Student -selected texts, independent reading

and the effects on reading comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This synthesis article reviews ten studies in which the self-selection of student texts is a common factor. These studies directly or indirectly show how self-selection of texts has an effect on student's reading comprehension. In addition to these studies, I examine six synthesis reviews highlighting research, eight miscellaneous scholarly articles and reports. Much research shows the positive impact of self-selected texts within the contexts of programs such as Silent Sustained Reading (S.S.R.), independent reading, reading/writing workshops and other adapted programs. Some research has been deemed to be inconclusive as to the effectiveness of such programs. As a result, there has been a great debate over what the focus of pedagogical practice should be. The way the results of some of these studies have been portrayed has come into question, as has the way some of these studies have been conducted. Which studies are to be disregarded and which are to be regarded highly in the canon of authentic research, has been a hot topic,

as has the question of what the criteria for distinction should be. This article not only examines research, it also examines the factors shaping pedagogical practice in programs incorporating the student self-selection of texts and the highly complex nature of reading comprehension itself.

Introduction

"I fake readed all my books" (Anonymous 7th grade student, October 2006).

A confession such as the one above, whispered in confidence to a classroom observer, has the potential to evoke a smile and silent laughter. Such was my initial reaction. But, that still, small voice echoes in my head and it has haunted me to this very day. How many of our students could admit this? This confession was made by a student who is an exceptional reader. Why would such a student pretend to read a book? To find an answer to this question, we need to think back several years (perhaps a bit longer for some of us) to a time when we ourselves could make a statement such as this. As English majors and

educators many of us love to read, so we may be a little biased, so keep this in mind as you remember.

I'm sure there were many times when an assigned classroom text was engaging and interesting to you, especially when it was presented by the right educator. On the other hand, I'm quite sure there were many more times when you found texts to be dull and you "fake read" books. In the study of Reeves (2004), all of the resistant and reluctant readers "went to great lengths to avoid assigned reading, and many stated that they could pass tests related to those texts without ever having read the book" (as cited in Lenters, 2006, p.138). Not only is boredom a factor in the construction of the resistant reader, lack of connection to text, skill level and genuine disinterest in reading are problems as well.

One classroom action researcher, Beers (2003), was concerned with her "fake readers," those who read the words, but failed to engage texts at a deeper level. These students viewed reading "as a mechanical process of figuring out and saying the words" (as cited in Kelley & Clausen, 2006, p. 41). The studies, (Gambrell, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Kasten & Wilfong, 2005; Warrican, 2006; Worthy & Mooreman 1998) all have found that students begin to loose interest in reading at the middle school level and their desire to read decreases sharply. The National Council of Teachers of English (2006), point out the disturbing fact that over eight million students between fourth and twelfth grade read below grade level and three thousand of these at-risk students drop out of high school daily.

It is crucial that we foster a love for reading in our students that will last a lifetime. The self-selection of texts by students can achieve this purpose. The studies (Oldfather, 1993, Paradis et al. 1996, Worthy et al. 1998, Kasten and Wilfong 2005, Pitcher et al. 2007) have all shown that text needs to be meaningful and authentic in order for students to connect with it. The studies (Gambrell, 2002; Harmon, Keehn & Kenney, 2005; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005; Kelly & Clausen 2007; Lenters 2006; NCTE, 2006; Oldfather,1993; Richards, 2001; Stewart & Paradis, 1996) all have found students are empowered by being able to select their own texts and their desire to read increases. Worth (2004) cites studies as far back as 1936, showing that "time spent reading in school and opportunity to self-select reading materials promote increased positive feelings about reading and improved achievement" (p. 256). There are many independent reading programs that incorporate student-selection of texts in classroom practice such as: Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), book clubs, book bistros, literary circles, Nancie Atwell's reading workshop and adaptations of all of these. The sky is the limit.

As educators, we want our students to develop a love for reading as they become critically literate. We need to create an environment and adopt classroom practices that provide the best conditions for this development. We are the tillers of rich soil. As students take root and flourish, our world reaps a rich harvest.

