IMPACT OF BUILDING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS'
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN SOCIAL STUDIES

by

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled IMPACT OF BUILDING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN SOCIAL STUDIES by Tammy S. Drayer, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Literacy Education (Birth-Grade 6), is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

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Abstract

This Master's Thesis project resulted in a Professional Development Project on building elementary students' background knowledge in the social studies. The project placed an emphasis on implementing effective resources and strategies in the curriculum as well as ways to use children's literature instead of the traditional textbook.

Keywords: elementary, background knowledge, professional development

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Chapter 1

Background knowledge is the strongest determinant of comprehension (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004); therefore, in order for students to comprehend what they read, they must first be taught how to activate their schema. To activate and build their background knowledge, students need to be involved in engaging activities (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Even though there is an abundance of different types of materials available both through the Internet and in physical form, the textbook is still the primary instructional tool being used by teachers of the social studies. Read the following passage…

> Inverarity visciously pulled Brown into the gully but was sent retiring to the pavilion by a shooter from Cox. Jones in slips and Chappel at silly mid were superb, and Daniel bowled a maiden over in his first spell. Yallop took his toll with three towing sixes but Thompson had little to do in the covers. Grant was dismissed with a beautiful Yorker and Jones went from a brute of a ball…(Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 93).

As I was attempting to make sense of the passage, even the employment of every strategy I know did not allow me to comprehend it. This must be how students feel when they attempt to read textbooks.

Children without background knowledge are unable to comprehend a text if they cannot connect the text to what already exists in their schema. It is particularly important for teachers of English language learners and striving readers to understand how to activate and build background knowledge.   Lionni's beloved picture book, *Fish Is Fish* (1987), illustrates this problem. The fish in the story hears of the world above the water's surface, but lacking sufficient understanding, imagines birds as fish with wings, people as fish with legs wearing clothes, and

cows as fish with horns. Similarly, the struggling reader who lacks background knowledge comprehends text through a distorted lens, unable to grasp an understanding of different people, places, and things (Karchmer, 2004). Students need to investigate and explore as real historians do and to read the types of materials which adults are reading in order to increase their worldly knowledge.

Learning effective ways to activate and build background knowledge, particularly strategies to ultimately enhance students' comprehension in the social studies, and ways to implement children's literature into the curriculum are both of personal interest to me and my future career as a lifelong learner and certified classroom teacher. Also, background knowledge is key to comprehension and therefore, as a reading teacher at the Clinic level, understanding the importance of background knowledge in enhancing students' comprehension when they read texts enables me to understand the reading process from a more in-depth perspective.

Engaging students in social studies by offering interactive activities or authentic texts before, during, and after reading might be more beneficial ways to help them build their background knowledge. "Rather than assign reading, we need to *teach* reading. We must change not just *how* we teach reading, but what we ask kids to read"(Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 17). In social studies, elementary students should be reading the same kinds of materials as adults and reading and investigating primary and secondary source documents just as historians do when they seek answers to their questions (2004). These types of documents are now easily accessible at many different government sites on the Internet.

Interest in the topic of background knowledge led to a Professional Development Project. The impact of building elementary students' background knowledge in the social studies as well as instructional resources and strategies which can aid elementary teachers in activating and

building the background knowledge of students in the social studies will be discussed.

Additional resources may be viewed in the appendices. Children's literature which will aid

teachers during their instruction of the Underground Railroad may be viewed in Appendix A.

Valuable and interactive websites may be viewed in Appendix B. Chapter 2 supports the content

of the Professional Development Project.

Theoretical Framework

The theory which this research most closely aligns with is constructivism because of its

emphasis on the central role of activity in the learning and reading processes. Background

knowledge plays an important role in one's ability to learn. We learn new knowledge by relating

it to prior knowledge, which in turn provides concrete understanding (Piaget, 1969). Through a

constructivist viewpoint, educators can view the reading process as one in which the reader

constructs his or her own messages while reading. The work of Bartlett (1932) and Pearson and

Anderson (1984) help us understand the ways in which already existing knowledge (organized as

schemas) influences the construction of these messages (comprehension). More specifically, it

addresses Schema Theory. This theory suggests that the more elaborate an individual's schema

for any topic (e.g., cooking, boating, or dogs), the more easily he or she will be able to learn new

information in that topic area. Without existing schemas it is very hard to learn new information

on a topic.

Now that educators understand how important existing knowledge is to the acquisition of

new knowledge, many classroom teachers have become adept at building and activating

students' background knowledge (schemas) prior to reading texts with students. Instructional

practices such as webbing, vocabulary activities, anticipation guides, and previewing all build

and activate schema prior to reading. Instruction related to reading process and text structures

are also valuable in developing students' schema (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Transactional/Reader Response Theory, put forth by Rosenblatt (1978), further extends the application of Schema Theory by arguing that all readers have unique responses to reading texts due to the personal nature of their background schemas and that everyone constructs individualized interpretations, based on the uniqueness of their personal schemas, during reading. The Transactional/Reader Response Theory is constructivist in nature because it emphasizes the active role of the reader in meaning making and recognizes the centrality of internal, non-observable events to learning and knowledge construction.

Rosenblatt's work adds that all readers have two kinds of responses to texts. These are known as "efferent" responses, which are fact-oriented, and "aesthetic responses" which are personally and emotionally based. When designing lessons for our students, we must remember that the purposes of reading informational texts and reading literature are very different. For informational texts, lessons should focus on obtaining efferent responses from students. When designing lessons using literature, the promotion of students' aesthetic responses to the texts should be the focus. One method of evoking aesthetic responses in children is to elicit connections between the text and their own lives (text-to-world connections) (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

The purpose of this research was to discover the impact of building background knowledge in social studies at the elementary level and to determine what instructional resources and strategies can be used to enhance that background knowledge; therefore, the questions which will guide this research and professional development are as follows:

- How does background knowledge impact the ways in which elementary children learn social studies ?

- Which instructional resources and strategies can be used in elementary social studies to enhance background knowledge?

The textbook, although it is a secondary source document, is more of a reference tool that should be used as exactly that – a reference tool (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). As the 2011 New York State Common Core Standards suggest, students need to become equipped, in their school years, with the knowledge and skills which will enable them to be college and career ready (New York State Common Core Standards, 2011). Strategies which students would be able to utilize before, during, and after the reading of both literary and informational texts would equip them with this necessary knowledge and skills.

