

From Silence to a Whisper to Active Participation: Using Literature Circles with ELL Students

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This article discusses benefits of using literature circles with ELL students to strengthen literacy skills and student confidence. Highlighting one teacher's implementation of literature circles, the authors present a candid examination of areas of initial weakness and describe strategies used for improvements in subsequent "rounds." A discussion of specific student growth in oral communication, attitude toward reading,and improved reading comprehension is included as well as lists of resources and strategies supporting effective literature circles.

"I don't really think that ELL kids can do lit circles – it's too hard for them to participate."

A Third Grade Teacher

Recently, while sitting in a graduate level children's literature course one of the authors overheard a comment similar to the one quoted above. In one corner of the room a small group of teachers shared with one another their doubts that English language learning (ELL) students could effectively participate in mainstream book discussions and projects evolving from those discussions. Some of the reasons given by the teachers for their doubts stemmed from their ELL students' shortcomings such as a lack of reading skills, reading comprehension, vocabulary to express their thoughts and questions and a lack of confidence to engage verbally with others. Other reasons given by teachers included what they thought were students' cultural dispositions preventing them from sharing personal opinions and insights or students' lack of background knowledge and schemata needed for book discussions with their "American" peers. These types of doubts are not uncommon among teachers who are suddenly faced with having to teach students whose first language is not English. For many teachers having more students of diverse cultural and linguistic groups is a new experience. With this experience comes the challenge of finding successful instructional strategies to appropriately meet the learning needs of these students.

As an ELL cluster teacher in a school district in the Pacific Northwest, Catherine had faced similar doubts when working with a group of ELL students who were not only reluctant to read in English but also preferred not to participate in many classroom activities. In searching for ways of reaching her students, she recalled a positive experience with literature circles in one of her graduate level courses. After consulting with her graduate advisor, Catherine proposed a master's research project on the topic of using literature circles with her fourth grade students. The purpose was not only to increase reading skill and comprehension but also to create a greater motivation in her students to read and participate more often in the classroom community. What follows is an account of one teacher's exploration of a strategy to strengthen ELL students' reading while drawing them into the classroom community.

The purpose of this article is to encourage all teachers, especially those working with ELL students, to explore the use of literature circles to more effectively involve second language learners in the classroom, increase their motivation to read, and strengthen their literacy skills. Through a discussion of selected theoretical arguments in support of using literature circles and in sharing some of the discoveries and lessons learned from this exploration we will outline how literature circles can be effective for teaching literacy, particularly to ELL students. In addition, we will share some of the resources available to teachers who are ready to venture into the use of literature circles in their own classrooms.

Our Changing Demographics

In the past decades, classrooms across the United States have radically changed. The influx of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Arabic nations and most recently, Russia and the Ukraine, have painted our classrooms with new multicultural tones. Since the 1991-92 school year, enrollment of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the U.S. has increased by 105 percent, while total school enrollment increased by only 12 percent. Of the total LEP enrollment, 67 percent of the students are at the elementary level and over 44 percent of those students are enrolled in the primary grades Pre-K through Grade 3 (NCELA, 2002).

In response to the growing numbers of ELL students, school districts throughout the country are attempting to meet the needs of these students by implementing a variety of instructional models. The types of programs range from fully bilingual classroom settings (e.g., instruction provided by a certified teacher in two languages) to pullout programs (e.g., assistance provided by a paraprofessional for brief period during the week). However, most of these services are only available to recent immigrants. In most states, and also as the result of the recent No Child Left Behind Act (2001), ELL students are no longer eligible for language support programs after two or three years of schooling. Thus, the figures presented above combined with current state and federal legislation suggest the imminent reality that all teachers, at some point during their careers, will have in their classrooms at least one student for whom English is a second language (Ernst-Slavit, Moore & Maloney, 2002).

Teachers are realizing they need tangible and successful strategies to support these learners.

Review of the Literature

One such strategy being implemented by teachers in classrooms at every grade level is literature circles or book discussion groups. Literature circles as a part of a balanced literacy program afford students rich opportunities to use many skills they learn in other areas of the literacy curriculum (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Schlick Noe & Johnson, 1999; Short & Klassen, 1993). Reading aloud, shared and independent reading, oral language, making personal connections, and critical thinking are just some of the skills learners use as members of literature circles. For students involved in literature circles literature becomes "lived through" as they actively engage with the text and with one another (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 38). Additionally, this model has been credited as a means of accommodating disparities in reading levels in a way that basal reading programs do not (Kasten, 1995).