Brilliant educators are not lackadaisical about classroom pedagogical methods. We need research findings to inform our classroom practice. It is critical that we examine whether the practice of the student-selection of texts is an effective means of increasing reading comprehension. It is imperative that we have ample evidence to support the effectiveness of our pedagogy when our students face the pressures of state testing that determines classroom funding.

The crux of this synthesis

The goal of this paper is to review and interpret the results of studies that investigate the use of student selected texts and show how this practice affects reading comprehension. I will examine elements that make several independent reading programs successful and also examine obstacles that hinder their success. Not only will I examine research informing practice, I will also examine the highly complex nature of reading comprehension itself and common misconceptions by parents, administration and educators that shape student perceptions and attitudes.

 Methodology

In order to determine the effectiveness of student-selection of texts, will review ten studies incorporating this practice, six synthesis reviews highlighting research, and eight miscellaneous scholarly articles and reports. At the outset, I set out to find direct quantitative empirical evidence that would be the foundation and basis of my synthesis. Not only did I find quantitative evidence, I also found a larger body of qualitative data to inform my research.

What studies and research have shown

All the evidence was highly positive in nature in regard to the effectiveness of independent reading programs that incorporate student-selected texts (Fisher, 2004; Gambrell, 2002; Harmon, Keehn & Kenney 2004; Kasten & Wilfong 2005; Lenters, 2006; Richards 2001; Warrican 2006; Worthy, Turner & Mooreman 1998). Studies have shown that students involved in independent reading programs incorporating the student selection of texts have shown improvement on tests scores (Fisher, 2004; Krashen, 1998). Participants and educators involved in these studies have found such practice to be highly motivational. It has been found that motivation is the key to success in many reading programs.

In two of the studies that I examined, students had a negative attitude toward reading because of the Accelerated Reader (AR) computer program (Battraw, 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005). The students involved in these AR programs were allowed to choose their own texts but the texts available to these students were limited to correlating test material in a computer data base. These students saw reading as task oriented or drudgery. In the study of Kasten & Wilfong (2005), students that were participating in an AR program began implementation of a "Book Bistro," which involved independent reading, student selected texts and discussion groups. Student positive attitudes toward reading increased from 3.2% to 96.8%. Teacher's perceptions of student attitudes toward independent reading increased to 98% positive. In my examination of the studies that incorporated the practice of the self-selection of student texts, I did not find evidence to suggest that this practice or the practice of independent reading have any negative effects on reading comprehension. All of the studies that I have examined show that the practice of student selected text in independent reading programs are an effective means of increasing motivation and reading comprehension (see table 1 in the appendices).

Many studies have been misinterpreted by educators, due to perceived fallibilities of the research. Some research has been deemed by some educators, to be inconclusive as to the effectiveness of independent reading programs. The way in which the results of these studies have been portrayed has come into question, as has the way some of these studies have been conducted. Which studies are to be disregarded and which are to be regarded highly in the canon of authentic research, has been a hot topic, as has the question of what the criteria for distinction should be. As a result, there has been a great debate over what the focus of pedagogical practice should be.

The great debate

In the year 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) detailed a report which stated that there was inconclusive evidence as to the effectiveness of independent silent reading in classroom practice. All of the studies examined by the NRP only involved the practice of

SSR. There were no studies examined by the NRP that involved other methods of independent reading in classroom practice. The NRP did not take into account the length of these studies. The studies that the NRP included were only short-term, some lasting only a matter of weeks. Since these studies only focused on SSR, only minutes of student reading time was taken into account. The NRP's statement that there is inconclusive evidence as to the effectiveness of independent silent reading in classroom practice is a generalization that has been widely misinterpreted. Here is what the NRP had to say about independent silent reading:

There has been widespread agreement in the literature that encouraging students to engage in wide, independent, silent reading increases reading achievement. Literally hundreds of correlational studies suggest that the more that children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. However, these findings are correlational in nature, and correlation does not imply causation. No doubt, it could be that the more that children read, the more their reading skills improve, but it is also possible that better readers simply choose to read more (National Reading Panel Report, 2000).