Teachers of elementary students are the first guides in leading younger students down the path of learning strategies which enable them to comprehend social studies texts, which may consist of both primary and secondary documents. Also, comprehension of various social studies topics may be made easier by implementing instructional tools, such as primary source documents and children's literature, specifically nonfiction. One of the six paradigm shifts in the Common Core Standards states that there must be half fiction present in the classroom and half nonfiction (2011). The research questions for this paper and the requirement that the same amount of fiction as nonfiction be implemented in the curriculum led to the creation of a Professional Development Project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review will discuss how activating and building the background knowledge of elementary students in social studies leads to the building of students' schema. Instructional resources and strategies which can be implemented in order to activate and build students' background knowledge will be discussed.

How Background Knowledge Impacts the Way Elementary Children Learn Social Studies

Much of the knowledge which children possess has been accumulated through experiences outside of a school setting before they enter kindergarten. Therefore, each child's knowledge will be different than that of his peers. The teacher plays an important role in recognizing these differences and the importance of building upon background knowledge to enhance comprehension, especially in the content areas. According to Brenner (2009), accessing prior knowledge is especially important in social studies, where students must make connections among a variety of disciplines and must find relevance in events that happened long ago.

Background knowledge is an important factor for creating meaning, and teachers should help students activate prior knowledge before reading so that information connected with concepts or topics in the text is more easily accessible during reading (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002). Fertig (2005) states that elementary children experiencing ongoing cognitive development do not think about the past as adults do. Many concepts and structural relationships used by historians to organize their own ways of knowing the past are too abstract to be meaningful to young learners. They have not yet acquired the historical background knowledge that older students have acquired through formal history instruction in school. Most of the history that children know has been learned informally, that is, outside of school from

family members, friends, movies, television, toys, games, and fictional accounts of the past (Levstik & Barton, 1996). Children also lack the life experience of older students and adults who make use of their personal histories and past experiences to interpret the past in ways that are not direct extensions of contemporary beliefs and values.

Readers are unique in that they possess certain traits or characteristics that are distinctly applied with each text and situation. According to Pardo (2004), the most important of these characteristics is likely the reader's world knowledge (background knowledge). The more background knowledge a reader has that connects with the text being read, the more likely the reader will be able to make sense of what is being read.

Reisman and Wineburg (2008) believe that contextualized historical thinking is impossible to accomplish without background knowledge. One need not know everything about a historical moment, but a basic chronology and some familiarity with key developments are fundamental. Years of research have shown the importance of prior knowledge in helping people make inferences as they read (Anderson, 2005). In the case of history, however, the inability of students to automatically apply prior knowledge may cause students to miss key differences between past and present. Background information allows students to decipher unfamiliar terms and to create accurate mental images as they read. Because teachers cannot expect students to know how certain words were defined in the past or how today's institutions differed, such information must be provided. Providing students with background knowledge enables them to interpret new information.

Beck, McKeown, and Gromoll (1989) performed descriptive, analytic work when they analyzed fourth and fifth grade texts. They suggest that "a key to engineering information for young learners is consideration of the knowledge they can be expected to bring to the text "

(p. 152). They analyzed four widely used social studies texts for grades four and five and found too many concepts explained in too few words with too much reliance on background knowledge and presentation of pointless facts and asides that could easily be misperceived as important to remember. The content of the texts seemed to assume that students have knowledge of some sophisticated and abstract connects, and so the texts make little attempt to establish such knowledge.

Willson and Rupley (1997) concluded that, for grades two to three, narrative text-based reading, comprehension is primarily driven by phonemic knowledge and secondarily by background knowledge for the text. Background knowledge appears to have its greatest effects at grades three to four, and strategy knowledge begins to be important to comprehension. At the upper grades, strategy knowledge of how to read text and what to read in text begins to dominate the prediction of reading comprehension for both narrative and expository text. The relations appear fairly stable, and background knowledge appears to become almost irrelevant to reading school-based text by grade six, a result discrepant with many current theories.

Instructional Resources

Because the textbook is still a tool used by many social studies teachers today, there seems to be a high demand for instructional strategies to build students' schemas before they read both texts in print and digitally. The Common Core Standards state that a curriculum must contain use of 50% fiction and 50% nonfiction (Common Core Standards, 2011), which is the perfect stepping stone for teachers to implement the use of many different genres of children's literature to build the background knowledge of their students. If the textbook must stay, then students need strategies which will introduce them to concepts and topics before reading a textbook.

Textbooks. Textbooks are still a primary resource for teachers in their pedagogical approach to teaching social studies (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Ironically, when given a choice, students often place greater trust in the textbook than more reliable sources. This may be because they are not given a choice. They simply do not question its authority (Nokes, 2005). According to Villano (2005), as students are being pushed to read and understand more content, many students struggle with not only what the text is about but also how to read it. She states that the textbook offers a breadth of information that trade books are unable to provide and that when students graduate from the elementary school to the middle school, they are expected to be able to negotiate a textbook. She states students will be expected to negotiate textbooks when they move to the middle school but she also states "…I let their text *guide* my curriculum; I did not let it *become* the curriculum. I used their textbooks to teach many historical facts, but I used other genres to help students interact with history and to gain background knowledge" (p.128).

Some teachers believe there are drawbacks to not using a text in the teaching of social studies. For instance, when teaching of economics using children's books, because the genre is children's literature and not textbooks, economics vocabulary and concepts are not systematically presented across books or even within books (Rodgers, Hawthorne, & Wheeler, 2007).

Students may read text in print or digital form; therefore, text also includes the Internet. According to Yopp and Yopp (2010), the Internet can "expand and enrich students' understanding of a book they are reading by allowing them to quickly learn more about the content, setting, or issues in the book" (p. 13). Students' enhanced knowledge then brought to the text will enhance their understanding. The Internet can also be used as a place for student to seek answers to their questions and to learn more about characters, such as the harsh

environments in which they live.

Strategies

There are many different strategies which may be used with the textbook. A few will be described in the following paragraphs.

Prereading. Swanson, Edmonds, Hairrell, Vaughn, and Simmons (2011) asserted that comprehension strategies for reading texts in the upper elementary grades are needed. They recommend the before reading strategy of previewing in which the teacher instructs during three activities, including preteaching proper nouns, introducing the big idea of the text, and preteaching and connecting students' prior knowledge with the text.

