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PATTERNS OF WRITTEN RESPONSE
TO LITERATURE
OF AVERAGE FIFTH GRADE READERS

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of the written responses of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

The subjects for this study were eight fifth grade students who read at grade level. The subjects attended a suburban public elementary school.

The eight subjects read the novel *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry each day in class in a variety of different groupings. After reading, the students were asked to individually respond in their response journals. The only prompt the students received from the teacher each day was “Respond in writing to what you have just read.”

Each student’s response journal entry was coded, compared, and categorized. The researcher found eight dominant patterns among all subjects’ responses. The researcher also kept anecdotal records, and conclusions were made for individual students based upon the results of this study.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of the written responses of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

Research Question

What patterns of written responses are demonstrated by average fifth grade readers without direct instruction or leading from the classroom teacher?

Need for the Study

The current emphasis on a meaning based approach to reading has more teachers needing to alter their traditional approaches to reading. With school districts in New York State using the *English Language Arts (ELA)* exam to assess students' skills in reading, writing, and listening, traditional approaches to reading and writing are less effective.

More teachers are using response journals in the classroom. The effects of written response are numerous. Entries indicate whether or not students understand what they have read. Journal entries are useful for evaluating individuals' thinking, especially those students who rarely joined class discussions (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995). Teachers have reported that they become acquainted with students faster through written responses, and were better able to assess individual strengths and needs.

Responding in writing seems to elevate students' engagement in literature and writing (Bonilla & Werchadlo,

1995; Hancock, 1992; Hickman, 1984). After responding, students were found to be spontaneously sharing, reading passages aloud to one another, and offering books. Written response offered opportunities for students to talk about books, and expand their writing about literature (Hancock, 1992).

Children cannot share book revelations and literature enthusiasm where conversing and free response are never allowed. They cannot transform their perceptions of a story into personal written responses unless time is allowed to do so. As the research suggests, written response in the classroom should be used as a way of exploring, comprehending, and elaborating upon meaning of the text (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Much of the research has been conducted with primary level readers and/or lower ability readers. Little research has been conducted with fifth graders reading at grade level. The information collected in this study was presented to

colleagues in an effort to help provide educators with current data regarding response journal use in the classroom.

Definitions of Terms

In this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Response Journal: A spiral-bound, lined notebook where students responded to the literature they read. It served as a record of the student's learning and thinking. The teacher used the notebook to communicate with the students and answer questions.

Average Fifth Grade Reader: A fifth grade student who reads at grade level, as determined by his/her *Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)* scores. The average fifth grade *DRP* range is between 54 and 62.

Literary Discussion Groups: A group of four to eight students who discussed the literature they read. When the subjects were in two groups of four, the teacher monitored the discussions. With the whole group of eight students, the

teacher joined the group discussions. The teacher may have provided discussion prompts, or the students may have initiated their own discussions among one another.

Researcher: The researcher in this study was also the classroom reading teacher. The terms are used interchangeably.

Limitations of the Study

- (1) This study examined eight students' responses to literature. Since this was a small sampling of average fifth grade readers, the results found may not be consistent with the entire population of fifth grade readers.

- (2) The selection of literature used in the study may, or may not, have been a story that the individual students would have chosen on their own. Therefore, the book used in the study may, or may not, have been at a high interest level for all subjects. As a result, the written responses may be atypical for the entire population of fifth grade readers.

CHAPTER II

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of the written responses of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

What is Written Response?

Reading and responding are personal transactions between a reader and a text. The patterns of words in a text activate specific elements of memory and consciousness for the reader. The ideas in a text stir up personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes, and the reader's stance affects what emerges from the reading. A true transaction between reader and text occurs when the reader participates in the story, identifies with the characters, and shares their conflicts and feelings

(Rosenblatt, 1982; Hancock, 1993a). The reader and the text contribute to make the lifeless print into a living experience, which is then synthesized into new knowledge (Cothem, 1993). Readers' ability to make inferences about characters' acts, perceptions, and goals affects their overall understanding of a story (Beach & Wendler, 1987).

The past few years have brought a renewed emphasis on meaning-centered approaches to literature response. The focal point has become the power of the students' abilities to construct their own meaning as they read. These methods reflect an acknowledgment of the importance of student response and move teachers away from relying solely on comprehension questions and skill worksheets. (Jewell & Pratt, 1999). With written response, students can assume that they are free to pay attention to what the words bring to mind. They can enjoy the images, sensations, actions, and associations they experience as they read, and feel free to express them in words (Rosenblatt, 1991).

Response “consists of cognition, perception, and some emotional or attitudinal reaction; it involves predisposition; it changes during the course of reading and is modified after the work has been read” (Kiefer, 1983, p. 15). A response-based view of literature suggests the collection of thoughts throughout the reading process. Literature-based reading programs strongly encourage children to respond to literature they read through writing (Hancock, 1992).