At the time of this report, many studies had been done showing the positive effects of independent reading, but most were disregarded by the NRP as not meeting their criterion for an ideal study. The NRP analyzed fourteen studies researching the effectiveness of SSR on reading comprehension. The very nature of some of these studies have been questioned by educators who also question the NRP's criteria for which studies were to be included or not included in the report. Regardless of their positions on the importance of independent reading, a large number of educators have agreed that the findings of the NRP panel have been widely misinterpreted. (Beers, 2004; Cooper, 2005; Kelly & Clausen 2007; Krashen, 2001, 2004 & 2005).

After the NRP published its findings, those who opposed independent reading programs such as SSR, could claim to be justified in ignoring or rejecting them. Those in favor of independent reading programs saw this as a direct blow, undermining the very foundations of critical literacy. The move away from traditional pedagogy has been slow. The shift from the use of exclusively direct teaching methods into a more meaning centered, constructivist approach in classroom practice is still met with resistance by some educators.

On more than one occasion, Stephen Krashen has cited the failings of the NRP report. Krashen (2004) points out that the NRP did not include long-term studies, and short-term studies are more likely to be inconclusive in their findings. Krashen posits that "in long-term studies (those longer than one year), sustained silent reading students performed better in eight out of ten studies, and the remaining two studies showed no difference"

(p.20). Krashen cites Carver & Liebert (1995) as a study that the panel should not have included because students in this study were limited in their selection of texts and provided with extrinsic motivators. Krashen (2005) also notes that some of the inconclusive studies showing no difference were comprised of advanced and established readers. If the panel were to throw out all ten of their inconclusive studies, they still would have been left with four positive studies. Another fact that Krashen (2001) points out is that "the case for reading does not rest entirely on studies of sustained silent reading" (p.120).

In my research, I have examined the studies of sustained silent reading and other independent reading programs that also incorporate the student selection of texts. Studies have shown common elements that make independent reading programs effective. These same studies have also shown that there are potential hindrances to the effectiveness of such programs.

Elements of an effective independent reading program

●The power of choice

Students are empowered when they are allowed to choose their own reading material and when educators recognize the importance of student voice (Fisher, 2004; Lenters, 2006; Worthy, Turner & Mooreman 1998). A study was conducted in 1993, by Penny Oldfather, an Assistant Professor and investigator at the National Reading Research Center, during a period of eight months. Almost one third of Oldfather's diverse fifth and sixth grade combined class had special needs. Oldfather's research points to the "importance of choice [as a] motivaton for literacy" (p. 672). Oldfather's students became highly motivated by her constructivist meaning-centered approach. Student voice and agency were valued, as was the importance of class interaction and the self-selection of texts. According to Oldfather, "students said that having choice was one of the main reasons they felt so motivated to learn" (p. 678). In 1998, Worthy et al. interviewed 35 ELA teachers who "agreed that self-selected reading is an important way to improve student's reading attitudes and achievement" (296).

●Student interest

Recognizing that each student has different interests and preferences is a key element in an effective reading program (Fisher, 2004; Gambrell, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005; Lenters 2006; Stewart & Paradis 1996; Warrican 2006). As

Stewart & Paradis (1996) found, "there is a direct connection between [interest] and choice. That is, choice leads to interest" (p. 473).

●**Student connections to text**

When students are interested in reading material, they can take ownership of it and make connections to it. In order to make connections the text needs to be authentic and relevant (Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005; Lenters, 2006; Oldfather, 1993; Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinesingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt, & Dunston, 2007; Stewart & Paradis, 1996; Warrican 2006). Bintz (1993) found that

> *When reluctant young adolescent readers initiate readings based on their own interests and questions, they deal with texts in more complex ways, such as relating stories to their own lives and recording information they find interesting* (Ivey & Broaddus (2000) p.71).

