The Impact of Literature Circles on Students' Growth in a Selected First Grade Class

Catherine M. Little

Milligan College

Spring 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of literature circles on a selected first grade class. The sample consisted of 13 students in a Response to Intervention class. Data were collected through two district- mandated tests; the STAR 360 and Oral Running Records. Data were also collected through student literature circle journals. The students participated in literature circles for the first semester of the school year. Data were compared from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year to compare for differences. The results indicated that literature circles impact students in a selected first grade class in a positive way. There were several trends in this study; student writing matured, students wrote stronger journal entries, students led their own learning, student scaled scores and percentile rank increased on the STAR 360, and students read and comprehended complex nonfiction text above their current grade level. These trends indicate that literature circles can be used to challenge advanced students within the framework of Response to Intervention to help them continue to grow in reading and in writing. Further research is recommended using a different research design.

Keywords: Literature circles, Response to Intervention

MILLIGAN BUFFALOES

Institutional Review Board Decision Tree

Based on your responses, you do not need approval from the IRB.

It looks like your study is exempt because it does not meet the definition of a research activity. Therefore, it does not require approval by the IRB. However, you should follow ethical practices even when just practicing or demonstrating research.

Refer to 45 CFR 46.102(d)

Student researchers may benefit from going through the IRB process even if they are only collecting data to learn techniques.

Return to Beginning

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

All too often, advanced students in classrooms are not getting the instruction or enrichment that they need to continue to grow. Teachers are often so focused on struggling learners and working to fill gaps in achievement that they unintentionally overlook the needs of students performing above grade level (Smutny, 2011). However, all students' needs must be addressed. Response to Intervention is an "all-inclusive model of education where all students benefit from differentiated instruction that fits their needs" (Seedorf, 2014). Response to Intervention is typically used for special education or at risk students, however it also provides time to challenge advanced learners. Response to Intervention has become an instrument for instructional delivery of all students (Johnsen, Parker, & Farah, 2015).

Cooperative learning is one of Marzano's nine high yield strategies to increase student achievement. Cooperative learning can have a twenty-seven percentile gain in student achievement and organizing students in cooperative learning groups has a powerful effect on learning (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2005). Literature circles encourage cooperative learning. Literature circles are student-led book discussions, the equivalent of an adult book club, but with greater structure, expectations, and rigor. Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books. Literature circles also encourage collaborative learning, students working with students. For advanced learners, working with peers is crucial. (Smutny, 2011). Students can work in groups within literature circles to enhance their learning. During literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss literature in depth. When students engage with texts and one another, they take control of their literacy in a positive and rewarding way.

Literature circles support the reflective nature of reading and writing and students can apply what they are learning about reading and writing in literature circles. Reflective learning is the process of internally examining an issue and connecting with experience (Sanacore, 2013). Reflection is important for students' literacy development. Discussions during literature circles are peer- led and students connect with each other and to the book while engaged in meaningful discussions. Students are constantly reflecting on what was read through literature circles. Students are usually given specific roles that they are responsible for, each student in the literature circle agrees to take specific responsibilities during discussions. The circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting. The roles may include: artful artist, passage picker, question asker, connection maker, and word wizard. The artful artist uses some form of artwork to represent a significant scene or idea from the reading. The passage picker points out interesting or important passages within the reading. The question asker writes questions that will lead to discussion by the group. The connection maker finds connections between the reading material and something outside the text. The connection could be a personal experience, a topic studied in another class, or a different work of literature. The word wizard discusses words in the text that are unusual, interesting, or difficult to understand. These roles are the talking points for students during discussion to encourage thoughtful reflection while reading (Daniels, 2002). These roles are also aligned with current Tennessee State Standards by providing students with opportunities for understanding, critical analysis, and finding evidence on which to draw conclusions ("Academic Standards," 2016).

Student motivation is increased with literature circles. Literature circles give students choice. Student groups are based, not off of ability, but on book choice. According to Daniels, (2002) "for reading to become a lifelong habit and a deeply owned skill, it has to be voluntary,

anchored in feelings of pleasure and power" (Daniels, 2002, p. 19). Students are also given opportunities to choose roles as they discuss and reflect on the reading. Choice leads to deeper engagement and increased intrinsic motivation. Literature circles are also social experiences. Students are expected to talk, in contrast to the rest of their time at school, to debate and argue their ideas. Students can bring their experiences and feelings into the classroom and are given time to share them.

Literature circles get students engaged so they will want to read. The best way for students to develop reading fluency is by becoming passionate and eager readers and writers (Long & Gove, 2003). Students engaged in literature circles participate in meaningful discussion and are reflective, they are becoming readers and writers who enjoy reading and writing.

Problem Statement

Teachers are often so focused on struggling learners and working to fill gaps in achievement that they simultaneously overlook students performing above grade level. However, all students' needs must be addressed. Response to Intervention aims to address all student's needs and provides a framework to challenge advanced learners through literature circles. Therefore, the problem of this study was to determine the impact of literature circles on students' growth in a selected first grade Response to Intervention class.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of literature circles on students' growth in a selected first grade Response to Intervention class.

Significance

The findings from the study may be used to help educators challenge their top students through literature circles within the framework of Response to Intervention. Response to

Intervention (RTI) is mostly being used for special education or at risk students, however, RTI

may also be used as a framework to enrich students performing above their peers. All students'

needs must be addressed and literature circles are a strong classroom strategy in which teachers

can address the needs of their students performing above grade level. Students can work in

groups within literature circles to enhance their learning. This may result in growth of students'

reading achievement, writing, speaking and listening skills, and positive feelings about reading.

Educators may see higher academic achievement in their advanced students if literature circles

are implemented.

Limitations

The following limitations were imposed in this study. The sample was not randomly

selected and was restricted to a first grade class, therefore, results cannot be generalized for other

groups. Some of the instruments used to collect data were designed by the researcher and were

not tested for reliability or validity.

Definitions

1. **Literature Circles:** Literature circles are student-centered book discussion groups in
   which each student has a role for which he or she is responsible to encourage thoughtful
   discussion and a love of reading. True literature circles have 11 defining features:

   1. Students choose their own reading materials

   2. Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.

