

**The Relationship between Literature Circles and Student Response to Literature
and Literacy Skills: A Synthesis of Existing Research**

This synthesis reviews four studies which explore the relationship between Literature Circles, a peer-led collaborative learning strategy, and students' spoken and written responses to literature, attempting to evaluate the effects Literature Circles have on reading comprehension. The studies referenced herein reveal that the teacher plays an instrumental role in both the initial and ultimate success of any type of collaborative learning environment, reminding us that no matter how purportedly failsafe a learning strategy may be, good teacher modeling and instruction are imperative to self-sustaining and successful Literature Circles. At the conclusion of the paper, suggestions are made for further research and successful implementation of Literature Circles in English Language Arts classrooms.

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ABSTRACT

This synthesis reviews four studies which explore the relationship between Literature Circles, a peer-led collaborative learning strategy, and students' spoken and written responses to literature, attempting to evaluate the effects Literature Circles have on reading comprehension. The studies referenced herein reveal that the teacher plays an instrumental role in both the initial and ultimate success of any type of collaborative learning environment, reminding us that no matter how purportedly failsafe a learning strategy may be, good teacher modeling and instruction are imperative to self-sustaining and successful Literature Circles. At the conclusion of the paper, suggestions are made for further research and successful implementation of Literature Circles in English Language Arts classrooms.

Introduction

For many years, prominent educators have repeatedly, as in over and over, bemoaned the decidedly nefarious movement toward standards-based testing, which typically only requires a level of comprehension needed to respond to factual recall prompts in a single word or sentence. Despite the fact that it has been widely agreed that traditional teaching strategies and assessment utterly fail in actualizing a citizenship of lifelong readers, which seems to be the professed and idealized goal of the English Language Arts teacher, many of these teachers still strictly adhere to traditional models which overemphasize teaching and testing for recall of facts. Many teachers are still largely perpetuating the notion that there is some single correct meaning to be eked out of a text. However, there are teachers out there who are letting go of the reins a bit and implementing the peer-led collaborative strategies that forward-thinking educators such as Nancie Atwell, Randy Bomer, Harvey Daniels, and their ilk have been outlining in how-to form for many years. If you have read the ELA and reading journals, if you have attended a conference in the past ten years, you have probably seen that teachers are running reading/writing workshops, book clubs, and Literature Circles with great student success. When Harvey Daniels came aboard in the early nineties as a pioneer and champion of Literature Circles, he did not fancy being a renegade; he was intent on “bringing the established adult literacy structure of voluntary *reading groups* into the public schools” (Daniels 2006). Adult readers are not bombarded with comprehension questions after they read, and if they were, they would probably avoid the whole production. The logical step seems to be avoiding this line of assessment with our students. But, even if we cannot scrap the traditional structure entirely, we can at least implement collaborative classroom strategies which will instill a sense of ownership in students concerning their education, following a Language Exploration and Awareness approach to the teaching of literature which focuses on student discovery, application, and learning, rather than teacher lecturing and student memorization (Andrews, 1994).

Aside from the stirring goal of inspiring lifelong readers in our classrooms, as we know that reading as a hobby is simply not for everyone, and that conducting any sort of comprehensive quantitative measures of this would be impossible, the research can at least prove that collaborative, peer-lead learning strategies such as Literature Circles are just as effective as traditional approaches to the teaching of literature in relation to students’ levels of reading comprehension, if not even more effective. The purpose of this article is to more closely examine not only the relation between Literature Circles and reading comprehension, but also their relationship to student motivation to read and the development of dialogic discourse and literacy skills such as critical thinking.

Background Information

Talking and Text Comprehension

In order to discuss the effects that Literature Circles and collaborative learning have on reading comprehension and other types of student response, it is necessary to first discuss the relationship between talk and text comprehension. Talk as it relates to thinking about or comprehending text has been a longstanding point of interest for educators and reading researchers. And using talk during reading provided the way for researchers to investigate the interactions that readers have with text (Olshavsky 1976/77; Piekarz, 1956; Squire, 1964; Waern 1978, 1980). Talk during reading also emerged as an approach for teaching reading comprehension (Kucan & Beck, 2003). Palincsar and Brown's (1984) early research with Reciprocal Teaching, an instruction strategy which encourages dialogue between teachers and students about text, put talk about text at the center of comprehension instruction. These seminal studies experimented with increased participation in group talk about text, and they found that students involved in talk about text (in both the individual and group environments) performed better on standardized tests of comprehension.