The more connections students make to a text, the more likely they are to engage with it on higher levels, using valuable critical thinking skills. The National Council of Teachers of English recognize that the self-selection of texts increases motivation and also increases the connections students make to texts. They cite (Alvermann, et al., 2000; Moje et al., 2000):

> *Many texts must be read in common by an entire class, as the curriculum dictates, but allowing some discretion for students to choose their own texts increases motivation, especially because these selections can help students make connections between texts and their own worlds. Of course, reading self-selected texts also increases reading fluency, or the ability to read quickly and accurately* NCTE (2006).

Critical consciousness is an important metacognitive function and an aspect of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is highly complex. Some educators still perceive it as rote memorization of vocabulary and the correct identification of words.

●Time

Time allotted to reading was one of the most common factors cited in successful independent reading programs (Ivey & Broaddus 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005; Kelly & Clausen, 2007; Pardo, 2004; Stewart & Paradis 1996, Warrican, 2006; Worthy et al., 1998). Providing time for independent reading is key to motivation in students. Ivey & Broaddus (2000) surveyed students to find out what they enjoy most in their reading language arts classes. Students mentioned free reading time "twice as many times as most other activities" (p. 69). In the three year study of Stewart & Paradis (1996), students were evaluated using quantitative measures. Qualitative results were also observed in student interviews. In this junior high literature-based developmental reading program, students were allowed the self-selection of texts found in classroom libraries and were allowed to read at their own pace in a variation of Atwell's reading workshop. Students were exposed to a variety of genres, fiction and non-fiction. Reading logs and journal entries showed improvement in reading, increased speed, fluency and understanding and remembering. There were also improvements in overall school performance and test performance. Students received higher grades and there were improvements in reading out loud. In interviews at the end of the study, students were asked what elements of the program had led to their improvement. Students cited the power of choice (which increased interest), time and practice.

●Variety

A variety of texts and exposure to diverse genres is crucial to a successful independent reading program. (Kelly & Clausen, 2007; Richards, 2001; NCTE, 2006; Worthy et al.,1998). Richards (2001) interviewed students and teachers to find out their perceptions of reading and reading comprehension. The lack of variety in material and instruction was a common lament of the students that were interviewed.

The majority of students wished that their teachers would offer varied types of reading instruction that included, books on tape, games, dramatic enactments, reading books of their choice, teacher reading aloud to the class, making reading fun and simple, individualized reading, grouping for instruction rather than whole class instruction, reading good books, reading long books, using computers (p. 9).

Access to a variety of reading materials is especially important in high-needs schools where students do not have an abundance of books at home. In many of these cases, teachers buy the books that students will ultimately read (Krashen,1998). Texts at a variety of skill levels are also needed in classrooms. An easier read can serve as a gateway to more critical texts as readers tastes develop and their comprehension

increases. Those students who are reading texts that appear to be above their reading level, may be comprehending some sections and finding enjoyment in them (Krashen, 2005). Since there is such a need for variety of reading materials in the classroom and because of the lack of funding in many cases, educators must be innovative in their means of procurement of these texts. In the studies that I examined, many schools held book drives and some classes made special trips to local libraries.

●**Modeling reading for enjoyment**

Setting an example by modeling reading for enjoyment is an important practice. Reading independently along with students shows the importance that we place on independent reading (Fisher, 2004; Kelly & Clausen 2007, Worthy et al., 1998). In the study of Fisher (2004), all school staff was to drop everything and read during SSR time. It was even written into the contract of a company hired to do work in the school building, that they stop working and read during designated times. Not only does modeling reading set a good example for the student body, many educators find it to be a time that they look forward to as well. I observed in a classroom last semester and I was actively engaging in SSR with the students. They were curious to see what I was reading and I was curious about their choices as well.

