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An On-line Journal  
for Teacher Research

## How Does Talk Around Reading Influence Comprehension in Third Grade?

Karen Gruhn Tomczak

### Abstract

This study attempts to document the efficacy of peer-support and self-monitoring during partnered reading by third grade students as evidenced by their discourse. Pairs of third grade students engaged in partnered reading in a general education third grade classroom. Their oral reading, coaching and conversations were recorded using i-Pod2s over the course of twenty days. The digital audio recordings were then analyzed to determine if the students employed reading strategies, what types of reading strategies they used, and how other discourse between the students influenced reading behaviors.

Reading comprehension lies at the heart of all reading; it is in fact the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1978-79).

For the greater part of 19 months I had been immersed in a graduate program studying reading and hoping to attain my Master of Arts as well as a reading specialist certification. For better or worse, my foray back into the formal world of academia coincided with my transfer into a third grade classroom, having spent the past 11 years in kindergarten and pre-k. I provide this background so that the reader may understand my trepidation when presented with undertaking an action research project on a new “playing field” and my dubiousness that other classroom teachers might find the information from my study useful in their practice. After all, I had so much to learn about how third graders learn, particularly how best to support their evolution into proficient readers! With notebook in hand, sticky notes at the ready, and words of encouragement from both my research supervisor and my principal, I set out to document what was happening while my students were engaged in literacy activities in our third grade classroom. Presented here are findings applicable for consideration by both classroom teachers and administrators. Perhaps even more exciting is that the method used for data collection is both teacher and student friendly.

As a teacher in a general education third grade classroom, my intent is to provide both instruction as well as scaffolded and independent practice with the skills and strategies used by proficient readers. The Report of the National Reading Panel (NIH, 2000) indicated that proficient readers, in addition to having developed phonemic awareness, utilize their knowledge of phonics and vocabulary, read fluently, and understand how and when to use comprehension strategies. An implication for educational practice, then, is that students need to know how to develop understanding as they read and teachers need to find effective methods of instruction to build student awareness of the metacognitive processes that skilled readers use. This would include opportunities for students to practice integrating reading comprehension strategies and skills outside of a task-specific reading exercise. In addition to providing excellent reading instruction, teachers need methods beside standardized tests to determine if and how students are transferring these developing strategies and skills to independent practice on a daily basis in the classroom setting. As Allington explained (2002), students who received effective instruction in reading achieved greater success on standardized tests, and perhaps more importantly, students developed “academic proficiencies well beyond the ability to score higher on reading and writing achievement tests” (p.742).

Having considered such writings as those of Reutzel and Wolfersberger (1996) and Roskos and Neuman (2011), I understood the impact creating a literacy-rich climate in the classroom has on literacy learning. Looking for practical guidance, I had devoured the advice and expertise of Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmerman (1997), Debbie Miller (2002), Donalyn Miller (2009), and "The Sisters," Boushey and Moser (2006). I had built an impressive classroom library with books sorted by series, genre, author and reading level. I had put into place a flexible and student-centered, student-driven literacy block. Following the "Daily 5" model (Boushey and Moser, 2006) to create a structure of independence, students had been coached in and had practiced acceptable behaviors and routines to self-select from predictable sets of activities while I was engaged in small group or individual instruction. Student options included listening to fluent reading at a listening center or on the computer, writing about books they had read or writing books of their own, word study, reading to themselves, and reading to a partner.

A cursory glance around the classroom would reveal that students appeared to be actively engaged in literacy learning. I could easily assess the process and product of their writing, visually track involvement at listening centers and interactive computer programs, and through discussions with my students gauge whether or not they were making "good fit" book choices and understanding the texts they were choosing for independent reading. However, measuring the efficacy of partnered reading was more elusive. I had continually and explicitly introduced, explained and then modeled through think alouds various reading strategies and had posted references to these strategies prominently in the classroom. Student practice within small, teacher-guided groups indicated that, for the most part, the children were able to use such techniques as "back-up and reread," "chunking words," "flip the sounds," "skip it," and "check for understanding" purposefully. However, whether students were transferring strategy use to partnered reading to assist one another in monitoring their reading for comprehension was unclear. Student talk during partner-reading could be observed from afar, and students self-reported that they were using reading strategies and discussion to check for