   3. Different groups read different books

   4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.

5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion (students have roles of connection maker, question asker, passage picker, artful artist, or word wizard).

6. Discussion topics come from the students.

7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.

8. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.

9. Evaluation is by the teacher observation and student self- evaluation.

10. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.

11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and the new groups form around new reading choices (Daniels, 2002).

2. **Reflective learning:** Reflective learning is the process of internally examining and exploring an issue and connecting with experience (Sanacore, 2013).

3. **Response to Intervention (RTI):** Response to intervention is an "all-inclusive model of education where all students benefit from differentiated instruction that fits their needs" (Seedorf, 2014).

Overview of Study

This study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter one contains the overview of the study including the: problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance of this study, limitations, and definitions. Chapter two consists of the literature review. Chapter three states the population, sample, data collection instruments, procedures, research questions, and the related hypothesis. Chapter four contains the data analysis, which is comprised of the collection

of data, research questions, and hypothesis. Chapter five concludes this study with a summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Literature circles are student-led book discussions, the equivalent of an adult book club, but with greater structure, expectations, and rigor. Literature circles can be defined as "small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same text where each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to help perform that job" (Daniels, 2004, p.13). There have been various studies conducted and articles written that describe what literature circles are, which grade levels and where literature circles are used, literature circles as best practice, potential problems of literature circles, and solutions to these common problems. Studies have also been done to evaluate the learning effects of Response to Intervention, some studies reveal the Response to Intervention makes a significant impact on student learning achievement, while other studies disclose results that Response to Intervention has a negative impact. Another study has reported that the results are inconclusive, that more research needs to be done to determine the impact Response to Intervention has on student learning achievement, especially in the higher tiers. The following literature review compares the various articles available that pertain to Response to Intervention, literature circles, effects of literature circles, literature circles as best practice, and potential problems of literature circles.

Response to Intervention

The Tennessee Department of Education (2015) defines the RTI framework as "aligned with the department's beliefs and allows for an integrated, seamless problem-solving model that addresses individual student needs" ("RTI2 Framework Manual," 2015, pg. 8). Response to Intervention is an all-inclusive model of education where all students benefit from differentiated

instruction that fits their needs (Seedorf, 2014). Response to interventions is a three-tier

framework that is mandatory in Tennessee for all grade levels, in all public schools. All children

receive high- quality, on grade level instruction in the general education classroom, Tier 1. After

a universal screener is administered to all students, students may be identified as needing

targeted intervention, in addition to the high-quality instruction they are receiving in Tier 1. Tier

II intervention is provided to students who fall below the 25th percentile on the universal

screener. Tier III interventions are provided to students who have not made significant progress

in Tier II, are one to two grade levels behind, or scored below the 10th percentile on the universal

screener. Response to Intervention is typically used for special education or at risk students,

however it does serve all students through differentiation.

The Response to Intervention framework has provided educators with a research- based

framework that can be implemented at all levels of education. There has been much research

done about the success of this model. In an article for the RTI Action Network, the authors

found that there is support for Response to Intervention programs improving academic

performance, primarily in early reading skills. The article also cited research findings from

Murray, Woodruff, and Vaughn that reading outcomes were linked to a Response to Intervention

program (Hughes & Dexter, n.d; Murray, Woddruff, & Vaughn, 2010). Murray, Woodruff, and

Vaughn had found in their research that the retention rate of first grade students decreased by

47% after Response to Intervention was implemented (Murray et al., 2010).

On the other side of the spectrum, there has been studies done to evaluate the

effectiveness of Response to Intervention and found that there were no impacts and even a

negative impact. A recent study by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional

Assistance evaluated Response to Intervention practices in elementary schools and the impact of

those practices. The results of this evaluation found that assigning students to receive Tier II or Tier III intervention services had a negative impact on a comprehensive reading measure for Grade 1 students, this negative impact was equivalent to about one month of learning for first-graders. The impact for Grade 1 students who were close to the cut point on the universal screener that still remained in Tier I was also negative, but not enough to be statistically significant. The impact for Grade 2 students and Grade 3 students in Tier I near the cut point were also not statistically significant (Balu et al., 2015).

There is also an article providing evidence that there needs to be more research done to prove the effects of Response to Intervention, that there is simply not enough research done. The findings of this research report that "most RTI research is conducted within the context of special education, and the subsequent articles are published in special education journals (McDaniel, Albritton, & Roach, 2013). The article goes on to note that more research needs to be done to outline evidence-based practices in Tier I and Tier II of Response to intervention for general educators.

Response to Intervention has become an instrument for instructional delivery of all students (Johnsen, Parker, & Farah, 2015). It is key to remember that Response to Intervention serves all students, not only students who are struggling. According to the Tennessee Department of Education, in Tier I English Language Arts instruction should include all of the Tennessee State Standards ELA strands; reading literature, reading informational text, reading foundational skills, writing, speaking and listening, and language. All students should receive high- quality differentiated instruction from the general education teacher during Tier I. The instruction should address individual needs using small groups that are flexible. Small group instruction should focus on students reading and discussing text, when students are not in small

groups, students should engage in purposeful practices that reinforce standards, like reflective

journaling. These state requirements for Tier I during Response to Intervention need to be kept

in mind as we look at how literature circles fit within the Response to Intervention framework.

Teachers are often so focused on struggling learners and working to fill gaps in

achievement that they unintentionally overlook the needs of students performing above grade

level (Smutny, 2011). Response to Intervention is typically used for special education or at risk

students, however it also provides time to challenge advanced learners. Johnsen, Parker, and

Farah have published an article on how to provide differentiated instruction to students with gifts

and talents within a Response to Intervention framework. "Students at all achievement levels

benefited from cluster grouping accompanied by differentiated instruction and content when

compared to students who were not clustered" (Johnsen et al., 2015). Therefore, the grouping

among the tiers in Response to Intervention provide the opportunity for educators to differentiate

instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Students in the lowest tier will receive intense

intervention, while the highest students in Tier I can receive enrichment.