●**Modeling multiple comprehension strategies**

Successful reading instruction includes modeling good reading strategies to help students connect with texts. (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002; Pardo, 2002) mention some of these strategies as "monitoring, predicting, inferring, questioning, connecting, summarizing, visualizing and organizing" (as cited by Pardo, 2004, p. 277). (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Pressley 2000) have all found that the use of multiple reading strategies in combination to be very powerful (as cited by Pardo, 2004). Guthrie et al. 1996 found that "teaching students to monitor their own literary practices, to look for information, to interpret literature, and to draw on their own prior knowledge enhances motivation" (as cited by NCTE, 2006). Harmon, Keehn & Kenney (2004) found that tutors in a summer reading program were successful in modeling multiple reading strategies to tutees, in the form of "think alouds." Tutees were quick to pick up on the use of these strategies and began to use them by themselves without any prompting.

●**Discussion groups**

Lit circles and book clubs encourage student interaction and stimulate critical thinking. (Richards, 2001; Gambrell, 2002). (Almsi, 1995; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000) found "considerable qualitative and quantitative evidence that book club formats and literature discussion groups enhance students' comprehension of text and their attitudes toward reading" (as cited in Richards, 2001, p. 14). In their excitement, students will share and recommend favorite books with their peers (Kasten & Wilfong 2005, Ivey & Broaddus 2000). (Conniff, 1993; Gambrell, 1996; Smith & Connolly, 2002) have also found that "studies of the characteristics of good readers show that proficient readers talk about favorite books with others and choose books recommended by friends (as cited in Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 658). Discussion groups will keep students from the "fake read," as they will have to share their reading experiences with peers. Discussion groups will also help to provide students with adequate feedback which is a very import aspect of an independent reading program (Kelly & Clausen 2007).

●Assigning meaningful responses to text

In the studies involving the Accelerate Reader program, many students find the computer generated questions distressing. These are the same students who viewed reading as dull and task oriented (Battraw, 2000; Kasten & Wilfong 2005). Students need assignments that will engage their critical thinking skills rather than simply test their ability to memorize text. Students like projects that are fun and group activities rather than assigned questions (Worthy et al. 1998).

●Multiple literacies

The use of multiple literacies in the classroom increases the number of ways in which students make connections to texts and connections to their world. It is a powerful tool to motivate students, increase metacognitive awareness and help students to become critically literate. A variety of genres of printed texts such as newspapers and magazines are important as well as electronic literacies. Students who have access to computers, find them to be an excellent source for finding information and for communicating. (NCTE, 2006, Pitcher et al. 2007, Richards 2001)

Hindrances to an effective independent reading program

I have found that successful independent reading programs incorporating the student selection of texts have common elements that make them effective. I have also found that these same programs also experience common hindrances that threaten their

effectiveness. These hindrances arise out of common misconceptions about independent reading and reading comprehension.

● **Misconceptions about independent reading and reading comprehension.**

Rather than encouraging students by modeling reading for enjoyment, many educators give their students the impression that the only purpose for reading is to memorize and increase vocabulary (Battraw, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus 2000; Lenters 2006; Richards 2001; Worthy et al.1998). The survey of Richards (2001) shows that teachers have misconceptions about the very nature of reading comprehension and how to teach it, as is evidenced by their responses. I have included the survey of Richards (2004) in my appendices (table 2). Reeves (2004) recognizes that because English teachers naturally love reading, they also have the potential to be blind guides.

> *English teachers naturally tend to be those who love reading and who have experienced success with it most of their lives. They are therefore pre-disposed to view reading, particularly of the literary cannon, as something that all students will love, and may easily overlook the irrelevance their students may perceive and the struggle they may experience* (cited in Lenters 2006 p.140).

Because of the way reading has been misrepresented by teachers, it is no wonder that many students have a poor attitude toward reading in general and come to see it as task-oriented and find no pleasure in it (Battraw, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus 2000; Pitcher et al. 2007; Richards 2001). In as survey conducted by Battraw (2000),

> *Many students perceive reading as essentially school-centered and task oriented: required, structured, formalistic, involved with academic chores such as homework, plot, charts, and tests, enforced through threats and punishments, and essential in the future but not often enjoyable in the present* (p.16).