Guided writing procedure (GWP). Students make connections before reading the text when they engage in the guided writing procedure (Brozo & Simpson, 2003; Readance, Bean, & Baldwin, 2001). This is a research-validated strategy that involves students in discussing, listening, reading, and writing about content area concepts. First, the student's prior knowledge of the topic is activated through brainstorming. Ideas are listed via overhead projection, on a chalkboard, or on newsprint, and small groups of students are asked to organize and label the ideas. Students then write individually on the topic using this information. Next, the students read the text and revise their explanatory writing. By using the GWP, students significantly improve the depth of their content understanding through writing (Knipper & Duggan, 2006).

Learning logs. Learning logs also serve as a prereading strategy which helps to build background knowledge of students. Through a well-structured prompt that encourages writing in a learning log, students make predictions, activate prior knowledge, and develop a prereading orientation to an assignment. Well-planned prompts help students focus on the upcoming topic of the lesson and give directions for their acquisition of knowledge. Students in grades 4-8 can

use this learning log with a chapter reading assignment in science or social studies (Knipper &

Duggan, 2006). A sample of a learning log may be viewed at the end of Appendix D.

  Visual or graphic organizers. Visual or graphic organizers help students to see not only

new concepts but also how previously known concepts are related and connected to new ones

(Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002). Teachers teach students how to make text-to-text,

text-to-self, and text-to-world connections so that readers can more easily comprehend texts that

they read (Pardo, 2004).

  Vocabulary. Soalt (2005) cited McKeown & Beck (2004) and RAND Reading Study

Group (2004) when stating, "Vocabulary, like background knowledge affects comprehension"

(p. 680). Research has shown that to have an effect on comprehension, students need to explore

a new word in a variety of contexts (McKeown & Beck; Mezynski, 1983; Stahl & Fairbanks,

1986). As stated by Marilyn Jager Adams, "Words are not just words. They are the nexus - the

interface - between communication and thought. When we read, it is through words that we

build, refine, and modify our knowledge. What makes vocabulary valuable and important is not

the words themselves so much as the understandings they can afford" (2009, p. 180).

  Reading aloud. Reading aloud and teacher modeling show students how to activate

schema and make connections (Pardo, 2004). A kindergarten teacher used her experience

working with older students to adapt lessons to work within her classroom of kindergarteners.

She began teaching comprehension by teaching her students how to activate their schemas.

Making connections, visualizing, asking questions, and inferring naturally flowed from there.

She began by defining the strategy, providing a visual representation of its meaning, and asking

students to use the strategy within the context of the story, through use of anchor charts and hand

signals. Schemas became the basis for interactions with the text. As new stories were read and

shared aloud, schemas became an ever-present force driving the discussion. By necessity,

comprehension instruction looks different with young children. It is more active and much more

visible (i.e., through the use of hand signals) (Gregory & Kahill, 2010).

Brabham, Boyd, and Edgington (2000) performed a descriptive, developmental study of

elementary students' acquisition of vocabulary, comprehension of content area concepts in

science and social studies, and ability to distinguish between fact and fiction in informational

books read aloud by pre-service teachers in the classroom. Fifty-nine second graders, eighty-six

third graders, and one hundred forty fourth graders from two different schools were part of the

study. The results of the study indicate that reading informational storybooks aloud can produce

significant increases in the numbers of unfamiliar words related to science and social studies

concepts that elementary students understand.

Without effective instruction, however, nonfiction and fiction may be no better for

teaching vocabulary and content than traditional expository texts, and for primary grades, they

may produce more confusion than knowledge about factual content in science and social studies.

Informational storybooks will be valuable instructional materials for reading aloud in science and

social studies if teachers take the time to assess and activate background knowledge (2000).

Villano (2005) used historical literature for schema-building activities and performed

action research with her 23 fifth grade students. She read aloud from nonfiction literature using

children's books, poetry, and plays. After reading aloud, her students made inferences based on

the information contained in the text and illustrations. Picture books' varied vocabulary and

illustrations allow students to create a foundation so that they can better comprehend information

from other sources. She used the textbook to teach many historical facts, but other genres to help

students interact with history and to gain background knowledge. She also stated that educators

should consider that reading aloud as well as interacting with many genres, including textbooks, appears to be one of the most comprehensive ways to help expand students' historical knowledge base and gain schemata to scaffold new information and learning.

Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011) performed a qualitative, yearlong, study of the influence of reading informational texts aloud to students on a regular basis and nurturing their synthesis of the content in these texts through written and sketched reports. The participants in the study were 21 children in third grade who were students of the second author. Their ongoing assessment of the students' responses to the texts read aloud revealed that the majority of the students were synthesizing while reading or responding to the text – that is, thinking about the big ideas a whole text. Their assessment of written responses to texts read independently found that 20 students were synthesizing independently, or at least engaging in the big idea and including some elaboration of their thinking.

Soalt (2005) suggested that one way to add world knowledge is to use informational books with all students, particularly young students. By using information books, students build world knowledge so that they will have the appropriate information to activate at a later time. Soalt concluded that when she read aloud two informational texts before assigning a fictional picture book (formally known as the strategy of using twin texts), the informational texts supported the student's comprehension in three ways: They build background knowledge, develop text-related vocabulary, and increase motivation to explore the topic under discussion.

Additional strategies for building background knowledge may be viewed in Appendix C.

Sources Beyond the Traditional Textbook

There is a repertoire of instructional resources available to teachers in the world of education today. Children's literature works particularly well when students are introduced to a

wide variety of genres through wide reading. These instructional resources can be beneficial

supports to aid teachers when building students' worldly knowledge. Ultimately, students'

comprehension in the social studies can be enhanced. All of the resources discussed may be

useful before or during instruction with the traditional textbook. In addition, websites which

may be used to build the background of students on the topic of Underground Railroad may be

viewed in Appendix B.

   Primary source documents. Primary source documents may be defined as "original

items or records that have survived from the past, such as clothing, letters, photographs, and

manuscripts. They were part of a direct personal experience of a time or event" (Library of

Congress, 2003). Building students' background knowledge in the social studies can be

accomplished through the use of primary source documents; however, the nonuse of these

resources may be due to the fact that teachers are unaware of how to properly implement them

during instruction in the social studies.