Literature Circles

Literature circles are student-centered book discussion groups in which each student has a

role for which he or she is responsible to encourage thoughtful discussion and a love of reading.

True literature circles have eleven defining features: students choose their own reading materials,

small temporary groups are formed based on book choice, different groups read different books,

groups meet on a regular schedule to discuss their reading, students use written or drawn notes to

guide their reading and discussion, discussion topics come from the students, group meetings

aim to be open conversations about books, the teacher serves as a facilitator, evaluation is by

teacher observation and student self- evaluation, a spirit of fun and playfulness pervades the

room, readers share with their classmates when books are finished, and new groups form around new reading choices (Daniels, 2002).   Students are usually given specific roles that they are responsible for, each student in the literature circle agrees to take specific responsibilities during discussions. The circles meet regularly, and the discussion roles change at each meeting. The roles may include: artful artist, passage picker, question asker, connection maker, and word wizard. The artful artist uses some form of artwork to represent a significant scene or idea from the reading. The passage picker points out interesting or important passages within the reading. The question asker writes questions that will lead the discussion by the group. The connection maker finds connections between the reading material and something outside the text. The connection could be a personal experience, a topic studied in another class, or a different work of literature. The word wizard discusses words in the text that are unusual, interesting, or difficult to understand.

There have been many studies completed that contribute to the positive impact of literature circles on reading achievement and student growth. Harvey Daniels is considered the expert on literature circles, his most recent book listed his findings that after implementing literature circles in several struggling Chicago primary education schools, the results showed that "in reading, our schools outstripped citywide test score gains by 14% in 3rd grade, 9% in 6th grade, and 10% in 8th grade. In writing, they topped citywide gains by 25% in grade 3, 8% in grade 6, and 27% in grade 8" (Daniels, 2002, p. 8).

There are also many articles that attest to the benefits of literature circles across grade levels. Elhess and Egbert, in their recent research article, listed that literature circles had several benefits including; improved comprehension, increased student participation, enhanced responsibility and motivation, expanded collaborative discussion, developed oral proficiency,

increased scaffolding opportunities, and reinforced writing skills. Their article listed these

benefits of literature circles and then gave a four-lesson plan unit on *Holes* for their adolescent,

intermediate level language learners to demonstrate how literature circles might be used in a

language classroom. Elhess and Egbert found that through collaborative discussions and tasks,

students were able to complete discussions and written tasks that expose them to diverse

perspectives, these experiences did not only help improve their basic language and literacy skills,

but may also help improve their basic language and literacy skills that are vital for helping

learners to grow as independent and autonomous readers (Elhess & Egbert, 2015). In another

study, Sheena Cameron investigates the use of literature circles for fluent readers at all levels in

the primary grades. She included the feedback of three primary teachers, Cameron, Hull, and

Murray. Cameron states that literature circles helped students to gain a more in-depth

understanding of the book and could see the book from another person's perspective (Cameron,

Hull, Murray, & Cameron, 2012). Most of the articles and studies thus far have focused on

literature circles used in the primary or intermediate grades, however, literature circles have also

been effective in higher grades, such as college. In a study by Levy, literature circles offered a

model to help collegiate students experience reading and support writing, while initiating textual

discussions and deepening reading comprehension (Levy, 2013).

Literature circles are even being used all over the world. A study in Turkey has found

that literature circles are effective in primary education students acquiring reading

comprehension skills, adopting a reading habit, increasing the permanence of what the student

has learned, and making learning more enjoyable for the student (Avci & Yuksel, 2011). Closer

to home, an educator in Oklahoma, Amy Cantrell, used literature circles as the basis for a project

with her students that won an IRA Award for Reading and Technology. The students chose a

book to read, took on roles, and acted as teachers and leaders in their groups by sharing their

learning. After the reading was finished, the students were responsible for creating a culminating

project to demonstrate their understanding. The article cited Cantrell, noting that literature

circles are a fantastic way to empower kids to be leaders in their own learning ("Students Shine,"

2010). These articles have shown how literature circles can positively impact reading

achievement and how literature circles are used across a wide span of grade levels as well as

across the globe.

Literature Circles as Best Practice

There are countless articles and studies that continually reinforce literature circles as best

practice because of the many reading, writing, and thinking skills they require. Literature circles

use cooperative learning, collaborative learning, require reflection, and increase student

engagement. Literature circles are also aligned with standards that educators are required to

teach. In Tennessee, teachers are required to provide students with opportunities for

understanding, critical analysis, and finding evidence on which to draw conclusions and students

also need to participate in collaborative conversations in diverse small and larger groups with

peers ("Academic Standards", 2016).

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which small groups of students use a

variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject and is one of Marzano's

nine high yield strategies to increase student achievement. Cooperative learning can have a

twenty-seven percentile gain in student achievement and organizing students in cooperative

learning groups has a powerful effect on learning (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2005).

Literature circles also encourage cooperative learning. Students are sharing and discussing ideas

in groups during literature circles and using a variety of ways to improve their understanding of

the text. Literature circles also encourage collaborative learning, students working with students to explore a question or text or create a project. For advanced learners, working with peers is crucial. (Smutny, 2011). Students can work in groups within literature circles to enrich their learning. During literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss literature in depth. When students engage with texts and one another, they take control of their literacy in a positive and rewarding way.

Literature circles support the reflective nature of reading and writing and students can apply what they are learning about reading and writing in literature circles. Reflective learning is the process of internally examining an issue and connecting with experience (Sanacore, 2013). Reflection is important for students' literacy development. Discussions during literature circles are peer- led and students connect with each other and to the book while engaged in meaningful discussions. Students are constantly reflecting on what was read through literature circles. In literature circle discussions, students usually have the book they are reading with them, so students are constantly referring back to the text and reflecting on what was read and what they recorded in their notes. Students discuss what was read and focus on their role during discussion. Students are one of the five roles; artful artist, passage picker, question asker, connection maker, and word wizard. These roles are the talking points for students during discussion to encourage thoughtful reflection while reading (Daniels, 2002). In a research article by Mills and Jennings, students and teachers used reflection to significantly improve the quality of their literature circle conversations (Mills & Jennings, 2011).

