READER-REPORTED INFLUENCES ON A FIFTH GRADER’S TRANSACTION WITH EXTENDED TEXT

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This study was designed to investigate the question of what goes on in a reader’s mind as she transacts with extended text. It was a case study with one respondent, a ten year old girl. She reported, in writing, her thoughts during teacher read aloud, subsequent silent reading of the same text, and group discussions about the text. The findings support and flesh out Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development theory, and Lipman’s Philosophy for Children theory. Conclusions were that there are numerous sociocultural influences on a reader’s transaction with text and that these influences must be taken into account in the classroom.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How does a reader arrive at meaning from print? The answer to this question has been theorized in various ways. Behaviorists (Adams, 1995; Gough, 1984) have proposed linear theories, situating the reader in isolation and viewing the reader and text as separate entities. Meaning is made through recognizing and understanding words, processing one word at a time, left to right. Psycholinguists (Goodman, 1994; Smith, 1971) have theorized that meaning is made through a process of predicting and confirming, a process in which the major role is played by the reader’s knowledge of the graphophonic, semantic, and syntactic systems of language. Social constructionists (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985) have exerted a strong influence on recent theories of meaning making. The context of the reading act is considered in all its complexities. The reader and the text are not separate, but instead are both integral parts of a multi-voiced event (Gee, 1996). One such theory is Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory.

Rosenblatt’s theory explains meaning making within a complex framework. Rather than isolating the reader, the text, or the reading act itself, this theory encompasses the reader’s history with print and literature, his or her world experiences, his or her purpose for reading, his or her attitude and motivation about the task, the amount and kind of attention paid to the reading, and his or her response to the derived meaning. The
meaning does not reside in the text or in the mind of the reader, but is created within the transaction between the two.

This is an elegant and compelling theory. But what does it look like in practice? Gavelek (1984) refers to the unavailability of observable cognitive processes as the “privacy of cognitive activity” (p. 15). Many and Cox (1992) ask, “How do we get inside the head of a reader?” (p. 118). Without a window into the mind, how do we explain the meaning making process and all the influences on that process?

Need for the Study

Numerous studies have been conducted on reader response and the meaning making actions of students. These studies have looked at the influence of text, reader characteristics, context and instructional strategies, and response processes (Short, 1995). Researchers are calling for a deeper examination of these processes. Harding (1968) sees response as active rather than passive, including both immediate and delayed effects. Overt responses may not be the total indicator of the inner responses that occur. Researchers must look beyond immediate and overt responses, finding a way to uncover the delayed and covert properties of response. Gavelek and Raphael (1996) maintain that students learn as a result of public, social interactions with many different individuals. Gee (1996) states

Whenever we write or read, speak or listen, we always do so within a specific historically achieved and history-creating coordination, a coordination of an identity, a social language, things, tools, sites, and institutions, as well as other minds and bodies (p. 189).
Studying social uses of language can give us insight into how response and meaning are made.

Short (1995) suggests a need for research to reflect the complexity of readers’ minds and lives. Martinez and Roser (1991) state that there is a need for systematic, detailed descriptions of reader responses and that peer interactions can serve as a way of studying children’s growth as respondents. They see a need for research that addresses our understanding of how children’s responses to literature “are shaped by cultural characteristics, including the physical and social characteristics of the classroom” (p. 648). This deeper look is more recently encouraged by Short (1995), who states that studying the link between literature and inquiry “would offer a more complete understanding of the ways students use literature to build a world view” (p. 147-148). Rosenblatt (1977) states that various factors affect what is expressed as a response. She suggests we focus on the transactional model, with its emphasis on the total situation. In my review of the literature related to reader response, I found no studies involving a single respondent, exploring his/her responses over time. This unexplored area indicates a need for the study.

The Significance of the Study

This case study, involving only one respondent, is an attempt to answer the calls for a deeper look at the transactional process in a social setting. In directly asking a reader to report her thoughts while reading, while being read to, and while discussing what has been read with her peers, a window has been opened into the head of this particular reader, allowing a glimpse of her cognitive activity. Asking for private thoughts has uncovered some of her delayed and covert responses. Participation in a
social setting, with a social language, in a familiar institution, reflects the complexity of this reader’s mind and life.

The Problem

What goes on in the mind of a reader during her transaction with text, during both public and private evocations? What sociocultural influences play a role in those transactions? In order to answer these questions, a single respondent was chosen, one from whom I could “learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). This respondent, a fifth grade girl, was asked to report, as fully as possible, what she was thinking as she read a novel. In addition to this form of transaction with the text, the respondent was also asked to report her thoughts during teacher read aloud of the same text, as well as her thoughts during a group discussion, based on the Philosophy for Children model, about the text. A single respondent was chosen because of the intensity and depth of the study. Time constraints and the intensity of the response process made the choice of one respondent desirable. Narrowing the focus to one respondent provided the depth necessary to answer the questions.

Research Questions

1) What are the reader-related influences on the respondent’s transaction with the text?
2) What changes in meaning are reported by the respondent?
3) What connections does the respondent make between the influences and the changes in meaning?
Definition

Philosophy for Children. Founded in 1969 by Matthew Lipman, Philosophy for Children is a program of philosophical discussion, based on literature and geared toward children. Teachers trained in the use of this program act as facilitators for their students. All participants read a text and then generate questions about the text. Participants meet in a circle and discuss the text, using the questions as starting points in the discussion. The purpose is not to find the “right answer,” but to consider all possibilities and then use logic and reasoning to determine which answers have more “warranted assertibility” (Dewey, 1938). A major difference between this type of discussion and those normally seen in literature circles is the facilitator’s role in keeping the discussion always moving to higher level thinking, steering the discussants to be more philosophical in nature, and asking the participants to justify their answers with logic or reasoning.

Limitations

1. In order to gain permission to conduct this study in the school district in which I was employed, I agreed to conduct the study in my own classroom, without changing the curriculum.

2. The research respondent was a member of my class, making the researcher-respondent relationship sometimes awkward because of the teacher-student relationship that had been established for several months and that had to be continued throughout the study. This issue is more fully addressed in Chapter 4.

3. The reader was not able to tell everything that occurred in her mind when she reported her mental activities. There were times when she could not recall why she had written certain things and could not explain what they meant.
4. Audiotaping the discussion group changed their behavior for the first two sessions.

5. The researcher’s theoretical stance influenced data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Outline of the Study

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, an overview of the need for this study, an explanation of the significance of the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, definitions, and limitations. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature and an explanation of the theories guiding this study. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the study. Data collection and analysis are discussed in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 contains findings and conclusions.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this review is to examine the current literature pertaining to certain aspects of the theories of Rosenblatt (1978), Vygotsky (1978), and Lipman (1991). Although the process of outlining the theories tends to separate and individually define them, it is the juxtaposition and overlapping of these theories that create the lens through which this study is focused. Rosenblatt (1978) and Lipman (1994) both acknowledge being strongly influenced by Dewey. All three, Rosenblatt, Lipman, and Dewey, theorize that learning is a social process that occurs in collaboration with others. All three posit that language is the medium of thought. Much of the research conducted on literature discussion is theoretically based on Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory of transaction and Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development. This review, while individually detailing each theorist’s ideas, is not intended as a taking apart of the pieces, but an attempt to make clear the pieces that fit together to form the focusing lens of the study. Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory is explained, followed by an explanation of Vygotsky’s view of the influences on meaning making and his description of the Zone of Proximal Development. The syntheses of studies based on these theories are presented together because of the theoretical overlap in them. The theory and studies regarding Lipman’s Philosophy for Children follow.
Rosenblatt’s (1978) Transactional Theory is a major component of the theory underlying this study. The next few paragraphs contain a brief explanation of her ideas, including the definition of transaction, the linguistic-experiential reservoir, attention to the reading act, stance, warranted assertibility, and group interchanges.

Rosenblatt (1978) has titled her theory of reading the Transactional Theory. She defines reading as “an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular . . . text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context” (1994, p. 1063). The meaning does not lie in the text, or in the reader, but “happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text” (1994, p. 1063). The text is simply marks on paper that guide the reader’s thoughts. Meaning, then, is not a static entity, the same for every reader, but is different for each reader and with each reading. It is “an active process lived through” (1978, p. 20), an “interflowing interfusion that goes on between us and the environment, between us and other people” (1995, p. 169).

Rosenblatt borrowed the term transaction from Dewey and Bentley, who coined the term in *Knowing and the Known* (1949). This term, in contrast with the positivistic term *interaction*, implies looking at the situation as a whole, or at the elements as conjoined, rather than dividing the text and the reader into discrete entities to be studied separately. It is that whole situation that helps to create meaning. The whole situation includes, but is not limited to, the reader, the text, the individual’s connotations of words, the reader’s linguistic-experiential reservoir, the reader’s selective attention, and the stance taken by the reader.
The words used in a text may have publicly shared connotations. The reader’s connotation might or might not agree with that held by the group. In the transaction with a particular text, the reader may understand the group’s interpretation of the word, but hold private, personal meanings that remain private. It is this combination of private and public meanings and experiences that form each reader’s linguistic-experiential reservoir, and it is this individual reservoir that helps shape the meaning for the reader. “Any interpretations or new meanings are restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken and written, brought to the task.” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1062). This reservoir reflects the reader’s cultural, social, and personal history.

The content of the reader’s linguistic-experiential reservoir partly influences the kind and amount of attention that is paid to the reading event. The reader selects the stimuli, both from the text and from his background, that he will respond to, a process Rosenblatt terms “selective attention” (1978, p. 42). Other factors that might influence attention include the physical and emotional state of the reader. Thus attention to the event can be “controlled or wandering, intense or superficial” (1994, p. 1062).

Another influence on attention is stance. Stance reflects the reader’s purpose. Rosenblatt theorizes a continuum of stance, marking one end as efferent and the other as aesthetic. Efferent reading, or reading done predominantly from the efferent stance, involves reading for what can be extracted and carried away from the reading. Examples of such results are information or directions to be used after the reading event is concluded. On the other end of the continuum is aesthetic reading, in which the reader’s approach to reading is one of anticipation of “living through” the event. Examples of what the reader comes away with are feelings, ideas, and images. Rosenblatt defines the
efferent as more public and the aesthetic as more private. Most reading events are a mixture of both and not wholly one or the other. While reading for information from a piece of nonfiction about a battle, the reader could become engaged by the emotions involved in the event, making the reading a combination of efferent and aesthetic. The aesthetic stance would predominate in the reading of a novel, but the “lived through” experience could be interrupted by an anachronism, leaving the reader searching the text for details that explain the time frame of the story. Readers move between stances as they read.

Rosenblatt warns that her theory does not give free reign to any and all interpretations of a text. She calls on Dewey again, using his idea of warranted assertibility (1938). A warranted assertion is one based on an agreed upon set of criteria for evidence. Not put forth as absolute truth, but open to further discussion and proof, these kinds of interpretations can be ranked, some being superior to others. The rigor with which the criteria are followed helps determine the merit of each assertion.

Rosenblatt (1994) encourages speech as a vital ingredient in the classroom. Discussion helps students to develop insights about transacting with text. “Group interchanges about their evocations from text . . . can be a powerful means of stimulating growth in reading ability and critical acumen” (1994, p. 1083).

In summary, Rosenblatt theorizes that meaning does not lie in the text or in the reader, but in the transaction between the two. Each reader brings all past experience with words, language, and life to the reading event. It is this reservoir of experience and the context of the situation that influence how much and what kind of attention the reader gives the reading event. The stance taken by the reader, either mainly efferent or mainly
aesthetic, also influences the meaning made by the reader. Every reading results in a
different meaning, though some meanings have a more warranted assertibility. Multiple
readings of the same text by the same reader create multiple transactions, each one
different. Talking with others about personal evocations from text, Rosenblatt theorizes,
can enhance reading ability.

Lev Vygotsky

The theories of Vygotsky have been studied in conjunction with Rosenblatt’s
theories in much of the research. The overlap in the two theories also undergird this
study. The next few paragraphs contain a brief outline of the parts of his theories
addressed in this literature review, including social constructivist theory, the role of
community in meaning making, and the Zone of Proximal Development.

Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist and philosopher of the 1930s, based
his theories on social constructivist ideas. These ideas emphasize the influences of
cultural and social contexts in learning. Vygotsky supported a model of learning that
placed the teacher and student in roles different from those traditionally envisioned.
Instead of a dispenser of knowledge to waiting recipients, the teacher’s role is one of
facilitator and guide. The student is an active participant in a situation that, when
learning occurs, moves him to a new level of competence, with the help of a teacher.

Vygotsky theorized that the community plays a central role in how an individual
makes meaning from his environment. The people around the individual greatly affect
the way he sees the world. Learning and development are social and collaborative
activities that cannot be taught. The learner must construct his own understanding, in his
own mind. During this process, those around the learner contribute input. Children do
not develop in isolation. Vygotsky states, “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once the process is internalized, they become part of the child’s independent development achievement” (1978, p. 88). The cultural sign that mediates this development is language.

The place where this learning occurs is in the learner’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky defined this zone as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86).

A task can be at one of three levels for the learner: at the level where the learner can perform the task independently, at the level where he can perform it with help, or at a level where the learner cannot perform the task even with help because it is too difficult. The middle level is the Zone of Proximal Development. With the help of a more knowledgeable other, in a social context with that person, the learner goes beyond his independent level. The more knowledgeable other, either an adult or a peer, scaffolds for the learner, giving temporary help where it is needed and withdrawing it where it is not. Thus the learner moves from an achieved level of learning into what had been potential.

In summary, Vygotsky theorizes that learning is an activity that cannot be taught, but is mediated by others through language. The learner moves from one level of knowing to another with the help of another person, a person more knowledgeable about the subject. This learning takes place in the learner’s Zone of Proximal Development.
Research Parameters

Many research studies have been conducted on Rosenblatt’s and Vygotsky’s ideas, many dealing with portions of their theories that are not addressed in this review. Some of the studies on reader response have looked at the influence of text (Anderson & Many, 1992; Kiefer, 1988; Leal, 1992; West, Weaver & Rowland, 1992). Others have concentrated on characteristics of the reader (Altieri, 1993; Galda, 1990; Hartman & Kretschmer, 1992; Many, 1991; Many & Cox, 1992). Several researchers have looked at stance (Cox, 1992; Cox & Many, 1992; Enciso, 1992; Fleckenstein, 1992; Hade, 1992; Langer, 1990; Many & Wiseman, 1992), exploring and explaining the role it plays in comprehension.

