

ENCOURAGING READING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL  
THROUGH LITERATURE RESPONSE  
THESIS

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover whether time spent in the classroom responding to literature read at home would encourage children to read at home.

This study was based on the past research that states that good readers spend more time reading outside of school than weaker readers. Also, research states that giving a child time to respond to what has been read helps the reader gain better comprehension.

Twenty-four third-grade students from a suburban school district participated in the study. During the first eight weeks, the children brought home a reading log, where time spent reading and the title of the book read was recorded. A parent initialed each entry. The logs were returned to school on Mondays and the teacher recorded the total time reading for each child. During the second eight weeks of the study, the subjects continued the same procedure of entering the time spent reading at home in the reading logs. The subjects were also given about fifteen minutes each day to respond to what was read the night before.

The total number of minutes read during the first and second eight weeks was recorded. A  $t$  test was used to check the statistical significance of any difference between the two totals.

The results of the study indicate that when a child is given the chance to respond to what he or she has read, he or she will read more. There was a statistically significant increase in the amount of time the subjects spent reading at home during the second eight weeks of the study, when they given the opportunity to respond.

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## CHAPTER I

## Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover whether time spent in the classroom responding to the literature read at home would encourage children to read at home.

Need for the Study

There has been much research on the effects of literature response techniques on children's understanding of what is read. It has been found that strong readers use a variety of responses, while weak readers generally are much more limited in the types of responses when writing about what has been read (Harris, 1991). With teacher feedback to response journals, children's ability to deeply understand and discuss what has been read improves (Johnson, 1990). Discussions around literary works have also been found to make the books more enjoyable and memorable to the reader (Lehman, 1993).

There has also been research on the importance of children spending time reading. It has been found that the amount of time children spend reading for pleasure is a good predictor of their reading achievement. (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988).

If children spend time in the classroom responding to the books they read at home, it may be seen that children will spend more time reading at home, since their understanding will be strengthened. If a teacher knows that reader response techniques are useful in both increasing understanding and promoting outside reading, the instruction in that classroom may change. Response techniques could become more prevalent in the classroom.

#### Research Question

Will there be a statistically significant increase in the total minutes third-grade students spent reading at home when given the opportunity in class to respond to what has been read outside of school?



### Limitations of the Study

The subjects in the study came from one classroom in a suburban school district. Twenty-five students participated. The number of subjects did limit this study. A greater number of subjects, districts, and grade levels would have been desirable.

In order to record the amount of time the subjects were spending reading outside of school, the subjects filled out a reading log, noting what was read and the time spent reading. Although these entries were signed by a parent to help ensure honesty, some error is to be expected.

## CHAPTER II

## Review of the Research

"The trend toward literature-based reading programs has focused attention on children's response to their reading" (Lehman, 1993, p.3). The concept of responding to literature in a classroom setting has grown. It is now seen by many educators as a crucial part of literacy programs for prereaders in kindergarten, up to expert readers in college. The importance for readers to create their own interpretations of literature, based on their prior experiences, is now being recognized (Lehman, 1993).

Response Journals

There are many types of responses a reader can include in a response log. Reader response journals can be an effective way for readers to express their initial reactions to literature, as well as a place for them to analyze and make inferences about the pieces read. In Harris' study (1991), she found that the number of responses in an entry indicated the strength of the reader/writer. Out of the 33 undergraduate

subjects, she found that the strongest readers included many different types of responses in just one entry. They may have included inferences, brief summaries, questions, associative responses, and/or feeling responses. Those students with only one type of response in an entry were generally the weakest. These entries were usually story summaries, with little or no analysis of the literature or personal reflection.

Children often respond to literature on a personal level. It has been found that they bring their own life experiences to the book being read and relate to the story according to that prior knowledge (Commeyras & Heubach, 1994a). Response journals allow for the uniqueness of each child. He or she can respond in his or her own way. For example, if a Jewish child is reading a book about World War II and the Holocaust, and he has been told about it through first hand accounts, he will come to a different understanding about that piece than a child who has no link to that tragedy (Atkinson, 1995).

Harris discovered through her research that direct teaching of the response types is extremely important

when working with students who have little or no experience with response logs. A variety of prompts should be used. Class time should be used to model appropriate responses and to guide students through responses (Harris, 1991).

Johnson found that journals are most effective when they are read by the teacher and that teacher then provides feedback. Through this feedback, the student will grow in his or her ability to write responses. It also will help the student to feel as though his or her ideas will be accepted, no matter what. Lastly, the student will feel that there is a purpose for writing the journal if the teacher responds in it as well (Johnson, 1990).

Through their research, Goatly and Raphael found that response journals are also helpful tools for guiding a discussion of a certain book. Reading logs, or journals, can be used to help students think about a book, and organize those ideas generated, before meeting with a discussion group. By writing first, the students will be more prepared and willing to share

with their peers, and the conversation will tend to be more focused (Goatly & Raphael, 1992).