Because of their collaborative and dialogic nature, literature circles enable students to learn and interact with one another in a non-threatening, community-like setting through sharing ideas, opinions, and personal experiences and responses to literature (Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000; Short & Klassen, 1993). These discussions allow students to develop greater understanding and compassion for others as they examine differences and similarities in the varying insights and experiences of their peers (Klassen, 1993; Short & Klassen, 1993). In addition, the variety of perspectives and responses provides reluctant students or students with less language experience with many different models for sharing, talking about, and interpreting literature (Kasten, 1995; Short & Klassen, 1993; Martinez, 2000).

One of the most powerful facets of using literature circles is this dynamic interaction or transaction among readers in the group and between readers and the text. This practice encourages, even demands, that students become active participants first in reading their books and second in the group discussions and projects or activities that are integrated into the structure. In their article, "Questions and Answers:

Continuing Conversations about Literature Circles," Brabham & Villaume (2000) describe skillful readers as those who engage intimately with the text by, among other things, making predictions, constructing visual images, creating connections to personal experiences and other texts, and taking ownership of their reading while constructing meaning in active and careful ways. Moreover, during their participation in literature circles, readers are encouraged to take responsibility for developing and discussing their own questions and interpretations of the materials they've read, a practice likely to invite more complex levels of thought, language, and literacy. Schlick Noe and Johnson, authors of *Getting Started with Literature Circles* (1999) submit that this is the very reason for the high level of enthusiasm on the part of the readers participating in literature circles. Along these same lines, Stephen Krashen (1993) points to research which indicates the importance of a lower affective filter in students learning to read. He argues that much learning occurs "effortlessly" when the learners feel they are members of a group or club and that this in turn leads to a lower affective filter thereby resulting in more language learning (p.71).

Undoubtedly, literature circles are a means to promote the acquisition and practice of many important skills. In particular, they provide a wide array of opportunities for second language learners to practice their English language skills. For Scarcella (1990) there is "increasing evidence that active engagement in real communication facilitates second language development" (p. 71). She explains that when educators have stressed using English for a wider range of "real" purposes the language skills of ELL students show substantial growth. She writes, "If we are to convince students of the value of mastering English we need to show them that it is a useful activity. We need to help them find it valuable to use English to accomplish purposes they themselves desire" (p. 71). Clearly, the use of literature circles to engage ELL students in sharing their own stories, opinions and insights in their new language in a small and non-threatening environment has the potential of providing fertile ground for fostering stronger literacy skills and cognitive development (Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000).

Moreover, Peregoy and Boyle (2000) suggest that informal groups offer ample opportunities for students to help each other negotiate the meaning of what they are reading and allow ELL students to become familiar with ways of discussing literature. When English learners are provided with the chance to interact with their English-speaking peers, productive language learning takes place. In addition, the collaborative atmosphere of such group work allows English learners to ask for repetition and clarification as often as needed. In the discussion of the general principles of language acquisition, the writers of the *TESOL ESL Standards for PreK-12 Students* (1997) submit that not only does "language acquisition take place during activities that are of a cognitive or intellectual nature" but also that "authentic language often entails the simultaneous use of different language modalities." The point is also made that "...reading activities may activate the development of speaking abilities, or vice versa" (p. 7).

In considering the research related to second language acquisition and practices that benefit language learners, it is apparent that the use of the literature circle model provides rich opportunities for ELL students to use English for real and authentic purposes. Not only do literature circles provide ample opportunities for ELL students to practice language and literacy skills and intellectual development, they allow students of diverse backgrounds to explore social and cultural issues through the analysis, discussion, and negotiation of ideas about the world around them (Klassen, 1993; Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000; Samway & Whang, 1996). In using literature circles, teachers are able to tailor instruction to the needs of the students while providing an important part of a balanced literacy program. Modeling, cooperative group negotiation, and the potential for creating meaning with peers, are all facets of literature circles that are of significant support for students developing literacy in English.

Overview of the Context

Participants

In Catherine's fourth grade class, 5 of 24 students were ELL at varying levels of language acquisition. Two of the students' primary

language was Ukrainian, two spoke Spanish at home and one spoke Russian at home. Both of the Ukrainian students and one of the Spanish-speaking students received weekly ELL support through a pull-out program. The Spanish-speaking student also received support for learning disabilities. Only the Russian-speaking student read at grade level; the others read at pre-primer level through level three on the Qualitative Reading Inventory II (QRI-II). The school was located in a suburban setting with 34 percent of the student body receiving free and reduced lunch and a 4 percent overall ELL population.