Some parents and administrators see independent reading as "enrichment rather than instruction" (Worthy et al.,1998, p.300) Consequently, independent reading programs often fall by the wayside or are the first to go when teachers are pressured to make instruction time "count." Some parents don't see the importance of independent reading programs like SSR. In one case, a school board member "received numerous inquiries from parents regarding SSR… parents did not understand why this activity needed to be

done in school. They wanted to see teachers teaching" (Cooper, 2005, p.459). On the flipside, many students are not given time to read independently in homes where parents don't see independent reading as "real" homework. Teachers have cited that the biggest reason for not providing time for independent reading is the pressure to teach skills for state exams (Worthy et al., 1998) despite the fact that studies have shown that students who are provided time for independent reading do better on tests than those who are not engaged in the practice (Fisher, 2004; Krashen, 1998). Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Stanovich, 1986 have also found "evidence that time spent reading leads to achievement gains" (cited in Worthy et al.,1998, p.302).

Of course we want students to do well on state exams, but can any exam truly prepare a student for life? Do exams foster a love for reading in students that will make them life-long readers? Do exams encourage critical awareness, leading to critical literacy? In many cases reading comprehension truly defies quantification because of its complexities.

The complexities of reading comprehension

There has been a common misconception in the definition of reading comprehension. Some educators still perceive comprehension as rote memorization of vocabulary and the correct identification of words in text. Kelly & Clausen (2007) were distressed with their findings in regard to student reading comprehension.

> *In the area of comprehension, over 50% of our students had difficulties with prediction, summary writing, interpretation, and reflection. Most disconcerting was that 89% of our students did not demonstrate metacognitive awareness* (p.41).

Many students, educators and those in administration still see reading comprehension as simply related to test results. Critical thinking engages skills beyond simply comprehending words. Reading comprehension is a multi-faceted metacognitive process (Harmon et al. 2004, Kelly & Clausen 2007, Stewart & Paradis 1996). Kuhn (1999) recognizes that critical thinking incorporates highly complex intellectual skills such as:

●*Metacognition: The process of thinking about your thinking and the awareness of when you are having difficulty comprehending.*

●*Metaknowing: The realization that knowledge is constructed by human beings, rather than existing external to humans and awaiting discovery.*

●*Metastrategic knowing: The realization of the repertoire of strategies an individual has available and the ability to select the proper strategy for the task at hand.* (cited in Johnson & Freeman, 2006. p. 3-4)

In the form of think-alouds, we effectively model comprehension skills to our students and we show them that knowledge and learning begins within ourselves. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," so goes the tired, but timely old adage.

As we take the constructivist approach, recognizing that meaning begins in students, we help them to activate their links to prior knowledge. Pardo (2004) recognizes that "teachers teach students how to make text-to-text, text-to-self and text to world connections so that readers can more easily comprehend the texts they read" (p. 274). Students activate a series of schema in their long-term and short-term memories as they make these connections. Multiple factors such as culture help to constitute meaning, but meaning is different to each individual. Critical thinking is only the top of the iceberg. Critical thinking leads to critical consciousness and ultimately to critical literacy. Johnson and Freedman (2006) define these concepts for us

Definitions of Critical Concepts:

Critical Thinking	Critical Consciousness	Critical Literacy
The ability to use logical thinking, analysis, comparison, and contrast, questioning, evaluation and summarization.	The ability to recognize the conditions that result in the privileging of one idea over another within a particular culture or society.	The discussion of how power is used in texts by individuals and groups to privilege one group over another.