There has also been research done to suggest that literature circles increase student engagement and motivation. Literature circles give students choice. Student groups are based, not off of ability, but on book choice. According to Daniels, "for reading to become a lifelong

habit and a deeply owned skill, it has to be voluntary, anchored in feelings of pleasure and power" (Daniels, 2002, p. 19). Students are also given opportunities to choose roles as they discuss and reflect on the reading. Student choice leads to deeper engagement and increased intrinsic motivation. Students love to have a choice in what they are reading, if a student gets to choose what they will read, they will be more motivated to read. Literature circles are also social experiences. Students are expected to talk, in contrast to the rest of their time at school, to debate and argue their ideas. Students can bring their experiences and feelings into the classroom and are given time to share them. Literature circles get students engaged, so that they will want to read. In an article that studied critical response in fourth grade readers, the authors found that the best way for students to develop reading fluency is by becoming passionate and eager readers and writers (Long & Gove, 2003).

Potential Problems of Literature Circles

In his latest book on literature circles, Daniels listed several potential problems with literature circles that he addressed in his book; an assessment culture with constant testing, a terminology drift, and role sheet dependency. The education system today is strongly guided by testing and teachers are subsequently teaching to the test, however, research has shown that literature circles do work and that literature- based programs are best for students. Daniels also spoke to the terminology drift in education, where a term, like writing workshop, is invented, described, and introduced into the education world. Then, the idea spreads and writing workshop becomes something it was not originally intended to be or educators are using the term incorrectly. The same thing has occurred with literature circles, if an educator gathers a groups of students for any activity that involves reading, it is sometimes called a literature circle. Even if the teacher has chosen the story, if it is a basal, if the teacher is running the discussion, it may

be called a literature circle. However, those examples are not a true representation of a literature circle. Another potential problem when implementing literature circles are role sheets. Daniels included role sheets in the first edition of his book that was published in 1993, they were handouts used to offer support to students just getting started in literature circle discussions, there were role sheets for each of the 5 roles of literature circles. The role sheets were "revised and republished in countless professional journals, in school district curriculum guides across the county, and in every corner of the internet" (Daniels, 2002, p.13). The role sheets Daniels produced were intended to help students read and discuss, but after they were changed so many times the role sheets would often hinder group discussions and not encourage real conversation amongst students. In the latest edition of his book, Daniels offers some simple solutions to these problems. He clearly provides research about how literature circles require real reading and thinking, not just teachers teaching to the test. He clearly defines what literature circles are and what they are not, so that educators are not confused or misinformed about the term literature circle. Daniels also offers alternatives, adjustments, and procedures along with the role sheets, so they are more likely to be used to get students started and are not meant to be used very long in order to encourage real dialogue between students during discussions (Daniels, 2002).

In his most recent article, Daniels writes how to solve some of these same problems and how to improve literature circles. Instead of using the structured role sheets, students are recording their thoughts for their response journals on sticky notes, homemade bookmarks, or text coding. Teachers with successful literature circles are using think alouds to model how smart readers think and teaching explicit social skills. In the past literature circles have focused on fiction books, however the literature circle model is just as powerful and effective for nonfiction texts. Instead of celebrating the end of a book with a project, like a diorama or

designing a new book cover, performance-oriented projects are a way to celebrate and promote

great books through readers' theatre, talk shows, poetry, or song parodies. Teachers are

assessing student comprehension all along the way, instead of giving a comprehension quiz at

the end of a book. Students are also participating in written conversations, where students write

notes to each other responding to the literature they are reading. These are the different ways

Daniels discovered that teachers are using to make literature more valuable for students (Daniels,

2006).

Along with Daniels, there are other articles published that speak to the potential problems

that can occur with literature circles, the articles also include how to fix them. Clarke and

Holwadel published an article that came about after they had spent endless hours of teaching and

explaining how literature circles work, but students would still struggle with using positive social

interaction skills during group discussions and the literature circles were unsuccessful when she

used them. Holwadel was a dedicated teacher that wanted to incorporate literature circles

because her students had enjoyed and understood books much more. Clarke was a researcher

who had been studying how students discussed literature for three years and was studying

Holwadel's classroom. The school this study had taken place at was high poverty. Some of the

problems that occurred during literature circles were tension between students, discursive

difficulties and structural barriers (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). There was hostility between

students and built up tension, students struggled with using discursive moves to promote positive

discussion, Holwadel did not have much time in her 90-minute block to build community in her

classroom, students were constantly moved in and out of her class, and interruptions to her

instruction with celebrations or long term testing. Despite all of these issues and their impact on

her failing literature circles, Holwadel and Clarke pressed on and made a plan to improve the

literature circles. The goal was to create meaningful instruction practices that valued student

voice, encourage positive interactions, and fostered reading opportunities. Holwadel and Clarke

accomplished these goals and turned their literature circles around by using powerful mini-

lessons, watching themselves on video, choosing good books, and coaching students. The mini-

lessons that were used were starting with a membership grid to build community, sharing the

airtime to encourage students to listen to each other, and give compliments to establish a

community of learners. These mini-lessons were inspired by Daniels and Steinke's book on mini

lessons for literature circles (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007; Daniels & Steinke, 2004). The students

also watched their discussions on video, they were able to see how their interactions impacted

the literature circles so that they could change their behavior in a positive way. Holwadel also

found good books to inspire discussions, books that the students in her classroom could relate

too. Clarke and Holwadel also began to coach students, even though a key aspect of literature

circles is the absence of a teacher, they sat in on discussions as a coach to aid the students in

becoming better literature circle participants.   They did not enter the groups as teachers, but as a

guide to encourage productive discussions. By the end of the year, students were making

connections, building on one another's responses, demonstrating listening behaviors, and

referring back to each other's' comments. Clarke and Holwadel "felt that by using powerful

mini-lessons, watching ourselves on videotapes, choosing good books, and coaching students,

we were giving them not only the discursive strategies that they needed to discuss books, but

also the ones that would help them in their interpersonal relations beyond literature circle

