interest survey given in October on paper required more supervision and assistance to complete than the same survey, delivered via an electronic format, in April. The boys quickly finished the survey because it was on the computer instead of being a “paper and pencil task.” When the boys were asked to read stories on a specific website, they were also quick to begin. The engagement level of the boys was also greater when they could use the computer to complete their retells about what they had read.

Some students showed an improved attitude toward reading in these situations. When I provided positive timely feedback, gave them more time to talk about what they had read, and integrated the use of technology, I observed that some students were more interested in reading. These tools seemed to engage participants and improve their level of understanding of the text. These are important findings that I can incorporate into future literacy lessons. There is also evidence from other studies to support my findings that will be discussed later in Chapter Five.

Summary

The results summarized in this Chapter were obtained from a variety of qualitative and quantitative means. The first section of this chapter described the findings for each student, and allowed the reader to see the individual characteristics of the students. The second section discussed the findings as they applied to all students and categorized them into the six characteristics: definition of reading, reading attitude, genre, fluency, metacognition skills and behaviour. The last section summarized additional observations that related to my original research questions. Thus, Chapter Four discussed my findings as they relate to my action research: How can I help improve reading comprehension? What can I learn about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers? Moreover, how do I positively influence students' attitudes about reading?

Chapter 5 will draw conclusions based on the findings outlined in this chapter and will address my fourth research question: How can I incorporate my new learning into action in my daily and future professional goals?

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

In this final chapter, I will draw conclusions from and provide explanations about my action research findings. My goal was to gain expertise in the teaching of reading strategies to students in the junior grades. In order to measure my effectiveness, I studied the ten students' behaviours, attitudes and levels of achievement within a focused, language-based setting. I considered my teaching practices successful if the students demonstrated improvement in specific categories related to literacy development. My conclusions will discuss what I learned about the struggling readers and their ability to use reading strategies. I reflect on which teaching strategies were most effective in helping my students learn, and I consider how I might apply these strategies and approaches to all students and classes when they come to the school library. There were areas where I struggled to teach a strategy effectively; here, I will outline my next steps as a teacher to develop further my skills in these areas. The success of this research will be judged by the degree to which I apply what I have learned to my daily practice and the degree to which I minimize habitual and ineffectual teaching practices.

My overall impression of the project is that there is still much to learn. This is exactly how I should feel, given the cyclical nature of action research. I have successfully learned to apply some of the theory of reading comprehension strategies to improve the levels of literacy achievement of struggling students.

Chapter Five contains two main sections. The first section will discuss the conclusions I've drawn from my findings. These conclusions answer the first three questions I asked at the beginning of my research. The questions I set out to answer were:

1. How can I, as teacher-librarian, help improve reading comprehension levels of junior-aged students in my school?
2. What can I learn about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers?
3. How do I positively influence students' attitudes about reading?

The second section will describe the implications of my learning. I will outline how my new knowledge will impact upon my daily practice as a teacher-librarian and how my new understandings will impact upon my future professional goals, thus answering my fourth question.

Conclusions

Improving reading comprehension. Although the focus of this action research was to increase my expertise in the effective teaching of reading strategies, I hoped that the time spent working with the students in my group would yield a quantifiable measure of improvement. According to the report card grades and the CASI assessment results, the students in my study showed improvement in their reading levels. This however, shows only limited evidence that my expectations were met, because their scores did not improve at a greater rate than those of the Grade 5 students who did not participate in the study.

I think that the students' report card grades and their CASI results were useful to collect for triangulation purposes, as they helped to verify the qualitative data, but I do not feel that they determined my level of success in this action research.

I feel there are many possible reasons why the CASI results did not indicate more improvement by the students. The CASI assessment allows students a choice of passages to read but some readers select the shortest passage, which is often more difficult to read. If I were to revise the action research program, I would observe the behaviour of the students as they wrote the CASI assessments, to ensure that they selected passages that interested them and that they were capable of reading. This lack of interest may have been the reason for the dramatic increase and decrease in Greg's results. He may have selected a passage that did not interest him in the second term. If I were to repeat this research, I would want to observe the students to determine if they used the strategies practiced in our sessions when completing the CASI assessment. This would be a better indicator of my impact.

The other weakness of the CASI assessment is that students must write their responses; thus their reading comprehension achievement is linked to their writing ability. As struggling readers, the students in my study were also struggling writers. At the time, the assessment did not allow a student to provide oral responses or discuss his or her answers before completing a written response. Thus, I feel that the design of this assessment limits

struggling readers from demonstrating their full ability, and so should not be used as the sole measure of progress. .

I feel that the CASI assessment, with its limitations, may not be the best method to evaluate student achievement, as there are multiple facets to becoming an effective reader. As a teacher-librarian, I can affect positive change, but my influence may not be reflected in an individual's CASI scores.

Since I saw areas of improvement in other qualitative and quantitative measures, I do not consider the CASI results a true summary of the effectiveness of my action research. I now recognize some of the obstacles that students face to show their understanding and the effort required by teachers to draw the best results from students.

Teaching reading strategies to struggling readers. Working with my small group of students allowed me to learn more about the way I teach and about the way struggling readers learn. I discovered I had many assumptions about students in the junior grades, based on my previous teaching experiences. I also found some challenges in planning effective lessons for the students. Some of the teaching strategies I found to be effective are discussed in this section.

Defining the struggling reader. I concluded that my group of reluctant readers—as viewed by their teachers and peers—were better named struggling readers. The students in the study appeared to be reluctant readers because they chose not to read the material assigned to them and they achieved low grades in reading assessments. Struggling readers are

“disengaged from reading activities that are related to schooling” (Guthrie & Davis, 2003, p.61). Nevertheless, as I observed them, I began to create my own description of the students. I prefer to call these students struggling readers because they were not reluctant to begin a reading task if they were interested in the format or the subject material. They did struggle, however, to comprehend the material when reading independently and had great difficulty communicating what they learned from their reading.

These struggling readers all shared common behaviour and attitudes around reading, which helped to change my tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge refers to the implicit or intuitive concepts on which one operates (Newton & Sackney, 2005). As I worked with them, these students helped me to uncover the many assumptions I had accumulated over time as a teacher.

I discovered that many of my familiar teaching methods were less effective when the selected students consisted of only struggling readers. My measurement of success in a whole-class setting used to rely heavily on the feedback received from the stronger and more engaged readers in the class. My time spent engaged in this action research project has made me more conscious of the students who do not respond when I teach a whole class lesson.