Preparation

Upon deciding to use literature circles, several resources from the experts were reviewed. The books by Katharine Davies Samway and Gail Whang (1996), *Literature Study Circles in a Multicultural Classroom*, and *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine Schlick Noe and Nancy Johnson (1999), provided information about setting up literature circles, the importance of book selection, and ideas for extension activities. Harvey Daniels' (1994) book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* assisted in establishing a theoretical base for the practice and methods for assessing student progress, and provided general scheduling ideas. Information about important literary elements upon which to focus was gleaned from Ralph Peterson and Maryann Eeds' (1990) book, *Grand Conversations: Literature Groups in Action*. Forms to facilitate student record keeping were designed and mini or focus lessons were developed on the various components of literature circles such as comprehension strategies and etiquette for group discussions. Additionally, extension projects and activities were planned to help students enrich their conversations and deepen their comprehension of the books (Daniels, 1994; Schlick Noe & Johnson, 1999).

Data Collection

Because Catherine was also interested in finding out whether or not literature circles would instill a greater motivation to read, as well as enhance the comprehension levels, pre- and post-surveys were administered to the students to assess their attitudes toward reading and

the types of books they chose to read on their own (Fiderer, 1995). Reading assessments to establish pre- and post-accuracy and comprehension levels were also administered. In addition to systematic observations, small group and whole class discussions were video and audio taped and later analyzed. Samples of student work were collected and anecdotal notes were kept throughout the study.

Book Selection

The selection of the books was an important factor for consideration. Realizing that the reading of books carries with it the potential for increasing awareness of other places, people and cultures (Klassen, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1996; Samway & Whang, 1996) and the opportunity for students to see themselves in the literature, books with multicultural themes were chosen at a variety of reading levels. More specifically, the selected books used rich language, had interesting plots, and strong characters (Samway & Whang, 1996; Freeman & Freeman, 2000). Through the assistance of the school media specialist, four to six copies of each book were secured and brief book talks were prepared on each.

Sample of Books Used for Literature Circles

The Family Under the Bridge (Carlson, 1958)
Hiroshima (Yepp, 1995)
Saddako and the Thousand Paper Cranes (Coerr, 1977)
Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear (Namioka, 1992)
Sing Dow the Moon (O'Dell, 1970)
Sing of the Beaver (Speare, 1983)
The Trouble with Tuck (Taylor, 1981)
One Hundred Penny Box (Mathis, 1986)
Esperanza Rising (Ryan, 2002)
The Big Lie: A True Story (Leitner, 1994)
Journey to America (Levitin, 1987)
One Day in the Tropical Rain Forest (George, 1990)
Stone Fox (Gardiner, 1983)

The book talks were short oral previews of each available book choice. In essence, Catherine created a brief summary of each including the level of difficulty, plot and character overview. Each talk ended with a "cliffhanger" statement to stimulate student curiosity.

Implementation

After hearing book talks, students reviewed the books and made a list of their top three choices. Students were then grouped according to their preferences and without regard to reading ability (Samway & Whang, 1996). After the groups were formed, they met and planned their reading goals on a group calendar. For the following two to three weeks, students met in their groups to read and discuss their books. ELL students and struggling readers were afforded the opportunity to read with a buddy or to read along with a taped recording of the book.

Catherine met with each group at least twice as an observer and to listen in on their discussions. In addition to reading, students wrote responses in a literature response journal to prepare for discussions. They also completed two to three extensions projects focused on their books, which were shared and discussed in the literature circles (See Table 1). Once students completed the reading they worked on a culminating project to demonstrate the group's understanding of their book and to encourage others to read it. The rubric for assessing the culminating projects was developed in a whole group setting with student input on what they thought should be assessed. Each group presentation was videotaped and later reviewed by students for self-assessment purposes.

Findings

After concluding the first round of literature circles, students were asked to reflect in writing about what they enjoyed and what they struggled with during their literature circle experience. Their feedback was combined with the teacher's personal observations and anecdotal notes and used in making decisions about the structural changes to implement in the future. Although all students reported enjoying participating in literature circles, the greatest successes and increased levels of enthusiasm were evident among the ELL students and the

reluctant readers. While evidence of heightened levels of confidence and more positive attitudes toward reading was less tangible than the actual reading level changes, the improvement in the students was quite notable. Following are brief overviews of the gains of some of these students in the areas of oral communication, attitude toward reading, and increased reading comprehension.