Atwell, Calkins, and Rosenblatt have all suggested the use of response journals as a way of collecting children’s thoughts and ideas about literature (Cothorn, 1993). Writing allows students some privacy for thought and expression. Children’s responses are more individual, personal and permanent (Lent, 1993; Studier, 1981). Writing down something about the text gives students authority over their own words and seems to provide them with confidence to share their ideas in class discussions (Lent, 1993).

The teacher may study them carefully and refer to them

at any time (Studier, 1981). The free form of the literature response journal has provided an efficient means for tapping responses to reading by capturing the spontaneous inner language of the mind in a natural written form. The literature journal can provide the unstructured format that many children need for freedom of written expression (Hancock, 1994).

Hancock (1992) found that written response is a mode of meaning making by extending children's responses to literature, and a way of learning more about the children we teach. Response journals are a means by which to encourage and capture our students' level of involvement and identification with characters (Hancock, 1993a). The individuality of the reader is recognized as a crucial factor in the response process. Without the readers' experiences and interpretations, the text would be meaningless. It is this unique point of view which facilitates children's understanding and appreciation of the text (Cothem, 1993).

Categories of Written Response

There are several different categories of written response exhibited throughout current research studies. Golden and Guthrie (1986) established text-centered responses and reader-centered responses. Text-centered responses included descriptions of plot, setting, and characterization. Reader-centered responses focused on the text as a real experience, where the reader related personal experiences to draw meaning from the text.

Bonilla and Werchadlo (1995) found that children in a first grade classroom progressed from text-centered responses to reader-centered responses over the course of a year. They defined text-centered responses as ones that dealt with retelling, understanding characters, questioning plot, and prediction. Personal reaction, relating text to experience, and putting self in story were categorized as reader-centered responses. Not only did the responses change from text to reader-centered, but the length increased over time, as the

children grew increasingly skillful at putting their thoughts and ideas in writing.

Hancock (1992) conducted a case study of a sixth grader to categorize her response patterns. Her findings correlated with the discoveries made in the Cox and Many (1992) and Wilson (1989) studies. The researchers determined that children responded to literature in six different ways:

(1) character interaction, (2) character empathy, (3) prediction/validation, (4) personal experience, (5) question and confusion, and (6) philosophical reflections (Bauman & Hooten & White, 1999; Cox & Many, 1992; Hancock, 1992; Wilson, 1989).

Character interaction was described as talking to the characters in a story, as well as criticizing their actions (Bauman et al., 1999; Hancock, 1992). Children displayed character empathy by writing of strong identifications with characters, as if they were active participants in the reading event (Wilson, 1989). Students' thoughts often went "beyond

picturing the story world created by the author as they actually enter into the world and envision what it would be like to be the characters themselves” (Cox & Many, 1992, p. 30).

Children predicted what was going to happen next, and later confirmed or denied the prediction (Hancock, 1992). As the children read, they thought about their own lives and experiences, and related them to the story to help them understand the text (Cox & Many, 1992). Students expressed their own wonder and confusion about the story in their response journals (Wilson, 1989). Philosophical reflections were found to be prevalent in students’ journals that revealed their deepest convictions on the themes in the books. They displayed their values and morals through their writing (Hancock, 1992).

Hancock (1993b) conducted a classroom study of sixth-grade students who responded to four books of realistic fiction in response journals. Categories of response were verified through interrater reliability. The study reported three

different modes of response: personal meaning making, plot involvement, and literary criticism (Hancock, 1993b). Within these three categories, Hancock (1993b) observed subcategories. Personal meaning-making responses reflected the reader's discovery or affirmation of meaning, inferences, predictions, and expressing wonder or confusion. Plot involvement responses consisted of character interaction, character assessment, and the reader's personal involvement with the story. Literary criticism responses were typical of a traditional book report with expressions of likes and dislikes about the story (1993b).

Beach and Wendler (1987), Hepler and Hickman (1983), and Hickman (1981) found that children's responses exhibited definite developmental differences. Beach and Wendler (1987) observed young adults who demonstrated an increased ability to consider different perspectives in responding to a situation in a story. Hepler and Hickman (1983) and Hickman (1981) reported that children's responses

reflected their level of thinking and language development. Older children showed greater expertise with language and varied response styles, while younger children responded by retelling (Hickman, 1981; Hickman, 1983).

Classroom Environment

Classroom environment was a prevalent component to written response. Classrooms filled with books, in a variety of genres and styles, helped foster an atmosphere rich in literature (Kiefer, 1983). Children worked in supportive environments, where they were free to express opinions and ideas in a variety of ways. Students felt free to write whatever they were thinking, and they felt encouraged to take risks without fear. Children felt valued, and confident that their responses were worthy (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995; Cothorn, 1993; Hancock, 1992; Hickman, 1981; Kiefer, 1983).