Some of my preconceived ideas about learning differed from what I observed; students in the junior grades retrieve and comprehend texts in ways that I had not anticipated. During the miscue analysis assessment, the students read along, without checking for understanding. Since they did not self-

correct as they read, they found it difficult to provide a simple retelling of the passage. From this experience, I learned that some students need to read in small chunks and stop to make notes, ask questions, or discuss the passage to ensure a good level of comprehension.

I was also reminded, when working with these students, that a large number of students will not understand something they read, even though they *appear* to be reading. These students receive grades in the C and D range because they often misinterpret the task. In the future, I will be more cognizant of the quiet students who fall “under the radar” in a busy classroom. To assist with this, I will create a tracking sheet to ensure that I confer with all students.

Prior to my research, I had also forgotten how active junior-aged students could be. The first meeting demonstrated their need to move around, as they were constantly fidgeting and moving items. They seemed to enjoy coming out from class to join the study, but then they would just as eagerly distract each other from completing tasks. “Junior students need opportunities to move and engage in active learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13). They were easily distracted and needed constant reminders to get back on task. I will make sure that I incorporate time to move around during future lessons in the library, in an effort to release the extra energy that these students need to expend.

Some of the tacit understandings about students that I possessed prior to beginning my work with the participants were, in fact, incorrect. This small

group of struggling readers helped me to realize that many of my habitual teaching methods required modification, in order to engage all students. I now know that a group of students in every class will need smaller group lessons to stay focused, time to pause and check their level of comprehension, and opportunities to be active.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, I discovered all of the students in my study shared the same six scholastic characteristics that made them ineffective readers. I used to call these students “reluctant” readers but now I see them as struggling readers. These boys shared similar reading behaviours and reading attitudes. As I summarized my results, I was able to create for myself and possibly for my peers, a working definition of a struggling reader in the junior grades, based on the ten boys in my study.

Ineffective readers struggle to understand because of the following characteristics:

1. All of the struggling readers in the project shared a narrow view of the reading process.
2. They also shared a narrow view of the reading genres available, which limited their interest in reading.
3. Their lack of fluency and critical thinking skills inhibited their level of comprehension.
4. They lacked the metacognition skills to self-assess how to deal with reading challenges.

5. All of these traits then attributed to negative attitudes about reading and drove their avoidance behaviours around reading.
6. They rarely read for pleasure, which reduced their fluency and comprehension. Thus, they did not get positive reinforcement from reading as avid readers do.

Influencing students attitudes about reading. During my action research project, I found that the students were more engaged in the reading tasks and were able to comprehend more fully when I used the following reading strategies. I considered these activities successful because the students participated fully and managed to complete the task in a guided lesson setting with minimal instruction. The use of a visualization strategy, the use of audio formats for reading material and the opportunity to discuss what they read all helped the students to understand the content of what they were reading. These are some ways that I can make reading a more positive experience for all readers, but especially for struggling readers.

Visualization. When the boys drew a picture of a reading passage, they seemed better able to recall details. Imagining a “movie in your head” when they read helped most of the boys monitor their own pace of reading and, thus, their understanding of the text. By the end of the project, two of the boys were using the movie technique regularly and considered it a strategy that helped them to better understand what they read. Both boys were able to slow down their reading and visualize as they read and, as a result, were able

to provide more coherent and detailed retells. Terry Thompson (2008) successfully used graphic novels and visualization to deepen a reader's understanding of texts.

Use of audio resources as a format. The boys enjoyed being read aloud to, whether by me, by a CD recording or by an audio clip (e-book) on the computer. Whenever I incorporated these audio readings, the boys were more receptive to begin the task. As listeners, they were not struggling with pronunciation or vocabulary challenges. As a result, they could concentrate solely on the meaning of the passage. I used audio recordings when I wanted to increase their enjoyment of reading. These boys benefited from hearing others read fluently, as many needed to hear the correct way to pronounce and phrase sentences. Selected passages, read by male readers, also helped to maintain the boys' interest. The use of an audio recording allowed the students to learn more about a topic of interest than they would be able to learn from reading independently. This tool helped to keep the students engaged, and it provided them with good examples of fluent reading.

Oral discussion. It was most difficult to keep the boys on task when there was a written task to perform. Those who rarely read also limit their ability to write well, because they lack good examples on which to model their own writing. The Office of Standards in Education, UK (OFSTED) noted in their 2003 study, "There is a correlation between the range and quality of a

student's reading and the student's development as a writer" (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 13).

Some readers who lack fluency skills will behave in ways to avoid writing. When students were asked to compose written responses to demonstrate their understanding of the selected reading passages, many exhibited avoidance behaviours, such as asking to go to the washroom, taking a mechanical pencil apart, or interfering with fellow students.

I learned that the boys were more capable of completing a written task if there was an oral discussion and examples were provided in advance. This is a place where the think-aloud strategy worked really well. Students needed to see a competent reader think through the reading process in order to recognize that all readers must actively work with a text.

The readers in my study demonstrated more understanding of the material when we incorporated visualization, use of audio resources, or oral discussions into our lessons. As they engaged with the texts, the students' comprehension of the material improved; this resulted in a positive reading experience. Thus, these strategies helped me to influence the students' reading attitudes in a positive way.

Development of effective readers. My second conclusion regarding how I might positively affect students reading attitudes, and thus their achievements, stems from the six characteristics of ineffective readers, as identified in Chapter Four.

The students in my study did not make reading a daily habit. They were unaware of the variety of genres available to them and they often stated that reading was “boring.” They also showed limited metacognitive strategies for solving problems while reading. They considered reading a chore forced on them at school, and they remained unaware that they read outside of school for other purposes.

The boys in my study all shared these same characteristics as struggling readers. With these characteristics in mind, I formulated a set of goals that I will use in the library to help students. Figure 5.1 outlines these six goals for teaching reading which are: increase fluency with practice, develop a habit of reading, define reading as a way to learn interesting things, develop behaviour conducive to reading, expand knowledge of genres and increase metacognition skills.

Figure 5.1. Six Goals for Teaching Reading



As the teacher-librarian, I feel I can encourage the achievement of these six goals by providing the setting and resources so that students can improve their reading ability and attitudes about reading. These goals have now become my foci when I initiate team teaching activities and when I implement new library programs in my school. I feel I can improve reading comprehension levels indirectly by collaborating with the literacy team in my school.

The conclusions I drew from my action research answered my initial questions. The students showed improvement in their reading comprehension

during their participation in my study, but the areas of improvement seen cannot necessarily be attributed to my teaching. Reading requires a wide range of skills, and the students learned a variety of skills from others during the research period.