Table 1

Possible Extension Projects

Project	Brief Description
ABC Book	An alphabet book that focuses on key events, characters, and information from the book.
Accordion Book	Five to seven significant scenes from the book are used to make an illustrated accordion-shaped book representing the sequence of the storyline.
Bookmark	A bookmark focusing on a favorite or significant character in the story.
Commemorative Stamp	Focusing on an important theme from the story, choose a significant character or scene to depict on a stamp.
Jackdaw	Collect, label, and display artifacts, which are representative of the important elements in the book such as characters, events, and/or ideas.
Map	Design a map to show a character's "journey" in the story. The journey might be physical, emotional or spiritual.
Open Mind	Illustrations and/or words depicting a character's possible dreams, fears, ideas, etc.
Story Quilt	Design a quilt square that represents a favorite chapter or important scene from the book.

Note. Adapted from Schlick Noe & Johnson (1999) and *The Literature Circles Resource Center* at http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/

Oral Communication

The most visible growth was evident in several of the ELL students who were previously very quiet during classroom activities and often apprehensive to participate verbally. During their participation in the literature circles, these students became much more outspoken, which carried over for the remainder of the school year even in other content

areas. In one case, Pavel, a very quiet Russian-speaking boy who rarely spoke to the other students during group activities would often wait until there were no other students nearby before speaking to Catherine, chose to take the lead as the narrator for his literature group's final presentation. He took on the leadership role in the group production and enthusiastically shared with the class, "This book was fun to read. When I was reading, I could not put it down. When I was in the middle of the book, I had to finish it!" As the school year progressed Pavel's verbal participation increased, not only in language arts activities, but in science and social studies group activities as well. Before literature circles Pavel orally participated in class, on the average, less than three times a week. After the project was completed he participated in small and whole group discussions on a daily basis.

Another student, Yulia, a Ukrainian-speaker receiving ELL support had been described by other students as "the quietest girl in the class." She was extremely quiet and although she occasionally raised her hand to contribute in class, if called on she would quickly put her hand down and whisper, "never mind." In fact, she had not yet spoken in front of the whole class that year. After the first round, Yulia volunteered to play the part of a main character in her group's dramatic representation of a scene from the book. She later explained that she enjoyed playing the part because she thought the character was brave. In a written recommendation of the book Yulia wrote, "I would think that somebody would like to read this book…it was so intrusting to me…I want to keep reading it because it was so intrusting." In a later presentation she narrated an artistic summary of her group's book. As the year continued Yulia began to volunteer to take lunch count in the morning and participated in class discussions.

In stark contrast to his usual withdrawn behavior, a third student, David, who spoke Spanish at home and was receiving learning support, actively participated during his group's book talks. When asked about his increased participation in the literature circle, David said that he usually felt very "dumb" in school but when he could talk about his ideas and feelings and ask questions about the book like everyone else did, he felt "as smart as the other kids." In creating his Open Mind extension project (Figure 1), David was able to artistically create a response to the book

and then verbally share with his classmates in a way he was not able to do in writing. While sharing his project he emotionally explained that he chose to reflect as the pilot of the Enola Gay because "he did the job but he was probably really, like … scared to drop the missile and I think it made him feel kind of guilty about it."

Figure 1. David's Open Mind Project



Attitude Toward Reading

According to responses on the pre- and post-surveys regarding the reasons students read and student perceptions of their reading abilities, 21 students, after participating in literature circles, determined that reading was for fun and/or learning as opposed to only 16 thinking so before participating in literature circles. Additionally, before participating in literature circles, 9 students perceived themselves as needing help with reading while 10 felt they read as well as most. Afterward, 17 students felt they read as well as most or better than most with only 6 perceiving they needed help. Finally, 22 out of 23 students independently chose a wider variety of reading materials and genres after participating in literature circles.

One of the most notable demonstrations of improved attitude toward reading was by a Ukrainian student who often refused to read, even during silent reading when he had choice of the materials. Viktor, who was receiving ELL support, was enthusiastic only about recesses and leaving to attend his ELL class because it was "easy." For Viktor reading was "stupid," a waste of time. As the literature groups were set up, Viktor chose a book dealing with World War II. After beginning his reading in the first book group meeting he asked if he could read his literature circle book, *Hiroshima* (Yepp, 1995), for silent reading. The next day he asked permission to take the book home to continue reading it. On the third day he requested to skip his ELL class to avoid missing any of the literature circle time. Upon the conclusion of the first round of literature circles Viktor began requesting to go to the school library to check out books, which he then used to write reports for extra credit. One such report included an interview with his grandfather who had "fought in war in Russia."