It was significant that the classroom surroundings be conducive to sharing. Opportunities for sharing provided

children with a valuable springboard for discussion (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995). Children eagerly shared what they had written with teachers and other students (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995; Cox & Many, 1992; Hickman, 1981; Steen, 1991; Wilson, 1989). Wilson reported that the students' responses in her study were full of "questions and tangents, insight and passion. And they wanted to talk about them" (p. 68). It gave time for student reflection, repetition, and spontaneous book discoveries (Hickman, 1981).

Teacher's Role

Researchers have accumulated a large amount of data about the teacher's role in written response. Hickman (1981) and Kiefer (1983) discovered that teachers, as role models, showed in attitudes, habits, and behaviors what it was like to enjoy reading and responding to literature. The children commented that the teacher made the role seem more attainable for them (Hickman, 1981; Hickman, 1983).

Teachers in the research studies were supportive of the response journals, and wrote comments back to the students (Cox & Many, 1992; Hancock, 1992; Hancock, 1993a; Hickman, 1981; Kiefer, 1983). Hancock (1992) found that brief, encouraging comments written each day convinced the students that their responses were valued. “When the threats of wrong answers and red pens were removed, young writers took risks and expressed their honest thoughts” (Hancock, 1992, p. 41). Comments were nonjudgmental, encouraging and thought provoking. Teachers tried to redirect, refocus, and/or expand student responses (Cox & Many, 1992; Hancock, 1992; Hancock, 1993a, Hancock, 1993b; Rosenblatt, 1982; Steen, 1991).

Jewell and Pratt (1999) found that there were radical changes in store for teachers. Literature discussions were based upon individual student responses rather than teacher-directed questions. Teachers moved out of their central role as questioners and into a role that guided students to create

their own meaning from the text. Guiding, nonevaluative comments were made by the teacher in oral or written form. These comments sustained the students' responses, and kept them eager to continue reading and writing (Hancock, 1992; Jewell & Pratt, 1999).

Hickman (1981) reported seven priorities that the teachers in her study saw as part of their responsibilities to encourage reading and responding in their classrooms:

- (1) Select quality books for classroom use.
- (2) Assure easy access to books.
- (3) Present literature by reading every day.
- (4) Discuss books with groups and individuals.
- (5) Provide space and time for responding.
- (6) Provide time for sharing and discussing.
- (7) Plan for culminating experiences with literature. (p.352)

Steen (1991) found that when she included book diaries in her second-grade classroom, she was able to use them as an informal means of assessing student learning. She also used the diaries when communicating progress to parents. The diaries served as portfolios of successive accomplishments and student growth (Hancock, 1992; Hancock, 1993b;

Hickman, 1981; Steen, 1991).

Effects of Written Response

The effects of written response were numerous. The written response entries indicated whether or not students understood what they were reading. There was no need for separate comprehension questions (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995; Hancock, 1992; Hancock, 1993a; Hickman, 1984). The journal entries were useful in evaluating individuals' thinking, especially those students who rarely joined class discussions (Bonilla & Werchadilo, 1995). The teacher in the Bonilla and Werchadlo study reported that she got to know her students faster than usual through written responses and was better able to assess individual strengths and needs.

Children were able to transform the text into personal reading experiences (Hancock, 1993a). Emery and Milhalvich (1992) discovered that many children benefited from response that encouraged them to consider a character's

perspective from a story. Galda (1982) found that aspects of the reader and the text interacted to influence the creation of the story. When asked to reread their responses, students gained invaluable insight into their own interactions with texts (Hancock, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1982). Jewell and Pratt (1999) found that students felt such a connection with the text that they used evidence to support their interpretations of the text without being directed to by the teacher. Higher-level thinking was prevalent among the majority of student responses, and involved use of prior knowledge, personal experiences, and inferential speculation.

Hancock (1993a) found that students were highly affected by the use of response journals. Students:

- Became more involved in the literature they read.
- Took a personal interest in the outcome of the book.
- Experienced growth as an interactive reader.
- Gained a deeper appreciation of literature.
- Attained a deeper understanding of their own feelings as they related with characters. (p. 43)

Responding in writing seemed to elevate students' engagement in literature and writing (Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995; Hancock, 1994; Hickman, 1984). There was a prevalent notion of a community of readers when response journals and discussion groups were utilized in classrooms. Discussion in groups seemed to allow students to work through meanings that might not have otherwise been expressed (Hepler & Hickman, 1983). After responding, students were found to be spontaneously sharing, reading passages aloud to one another, and offering books. Soon after one child had shared responses about a particular book, other children showed interest in reading that book (Hickman, 1984). One child in the Hickman study reasoned that having a friend's recommendation made finding an interesting book easier.