understanding; many students even delineated the specific strategies they chose to check their understanding as they read. In spite of this, the skeptic, and perhaps pragmatist, in me gave pause. With what seems to be so little time in a school day and with an urgency to use that time wisely, it became imperative that I know if the goals of partnered reading were being achieved. Were participation in partnered reading and the conversations between partners evidence of strategy use to enhance comprehension? This is significant because, as stated by Keene and Zimmerman (2007), "Monitoring is quite simply vital to comprehension" (p. 33). A review of the literature devoted to elementary student self-monitoring and peer-supported discourse as related to reading comprehension (Van Keer and Verhaeghe, 2005; Brown et al, 1996; Marion and Alexander, 1996; Brown, 2006; Sarasti, 2007) provided focus for my research question. How was student talk around reading influencing reading comprehension in my third grade classroom?

## Theoretical Framework

One of the theoretical frameworks that informs my study is metacognitive theory. In *Lenses on Reading*, Tracey and Morrow (2006) defined metacognition as "the process of thinking about one's own thinking" (p. 61). Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) examined peer tutoring of fifth and second graders to determine if collaboration with both same age and cross aged tutors increased student self-monitoring for comprehension. As applied to reading, Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) described metacognitive strategies as "self-monitoring and regulating activities that focus on the product and the process of reading, support readers' awareness of comprehension, and assist in the selection of cognitive strategies as a function of text difficulty, situational constraints, and the reader's own cognitive abilities" (p. 292). Comprehension, then, is reliant upon a reader's ability to think not only about the message in the text while reading, but also about what to do when comprehension breaks down.

Pressley's (2000) finding indicated that proficient readers independently employ a number of metacognitive strategies during reading, including "fix up" strategies to clarify understanding. This is

consistent with the conclusions of Brown et al. (1996) from their study of struggling second grade readers' use of comprehension strategies. They stressed the importance of the "orchestration of cognitive processes" rather than individualized use of strategies. Learning to use a strategy, or over reliance upon a single strategy is not sufficient. Competent readers need to know how to flexibly use multiple strategies when reading.

In my third grade classroom, as occurs in many elementary classrooms, students engage in partnered reading with peers. Student pairs sit side by side and negotiate the shared reading of a book, sometimes each with their own copy of the text, sometimes with a book shared between them. These paired readings ideally involve the use of student discussion and coaching as peers collaborate to decode and comprehend text. According to Vygotsky, this collaboration and cooperation between peers is essential to the learning process. Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, and the scaffolding considered key to learning from a social constructivist perspective, is also relevant to my study. During the social exchange of partnered reading children have an opportunity to scaffold one another's learning and support each other as they try out reading strategies. Palincsar (1998), in her analysis of empirical research on social constructivist teaching and learning, concluded that collaborative discourse, specifically which generates explanations, is associated with learning gains. Manion and Alexander (1996) conducted a study to examine the effects of peer collaboration on recall, cognitive strategy use and effectiveness, and metacognitive understanding of strategy use. They found that fourth grade students, especially when paired with a more knowledgeable peer, benefited from the modeling and scaffolding provided through collaboration. Collaborative partnered reading experiences are consistent with the socio-cultural perspective, which also grounds my study. Au (1997) stated that the socio-cultural lens "begins with the assumption that reading, like other higher mental functions, is essentially social in nature" (p. 184). She also asserted "both success and failure in learning to read depend on students' interactions with their teachers and one another" (p. 199). Social constructivist learning theory is evidenced in the scaffolding that occurs during

partnered reading, the assistance provided by a more knowledgeable peer through guidance, prompting and coaching. Student partnered reading provides a context that is both social and collaborative.

Partnered reading, a socially mediated learning opportunity, also encourages "transactional" comprehension (Rosenblatt, 1978) as students talk and share personal connections and thinking about text. Brown (2006), in her study examining the functions that student talk served during partner reading in a second grade classroom, found that the students "used their socially constructed language to make sense of texts" (p. 36). In his study of the effects on third grade students' comprehension using reciprocal teaching, Sarasti (2007) cited Block, Schaller, Joy, and Gaine (2002) stating "dialogue and discourse during the reading process are an important part of processing information and making sense of what has been read" (p. 18). These studies seemed relevant to what I hoped to discover about the dialogue that took place between my third grade students while engaged in partnered reading.