My conclusions have helped me to reflect on my current teaching practices and determine their effectiveness when teaching struggling students. Evaluating my teaching style was of great help as I now recognize some ineffective old habits, which I can change. I also developed some effective teaching techniques to assist students to improve their comprehension when reading texts. For example, the use of audio formats, visualization techniques, and oral discussion times all increased student engagement in reading during this study.

The definition of the struggling reader was based on the commonalities the boys shared about reading in both attitude and achievement. Developing a definition of the struggling reader from the findings was a valuable exercise, as it highlighted the areas that I should focus on, as the teacher-librarian, to help improve students' reading achievement. My conclusions relate back to this definition as I focused on the six areas required to be an effective reader. I believe that I will make a positive impact on the reading attitudes of students in my school when I include these components in my programming decisions in the library. The ways in which I can put these ideas into action will be discussed further in the next section.

Implications

From my findings with the students in the study, I defined six characteristics of ineffective readers, which helped me determine six goals for teaching reading. The six goals helped me to think about specific ways in which I could help readers in my school. This new knowledge can be applied to the way I work, with the students and staff in my school, to improve literacy skills.

The fourth question I set out to answer is discussed here, as it required me to reflect upon how I might change my practice to improve student learning.

How can I incorporate what I learned into my daily practice? The completion of this action research challenged my tacit knowledge about teaching students in the junior grades. My evaluation of some of my teaching habits helped me to identify ineffective practices. As I learned more about the struggling readers, I developed ways to adapt my lessons to meet the needs of the students. I gained more expertise in the effective way to teach reading strategies, which I will apply to my lessons in the library.

The conclusions made about the ways I can positively influence students' attitudes about reading are, in my opinion, the most important conclusions, because of their implications. I can easily apply the six goals for teaching reading into my daily role as the teacher-librarian. Thus, my conclusions regarding struggling readers have altered how I perform some of my duties.

Assisting students to select appropriate reading material and building a relevant and rich collection are always the main goals of a teacher-librarian. I realize that this is a very important part of my role as the teacher-librarian. The school library is the main source of reading materials—both informational and recreational—for many of the families in my school.

As the teacher-librarian, I make the library a welcoming space that is conducive to reading, and I organize the library to encourage students to find resources independently. I select a variety of formats and genres to complement classroom reading goals. Although the library is a busy place, filled with students and staff, it is still a place to browse for books or to ask for reading suggestions. I provide opportunities for avid readers to join programs such as the Ontario Library Association's Forest of Reading program. For the last three years, I have also organized a "Boyz Read" club in my school for "reluctant boy readers."

Participation in such programs is a way to increase students' interest in voluntary reading and encourage students to develop positive reading habits and attitudes. Providing interesting material, at the appropriate reading level, benefits the students in my school, because it gives them more opportunities to improve their fluency and comprehension. Thus, I plan to use what I have learned to build upon the vibrancy and efficacy of my library.

The six characteristics of ineffective readers, as identified in my study, led me to develop goals to improve my teaching of reading comprehension skills. I will discuss the ways in which I will incorporate these six goals for

teaching reading to support struggling readers. I developed four planning priorities (see Figure 5.2) for team teaching, which address these six goals. When planning, in future, with my colleagues, we will integrate students' interests, checks for understanding, opportunities to think critically, and time to develop metacognition skills into the lessons. These were the areas that the boys and I found most challenging during my action research project.

Klinger, Lee, Stephenson, Deluca, and Luu (2009) observed teacher-librarians in exemplary schools to identify and define possible best practices for other school libraries. Their study found effective collaboration to be an effective tool. "The most successful programs were characterized by teacher-librarian and classroom teacher collaborations in terms of teaching, learning and library use." I feel that teacher collaboration is very important to student achievement because the quality of teaching improves when teachers plan together. During this action research project, I learned ways to make my collaboration times more effective

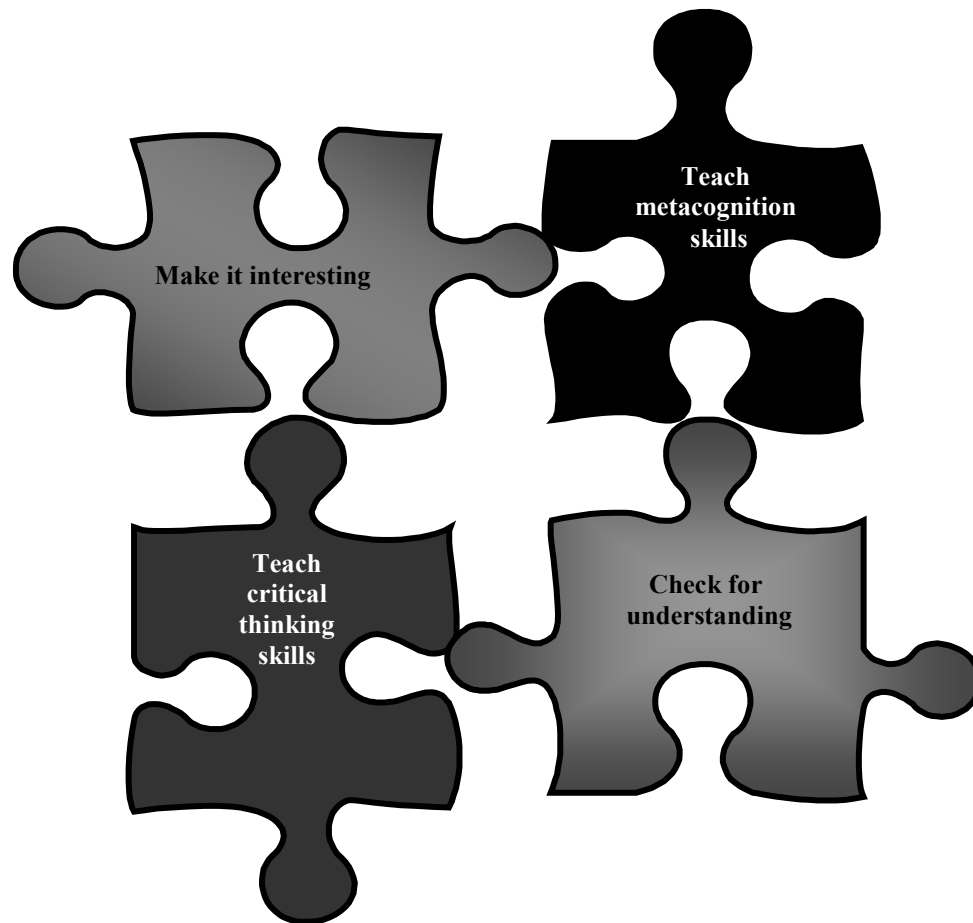
Figure 5.2 outlines the strategies I will use to support my peers in the teaching of literacy skills. As the teacher-librarian in my school, I have an opportunity to plan with all classroom teachers, in all grades, when their students use the library. The four planning priorities for team teaching are depicted as parts of a jigsaw piece; they are interconnected and equally important strategies for supporting the readers in our classes, which are more effective when used together than when used in isolation.. I believe that they should always be part of our team-teaching goals, in order to improve

students' literacy development. I will endeavour to incorporate these four priorities when I plan literacy activities with my colleagues.