Students' appreciation for literature grew, and one factor that seemed to help contribute to that was that students had the opportunity to express their opinions about what they

were reading (Baumann et al., 1999). Written response offered opportunities for students to talk about books, and expand their writing about literature (Hancock, 1992). The most cherished responses became the “seeds for further writing extensions” (Hancock, 1992, p.41).

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of written response of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

Research Question

What patterns of written response are demonstrated by average fifth grade readers without direct instruction or leading from the classroom teacher?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study were eight fifth-grade students from a suburban public elementary school. This particular school was a “school without walls.” It had partitions between classrooms, and housed third through fifth grades.

The subjects were five female and three male students who read at grade level, as determined by the *Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)*, which was administered in the spring of 1999. The average *DRP* range is reported as being between 54 and 62. All eight subjects’ scores were within this range at the start of the study.

The eight students received instruction from the same reading teacher during the previous school year. After an interview with the subjects’ previous reading teacher, it was determined that the children were instructed using a basal-based program, which did not include any instruction in reader response.

The classroom teacher who participated in this study had six years of elementary education teaching experience, three of which had been at the fifth grade level.

Materials

The novel that was used in this study was the 1990 Newbery Award Medal Winner *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. It is an historical fiction book about ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend, Ellen Rosen. They live in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1943 during the Nazi occupation of Denmark. The Jews are being “relocated” and Annemarie and her family try to help the Rosens get to safety. Annemarie faces a dangerous mission to save her best friend’s life.

The subjects in this study used response journals to write their responses. The journals were spiral-bound, lined notebooks.

Procedure

At the start of the novel, the subjects predicted what the story was about, and a discussion took place, which was guided by the teacher. The purpose of the discussion was to discover what the students had in their schemata regarding the novel's plot. The children were guided to use the book's cover, title, and author's name to make predictions.

There were a total of twenty-three general education students in the reading class. The teacher, reading session time, and classroom were the same for all twenty-three students. However, the students who did not participate in the study read the novel *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli as a separate group. They were instructed separately from the subjects in this study, and response journals were not introduced to that group as a way of responding to the novel. Instead, those students participated in vocabulary development, comprehension inquiry, and other reading activities.

The eight subjects in the study read the novel using whole group (all eight subjects and the teacher), partner (two students), cooperative (four students), and individual groupings. The subjects read a section of the novel during every class session, and wrote written responses in their response journals immediately afterwards, before any discussion of thoughts or ideas could take place. The only prompt the students received from the teacher each day was “Respond in writing to what you have just read.”

The teacher responded in writing to all of the subjects’ written responses by answering questions, asking questions to clarify student thoughts or comments, and praising them for what they had done well. The teacher did not guide the subjects into making specific types of responses.

After the teacher responded in the subjects’ response journals, the subjects participated in literary discussion groups, which included all eight subjects and the classroom teacher. The discussion groups varied in form. During some

class sessions, the groups consisted of four students at a time, while other days the group met as a whole. The literary discussion groups discussed the novel, with guidance from the teacher. The responses in the response journals were not purposely discussed. However, when a subject wanted to share a response, he/she was allowed to do so.

In addition to the daily reading activities, the entire reading class was assigned monthly book reports. The required book report assignments were unrelated projects based upon novels that the students chose to read. They did not correlate to the novel used in this study.

Analysis

Each student's response journal entry was coded, compared, and categorized. Without using predetermined category types, the researcher noted the dominant patterns after comparing all subjects' responses, and determined what categories emerged. Other observations, such as students

using two or more different response types in one journal entry, were also noted through anecdotal records kept by the observer.

Summary

This chapter discussed the subjects, novel, and the student and teacher written responses made in the response journals. The teacher's role in this study was not instructive, but rather served the purpose of clarification for the students.

A brief summary of the novel was included for the purpose of providing background information on the novel, which will provide assistance in analyzing the children's actual written responses in later chapters.

The researcher observed the patterns of individual responses, recorded them, and categorized the responses into different types.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of the written responses of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

What patterns of written responses were demonstrated by average fifth grade readers without direct instruction or leading from the classroom teacher?