#### Book Talks

"When ideas are shared, perceptions are changed" (Alvarez, Flood, Jones, Kabilidis, Lapp, Lungren, Moore, Ranek-Buhr, & Romero, 1994, p.22). Discussions of literary works are great ways to respond to literature. It was found that books tend to be more memorable and enjoyable when the reader has the opportunity to talk about them with others (Lehman, 1993). In a study by Johnson (1990), middle school children who only read when they absolutely had to, were asking to have more time in class devoted to reading and discussing what was read. Their attitudes toward reading changed when they had the chance to tell someone how they felt about the book, and when they had the chance to hear their peers share their perceptions of the books.

Research has shown that readers get more out of a piece of literature when they have the opportunity to discuss it with others. People who read books alone and do not share their thoughts about it with anyone

often limit themselves to only a personal impression of the work. When readers have a chance to discuss a book, however, they tend to become more analytical. They feed off each other's responses, either challenging or confirming others in the group (Lehman, 1993).

In a study by Gross and Shefelbine (1991), it was stated that it is important to remember to keep the number of people in the book talks small. People feel much safer in a small group setting than in a whole class setting. When people feel safe, they tend to share more, take more risks, and really express themselves. They look forward to listening to others in the group, and feel comfortable sharing.

Another important key to successful book talks in school is to carefully design the groups. A discussion group should be a heterogeneous mix of four to six students (Pardo, 1992). In Pardo's study (1992), she found that at times the members of the groups must be arranged according to personalities also. There was one girl mentioned in the study who was a leader. She liked to control the groups she was in, and often

dominated the discussion. The less confident children would let that happen. The purpose of a book talk is for everyone to share, however, so she was placed in a group with other leaders. Those other children would not allow the conversation to be one-sided. That discussion group turned out to be a successful one.

People of all ages can benefit from book talks. The amount of teacher direction and assistance, however, will vary, depending on the age and experience of the group members. In McCormack's study (1993), it was found that second grade students are able to sustain a discussion about literature in peer response groups. These groups worked without direct teacher assistance, but there was a good amount of teacher modeling before the groups met. Also, the teacher was present in order to give the groups indirect support.

After several meetings with the group, the children were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the books. They were taking turns, asking questions, summarizing, and elaborating on each other's responses. The book talks were a success in that primary classroom.

Even children younger than second grade can effectively discuss books read. It was found that first grade children often commented on pictures within a story. They made predictions as to what might happen next. They even could make evaluative statements. For example, they could mention whether or not they liked the story, their favorite parts, and the parts of the story that were funny to them (Elliott & Stahle, 1993).

Johnson stated that book talks are often pleasant places for people. Children need the time to be social, and these discussion groups offer a constructive solution to that need (Johnson, 1990). People, including adults, look forward to that time of sharing (Gross & Shefelbine, 1991).

#### The Role of the Teacher

When dealing with response to literature, the role of the teacher is quite different than that of traditional reading teachers. The teacher is a guide and a model. She/he provides an atmosphere of safety (Alvarez, Flood, Jones, Kabilidis, Lapp, Lungren, Moore, Ranek-Buhr, & Romero, 1994; Gross & Shefelbine, 1991). Through much research, Collins (1993) concluded



that children must also create a place which promotes the learner to be inquisitive. The teacher must encourage questioning, predicting, and the organizing of ideas. With this general atmosphere, the learners will become critical readers.

It has been stated that the educator must directly teach the students how to respond to a piece of literature. The direct instruction of the specific response types plays an important part in a successful literature-based classroom (McMahon, 1992). For example, children must be taught how to write an associative response. If one has never done such a thing, and has never seen it modeled, teachers cannot expect a well written associative response from the child (Harris, 1991).

In a study by Atkinson (1995), it was stated that teachers should keep in mind that individual differences will affect children's response. They also can use this individuality to help the child grow all the more. The teacher should encourage each child to take a step further in the maturity of his or her responses. For example, a child who is only making

simple summary statements can be shown and encouraged to make personal, or feeling, responses. The child who is already responding on a personal level, however, can be taught to make inferences or evaluative responses.

Through research conducted by McCormack (1993), it was found that children should be instructed as to how to conduct themselves within a book talk. Since this may be new to many children, especially young ones, teachers need to instruct them on format of a book talk and the expected behaviors during the group discussion. With direct instruction and adequate modeling, even young children can efficiently monitor a peer group discussion.

It was found that teachers also need to provide instruction on different types of literature, themes in literature, and strategies used in reading literature. These skills, after being taught, can be practiced and discussed in the response logs or book talks. Children must realize that literature must be understood (Cianciolo & Quirk, 1993b). With the direct instruction by the teacher and the practice through

responding, children will learn that concept (Cianciolo & Quirk, 1993a).