These planning priorities were derived from the patterns I discovered through the boys' participation in the reading project. Using lesson plans based on these priorities will encourage literacy growth and, at the same time, provide struggling readers with more tools to assist with the comprehension of texts.

The following section will describe each of these priorities in more detail, as they apply to my role in the school. I feel that all four "pieces of the puzzle" must be considered when planning and implementing programs for students. A sample collaboration form that I will use when team teaching is included in Appendix H.

Figure 5.2. Four Planning Priorities for Team Teaching



Make it interesting. Creating projects and library activities that are relevant and engaging for students, as well as pedagogically sound, can sometimes be difficult. Often the teacher's interest and the students' interests are not the same. It was worth the time to collect information on the students' interests about what they like to read at the beginning of the research project so that I could select resources of interest. During the project, I struggled to keep the activities new and interesting. For most of the boys interesting meant learning facts. This explains the condition of the Guinness Books of Records in my library: The book is well worn despite the newness of the school.

Guinness Record Books are exactly the type of books struggling readers enjoy. They are filled with facts; students can read the books and then talk about them with their peers.

Selecting interesting material that is at the right reading level for the students is challenging. I now understand why many of the students who sign out books do not read them: They abandon the books—even though they are on topics of interest to the students—because they are too difficult to read. Tony Stead (2009) illustrated this when he showed a video of a student who could not find a book to read. The student kept abandoning books. I now realize that sometimes when a student cannot find a good match it is because I do not have the right book. The right book is one that is of interest and one that is at the correct reading level.

I have learned that, as I add to our school library's collection of books I also must be cognizant of providing books for a variety of different reading levels, as well as a variety of different interests. I have learned that students need reading material below their guided reading level, so that they can read the material with independence. Both their enjoyment and their comprehension will increase if they do not have to struggle to decode the material. In order to complete research projects, the research materials must be within the students' comfort level. Many publishers of educational material produce books, particularly in the content areas of science and social studies, for individual grade levels. Unfortunately, these books are often too difficult to read independently by students in the specified grade. I became

aware of this fact during my research with the students. I will incorporate my new understanding when purchasing new materials for my library.

My new-found knowledge has altered the way I select fiction and non-fiction materials for the library in several ways. I now buy more non-fiction at lower reading levels, and I buy more fiction for the older students at a lower reading level. For example, my Grade 8 students enjoy the series of books I purchased, which discuss young adult issues in realistic settings, even though they are at a guided reading level much below their reading ability. This is an example of the value of providing a variety of books, at and below the reading levels of the students.

Another way I kept the boys engaged was by finding ways to incorporate technology. When the task was reading from a website or using a computer to write out responses, students completed more of the task than they did without the use of the technology. For example, when I converted the CASI reading interest survey from a paper and pencil task to an online task, the boys more eagerly and quickly completed the survey. The use of the computer to complete a written task increased their engagement and provided me with the feedback that I needed.

As the teacher-librarian and the computer lead in the school, I feel that integrating technology is part of my role. Lutz, Guthrie, & Davis (2006) note that finding ways to keep students interested increases achievement. It is easy to make a project more interesting when students know that they will be using information communication technology to create or share their work.

I enjoy learning along with the students and like to try new styles of technology. For example, I have taught students to create web pages in past years but this year we are engaged in the use of weblogs and wikis to further our communication and information literacy skills. Weblogs and wikis are interactive ways to communicate online with others. Students enjoy the newer technology and work harder to edit and revise their work when they know that their peers will read the presentations. Thus, it is important to include such interesting activities for students when planning library activities. As Wilhelm (2009) asks, "If the assignment is not interesting to you as the teacher, then why are you giving it to the students?" Students need to develop a positive attitude about reading to attain a high level of engagement. When teachers provide carefully planned projects and students become genuinely engaged, their behaviour towards reading improves greatly.

Check for understanding. In my study, assessment tools, like the over the shoulder miscue analysis, demonstrated that struggling students would continue to read material even when they no longer understand the meaning of the text. Fluency is correlated to comprehension. Now that I am aware of this, I will incorporate more checks for understanding into the work I do with students in the library.

I will take more time with oral explanations and check that students understand the task. Taking more time to prepare the students for what they are about to read is valuable. Relating the new task with experiences or prior

knowledge helps to increase the student's reading comprehension level (Cunningham & Allington, 2007, p.114).

I will engage in more oral discussions and track more carefully during research classes to ensure that the “quiet” students do not go unnoticed. For example, an “exit ticket” out of class is a great way to have students quickly reflect on the facts or process of learning. To earn a ticket, students must share a fact about what they learned during the research period. This provides insight into how the student is processing his/her learning.

Another way to check for understanding is to create an opportunity for students to discuss what they have read with the teacher or with a peer. This helps students consolidate their learning along the way; it also gives them the opportunity to ask for clarification, if needed, before the students prepare the final report. This valuable feedback is essential for students to learn metacognition skills and for teachers to adjust their lessons to ensure learning success. Whenever the students in the research study had time to discuss the reading, they were always more capable of starting and finishing the written tasks. This was a great discovery.

Other researchers have also found oral discussion to be a valuable way to improve comprehension. Barrs and Pidgeon (1993) list providing time to talk about what they read as a strategy for success for improving boys' literacy skills (p.24). Accountable talk sessions, wherein teachers give students the time to respond to higher-order questions, is another effective way to increase students' comprehension (Wolf, 2006). Students enjoy

talking about their work, and I will make sure that I incorporate time for students to share with their peers, before they complete written answers. This will benefit all students, as some strong readers benefit from the oral discussion time to organize their thoughts. Thus, a higher level of comprehension for all students and abilities is possible. These are the kind strategies that I will incorporate into my future team teaching opportunities.

Teach critical thinking skills. It is important to develop critical thinking skills in children, so that they can become thoughtful adults. Critical thinking is the thoughtful response to what one reads. It is the ability to question and evaluate the authority of the text while reading (Booth, 2008, p.11). Being able to recognize a reliable source when completing research and to understand the intention of media is essential in our information age. Tony Stead believes that we need to expose students to more non-fiction formats at earlier ages, so that they learn how to write in this style. We, as teachers, have relied heavily on the narrative structure, because it is often within our area of comfort. Students need to be able to understand non-fiction, as well as narrative fiction, to help them develop into critical thinkers (Stead, 2005). The research process encourages the students to think their way through a problem. Sharing in the selection and processing of resources is an excellent way to help students to think deeply about the world around us.