The group of eight fifth-graders taking part in this study responded in eight different response patterns. Using the response types that were prevalent in the Hancock (1992), Cox and Many (1992), and Wilson (1989) studies, the

researcher categorized the students' responses into the following response categories:

- (1) Character Interaction: Student talked to the character in the story, criticized or evaluated character actions or ideas.
- (2) Character Empathy: Student identified with the character, put himself in the story as the character, envisioned what it would be like to be the character.
- (3) Prediction/Validation: Student told what he thought would happen next, or confirmed/denied a previous prediction.
- (4) Personal Experience: Student thought about his own life and experiences, and related them to the story to better understand the text.
- (5) Question/Confusion: Student expressed wonder and confusion about the story.
- (6) Philosophical Reflections: Student revealed

his thoughts, ideas, feelings, and deepest convictions on the concepts in the story; displayed his values, morals.

- (7) Prescriptive: Student told what a character should do or should have done.
- (8) Retelling: Student told what happened in the story, summarized.

There were a total of 95 journal response entries made by all eight subjects. Each entry in their response journals was counted and recorded. All but one written response out of the total 95 entries included more than one response type in the same day's entry. Each response type was counted separately, whether it was made in the same day's journal entry or not. Therefore, there were a total of 227 response types counted and categorized.

Table I

Responses Made As A Group

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	22
Character Empathy	35
Prediction/Validation	25
Personal Experience	4
Question/Confusion	27
Philosophical Reflection	54
Prescriptive	19
Retelling	41
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	227

The researcher made anecdotal notes as she recorded and categorized the responses for each individual student, noting predominant response patterns.

Khalil

Khalil had a total of 12 separate response journal entries. Within those entries, the researcher recorded 31 different response types. The dominant response type was philosophical reflection. Twelve of Khalil's response types consisted of his thoughts, feelings, and opinions about what he read. Six of his responses were predictions, while others were questions (5) and retellings (5). Khalil did not significantly address the remaining response types.

Table II

Khalil's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	0
Character Empathy	0
Prediction/Validation	6
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	5
Philosophical Reflection	12
Prescriptive	3
Retelling	5
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	<i>31</i>

A Sampling of Khalil's Responses

Philosophical Reflection

"I did not like it when the soldier slapped Mama's face. That was so rude! You are not supposed to slap women. Who do the soldiers think they are?"

Prediction	“I am going to predict that they are going to put Ellen aboard Uncle Henrik’s boat, and that she will be sailed to safety.”
Questions	“I wonder what happened with Mama and the Rosens last night. Are they okay? Also, did Mama cry because the wake was fake and the soldiers would have known?”
Retelling	“In this chapter, Annemarie is on a dangerous mission. The soldiers stop her on the path and ask her a lot of questions. Then they take her basket.”

David

David had a total of 12 separate response journal entries.

Within those entries, the researcher recorded 22 different response types. The most prevalent response type was retelling. Ten of David’s response types consisted of retelling, or summarizing what occurred in the chapter. Four of his responses were character interactions, but he did not

significantly address the remaining types.

Table III

David's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	4
Character Empathy	1
Prediction/Validation	0
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	2
Philosophical Reflection	3
Prescriptive	2
Retelling	10
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	22

A Sampling of David's Responses

Retelling

“In this chapter, Annemarie and Ellen couldn't find Mrs. Hirsch. They told their mothers after school. Mrs. Johansen went outside to talk to Mrs. Rosen. Then she came back and told

Annemarie that the Germans closed all of the Jew stores.”

Character Interaction

“Ellen is lucky to be safe so then she won’t be killed. I don’t like how she doesn’t realize that she has a good friend who wants to help her stay safe. She has a second family, the Johansens, and a really good friend.”

Kyla

Kyla had a total of 12 separate response journal entries.

Within those entries, the researcher recorded 26 different response types. The dominant response type was philosophical reflection. Eleven of her response types consisted of her thoughts, feelings, and opinions about what she read. Eight of Kyla’s responses were displays of character empathy, while others were character interactions (4) and retellings (3). The remaining response types were not addressed by Kyla.

Table IV

Kyla's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	4
Character Empathy	8
Prediction/Validation	0
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	0
Philosophical Reflection	11
Prescriptive	0
Retelling	3
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	26

A Sampling of Kyla's Responses

Philosophical Reflection

"I thought it was disappointing to hear all the stores owned by Jews would be shut down, and to think about what might happen to Ellen and her family. It makes me sad. I can't believe that the Nazis could do that."

Character Empathy

“Ellen was very, very frightened. If I were her I would be extra frightened that something might happen to me or to my family. She is probably very scared to have that happen to her. I was really scared reading about the soldiers asking them questions.”

Character Interaction

“I wish I could tell the soldiers exactly what I think of them. I would tell them that they are rude and mean, and cruel! I can’t believe that the soldier slapped Mama across the face! I would like to slap him across the face and see how he likes it!”

Retelling

“Chapter six was about how Annemarie was happy to visit her uncle. Ellen was happy to get out of the city. Annemarie’s mom was happy to go back to her country home.”