discussions" (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007, pg. 28).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many studies that have been conducted that were oriented towards literature circles, their descriptions and effects, and potential problems of literature circles. Literature circles are used across grade levels, from primary education all the way up to college. They are also used with struggling English language learners and even fluent readers. The positive effects of literature circles are not debated, seeing as they are used with so many students and across the globe, but many teachers have encountered problems when implementing literature circles because they are so flexible in nature. There is research to try and solve some of the most common problems that teachers encounter. Usually, these problems in literature circles are fixed by letting go of role sheets and implementing mini –lessons and think alouds. There are several aspects of literature circles that are consistent; the five roles, student book choice, student led discussions, and the teacher as a facilitator (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). Students have more responsibility for their own learning and guide their own discussions, while the teacher serves as a coach or guide to the learning and discussions. The teacher also provides mini-lessons or think alouds that give students opportunities to see how good readers think while reading or speak when discussing. There is flexibility in choosing how students will respond, whether through role sheets, response logs, or sticky notes. There is also not a list of books for teachers to choose from to provide to students, rather the teacher chooses an assortment of books that will resonate and be a good fit for his or her students and then provides these books to students to choose from (Daniels, 2006).

There are several positive effects of literature circles, if literature circles are implemented correctly. These effects vary from study to study, but the studies always list positive effects. Literature circles deepen reading comprehension, improve writing, speaking, and listening skills,

increase student motivation and engagement, and develop student vocabulary. Literature circles are also used as a best practice; they combine many current best practices that teachers are strongly encouraged to use each day in the classroom. Literature circles use cooperative learning, collaborative learning, incorporate reflection, encourage the use of writing, develop language, and engage and motivate students (Elhess & Egbert, 2015).

The research behind Response to Intervention is more controversial. Response to Intervention is a state mandate in Tennessee, along with several other states. There are studies that report the positive impact of Response to Intervention, while others say it has a negative impact or no impact at all. There are even studies that say more research needs to be done to determine the effectiveness of Response to Intervention, especially in the higher tiers. There is more research done on Response to Intervention in relation to Tier II and Tier III and special education. There is not nearly as much research on Response to Intervention in Tier I as there is in the lower tiers (McDaniel et al., 2013).

Literature circles are aligned with state standards and fit under the mandates of Response to Intervention for Tier I. The state standards require students to think critically about a text, respond to text, and to speak and listen collaboratively with their peers in small groups. In Tier I English Language Arts instruction should include all of the Tennessee State Standards ELA strands; reading literature, reading informational text, reading foundational skills, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The instruction during Tier I should address individual needs using small groups that are flexible, where students read and discuss text ("Academic Standards," 2016). There has been research published that says that Response to Intervention provides a framework for the instruction of all students, not only students in special education, but all students. Response to Intervention has been used to differentiate instruction and to teach

gifted and talented students, or students who are at or above grade level. Response to

Intervention provides a framework where all students needs are met, not only students who need

intense intervention, but also students who need enrichment. There has not been research done

on implementing literature circles with top performing students of Tier I in Response to

Intervention (McDaniel et al., 2013).

In conclusion, this literature review has proven to be informative. The numerous pieces

of literature have clearly defined literature circles, the various effects of literature circles,

literature circles as best practice, problems encountered when implementing literature circles,

and the framework that Response to Intervention provides for the differentiation of learning for

all students.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

Research reveals that literature circles develop a students' love of reading. Response to Intervention is a state mandated framework that provides time for all students' instructional needs to be met. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of literature circles on students' growth.

Population

The population of this study consisted of students from a public elementary school in Northeast Tennessee. At the time of the study, the school served 508 students. The population of the school consisted of 89.8 percent Caucasian, 4.9 percent Hispanic students, and 3.9 percent African American. The composition of the school consisted of 52% male and 48% female. The population of the school was also made up of 13.8 percent students with disabilities and 63.1 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged. 56 percent of those students were participating in a free or reduced price lunch program.

Sample

The sample that was chosen for this study came from a Response to Intervention classroom. The students were not randomly selected because they were in an intact group requiring forty-five minutes of Tier I reading instruction. The students took a universal screener and these students scored the highest of the first grade, these students were in need of differentiated instruction to enrich their learning. There were 13 students in this Response to Intervention group, eight boys and five girls. All of these students came from seven different first grade classes and are six or seven years old.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two district-mandated tests. All students in Washington County were required to take the STAR 360 Reading test at the beginning, the middle, and end of year. This was an online assessment that students took in the computer lab. Teachers in Washington County were also required to give students an Oral Running Record at the beginning, middle, and end of year. In this assessment, the student read a leveled text to the teacher and the teacher recorded errors and asked the student a few questions on text understanding, this determined the students' instructional reading level. The scores from the beginning of the year and end of the year on both assessments were compared. Data were also collected through student literature circle journals. Students will participate in literature circles all year long.

Procedure

Before the study was conducted, permission was sought from the principal of the school, the school district, and parents of the students. Permission was also sought from Milligan College IRB. When all permission was obtained, the study was implemented. The sample were all the students placed in the researcher's RTI (Response to Intervention) class, based on their initial test scores from the universal screener taken at the beginning of the school year. All of the subjects made the highest scores in the first grade and then were placed in the researcher's RTI class. The sample consisted of eight boys and five girls. The sample was taught in a small group setting the whole time because of their placement in RTI.

The study lasted the entire school year. The sample was taught about literature circles and then students began to participate in literature circles, first with support from the researcher and then on their own. The researcher implemented mini lessons focused on speaking and

listening skills and reading comprehension. After the mini lessons, students would break into their groups to read, reflect in their journals, and discuss in literature circles. Students chose books that decided their literature circle groups, they read both fiction and nonfiction texts.

At the end of the year, the researcher compared the assessment results of the universal screener and Oral Running Record from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. The researcher also examined the writing development evidenced in the literature circle response journals and district assessments. The students' attitudes about reading were also examined through a survey taken before literature circles were implemented and then after. Theses scores, assessments, and surveys were examined to determine the impact of literature circles.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following question:

Research Question: What is the impact of literature circles on a selected first grade class?