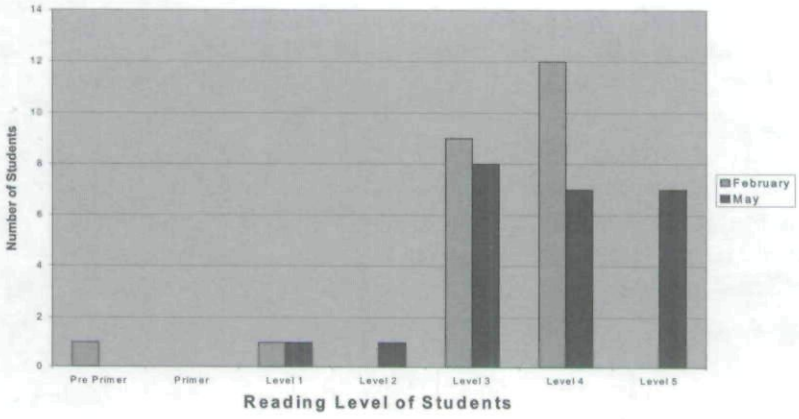
Improved Reading Comprehension

Upon completion of the first two rounds of literature circles, which spanned about two months, there were increased reading comprehension and accuracy levels for most of Catherine's students. Pre- and post-Qualitative Reading Inventory II (QRI-II) scores indicated an increase among the students reading at Level 4 from 52 percent accuracy with comprehension between 75 and 100 percent to 25 percent reading at a Level 4, and 29 percent reading at Level 5 with comprehension at both levels ranging from 93 percent to 100 percent. The two lowest readers (both ELL), one at Pre-primer and one at Level one, increased their reading abilities by at least one grade level (see Table 2).

Although variables might affect the outcome of the student qualitative reading inventory assessment, these gains are significant, especially in relation to the students initially reading below level four. For all students the increase in reading levels created a hightened sense of self confidence and motivation to continue to read.

Table 2

Pre and Post Reading Scores



Discussion: Adjustments Made Along the Way

Of course, not all facets of the first exploration of literature circles went smoothly. While the students reported thoroughly enjoying them, there were components in need of improvement. For example, students initially struggled with maintaining meaningful discussions about their books. They felt encumbered by the lengthy role sheets, and needed more guidance in methods for recording their responses to the reading. As a result, the following three changes were introduced:

- the format was more intentionally taught through the use of a whole group literature circle;
- minilessons were refined and;
- the extension projects were narrowed and enriched.

Demonstration Using Whole Class Literature Circle

After overwhelming students with information, directions and explanations on the first round of literature circles, Catherine decided to use various read aloud books to model the reflecting process and

methods to maintain more engaging discussions. This was done by "thinking aloud" as she read to students then engaging them in discussion about the reading through open ended questions in a whole group setting. Through this process Catherine was able to model the types of questioning and metacognitive processes necessary for sustaining rich conversations about the book. In addition, prior to initiating the small literature circle groups, the format was introduced in a whole group literature circle with everyone using the same book. While reading a book such as *Shoe Shine Girl* (Bulla, 1975), methods for planning reading, strategies for discussion, and techniques for responding to the literature were demonstrated whole group in the form of minilessons. The whole class setting followed by small group practice allowed the students to be exposed to a wide variety of response styles, which was especially beneficial for the ELL students. Students were also offered strategies for reflecting in response journals and using post-its or bookmarks for recording notes about wonderings or making connections as they read. The whole class setting provided rich opportunities for sharing journal responses to the reading, enabling students to glean ideas and learn from one another.

As students began to read their individual small group books, they learned how to manage their literature circle activities. Using a class calendar on the overhead projector students were taught to create timelines on their own calendars for their reading and to plan for extension and final projects for the sharing sessions (Daniels, 1994). Eventually, students worked as a team in their book groups to negotiate the structure of their own timelines. The reading calendars later served not only as a means of accountability for students but also fostered a sense of independence and responsibility among the individual literature groups.