Brittany

Brittany had a total of 12 separate response journal entries. Within those entries, the researcher recorded 34 different response types. The most prevalent response type for Brittany was philosophical reflection. Eight of her response types included her thoughts, feelings, and opinions about what she read. Seven of her responses were displays of character empathy, while others were predictions (5) and prescriptive types (5). Brittany did not significantly address the remaining response types.

Table V

Brittany's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	4
Character Empathy	7
Prediction/Validation	5
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	2
Philosophical Reflection	8
Prescriptive	5
Retelling	3
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	<i>34</i>

A Sampling of Brittany's Responses

Philosophical Reflection

"I am glad that they called Ellen Lise in this chapter and that Papa found the old pictures. That was great because it gave the soldiers the idea that Ellen was Annemarie's sister."

Character Empathy

“I am so sad! Annemarie Must be so sad that Ellen left. I was getting so excited about that part as I was reading, that I couldn’t put the book down. I felt just like Annemarie.”

Prediction

“I think that Ellen is going to be taken away to a concentration camp. I think that something has happened to Uncle Henrik because Annemarie got all excited when they were talking about him.”

Prescriptive

“Kirsti shouldn’t always interrupt Annemarie when she tells her a story. She should just listen and enjoy the story. Kirsti should be satisfied with what she is given.”

Jillian

Jillian had a total of 12 separate response journal entries.

Within those entries, the researcher recorded 37 different response types. The dominant response type was question/confusion. Twelve of her response types involved questioning the text and expressing confusion about what she

read. Jillian expressed character empathy (7) and philosophical reflection (7) in her responses, as well. Five of her responses were predictions. The remaining response types were slightly addressed by Jillian.

Table VI

Jillian's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	3
Character Empathy	7
Prediction/Validation	5
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	12
Philosophical Reflection	7
Prescriptive	3
Retelling	0
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	<i>37</i>

A Sampling of Jillian's Responses

Question/Confusion

"I wonder why Peter didn't visit often? I also wonder if King Christian X died? Why didn't the German soldiers know who King Christian X was?"

Character Empathy

"If I were Annemarie, I would have waited thirty seconds, then gone up to wake Kirsti up. I would run and go to the harbor to make sure everyone was ok."

Philosophical Reflection

"I hope that Annemarie's parents talk about Lise because then they would remember all of the good things about her, and still enjoy her. They will remember that she was a wonderful girl, and that heaven is a better place."

Prediction

"I think that Annemarie is going to run outside and help Mama. Maybe Mama got caught by a soldier and it was all a set up. I think that when Annemarie goes to help Mama, she will get caught and get hit with a soldier's gun."

Jim

Jim had a total of 11 separate response journal entries. Within those entries, the researcher recorded 14 different response types. The dominant response type was retelling. Ten of Jim's responses consisted of summarizing what he read in the chapters. The remaining response types were not significantly addressed by Jim.

Table VII

Jim's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	2
Character Empathy	0
Prediction/Validation	1
Personal Experience	0
Question/Confusion	1
Philosophical Reflection	0
Prescriptive	0
Retelling	10
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	<i>14</i>

A Sampling of Jim's Responses

Retelling

“In this chapter, the Johansens and Ellen are all going to Uncle Henrik’s house. They took a train there. On the way German soldiers stopped them.”

Retelling

“In this chapter, Mama is taking the Rosens and three others to Uncle Henrik’s boat. Peter is doing that, too. It has been too long, and Annemarie finds Mama lying on the earth.”

Heather

Heather had a total of 12 separate response journal entries. Within those entries, the researcher recorded 36 different response types. Heather had a mixture of all response types. Nine of her responses were philosophical reflections, while others displayed character empathy (6), prediction (5), and prescriptive responses (5). The remaining response types were minimally addressed by Heather.

Table VIII

Heather's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	3
Character Empathy	6
Prediction/Validation	5
Personal Experience	2
Question/Confusion	4
Philosophical Reflection	9
Prescriptive	5
Retelling	2
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	36

A Sampling of Heather's Responses

Philosophical Reflection

"I think that it was cool how Annemarie held the "Star of David" in her hand so hard like that to save her friend's life. Ellen was lucky. I can tell that Annemarie really values her friendship with Ellen."

Character Empathy

“If I was Ellen, I would be crying so much! I would be so afraid that the people (soldiers) would try to harm my parents.”

Prediction

“At the end of the chapter when Annemarie thinks she sees Mama, I think that it is a soldier, and Annemarie is going to get in trouble because she is home alone and no one is home with her. I think that Mama will get caught and there is going to be trouble.”

Prescriptive

“I think that if Kirsti doesn’t like her green shoes, she shouldn’t be able to have shoes. She should have to wear her shoes that don’t fit anymore.”