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of literature circles on a selected first grade class. This study showed that literature circles can have a positive impact on students in first grade. Educators should be aware of the impact that literature circles can have and strive to incorporate literature circles into their own teaching disciplines.

Data Collection

The data collected for this qualitative study consisted of literature circle journal examination, STAR 360 test scores, and Oral Running Record levels. The data were collected from thirteen students in the researcher's Response to Intervention class. Data were compared from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year to compare for differences. The demographic profile for students is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Student Demographic Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	8	61.00
Female	5	39.00
Total	**13**	**100.00**

Research Question

One research question was used to guide the analysis of the data collected. The research question was as follows:

What is the impact of literature circles on a selected first grade class?

To answer this research question, three instruments were used to collect data, and the data were investigated and analyzed. These instruments consisted of literature circle journals, STAR 360 test scores, and Oral Running Record levels.

Results Derived from Literature Circle Journals

When student literature circle journals were analyzed, two trends emerged. The researcher examined journal entries from the beginning of the year to journal entries at the middle of the year. Trend 1 indicated a maturity of student writing. Student handwriting was neater, letters remained on the lines, and there were less spelling mistakes. Trend 2 indicated that the content of their writing was stronger. Students were making detailed connections to stories, defining new words, visualizing with detail, noticing author's craft, and digging deeper into the text with thoughtful questions. Journal entries at the middle of the year included more detailed content with less spelling mistakes and neater handwriting.
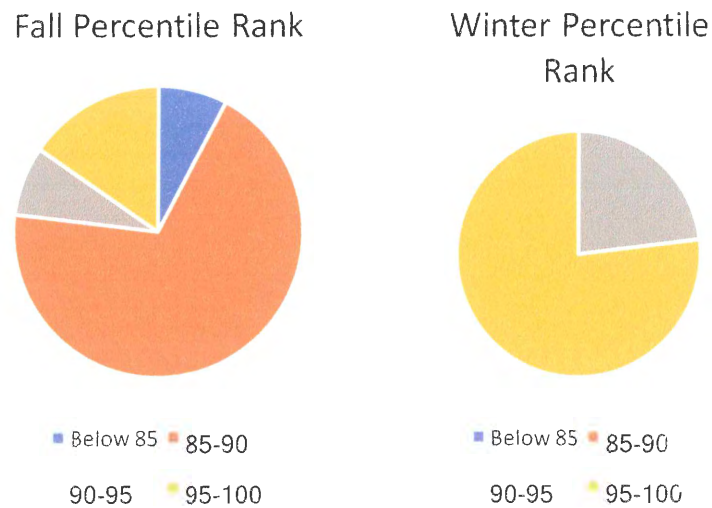
Results Derived from STAR 360 Test Scores

STAR 360 is a district mandated online tests that all students are required to take three times per year: fall, winter, and spring. The test gives an abundance of data to be analyzed. When STAR 360 test scores were investigated, two trends emerged. Trend 1 indicated an increase in student scaled scores. Scaled Sores are computed based on the difficulty of the items administered and the pattern of right and wrong answers. Scaled scores range from 0 to 1400, in

first-grade the band of scaled scores is from 63-188. Most of the first graders in the researcher's

class scored in that range at the beginning of the year, with several students already passing those

first-grade scores. Figure 2 displays the number of students who fell in each scaled score range

for the Fall STAR 360 and the Winter STAR 360.

Scaled Score of Students
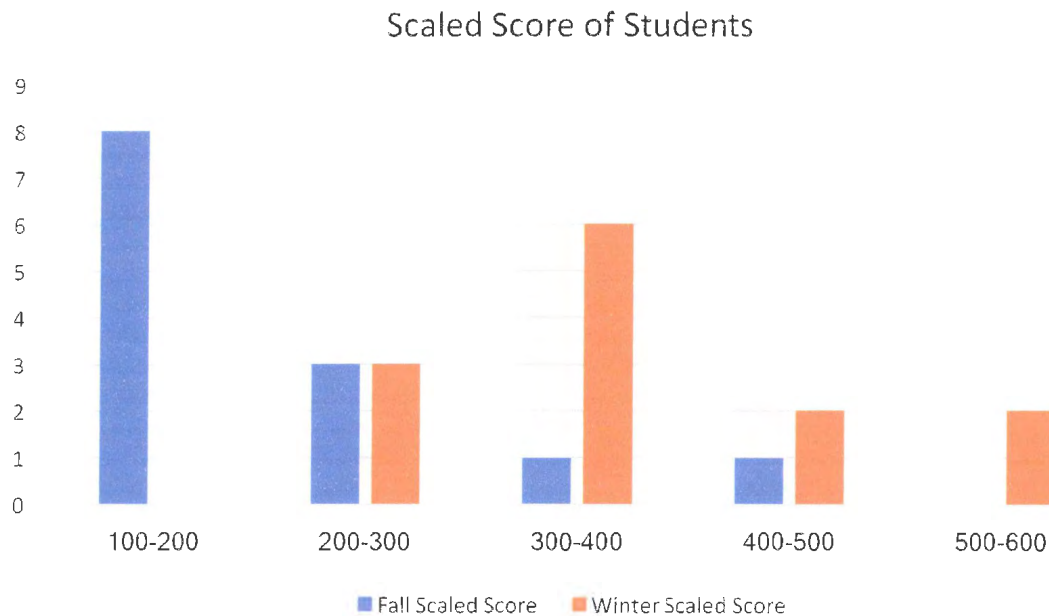
Figure 2: Number of Students in Each Scaled Score Range from Fall and Winter

Trend 2 indicated that all students in the selected first grade class grew in percentile rank.

