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Research Question:

What are the effects on students' reading comprehension when they participate in book talks?

Rationale:

It is widely acknowledged in literature that there are many variables that affect reading comprehension such as teacher quality, students' social economic background, motivation and perception as a reader. I felt that my practice was pretty sound with regard to teaching reading but the perplexing difference in reading comprehension and literature response scores demonstrated that there was still a gap in my instruction. According to the subscores on the CST for the last four years, I was effective in teaching reading comprehension. Students did particularly well on comprehension questions. For example, "Who is narrating the story?" or "Where is Lisa writing her postcard from?" The opposite happens when students answer literature response questions such as, "What do you think is the moral of the story?" or "From the details in the story how do you think the character feels about her family?"

Research on language, literature and thinking (Bakhtin, 1981, Vygotsky, Freiere) suggests that talking about literature can transform learning experiences such as reading into cognitive structures. Talking is a particularly good way to develop and extend students' deep understanding of what they have read in all content areas especially to enhance their own personal lives. The overwhelming amount of students in my class scored Below Basic (BB) or Far below Basic (FBB) on the CST. This may suggest that students utilized lower level thinking skills, such as drawing out factual answers from text, recalling facts, and recognizing terms about a concept, rather than utilizing higher level thinking skills that would allow them to transfer and apply concepts to another context.

The book talk was implemented in my classroom at the beginning of the school year (September, 2005) and meets at least twice a week. The objective of the book talk was to

provide experiences such that students could acquire the ability to make new insights, correct misrepresentations and misconceptions, and discover new ways to relate to each other. Initially I took responsibility for assigning book titles, groups and the types of questions: however the students gradually assumed these responsibilities. This transferred responsibility provided an important element of an effective reading program- student motivation.

Through metacognitive strategies students learned to self regulate and thus monitor their comprehension through questioning strategies. Through direct explicit instruction I integrated Blooms' taxonomy of cognitive objectives which required greater depth of thinking. I argue that most teachers including myself despite years of experience do not adequately teach the higher levels of Bloom's, 1956 (Anderson & Krathwohl,2001) taxonomy but rather focus on the phonics or other learning to read skills versus reading to learn because the teacher perceives the student to be a poor comprehender. On the other hand, the teacher who perceives a student to be a good comprehender might expect higher level thinking such as reasoning or applying what they have learned. Eventually a reading version of the *Mathew Effect* develops – ***Poor Readers become poorer readers and Good readers become even better readers.***

Description of Setting:

The student participants are from an inner city school, Dr. George Washington Carver Elementary School, which is located in Bayview Hunters Point (BHP). According to the 2000 US Census, 48% of the residents are African American, 1.3% American Indian, 23 %Asian & Pacific Islanders, 17 % Hispanic and 10% White. The unemployment rate is 13% in BHP which is twice the rate for the city as a whole. The students are from my own classroom with twenty students composed of twelve fourth graders and eight third graders. Eight students are African American, seven Samoan, one Cambodian, three Samoan, and one Tongan.

Data Collection:

There were two tools used for collecting data. Students were videotaped in the fall and spring semesters and the book talks were transcribed and coded. In this procedure the students' questions and statements were examined based on Blooms (1956) & Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) taxonomy. The other source of data was the student's individual CST (2004-05) Reading Comprehension scores.

Project Status/preliminary findings:

The data from the fall book talk suggests that students were focused on the easiest cognitive processes such as recognition and recall of texts. A preliminary analysis of the spring book talks demonstrate that book talk improves students reading comprehension. Students asked more questions which could be categorized under application, evaluation and synthesis. As of the September 2006 of the new school year I will have the new CST scores. I predict that students will show a significant improvement in the literature response section while maintaining their reading comprehension scores as well.

Policy Implication:

The administrator for Dr. George Washington Carver Elementary School has agreed to modify the daily schedule for 2005-06 to include the book talks during the SSR period. After receiving positive feedback from parents and visitors who have watched our book talks, she also suggested that parents be invited to watch their children during these books talks.

Next Steps:

- Share finding with the faculty at Dr. Carver and demonstrate the efficacy of running a book talk.
- Collaborate with the District and have book talks in other schools in the Bayview.
- Continue to pursue my own research and find ways to improve the book talks.