Michelle

Michelle had a total of 12 separate response journal entries. Within those entries, the researcher recorded 27 different response types. The most prevalent response type was retelling. Eight of Michelle’s responses were summaries of what she had read. Six responses displayed character

empathy, and four were philosophical reflection responses.

Michelle minimally addressed the remaining response types.

Table IX

Michelle's Categorized Response Types

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Character Interaction	2
Character Empathy	6
Prediction/Validation	3
Personal Experience	2
Question/Confusion	1
Philosophical Reflection	4
Prescriptive	1
Retelling	8
<i>Total Number of Response Types</i>	27

A Sampling of Michelle's Responses

Retelling

“Annemarie and Kirsti were going to the button store where Mrs. Hirsch worked because one of Kirsti's buttons was missing on her

jacket. They were on their way and when they got there they found a sign that said closed in German.”

Character Empathy

“I would be really scared if my sister had died from an accident two weeks before her wedding. I would at least talk about her, and not pretend like she never lived! If I were a soldier I sure would not be so mean to the town and the people.”

Philosophical Reflection

“When it said in Chapter 9 that Annemarie and her mom were suddenly equals I think that means that her mom knew that Annemarie knew all about the plan and that there was no Great Aunt Birte. I think that that was probably a neat moment for them.”

Summary

The data found in this study correlated with the response types found in the Hancock (1992), Cox and Many (1992), and Wilson (1989) studies. The group of students that took part in this study displayed all eight of the response types throughout the reading of the novel. Table I exhibits the fact that all response types were utilized by the majority of the students. Philosophical reflection and retelling were the most commonly used response types. The personal experience response type was very uncommon among the students' written responses. That particular response type was evident only four times throughout all of the response journal entries. It should be noted that this may have occurred because the subject matter of the novel used in the study was World War II and the Holocaust. The fifth-graders probably did not have many personal life experiences to relate to those historical events.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the patterns of the written responses of average fifth grade readers who have not received instruction in literature response.

Conclusions

All eight of the response types (Cox & Many, 1992; Hancock, 1992; Wilson, 1989) were exhibited in the students' response journals throughout the reading of the novel. As a whole group, philosophical reflection and retelling responses were most commonly displayed in the subjects' response journals. The students overwhelmingly preferred to write about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in their response

journals. The researcher noted that the students seemed to benefit from expressing their personal ideas about the story and the characters. Their philosophical reflection responses showed the subjects' varying levels of involvement and comprehension of the novel.

Retelling was common among all subjects' response journals, especially in the beginning entries. The researcher noted that most of the students seemed to steer away from summarizing the chapters after the first couple of entries. Instead, the students were inclined to combine retellings with another response type, or neglected retellings altogether.

Character empathy responses were prevalent among the students' responses. They seemed to enjoy putting themselves in the places of the characters in the story. These response types helped the students identify with the characters, and therefore, better understand the story.

Each subject in the study responded differently to the novel. The researcher noted specific individual patterns

among entries, and made conclusions based upon these patterns.

Khalil

Most of Khalil's responses were philosophical reflections. He seemed to prefer writing about his thoughts and opinions. Khalil would benefit from instruction in the other areas of response. He needs to be encouraged to interact with characters, place himself in the story as a character, and tell what he would do in their positions.

David

David responded in his response journal with many retellings. He relied on the literal language of the text, and did not expand upon his responses until the very end of the novel. David was not adventurous in his responses. He seemed to believe that there was a definite "right or wrong answer" for each response. David needed a good amount of reassurance before attempting his entries. The teacher did not lead his responses, but instead repeated the directions for him

when needed. David would benefit from instruction and encouragement in the other areas of response.

Kyla

Kyla primarily responded with philosophical reflections. She was very detailed when expressing her thoughts and opinions about the story. Kyla had very well-written, specific responses. Through her entries, it was obvious that she not only understood, but enjoyed the novel. Kyla would benefit from some instruction in predicting, questioning, and prescriptive responses.

Brittany

Brittany responded using a wide variety of response types, which enabled the researcher to learn more about how she read and reacted to the novel. Brittany routinely put herself in the character's shoes, which seemed to help her to better understand the story.

Jillian

Jillian preferred to express her own wonderment and confusion about what she read. She asked herself many questions about what was happening in the story and why characters behaved in certain ways. It was beneficial for Jillian to express these ideas in writing because it enabled her to better understand the story. Putting herself in the position of the character and asserting her own thoughts and opinions also helped her to work through the more challenging concepts in the novel. Prior to the study, Jillian would not offer her ideas or questions in classroom discussions, and was a bit shy when it came to reading in the classroom. The researcher discovered quite a bit of information about how Jillian interprets and digests text through the use of the response journal.