The importance of talk during reading also became the focus of a study of two groups of college students (Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu, & LaVancher, 1994). Students in a self-explanation group were asked to read a text, stopping after each sentence to explain what they understood. Students in a rereading group read the same text twice, without the option of explaining what they understood. Students in the self-explanation group outperformed the rereading group in answering literal and inferential questions about the text.

In the same vein as the Chi et al. (1994) study, another seminal study conducted by Loxterman et al. (1994) worked with individual students and provided evidence that talking during reading supports student comprehension. Yet, the studies also raised an interesting question: would the discourse environment, whether it is an individual speaking aloud as they read or a group involved in discussion, make a difference in students' comprehension (Kucan & Beck, 2003)?

Talking about Text in Groups

In the mid-90's, reading comprehension researchers began to focus on the discourse environment of group discussion in classrooms and in small groups within a classroom. Comparisons of discourse environments can be found in the work of Almasi (1995) who studies peer-led and teacher-led discussion groups and found that students involved in peer-led discussions talked more and provided more elaborate responses than those who were in the teacher-led groups. The work on discourse environments conducted by both Almasi (1995) and McKeown et al. (1996) "suggests that the group context of a discussion supports a specific kind of talk, one that may be characterized as dialogic, a term used by Bakhtin (1975/1981) to refer to the awareness of possible perspectives or interpretations (Kucan & Beck, 2003). Dialogic discourse promotes a floating standard of correctness, allowing multiple perspectives and interpretations which function as new ways of thinking and catalysts for further discussion.

Talking and Thinking

How then do students come to treat their talk and the talk of others as ways of thinking (Wertsch & Toma, 1995)? According to Mead (1934/1967), individuals internalize the social process of conversing with others by creating an internal social forum in which they not only consider what others would say in response to their own ideas, but also take on the roles of others in order to better represent their points of view (Kucan & Beck, 2003). Even the earliest and most seminal of educational theorists recognized the importance of social interaction in the educational process. Dewey (1916/1966) stressed that it is in the process of explaining ideas to others that we build an understanding of them for ourselves. As teachers, I am sure that we can easily find truth in Dewey's assertion, since we should be able to admit that we still learn the full complexities of things as we learn to explain them to others. Like Mead and Dewey, Vygotsky (1978) saw participation in a social context as a necessary condition for internalizing higher mental functioning. The work of Kucan and Beck (2003) with discourse environments provides evidence not only that talking about text in both the individual and group contexts supports reading comprehension, but also that group discourse is more conducive to an environment which produces dialogic discourse, an environment in which students move towards more intellectual modes of thought, rather than just literal/factual recall. These studies support the somewhat recent push from progressive educators toward more group based and peer-led forms of classroom discourse, such as Literature Circles, book clubs, and other forms of collaborative learning.

Literature Circles

“The primary goal of Literature Circles is to help kids fall in love with books” (Kasten 1995).

Judging from the body of work done on Literature Circles to date, it is impossible to gauge who invented the concept of Literature Circles—or Literature Discussion Groups or Book Clubs, as they are also commonly referred to as—but the seminal writer and researcher concerning Literature Circles, the one who needs to be cited in every piece of literature in order to give it a shred of credibility, is Harvey Daniels. And according to Daniels, Literature Circles can be traced back to the 1980’s, though they were not widely implemented as Daniels and Co. prescribe or referred to as Literature Circles until the mid-to-late 1990’s. Daniels defines Literature Circles as “small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same article, poem, book, or novel and talk about it with each other” (Daniels 2004). Where Lit Circles diverge from the typical formula of most collaborative learning strategies is that they should be relatively untainted by teacher manipulation because students choose the reading materials, they work in groups of three to six students, grouping is by text choice and not by ability, and most importantly, students dictate the majority of the Lit Circle curriculum: making the reading schedule, generating their own questions, facilitating their own discussions, and sharing what they consider the highlights of the Circle with the other groups. Though there are individual roles to be chosen when beginning your classes in working with Lit Circles (such as discussion director, connector, summarizer, passage finder, etc.), Daniels (2004) asserts that “[i]f you listen in on some discussions, you’ll find that the conversations are ‘leaderless,’ meaning that every member has personal responsibility for contributing to a lively, productive, and on-track discussion” (p. 4). The students’ ability to dictate their own curriculum, engage in and participate in discussion to a high degree with their peers, and the responsibility of being prepared for the sake of discussing literature with their peers contribute to the success of Lit Circles in improving comprehension and attitudes toward reading. Obviously, if implemented by disinterested teachers, or those who do not feel comfortable relinquishing control of their classroom to their students, Lit Circles could easily fail. But, collaborative learning has been proven to improve comprehension as well as increase perspective and dialogic discourse (Kucan & Beck, 2003; Almasi, 1995; McKeown et al., 1996). And, Literature Circles in particular are an effective collaborative learning strategy not just because they are proven to improve comprehension when