This study employs multiple lenses. According to social constructivists children learn from their social interactions. Metacognitive theory, the thinking about reading that occurs during these social interactions, brings to the front the importance of strategy use during reading. The interaction between reader and text and between readers to build meaning from the text is clearly aligned with transactional theory. In addition, proponents of collaborative learning argue that discourse among students and scaffolded collaboration enhances their learning. The "student talk" that occurs during peer supported partnered reading in my third grade classroom is the means by which data would be collected for this study. What this study aims to clarify is how discourse with their peers during partner reading influences understanding of text by third grade students.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in the researcher's general education classroom were third grade students whose parents consented to their inclusion in this

study. The children attended a Title 1 school in a suburban area that serves over 450 students in grades pre-kindergarten through third grade; many transient students come to this school from urban areas. The study included the audio recording of six student pairings: three partnerships of girls, one of boys, and two boy/girl partnerships. Students' reading levels ranged from 28 to 40 as determined using the Developmental Reading Assessment, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (DRA2); three partnerships included students of like reading level and three included students of divergent reading level. The data included in this study includes transcriptions from i-Pod2 recordings made by the fifteen children for whom I received parental consent; of the fifteen students who recorded their readings, some were excluded due to the poor quality of the audio. I also excluded recordings and transcriptions of readings between a first-year English Language Learner (ELL) and her non-ELL partner since transcripts of this "partnership" revealed virtually complete dominance by the non-ELL partner. Therefore, this study examined the content of discourse between student-pairs representing 86% of the students of my general education classroom whose paired reading transcriptions were considered for inclusion in the study, or twelve of the fourteen students.

At the time of the study, students in my classroom were free to select partners for the "read to someone" segment of our literacy block. Initially, as partnered reading was first introduced, texts were teacher-selected based upon DRA2 scores of specific students. Aligned with our established guided reading groups, students with the same text could seek one another out to partner read during our literacy block. During the first weeks of the school year choosing a space in which to read, how to sit closely enough to use a quiet voice, and use of a "coaching sheet" (Appendix A) were all modeled and practiced. After several weeks of daily participation in homogeneous partnered reading, students began to ask to permission to expand outside of their teacher-established reading groups to include self-selected texts from our classroom library with partners of heterogeneous ability. Palincsar and Brown (1987), as cited by Palincsar (1998), had concluded that "heterogeneous groups of children with diverse comprehension skills attained competence by using the learning dialogues

more quickly than groups of more homogeneous ability" when using reciprocal teaching to comprehend text (p. 349). While peer coaching employed in my classroom did not correspond directly to the reciprocal teaching model, I agreed that opportunities for partnered reading could and perhaps should include sharing of texts between friends of divergent reading abilities to support and encourage coaching and comprehension monitoring. I took a leap of faith and trusted my students to make the important decisions of book selection and reading partner and hoped they would apply metacognitive strategies while reading to monitor their comprehension. It became immediately clear that I needed evidence of the efficacy of the partnered reading occurring in my classroom on a daily basis and I needed a reliable method of data collection.

## Implementation and Data Collection

My school reading specialist, for whom I am ever indebted, armed me with i-Pod2s, and with her help we introduced the students to the recording and playback features. Pairs of students were given i-Pod2s to try out. The enthusiasm ran high! Once everyone had had practice with the device, i-Pod2s were made available daily for students' use during partnered reading.

In addition to the audio recordings, I gathered data with the use of an after-reading questionnaire (Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to interview students to determine how they were thinking about reading and making decisions as readers. The questionnaire asked the students how they selected a reading partner, determined which book to read together, and which strategies they used during the partnered reading. The results of the questionnaire are exhibited in Table 1. Throughout the study I also recorded anecdotally in my field journal instances when students spontaneously referred to or overtly used a reading strategy during large group discussions or during what came to be known as our occasional "Show and Share-A-Strategy" time at the end of the day - informal discussions about their reading and how they used strategies that had been previously introduced to the class.