The National Council of Teachers of English (2006) recognizes that learning and meaning begin in students as they link with texts at critical levels:

> *Effective literacy education leads students to think deeply about texts and use them to generate ideas and knowledge. Students can be taught to think about their own thinking, to understand how texts are organized, to consider relationships between texts, and to comprehend complexities.*

Such complexities include concepts of hegemony, discourses of power and concepts of critical theory. As we embrace a critical pedagogy in our classrooms, we are also embracing a pedagogy of possibility. Positive change in society begins with empowering the next generation to become critically literate lifetime readers. As educators, this is our passion.

Conclusion and implications for further research

The naked king must finally be confronted by his subjects. In order to justify the practice of the student selection of texts and independent reading in our classrooms, quantitative evidence to support our pedagogy is often required by those who are hesitant to embrace it. This is the nature of the beast: we must confront decades of flawed pedagogy head on using its own flawed standard. Unfortunately, in obtaining this quantitative evidence, reading comprehension is reduced to measured quantifiers such as the length and frequency journal entries and test scores. Even so, there is a need for such evidence. Studies must be done in correlation to each other. All types of independent reading programs must be measured by the same quantifiers and within the same time frames. There is a definite need for more long-term studies, as the effectiveness of an independent reading program can hardly be charted in a matter of weeks. As educators and researchers who embrace a pedagogy of possibility, we are passionate about global literacy and we must work together to achieve our common goal.

How can one effectively measure critical consciousness and critical literacy? The complexities of student writing can be assigned rubrics, but these measures rely on qualitative judgments. Perhaps someday, electronic activity in specific hemispheres of the brain could be monitored in students in order to truly quantify metacognitive awareness.

Table 1. Description of primary studiesincorporating SST and independent reading as a common factor Author(s)	Participants	Purpose	Methods	Findings
Battraw (2000)	10 students and 6 teachers in a Junior High School in the southwestern United States.	To find out how students and teachers viewed reading and reading comprehension	Personal interviews of teachers and students who regularly used the A.R. program	Students viewed reading as school-centered and task oriented, rather than a pleasure. Teachers saw reading comprehension as recitation and memorization rather than gaining a deeper understanding of the text.
Fisher (2004)	The students and faculty of a California High School	To assess the impact that independent reading has on achievement	Gates-MacGinitie scores were compared in the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year. Two groups were compared. One group practiced S.S.R., the other did not.	Quantitative analysis showed that students who were provided time to read independently on a daily basis had statistically higher reading scores.
Harmon, Keehn & Kenney (2004)	Tutors and tutees from two summer tutoring programs. In one program there were 22 adolescents ages 14-18 yrs. The second group consisted of 16 students ages	To assess struggling adolescent readers. To examine comprehension strategies in use. To find what motivated these students. To find the most/least effective	Tutees were given Atwell's (1998) reading survey. Tutors allowed students to choose texts themselves. Think-aloud procedures were used. Student response logs,	The strategies tutees used most often, (ranked from the highest to the lowest) were questioning, inferring /predicting, vocabulary and situational awareness. Other strategies used to a lesser degree were retelling, monitoring, making connections, confirming/disconfirming, predictions and visualizing. Tutees were motivated by

	14 - 16.	program practices. To assess tutor perceptions.	case study reports and transcriptions were analyzed using qualitative measures.	interpersonal relationships, student choice, individualized instruction, high-interest books and interesting analogies for think alouds.
Kasten & Wilfong (2005)	Two studies: one focused on 62 ninth grade students in the northeast, another focused on 22 seventh grade honors students. 24 Teachers were surveyed.	To find out if the implementation of a program (Book Bistro) would increase student motivation to read and change attitudes toward reading.	Student and Teacher surveys, one prior to implementation and another after.	In the ninth grade study, student positive attitudes toward reading increased from 3.2% to 96.8%. Teacher's perceptions of student attitudes toward independent reading increased to 98% positive.
Oldfather (1993)	Students of a combined 5th and 6th grade classroom in southern California.	To find out what would motivate students to read.	Student surveys were conducted	Students were motivated by a meaning centered pedagogy which was responsive to student expression, voice and agency. Students were motivated by self-expression and empowered by choice.
Pitcher et al. (2007)	11 researchers worked at eight different sites administering surveys to 384 adolescent students, 100 were interviewed.	To find out what motivates students to read.	Surveys and conversational interviews were conducted	Students were motivated by choice of authentic reading materials, multiple literacies and lit.circles.
Richards (2001)	24 Mississippi elementary and secondary teachers and 144 of their students.	To assess student and teacher concepts of reading and reading	Student and teacher interviews were conducted	A majority of teachers saw reading as recitation and memorization. As a result of teacher attitudes, their students saw reading as burdensome academic work.