Vygotsky’s theories are wide in scope and very detailed. Research on his theories has included studies on writing instruction (Hicks, 1998), studies of very young children (Boyes, 1993; Reynolds, 1996; Schrader, 1988), and studies of children with special needs (Baldwin, 1997; Gamlin & Bountrogianni, 1985; Hall, 1991; Schneider & Watkins, 1996). The parent-child dyad has also been a topic of research (Cazden, 1979; Kovac-Cerovic, 1996; Pellegrini, 1984, 1986; Portes, 1993, 1994).

Though of interest, these studies do not address the issues germane to this study. The overlap of Rosenblatt and Vygotsky’s theories includes the social aspects of learning. Learning and making meaning from text are facilitated and influenced by community, backgrounds, group interchange, commonly held connotations, and the assistance of more capable others. The balance of this review is focused on instructional context and strategies, in particular the use of discussion as an instructional tool, and on the social aspects of learning, including the Zone of Proximal Development.
Discussion is the topic of much research. The aspects that have been researched include definitions of discussion (Cazden, 1986; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996), how and by whom discussions should be led (Almasi, 1995; Lyons, 1996), how gender, age, grade level and ability affect participation (Many, 1992; Orellana, 1995), the effects of culture and viewpoint (Echevarria, 1995; Golden, Meiners, & Lewis, 1992), the various ways of responding (Galda, 1980; Hill, 1985), the social context (Carey, Harste, & Smith, 1981; Innes, 1991), and the benefits of discussion (Kelly, 1990; Leal, 1993). While these studies approach the subject from different perspectives and are looking at different aspects of the discussion act, the theoretical foundations are similar. The authors of these studies refer to the theories of both Rosenblatt and Vygotsky. Transactional theory is enlarged to involve the transaction by the group, rather than just that of an individual reader and the text. The Zone of Proximal Development is used as a template to illustrate how learning from language occurs during discussion. Current research on discussion is presented as a whole, without trying to separate the studies into those influenced by one theory or the other. In many cases both theories form the bases for the studies.

Definition

How teachers define discussion tends to influence how discussion is conducted in the classroom. Gambrell and Almasi (1996) define discussion, in what they call the new view emerging in the literature, as “interactive events in which individuals collaboratively construct meaning or consider alternate interpretations of the text in order to arrive at new understanding” (p. 2). This is in contrast to the old I-R-E (Cazden, 1986; Mehan, 1979) model of Initiate-Respond-Evaluate, wherein the teacher initiated an interaction by asking a question, a student responded, and the teacher evaluated the
answer before moving on to the next initiated interaction. Some classrooms still run on the old model. In a study done by Alvermann, O’Brien, and Dillon (1990), the teachers studied could give an updated definition of discussion, but what occurred in the classroom more closely resembled the older model. The cause of this situation was thought to be pressures from outside forces that made the teachers hesitant to change. Lehman and Scharer (1996) looked at how adults’ responses to a book influenced the way they viewed children’s responses to the same book. The adults’ definitions of their role in facilitating discussion changed after coming into contact with the thoughts of the children. Marshall (1989) found that the teachers he studied saw discussions serving two purposes: lively interaction and deep analysis of text. Teachers in Koeller’s (1981) study defined discussion as a means of furthering children’s companionship and understanding of one another. In both studies the teachers saw their roles as facilitators and guides. In 1994, Commeyras found that her own definition of what a good discussion entails changed when a group of second graders used their own definition of what a discussion should be and proved it worthy. Commeyras found her new definition to be more child centered. Definition, then, frames how discussion is performed in the classroom.

The form of discussion used in this study, Philosophy for Children, is child centered, with the students themselves supplying the topics of discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to provide an opportunity for the students to interact with others in order to enlarge their understanding of what they have read. The definition agrees with the “new emerging view” (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996, p. 10) in recent research.
Leadership

Whether teacher or student should lead the discussion is another focus of research. Lyons (1996) and McCormack (1993) researched peer-led discussion groups. McCormack (1993) found that, with teacher modeling, second graders could respond to a text, taking turns, responding, and elaborating appropriately. Lyons (1996) found that the students in her study preferred student-led groups and that they performed better when allowed to participate in this way. Almasi (1995), Haught (1970), and Leal (1993) compared peer-led and teacher-led discussion groups, with mixed results. Students talk more in smaller, peer-led groups, with more students getting a turn to talk, but less divergent thinking goes on than in teacher-led groups. The kinds of talk differ, also. Orsolini and Pontecorvo (1992) looked at how talk differs in various phases of the discussion. Agreement and disagreement changed the patterns and content of what was said.

Whether done in teacher-led or peer-led groups, students do need some kind of guidance. Probst (1990) suggests that, though free response is desirable, the students must be led to reflection and analysis. Dunning (1990) found, however, that too much leading can get in the way of response. In his visit to a third grade classroom, he found he had planned too much and left too little for the children to respond to. Graup (1985) found that students who were taught question generation tended to have more interpretive responses. Roberts and Langer (1991) showed the teacher’s role to be crucial.

In summary, these studies support the idea that the teacher plays a very important role in setting up the discussion event, training, encouraging, and providing demonstrations for the participants. But the teacher must not do the work for the students.
The teacher’s role is that of facilitator and requires a careful balance of knowing how and when to intervene.

The Philosophy for Children form of discussion that is a major part of this study incorporates the findings of these researchers. The leader trains the students in how to ask questions, what kinds of questions to ask, and how to take turns and assume leadership roles. After the initial training, the adult leader gradually turns control over to the group, but always maintains the role of facilitator and model. The work is done by the students, but the leader, thoroughly trained in the process, knows how and when to intervene in order to promote higher-level discussions.

Gender, Grade Level, and Ability

Gender, grade level, and ability have been examined as influences on how students respond and transact in discussion groups. Orellana (1995), in her ethnographic study of two Spanish-English primary classrooms, found that gender had powerful effects on literacy practices. Literacy “served as a vehicle for students to construct similar understandings of what it means to be male or female,” but “understandings of what it means to be male or female also helped to construct literacy” (p. 705) through use of social construction of meaning. Many (1992) studied grade level and its effect on stance. The aesthetic stance increased with personal understanding of a text, and both increased with age. Several studies have looked at the at-risk student, the reluctant reader, and the resource student and their participation in discussion. Lewis (1995), in her ethnographic study of fifth/sixth graders, focused on a sixth grade student who did not fit in with the high achieving students, but preferred discussions with a group of fifth grade boys with whom he more closely identified. McCutchen, Laird, and Graves (1993) included poor
readers in a discussion program called Extended Classic Books. They looked at two groups, one successful and one not, as judged by the classroom teachers. The answer to their research question of whether at-risk students can benefit from literature discussion was yes, with the right group. The group had to believe they could be successful. Raphael (1996) studied a mainstreamed special education student who participated in book discussion groups. This participation offered the student the opportunity to demonstrate his understanding of what he had read, in contrast to standardized testing situations where his understanding was not evident. Siddall (1998) examined classroom discussion and noted one student who, though struggling with reading, was able to engage successfully in the discussions because he was not constrained by paper and pencil tasks. Wollman-Bonilla (1994) analyzed two literature discussion groups in a sixth grade classroom; one made up of higher ability students, the other lower ability. The higher ability group defined the discussion group as people who help each other understand the book. The lower ability group did not mention making meaning or learning from each other. The higher ability group took turns playing the role of teacher, leading the discussions, and giving feedback to one another. The lower ability group was passive, waiting for the adult to assume all leadership roles.

This research was instrumental in helping define the criteria for the respondent of this study. While at-risk and lower ability students can succeed at discussion, they lack the higher-level thinking that is necessary for reporting their metacognitive processes. Because I wanted a respondent who could give an abundance of information, this research made it obvious I needed someone of average or above average ability.
Cultural Aspects

There have been a few studies that have focused on the cultural aspects of making meaning in a discussion group. Echevarria (1995) studied the effects of instructional conversation on the language and concept development of Hispanic students with learning disabilities. She found that a linguistically rich learning environment improved their understanding of concepts, but the program did not result in improved literal comprehension. Golden, Meiners, and Lewis (1992) worked with Native American second graders. They found that story meaning was enhanced when students were given the opportunity to explore their own personal meanings first.

Because my class included several Spanish speaking students, one who had just exited the bilingual program and one still in the English as a Second Language program, it seemed important to look at research regarding the cultural aspects of discussion in the classroom. I found little on the subject. These meager findings, plus the language differences exhibited by my Spanish speaking students, further helped to narrow the choices for the respondent of this study.

Discussion Responses and Related Activities

How student responses to the text in a discussion event and responses in subsequent language arts activities relate to one another is another related topic of research. Hill (1985) and Galda (1980) both looked at fifth grade classrooms and the students’ literary responses. Both found evidence of transactions and reactions unique to each individual. Each student evidenced using their individual background knowledge and a personal response to the text. Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda (1983) found a direct relationship between story preference and comprehension when they studied fourth, sixth,
and eight grade students’ responses to novels. Kelly (1990) found that, in the process of discussing literature, personal response, emotional involvement, and appreciation of literature increased in third grade students. Wilson (1975) also found an increase in interest in reading from in-depth discussions in a sixth grade classroom.

Siddall (1998) researched the ways fifth grade students chose to respond in a literature group and looked at the links among the modes of the language arts; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Bartelo (1990) examined the linkages between and across the language processes of listening, speaking, reading, drawing, and writing in a first grade classroom. Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo, and Woodman (1992), in their Book Club program, have researched the nature of classroom talk about texts and the interrelations among the components of reading, writing, discussion, and instruction. All found direct connections among the modes.

Eeds and Wells (1989), coining the term “grand conversations,” looked for and found instances of transaction in their study of fifth and sixth grade students discussing student selected novels in teacher led groups. Villaume and Hopkins (1995) found, in fifth grade classroom discussions, instances of intertextuality and scaffolding. These studies show that each student creates his or her own personal evocation. These evocations are influenced by discussion and the other means of responding and transacting.

This section of the review of literature is closely tied to the intent of this study, to explore the response of the subject to the reading and discussing of text. The Eeds and Wells (1989) and the Villaume and Hopkins (1995) studies are of particular interest because of the grade level of the students involved in the studies and the findings of
transaction, intertextuality, and scaffolding, representing the overlap of Rosenblatt’s and Vygotsky’s theories in practice. In my search for studies about reader response, I did not find any case studies involving only one student, with an in-depth look at his/her response over time. This appeared to be an unexplored area.

Social Context

The social contexts of literacy acts influence those transactions in a powerful way. Some aspects of the social context are what the participants bring to the event, how they view the event, and who controls the event. Squire (1964) found that the students’ histories were an influence throughout the construction of meaning. Carey, Harste, and Smith (1981) demonstrated the effect of background knowledge and situational context on the interpretation of text by undergraduates. Myers (1992) writes that what the teacher values controls much of what happens in the classroom, thus affecting the personal literacies of the students. Smolucha and Smolucha (1989) suggest that the different forms of talk in the classroom, such as lecture, recitation, and informal discussions, represent different levels of teacher control. Some forms are more effective in reaching students in their Zones of Proximal Development. Cazden (1977) states that it is the integration of skills into a social act that gives them personal meaning. Innes (1991) found that when children gave legitimacy to their own knowledge and experiences, rather than giving legitimacy to only the teacher’s authority, their responses showed use of their personal knowledge. Hynds (1989) was offered comments from the subjects in her study as to how social experiences affected their literacies. These adolescents found some teachers’ behaviors to have a constraining influence on the students’ interpretations of text, due to excessive evaluation and rejection of any interpretation but the teacher’s own. These
students mentioned the pleasure of finding the rare teacher who acted as a co-learner with the students. Mauro (1983) observed that students developed notions of how literacy was to be expressed in the classroom. Some means were deemed appropriate, while others were not. Cazden (1979) and McMahon and Goatley (1995) observed students using effective teaching strategies with their peers, making the social context one of educational benefit, even without the presence of the teacher. Probst (1991) offers the conclusion that “literary response is not a biological phenomenon but a cultural one—it occurs, that is to say, within a social context, the context of the school” (p. 660).

Social context is what this study is designed to explore. Some of the things that make up this context are the subject’s background, the classroom climate, the form of discussion, and the interactions among the participants. These studies help to confirm that the subject’s personal reactions and responses to the reading and the text are influenced by numerous, social relationships.

Benefits

One of the benefits of literature discussion is an increase in critical thinking ability (Hudgins & Edelman, 1985). Hudgins and Edelman (1985) found that the fourth and fifth grade students they studied learned through the process of discussion to offer evidence for their opinions and conclusions. Leal (1993) found three benefits in her study of first, third, and fifth graders. Peer group discussions serve as a catalyst for learning, provide a platform for peer collaboration and tutoring, and give the opportunity for exploratory talk with a real audience. Wilson (1976) and Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, and Afflerbach (1995) noted that discussion generated a greater interest in reading and
produced a greater amount of reading. As noted earlier, Wilson (1975) and Kelly (1990) found an increase in interest in reading because of classroom discussion.

Researchers in the education field conducted these studies. They corroborate the findings of research done by those in the field of philosophy, particularly studies conducted using the Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1973) form of discussion. Because the Philosophy for Children discussion model is used in this study, this review of literature includes research that addresses education and reading and the impact Philosophy for Children has had, particularly those studies that address those areas of overlap with the theories of Rosenblatt and Vygotsky.