Teachers still need to ask children questions, however. The questions should be used to guide the students with their responses. These questions need to be open-ended, though (Hertzog, 1995). Teachers should not be asking questions such as, "What color is Johnny's bicycle?" Instead, they should be posing questions that allow the students room for interpreting the text and forming an answer after much thought and consideration (Harris, 1991).

Teachers also have the responsibility to encourage students to read outside of school. "The best way to help children develop their vocabulary is to lead them to become independent learners, to let them have more time and opportunities to read, to provide them with suitable reading materials, and to encourage them to read widely" (Anderson, Shu, & Zhang, 1995, p.92). In the study, it was found that children learn the meanings of new words better if they have read them in context. It is suggested in the study that extensive reading is very beneficial to children.

"Nurturing lifelong reading habits is a challenging responsibility for schools" (Peterson, Romatowski, & Trepanier-Street, 1993, p.136). In the study, it was found that by holding reading clubs for young urban students, the students gained an appreciation toward literature. When compared with students who did not participate in the study, the children in the experimental group had "a heightening awareness of the pleasures of reading" (Peterson et al., 1993, p.141). It was also found that these children increased their interests in personal reading and reading in school became more of a pleasure for those children than it was before. The reading club, where young children were given the chance to respond to books, was seen as a success.

#### Reading Outside of School

While many teachers have their students read during the school day, research has shown that these children do not read a lot outside of school. Greaney (1980) found, an average of 5.4% of a child's free time was spent reading. Twenty-two percent of the subjects spent no time reading at all.

A study was conducted by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) in which 155 fifth grade students kept track of how they spent their time outside of school. It was found that on most days, the majority of the subjects did little or no reading as a leisure activity.

Why is it so important for children to read outside of school? The same study also showed that "among all the ways children spent their time, reading books was the best prediction of several measures of reading achievement, including gains in reading achievement between second and fifth grades" (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988, p.300). Children who scored in the 90th percentile on a reading achievement test read outside of school for an average of 5 times as many minutes per day as children who scored in the 50th percentile and 200 times as many minutes per day as the children who scored in the tenth percentile.

Experience with books at home, for children as young as preschool age, can be indicator of how well they will read once in school. Scarborough, Dobrich, and Hager (1991) found that out of the 56 middle class

subjects "those who became poor readers had accumulated substantially less experience with books and reading than those who became better readers" (Scarborough, Dobrich, & Hager, 1991, p.510).

It is important that teachers encourage this outside reading. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) suggest that teachers can influence the amount of time their students spend reading. They found that teachers who encourage leisure time reading do such things as have interesting books at appropriate reading levels readily available, read aloud to the students, and provide reading time for pleasure during school hours. Teachers play an important part in encouraging reading for pleasure in children (Irving, 1980).

## CHAPTER III

## The Research Design

## Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover whether time spent in the classroom responding to the literature read at home would encourage children to read at home.

Research Question

Will there be a statistically significant increase in the total minutes third grade students spent reading at home when given the opportunity in class to respond to what has been read outside of school?

MethodologySubjects

The research was conducted using 24 students from a third-grade heterogeneous class in a primary school in a suburban district.

### Materials

The materials used in the study consisted of a reading log and composition book for each child.

The reading log traveled back and forth between the home and school. The subjects recorded what was read and the time spent reading in this log. A parent initialed each entry to help ensure honesty when recording.

Each child had a composition book. In this book, the subjects entered their written responses to the literature read at home and school. All writing done in this book was done in school.

### Procedure

During the first eight weeks of the study, the children brought home a reading log. In the log, the time spent reading and the title of the book read was recorded. A parent initialed each entry. The logs were returned to school on Mondays and the teacher recorded the total time reading for each child. At the end of the eight weeks the time that each child spent



reading was totaled to come up with a combined amount of time for all 24 students.

During the second eight weeks of the study, the subjects continued the same procedure of entering the time spent reading at home in the reading logs. The subjects were also given about fifteen minutes each day to respond to what was read the night before. If a child had not read the previous night, he or she was instructed to think about the last thing they read and use that book when responding.

The responses varied in type. Sometimes the children drew a picture in response to what was read. Other times the children wrote a response in their composition books. Both of these types of responses were then shared with a partner or a small group. Still other responses were strictly oral, sharing with a partner or small group.

The responses also varied in the kind of content. Sometimes the subjects were asked to discuss parts of the story (characters, setting, problem, events, and solution). Other times the responses were linked to the subject's personal life (for example, "How are you

like the main character?" or "What has happened in your life that is like something in your book?"). Other responses dealt with the reader's opinions. There was always some choice in the response, including an option for those subjects who read nonfiction.