As a daily occurrence, students self-select partners and engage in "Read to Someone" as a choice activity while I work with individuals or small groups. It was hoped that the data collected via audio recordings during these partnered readings would provide evidence of reading strategy use through peer conversations and coaching. Information gained from the recordings could then be used to plan continued assistance in the form of intensive, differentiated instruction on using specific strategies as well as in using a multiplicity of strategies more flexibly. In addition, the teacher could make modifications with the knowledge of which reading pairs appeared to engage in productive dialogue to enhance strategy use, as opposed to those that did not offer support and coaching.

The i-Pod2s were introduced to all students in early November, after they had been involved in the daily "Read to Someone" activity for approximately two months. Recordings were played back and student talk was transcribed and categorized to determine types of peer support and strategies used during partnered reading. As stated by Pressley (2001):

"Comprehension will only be maximized when readers are fluent in all the processes of skilled reading, from letter recognition and sounding out of words to articulation of the diverse comprehension strategies used by good readers (e.g., prediction, questioning, seeking clarification, relating to background knowledge, constructing mental images, and summarizing)."

With this in mind, and considering the "big ideas" of the report of the National Reading Panel (2000), student-employed strategy use was categorized to correspond with four components of effective reading. Phonemic awareness, a fifth component of the NRP report was not considered in this study. A simple tally table was used to count incidences of decoding assistance (use of phonics skills), use of a dictionary (to understand unknown words or to assist with pronunciation), rereading (for fluency, to correct decoding errors, to use context to increase understanding), questioning and conversations about the text and personal connections (to develop comprehension). The results of this analysis are

displayed in Table 2 (Documented reading behavior during partnered reading).

Decoding errors left uncorrected were also included in the analysis. Looking at these miscues and determining if they interfered with meaning would provide information on which comprehension strategies students were not attempting to use or those they were unable to use proficiently. Their miscues would also indicate instances when metacognition, monitoring for comprehension, was breaking down.

## Results

### Analysis of Student Book Selection Questionnaires

A student interview questionnaire (Book Selection Questionnaire, Appendix B) was developed to provide a mechanism for students to self-report strategy use as well as to determine if and how students were thoughtful in their choice of reading partner. Students dictated and I took quick, abbreviated notations of their responses. Student responses were analyzed for common themes and categorized. A tally chart was then created, responses were reviewed again, and I recorded the number of incidences of each type of response to each question. The results of this analysis are listed in Table 1 (Questionnaire Results).

The questions were intended to provide me with a "quick look" at whether students could articulate their decision making with regard to book selection, partner selection, and use of reading strategies. An analysis of student responses revealed that they were, in fact, able to articulate metacognitive strategy use for choosing reading partners and to deepen or clarify understanding of text. The information obtained in the surveys was cross-referenced with the audio recordings of the students to determine if the reported strategy use and the actual strategy use were the same. Excerpts from student interviews follow. (All student names used in this study are pseudonyms.)

Teacher: How did you choose your reading partner?  
Tyler: I knew he was interested in dragons and so am I, so I wondered if he wanted to read with me.

Table 1: Questionnaire Results

Question	Types of Responses	Number of Students Who Chose Response
How did you decide to read this book?	Book looked interesting: Prior interest in topic: Friend recommended: Other:	6 out of 12 3 out of 12 2 out of 12 1 out of 12
How did you choose your reading partner?	Asked someone who is not usually a reading partner: Asked someone with like interest: Asked someone who is on reading level with self: Not clear:	5 out of 12 5 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12
What strategies are you finding most helpful as you read? (Some students provided multiple responses to this question)	Back up and reread: Sound it out/chunking: Think about reading: Use of comprehension cubes: Stop and think: Write about reading: Skip it – keep reading and figure it out: Practice fluency: Use a dictionary: Use of Peer Coaching:	7 out of 12 3 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12 2 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12
Is this book easy, a challenge, or just right? How do you know?	Easy: I know the words: I understand the story: Just right: There are some words I don't know: Words are not too hard or too easy: I can understand the words: Challenge: The words are challenging:	2 out of 12 1 out of 12 6 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12 1 out of 12

Tyler’s previous knowledge of his intended partner’s similar interests is confirmed by Joey’s response.

Teacher: How did you decide on reading this book?

Joey: My sister and I are interested in dragons. We watch movies about dragons and have dragon toys.

Teacher: How did you choose your reading partner?