Matthew Lipman

In 1969, Matthew Lipman, Professor of Philosophy at Montclair State College, developed a program called Philosophy for Children. The development of this program was in response to Lipman’s perception that students were not being educated to think critically (Nicol, 1991). Strongly influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, Lipman believes that students cannot be given meanings, but must discover them for themselves, through their involvement in “dialogue and inquiry” (Lipman, 1980, p. 7). He asserts that there is an intimate connection between thinking and language and that dialogue generates reflection. The form this dialogue takes in the classroom is a form of discussion that “sharpens the child’s reasoning and inquiry skills as nothing else can” (Lipman, 1988, p. 24). Lipman identified curiosity as a disposition that children and philosophers share and created a curriculum “from the history of philosophy but . . . translated into ordinary language” (Lipman, 1988, p. 183). He took the big ideas of philosophy, such as freedom, truth, and justice, and wrote them into a set of novels for children. These novels
were used as springboards for philosophical discussions. Students’ participations in Philosophy for Children discussions leads to an internalization of what has been going on in the group (Lipman, 1991). Thus, through participation in a discussion patterned on Lipman’s Philosophy for Children model, students think by way of their use of language, sharpen their reasoning skills, and internalize the process of comparing ideas and justifying answers, thereby arriving at new meanings. Lipman considers this true education. “Education, then, is the process of an individual creating and/or discovering meaning” (Nowell, 1995, p. 20).

Marzano (1991), in his review of approaches to the teaching of thinking, calls Philosophy for Children “one of the most thoroughly evaluated” (p. 570). As pointed out by Marzano, this program is closely tied to the language arts because of the primacy of language in cognition. Studies have measured the effects of Philosophy for Children on reasoning ability, math achievement, and reading comprehension. This review contains primarily studies dealing with reading results.

Lipman (1973) himself conducted a study in 1970. He taught reasoning skills to fifth grade students, using a pre- and post-testing method. The results, obtained through the use of a test of logic, showed an advance in logical thinking by the pilot group over the control group. The same two groups were tested in reading two and one half years later, showing a significantly positive effect on the reading scores of the pilot group, as measured by a standardized reading test. While it is not clear why reading was tested after such a lengthy period, the results suggested to the researcher that the Philosophy for Children program’s effects are long lasting.
Haas (1976) also worked with intermediate students, fifth and sixth graders. Her study involved multiple conditions; setting (Newark, New Jersey, and Denton, Texas), teacher preparation, student ethnicity, and time spent in the Philosophy for Children program. The Philosophy for Children program was the treatment. Reading was among the student factors measured, using the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The experimental group’s reading comprehension scores were significantly higher than those of the control group on the post-test.

Between September, 1976 and June, 1978 the Philosophy for Children program was subjected to an extensive study conducted by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, funded by the New Jersey Department of Education (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Two communities were involved, with 200 experimental and 200 control subjects in each, students in grades 5-8. Teachers received training in facilitating discussions and the students participated in discussions for approximately two and one-fourth hours per week for one year. The reading portion of the testing was done using the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. The overall program effect in Newark on reading and mathematics, using scaled scores so as to combine data across levels, was at the significance level of .0001. Qualitative observation showed the program to be very effective for children identified as slow readers.

Studies conducted between 1977 and 1988 on the effects of the Philosophy for Children discussion program on reading comprehension showed significant improvement in the experimental groups (as cited in Thinking, 1988). Shipman (1978) found significant improvement on reading scale scores for 5-8 grade students. Higa (1980), in a study of
sixth grade students in Hawaii public schools, found significant improvement in reading comprehension measured by SAT-S. In a three year study, Burnes (1981) found gains on reasoning and reading comprehension by fifth and sixth grade students who had participated in the Philosophy for Children program. Comparing students with norming data, the experimental group, using the Philosophy for Children program, in Yeazell’s (1981) study significantly improved reading scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Camhy and Iberer (1988) studied third grade students in the Austrian public school system who participated in the Philosophy for Children program. In their two-year study, the experimental group’s mean score was greater than the control group’s on the post-test.

Obviously, much of the research in this area has been quantitative in nature. There has been a shift away from this in the last ten years. Nicol (1991) evaluated the Lipman project in an English comprehensive school, using his own observations regarding room configuration and how the materials were used. Though very loosely designed, this action research did move beyond test scores by using observation as the data collection method.

Palsson (1994) argues for an interpretive research methodology in Philosophy for Children. Assessment by testing relies on an individual’s isolated performance, rather than what actually occurs in Philosophy for Children, thinking and learning in a community of inquiry. Palsson conducted such a study in 1986, in Reykjavik, Iceland, with twelve year old students. As participant observer, he observed and conducted discussions, looking for the presence, absence, or genesis of community of inquiry. He found varying degrees of the beginning stages of creating community, but in no instance
did he find an active community of inquiry. He concluded that communities of inquiry need social togetherness and intellectual openness.

Others, too, are calling for research with a more qualitative aspect (Slade, 1992; Santi, 1993). Only through looking at the process, rather than its outcomes, can we find out how it works. Niklasson, Ohlsson, and Ringborg (1994) conducted a qualitative study in Swedish compulsory schools with sixth grade students, looking for long-range effects of the Philosophy for Children program. Instead of a pre- and post-test design, the researchers used observers to document climate, participation, and patterns of interaction. The students were grouped by past experience with Philosophy for Children discussions. The observers were not told which group of the four had previously engaged in this type of discussion. Results showed the experienced group to have a greater facility with logical reasoning to explain their ideas. Although not tied directly to reading, this study showed how qualitative methods can reaffirm, in a different way, what quantitative studies have shown about the effects of Philosophy for Children.

Summary

I conducted this review of the literature with four major things in mind. I was curious as to how Rosenblatt’s, Vygotsky’s, and Lipman’s theories looked in practice. I was looking for methodologies that seemed suitable for finding the answers to my research questions.

- What are the reader-related influences on the respondent’s transaction with the text?
- What changes in meaning are reported by the respondent?
• What connections does the respondent make between the influences and the changes in meaning?

In that same vein, I was looking at subject selection and how the number and type of subjects varied from study to study. Most important to me, I was searching for studies that had already answered my questions, that had tied reader response, sociocultural theory, and discussion into one study. I was looking for the “hole” in the research that needed to be filled.

I learned that instances of transaction, scaffolding, and intertextuality have been found (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, 1980; Hill, 1985; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995); that children evoke their own interpretations of text (Leal, 1993; Squire, 1964); and that Philosophy for Children discussions promote critical thinking and increase reading ability (Haas, 1976; Shipman, 1978; Yeazell, 1981). The theoretical base for this study was therefore shown to be solid.

The studies that seemed most suitable for answering my research questions were qualitative in nature (Almasi, 1995; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, 1980; Lyons, 1996; McCormack, 1993; Wollman-Bonilla, 1994). Villaume and Hopkins (1995) call for research that integrates a sociocultural view of learning with transactional theory. Researchers in Philosophy for Children are also arguing for qualitative aspects, to look at the process rather than just the outcomes (Slade, 1992; Santi, 1993). A qualitative study was therefore deemed appropriate.

Subject selection varied widely, from kindergarten (Commeyras, 1994) to undergraduates (Carey, Harste, & Smith, 1981) and teachers (Koeller, 1981; Marshall, 1989). Ability levels were studied (Lewis, 1995; McCutchen, Laird, & Graves, 1993;
Raphael, 1996), as well as cultural aspects (Echevarria, 1995; Golden, Meiners, & Lewis, 1992). The choice of respondent, because there was to be only one, was critical.

In looking for a “hole” in the research, an area that has not been looked at fully, I have found no study that recorded reader-related thoughts during reading, during having the same text read aloud, and during discussion of that text with peers. The Philosophy for Children discussion form differs from others that have been researched by the reading community in that the role of the facilitator is to constantly nudge the discussion to higher levels of thinking. The group is searching for an answer, not only as individuals, but negotiating, as a group, a unique transaction with the text. This study, designed to investigate at least three possible evocations and the reader’s thoughts during each, as well as incorporating Philosophy for Children discussions, fills this “hole” in the research.
CHAPTER 3
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY
Research Approach

Rosenblatt (1988) recommends that transaction be studied as a dynamic phenomenon, “happening in a particular context, as part of the ongoing life of the individual in a particular educational, social, and cultural environment” (p. 14). Villaume and Hopkins (1995) say, “Research is needed that integrates a sociocultural view of learning with transactional theory” (p. 191). This study was designed to address these recommendations. It was the dynamic nature of evocation that was investigated, through a lens deliberately focused on the sociocultural influences that attend the transaction. The reader participated in educational events that were part of the ongoing program in place in her classroom.

Qualitative methodologies were used because of the nature of the questions being asked and because these methods fit with the theory base guiding the study. The research questions were concerned with understanding and describing process (Merriam, 1988), the main purpose being to find out what was “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 72). These questions were:

1. What are the reader-related influences on the respondent’s transaction with the text?

2. What changes in meaning are reported by the respondent?
3. What connections does the respondent make between the influences and the changes in meaning?

The reader’s own frame of reference was the concern of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). These methodologies included a log of reader-reported thoughts, transcripts of discussions, observations, and semi-structured interviews.

Description of the School

The site of the study was a suburban elementary school, grades pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The school is located in a lower-middle to middle class suburb of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex in north Texas. The school population was approximately 560 students, one-fourth of whom were bused to the school for the Spanish and English bilingual program. Approximately 36% of the students were on free or reduced lunches. The building was 40 years old and was undergoing reconstruction during the study.

The turnover rate for faculty and staff at this campus was low. Some of the teachers had been at the same school for more than 25 years. There was a strong Parent Teacher Association, with community involvement in programs such as after school tutoring and fund raising efforts. Several of the area businesses were Adopt-A-School partners with the campus, donating time and goods to the school. The academic record was outstanding, with the school receiving the highest rating of exemplary from the state of Texas for the last six years. Academics were a priority of parents, teachers, and community.

Description of the Class

The class in which the study was conducted was a fifth grade heterogeneous homeroom of 19 students. The class included two students identified as gifted and
talented, three students identified as needing resource assistance, and seven students on free or reduced lunch.

I was the teacher and researcher in the classroom. I have been teaching in Texas public schools for 14 years, two years in fourth grade, and 12 in fifth grade. I was trained in using Philosophy for Children as part of my master’s work at Texas Wesleyan University, and have used the program in my classroom for the past four years.

I usually arrived at the school 15 to 30 minutes early, to get things ready for the day and to catch up with any paperwork. The school day started for the students at five after eight when the bell rang to dismiss them from the gymnasium to go to their classrooms. The next 10 minutes were spent at the lockers out in the hallway, in the wing where all the fifth grade classes were located, or in the classroom, sharpening pencils and turning in homework. The students in my homeroom could turn in their homework in any of the three regular education classrooms at this time, but visiting with other students was discouraged because of the brevity of the preparation time. Occasionally the parent of a student would come to the classroom during this time with questions or notes.

At 8:15 the tardy bell rang and students were expected to be at their desks, ready for the school day. At the bell, we all stood and said the Pledge of Allegiance and sang the National Anthem, broadcast over the school PA system. The principal would then make announcements, including student birthdays. After the announcements I took attendance and the lunch count. We were scheduled to change classes for math at 8:20. The students were ability grouped for math and went to one of the three regular education teachers or to the special education class for math instruction. My class was usually ready to change before the other two, so we spent the extra time, five minutes or so, telling
stories to the class. I told stories about my children and grandchildren, and they told stories about things that had happened to them or to others in their families. Sometimes we told jokes, but they had to be rated G.

All three fifth grade teachers taught math for the first 40 minutes of school, then the students went either to art, music, or physical education for 45 minutes, rotating each week by homeroom. This was the homeroom teacher’s plan time. The students returned to their math classes for an additional 30 minutes of instruction after this break.

The students then returned to their homerooms for an hour and a half reading class. The reading program was literature based. Class sets of novels were used for whole class study, while book groups, based on common interests, were formed at other times. Nonfiction subjects were explored using several titles on the same topic. Assessment was ongoing and frequently open-ended. Opportunities for response included drama, art, music, poetry, written response, and discussion. Everyone in my homeroom stayed for reading, except for two who left one day a week to go to Title I. The student desks were arranged in groups of four to six. With the exception of three students, they could sit wherever they wanted. The three exceptions were strategically placed by me for the least amount of disruption to the class. Unlike other classes I have taught, the students did not choose to move often. They chose a table and stayed there for several months at a time. Even when given the opportunity to sit on the floor or in someone else’s seat for silent reading time, they chose to stay in their seats.

For each class I wrote on the board what the plans were for the day and the due dates for assignments. We always started reading class with 30 minutes of sustained silent reading. It was possible for the students to lose recess privileges if they did not
participate in silent reading, but I very seldom had to remind them. This particular class included many avid readers, and everyone was given the chance to recommend his or her book at the end of the silent reading period if he or she thought the other students might like it. They were eager to tell about their books.

On most days silent reading was followed by teacher read alouds. I read aloud very dramatically, with pauses for effect, changes in pitch and volume, and sometimes singing and sound effects. I have had other teachers stop outside my door during read alouds to enjoy the reading.

Each day students worked on worksheets, projects, and opportunities to respond individually and in groups, or participated in discussion groups. Some of the worksheets were straightforward skills sheets, asking the students to sequence events or give cause and effect. Some of the worksheets were very open ended, asking for the students’ opinion or evaluation of some aspect of the story or the way it was crafted. Some worksheets required a group effort, such as the one asking for a group consensus on what items they would take with them to survive in the wilderness. Projects included producing a meal consisting of only foods found in a novel set in the rural south during the Great Depression, building models of the Titanic based on the description and pictures in several nonfiction books, and performing the time sequence of the life of a baobab tree through dance and music. Discussions were always centered around questions the students had. Sometimes the whole class would form one large group, especially when I felt very important points were likely to emerge. At other times the class was divided into two groups, meeting at opposite ends of the room. I floated between the two groups, monitoring progress and behavior. Sometimes I would become
intrigued by an issue and would call the two groups together and have them debate the ideas. An issue that came up repeatedly over the school year was the idea of power: who has it and why, and how should it be used? This topic came up during the study of every novel we read.

The reading class went to the library every Monday for 20 minutes to check out books. Occasionally they went on Tuesdays for Library Instruction, a class taught by the librarian to introduce new books, new genres, and information on how to use the library. The librarian was a warm, caring person who worked very hard to get the books the students wanted. She was impressed with the willingness of this class to check out the longer chapter books, and by their behavior in the library. She invited some of them to help her keep the shelves straight and the books in order. The students checked on their shelves every week and voiced disappointment that other students in the building had “messed them up so bad.”