   Studies in the use of primary source documents at the elementary and middle levels have

been more limited than the effects of using primary source documents at the high school level

(Dutt-Doner, Cook-Cottone, & Allen, 2007). No research could be found on empirical studies

performed at the elementary level on how the use of primary source documents affects the

background knowledge of elementary students.

   There is an immense amount of digital historical resources available on the Internet now

for teaching the social studies. It is important to note that digital historical resources are more

accessible than non-digital primary source documents and artifacts. The most comprehensive

efforts to create and preserve digital historical resources can be found in the Library of Congress

"American Memory" project. One example of the work being done is a collection of ex-slave

interviews and narratives. The availability of these new resources allow for a more for the teaching of history to move from a teacher-centered transmission model to a model that encourages student inquiry (Lee, 2002).

Children's literature. Teachers support students' acquisition of world knowledge by establishing and maintaining a rich, literate environment, full of texts that provide students with numerous opportunities to learn content in a wide variety of topics (Pardo, 2004). Villano (2005) used picture books and poetry to help her fifth grade students build background knowledge in the area of social studies. She claims picture books are a simpler genre with strong illustrations that support the content and were great to use before her students read their textbooks.

Villano also states that students who are unfamiliar with expository reading (textbook reading) have difficulty understanding how to negotiate textbooks because they lack schema for such genre and topics. Students entering fifth grade have yet to learn much American history, thus they lack prior knowledge to scaffold new information. The necessity to employ multiple methods and to provide supplemental materials was quite evident in order for her to help her students create schema for a social studies topic while using materials in addition to their text.

Using children's literature to enrich learning in content areas provides opportunities for students to make text-to-self connections (Kinniburgh & Byrd, 2008). Making connections is very important in students' building of their background knowledge. The primary reason for a reader to make connections is to enhance understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). "Good readers draw on prior knowledge and experience to increase their understanding, which means that when you teach students how to connect to text, you are giving them a tool to better understand what they are reading" (Mariotti, 2010, p. 87).

Wide reading of children's literature from a variety of genres can build students' background knowledge and therefore, enhance their comprehension. Fisher, Ross, and Grant (2010) selected one section of ninth grade Earth science students for an intervention unit on plate tectonics; students in other sections of the course served as the control group. One class of 11th grade physics students was also tested. Because of the small number of students in this class, scores on one intervention unit on waves were compared with scores in other assessed areas on the comprehensive physics exam, instead of assigning a control group. Students read for widely for 10-12 minutes of class time each day.

Students were encouraged to make a different selection if they were getting stuck on a specific reading and reminded that well-chosen selections could help them build a foundation for new learning in the content area. This concept is based on research supporting schema theory, which views knowledge as an internal, organized domain upon which deeper understanding may be developed as discussed in McNeil (1987) and Stahl (1999). Fisher et al. state, "Students cannot learn from books they cannot read" (p. 25). The results of both the textbook unit test and state test suggest that building background knowledge through wide reading improves student achievement. On the state test, students who read widely averaged 86%, compared to 59% correct in the control class. These researchers found that when the content was kept constant and the level of the reading materials was varied, students achieve at higher levels.

Fisher et al. also stated that students need time every day to develop a habit of reading for information in their classes, which mirrors the lives of scientists, who read widely on nearly a daily basis, in journals, websites, field notes and the like. This information may be useful in promoting the idea that students in the social studies may benefit from exploring materials as a

historian does, such as websites and journals (see Appendix B for websites). Without sufficient background knowledge, comprehension tools often recommended by experts, such as visualizing, predicting, and summarizing, questioning, making connections, and inferring, will not be effective. They also state that wide reading has a positive impact on student achievement.

The textbook is a genre which is still common in the classroom; therefore, prereading strategies which students can choose to implement before reading the text in order to build their background knowledge could only be beneficial. Through use of children's literature and instructional resources, such as the Internet, elementary teachers can also begin to build the knowledge of their students. Specific strategies which invite the use of nonfiction can be useful, such as reading aloud. This particular strategy benefits striving and English language learners. Reading aloud allows students who struggle with the decoding of text to learn about new things by listening. Worldly things are made accessible through simply listening. Vocabulary, like background knowledge, increases comprehension. In order to encounter more words and build their background knowledge, students need to have a variety of genres on many topics in order to read widely.

Building background knowledge of elementary students in the social studies begins with teachers. In social studies in particular, students must connect information and find relevance in past events for which they possess little, inaccurate, or no schema. Elementary students lack life experience and therefore, possess little knowledge to connect new information to, especially in the social studies. Building background knowledge builds schema and increases the amount of information a child has to connect to other areas of their lives.

Chapter 3

Methods

Two areas which this research investigated were the importance of background knowledge for elementary students in the social studies curriculum and the instructional resources and strategies that can be used to activate and build schemas of elementary students studying social studies. Literature was reviewed in order to seek answers to the research questions and to provide a framework for the professional development project.

Data Collection

Information for the professional development project was gathered using library research databases to locate articles. Databases used to search for articles included *Education Research Complete*, *ERIC*, *Academic Search Complete*, *PsycInfo*, *PsycArticles*, and the *Professional Development Collection*. Google Scholar was also used to locate articles which pertained to the topic. Once articles were located, the researchers sited in the articles were used to locate other articles on the topic. Other ways of gathering research included viewing others' professional development projects, perusing mentor books, and websites of professional organizations, such as the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English.

When using the databases to locate articles, key terms which were used to search included "social studies" and "background knowledge", "background knowledge and "literacy", "social studies" and "elementary teaching methods", "primary and secondary documents" and "literacy", "background knowledge" and "comprehension", "background knowledge" and "informational text", "informational texts", "social studies", and "elementary students", "background knowledge" and "social studies" and "strategies." For this research project, the term *background knowledge* and *schema* are used interchangeably. A reader's *schema*

(background knowledge) is defined by Pardo (2004), using Anderson and Pearson (1984) and Narvaez (2002), as a series of networkable connections by which the processing of connecting known information to new information takes place.

Criteria for selecting articles included articles which addressed elementary students and background knowledge. Articles which addressed other content areas, such as science, and middle and upper level students were still considered as information within them could be applied to the social studies and elementary students; however, those articles which focused on the impact of building the background knowledge of students and instructional resources and strategies beneficial to implement in order to build background knowledge were the focus of selection.