After literature circles were implemented over the course of the semester, 10 of 13 students

scored in the 95th percentile. Percentile rank is a norm-referenced score that compared student

test results to the results of other students who have taken the same test. Percentile Rank shows

how an individual student's performance compared to that of his or her same-grade peers on the

national level. The student percentile ranks from the Fall and Winter STAR 360 are displayed in
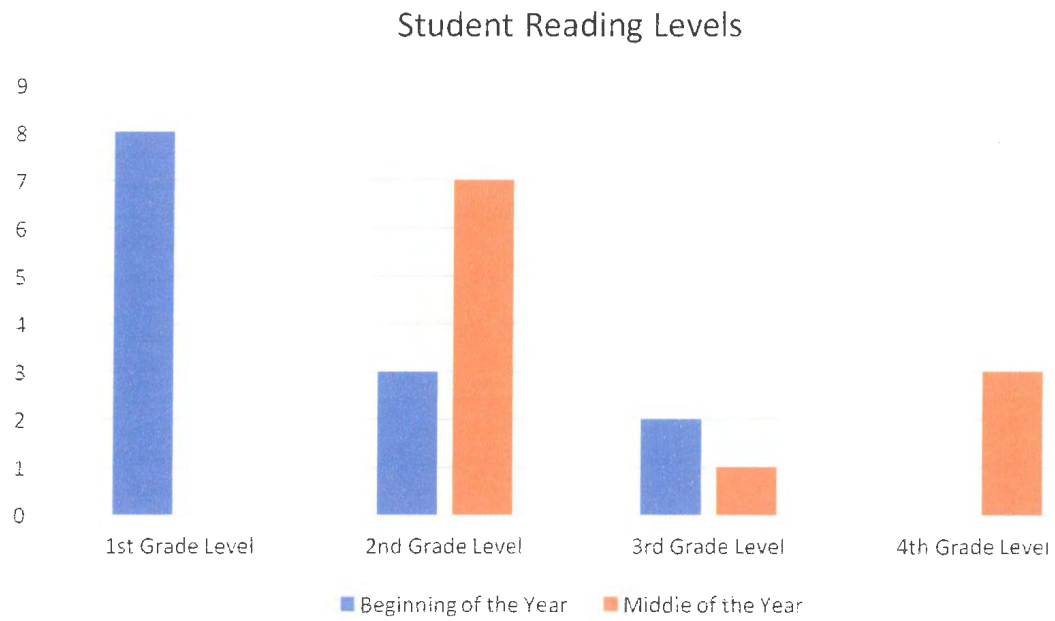
Figure 3.

Fall Percentile Rank   Winter Percentile Rank

■ Below 85 ■ 85-90   ■ Below 85 ■ 85-90
    90-95   ■ 95-100   90-95   ■ 95-100

Figure 3: Percentile Rank of Students from Fall and Winter STAR 360

Results Derived from Oral Running Record Levels

A running record is a tool that helps teachers to identify patterns in student reading behaviors and determine their reading level. An oral running record is administered to all students three times per year in Washington County; beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year. The researcher analyzed the oral running record of students from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year and 1trend emerged. Trend 1 indicated that students are reading higher level and more complex nonfiction text. Figure 4 displays the results.

Figure 4: Student Reading Level from Beginning and Middle of Year

Chapter 5

Findings, Recommendations, and Implications

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary of the findings, recommendations for further research, and implications of this study. This research study was based on the review of the literature that identified the benefits of literature circles. The results of the study were also based on the data analysis described in Chapter 4.

Summary of Findings:

The major question addressed in this study was, what is the impact of literature circles on a selected first grade class. There were several significant trends that emerged from the three data collection instruments used for this research. The three data collection instruments included literature circle journals, STAR 360 test scores, and oral running record levels.

Two trends emerged from the results derived from literature circle journals. The first trend indicated that student writing had matured. Students did not know how to write in a spiral bound notebook until they began using them for literature circles. As the year progressed, student journal entries indicated more mature writing. Student handwriting was neater, letters remained on the lines, and there were less spelling mistakes. Students were also writing more than they had at the beginning of the year.

The second trend showed that the content of student writing was stronger. Students were making more detailed connections to the chapter books they were reading. Students were able to independently use a dictionary to look up the definitions of unknown words. Students were visualizing images for the books rather than simply copying pictures from the books. They labeled these visualizations and used details from the story to help them. Students were noticing

author's craft and recording it in their journals. Students began to ask questions that required their group to dig deeper into the text. These questions also guided their discussions as the students chose what they wanted to focus on and learn more about. One student remarked, "Mrs. Little, it is like we are the teachers!" These first graders felt empowered to be leaders of their own learning through literature circles ("Students Shine," 2010).

Two significant trends emerged from the STAR 360 test scores. The first trend that emerged was an increase in student scaled scores. Every single student in the class increased their scaled score. The band of scaled scores for first grade is from 68-188. The scores from the students in the selected first grade class after literature circles were implemented ranged from 248-556. These students made huge gains and have moved far past the band for typical first grade scores.

The second significant trend that emerged from the STAR 360 scores is the growth of the students' percentile rank. All students rose in percentile rank, except for one. That student scored in the 99th percentile at the Fall STAR 360 and stayed at the 99th percentile at Winter STAR 360. It is difficult to stay at the same percentile rank, some students drop in rank after they reach the 99th percentile, but it is significant that this student remained the same. All the others students rose significantly in percentile rank. Before literature circles were implemented, two students scored above the 95th percentile. After literature circles were implemented, 10 of the 13 students scored above the 95th percentile. This showed that after participating in literature circles, 10 students scored higher than 95% of their peers that had taken the test.

There was one important trend that emerged from the analysis of the oral running records. At the beginning of the year, 8 students were reading on a first-grade level, 3 on a second-grade level, and 2 on a third-grade level. After literature circles were implemented for

one semester, 7 students were reading on a second-grade level, 1 on a third-grade level, and 3 on a fourth-grade level. After the implementation of literature circles, students were reading and comprehending complex nonfiction text above their current grade level. These data showed that literature circles do help students acquire comprehension skills.

These trends suggest that literature circles had a positive impact on students in a selected first-grade class. There are several reasons that the research turned out this way. First, students were motivated. Students loved choosing their own books, they were able to choose from high-interest, complex, nonfiction and fiction texts. Students were interested in the books they chose, which made them motivated to read and learn through literature circles. Students also enjoyed time to discuss with each other. Throughout the school day, students are often made to be quiet. This was not the case during literature circle discussions, students were encouraged to discuss and reflect about something they were interested in with their peers. This also increased their motivation, which could have led to the positive impact of literature circles shown in the data.