After reading class, the three homerooms traded places, going to the first of three departmentalized classes. One of the fifth grade teachers taught Social Studies to all three homerooms, one taught Science, and I taught English Composition to all three. My homeroom went, for the next 45 minutes, to the classroom across the hall for Social Studies, while I taught English Composition to one of the other two classes. Social Studies was taught by a teacher with a very different teaching style. She did quite a bit of lecturing and work out of the book. She was extremely knowledgeable, having a master’s degree in history and more than 30 years’ experience teaching fifth grade. Her classroom discipline was not as structured as mine, and she reported much more misbehavior from my class than I experienced.
Following the first departmentalized class, the entire fifth grade went to lunch. I did not have lunch duty and did not participate in their lunchtime. The teacher next door and I took them after lunch to their outdoor recess time, weather permitting. We were extremely fortunate during this school year and did not lose many outdoor days to weather. We did lose some of our playground territory to construction vehicles. This was never a happy circumstance for the boys, who anxiously ran to the soccer field, choosing sides on the fly. Some girls played soccer, but most jumped rope, played four square, played chase, or talked with their friends.

During the 20 minutes following recess, the fifth grade was divided, with half in my room and half in the room next door. We called this time study hall, a time for doing homework, studying for tests, reading, and tutoring. The other two teachers were at lunch.

Following study hall time, there were two more departmentalized periods. My homeroom went to Science class next, taught by a teacher with 15 years experience. She gave the students many opportunities to do experiments, but she also assigned book work. Her discipline was similar to mine, with clearly defined limits and not many warnings.

The last class of the day brought the students back to their homerooms. One of my students went to English as a Second Language class during this time, leaving 18 in the room. This was a process writing class. Each student kept a portfolio of work in the classroom. During the six weeks grading period, the students would compose pieces of writing of their choice. They could write alone or with a partner and could conference with anyone in the room, including me, at any time they needed it. These conferences
could be about content or could focus on mechanics or spelling. I circulated through the room, asking and answering questions. I taught mini-lessons on grammar, punctuation, genres, forms of poetry, figurative language, and other topics that came to my attention during conferences. Sometimes I would give assignments to assess progress. At the end of the six weeks I held an individual conference with each student, during which we decided on a grade for quantity, the amount of work done, and quality, the amount of improvement noted. During the last class of the day, with my homeroom class, I was able to tie what we had read to what they were writing, something that was harder to do with the other two classes.

The last 15 minutes of school were used for several things. The students were required by the district to keep a planner of assignments to show their parents. Some students used this time to fill in their planners. Sometimes I would teach self defense and karate moves to the students. I hold a brown belt in karate and the students frequently wanted to be taught some techniques. Sometimes we would tell stories, or continue a topic that had been discussed in reading class. Every week, at least once and sometimes twice, we held class meetings. All this took place in a very informal manner, with students moving in and out of the classroom to get their things ready to go home.

Class meetings served as a problem solving venue for the class. The purposes of the class meetings were to solve problems, to help each other, and to plan events. We kept one end of the chalkboard reserved as the Agenda board. Any one who had a problem or a concern could write it on the board, sign their initials, date it, and the issue would be addressed at the next class meeting. We had a little stuffed bear that we used to determine whose turn it was to talk. Only the person holding the bear was allowed to
speak. We sat in a large circle on the floor and the bear got tossed from person to person. I don’t recall the original name the group gave the bear, but when he lost his leg in a toss, they renamed him Stumpy. The issues that were discussed were sometimes resolved and sometimes not. Sometimes just bringing the problem or concern to everyone’s attention solved the problem. Issues ranged from people cutting in line, to the theft of pens, to someone hurting another person’s feeling, to a particular student using especially foul language. I was very impressed with how the class handled the language problem. They were very honest and very caring with the student, telling him how they felt and what they could do to help him, if he would accept their help. Sometimes we used the class meetings just to give compliments. This was the most requested type.

The closing bell marked the end of the school day. The students were free to go meet their friends or parents, or to go pick up younger siblings. Some students chose to stay and help put up chairs or just to visit. Some days sixth grade students would stop by to say hello. Occasionally there would be a parent with a question or concern. The fifth grade wing was usually clear of students after 15 minutes, except those kept after for tutoring.

I have mentioned that the building was under construction during this school year. The students put up with quite a bit of disruption, with a minimum of grumbling and complaining. Sometimes the noise level was too high for us to hear one another. At times our route through the building had to be changed. Once or twice we had to close the window blinds in our room because of welding going on outside. The move from one room to another produced the most immediate change, from a brightly decorated homeroom to one full of brown cardboard boxes and empty shelves. The students
handled all this extremely well. They stayed focused on their work in the worst of circumstances and laughed when things went wrong. It was a good year.

Selection of the Respondent

Because this case study was qualitative in nature, a form of nonprobability sampling called purposeful selection (Patton, 1990) was used (Merriam, 1988). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) call this kind of sampling criterion-based. Criterion-based sampling requires that one establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation; one then finds a sample that matches these criteria (as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 48). “The researcher develops a profile of an instance that would be the best, most efficient, most effective, or most desirable of some population and then finds a real-world case that most closely matches the profile” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 82).

The profile used in selecting the respondent included these criteria:

- The respondent must be reflective
- The respondent must participate in classroom discussions
- The respondent must have the language resources to explain his or her thought processes
- The respondent must have time for multiple interviews
- The respondent must be willing to give up his or her time to participate
- The respondent must be responsible enough to complete the logs
- Parents of the respondent must be willing to give permission

In order to receive district permission to conduct this study, I agreed to do the study in my classroom. Because of this condition, the number of students available to me
was limited to those 19 in my homeroom class. In following the qualitative guidelines for selecting a case study respondent, I looked carefully at the behaviors and abilities of my students. Of the 19 students, three were special education students without the verbal abilities to report what they were thinking; four students did not actively participate in the discussions which were an integral part of the study; two students were classified as Limited English Proficient and were therefore unable to report their thoughts in English; one could not stay after school for interviews because of riding a daycare bus; and two left the classroom one day a week for a pull out program. This left seven students from whom to choose the one “from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). There were two boys included in the seven, but neither had exhibited a high degree of ability in reporting his thoughts. Two of the seven students, both female, exhibited more reflective thinking in their responses to the other novels we had studied, but one of the girls was in a pull out program and left the class once a week during reading time. Michelle was selected because she met all the criteria. (All student names are pseudonyms.)

Overview of the Design

Data were collected in January and February, during the study of Natalie Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting* (1975). This novel was chosen for several reasons. There was a class set of books available, as well as a teacher’s manual to facilitate the discussions (Hubble, 1997). I had used the book in my classroom for several years and was very familiar with the story line and the aspects likely to be brought up in discussion. I had noted the same increase in reflective responses by my students that was found by Eeds and Wells (1989) in their study of fifth graders responding to different novels. Eeds and
Wells maintain that the exceptional quality of *Tuck Everlasting* leads to more in-depth responses.

I divided the novel into seven sections, each about 20 pages long. I explained to the students that the sections were short so they could read thoughtfully. For each section, the following process was followed:

Day 1: Students were assigned the section of the novel to be read silently, to themselves. Michelle recorded her thoughts while reading, prompted by the questions Who/What I thought of? and Why? These logs were turned in to me the next day.

Day 2: I read aloud to the class the section of the novel they had read to themselves the night before. Michelle recorded her thoughts while listening to the read aloud text, prompted by the questions Who/What I thought of? and Why? These logs were turned in to me at the end of class.

Students were then asked to formulate three to five questions they had about that portion of the text, or any preceding portion. They were not to read ahead. Michelle wrote her questions, which were turned in to me after the discussion of the questions.

Day 3: Students participated in their discussion groups. Michelle was with the same five students for the duration of the study so that the dynamics of the group could be explored and the social aspects of the discussions would be kept stable. The group included in this study met while the rest of the class read silently. The other two groups discussed while the study group read silently.

Homework for Day 3 was to read the next assigned section of *Tuck Everlasting*.

After school on discussion days, Michelle stayed to listen to the audiotape made of the discussion. She was free to stop the tape at any time to write down what she
I remembered thinking during the event. These logs were turned in to me before she left for the day.

This process was repeated six times, until the entire novel had been read and discussed. At the end of the novel study, Michelle and I met for a taped summative interview.
CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Setting Up the Study

Michelle was a white, middle class, 10 year old girl of average ability. She was the older child in a very close family of four. Her younger brother was four years old and loved visiting the school with his mother. Michelle’s mother was active in the Parent Teacher Association and was in the school building frequently. She and I talked informally in the hallway before and after school three or four times a month. Michelle was pleasant and polite in class, a little standoffish, but not shy. She had several friends in the homeroom class, and was friendly and polite with the others. She got along well socially, in a low-key fashion, not calling attention to herself by being loud or boisterous.

I chose Michelle as the respondent for the study because she appeared to be the one from whom I could learn the most. She had shown herself to be more reflective in her work than most of the other students in the class. She could explain how she came up with an idea and what caused her to think of it. She participated in classroom discussions, and adequately explained her thoughts and ideas to the group. Michelle was very consistent in turning in her work, which made it probable she would be responsible in completing the logs.

I met with Michelle’s mother in November. I knew the study would take time outside of the school day and the workload would be intense for the two or three weeks that it would take to study the novel. I needed to know if any of this would be a problem.
She thought Michelle could handle it, but she would talk it over with her husband and let me know. She brought back the signed permission form the next day.

During the course of this meeting Michelle’s mother told me that Michelle had started reading in kindergarten, with little apparent effort, and had enjoyed reading to the other children in her class. Her mother told me that Michelle read a lot at home, sometimes instead of watching television. She read mostly fiction and poetry. The examples her mother gave were the Babysitter’s Club books (Martin, 1993) and Shel Silverstein’s *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974). She did not read to her four-year-old brother and her parents no longer read aloud to her. Her mother could not recall any spontaneous discussions they had had about books. She had helped Michelle with book reports by asking questions about the books.

Michelle’s home reading seemed to be a very individual activity. When asked about it, Michelle said that reading at home was for fun. She said she “got into” books at home, but she thought about books more at school.

After receiving permission from Michelle’s parents for her to participate in the study, I met with Michelle to explain the study and what would be expected of her. She readily agreed and had few questions. I had a short, informal meeting after school that day with Michelle and her mother to set up a tentative schedule as to what days Michelle would need to stay after school, and to answer any additional questions.

Next I selected members of the discussion group from students with signed consent forms. Because I wanted the group to be stable, I chose students who were not in pullout programs and would therefore be in class every day. I also chose those students who I believed would actually read the book and be prepared to discuss it. I chose three
boys and two more girls, making a group of six students and one teacher. The rest of the class was divided into two more discussion groups, who met and discussed while the study group was doing silent reading.

I did not want Michelle to suffer any social ill effects from this study, for her to be branded teacher’s pet, or for the other students to think she was staying after school because she was in trouble. There was in place in the classroom a problem solving system called class meetings. At least once a week, and more often if needed, we met as a class in a circle on the floor for the last ten minutes of school. At these meetings we addressed three things: how we could help each other, how to solve problems that had come up, and planning for events. The students had become quite adept at solving many of their problems without much input from me. I brought up my concerns at a specially called meeting. There was very little discussion, I think because the other students were relieved that they did not have to do all the extra work that Michelle did. I met with Michelle and her mother after this class meeting to discuss what we could do if Michelle did begin to feel uncomfortable with the situation. Either Michelle or her mother was to report to me immediately if anything untoward happened. Neither one reported anything during the study or after.

I watched my relationship with Michelle, trying to maintain as close as possible the teacher-student relationship that had been in place since August. However, our relationship did change, even before the study started. I had obtained all the permissions and consents before Christmas, but waited until January to start the study because of the likelihood of fewer interruptions to the schedule after the holiday season. Between the times that Michelle knew she was to be the respondent and the actual start of the study,
she became more relaxed in her behavior. She talked more in class. She interacted with me more outside of class, in the hallways, and after school, in a friendlier, more casual manner.

Michelle was a compliant student, ready to please the teachers. I felt there was a strong influence from home to be “good” at school. Michelle’s mother asked several times during the study how Michelle was doing, indicating to me that there was some pressure on Michelle to “do it right.”

I found myself backing off some on discipline. Michelle was never a behavior problem or a disruption in class, but when she talked during instruction, I was slower to correct her than others. I needed her for the study and was anxious not to alienate her. Merriam (1988) suggests the researcher try to be “nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the respondent” (p. 76). This would have been easier in a strictly researcher/respondent relationship, because one of my functions as the teacher was to be judgmental. I gave up some of that function in order to keep the reader on my side. There was some tension in trying to fulfill two roles at once, those of teacher and researcher.

Data Collection

I started the study of *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975) by reading aloud the first two pages of the book, the prologue. I did this for several reasons. The text is dense with figurative language and ideas. There are instances of foreshadowing, metaphors, and personification. This is not an easy book to get into. I shared with the class how I once met Natalie Babbitt and had the opportunity to visit with her about the book. I let them know how important I thought the book was. We talked about the metaphor of the wheel and how it is carried throughout the story. The students identified the woods as the hub of
the story. They predicted the book would not have a happy ending because of the negative sounding foreshadowing statements.

Before beginning the read aloud, I gave Michelle a sheet of paper (see appendix) marked with the date, Teacher Read Aloud, and the page numbers of the pages I read aloud. There were two columns labeled Who or What I Thought Of and Why. Michelle put down her thoughts on this paper as I read aloud to the class. The behavior options for the students during read alouds were that they look at me or that they follow along in the book. Michelle did a nice job of recording her thoughts without calling attention to the fact that she was writing.

Immediately after that first read aloud, keeping in mind the research questions I was trying to answer, I started looking for answers and patterns in the data. My questions were:

1. What are the reader-related influences on the respondent’s transactions with the text?
2. What changes in meaning are reported by the respondent?
3. What connections does the respondent make between the influences and the changes in meaning?

Michelle had thought of:

- a friend whose parents had just divorced, because Mae Tuck was mentioned without a husband and she might be divorced
- Bill Gates and how rich he is, because Winnie Foster might have a lot of money
the seven escapees from the Texas prison, labeled the Connally Seven and later the Texas Seven by the media, and how they had killed someone and so far had gotten away with it, because the Stranger (the antagonist in the novel) might want to kill someone and get away with it.

Interestingly, none of the features I had pointed out to the class during the read aloud were included in her log. I saw in this small sample examples of personal and media connections, predicting skills, and literary knowledge of character development and character motivation. This first sample of data was exciting. I was being given a first hand look into what the reader was thinking as she listened to the story.