Data Analysis

Methods used to analyze the information included coding of the content by using different colors. Content within the articles was assigned a color depending on the research question which it addressed. A semantic map was used to organize information visually according to topics which emerged from the content in the articles. The resulting information led to the creation of a professional development project for elementary social studies teachers and any others interested in empowering teachers in building the knowledge of their students and therefore, enhancing students' comprehension. The professional development project will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Professional Development Series

Reading First is a federal program which was implemented through Title 1 Part B of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Schools were provided with funds to introduce scientifically based reading curricula, systems of accountability for tracking students' individual progress in reading, and to implement professional development programs to support improvement in K-3 instruction. This program added an emphasis on professional development as a means of improving early elementary reading instruction. For many states, literacy coaching was an important component of the professional development provided for teachers (Scott, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012).

In order for classroom teachers to implement instructional resources and strategies, they need a coach in this process. Literacy coaching is a very important part of the building of teachers' background knowledge in order to have positive results in student achievement in all academic areas. The role of the literacy coach in providing professional development for, and with, teachers needs to be further researched. There is very little guidance regarding the structural role and core features of the professional development activities that involve coaches. Documents that do offer guidance typically offer guidance at the most general level (L'Allier & Elish Piper, 2006).

In content areas, and in the social studies in particular, there are the Common Core Standards which are now requiring teachers to implement more and different kinds of instructional resources than have been offered to students in the past. With the implementation of more nonfiction in the classroom, strategies which build background knowledge using the nonfiction genre, such as reading aloud, may result in greater student achievement. When

students who have difficulty decoding text are able to listen to learn new content before attempting to read a textbook, they may improve their reading. As will be evident in the Professional Development Series, children's literature and the Internet may be used to teach strategies which build the background knowledge of students. The content areas, and social studies in particular, require students to have an understanding of a wide range of topics; therefore, literacy coaching and professional development are needed to support teachers.

Results of the Review

Literacy coaching. L'Allier, Ellish-Piper, and Bean (2010) synthesized the findings from their studies, and related literature, to develop seven guiding principles that literacy coaches can use to improve professional development for teachers. The principles may be used by literacy coaches to focus their work on the improvement of literacy teaching and learning in the elementary grades. The seven guiding principles for literacy coaching are outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Seven Guiding Principles for Literacy Coaching

Principle		Explanation
1	Coaching Requires Specialized Knowledge	• Knowledge of literacy processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction
2	Time Working With Teachers Is the Focus of Coaching	• Job-embedded, ongoing professional development which consists of observing, modeling, conferencing, coteaching, and leading book study groups (Casey, 2006; Froelich & Puig, 2010; IRA, 2004)
3	Collaborative Relationships Are Essential for Coaching	• Coach as collaborator vs. evaluator; discussions focus on students rather than strengths or weaknesses of a teacher's instruction (Casey, 2006; Toll, 2005)
4	Coaching That Supports Student Reading Achievement Focuses on a Set of Core Activities	• Literacy coaches administer and discuss student assessments, observe teacher instruction and provide feedback, conference with teachers about their instruction and students, model instruction in classrooms (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007)
5	Coaching Must Be Both Intentional and Opportunistic	• Coaches have an in-depth understanding of why and how they are working with teachers and understand opportunistic or on-the-fly coaching is sometimes necessary

6	Coaches Must Be Literacy Leaders in the School	• Coaches set goals or directions in a school, develop people, and redesign the organization to facilitate accomplishment of goals (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004)
7	Coaching Evolves Over Time	• Coaches continue to learn, develop positive relationships with teachers, and modify what they do as they evolve as literacy coaches

L'Allier, Ellish-Piper, and Bean (2010)

Professional development. The role of a literacy coach is not an easy job. The demands are very high and the role also requires the ability to work with adults. The role of the literacy coach in providing professional development is also complex.

What counts as professional development? Desimone (2009) states, "...experiences can range from formal, structured topic-specific seminars given on in-service days, to everyday, informal 'hallway' discussions with other teachers about instructional techniques, embedded in teachers' everyday work lives" (p. 182). The professional development which will be offered to the audience for purposes of this particular project on developing background knowledge will include both formal and informal development. Teachers will participate in an all-day workshop and follow-up will consist of both formal and informal encounters with the literacy coach.

Desimone also states that there is research consensus on the main features of professional development that have been associated with changes in knowledge, practice, and, to a lesser extent, student achievement. The critical features of professional development are: (a) content focus, (b) active learning, (c) coherence, (d) duration, and (e) collective participation (Hawthorne & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999). These critical features are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Critical Features of Professional Development

FEATURE	IMPORTANT ASPECTS
Content focus	• Improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects in order to support student achievement in positive ways

Active learning	• Observing expert teachers or being observed, followed by interactive feedback and discussion • Reviewing student work in the topic areas being covered • Leading discussions
Coherence	• Extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teachers' knowledge and beliefs • Consistency of school, district, and state reforms and policies with what is taught in professional development • Aligned with and directly related to state academic content standards, student academic achievement standards, and assessments
Duration	• Activities of sufficient duration, including both span of time over which the activity is spread (e.g., one day or one semester) and the number of hours spent in the activity • Research shows support for activities spread over a semester (or intense summer institutes with follow-up during the semester) and include 20 hours of contact time • Sustained and intensive
Collective participation	• Participation of teachers from the same school, grade, or department for potential interaction and discourse • Collaboration • Teachers learn from one another

Desimone (2009)

The model which is recommended by Desimone in studying the effects of

professional development on teachers and students may be viewed in Table 4.3. The information

in the table follows a path which begins in column one and ends in column four.