I have established a school-wide research model based on the four-step research model from the Ontario School Library Association:

Step1: Prepare

Step 2: Access

Step 3: Process

Step 4: Transfer Knowledge

More details about this model can be found in the graphic organizer in Appendix I. This four-step process is a model that students and teachers follow to aid in the production of quality research. It is similar to the action research model that I have used in the project, as there is time set aside to reflect and think of how to improve the next time. It incorporates the use of many critical thinking skills.

I have been using this model with classes for the last three years but now I want to make more of an effort to model the benefits of this research process for my peers. If more teachers develop assignments where students are required to use and develop “higher-thinking skills,” the students will develop effective critical thinking skills and student achievement will improve. As I build upon the students’ research skills, I can increase the sophistication of the research projects mastered at each grade.

The knowledge that I gained from the project has provided me with the drive to seek out more teachers with whom I can co-teach this year, and to bring younger students into the library for research tasks. The results of this project have confirmed my belief that students must learn to navigate successfully through our world of information and misinformation. It is very important for teachers to plan the integration of these critical literacy skills into all school activities, in order to improve students’ ability to comprehend.

Students in the junior division need to understand that reading is not just a mechanical process, but also a way to learn more about the world around them.

Teach metacognition skills. The ability to self-assess our strengths and weaknesses is fostered by the practice of metacognition skills. As adults, we rarely make time to reflect upon our lessons, our classes, or our lives. When I began taking Masters of Education courses, I realized how valuable it was to me to make time for thoughtful reflection. The framework of action research enabled me to review my teaching practices. It helped me to realize that I need to demonstrate self-reflection for students.

Successful readers are constantly assessing their strategies and have a sense of when they need to slow down or speed up their rate of reading depending on the genre or format of the reading selection. They also know that the purpose of reading dictates the level of comprehension required.

Developing and implementing this action research project has helped me to learn more about my style of teaching and its effectiveness. Students also need time to self-evaluate the process of their learning, so they can better identify where they need to go next with their learning progression. Self- and peer-assessments are helpful tools to provide feedback for teachers and students about the value of the learning experience. I will make sure that I include time for self-assessment in the lessons that I teach.

Appendix J is a sample of the self-evaluation form that I use with my students in Grades 7 and 8, upon the completion of their research projects. I

now make sure that they have enough time to complete this page in class, as it helps students assess their strengths and weaknesses when completing a research project. The careful completion of a research project develops critical thinking skills and requires students to generate questions and process information from a variety of resources for a specific task. I will also create self-assessment forms for younger students to promote metacognition skills. These types of activities will be encouraged during my team-teaching times in the library, to promote critical thinking and metacognition skills.

Figure 5.2 depicts the areas that I will include when I am team teaching in the library, in an effort to improve the quality of the literacy experiences for students at my school. “People are motivated to learn by success and competence. When students feel ownership and have choice in their learning, they are more likely to invest time and energy in it” (Katz, 2006, p 6). I discovered this with my group of students on several occasions. Appendix F is a sample collaboration organizer form, which I will now use to remind me to include these four components into our literacy activities.

The completion of this action research project has taught me many things about how struggling readers learn in the junior division. Finding successful teaching strategies for struggling readers will enhance my teaching of all students. I have become aware of my misconceptions and old teaching habits, which are ineffective with some students. This was very important to learn, because teacher-librarians must find ways to reach struggling readers, as they are most at risk of failure. We know from research that the presence of a

qualified, full-time teacher-librarian is positively correlated with the enjoyment of reading (People for Education, 2006). I am more aware of the struggling readers in the junior grades, and I can implement the effective strategies I have learned to support them when they come to the library.

As I reflect upon the action research process and my findings, I have been able to draw many conclusions about reading and the teaching of reading. I have discovered many possible answers to my original four questions. In this last section, I will then discuss my next steps as a lifelong learner.

Implications for my future professional development. I learned many things about myself, as a teacher, from the completion of this action research project. I have gained confidence in my abilities to communicate with other teachers about literacy strategies and teaching ideas. I feel better prepared to assist students and teachers in the area of reading comprehension. I also discovered that many of the skills that the struggling reader in the junior division lacks are the same skills that students in the primary division are learning. I feel that I can now assist struggling readers in the intermediate grades because they are struggling with the same fluency problems as the junior-aged student—problems that adversely affect their reading comprehension.

Many of the concepts discussed in this thesis are areas about which I had some background knowledge. My action research, therefore, gave me the opportunity to refine my skills and evaluate the quality of my teaching style.

Being able to focus on reading strategies helped to consolidate my skills.

Some of the discoveries that I made about myself and how I teach are discussed below.

Seeking feedback. I found that I am very reliant on feedback and require it to keep me engaged in all of my personal and professional interests. I must remember that feedback is equally important to all students but, even more so, for students who do not ask for it. Many of the boys in my group have learned that if they are quiet in class they can be invisible and avoid attention. Some of these boys have mastered the art of being invisible by pretending to read so that they appear to be on task. These students benefit more from small group teachings, because immediate feedback provides the encouragement they require to persevere with reading tasks. Students' engagement increases when timely feedback is given about their efforts. Dr. Katz described this in an assessment lecture to teachers. Research has shown that feedback has the greatest influence on student achievement (Katz, 2008).

Providing feedback to students about their efforts is an important factor, but I also learned that feedback about how students read is very important to shape my teaching strategies. The use of Davenport and Lauritzen's over the shoulder miscue analysis assessment was one of the best ways for me to assess the fluency and comprehension level of a student in the junior grades. It takes about five minutes to complete an assessment, which is an important consideration when there are 35 students in a classroom. A great deal of information can be gathered about the way a student has applied or not

applied reading strategies with this assessment. It identifies patterns in the way a student reads and how these patterns affect the meaning of the passage. I have used this miscue analysis with other students to assist teachers at my school. The results of this practical and informative test may guide the strategies used with a specific student. I will continue to use this effective method to inform me about a student's reading ability and to plan teaching strategies.

Improving questioning techniques. I found myself relying on low-level basic comprehension questions to get the students engaged in conversations when teaching this small group. Alternatively, I would ask a question requiring a high level of thinking, but I would not give the boys time to think about the question. Most of the time, I jumped in and answered it myself without giving the students' time to formulate a response or to lose interest. Even though I know these low level questions do not engage students, I have continued to use basic comprehension questions when working with my students.