Focus or Minilessons

Although the minilesson approach was used in the first attempt with literature circles, too much information was given to students all at once causing them to feel bombarded with "how to" lessons without having enough time to practice each specific strategy before moving to the next minilesson. In their book, *Getting Stated with Literature Circles*, Schlick

Noe and Johnson (1999) recommend *focus lessons* as a means of clarifying instructions and demonstrating processes as well as teaching the components and strategies of literature circles. They define the format for the focus lessons as, 1) a brief introduction, 2) a discussion, explanation, and/or demonstration of a strategy and, 3) an opportunity to use the strategy (p. 82). Lucy Calkins suggests *minilessons* last between five and fifteen minutes followed by immediate practice by students of the content of the lesson using the material they are reading (Calkins, 2001).

In the second round of literature circles, topics for minilessons were more clearly defined. Among the relevant topics highlighted were:

- strategies for highlighting information or personal reactions to the reading which students wanted to remember;
- ways to increase the interest level of the discussions of their books and;
- tips for using active listening skills.

The new, simplified, more focused minilessons were very beneficial, especially for ELL students since the lessons provided brief and specific instructions followed by opportunities to practice the skills in small group settings using familiar material. Table 3 provides a compilation of minilesson ideas.

Extension Activities

When first used with students, numerous extension activities and projects were introduced and demonstrated. The students were required to complete *all* of the projects for each book they read with the projects being due throughout duration of their reading calendars. The well-meant intent was to enrich the students' experiences with the books; instead, they became overwhelmed and burned out. The purpose of the projects was lost in the almost - mechanical process students manifested in their attempt to dutifully complete each of the projects. Like the over-organized and cumbersome role sheets, the extension projects actually served to curtail the rich interaction it was hoped they would illicit. The lesson learned here in terms of the extension activities is that, especially

with ELL students, those who lack confidence or readers who are reluctant to engage - less is more.

Table 3

Possible Minilesson Topics

Literary - Elements of Author's Craft	Reading and Writing/Response Strategies	Literature Circle Procedures
How does the author grab our interest?	Self correcting when reading doesn't make sense	How to choose a book
Ways authors reveal the character of a person	Making and checking predictions	How to start a discussion
What makes a good book title?	Incorporating ideas from Post-it Notes into a written response	How to be an active listener
What helps the dialogue in stories sound realistic?	Supporting ideas with information from the book, your life, or other books	How to keep the conversation going
How much detail is too much?	Previewing	How to disagree constructively
What are the main components of a particular genre?	Using flexible strategies to identify unknown words	What to do when you don't understand?
How does the author set the tone and mood of a story?	Building vocabulary through reading	What to include in your response journal
How does an author use "memorable" language?	Creating pictures in your head or using sketches and illustrations to extend ideas	How to connect extension projects to the reading
Components of a story	Analyzing, interpreting, inferring	How to self assess
Ways to incorporate point of view and perspective	Writing a response from a character's point of view	What do you do when your group finishes?

Note. Adapted from Daniels (2002); Schlick Noe & Johnson (1999).

In their discussion of extension projects, Schlick Noe and Johnson (1999) state that, "What's important is the opportunity you offer when you ask your students to pause at the end of their reading and create something that brings their book to life" (p. 103). It is the quality and the depth attained in creating the extension project through the processes of "reflection" and "interpretation" that hold the tangible benefits for the students. In focusing their energies on one project, taking the time to review their personal reflections, and reactions recorded on their post-it notes, bookmarks, or response journals, students have the opportunity to gain a deeper and more intricate understanding of the reading. In sharing their projects with others, they are able to demonstrate understanding through verbal interaction and/or through the medium of the project, whether a dramatic representation, a written poem, or a piece of artwork. These projects should be considered an extension of the readers' responses to what they read and can be completed alone or in collaboration with group members and often include integration of the arts.

Implications

Clearly, the ideas and procedures presented in this article are merely "the tip of the iceberg" with regard to using literature circles as a means to strengthen literacy skills. The literature circle model, as a part of a balanced literacy program provides abundant opportunities for dynamic interaction among readers and text. While enjoying collaborative learning, students are actively engaged in using authentic language for real purposes. This component is especially powerful for ELL students. As literature circle members, students enjoy the safety of the small group setting in which they are able to better negotiate meaning and seek clarification. Furthermore, the use of multicultural and multiethnic literature assists students in making connections to their own lives and encourages a greater appreciation for the diversity of all students.

As the number of students who speak languages other than English increase so does the challenge of helping them to become successful speakers of English. Using literature circles is a fun and exciting way to afford students choice while at the same time exposing them to powerful strategies to build confidence and enhance their language and literacy

skills. Decreased anxiety about reading and participation, increased motivation on everyone's part, and improved reading accuracy and comprehension…literature circles is one practice teachers cannot afford not to explore.

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