Tyler: He [Tyler] picked it [the book,] and I asked him if he wanted to read and he said, “Yes.” I also thought he’d be a good fit because he’s smart and helpful.

Tyler's response indicates that his criteria for selecting a reading partner included the ability of his partner to be "helpful." Chelsea, on the other hand, made her decision of reading partner based upon the compatibility of their reading level:

Teacher: How did you choose your reading partner?

Chelsea: He's (Eddie) on my level in reading. We can read challenging books together without having someone who can't read the words.

Doneyea explained her choice of partner based on another consideration:

Teacher: How did you choose your reading partner?

Doneyea: I didn't have a reading partner, and I asked Amy. We like the same genre.

Gambrell (2011) points to the motivating factors that increase student reading achievement. Among these factors is a students' ability to make decisions about the material they read and the social interactions they engage in around reading. Her findings clearly support the practice of allowing student choice of reading partner and text based upon their own criterion.

Students consistently indicated that they were using strategies to help them during reading. When queried as to the reading strategies they found most helpful as they read, students most often identified "back up and reread" (7/12), "sounding out/chunking" (3/12), "thinking about what we read" (3/12). One pair of students was rereading an entire short chapter book because "the first time we were rushing and not stopping."

Another pair of students reported in their questionnaires that they were working on fluency and expression during their partnered reading of *Marvin Redpost: Class President* (1999). A part of the transcribed conversation between Doneyea and Tyler affirms their intentional strategy use.

Doneyea: OK...read with expression next time, right?

Tyler: Like this, like this...

Doneyea: Hold on, hold on. I found one. Like... "You need to clip your toenails!" said Marvin. "You should clip"...ok...ok.

Tyler: Like this... I bet him a million dollars!

Doneyea: Yeah. That's very, very good.

## Analysis of Digital Audio

### Recordings

The use of digital recording provided an opportunity to listen in on students' partnered reading. A total of eighty-three minutes and forty-one seconds of recordings done over twenty days was used for analysis. Student recordings ranged in length from three minutes and eleven seconds to sixteen minutes and six seconds with a mean length of seven minutes and 13 seconds.

Table 2 documents five types of discourse identified from the transcribed audio recordings of partnered readings as well as the occurrence of each type of discourse. Listed in order of frequency of use, student talk is categorized as: rereading (for fluency, to correct decoding errors, to use context to increase understanding), questioning and conversations about the text, decoding assistance (use of phonics skills), use of a dictionary (to understand unknown words or to assist with pronunciation), and personal connections (to develop comprehension).

Decoding assistance, or coaching toward decoding, occurred six times. An example of this peer coaching occurs between Amy and Doneyea as they consulted their "Coaching Sheet." Following is an excerpt taken from their transcribed partnered reading of the book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever* (2011).

Doneyea: (pauses while reading the sentence "Well, the Tell-a-Teacher station just ended up being a convenient place for the bullies to hang out and find their next victims.")

Amy: Coaching or time? (pause)

Amy: Do you need coaching or time?

Doneyea: Umm, coaching.

Amy: OK, let me go get my coaching sheet

Doneyea: con...

Amy: What strategy have you used?

Doneyea: I found it...I sound out the word...Well, the Tell a Teacher Station just ended a...never mind, I didn't...

Amy: What strategy have you used?

Doneyea: I think "flip the sounds" so far.

Amy: Go back and reread. Think what word would probably make sense there.



Donyea: Well the Tell a Teacher Station just ended up being a *blank* place for the bullies to hang out and find their next victims.

Table 2: Documented reading behaviors during partnered reading

Type of partnered interaction	Number of instances
Decoding assistance: use of phonics skills	6
Use of dictionary: to understand unknown words or to assist with pronunciation	2
Rereading: for fluency, to correct decoding errors, to use context increase understanding	37
Questioning/conversations: to develop comprehension	24
Personal connections: to develop comprehension	1
Decoding errors left uncorrected	21

Donyea: hmmm...I thought...I don't...next one.

Amy: Chunk the sounds.

Donyea: OK. I'll do that. Con-vee...Can I sound...can I get the dictionary?

Amy: I'm coaching.

Donyea: OK. Next one.

Amy: I'm gonna tell you the word. Convenient.