The development of good critical thinkers requires me, both as a teacher and as a role model to other teachers, to use a variety of thought-provoking questions to elicit thoughtful responses. I would like to see this modelled in classrooms in my school and I will take advantage of the eworkshop.on.ca video lessons online to get me started on the road to better questioning techniques. Critical literacy is an important skill required by all learners. "Questioning is the catalyst for deep thinking" (Koechlin, 2009).

Through my action research, I have gained knowledge about the importance of critical thinking; this knowledge has influenced me to take a leadership role in this area with my peers. As a result, I became involved in a project funded by the Ontario Teachers' Federation: I submitted a proposal to complete a critical literacy project with three other teacher-librarians. We developed units to use with classroom teachers to encourage critical literacy skills in our students. We incorporated critical thinking skills into research projects in the primary, junior and intermediate grades. Then, we piloted the units in our schools, used teacher moderation to assess the students' work, and used teacher feedback to refine the unit plans. We will share these unit plans among the teacher-librarians in our school district. The Ontario Teachers' Federation will post the unit plans on their website, so others can use our lessons to improve critical literacy skills in their classrooms. This funding approval demonstrated that critical literacy goals are important. The project has provided me with another valuable learning opportunity. I do not think that I would have applied for this professional grant or been as capable a project leader, prior to my action research.

Strengthening my own metacognition skills. Another effective way to teach students how to think about the way in which they learn is to model think-alouds. I found that I struggled greatly with this during the project. With the exception of teaching multi-step, problem solving in mathematics to my Grade 8 students, I rarely used the think-aloud process as a teaching tool. I now believe that this is a very powerful tool for students; it allows them to

see inside an effective reader's head and to understand that all readers actively work to make sense of what they read. Think-alouds provide a framework for students to model their reading comprehension strategies. Participating in these exercises can increase a student's self-awareness about how he or she learns. It also shows them that "expert" readers must persevere to complete tasks. I intend to visit other classrooms in my school and school district to see examples of successful think-alouds in the junior grades, in order to improve my competence in this area.

I have learned a great deal about myself as a teacher of reading strategies, and about how I can apply these strategies to my everyday interactions with students. I have learned more about the reading process by observing the students' efforts. I have also learned to teach reading comprehension skills in many practical and effective ways. This year, I will work to incorporate specific reading skills into my library program to support all students.

I have learned that many of the programs I currently run in the library are valuable and should continue, as they employ some of the six categories that readers need to develop stronger literacy skills. My conclusions have provided me with confirmation of their importance. This gives me more confidence and energy to develop the programs, to make them relevant to students' interests and academic needs.

Summary

My confidence to help students and staff with literacy programming has increased as a result of conducting this project. I now feel that I can be a leader of literacy initiatives at my school and fulfill the very important role of the teacher-librarian. With my new focus on the importance of encouraging all students to enjoy reading, and my renewed interest in developing critical literacy goals and metacognitive skill building opportunities, I have a clearer understanding of how I can improve the literacy skills in my school.

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Appendix A
Sample Lesson Plan

Literacy Lesson Plan	
Grade 5	November 19-23
Lesson Focus: Guided reading Summarization on non-fiction text	
Strategy: Taking notes to improve quality of summary	
Curriculum Connections: Language:	
Materials Needed: - Non-fiction High Five series "The Globetrotters" begin at Chapter 3 - CD player - Horseshoe table and chairs, paper, pencils	
What teachers do	What students do
Before Strategy Remind them of strategies to use: - follow along as text is read - create one point per paragraph - notice subtitles - look at pictures	Watching teacher and ensuring that he understands strategies that were practices last week.
During Strategy review any difficult vocabulary- scandal, retired Observe behaviour and make anecdotal notes	Actively listening to CD and making jot notes
After Strategy Discuss any successful uses of any above mentioned strategies	Demonstrate understanding of text through oral and written communication Write a brief summary of the content in Chapter 3
Assessment: Review jot notes taken by the students to see if there were improvements in the organization and quality of the notes from when we did this in shared reading practice.	

Appendix B
Sample Completed Lesson Plan

Literacy Lesson Plan	
Grade 6	November 19-23
Lesson Focus: Guided reading Summarization on non-fiction text	
Strategy: Taking notes to improve quality of summary	
Curriculum Connections: Language: fluency in reading	
Materials Needed: - Non-fiction High Five series "The Globetrotters" begin at Chapter 3 - CD player - Horseshoe table and chairs, paper, pencils	
What teachers do	What students do
Before Strategy Remind them of strategies to use: - follow along as text is read - weak - create one point per paragraph ✓ - notice subtitles ✓ - look at pictures ✓	Watching teacher and ensuring that he understands strategies that were practiced last week. - most of boys did - Gus - nodded like they were understanding
During Strategy review any difficult vocabulary- scandal, retired Observe behaviour and make anecdotal notes	Actively listening to CD and making jot notes - often lost focus
After Strategy Discuss any successful uses of any above mentioned strategies 1 point per paragraph	Demonstrate understanding of text through oral and written communication Write a brief summary of the content in Chapter 3
Assessment: Review jot notes taken by the students to see if there were improvements in the organization and quality of the notes from when we did this in shared reading practice. continue next time at p. 34	

absent - Kris
- Sean

not transferring
any
strategies

Observations:

Alan highly distracted - never looks at words to follow along when listening to CD.

Murray - looked like he was listening
Ed. - taking in information and making approp. notes

Steven - gave up 1/2 way through reading with following along
- not focused during reading

Darryl - never looked at book while listening - not using cues.

Kevin + Greg very focused
"this reminds me of"
lots of writing quality?

Appendix C

Reading Interest Survey

Reading Interview

Name: _____ **Age:** _____

Grade: _____ **Term:** _____ **Date:** _____

1. Do you think you are a good reader? How do you know?	
2. a) What do you find easy to read? What makes it easy? b) What do you find difficult to read? What makes it difficult?	
3. What is the last reading that you did that you really enjoyed? Why?	
4. How do you choose books to read?	
5. a) How do you know when you don't understand what you are reading? b) When you have difficulty understanding what you are reading, what do you do?	
6. a) When you are reading and you come to a word you don't know, what do you do? (prompt if necessary, Do you ever do anything else?) b) Which of these strategies do you do most often?	
7. How often do you read when you are not at school?	
8. What kind of reading do you do using technology? (e.g., websites, e-mail, CD-ROMs, MSN, text messages)	
9. a) If you knew that someone was having difficulty reading a <i>story</i> , how could you help? b) If you knew that someone was having difficulty reading an <i>information article</i> , how could you help?	
10. Think of someone who is a good reader. What do you think makes that person a good reader?	
11. Do you read in any other language(s) at home or at school? Which one(s)?	
12. a) As a reader, what would you like to do better? b) How can I help?	