it is tested, but because through mini-lessons and effective teacher modeling of what good readers do when they read, teachers can essentially show students how to comprehend texts when they read and discuss in their Lit Circles (Day & et. al. 2002).

Methods

In an ideal situation, this review would consist solely of empirical research which examined the effects of Literature Circles on reading comprehension and other literacy skills in students at the secondary level in English Language Arts classrooms. But, as it stands as of now, there are scant empirical studies on Literature Circles available. The lion's share of the extant research on Literature Circles mostly exists in diluted articles, as most of the teachers who have been courageous enough to hold Literature Circles and book clubs within their classrooms are not serving as scientific researchers and collecting or providing explicit empirical data in the findings of their experimentation; they are most often enthusiastic teachers who enacted this mode of collaborative learning in their classrooms after attending a workshop or being introduced to the work of Harvey Daniels, and then report their findings unempirically, but again, enthusiastically, in the various teaching journals. Anne Simpson (1995) discusses Literature Circles run in Australian classrooms and makes large claims of their success, citing many words of approval from both teachers and students, but her writing ultimately lacks any detail of the way the Lit Circles were run or resulting empirical evidence and basically constitutes a how-to article, even though neither Daniels nor any of the other seminal researchers are cited. Bonnie Burns (1998) work with Literature Circles falls prey to the same kind of telling snippets of transcribed student dialogue which took place in purportedly successful Literature Circles, but the student dialogue constitutes much of the detail. Burns also chimes in with more how-to, which is necessary when writing about a learning strategy that the assumed audience will likely know little about, but is disappointing because the success cannot be accounted for other than the snippets of approving dialogue. Even the research of Daniels (2002) himself is limited to comprehension scores. Daniels reports that in reading, his Chicago schools which implemented Literature Circles "outstripped citywide test score gains by 14% in 3rd grade, 9% in 6th grade, and 10% in 8th grade. In writing, they topped citywide gains by 25% in grade 3, 8% in grade 6, and 27% in grade 8" (2002, p. 1). Aside from the numbers though, Daniels has no hard data to show how Literature Circles were effective or even if they were largely responsible for the reported gains. The present review is also limited in its scope because the extant empirical research conducted with Literature Circles is focused entirely on elementary and middle school students, so those studies are the focus of this review.

The question which guides the research remains: How do Literature Circles affect reading comprehension and other literacy skills? Despite the fact that the chosen research examined herein is exclusive to elementary- and middle-level reading and ELA programs, this does not in any way imply that the findings of the research are not relevant to secondary educators. Talk about text is imperative to increasing comprehension and fostering critical thinking skills and acknowledging multiple perspectives (Kucan & Beck 2003), and should be a regular occurrence, if not a central activity, at all levels of education.

Results and Discussion

The both quantitative and qualitative studies referenced herein gauge the success of Lit Circles mainly in tests for improved reading comprehension (Brown, 2002; Farinacci, 1998; Davis et. al., 2001). Davis et. al. (2001), in addition to exploring the effects on comprehension, also set out to discover how effective Lit Circles would be in reaching reluctant readers and increasing their motivation to read. Short et. al. (1999), not studying just the effects of Lit Circles on student skills and comprehension, examined how teacher talk in different teacher roles affected student outcomes in Lit Circles, as well as Lit Circle outcomes when teachers were and were not present.