		comprehension.		
Stewart et al. (1996)	Approximately 1000 students in a program evaluation, conducted in a Wyoming junior high school.	To assess the effectiveness of a multi faceted reading program and student attitudes toward reading	Test scores were examined prior to program implementation and after. Students were interviewed. Journal entries and reading logs were also examined.	The study showed improvement in reading, increased speed, fluency and understanding and remembering. There were also improvements in overall school performance and test performance. Students received higher grades and there were improvements in reading out loud. In interviews at the end of the study, students were asked what aspects of the program had helped them. Students cited the power of choice which increased interest, time and practice.
Warrican (2006)	17 "reluctant readers" in a Caribbean high school.	To assess the effectiveness of a reading program and student attitudes.	Students were surveyed at the outset of program implementation. Data was compiled from data collected from student reading logs, observations and interviews.	This study showed the importance of S.S.T., time for independent reading, group discussion, text variety/diversity for students with different interests and abilities.
Worthy et al. (1998)	35 grade six language arts	To collect data on the practice	Teachers were interviewed and	A majority of the teachers practiced S.S.T. to some

	teachers from nine schools.	of S.S.R. and find out what factors contribute to effective classroom practice	data was collected and compiled.	degree and felt that choice was important for positive attitudes and motivation. Teachers cited the most important features of self-selected reading as: providing regular reading time, listening to student preferences, modeling reading for enjoyment, assigning meaningful responses to reading and sharing books. Barriers to S.S.R., were: parent/administration/faculty view of such practice as being *enrichment* rather than instruction, Students not being allowed time at home for such practice and pressure of statewide testing.

Table 2

Teacher Survey Questions and Examples of Teachers' Responses (Appendix A, Richards 2001)

1)What is reading comprehension?

-The ability to make sense of the printed page.

-When readers can fluently read a passage and be able to explain it in detail.

-The ability to understand a passage.

-Understanding what you are reading.

-When students can tell me the events in a story in which they occur.

-When readers understand information in written form.

2)How do you know that students have comprehended what they have read?

-Through assessment measures and observations and checklists.

-When they can retell a story.

-When they can answer questions and tell what the story is about.

-By asking questions.

-I test them on sequencing, vocabulary words, and sentences from the story.

-Okay, Before a child can read words, um, they need to know the sounds of letters which is the most important step in reading. I ask my students questions too. I also tape record books for auditory learners.

3) What do you know about multiple literacies?

- I don't know a lot. I would think multiple literacies would be that they are technologically literate.

- I am not familiar with the term.

- Never heard of it.

-I think it is using different ways of teaching literacy.

-Drama and puppets.

-Learning styles. I have studied a great deal about learning styles.

How do you teach reading comprehension?

- By asking questions

- By reading to students, asking them questions about the story (picking it apart).

- By asking questions and discussing the story.

- I teach vocabulary and sequencing.

-Okay, I teach reading comprehension through word play and reading and writing activities. I use flash cards to help them memorize words. I teach them how to blend sounds in words. I use K-W-L.

How do you assess students' reading comprehension?

- I ask them to retell what they have read.

-We answered that question already…through formal and informal ways.

- By asking questions and having students answer in a verbal and written form.

- I test them on vocabulary in each story and the sequencing of events. I use the discussion questions at the end of the stories.

- By observation.

- An easy one… I use oral questioning and written questions.

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