Appendix D
Reading Attitude Survey

Reading Attitude Survey

Name: _____

Age: _____

Grade: _____

Term: _____

Date: _____

Circle the number that most closely matches your opinion of each statement. Remember, there are no "right" answers!				
1. I enjoy listening to someone read aloud.	1	2	3	4
2. I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.	1	2	3	4
3. I enjoy reading at home.	1	2	3	4
4. I think nonfiction is easier to read than fiction.	1	2	3	4
5. It takes me a long time to read most things.	1	2	3	4
6. I read for enjoyment.	1	2	3	4
7. I am a good reader.	1	2	3	4
8. Reading is something I do just for school.	1	2	3	4
9. When I enjoy a particular book, I try to find more books by the same author.	1	2	3	4
10. Reading is boring.	1	2	3	4
11. Reading is important for subjects like science, writing, social studies, art, or math.	1	2	3	4
12. I read to learn about things that interest me.	1	2	3	4
13. I choose books to read that other people have recommended.	1	2	3	4
14. My family reads at home.	1	2	3	4
15. I enjoy going to the library.	1	2	3	4
Comments: 				

Appendix E

Genre Inventory

Reading Interests Inventory: Student Form

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Term: _____ Date: _____

Listed below are different types of reading materials and topics you can read about. Show how interested you are in each using the rating system below. Remember, there are no "right" answers!

- 1 I don't really like this.
 2 It's okay.
 3 I like this a lot!

Types of Reading				Topics	
Fiction		Nonfiction			
	Rating		Rating		Rating
fantasy		magazines		math	
picture books		biographies		art	
fables		letters/e-mail		games	
novels		maps		music	
legends		fact books		history	
poems		autobiographies		cars	
adventure		textbooks		romance	
folktales		diaries or journals		relationships/ friendship	
mysteries		manuals		crafts/hobbies	
myths		experiments		sports	
comic books		interviews		war	
science fiction		newspapers		human body	
humour		recipes		pets	
riddles and jokes		other		wild animals	
other:				plants	
				computers/ technology	
				other:	

Appendix F

Sample Miscue Analysis November 2007

Adapted from Classroom 2002

Student "Steven" Over the Shoulder Miscue Analysis Record Page
 Date Nov 2
 Selection Read P 30-34 Text Type novel (fiction)

Reader said	Text said	Self corrected	Unconnected to meaning change	Unconnected with meaning change	Graphic similarity			Page #
					High	Some	None	
on	—							
Mitchell	Michael							
forgot	forgot							
to	on							
she	Michael							
Mitchell	Michael							
could should	—							
hipped	—							
Andrea	—							
in	to							
braggedged	bragged							
balls	to							
to Mitchell	Michael							
pursed	pretended							
extremely	excitedly							
would	wouldn't							
have	—							
at and	all							
encounter	what							
and	—							
encouraged	—							

Student "Steven" Analysis Page

		Self correct	U.C. no change	U.C. meaning change	High	Some	No
Totals	20	9	7	4	3	9	8
Percentages		45	35	20	15	45	40

How the reading sounded good slow moving

Anecdotal notes from the teaching conversation (use back of page and consider):

- unassisted recall, assisted recall, do you have any questions
- discuss patterns or specific miscues (what were you thinking, what could you do in future, how...)
- teaching points to work on
- something the student did that demonstrates good reading (celebrate and confirm)

Reading progress: Student is self-monitoring and constructing meaning ☒:

Student accepts uncorrected miscues that change meaning ☐:

Student is depending on decoding print (sounding out) and frequently changes meaning ☐:

Student makes links to self ☒ to world ☒ to text ☒

Student notes important information ☐ summarizes ☒

Student asks questions ☐ makes inferences ☐ makes predictions ☐

Student notes visual images ☐

Student identifies or analyzes author's craft ☐

Appendix G

Sample Miscue Analysis April 2008

Student: Steven Date: Apr 28
 Selection: Real p. 1, Capt Underminds (1-13) Red Type: chapter book fiction

Reader's text	Text used	Self-corrected	Unchanged or meaning change	Unconscious meaning change	Fluency			Total
					High	Some	None	
Horrible	Horrible		✓		✓			
Whenever	Whenever		✓		✓			
monks	monks		✓		✓			
your	your		✓		✓			
they	it	✓					✓	
a	a		✓				✓	
supposed	cupboard		✓				✓	
crummed	crummed		✓		✓			
of	and	✓					✓	
Timmy	Timmy		✓		✓			
had been	had to		✓				✓	
The			✓				✓	
as	He	✓					✓	
comic	copy	✓					✓	
comic	comics	✓			✓			
p.			✓				✓	
napas	despair		✓				✓	
cotton	cottony	✓			✓			

good expression

Student: Steven Analysis Page

		Self-corrected	U.C. no change	U.C. meaning change	High	Some	None
Words	19	6	11	2	6	7	6
Percentages		31.6	57.9	10.5	31.6	36.8	31.6

How are reading strategies Blended - easy, level

Anecdotal notes from the teaching conversation (use back of page and consider):

- Unabridged text, unabridged text, do you have any questions?
- discuss patterns or graphic miscues (what were you thinking, what could you do in future, how...)
- teaching point to work on
- something the student did that demonstrates good reading (celebrate and confirm)

Reading progress: Student is self-monitoring and constructing meaning ☐

Student accepts uncorrected miscues that change meaning ☐

Student is depending on decoding print (sounding out) and frequently changes meaning ☐