Unsolicited, spontaneous partner-provided decoding is evidenced in exchanges such as that between Angel and Mia while reading the picture book *Pumpkin Eye* (2001).

Mia: tate-er-ed

Angel: tattled, I mean tittered, no...tat-ered, tattered

Mia: tattered rag, toothless hags, pointed tails, blood red nails

Analysis of the data also revealed students used the dictionary as they were confronted with new vocabulary. One such interaction between partners Chelsea and Eddie during a partnered reading of the book *An Alec Flint Mystery #2: The Ransom Note Blues* (2009) is shared below.

Chelsea: I don't know what this word is.

Amy: So what do you think would fill in the blank?

Eddie: Um, rep-ree-mand-ed.

Chelsea: Maybe we should get a dictionary and figure out what this means. It's always good to stop and think about what you know. So...

Eddie: Let's see. What was it?

Chelsea: Go to the "r's" – the r-e's. rep-ree-minded, something like that. We need the r-e's.

Eddie: Yeah. Oh, reprimanded. There's reprimand.

Chelsea: So, just add the -ed on it.

Eddie: Yup.

Chelsea: Reprimand is a criticize [*sic*] a person's services especially from a position or....

Eddie: Oh, now I get it! It's like when somebody criticizes somebody.

Chelsea: Ok. Can you spell the word out for me so I can write it in my dictionary? ... You know, criticizes has an -es on the end?

Rereading, for prosody or comprehension, was the most commonly documented reading behavior. As indicated in the student responses to the Book Selection Questionnaire, students also self-identified this as the most prevalently employed reading strategy. Angel's persistence while reading *Class Picture Day* (1999) with her partner Mia is transcribed below. Clearly she is aware of the disconnect between what she is reading aloud and the print she is reading and makes adjustments as she rereads the text.

Angel: I'm sticking my tongue out my mouth...umm..I'm sticking my tongue...no, I'm sticking out my tongue.

Also widely employed between partners was questioning and conversation about the text.

Below is another transcribed exchange between Amy and Donyea as they paused to talk about a section of their book, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever*. It shows evidence that they felt compelled to stop and make sense of what they had just read. They use summarization and make text-to-self connections to collaboratively clarify understanding of the text just read.

Amy: Ok. So, wait, let's summarize it. So, the teachers are trying to put a stop to bullying.

Doneya: Yes. You know, can I make a connection to that? That's not just that school because we do have a bullying rule and the principal will step right in...Like how the girls was [sic] fighting and the vice principal.

Amy: Had to come.

Doneya: Yeah. And you know that's good how they put a Tell-A-Teacher-Station.

Amy: Actually, kids should have hung around there!

Doneya: Yeah. You know what, it's just like this but we don't have a box, we actually go and tell a teacher.

Amy: Yeah.

The dialogue between Jasir and Joey when they paused to check for understanding while reading *Marvin Redpost, Class President* (1999) demonstrates their use of summarization to collaboratively build comprehension.

Jasir: What do you understand?

Joey: That Miss North brought Marvin to her house and there was a dog named Waldo so fat he looks like a walrus.

Jasir: What I understand is that Miss North is going away for seven days and Marvin has to take care of Waldo, and he is one-hundred nineteen years old. And, uh, Marvin petted him behind the ears, and, uh, Miss North showed him around.

Sometimes students used their reader's notebooks to write questions such as in the exchange between Chelsea and Eddie while reading *An Alex Flint Mystery: The Ransom Note Blues*.

Chelsea: Let's write down, "Why are... I wonder why cracking cases is so important."

Eddie: I forgot to write down words from the clues.

(Students flip through pages of book)

Eddie: Keep reading, your turn. We're on this page, page 4.

Occasionally pairs rolled "comprehension cubes" to generate questions to think about the story:

Amy: Do you want to roll the dice or do you want me to roll the dice?

Doneya: Umm, you roll first.

Doneya: How did...

Amy: How did...How did the teacher make the Tell a Teacher station?

Doneya: You know what? How did the vice principal stop their...those girls from fighting?

Amy: I mean, would you...how did... I was wondering the same thing because it doesn't even tell you where the vice principal is, they might not even know about it.

Another example of student use of comprehension cubes occurred when Dania and Carly stopped during their reading of *The School Play from the Black Lagoon* (2011):

Carly: Why will...