The next step was to assign pages 5-21 to be read silently. The students promised not to read ahead, and if they did, not to divulge the story to others. I explained that the reading assignments would be short so that they could read thoughtfully. They knew from past experience that I would be reading these same pages aloud the next day in class. I pointed out to them that the section about the cows was confusing and to do the best they could and we would talk about it the next day. Another student said he was reading a book about cowboys and that would probably help him. Michelle looked confused and he explained the connection he had made to her, of cows and cowboys. I looked for this incident in her next log, but it was not mentioned. Michelle was given another sheet of paper (see appendix), marked with the date, Read to Self, and the page numbers. The two columns were labeled Who or What I Thought Of and Why.

Michelle turned this paper in to me the next school day. She had written 11 thoughts and I checked them over quickly to make sure I understood them. Several of them she explained as pictures she got in her head as she read. These pictures included a
big potato when Babbitt describes Mae as a “great potato of a woman” (p. 10), a Pilgrim because of the description of Mae’s clothes, and pieces of spaghetti because of the mention of friendly worms. There was an intertextual connection made between a character in Mildred D. Taylor’s Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976) and the stranger in Tuck Everlasting, because they were both strangers and they were both looking for a family. The other thoughts were not so obvious as to where they might fit into a category.

I read aloud pages 5-21 to the class. As is my normal practice, I read with a lot of expression. I emphasized important parts with tempo, pacing, and volume. I stopped and explained things I thought might be unclear to the students, in this case personification and the definition of the word conceal. Michelle was given the sheet of paper on which to write her thoughts. She recorded five thoughts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who or What I Thought of</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A tree blowing in the wind”</td>
<td>“When talks about the road”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Fairy Tale”</td>
<td>“When Natalie Babbitt said what the cow thought”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A grandparent”</td>
<td>“When it talks about Mae’s boots”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Stationary Paper”</td>
<td>“Because of the stationary cloud”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Whistling”</td>
<td>“Because of when the Music tinkled faintly.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of these thoughts were duplicates of those she had reported while reading these same pages to herself. I met with her for a couple of minutes to clear up my thinking on
what she meant. She could not remember what the first response meant. Another seemed very poetic. She thought of grandparents when Mae’s boots were described as soft and old. A vocabulary problem was evident in her meaning of the word stationary. My sketchy, rather vague classifications were not keeping up with the data.

After the read aloud the students were to write three to five questions they had about the pages that had just been read (see appendix). These questions were to be used to focus the discussion on the following day, so they needed to be higher level questions that were not directly answered in the text, but needed to be talked about to find an answer. All four of Michelle’s questions over these pages started with why. They seemed to deal with character motivation.

1. “Why does Winnie’s grandma believe the music is elves?”
2. “Why does Mae only visit every 10 years?”
3. “Why doesn’t Tuck go with Mae to visit their sons?”
4. “Why did the stranger go to Winnie’s house?”

I met with Michelle and asked her to tell me more about the questions she had written. She had nothing to add to the first question. Regarding the second one, she wanted to know why Mae didn’t go more often than every 10 years, and thought it would be hard to keep track of when she would go see the boys. She thought that if Tuck was the dad, he should go, too. And she wanted to know why the stranger chose that particular house, how he had selected it.

The first discussion took place the day after pages 5-21 were read aloud. This group was hand selected by me in order to provide a stable group that would participate willingly, stay on topic, and would listen to one another. Denver was a natural choice. He
talked all the time; in discussions, in class, in the hallway, to anyone who would listen. He also liked to debate a point. Juan was a recent addition to the class, a very bright young man who had just exited the Spanish-English bilingual program. He had shown a willingness to explore new ideas in a creative way, rather than just take the standard answers. He was also willing to defend his ideas. Scott was one of Denver’s good friends and they tended to bounce ideas off one another. Scott could see both sides of an argument and would switch sides in an argument at times. Susan was a well-respected member of the class. Many of the other students considered her to be very smart, but Susan was of average ability. She had a very strong work ethic and performed above average in reading class. She was chosen because of her excellent interpersonal skills and her dependability. Tammy was chosen because of her history of bringing up intriguing ideas. She did not participate orally as much as the others, but when she talked, the others listened. None of the members of the group were close friends of Michelle. When given the choice of who to be with informally, such as at lunch or at recess, all but Denver and Scott chose others in the fifth grade.

There was a little self-consciousness in the group for the first three or four minutes, but it soon passed. Only one participant, Tammy, was still hesitant to talk after the first couple of minutes. This pattern matches that found by Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986), that after the acclimatization period, taping was “unobtrusive and did not produce atypical classroom behavior” (p. 42). Because I had used this form of discussion for several years and specifically with this class for several months, I knew what to expect as typical behavior. During this first discussion I realized that, because I was the facilitator of the discussion and had a stake in how the discussions proceeded, I would not
be able to make detailed observations and field notes during the discussions. I could not
write and make note of what everyone was doing and still concentrate on the discussion.
There was also the conflict of being the teacher and the researcher. As the teacher in the
classroom, I needed to monitor the other students in the room. Instead of taking notes
during the discussions, I noted, after the discussions, how things went.

Following are a couple of excerpts from the discussion, to illustrate the kinds of
talk that occurred and to what Michelle reacted during the discussion.

Excerpt from the first discussion:

Denver: Why didn’t he (the stranger) say who he was looking for?
Scott: Because maybe he was from like a different state or country and had only
heard about them (the Tuck family).
Juan: Probably because it might have been the secret case and he was looking for
that family, maybe because they did something wrong.
Denver: I’m thinking, I’m pretty sure that Winnie said that the man was from the
village. He looked like he was from the village.
Teacher: What is he called in the book? What does the author call him?
Several respond at one time: The stranger.
Scott: The man in the yellow suit.
Denver: And they said, Winnie said, that he was from the village.
Susan: But remember, they didn’t have enough time. He was asking Winnie
questions because the grandmother heard the music and she forgot about him and then
they were gonna go eat something.
Teacher: Back to Denver. I think I hear you saying that the stranger is from the village. Can you back that up from the book?

Denver: I’m pretty sure I can. I’m almost positive it said that.

(pause, pages turning)

Denver: The stranger comes in in chapter four, right?

Several reply: Uh huh.

Teacher: If you have found it . . .

Michelle: I’ve found it. It’s on the first page. It says, “at sunset on that same long day the stranger came strolling down the road from the village and paused at the Fosters’ gate.”

Scott: Maybe he had been getting information from people in the village. That doesn’t necessarily explain why, I mean he could have been, like I said, from another country or state and just heard of them and he’s just going to the city or, I mean the village, to . . . and he got information from there.

Susan: Yeah, maybe he was just traveling to the village, but he’s from somewhere else, to get information.

Juan: Like it say, he was going up the road, but it didn’t actually say he’s from the village.

Denver: But, that village, it’s an elf village, isn’t it?

Michelle: It’s what?

Denver: Isn’t that a village of elves? It said that ‘cause there, Winnie’s grandmother said that the music came from the village in the wood. And . . .

Michelle: Hmm?
Denver: No, OK.

Michelle: She didn’t say it came from the village.

Denver: She just said it came from the wood. OK. Sorry. My bad.

Susan: It was just music to her.

Teacher: The question we started with was . . .

Denver: Why didn’t the man tell who he was looking for?

Teacher: OK. Have we answered that?

Michelle: I just had something to say. When Susan said it wasn’t elves, the grandma thinks that it’s elves.

Susan: Yeah.

Michelle: But, she just doesn’t know.

Denver: Just getting back to the question ‘cause we kind of got onto the elf thing.

Why wouldn’t he tell who he was looking for? What I think is that the man was one of the sons of Mae Tuck. Yeah, that’s what I’m thinking.

Later in the discussion:

Denver: Why did they say the man’s fingers were graceful and very white?

Mumbling from the group

Teacher: What do ya’ll think?

More mumbling

Teacher: I have an opinion on that and I’m wondering what ya’ll think.

Denver: It said it was night. And the guy walked off, whistling, and if you’re in the night it’s pretty hard to see a person’s color on their fingers.
Michelle: It, the book said that he was talking to Winnie and that Winnie was catching fireflies.

Scott: Maybe one of the fireflies came to him and he grabbed it and the glow went through his skin and they could kind of see everything.

Susan: He told Winnie that he used to catch fireflies when he was very old, I mean a long time ago.

Juan: Yeah, like Susan said, he used to catch them and probably he did that too much that his fingernails, or I don’t know what, came white and graceful.

Denver: The only way that you’d be able to see a person’s finger color in the night is if they had a street light, which they didn’t have back then. Or, because it’s way out in the country, just a dirt road, and it’s not like he ate the fireflies or anything that glowed, so . . .

Michelle: But what about if they had a porch light, and he was standing right near the porch since he was talking to Winnie and Winnie can’t go far away from the house.

Susan: Yeah.

Denver: But it said that Winnie has a big front yard, so the gate is a distance away from the house. And a porch light can’t go . . .

Michelle: I know.

Denver: that far. The light can’t go off that far.

Scott: But if they had porch lights, you could say that they’d have streetlights.

Susan: But didn’t it say that he was out in the back yard catching fireflies?

Michelle: No, it was the front.

Denver: It was the front.
Michelle: But since it was such a big yard and it was nighttime, maybe her parents didn’t want her to go out that far near the gate and stuff, you know.

Michelle stayed after school to record what she remembered thinking during the discussion. I told her she had control of the tape recorder and could stop it at any point to write down what she remembered thinking. She was given a sheet of paper (see appendix) labeled with the date, the book page numbers covered in the discussion, and Listening to Tapes. The columns were labeled What Was I Thinking About? and Why?

We settled in side by side with Cokes to listen to the tape. I noticed that Michelle would glance at me before writing anything. She never stopped the tape, but wrote while listening. I moved my chair back a little to give her more space. She still tended to look at me before writing. During the last ten minutes of the tape I moved away from the table entirely and pretended to be busy at my desk. Michelle’s body language changed when I moved away. She leaned in closer to the tape recorder and appeared to be listening more intently. She stopped looking at me. From this time on I stayed close enough during these sessions for Michelle to know I was available, but far enough away to give her a comfortable place to work. Michelle particularly liked the big chocolate chip cookies that were sold in the school cafeteria, so I tried to have one of those and something to drink for her when she stayed after school. It worked out well that Michelle did not need me with her during these times because there were interruptions at almost all of the sessions that I could handle without disturbing her: students came back to the room for books, parents stopped by to ask about assignments and parties, and other teachers needed materials.
The thoughts that Michelle recorded having during the first discussion were mainly in response to comments and questions posed by the other participants. She wrote:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Maybe he didn’t want to tell his name”</td>
<td>“because of Denver’s question”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He might not even be related”</td>
<td>“because of what Mrs. Hubble said”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I thought it was sort of mean”</td>
<td>“because of Juan’s question.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He might not have been one of Mae’s sons”</td>
<td>(no reason given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The stranger was looking for a family, not 1 person”</td>
<td>(no reason given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He might not even be related”</td>
<td>“what Mrs. Hubble said”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Something might happen to her”</td>
<td>“Susan’s question”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How can someone stay the same”</td>
<td>“what Mrs. Hubble said”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I thought it was sort of mean”</td>
<td>“Juan’s question”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If they live in the village why would Mae go past the village”</td>
<td>(no reason given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How are someone’s hand be graceful”</td>
<td>“Denver’s question”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They could have a street light if someone built one”</td>
<td>“Denver said they had no streetlights”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these entries made sense because I remembered the parts of the discussion to which they referred. For others I needed the transcript of the discussion to make sense of her thoughts.
I started transcribing the tape that night, but it took much longer than I had anticipated, because of my inexperience. I did not finish it in one night, so I could not compare her Listening to Tape log with the transcript before I had another tape to transcribe. Data were piling up and my analysis was not keeping pace. I did not want to slow down the pace of the study because of the intensity of Michelle’s workload. I feared that slowing things down would cause a slackening of interest on her part. I felt that a quick, steady pace would be best for keeping her involved.

Data collection proceeded according to plan for the next few days, following the cycle of student read to self, teacher read aloud, student generated questions, discussion, and listening to tape. The vicissitudes of classroom life became apparent when during the second discussion a construction truck became stuck in the mud right outside the classroom window. In trying to free the truck, the driver was actually hitting the wall and windows of the classroom with construction materials. Other teachers were standing outside our doorway, watching and laughing. When things calmed down and the truck had been abandoned, the discussion continued, but the group was much rowdier than normal, talking across one another more. In this case the tape recorder was an advantage because they realized their talk was being recorded and they settled down quickly.

During the teacher read aloud of pages 42-59, I defined the word colander. The students all knew what one was, but did not know the name of it. This particular mention during the read aloud was included in Michelle’s log of thoughts during the read aloud, unlike the short discussion we had of skinny-dipping.

On the tenth day of the study, in my notes I wrote, “Do I ask for more? It seems she’s doing an awful lot. When asked for more, I’m not getting much, but some. Balance
– keep her on board VS push her too far. I don’t think she’ll quit the study, but she could partially shut down.” My concerns were based on the response I was getting from Michelle when I asked her follow up questions to the entries in her logs. More and more often I was getting shrugs and “I don’t know” answers. I imagined myself in her position, revealing my thoughts for several days, and realized anew how personal and intense this was for her. I chose to cut back on clarifying questions. I felt she was giving me all she was willing or able to give. I think it was the right decision because the same day I wrote these comments, I also noted how quiet Michelle was in the discussion and how low level her questions were. Michelle’s contributions to the discussion that day were infrequent and were mostly just agreeing with the other participants, instead of adding to the discussion. Instead of discussing the implications of water that could make you live forever, she seemed stuck on mundane details, such as the size of the pebbles.

Excerpt from 1/29/01 discussion:

Juan: (Reading from book) “The ground was shiny wet. The boys lifted a final stone and Winnie saw a spurt of water arching up and turning like a fountain into the ground. He lifted a final stone.”

Two students: pebble by pebble

Michelle: the final pebble

Denver: (Reading from book) “He moved the pile to one side carefully, pebble by pebble. Beneath the ground was shiny wet. The boy lifted a final stone and Winnie” . . . pebbles are the same as stones, aren’t they?