Student makes links to self ☒ to word ☒ to text ☒

Student makes important information ☒ summarizes ☐

Student asks questions ☐ makes inferences ☒ makes predictions ☐

Student makes visual images ☒ PHANCS

Student identifies or explains author's text: ✓ funny situation

Appendix H

Collaboration Planning Page

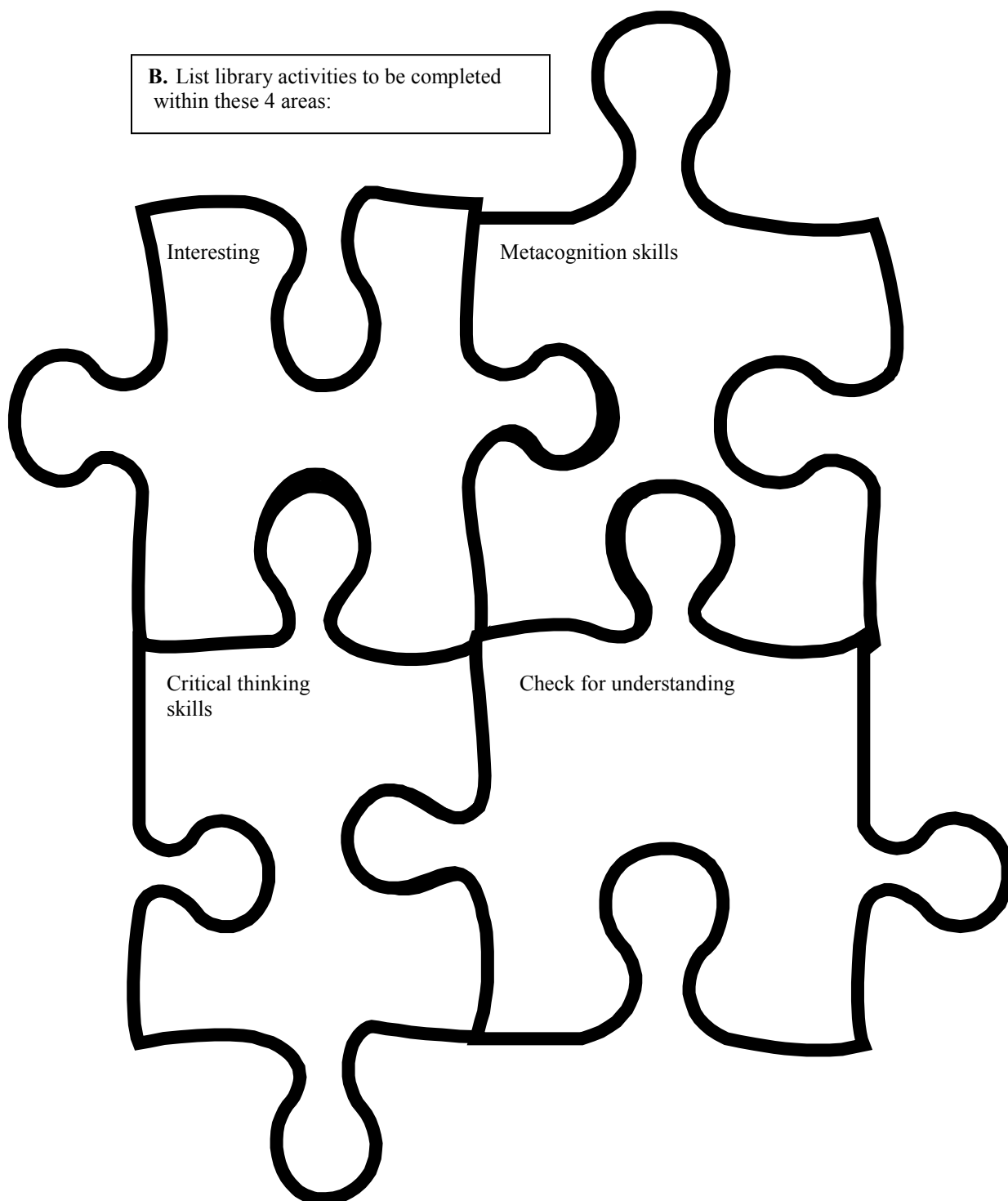
A. Stages of Research: (circle the ones to emphasize)

- ☒ **Stage 1: Preparing for Research** (*define, explore, identify and relate*)
- ☒ **Stage 2: Accessing Resources** (*locate, select, gather and collaborate*)
- ☒ **Stage 3: Processing Information** (*analyze, test. Sort and synthesize*)
- ☒ **Stage 4: Transferring Learning** (*revise, present, reflect and transfer*)

Expectations: (social/academic)



B. List library activities to be completed within these 4 areas:



Appendix I

Ontario School Library Research Model

Introduction

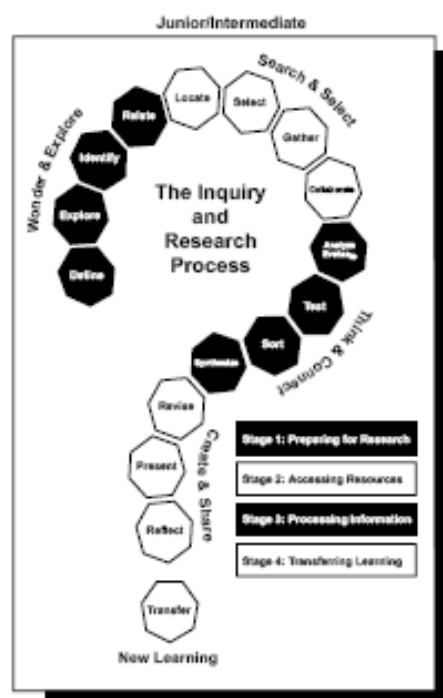
The Inquiry and Research Process

I.3



How well can you research?

You can become a better researcher by following the steps of the research model. The research process will help you define what you want to know, provide you with the steps to follow, and help you apply your new knowledge from one research project to the next.



I am an Effective Researcher.

Stage 1: Wonder and Explore

I know how to prepare for research.

- ☐ I understand my task.
- ☐ I brainstorm information on my research topic.
- ☐ I create a research question.

Stage 2: Search and Select

I know how to access resources.

- ☐ I know where to look for information.
- ☐ I use the School Library Website to find good resources.
- ☐ I check a variety of resources.
- ☐ I use the Table of Contents, indexes, and menus to locate information.

Stage 3: Think and Connect

I know how to process information.

- ☐ I check and evaluate my sources.
- ☐ I record the information in my own words.
- ☐ I check if my information answers my question.
- ☐ I arrange and organize my information.
- ☐ I plan an outline.

Stage 4: Create and Share

I can transfer my learning.

- ☐ I edit and revise my work.
- ☐ I list my resources.
- ☐ I prepare my final copy.
- ☐ I practise, rehearse, and share what I have discovered.
- ☐ I conference with others.
- ☐ I think about what I have learned and what I could do better.

Appendix J
Self-Evaluation Form

Name _____

Student Self-Evaluation of the Research Process

Preparation

What did you do to prepare for your research?

What will you do differently in your next research project

Accessing:

Where did you get your information? If you did not use a variety of resources explain why.

Did you include all of the necessary components of the project?

- ☐ good copy
- ☐ diagram/graph
- ☐ reference page
- ☐ rough notes
- ☐ assignment page/rubric page at back

Processing:

What decisions did you make to decide if a resource was appropriate?

How could the assignment be made better?

What steps did you take to edit and revise your work?

What are three questions you have about the topic now that you know more about it?

Transferring:

What did you learn from doing this project? (fact, process)