The qualitative study conducted by Farinacci (1998) occurred in a second grade class of twenty-four students, with nine of them tracked closely by the teacher, evaluating their progress on participation in discussion, quality of response in journals and discussion, textual references made to support and clarify their ideas, and observed interest in others while talking. Farinacci found that students took ownership of their discussions, progressing over time so that they no longer relied heavily on their written journal responses to sustain discussion. Students also made observed improvements in comprehension: they clarified meanings, offered interpretations, negotiated ideas, and learned from each other's perspectives. Farinacci notes that students "were sharing, thinking about their books from different perspectives, hearing each other's feelings and attitudes. In some ways these, their most important gains, could not be truly documented" (p. 10). The researcher fails to recognize though that these gains could be documented and even categorized by types of talk. Farinacci's findings reveal dialogic discourse taking place in the Lit Circles, and it would have been interesting to categorize the students' talk in order to find out what percentages of the students' discussion was personal, textual, intellectual, or off-topic, in order to diagnose for modification of the circles.

In an action research project enacted by Davis et. al. (2001), two separate elementary classrooms, a fourth and a fifth grade, were used to examine the effectiveness of Lit Circles in improving reading comprehension and motivation to read. In the fourth grade classroom of Laura Davis, students made a significant improvement when tested for reading comprehension: one third of them were failing the reading subtest of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) before the Lit Circles were implemented, and on the posttest 20% more were passing the reading subtest of the TAAS. Pre and post attitudinal surveys also revealed an increase in student motivation to read and self-confidence in reading. As part of the same action research project, Alexa Camacho focused the research with her fifth grade classroom specifically on using Lit Circles to address reluctant readers. She specifically targeted six students who demonstrated low motivation to read on an attitudinal survey and in her observations. The pretest survey revealed that only 52% of her students enjoyed talking about what they read “sometimes” or “a lot.” Following the study, 96% indicated that they liked talking about books either “sometimes” or “a lot.” Students also made gains of 25% on the STAR test, a computerized comprehension test.

The only available research on Literature Circles that has been conducted with an experiment group and a control group is Barbara Brown’s (2002) study of using Lit Circles in two of her eighth grade classrooms, which were comprised of 80% African Americans of low socioeconomic status. The experimental group was assigned Literature Circle discussions, while the control group continued with traditional textbook instruction. There were no significant differences in the mean test scores on the pretest, as was expected, but on the posttest, there was a significant difference in favor of the experimental group. Brown found that the textbook used with the control group did not seem to hold the attention as well as the novels selected for the Lit Circles, which featured stories that were more relevant to the personal culture of the predominantly African American student population. This presumed enhancement of personal interest in the texts could have largely contributed to the increases in comprehension scores, and likely did, but no reader surveys were conducted to find out.

Unlike the previously referenced studies which primarily focused on the effects of Lit Circles on student comprehension and attitudes toward reading, Short et. al. (1999) examined how teacher talk in different teacher roles affected student outcomes in Lit Circles, as well as Lit Circle outcomes when teachers were and were not present. The previously discussed studies largely fail to recognize and discuss the presence of the teacher researcher and the roles taken in the Lit Circle discussions, but in order to be able to comprehensively evaluate the research, it is necessary to have an awareness of the roles which were played by the teacher. Teachers are high-status participants who set the tone and direction for the entire Lit Circle process, so the nature of the teacher’s talk and modeling of reading discussion is essential (Short et. al. 1999). These researchers broke teacher roles within Lit Circles into four categories: teacher as facilitator, participant, mediator, or active listener. The researchers found that the teachers were too readily and frequently assuming the role of facilitator because the students were in turn taking the teacher’s participation as a model and engaging in facilitator-type talk, too often disrupting discussion to invite others into the conversation and diverting the discussion to different

topics. This kind of overbearing presence of the teacher as facilitator could also have been a problem in the study conducted by Davis et. al (2001). Laura Davis noted that her role in the Literature Circles was often to guide the discussion, asking questions frequently and, though she does not comment on the effectiveness of her assumed role, potentially serving as a disruptive presence, and one that models undesirable member behaviors.

In the study conducted by Short et. al. (1999), the teachers were also failing to be engaged in discussions as participants, providing models of good responses for students to follow, as Daniels (1994) initially suggested. Instead, teachers were found to often be sitting in the groups as active listeners, which likely sent a message to students that the teachers were asserting their power in the group. The research also revealed that when taking the role of mediator, teachers often took the students away from textual talk, diverting them toward personal issues and adhering to the teacher's agenda too often. The findings of this study are encouraging though, since there were no qualitative differences between the issues discussed when teachers were present and when they were not.