Table 4.3
Model for Studying the Effects of Professional Development on Teachers and Students

1	2	3	4
Core features of professional development: • Content focus • Active learning • Coherence • Duration • Collective participation	Increased teacher knowledge and skills; change in attitudes and beliefs	Change in instruction	Improved student learning

Desimone, 2009

Gilrane, Roberts, and Russell (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of a professional

development effort that was part of a 2-year Reading in Excellence Act grant in a high-poverty,

rural elementary school in the southeastern United States. The purpose of the study was to

evaluate the effectiveness of the Professional Development (PD) program. Student achievement

showed that the instruction was successful, and they wanted to know how the Professional

Development activities supported teacher change and reflection. Analysis of the data revealed

that teachers found the following conditions supportive of their growth, change, and reflection:

    (a) having a voice in determining PD needs – flexibility in carrying out 90-100 hours of
        additional PD; ability to attend workshops, observe other classes, read professional
        books, view teaching videos, and attend professional conferences; for the 10 days of
        attendance required of all teachers, observations of and conversations with teachers
        were taken into consideration

    (b) having structure in place (e.g., materials, time, and space for collaborative planning)

    (c) feeling supported in their efforts by administrators and change facilitators

    (d) observing students' success and having meetings to discuss assessment data in ways
        that celebrated the good news and emphasized areas in need of further growth"
        (p. 337).

Application of the Results to a Professional Development Project

How background knowledge impacts the ways in which elementary children learn social

studies and which instructional resources and strategies can be used in elementary social studies

to enhance background knowledge were the foci of the Professional Development Project, which

will be based on the information in Tables 4.1, seven guiding principles for literacy coaching;

Table 4.2, critical features of professional development; and Table 4.3, a model for studying the

effects of professional development on teachers and students.

Design of Professional Development Project

During the Professional Development Series, teachers will be introduced to instructional

resources and strategies which will aid in building the background knowledge of elementary

students in the topic of the Underground Railroad. Ways in which to implement children's

literature, specifically both fiction and nonfiction in the curriculum in order to build background

knowledge of elementary students, will be discussed

Literacy coaching workshop goals and objectives. Using Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 as

supporting guidance, the following is a list of the literacy coach's goals and objectives for the

Professional Development Series:

- Increase teachers' awareness of the impacts of building background knowledge in the social studies

- Increase teachers' knowledge of instructional resources and strategies for building background knowledge in the social studies

- Show how children's literature and websites are valuable resources for building background knowledge

- Continue collaboration with teachers beyond the Professional Development Series

Proposed audience. Those who might be interested in this research include principals;

entire school districts wanting to implement best reading practices within their districts; and

classroom teachers, particularly those who teach the social studies. Any instructor who works in

meeting the needs of striving readers and English language learners would also be interested

since these types of readers in particular would benefit from strategies which build background

knowledge. The importance of activating and building background knowledge in the

elementary curriculum, particularly when teaching social studies, as well as instructional

resources and strategies which may be implemented when teaching social studies, will be

explored.

Proposed time and location. The information will be initially presented at an all-day

workshop. The location of the series will be in a school or college facility where use of an

overhead projector is possible. Seating with desktops is necessary for the participants to engage

in the learning of strategies.

Proposed workshop format and activities. Table 4.4 provides an outline of the

Professional Development Series.

Table 4.4
Workshop Agenda

Hook	Point of view activity: • Participants of the workshop will engage in a point of view activity. A difficult reading selection will be read by the participants. This activity will set the stage for the discussion of the importance of building students' background knowledge in the social studies before reading so they may better comprehend.
Power Point	Introduction of theme of Underground Railroad Brief 15-minute discussion • Reasons for selection of topic • Research questions • Literature review • Methods • Findings • Conclusion
Overview of Activities	• Participants will be informed about the activities of the day
Instructional Resources and Strategies	Whole group (on overhead projector) • Participants will be introduced to research-based strategies which can enable students to build their background knowledge in the social studies • Participants will engage in the use of children's literature (both fiction and nonfiction) and instructional resources, such as primary source documents, to actually learn some of the strategies being recommended for building background knowledge in the social studies • Participants will be taken on a tour of some of the websites which can aid them in building background knowledge of their students
Future Professional Development	• Participants will be informed about various ways in which their professional development will be extended beyond the workshop
Question and Answer Session/Feedback	• Participants are given an opportunity to ask questions and report feedback on their professional development experience

The proposed Professional Development Series stemmed from the idea that the traditional one-day workshop is not what brings increase in teacher knowledge and skills and student achievement. It is professional development which is job embedded and ongoing that is the most effective for teachers. Therefore, it is the professional development that takes place after the workshop, in the schools, that has the most positive effects on both teachers and students. Teachers will also be actively engaged in the learning process when they learn about the strategies for building background knowledge and how to implement them. It was my intent, as a literacy coach, to make the presentation meaningful to the teachers with the ultimate goal of student achievement in mind.

Chapter 5

Final Thoughts

Overview of Study and Findings

Most of the history that children know has been learned informally (Fertig, 2005); therefore, elementary students have not yet acquired historical knowledge that older students have acquired through formal history instruction in school. Younger students often possess limited worldly knowledge and what they do possess in their schemas is often enhanced through instruction by the teacher. The teacher plays an important and key role in assessing students' background knowledge in order to determine the direction of future lessons.

As put forth by Rosenblatt (1978) in the Transactional/Reader Response Theory, all readers have unique responses to reading texts due to the personal nature of their background schemas and everyone constructs individualized interpretations based on the uniqueness of their personal schemas, during reading; therefore, there is a need to develop students' schemas so comprehension when reading texts is enhanced. Students have to be able to connect what they read to what already exists in their schemas. It is the teacher who can aid students in building their schemas with various instructional resources and strategies.

Significance of the Findings

There is a need for teachers to learn effective strategies that will build students' background knowledge before reading a textbook or other print, or non-print sources. Students have to be able to connect what is read to what already exists in their schema. In addition, due to the Common Core Standards, nonfiction books are now as important as fiction. Teachers will need to know how to properly implement strategies using this genre.

Background knowledge is the key to comprehension, especially in the content areas,

which is why the teacher plays an important role in developing students' everyday knowledge in the social studies. And, the literacy coach becomes a key collaborator in helping the teacher to accomplish such a goal. Constructivism emphasizes the central role of activity in the learning and reading processes, which is why the teacher needs to find engaging ways to enable students to become better readers and writers. These ways can include use of children's literature and interactive websites. As stated by Daniels and Zemelman (2004), "Rather than assign reading, we need to *teach* reading. We must change not just *how* we teach reading, but what we ask kids to read" (p. 17).

Limitations of the Findings

A major limitation was that the Professional Development Series was not implemented, just proposed. Actual implementation of the Professional Development Project would enable the literacy coach to actually gather feedback from teachers in order to determine areas of strength and weakness to aid in development of future presentations. Also, by interacting with teachers, the literacy coach could actually determine the teachers' needs in further developing their students in the area of building background knowledge in the social studies.