Dania: Why will...why will Hubie be better in the audience?

Carly: OK

Dania: But they already told us that...

Carly: I said "why will." I don't know why he will.

Dania: Because it's the safest place. Remember?

The verbal exchange between these readers also demonstrates the efforts of a more proficient reader, Dania, help to clarify understanding of text for her peer.

Self-monitoring was evidenced through use of decoding strategies, re-reading of text, dictionary use, and discourse around the story including verbally sharing connections. In addition to stopping to engage in spontaneous conversation about the text, three pair of students used "comprehension cubes" to formulate questions to answer about their understanding. While rereading was, as expected, the most predominant strategy identified in an analysis of the transcriptions (37 instances), student conversations to address questions and wonderings about the text and to clarify understanding and make connections were widely used (24 instances). I found it interesting that the audio recordings did not contain any off-task discussions.

Analysis of the recorded readings and conversations revealed twenty-one instances of

students not addressing decoding miscues, however only four of these miscues appeared to alter meaning as they are mispronunciations of words likely unfamiliar to the reader. An example of this type of miscue was noted when a student decoded the word legitimate as /leg//i//mate/ and neither reader nor partner made any attempt to correct the miscue. Non-meaning altering miscues were more common as were those such as when a student pronounced photographer as /photo//grapher/, yet in succeeding conversation with her partner referred to the student getting her class picture taken.

Students' use of a dictionary, their interactive dialogue, and attempts to make a connection to word study all reflected use of metacognitive thought as students synthesized information from the text with their current understandings.

## Discussion

In their 2005 study, VanKeer and Verhaege (2005) questioned the dubious readiness of children at the second grade level to be fully prepared and able to assume the role of tutor. While the participants in this study were a full grade level older, I was surprised to determine that the third grade students in this study often effectively coached their reading partners and used a wide breath of strategies. I had thought that more students would rely heavily on re-reading the text, entirely skip miscues made by themselves or their partners and that off-topic conversation would be widespread. Given the results of Van Keer and Verhaege's research, I was less than certain that my third grade students were prepared to provide effective coaching or articulate their use of strategies. What my data showed was that I had made a gross misjudgment on the ability of my third grade students to remain productively engaged in metacognitive reading strategy practice and their ability to offer support to their reading partner.

Their talk around reading clearly provided peer support and encouraged self-monitoring by my third grade students during reading. My data analysis has led me to include in this study four primary themes that validate student use of digital

audio recordings during partnered reading. Student accountability with regard to on-task behavior, student enthusiasm for participation, immediacy of feedback to underscore the purpose of the task, and ease of use as a data collection device for both students and teacher indicated use of this technology as a viable classroom tool.

**Accountability** – Without exception students who chose to use the i-Pod2s to record partner reading were keenly aware that I would be playing back their partnered readings and listening to their conversations. This increased accountability measure may have been instrumental in motivating focus for some students who might otherwise have veered off-task.

**Increased enthusiasm** – On the days that the i-Pod2s were available they were in high demand! As documented in the student surveys, students who may not have collaborated before were choosing partners based on who was available to read with the chance that they might miss out on reading into the i-Pod2 on a particular day. Use of technology appeared to motivate students to engage in partnered reading.

**Purpose** – The purpose of partner reading, I believe, became clearer through the use of the i-Pod2s. The audio recordings provided feedback to the students as they monitored their fluency, expression, coaching, and self-corrections. Student awareness that the recordings would be used as a tool for the teacher to evaluate their performance as reading partners likely served to remind students to use their coaching sheets and perhaps reference the strategies board in the classroom. For the researcher, the use of the digital audio recordings provided a means to easily receive feedback on student learning while remaining available for small group and independent instruction.

**Effective method of data collection** – While guidelines for emergent practitioner research caution against use of digital audio recording, I have found that for my purposes it was a highly effective and efficient method of data collection. A teacher-researcher, by definition, cannot be

divorced from the instructional demands of the classroom. I-Pod2s provided an easy, student-friendly device for collecting data that can be stored and accessed at the teacher-researchers convenience.