The teacher acted as a model and facilitator during these response sessions. If the subjects were asked to respond in a new way, the teacher modeled a response, using the book that was being read aloud to the class. As the children were responding, the teacher walked about the room asking clarifying questions in order to get the children to respond more deeply.

At the end of the second eight weeks the reading time for each child was totaled with the other subjects to come up with one combined amount of time spent reading at home.

### Data Analysis

The children's time spent reading was totaled for the first eight weeks and again for the second eight weeks. Those times were recorded and compared to note any changes in the amount of time spent reading after the treatment. A *t* test was used to identify statistically significant changes.

### Summary

This research was conducted to investigate the relationship between children's response to literature and the amount of time spent reading outside of school.

Twenty-five third-grade students from a suburban school district participated in the study. Each child kept track of his or her outside reading in a reading log that was signed by a parent. This was done for a total of sixteen weeks.

After the eighth week, the children were given the opportunity to respond to the books read at home. They responded in a variety of ways, all of which were modeled by the teacher.

The total number of minutes spent reading for the entire class was recorded for the first eight weeks and again for the second eight weeks. The two amounts were then compared, noting any changes.

## CHAPTER IV

## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover whether time spent in the classroom responding to the literature read at home will encourage children to read at home.

Research Question

Will there be a statistically significant increase in the total minutes third grade students spent reading at home when given the opportunity in class to respond to what has been read outside of school?

Results

The total time spent reading at home during the first eight weeks of the study was 380.33 hours, an average of 15.85 hours per student. During the second eight weeks of the study, when the intervention took place, the subjects spent a total of 507.1 hours

reading outside of school. This was an average of 21.13 hours per subject.

Table 1

Results of t Test, Comparing Mean Outside Reading Hours for Students Who had Response Time in Class with Students having No Class Resonse Time

|                              | No Class<br>Response Time | Class<br>Response Time |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Mean Hours per Student       | 15.85                     | 21.13                  |
| Derived t                    | 1.94                      |                        |
| <hr/>                        |                           |                        |
| t critical value (.05)= 1.68 |                           |                        |

A t test was used to determine the statistical significance between the two times. This test was used since the sample size of the study was small. The derived t equaled 1.948. The critical value was 1.684. Since t was greater than the critical value, the study does show that there was a statistically significant increase in the total number of minutes spent reading at home when given the opportunity in class to respond to what has been read outside of school.

## CHAPTER V

## Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover whether time spent in the classroom responding to the literature read at home would encourage children to read at home.

The subjects in the study were twenty-four third-grade students from a suburban school district. They were asked to keep track of the amount of time they spent reading outside of school in a reading log. The entries in the log were signed by a parent to help ensure honesty, and the log was to be brought to school each Monday, so the teacher could record the total number of minutes read the previous week. For the first eight weeks of the study, the books that were read at home were not discussed in class. During the second eight weeks, the children responded in class to what was read at home. These responses were facilitated by the researcher, and models were shared with the students.

### Conclusions

The treatment in the study was successful. A *t* test showed that there was a statistically significant increase in the amount of time children spent reading at home when given the opportunity in class to respond to what was read.

Not only did the class read more during the intervention, but they also grew as readers. Their attitudes regarding the time spent responding changed over the eight weeks of the intervention. During the first couple weeks, there were a few children who had a difficult time thinking back to what they read. They also had difficulty relating the books to their own lives, which was often part of the response time. I heard quite a few complaints during the first two weeks or so.

As time went on, however, things began to change. Students seemed to enjoy this response time. In fact, when the time of the response time changed one day due to a conflict, I heard from several children, "Aren't we going to talk about what we read last night?" They seemed to look forward to that time. I also heard far



fewer complaints, even from the few reluctant readers in the class.

This response time also made the students more accountable for the reading they did at home. They knew they must have a book in mind when they went to school. I believe that by scheduling a time during the day to discuss what was read at home gave the students the understanding that the teacher believes reading at home is important.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

To ensure its reliability, this study should be done again. It would be beneficial if the subjects were of a different grade, in a different district. Also, it would help the study if more subjects were used in future investigations.

In this study, all of the reflection about what was read at home was done in school. Further research might examine what would happen if the subjects were expected to do some responding at home, before coming to class. They could write in a response journal each night, after reading, for immediate response. Then, in class, they could respond in discussion groups.

It was interesting to hear how the subjects felt about responding to the reading that was done at home. In a future study, the children's opinions could become a part of a qualitative study.

#### Classroom Implications

This researcher will continue to give the students the opportunity to respond to reading done outside of school. A portion of the day will be set aside just for this response time.

These response techniques taught in class can also be used to respond to books read in class. Using the response techniques for all kinds of reading will help the children internalize those skills. By internalizing them, the children will be able to respond to all that they read, even if there is no direct teacher involvement, making for a strong independent reader.

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