Another limitation was the narrow topic. It was difficult to locate information on background knowledge. For example, one area that could not be explored is how elementary children's background knowledge, in particular, is affected when using primary sources to study social studies topics. The list of instructional resources and strategies for building background knowledge in the social studies is not limited to those discussed in the Professional Development Project.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could include interviewing social studies teachers on the tools,

instructional practices, and strategies they use to activate and build students' background knowledge in the social studies. Teachers who have participated in professional development might be interviewed to determine components which they prefer and find valuable in a professional development workshop or what they might recommend for a smooth and exciting presentation. Studying samples of students' work to determine areas of strength and needs may aid in determining the direction of future professional development needs of teachers.

More research is needed to determine how literacy coaches can be utilized to achieve, ultimately, the greatest increase in student achievement. The structure of the work of coaching needs to be determined so that teachers, and ultimately, students benefit from the potential of coaching as a tool for instructional reform (Smith, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012). As put forth by Desimone (2009), it is important to note that for professional development to be more successful, more consistent components need to be studied. Interviewing teachers on what they desire in a literacy coach and how adults learn best needs to be studied more in depth. Also, empirical studies on the impact of using primary source documents with elementary students in socials studies is needed.

Conclusion

When children, particularly striving and English language learners, lack sufficient background knowledge, they may have difficulty reading. Teachers must become equipped with instructional resources and strategies to aid these students in activating and building their background knowledge. As students enter the middle and upper grades, textbooks and other print, and non-print sources, become more and more a part of their everyday lives in the classroom. Therefore, students need to become familiar with resources and strategies that will assist them in building their background knowledge and enhancing their comprehension of

textbooks in the content areas.

Professional development is needed in order to provide teachers in all content areas, particularly the social studies, with instructional resources and strategies which can aid students in building their background knowledge. Literacy coaches play an instrumental role in collaborating teachers. It is important to note, however, that professional development can begin at a workshop but the true development is job-embedded and takes place AFTER the workshop when the teacher is implementing instructional resources and teaching the strategies which enable students to build their background knowledge. Better definition of the role of the literacy coach will also strengthen coaches' ability to develop teachers.

The new Common Core Standards emphasize the importance of nonfiction and content area reading. We educate ourselves by reading a variety of genres. Children today read texts in both print and digital form. Without sufficient background knowledge, students are unable to comprehend the texts they are reading. In order to read texts, students need strategies for building their background knowledge. This ability to comprehend a variety of genres is a skill which students will need in their everyday lives. Effective professional development is the key to highly skilled teachers and literacy coaches who enable students to become lifelong readers who will succeed not only in college and the work place, but in life in general.

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Appendix A

Children's Literature for Teaching the Underground Railroad

Nonfiction

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Fiction

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Appendix B

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WEBSITES

Scholastic Teacher Site
http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/index.htm
- Wealth of information about the underground railroad, including slide shows of important themes in American history with images and audio, online and offline activities that investigate the people, places, and events of the 1800's, and primary sources, such as many photos and posters to help students understand the historic time. Also available are interviews with authors Ellen Levine and Christopher Paul Curtis. Curtis also shares how he went about researching before he wrote and illustrated his book so that the setting of the book was placed in the proper context. There are also slideshows of many primary source documents, slavery, the Underground Railroad, and the new life of freedom for the slaves. What is most exciting is the interactive, online activity which invites the reader/student to participate in a journey which begins on a plantation and ends up in freedom of the slave who tells his story.

National Geographic Beta
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/kids.html
- Students are educated about the Underground Railroad using multimedia when they participate as a slave in an interactive journey complete with music, sound effects, and visuals. Along the way, they learn about famous helpers on the Underground Railroad, such as Harriet Tubman, William Still, and Thomas Garrett. Also included on this site are a timeline, pictures of where slaves hid, and maps of the Underground Railroad.

Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Railroad
http://pathways.thinkport.org/resources/video.cfm
- Excellent site! Questions and answers to the basics of the underground railroad which will enhance students' background knowledge; questions and facts labeled in the left column with labels to help guide students when they read and identify the type of information presented, such as "right there" or "definition"; a timeline; many links to valuable resources, including interviews with former slaves; strategies to implement when students are reading the material on the site; video clips on Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass; primary source documents, such as excerpts from William Still's diary

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
http://www.freedomcenter.org/underground-railroad/
- Here a timeline is offered, what the underground railroad was and where the term originated, what escaping slaves endured and risked, Florida's role in the Underground Railroad, famous participants of the Underground Railroad, and slaves' reasons for escape, how they escaped, and who escaped.

History Channel
http://www.history.com/topics/underground-railroad
- Short videos about Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass

HARRIET TUBMAN WEBSITES

bio.True Story
http://www.biography.com/people/harriet-tubman-9511430/videos/harriet-tubman-mini-bio-2079119094
- Synopses, quick facts, photos, and videos of mini-biographies of at least Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. This site would be great when building the background knowledge of a striving, auditory, or English language learner.

Social Studies for Kids
http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/undergroundrailroad1.htm
- Several links to slavery and the Underground Railroad

United States Library of Congress
http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/tubman
- Under "Activists and Reformers" can be found a short excerpt on Harriet Tubman as a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Readers can also find out about her early years and escape from slavery and what she did during the Civil War; very valuable site for investigating primary source documents

SITES FOR TEACHERS TO BUILD THEIR BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

American Civil War
http://www.americancivilwar.com/documents/index.html
- Civil War documents, including the Emancipation Proclamation, a timeline of African American history, children's literature which centers on the Civil War, photos, brief discussion of Harriet Tubman

Activities on the Underground Railroad for the primary grades
- http://www.ehow.com/info_8362635_activities-underground-railroad-primary-grades.html

Activities for heroes of the Underground Railroad for elementary
- http://www.ehow.com/info_8676277_activities-heroes-underground-railroad-elementary.html

Website- created by a teacher and her students
http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/tubman.html
- Site on Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad; contains a timeline, activities, other links, photos, etc.