Jim

Jim did not put a great amount of effort into his response

journal entries. Most of his entries were short and literal. He chose to retell the story in his response journal. Although the retellings were usually accurate, they did not give the researcher a good deal of information about Jim and how he interpreted the novel. Jim would benefit from instruction in all of the response types mentioned in this study.

Heather

Heather responded in her response journal using all of the response types, which enabled the researcher to get a good picture of how Heather interpreted the text as she read.

Overall, it seemed she preferred to express her thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the story. Heather's responses were incredibly detailed, and thorough. She mentioned that she enjoyed responding in writing several times throughout the novel.

Michelle

Michelle responded in her response journal using all of the response types, which gave the researcher a good picture

of how Michelle interpreted the story as she read. Prior to the study, Michelle did not often volunteer her thoughts or opinions about a story in class discussions because of her shyness. However, she seemed eager to express her ideas in her response journal. Her response entries were lengthy and detailed. Overall, Michelle preferred to retell and put herself in the position of the character. She would benefit from instruction in the question, prediction, and character interaction response types.

These results provide support that reading is a highly personal activity. The diversity of experience and background bring different reactions to the reading of a novel. The findings in this study support Rosenblatt's (1991, 1982) work in the field of written response. Rosenblatt (1991) concluded that readers create different meanings when transacting with the same text. She found that different readers interpret the text differently because each individual reader brings a wealth of past experiences to the text (1982).

Therefore, it can be concluded that although there was some consistency among certain response types, there was still a wide variety in response types for these particular students. Some subjects had more of an even span of the response types, while others focused primarily on one or two of the response types throughout the novel.

Implications for the Classroom

Children cannot share book revelations and literature enthusiasm where conversing and free response is never allowed. They cannot transform their perceptions of a story into personal written response unless time is allowed to do so. For a teacher, this may mean reorganizing his/her classroom reading program to benefit written response. As the research suggests, written response in the classrooms should be used as a way of exploring, comprehending, and elaborating upon meaning of a text. If children's response to literature is used in the classroom, teachers are helping young children to

become discriminating, lifetime readers (Studier, 1981).

The hindrance to written response for the teacher is trying to find the time necessary for commenting. For written response journals to be successful, teachers need to write back to the students in their journals. It has been suggested that teachers comment to student responses daily. With an average class size of twenty-five students, one teacher would need an ample amount of time to respond appropriately to all twenty-five journals. Teachers may need to explore other options such as using response journals with small groups within their reading classes, or using group sharing times.

The results from this study indicated that some students have dominant response patterns when asked to respond freely in a journal, while others do not. Perhaps students would benefit from exposure in the classroom to the many different forms of written response. Teachers need to unveil through instruction the varied response types to those students who repeatedly respond in the same way. Broadening their

understanding of response may aid them in discovering new or deeper meanings of a piece of literature.

Classroom teachers need to be utilizing a variety of reading strategies to ensure a thorough understanding of literature. Written response is just one strategy that should be used. Whatever teachers do, or fail to do, with books has an effect on children's progress as readers of literature (Hickman, 1984). The understanding of literature works on many different levels and it is important that it be seen as offering exciting prospects for enriching children's literature experiences, rather than being seen as a problem that needs to be solved with literal questions (Bunbury, 1985).

Implications for Further Research

Work still lies ahead for research in the area of written response. Golden and Guthrie (1986) and Galda (1982) suggested that future research be explored regarding the influence of specific aspects of cognitive development on

literature response. More longitudinal studies should be considered to show the differing developmental effects of written response. Obviously, students in first grade will respond in writing differently than students in eighth grade, but how is the transition more cognitively complex? Perhaps a longitudinal study that compared a group of subjects' response modes over several school years would be beneficial.

It seems that the ways in which teachers respond and comment upon students' written responses need to be investigated. Teachers also need to have suggestions for devoting time in the average day to the necessary commenting. Is it just as beneficial to students if teachers orally respond to children's written responses in conferences, or if the class discusses the responses? Is there a way that the students prefer, or a way that makes them feel that their responses are more valued?

An area which requires further research is the classroom environment in which children respond to

literature. Hickman (1981) suggested that environment played an influential role on the subjects she studied. She reported that the subjects responded the way that they did as a result of the positive, supportive environment they were in. Teachers and students may have to learn more about how to obtain a beneficial environment for written response to be successful.

Summary

The research concerning written response is extremely convincing, with few hindrances for the teacher. All teachers, no matter how many years of experience in teaching, need to consider the effects and incorporate written response into their reading programs in some way. As Hancock (1992) expressed, the literature response journal “is a treasure chest filled with spontaneous thoughts and ideas that otherwise would have been forgotten” (p. 41). It would be difficult for any teacher to review the research regarding written response and not recognize all of the benefits that it provides for students.

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