Conclusion:

The results of this study indicated that literature circles impact students in a selected first grade class in a positive way. The results also indicate that literature circles can be used to challenge advanced students within the framework of Response to Intervention to help them continue to grow in reading and in writing. There were several trends in this study; student writing matured, students wrote stronger journal entries, students led their own learning, student scaled scores and percentile rank increased on the STAR 360, and students read and comprehended complex nonfiction text above their current grade level. The trends in this study indicate that literature circles increase student achievement scores, advance student reading level, improve student writing, and foster a love of reading.

Recommendations:

1. Future research should include a randomly selected sample to determine the impact of

    literature circles.

2. Future research should include several schools for a sample to determine the impact of

    literature circles.

3. Future research should include a study of older students to determine the impact of

    literature circles on different ages of students.

Implications:

1. Educators should be aware of using literature circles to improve student achievement

    scores, advance student reading level, and improve student writing.

2. Educators should be aware of using literature circles to challenge advanced learners

    within the framework of Response to Intervention.

3. Parents should encourage students to choose books they are interested in and guide their

    own learning through questions.

4. Students should be encouraged to participate in literature circles with their peers to

    empower them to be leaders of their own learning and develop communication skills.

References

Academic Standards. (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2016, from

> https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/academic-standards

Avcı, S., & Yüksel, A. (2011). Cognitive and affective contributions of the literature circles

> method on the acquisition of reading habits and comprehension skills in primary level

> students. *Kuram Ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri, 11*(3), 1295-1300. Retrieved from

> http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.milligan.idm.oclc.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=8

> 53ed385-ff18-441f-b165-ef2ac374ffce%40sessionmgr4006&hid=4102

Balu, R., Zhu, P., Doolittle, F., Schiller, E., Jenkins, J., & Gersten, R. (2015). Evaluation of

> response to intervention practices for elementary school reading. Executive Summary.

> NCEE 2016-4000. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.*

> Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov.milligan.idm.oclc.org/?id=ED560821

Cameron, S., Murray, M., Hull, K., & Cameron, J. (2012). Engaging fluent readers using

> literature circles. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, 20*(1), i-viii. Retrieved from

> http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.milligan.idm.oclc.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=80d69b7c

> -fbfc-45ad-86eb-21d333f7b35c%40sessionmgr4007&vid=2&hid=4102

Clarke, L. W., & Holwadel, J. (2007). Help! What is wrong with these literature circles and how

> can we fix them?. *Reading Teacher, 61*(1), 20-29. Retrieved from

> http://www.jstor.org.milligan.idm.oclc.org/stable/20204547?seq=1#page_scan_tab_conte

> nts

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups.*

> Portland, Me.: Stenhouse Publishers.

Daniels, H. (2006). What's the next big thing with literature circles?. *Voices from The Middle*,

    13(4), 10-15. Retrieved from

    http://www.csun.edu/~krowlands/Content/Academic_Resources/Literature/Instructional

    %20Strategies/Daniels-lit%20circles.pdf

Daniels, H., & Steineke, N. (2004). *Mini-lessons for literature circles*. Portsmouth, NH:

    Heinemann, 2004.

Elhess, M., & Egbert, J. (2015). Literature circles as support for language development. *English

    Teaching Forum, 53*(3), 13-21. Retrieved from

    http://eric.ed.gov.milligan.idm.oclc.org/?id=EJ1077926

Hughes, C., Dexter, D. D. (n.d.) Field studies of RTI programs. Retrieved October 16, 2016 from

    http://www.rtinetworlk.org

Johnsen, S. K., Parker, S. L., & Farah, Y. N. (2015). Providing services for students with gifts

    and talents within a response-to-intervention framework. *Teaching Exceptional Children*,

    47(4), 226-233. doi: 10.1177/0040059915569358

Levy, R. J. (2011). Literature circles go to college. *Journal of Basic Writing (CUNY), 30*(2), 53-

    83. Retrieved from

    http://www.eric.ed.gov.milligan.idm.oclc.org/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno

    =EJ988210

Long, T. W., & Gove, M. K. (2003). How engagement strategies and literature circles promote

    critical response in a fourth-grade, urban classroom. *Reading Teacher, 57*(4), 350-361.

    Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.milligan.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/20205370.pdf

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. E. (2005). *Classroom instruction that works: research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

McDaniel, S., Albritton, K., & Roach, A. (2013). Highlighting the need for further response to intervention research in general education. *Research in Higher Education Journal,* 20. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov.milligan.idm.oclc.org/?id=EJ1064666

Mills, H., & Jennings, L. (2011). Talking about talk: reclaiming the value and power of literature circles. *Reading Teacher, 64*(8), 590-598. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.milligan.idm.oclc.org/stable/41203458?&seq=1#page_scan_tab_con tents

Murray, C. S., Woodruff, A. L., & Vaughn, S. (2010). First-grade student retention within a 3-tier reading framework. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 26*(1), 26-50. doi: 10.1080/10573560903396934

Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework Manual (2015) Retrieved October 20, 2016 from https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/education/rti2/attachments/rti2_manual.pdf

Sanacore, J. (2013). "Slow down, you move too fast": literature circles as reflective practice. *Clearing House, 86*(3), 116-120. doi:10.1080/00098655.2013.773270

Seedorf, S. S. (2014). Response to intervention. *Gifted Child Today, 37*(4), 248-257. doi:10.1177/1076217514544029

Smutny, J. F. (2011). Challenge your top students. *Instructor, 121*(3), 30-35. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov.milligan.idm.oclc.org/?id=EJ991949.

Students shine in 'Starring, The Lives of ...': literature circle-based project wins IRA Award for Technology and Reading. (2010). *Reading Today,* (1), 42. Retrieved from

http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.milligan.idm.oclc.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=2c6c5798

-9a40-4d15-bdf2-9945ffc551d8%40sessionmgr4007&vid=18&hid=4102