Web Quest
http://www.questgarden.com/96/18/0/100612182518/process.htm
- Takes the student on an adventure; viewpoints of both a male and female slave are shared from being on a plantation, escaping, and eventually gaining freedom

Think Quest Education Foundation
- The Life as Slave
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/00394/life.htm

Interactive Map
http://www.eduplace.com/kids/socsci/books/applications/imaps/maps/g5s_u6/index.html#top
- Interactive map which allows students to explore routes travelled by slaves

Awesome Stories
http://www.awesomestories.com/history/slave-voices/trips-on-the-underground-railroad
- Slaves tell their stories on this site; much information about slavery is present

History Alive! Teaching with Stories
http://www.teachingwithstories.com/index2.htm
- Students choose from any one of ten different links to experience the Underground Railroad

Teacher Tube
http://teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=19374
- Video on the brief history of the Underground Railroad

Appendix C

Prereading Strategies to Implement with Children's Literature

Picture Carousel (Yopp & Yopp, 2010)
- May be used to enrich students' background knowledge and elicit affective responses about a topic prior to reading
- May be used with fiction or nonfiction

Implementing the Strategy:
1. Select images related to the literature and post around the room; images may be obtained from the Internet (Google Images) or other sources (magazines, old books, etc.)
2. Number each displayed image
3. Students are given a guide that directs their attention to important aspects of the image or teacher poses questions for students to consider as they examine the image; guide is organized so comments or questions correspond to each numbered photograph
4. Individually, or in pairs, students move around the room at their own pace to explore each image and record notes (give ample time for thorough and close examination of photos)
5. Students gather in small groups to discuss their responses to the questions and to the photographs

Differentiated Instruction:
- All students participate in the activity but they read different books following their discussions; after books are read, students share what they have learned and view the images again
- Different response guides may be provided; for example, students may respond in writing on the guide, sketching a response to each image, or recording a list of words that come to mind as they view each image

Images to use for the Underground Railroad

Image 1: quilt with a design
Image 2: advertisement
Image 3: picture of Niagara Falls
Image 4: plantation, cotton picking
Image 5: slave quarters

Children's Literature:

Low level: *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (Ringgold, 1992)
At level: *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007)
Above level: *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl* (McKissack, 1997)

Book Boxes (Yopp & Yopp, 2010)
- Students are shown objects that serve as clues to a text's content

- Listening to the experiences, knowledge, and thinking of peers supports all students as they consider the objects and possible relationships among them
- May be used with fiction or nonfiction

Implementing the Strategy:
- Inform students that they will soon be reading a new book and that there are several objects in a box that are somehow related to the book
- Teacher draws one object from the box at a time
- Students identify the object and begin to generate predictions about the content of the book. What does the object suggest about the book?
- After several predictions are shared with the entire group, a second object is drawn from the box
- Students once again engage in discussion, first in small groups and then as they share their thinking with the entire group
- As each new object is drawn from the box, students' predictions about the selection are extended or revised
- After the students have seen all the objects, they make final predictions that must account for each object; it is important that students are given ample time to talk with one another and to share their evolving visions of the selection

Note: Objects may be drawn from the book box in any order

As an extension activity, students may record their thinking in writing. Students identify each object as it is revealed, engage in small-group discussion and record two predictions-individually or as a group- before thinking is shared with classmates. Developing two predictions about the content of the text after each clue stretches students' thinking and encourages elaboration in their discussion as they consider alternatives that would account for each of the clues.

Children's Literature:

Henry's Freedom Box (Levine, 2007)

Objects in the Book Box:

Miniature crate/box
Picture of wife and children
Bandage
Birthday cake
Map with Philadelphia, PA on it

During Reading Strategies

Ten Important Words (Yopp & Yopp, 2010)
- Activity strengthens students' vocabulary skills
- A follow-up activity may be to ask students to view related websites that have been previously identified and bookmarked. Students search for one or two of their important words on the websites to see whether and how the words are used, furthering their understanding of both the words and the content
- During reading activities prompt personal responses to literature
- Students actively engage with a text

Implementing the Strategy:
- Provide each student with a copy of a reading selection and a set of self-adhesive notes
- Teacher instructs the students to independently identify the ten most important words in the text as they read- that is, the words that capture the most significant ideas in the selection- and record one word on each of the self-adhesive notes
- As students silently read the selection, they choose and record words, revise their choices with continued reading, choose additional words, reread the selection, and make final decisions about word choices
- When each of the students has settled on a personal set of ten words, the teacher assists the students in building a group bar graph of the words and then leads a discussion about the visual display of the students' word choices. What patterns are seen? Which words are frequently selected by the students? Why were some words selected by so many students? Which words are unique? Why might those words have been chosen by a member of the class? What does a particular word mean? Observations about the word selections stimulate discussion about the content of the text, and students elaborate on their word choices by explaining how the word is used in the text.
- After the discussion, each student writes a one-sentence summary of the text. Their own reading of the text, their selection of important words, and their discussion with peers support the students' efforts to summarize the text. Summaries usually reflect a deep understanding of the reading selection that results from the thoughtful interactions with the text and peers about the important ideas.

Differentiated Instruction:
- English language learners are supported by the emphasis on vocabulary and big ideas in the selection, the oral elaboration of ideas in the text as students discuss word choices, and the visual display of word selections
- Allow students to select their ten important words with a partner in the first step of the activity if the material is challenging
- Students can complete this activity at two different points if the reading selection is lengthy

Children's Literature:

The Underground Railroad (Monroe, 2003)
- Chapter 3

ABC List for Frederick Douglass

- Abolitionists, Anna Murray, Anti-Slavery Society
- Bailey, Baltimore, Boston
- Civil War
- Documents for freedom
- Emancipated
- Farms, fugitives, freedom fighter
- Garrison (William Lloyd)
- Hugh Auld, hiding
- Independence
- Jailed, John Brown
- Knowledgeable
- Liberator
- Maryland
- New York, North Star
- Opinionated
- Published author
- Quotable
- Reading, Republican Party
- Sailor, slave owner
- Thomas Auld, Tuckahoe Creek, Talbot County
- Underground Railroad
- Valiant
- Washington, DC; white father
- X
- Youth
- Zeal

Knipper & Duggan, 2006

Sample of a learning log

Predictions
What will I learn from this material?

Concepts
What have I learned from this reading material?

Questions
What don't I yet understand about this material?

Personal opinion
What do I think about his material?

Knipper & Duggan, 2006