Michelle: Yeah.

Denver: So it wouldn’t necessarily be one big stone.
Michelle: You don’t have to call it a pebble all the time.

Denver: Yeah.

Michelle: You could call it a rock . . .

Denver: So basically, we don’t know if it was huge or not.

Michelle: Could be.

Denver: I’m thinking it’s just a little pebble.

Michelle: Me, too.

Denver: A little rock.

Instead of rich, thought provoking questions, she had written

1. “Why did Winnie say she wanted to leave in the middle of dinner” (This
questions is answered in the text of the novel.)

2. “Why would brothers who are alone split up?”

After making the decision to curtail follow-up questioning, I watched to see what

...effect this decision would have on Michelle. Over the next two cycles of read, read aloud,

questions, and discussion, she participated more fully in the discussions, offering her

opinions and ideas, and contributing information.

Excerpts from 1/31/01 discussion

Teacher: Why would an author, she’s done this twice so far in the book, talk

about his white hands?

Michelle: Maybe it’s something we need to know.

Excerpt:

Teacher: Do ya’ll see any problem with selling the water to people?

Several: No. Yeah. Yes.
Michelle: Sort of, ‘cause the Tucks wanted to keep it a secret.

Excerpts from 2/2/01 discussion

Teacher: How would not showing emotion help him blackmail anybody?

Michelle: Maybe if he had emotion he’d look mean. Like he had an idea to do something.

Excerpt:

Teacher: (Talking about a fish) How can it be beautiful and horrible?

Juan: She probably thought that it was beautiful because it had a rainbow in the scale and the eye was horrible because of how he was acting without the water.

Scott: Yeah, kind of like what Juan said. The fish looked beautiful because of the way the sun was reflecting on it, making it rainbow or its eyes, but it was terrible because it was flopping around and dying.

Michelle: And maybe it’s because what Scott and Juan said in the first part, it was probably beautiful because of the way it looked and everything, but it would be horrible to kill it, later it would be horrible. So it’s good to catch the fish, but bad to kill it.

Michelle’s questions were stronger over the next few days. Examples of her better questions were:

1. “Why won’t the stranger let Mr. Foster come along when it’s his daughter?”
2. “Do you think the stranger was telling the truth about his grandma?”
3. “Do you think that Mae would die if she got hanged?”
4. “Do you think that the constable is eager for Mae to die?”
I felt the decision to take only data Michelle could and would give me, without additional questioning, was necessary to avoid overburdening Michelle. Her return to more typical behavior was encouraging.

I noted during the second half of the study how well the discussion group was performing. The group was cohesive, with everyone playing a role. No one backed down when there was a disagreement, but were agreeable in their negotiations. There was one verbally dominant participant, Denver, who tended to talk over others, but the others did not allow him to dominate the ideas. They politely disagreed with him and pointed out other options and answers.

The final discussion was very spirited. Topics included why Winnie did not drink the water, what eventually happened to the Tucks, and how can one person make a difference in the world. I made an attempt to broaden the students’ idea of what the book’s deeper meaning was.

Excerpt from 2/08/01 discussion:

Teacher: OK, I’m going to give you one last question and want ya’ll to think about it. What is this book about?

Juan: Everlasting people.

Michelle: People who are everlasting.

Several: Yeah.

Teacher: Is that all it’s about?

Several: No.

Michelle: But that’s just part of it.

Denver: It’s about how a family made it through bad and how they had to . . .
Tammy: worked together
Denver: Yeah, how they worked together to get through everything.
Teacher: Is that all it’s about?
Susan: No. Mae went to jail and that’s a really important part of the story.
Denver: It’s mainly about the family.
Teacher: What’s the big thing it’s about?
Juan: Probably . . .
Tammy: The spring.
Denver: Yeah, the spring. I say that’s the main character . . .
Juan: How would it be to live forever?
Several talk: . . . the spring, living forever.
Teacher: What does Natalie Babbitt keep bringing back and back and back in the story?
Juan: The wheel.
Scott: Oh, the wheel.
Michelle: The touch me not cottage.
Teacher: The metaphor of the wheel and it being . . .
Juan: The touch me not cottage.
Teacher: the symbol of . . .
Juan: life.
Teacher: life. And the cycles and how it’s supposed to be . . .
Tammy: without. Probably it’s like Tuck says, we’re not a part of the wheel.
Susan: because they’re everlasting.
Michelle: They’re like picked out and put to the side.

Juan: How would it be to live forever?

Closing this discussion was not easy. Every time I attempted to end it, someone would bring up another topic that needed discussing. I finally just said, “OK. Thanks, guys,” and turned off the recorder. The group was still talking about whether or not the water was evil on the way back to their seats.

I met with Michelle for a final interview after all other data had been collected. I was hoping to get a broad picture of how the meaning of this book changed for her through the course of the study. The interview did not begin auspiciously. I asked in several ways what she thought the book meant, what was the meaning of the book, or what was the general idea of the story. She gave me blank looks. When I asked for the main idea she gave me the main story line, of people drinking magic water and becoming immortal. I asked how her understanding of the book had changed. Blank looks again. Finally I asked a question that got us started.

Excerpt:

Teacher: Well, like at the beginning (of the book) what did you think it (the story) meant and how it (the story) changed?

Michelle: I thought the stranger would be nice, but then I found out he was being mean. I thought that Winnie might . . . uh, I never thought that the stranger would get hit and die, that’s for sure.

Teacher: Why do you think that that wasn’t part of your prediction?
Michelle: I don’t know, I guess I just didn’t want to think that Mae would do something like that. She seemed really nice in the beginning. I’m not saying that she was mean, but she was just protecting Winnie.

Later in the interview:

Teacher: See if you can answer this. Was there someone or something that happened during the two weeks that changed your mind about things, like somebody in the discussion group, somebody you talked to, somebody you thought of, something that changed your mind . . .

Michelle: Well, sometimes the peoples’ questions would change my mind. Stuff like when we were discussing, someone would say something and I’d say, “Oh yeah, that makes sense now.” People would say one thing and I would think another and they’d like explain it more, then I would get it. I would agree with the person.

Teacher: OK. Do you remember a particular time?

Michelle: No, not really.

Teacher: Just generally. Um, when you knew you had to write questions, did that change the way you read the story?

Michelle: Not really, because that’s usually what we always do.

Teacher: Were there questions that you wrote that you didn’t get to talk about in your group?

Michelle: No.

Teacher: So you got to talk about all of them?

Michelle: (nod)
Later in the interview:

Teacher: When you were writing your questions were you thinking of the answers to them?

Michelle: Well, I sort of thought of an answer that might be said or something, but really there was no answer.

Teacher: When you were writing questions, did you ever think about anybody in our discussion group? And how you thought they would answer or what you thought they would say or anything?

Michelle: No, not really.

Teacher: Did you have questions that you didn’t write down?

Michelle: I sort of thought of some, but then I like thought it was stupid or something. I mean it didn’t make sense, you know. Like the answer was in the book and everything.

Teacher: Did knowing the questions would be graded make you change some of them?

Michelle: Sort of. It made me think hard so I wouldn’t get a bad grade.

Teacher: Overall, generally, from the very beginning to the very end, do you think the meaning for you of this book changed? What it meant to you?

Michelle: Sort of. I mean it sort of changed the meaning. I don’t know.

Teacher: Did you like it?

Michelle: Yeah, I liked the book a lot. At first I thought the book was gonna be like any other book, you know, not boring, but just like regular. Then it got very interesting.
Teacher: When you first started reading it, did it remind you of any other books?

Michelle: No, well, yeah, sort of. It talks about elves and everything, the water, like fairy tales and stuff. The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe.

Off tape, I asked Michelle a question about how reading at home and reading at school were different for her. She said, “I think about the books more at school. I get into books at home, but I think deeper at school. Home is for fun.”

Data Analysis

I attempted to analyze data during data collection, but I did not make much progress in doing so. I had warned family and friends that I would be unavailable for several weeks, and they were accommodating and left me alone. I diligently transcribed and read over data. However, I was continuously receiving data and could not keep up with them. I chose to wait until data collection was complete to concentrate on analysis because the study was scheduled for such a limited time span and there was a clear cut off for data collection.

Data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). With the first log of thoughts Michelle had as she read to herself, I began looking for patterns and categories. The first ones were rather vague and scattered: reading skills, literary devices, inside or outside the book references, and personal or media influences. After reading and rereading the logs numerous times, I realized I needed more structure to see any patterns, a way to put like with like. I cut apart the data and taped them to colored index cards: purple for text read to self, green for text read aloud by the teacher,
yellow for discussion questions, and pink for responses to the taped discussions. Each card was coded with the page numbers from the novel, *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975). Both the thought and what caused the thought were included on the purple and green cards.

**Initial Impressions**

I read through the purple cards, those from the silent reading, several times, looking for first impressions. Those first impressions included the following categories:

Michelle attended to the language of the novel,

“I thought of a big potato when it said ‘A great potato of a woman.’”

“I thought of Dr. Seuss when it said ‘that housed the mouse.’”

started talking to and about the characters in her responses,

“I’m really starting to hate this guy – When the stranger brings up Miles’s wife and kids”

“Bad people like you Mr. Stranger – When the stranger told the Tucks he was selling it to people who deserved it”

related the story to books, movies, and other media,

“Mr. Morrison (a character in another novel we had read) – When the stranger said he was looking for a family.”

“The Wicked Witch – Because it said ‘and all thought of running melted away.’”

“Mario or Luigi (from a video game) – When Winnie thought kidnappers had long mustaches”

visualized vivid scenes,
“I thought of flying beans when the bugs flung up at them like pebbles.”

“The first part of ‘Little House on the Prairie’ when the book said Jesse
and Winnie were running together.”

responded with physical sensations,

“I thought of flipping when it said she thought they would tumble her into
a bag.”

“I thought of spreading out a blanket when Winnie felt a warm spreading
feeling.”

“I thought of tying a bow on a package when it said ‘it was like a ribbon
tying her to familiar things.’”

and she showed some misconceptions about references to woods and nature.

“I thought of an open ground (the ground splitting open, like in an
earthquake) because it said ‘The ground somewhat more open.’”

“I thought of fog clearing away when it said there was a clearing in front
of her.”

The green cards, those from teacher read aloud, yielded these initial
impressions:

Michelle alluded to people in the media,

“I thought of Bill Gates and how he is so rich, because Winnie Foster
might have a lot of money.”
“I thought of the 7 escapees and how they killed someone and so far have
gotten away with it because of the Stranger, how he might want to kill
someone and get away with it.”

connected the story to her personal experiences,

“I thought of Jordyn and her parents being divorced, because Mae Tuck
might be divorced.”

“I wouldn’t do that (throw back a fish) – When Winnie didn’t want Miles
to keep the fish.”

mentioned movies and television shows,

“I thought of the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ movie when it said ‘and not the
least alarming.’” (The character Bell in the movie sings a song with the
word ‘alarming’ in it.)

“I thought of ‘Bewitched’ when people thought they were witches or
gypsies.”

talked to the characters in the book,

“Go, Mae – When Mae hit the stranger.”

and she started forming opinions.

“He is very, very mean – When the stranger told the Tucks ‘instead of
pigs’” (He is comparing the Tucks to pigs.)

“He’s probably just lying – When the stranger was telling the Tucks the
story.”
I then compared the purple cards, those from reading to herself, and green cards, those from teacher read aloud, to see how they were different. There were some differences, but the organization of the data was still too random to form a clear picture.

The yellow cards, consisting of the written questions meant for discussion, were mostly about motivations.

“Why did the stranger go to Winnie’s house?”

“Why did Winnie want to stay?” (instead of running away)

“Why did Mae take her farther away from the spot they were at?”

Three of the questions concerned the fantasy aspects of the story.

“How did the water get like how it is?”

“Do you think that Mae would die if she got hanged?”

“If they poured some of the water on the fire then do you think the fire would last forever?”

One question seemed to be in a category by itself.

“How can a pond have all the answers?”

These data obviously needed further analysis.

The pink cards, responses to the taped discussions, on initial analysis, showed Michelle to be actively engaged in the discussions, even when she did not say anything aloud. She recorded thoughts that occurred as she listened to the others, though not participating orally in the discussion at the point.

She gave personal answers to questions,

“They might.” (when Scott asked if people would believe the Tucks)
“I would think something is very wrong with Mae.” (when the question of what would happen if Mae were hanged and nothing happened)

made private comments to others that she did not make out loud,

“How rude, Scott.” (when Susan asked first to ask her question and Scott cut in with his question)

“He is being a little annoying.” (when Scott kept saying over and over, “The answer’s on the back of the book.”)

“What a thing to look forward to.” (when Juan said he wanted to see if he [Tuck] died or not)

corrected answers given by others,

“Yet Winnie knows, too.”

“It never said it knocked Tuck out.” (when Susan and Denver said it would knock Mae out if she got shot)

finished arguments that happened during the discussion and were not resolved,

“The stranger was looking for a family, not 1 person.”

“They could have a streetlight if someone built one.”

gave her personal opinion of others’ answers,

“They sound the same.” (regarding answers given by Tammy and Susan) and changed her mind about the benefits of living forever over the course of a discussion.

“I’d like living forever.” (1/25/01)

“I changed my mind. I thought it would be good.” (1/25/01)
She responded more often to Denver (19 times) and to Juan (13 times) than to the others in the group (four to eight times each).

The next step in data analysis was to highlight Michelle’s contributions to the discussions on the transcripts. I determined, by reading the transcripts, my notes, and listening to the tapes, to whom she was responding. She responded many more times to Denver (56 times) than to anyone else in the group (6-39 times). This may have been because of Denver’s tendency to dominate. The following excerpts illustrate the kinds of responses she made to everyone:

- **Answering**
  Scott: Why didn’t they let the cat get a drink of water?
  Juan: Probably because you know how cats probably they have germs and eat mice and stuff and some cats eat cockroaches and stuff.
  Teacher: Oouuww.
  Michelle: Probably because cats don’t really like water.

- **Agreeing**
  Scott: Depending on what year this book was based on, maybe they (the villagers) thought she (Mae Tuck) was a witch.
  Michelle: Oh, yeah. Maybe they didn’t like her because she believes in something different.
  Scott: Like a different religion.
  Michelle: Yeah, like a different religion or something else, like she believes in one thing and they don’t.