## Conclusions

Brown and colleagues (1996) asserted "true self-regulation is the product of years of literacy experiences" (p. 34). However, their study also indicated that leading young children toward more mature reading behaviors through instruction, modeling and practice appears to have some positive effect assuming the quality of those interactions reflected appropriate flexibility in strategy use. This study found that third grade students could approximate and often proficiently use some strategies to support one another in the use of self-monitoring for understanding. To answer the question proposed in this study, I would argue that talk around reading in third grade provided opportunities for students to collaboratively build comprehension of text. Students in this study effectively encouraged one another to reread to clarify understanding, made personal connections, collaborated to make meaning of unfamiliar words and generated discussion related to the characters, plot, and text structures of stories. The data analyzed indicated that the use of digital audio recording provided a means whereby students could monitor their reading both for prosody and strategy use. It appeared that third grade students who have received instruction in and practice using a variety of strategies to assist in both decoding and monitoring comprehension could capably apply these strategies during monitored partner reading.

I am eager to share the results of this study with both my colleagues and administrators. Teachers may find the use of this technology, readily available in our district, a valuable resource. While affording the students motivation to read in a partnership and opportunities to practice skills and strategies, it also provided the teacher a method to collect data on individuals and pairs of students that would otherwise likely go unnoticed. Clearly, complete analysis of student recordings is time consuming; however, a less exhaustive analysis of the audio still provided information

that was useful for consideration in planning instruction. Administrators will be interested to know that the monetary investment in technology for classroom use is well worth the expenditure as teachers use the data to plan and provide relevant instruction in strategy use.

## Limitations

While use of the i-Pod2's provided a number of benefits in terms of accountability, enthusiasm, purpose and ease of data collection, there were some downsides in using student-recorded audio. Primarily, there was lack of clarity in some audio thereby making it unusable for this study. In addition, student communication that was not verbal and which may be "coaching" (e.g. facial cues, pointing at text) were not documented.

Another limitation to this study is that student use of metacognitive comprehension strategies could only be monitored for the passages that were recorded on audio. Therefore, it is possible that students read passages in the extended text without full comprehension, and since not every passage was summarized or discussed by the students, these lapses in understanding would not be documented.

Students who were included in this study were representative of a range of reading proficiency levels. The study used both heterogeneous as well as homogenous partnerships. The importance of analyzing the effects of both types of partnerships as related to reading strategy use may be beneficial. Additional analysis to determine the incidence of specific strategies employed by student partnerships of varying levels of reading proficiency would also be useful. Follow-up research may also determine if self-selected partnerships as opposed to teacher-determined partnerships based upon reading level provide increased and long-lasting metacognitive strategy use.

## Looking Forward

In the months following my study and the introduction of digital audio recording as a component of partner reading in my classroom, the popularity of using i-Pod2s remains high. In addition to using the i-Pod2s for partnered reading, some students have requested use of



them when reading independently to check their fluency. While I do not replay every student recording every day, I have made it part of my practice to take time each week to quickly "eavesdrop" on the dialogue that takes place between students as they read. Generally I choose audio of specific students to listen for specific strategy use; that is, for a student who has been working on fluency, I will check that audio to listen for increased prosody while reading; if we've been practicing stopping to "check for understanding" with a partner, I will be tuned into students' conversations about the story.

As a result of my study, some teachers I have shared my results with have begun providing i-Pod2s for student use during partnered reading. They, too, have reported an enthusiastic response from their students. My colleagues welcome the ease of collecting information about their students' collaborative use of skills and strategies as they read, and they appreciate the apparent motivation for accountability to the task that the i-Pod2s encourage.

As new technologies become available for classroom use, I hope to find continued ways to utilize their appeal to students as a means to motivate and enhance literacy learning in third grade.

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Appendix A



## **Coaching or Time?**

### Coaching Sheet

- ❖ What strategy have you used?
- ❖ Go back and reread.
- ❖ Skip the word and come back.
- ❖ Chunk sounds together.
- ❖ What word could fit here?
- ❖ Look at the pictures. The word is right here.
- ❖ I am going to sound this word out with you.
- ❖ I am going to tell you the word.

Appendix B

Book Selection Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What book are you reading during “Read to Someone?”
2. Who is your reading partner?
3. How did you decide to read this book?
4. How did you choose your reading partner?
5. What strategies are you finding most helpful as you read?
6. Is this book easy, a challenge, or just right? How do you know?