- **Disagreeing**
(Earlier in the discussion Juan had stated that Jesse was six years older than Winnie.)

Michelle: When Juan said she was only six years apart, I thought that the book said that she was just 10, and 11 in a few days.

Scott: Yeah, but she’s about to turn 11. Yeah, very recently.

Juan: The thing about it is, she is 10, but I said it was six years apart ‘cause Jesse had 16 and she had 10.

Michelle: Jesse’s 17, not 16.

Long pause.

• Questioning

(The group was discussing what would happen if the stranger shot Mae, comparing their ideas with what happened when Tuck shot himself.)

Denver: So it would, it would knock her off the horse and knock her out.

Tammy: But he shot himself through the heart. The bullet did go through his heart.

Denver: He’s probably going to aim at her back, at her spine, or at her head.

Scott: Well, if it went through her spine, it would probably pretty much hit her heart.

Denver: Yeah. It could easily go through her back, go through her shoulder blade, and then just hit her heart.

Juan: Yeah, but it would knock him down.

Michelle: I don’t see where it says it knocked him out.
Tammy: I said it knocked him down.

Michelle: I know, but they’re saying that it knocked him out and I don’t see that.

Tammy: It says he got right back up.

- Adding information

(The group is discussing the plan to break Mae out of jail and how much noise it would make.)

Scott: If he used like a chainsaw to cut down wood, you could hear that about a mile away. So how could you not hear it when you’re not in the same room?

Michelle: I don’t know, but in the book Jesse told Winnie that Miles was a really good carpenter, so he would know what to do.

- Adding opinion

Juan: Why did Mae Tuck only went to the woods one time every ten years?

Susan: Maybe her sons come from wherever they’re going once every 10 years and then she comes to visit them.

Scott: Yeah, but what if, like Susan said, her sons don’t live in the village or around there. Maybe that’s just like a place where they meet and – I’ve been thinking – I didn’t write this questions down, but why didn’t the sons of Mae Tuck just come and visit them wherever they usually live?
Michelle: Maybe it’s because like if someone, if she is like a criminal, like she goes every 10 years so if someone captures her then after a year they’ll think that she’s like gone away, and she comes back every 10 years.

Teacher: So 10 years is a safe time.

Michelle: Yeah. People forget. People will forget her. ‘Cause it says that no one will remember you.

- New understanding

Teacher: OK. Who has a question?

Denver: Did the man in the suit hear about the water? Because Winnie said that, when she was just talking to herself in her head, it said that she saw the man in the yellow suit behind a bush.

Teacher: I think it’s answered in the book. Can ya’ll find it?

Scott: It’s on the back.

Teacher: (surprised) It’s on the back?

(Some mumbling while students read the back book jacket)

Teacher: It is on the back. But can you find it in the book, too?

(Mumbling, pages turning)

Michelle: (reading back of book) Oooh, so that’s why the stranger wanted to talk to Winnie’s father!

Teacher & Michelle together: Ooooh!

- Finishing a thought

(The group is discussing the plan to break Mae out of jail.)
Scott: Maybe he wouldn’t really have to worry about that (the constable watching) because maybe part of Miles’s plan is they could like send Tuck and Jesse or somebody.

Michelle: To distract.

Scott: Yeah, and distract him and since they know that they’re partially guilty on what happened to the man in the yellow suit, then maybe they would go distract him and he would get his gun and then Miles would do his work and then possibly do everything and then . . .

Michelle: Winnie would take her place.

Scott: Yeah, and then . . .

- Controlling the group

(Susan is trying to ask her question, but the group is talking over her)

Michelle: OK, you guys, she has a question.

- Clarifying the question

Teacher: I want to go back to something Michelle said. What did you say, repeat what you said earlier about . . .

Michelle: After she (Susan) asked her question?

Teacher: Yeah.

None of Michelle’s written questions were brought up by Michelle during the discussions.
Emerging Patterns

I went back to the purple and green cards, those from the silent reading and teacher read aloud, to compare the data again. Patterns did become apparent in the data, after much sorting and resorting. The categories that emerged were:

- Self talk/personal response
- Actions/sensations – what things might feel like to her
- Settings – places or events she was familiar with
- Media – included TV, newspaper, movies, video games
- Appearances/pictures – visualizations tied to familiar things
- Icons– archetypes of characters (bum, clown)
- Sounds
- Other texts – included only written text

Some of these categories I had expected to find; media, appearances/pictures and other texts. I had made a conscious effort in class to make intertextual links for and with the students during read alouds and discussions. I frequently mentioned characters from other stories that came to my mind while reading. One common way of responding to stories and poems in our classroom was through drawing, and I routinely encouraged the students to make mental pictures of scenes in their minds while they were reading.

The other categories were less expected. I was actually surprised by the actions/sensations and sounds categories. I had not anticipated such a strong sensory response.
Another look at the yellow cards, those questions written for discussion purposes, produced three categories. Four of the twenty-two questions were “Do you think . . .” types, with which Michelle seemed to be looking for agreement or for others’ ideas:

“Do you think the stranger was telling the truth about his grandma?”

“Do you think that Mae would die if she got hanged?”

“Do you think that the constable is eager for Mae to die?”

“If they poured some of the water on the fire then do you think the fire would last forever?”

Three questions were “how” questions, asking for clarification:

“How did the water get like how it is?”

“How can a pond have all the answers?”

“How can you bulldoze water?”

The bulk of the questions, fifteen of them, were “why” questions, searching for the motivations of the characters or clarification. Samples:

“Why does Winnie’s grandma believe the music is elves?”

“Why doesn’t Tuck go with Mae to visit their sons?”

“Why did Winnie say she wanted to leave in the middle of dinner?”

“Why would someone steal a horse just to go back somewhere?”

“Why did the stranger come in through the front door? Why didn’t he just sneak in while the Tucks were asleep?”

As noted earlier, Michelle did not bring up any of these questions during discussions. Some others in the group came up with the same or similar questions and they were discussed. When I asked why she did not ask any of her questions, Michelle said she
really wrote the questions just for the grade. Because I felt her questions to be of limited importance to Michelle, I gave them less weight as data. I thought she might have been writing what she thought I expected, rather than what she was genuinely interested in.

I kept the final interview as a piece, without categorizing each question and answer. I felt there was a flow to the piece, a summarizing aspect that needed to be kept intact.

After several weeks of working with the data, I met with a fellow fifth grade teacher. I had worked with this teacher for the last thirteen years and knew her to be very analytical in her approach to problems. I explained the categories I had come up with and the different sources of the data. She then independently coded the data. After her coding, we discussed those that were not clear until consensus was reached. Only two pieces of data were moved to another category. Michelle had mentioned the Wicked Witch that melted and I had assumed an intertextual link. The other teacher thought she might be referring to the movie. We decided this was probably the case and moved the card to the media group. The other change was an interesting outcome of this meeting. I mentioned that Michelle had noted Bill Gates as a thought during reading on more than one occasion and expressed my surprise at how important this media figure was in her transaction. The other teacher, who taught Social Studies to Michelle, told me that Bill Gates had been featured in a current events magazine that the class had read. The cards containing the information about Bill Gates had been placed in the media group, but we opted to include them in the other text group because we knew for sure that Michelle had read about him in class.
Final Analysis

I combined the data from the Read to Self logs and the Teacher Read Aloud logs because these were both individual activities, without input from other students. The eight categories that emerged are listed, with examples from the logs to illustrate the contents of each.

1. Self talk/personal response

   **Who/What I Thought of**                  **Why**
   
   “I’m really starting to hate this guy”  “when stranger brings up Miles’s wife and kids”

   “What is so interesting about leaving?”  “when Winnie escapes from her house”

   “I wouldn’t do that”                     “when Winnie throws fish back”

   “Go, Mae”                               “when Mae hits stranger”

2. Actions/sensations – What things might feel like to her

   **Who/What I Thought of**                  **Why**
   
   “Tying a bow on a package”                “it said, ‘It was like a ribbon tying her to familiar things’”

   “Sandpaper being the roof of her mouth”  “Winnie’s mouth being dry as paper”

   “Spreading out a blanket”                “When Winnie felt a warm spreading feeling.”

3. Motifs/settings – places or events with which she was familiar
### Who/What I Thought of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who/What I Thought of</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A party”</td>
<td>“when it talks about a banquet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A ranch”</td>
<td>“when Winnie, the constable, and Mae ride away”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“New York”</td>
<td>“when it says Mae and Tuck passed a hot dog stand”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Media – TV, newspaper, movies, video games

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who/What I Thought of</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Weather Channel”</td>
<td>“when Mae said ‘what weather,’ splashing her face with water”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A jungle movie”</td>
<td>“when someone says ‘I’m no barbarian.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Energizer Bunny”</td>
<td>“when it said a forest that went on and on and on”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Appearances/pictures – visualizations tied to familiar things

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who/What I Thought of</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Peas”</td>
<td>“when Winnie saw the milkweed open its pod”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Flying beans”</td>
<td>“when the bugs flung up at them like pebbles”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“A fire”
“when the day was on the brink of burning”

“A necklace”
“when it talks about the dragonfly”

6. Icons – archetypes of characters

Who/What I Thought of
“A wizard or old guy”
Why
“when it talks about the stranger’s fingers”

“A Texan”
“when Tuck said ‘I ain’t.’”

“A preacher”
“because it says ‘whenever the spirit moves’”

7. Sounds

Who/What I Thought of
“Humming air”
Why
“when it said ‘It hummed with their daybreak activity.’”

“A bell”
“when it says the ring of the trees”

“A lion”
“when Mrs. Hubble and the book said roared Tuck.”

8. Other written texts

Who/What I Thought of
“Fairy tale”
Why
“the story has magic”
“Dr. Seuss”

“when it said ‘that housed the mouse’”

“Fairy tale”

“when Natalie Babbitt said what the cows thought”

I made a chart of these responses, to check the overlap of the thoughts that occurred during self reading and those during teacher reading. There was only one exactly the same; the description of the dragonfly made her think of a necklace both times. There were other thoughts that were the same, but she had them for different reasons. For example, she thought of beans three times (“beans”, “jumping beans”, and “flying beans”), but because of two different prompts (“when it’s talking about the pebbles”[covering the spring] and “when the bugs flung up at them like pebbles”). All in all, teacher read aloud brought about responses different from those during silent reading.

The questions that Michelle wrote for the discussions did not seem important to her. She told me she wrote them only for a grade, though she did work hard on them so she would make a good grade. She did not bring any of the questions up during discussions. The three categories are listed, with examples to illustrate the contents of each.

“How” questions – asking for clarification

“How did the water get like how it is?”

“How can a pond have all the answers?”

“How can you bulldoze water?”

“Do you think” questions – looking for agreement or for others’ ideas

“Do you think the stranger was telling the truth about his grandma?”
“Do you think that Mae would die if she got hanged?”

“Do you think that the constable is eager for Mae to die?”

“Why” questions – searching for motivation or clarification

“Why does Winnie’s grandma believe the music is elves?”

“Why would brothers who are alone split up?”

“Why won’t the stranger let Mr. Foster come along when it’s his daughter?”

“Why did Winnie pour the water on the toad?”

Michelle’s written questions tended to look like those posed at the end of a story in a reading book. I think Michelle wanted to “do” the study “right,” and thus she wrote questions she thought would meet the expectations of the teacher. Her questions were not important to her and did not indicate any intense interest on her part to find answers to them. Perhaps her questions would have improved and become more personally meaningful with more time and encouragement to produce questions that matched her own interests.

Michelle used her time with the taped discussions to report her thoughts during the discussions. Her record of these thoughts included things that she did not get an opportunity to say or was too polite to say in the group. The categories that emerged and examples of the contents of each are listed.

1. Gave personal answers to questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“They might”</td>
<td>“when Scott said ‘would they believe the Tucks?’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“What a waste of water”  “when Tammy said that Jesse
probably thought that I gave her that
water and she didn’t use it”

“Something might happen to her”  “in answer to a question by Susan”

2. Made private comments to others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “I thought I said that”   | “when Denver said that Susan said
something that I thought I said” |
| “How mean to kill a cat”  | “when Juan said they could kill a
cat” |
| “How rude, Scott”         | “when Susan asked first to ask a
question” (and Scott jumped in
ahead of her) |
| “That’s a good question”  | “in response to a question by Susan” |

3. Corrected others’ answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “How do you know”         | “when Juan said the stranger drank
the water” |
| “But you don’t know when
her birthday is”            | “what Scott said when she was
turning 11 soon” |
| “Yet Winnie knows, too”   | “when Tammy said the Tucks were
the only ones who knew” |
4. Finished an argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The stranger was looking for a family, not one person”</td>
<td>(after a prolonged argument about whether the stranger was looking for an extended family, a nuclear family, or just one member of a family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They could have a streetlight if someone built one”</td>
<td>“Denver said they had no streetlights”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The station wasn’t exactly built on the spring”</td>
<td>“when Juan said a gas station was built on the spring”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You would make a difference if you built a house”</td>
<td>“when Susan said you would make a difference if you built a house for poor people” (Michelle insisted that building a house for anyone would make a difference.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Gave personal opinion of others’ answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Was I Thinking About?</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I know Susan doesn’t like killing things”</td>
<td>“when Denver was talking about hunting and killing a deer and she was like ‘No’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He is being a little annoying”</td>
<td>“when Scott says ‘it’s on the back of the book’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“They sound the same”
“what Susan and Tammy said”
(similar answers)

6. Changed her own mind about issues

**What Was I Thinking About?**

“I’d like living forever”

“I changed my mind. I thought it would be good”

**Why**

“Denver’s question”

“what Denver thought, it would be good”

The last data, the transcripts of the discussions, are not reader reported like the others. These data serve to illustrate what happened in the social setting of the reader’s transaction with others. Categories that emerged from analysis are listed, with examples of each.

1. Answering

Excerpt:

Teacher: So what do you think it means?

Michelle: A family, like the whole thing: a mom, a dad, a grandmother

Teacher: So you don’t think he’s looking for the Tucks?

Michelle: Uh, not really. Not just one person.

Excerpt:

Scott: Why didn’t they let the cat get a drink of water?

Michelle: Probably because cats don’t really like water.

2. Agreeing

Excerpt:

Denver: So basically, we don’t know if it was huge or not
Michelle: Could be.

Denver: I’m thinking it’s just a little pebble.

Michelle: Me, too.

Excerpt:

Tammy: Well, maybe because he did something to the town that, if he tells his name, they’ll know he’s a bad person and take him to jail.

Michelle: Oh, yeah! That’s what I was thinking of.

3. Disagreeing

Excerpt:

Susan: Maybe he could have dranked the water, but he got shot, so I don’t know.

Michelle: He didn’t get shot.

Excerpt:

Denver: She hit him in the back of the head with the stock of the gun, he fell off the horse, but his eyes were open

Michelle: It never said that he was on the horse.

4. Questioning

Excerpt:

Michelle: Didn’t he knock on the door?

Excerpt:

Michelle: I don’t see where it says it knocked him out.

Tammy: I said it knocked him down.
Michelle: I know, but they’re saying that it knocked him out and I don’t see that. (looking in book)

5. Adding information

Excerpt:

Scott: They’d just be floating in space. Then they’d go to the asteroid belt and get hit by asteroids.

Michelle: They’d see the man in the moon.

Excerpt:

Denver: (to Susan) You said that the Tucks could live for a long time, but the Tucks can live forever. And so can the horse.

Michelle: (very quietly) But not the cat.

6. Adding opinion

Excerpt:

Michelle: Maybe the cat was afraid to go near the water. I don’t know. ‘Cause maybe it was like big or something.

Excerpt:

Michelle: I think it’s sort of good and bad. ‘Cause it’s sort of good like Denver said. He said that, I know some people might want to live to see like 3000, or whatever. Or to see what happens in the future. But it might be bad because like what we were talking about, like if their friends (interrupted)

7. New understanding

Excerpt:
Michelle: (reading back of book) Oooh, so that’s why the stranger wanted to talk to Winnie’s father!

Teacher and Michelle together: Oooh!

8. Finishing a thought

Excerpt:

Scott: Maybe he wouldn’t really have to worry about that because maybe part of Miles’s plan is they could like send Tuck and Jesse or somebody . .
Michelle: Winnie would take her place . .
Scott: Yeah, and then . . .

Excerpt:

Scott: I was going to say that same exact thing, except I had a different explanation of why. Well, you put this stick in and then you put the pebbles around it and whoever sees it, they may think
Michelle: It’s somebody’s grave.

9. Controlling the group

Excerpt:

Michelle: OK, you guys, she has a question. (when the group won’t yield to Tammy)

Excerpt:

Michelle: Read it. (to prove a point by using the text)

10. Clarifying the question

Excerpt:
Teacher: I want to go back to something Michelle said. What did you say, repeat what you said earlier about . . .

Michelle: After she asked her question?

Teacher: Yeah.

Excerpt:

Teacher: How many of you asked that question?

Michelle: What was the question?

Excerpt:

Susan: That’s exactly the same question I have.

Michelle: What?

I analyzed data consisting of logs of reader-reported thoughts during silent reading, recorded thoughts during teacher read aloud, and remembered thoughts during discussion, questions generated by the reader for the purpose of bringing to the discussion, and transcripts of the discussions. During analysis of these materials, I used notes made during the study to illuminate confusing or unclear information. I found these data sufficient to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings

This study was designed to help answer the question of what goes on in a reader’s mind during her transactions with text. I was privileged, by a thoughtful and generous fifth grade girl, to be privy to some of what went on in her mind through several evocations of a text rich in language and ideas. I watched as she brought to the text her “past experience and present personality” (Rosenblatt, 1978), and “crystallized out from the stuff of memory, thought and feeling a new order, a new experience . . . which becomes part of the ongoing stream of her life experience” (p. 12).

What I found, in a real classroom with real students, bears out the compelling theories of Rosenblatt, Vygotsky, and Lipman. Learning is social and collaborative. Language is the medium of thought. Dialogue does generate reflection.

The social aspects of learning were apparent in the discussions. Michelle collaborated with the others in the group to negotiate answers to their questions. She did this through social uses of language: answering, agreeing, disagreeing, questioning, adding information, adding an opinion, finishing a thought, controlling the group, and clarifying the question. Social aspects were also evident in Michelle’s written responses. She talked to characters in the book, as well as evoked icons of familiar archetypes. She thought of people in the media, and of her friends and family during her reading, tying the new to her personal social experiences.
Language was the medium of the exchange of thoughts. Michelle expressed and reported her ideas in words, spoken and written. The discussion group used language to negotiate meaning. This was expected. What was unexpected were Michelle’s responses that seemed more sensory based than language based. Some of her responses dealt with how things might feel physically, how things might affect one emotionally, how things might look, and how things might sound. The sensual nature of these responses was a surprise.

Michelle evidenced reflection caused by dialogue, especially during her recording of what she was thinking during the discussions. She was still arguing her side of a disagreement four hours after the discussion. She reported changing her mind about living forever during the course of a discussion. Dialogue appeared to move Michelle beyond her initial response to the text, to aspects she had not considered in her own reading.

Michelle’s responses to the novel enlarged my definition of the affective part of reading. Until I observed Michelle experiencing this novel with her whole self, with all of her senses, I had defined affective aspects as those dealing with just the emotional response to a piece of writing. Her responses of hearing the humming air, of feeling the sandpaper on the roof of her mouth, of seeing the stranger’s white fingers, broadened my understanding of all that the affective can evoke in a reader. Rosenblatt’s definition of aesthetic reading took on new meaning for me.

Answered Questions

The research questions were:
1) What are the reader-related influences on the respondent’s transactions with the text?

2) What changes in meaning are reported by the respondent?

3) What connections does the respondent make between the influences and the changes in meaning?

What are the reader-related influences on her transaction with the text? Michelle attempted throughout the study to record everything she thought about while reading, being read to, discussing, and later listening to the discussions. Rosenblatt (1978) states that there is a synthesis and revision that goes on during reading, and especially in aesthetic reading. The reader selects what she will pay attention to. “Much of this activity seems to occur on the periphery of consciousness, while the reader’s attention is focused on the work he is shaping” (p. 62). Michelle could not record every thought she had because some were never brought to her full consciousness. She did record a large number of thoughts. These thoughts were influences on her transactions because they were the thoughts to which she elected to pay attention, thus shaping her “work.”

I believe that Michelle adopted a predominantly aesthetic stance in transacting with this text. Rosenblatt (1978) describes an aesthetic reading:

To produce a poem, the reader had to pay attention to the broader gamut of what these particular words in this particular order were calling forth within him: attention to the sound and rhythm of the words in the inner ear, attention to the imprints of past encounters with these words and their referents in differing life and literary contexts, attention to the overtones of feeling, the chiming of sound, sense, idea, and association (p. 26).
Michelle gave evidence in the data that she had attended to these things. She heard the sound and rhythm of the words and thought of Dr. Seuss and the Energizer Bunny. She remembered the use of the word “barbarian” in a jungle movie and the use of the phrase “whenever the spirit moves” by a preacher. She paid attention to the overtone of feelings and began to hate the stranger. She imagined the sounds of humming air and a lion roaring. She attempted to make sense of things she did not understand by asking questions about the motivations of characters. She explored, with the discussion group, the validity of the jailbreak plan. She associated places and people with whom she was familiar and the settings and characters in the book.

“In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25) and “the reader’s primary purpose is fulfilled during the reading event, as he fixes his attention on the actual experience he is living through” (p. 27). A frustrating part of this study was in trying to elicit from Michelle what the story meant to her. She tended to give a simple recounting of the story line. Rosenblatt (1978) explains this as the construction of an “experienced meaning” (p. 69), a lived through experience of the story that can be recalled and relived by the reader. I am not sure Michelle could separate herself from her experienced meaning, to make it an abstraction apart from her experience.

Because of Michelle’s aesthetic stance, her reported thoughts were personal and social in nature. A number of her responses were what one would expect from a ten year old girl: her friends, her family, video games, and such. The unexpected sensory based responses such as sound, texture, and sensations took me aback. The affective part of response had, to me, involved only the emotional feelings a reader might get from
reading something especially beautiful or horrific. Michelle expanded my definition of
the affective to include all the senses. She imagined what it would feel like to have
sandpaper on the roof of her mouth, to flip through the air while being tumbled into a
bag, the texture of ribbon while tying a bow on a package, and what a lion’s roar would
sound like.

What changes in meaning are reported by the reader? Michelle made very few
direct statements about changes in meaning. Michelle did report some changes that her
ideas underwent during the course of the study: she thought the book would be ordinary
and found it to be “really, really good,” she initially assumed the story would be like a
fairy tale and did not find additional elements of the genre, and she did not expect a
protagonist to kill someone and was surprised when she did.

I think Michelle could not report changes in meaning because she had what
Rosenblatt (1978) refers to as a lived through experience with the book. Her transaction
with the book was a “web of feelings, sensations, images, ideas” (p. 137) that she created
between herself and the text. She literally experienced the events of the story. Changes in
meaning were subsumed in this experience. When asked directly what she thought the
meaning of the book was, she could give no answer. Changes in the meaning created by
Michelle, then, had to be inferred from the data.

Rosenblatt (1978) rejects the idea of a reader finding the meaning in a text.
Instead, the reader creates her meaning with a specific text at a specific time and place.
“Change any of these, and there occurs . . . a different event – a different poem” (p. 14).
If changing the time and place produces a different poem, then Michelle experienced a
slightly different version of the text when she read it to herself and when it was read
aloud to her. This theory is reinforced by the data, that Michelle reported thinking of different things during silent reading and read aloud. In all of the data collected during silent reading and read aloud, one hundred one in all, there was only one instance in which the same thought was recorded in both situations for the same reason, the mental picture of a necklace when a dragonfly was described. Michelle selected different thoughts to pay attention to during the different events. These changes were not big, storyline changing events, but more like nuances, a tweaking of the evocation.

Michelle was more aware of changes in meaning that occurred during discussions. In our final interview she said, “Well, sometimes the peoples’ questions would change my mind. Stuff like when we were discussing, someone would say something and I’d say ‘oh yeah, that makes sense now.’ People would say one thing and I would think another and they’d like explain it more, then I would get it. I would agree with the person.” She could not give any specific examples.

Changes in meaning were reported by Michelle, those she was consciously aware of. Others had to be implied from the data. The most striking aspect of these sometimes subtle changes was the lack of overlap between the silent reading sessions and the read aloud sessions.

What connections does the reader make between the influences and the changes in meaning? Data collection logs were designed to elicit these connections, with the second columns labeled “why.” For every thought that was recorded, every thought that Michelle gave attention to in her transactions, there was the expectation that she would explain what caused her to think of it. She did so on all but a few.
All of the thoughts Michelle recorded during her silent reading of the text were prompted by the text itself. These particular words in this particular order evoked in her reactions and feelings. The same was true during the read aloud sessions, that the text itself was the catalyst for her thoughts. The actual unfolding of the story, in the words of Natalie Babbitt, prompted Michelle’s meaning making process.

All of the thoughts Michelle recorded during her listening to the taped discussions were prompted by the comments or questions of someone in the group. She responded to these in social ways; giving personal answers to questions, making private comments to others, correcting others’ answers, finishing an argument, giving personal opinions of others’ answers, and changing her own mind about issues. The verbal interchanges, in the words of her classmates, prompted Michelle to examine the meaning she had made.

Conclusions

The first conclusion drawn from this study was that the results map perfectly onto the undergirding theories. Michelle had multiple transactions with the text, bringing to the reading and discussion events her past experiences and present personality. She employed language as a medium of thought, to share in writing and in speech her ideas and thoughts about the text. She participated in social events that expanded and sometimes changed the meanings she had created. These social events caused her to reflect, then and later, on the topics of discussion. The results of this study helped to flesh out the theories, to illustrate what they look like in life.

A second conclusion was that an aesthetic reading, leading to a lived through experience, is not easily or quickly analyzed by the reader. Michelle seemed unable to
step outside her experience of the book in order to separate the events of the story from
the meaning of the story.

The third conclusion dealt with the sensual character of data referring to the five
senses. This reader was not intellectualizing what she read, but instead was experiencing
the story with her whole self. This way of experiencing a story greatly expands the notion
of reading as simply a cerebral activity. All of a reader’s senses might be called upon
during a transaction.

The last conclusion was that the social aspects of meaning making do not occur
only in a person-to-person, verbal setting. Michelle did, of course, engage in talk with her
classmates during discussion events, but she also talked to them in her mind, arguing and
agreeing and debating, even hours later. In addition to this mental dialogue with her
classmates, she also talked mentally to characters in the novel. She interacted socially
with others in the privacy of her mind.

Implications

This was a case study, with one respondent. The results cannot be generalized to a
population. We can, however, imagine a classroom with Michelle in it. What could we do
in that classroom to help to ensure that she could continue to think deeply about books, to
experience the stories?

We could allow for differences in meaning, permitting the students to explain
their answers, so that each answer could be judged on its merits, rather than discounting
any answer that does not match the “right” one.
We could allow time for students to talk with one another about what they are reading. This practice would allow for social interaction, necessary for learning, and could possibly lead to reflection, enriching the meanings held by the students.

We could allow for varying kinds of response to a text. Consider the five senses. How might they be brought into the reading program, and how might they influence the transactions of the students? Perhaps music, dance, drama, art, and food are some places to start.

We could allow for multiple exposures to the same text. The students could read a text silently, then have it read aloud to them by the teacher or another student. They could listen to the text on a recording, two or more students could read the text in a group, or the student could simply reread the text. If each transaction produces changes in the meaning, the repeated exposures could lead to a richer, deeper meaning.

What goes on in the mind of a reader during her transaction with text? The answer to this question will be different for every reader, and different with every reading. Our goal as educators should be to foster that building of meaning. Instead of expecting one right answer, we must appreciate the reader’s answer. Rather than asking students to academically intellectualize their reading, we must encourage them to personalize it.
APPENDIX

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<tr>
<td>Who/What I thought of</td>
<td>Why</td>
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<td>Day of Week, Date</td>
<td>Read to Self</td>
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<td>Who or What I thought of</td>
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<td>Questions</td>
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Day of Week, Date                              Listening to Taped Discussion

Page #’s   (Chapter #’s)

What Was I Thinking About?                      Why?
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