I honestly expected to find a good deal of Literature Circle accounts in my research which detailed procedures which do not jive with the procedures outlined by Daniels (1994) and the others who set the guidelines for conducting Literature Circles, also known as "terminology drift," which is a term for when a new idea or practice is introduced and explained, and proffered to the masses, then the "currents of fad and fashion" misconstrue and distort the idea or practice far from the way it stood in its original inception, becoming a "completely contradictory practice" (Daniels, 2006, p. 10). Yet, the Literature Circle studies which I have examined in the present review, as far as one can tell from the information that has been supplied in each text, seem to have followed Daniels' model accurately for the most part, portraying their classroom and procedures as conducive to successful implementation of Literature Circles. Short et. al. (1999) seem to have gone by the book for the most part, other than the fact that they basically tested Daniels' (1994) hypothesis that teachers, if they are going to participate in Lit Circle discussion at all, should only contribute to the discussion as a member of the circle on an equal level to students, taking care not to manipulate the discussion. Short et. al. (1999), though they did not explicitly set out to do so, proved Daniels hypothesis through extensive analysis of teacher talk within the four roles.

The incongruities found in the other studies are also minor, and do not necessarily qualify as major drifts in the terminology of Literature Circles. Farinacci (1998) put five to eight students in each discussion group, based on student request, whereas Daniels suggests groups of three to six members. Two members too many may not seem like a fatal error, but eight does seem like too many members to achieve the heightened student involvement in transactional discussion which is the intention of Literature Circles and what ultimately sets them apart from large book clubs and Socratic seminars where students get fewer opportunities to speak. The

only other misstep in the conduction of the research was previously noted: the over-facilitation of the discussions by Davis in her action research (2001).

Conclusion

Overall, the research provides a resounding statement for the efficacy of Literature Circles in improving reading comprehension scores and attitudes toward reading and discussing literature. Again, the empirical research on this topic is scant, but it does validate the countless claims of the many champions of Literature Circles in the teaching periodicals and workshops (Brown, 2002; Farinacci, 1998; Davis et. al., 2001). There is not any research that suggests Literature Circles to be more effective than other forms of peer-led collaborative learning in a side-by-side comparison in improving comprehension scores and attitudes toward reading, and it can certainly be surmised that the increases were resulting from the increased opportunities for students to talk about text which they may not have been previously afforded. The teacher researchers tend to ground their research findings too much in their personal observations from their observation logs, rather than in hard qualitative data such as classifying written student response to track shifts/improvements in levels and types of student talk about text as compared to their previous journals. Whether the success of Literature Circles is largely due to the increase in student talk about text or the tailoring of text to the students and the allowance of choice of text has not yet been quantified, but it seems reasonable to assume that both played major roles in the studies examined in this review.

While much of the extant empirical research on Literature Circles that I was able to track down has been conducted in elementary school classrooms, this does not by any means imply that Literature Circles cannot be successfully implemented in secondary classrooms. This unfortunate lack of secondary level research does seem to conform to the traditional notion that high school students need to be taught more sophisticated readings of texts in order to prepare them for their collegiate studies, but they simply are not capable of producing these sophisticated readings themselves, so teachers must still adhere to more traditional, teacher-centered modes such as lecturing, rather than entrusting and empowering these students by providing opportunities for them to discuss texts amongst themselves and come to their own conclusions while developing a sense of authenticity and ownership in their education. Literature Circles would even work well in English classes at the collegiate level, where lecturing seems to be an unbreachable pandemic. I have participated in Literature Circles at the graduate level in a literature course, and I found them to be not

necessarily more stimulating than typical seminar style discussion, but more gratifying because of the heightened sense of intimacy inherent in a small group of three or four students and the increased and welcomed burden of discussing a text more for yourselves and coming to more of your own conclusions..

As previously mentioned, the studies examined in the present review mostly avoid terminology drift and seem to have been conducted as fairly well structured Literature Circles, but where the researchers seem to have miscalculated is in their unifying assessment strategy: comprehension quizzes and standardized tests which mostly measure factual recall. Validation of learning strategies nowadays must be made with standardized tests in many states; it's an unfortunate fact. Yet, as the research of collaborative learning (Kucan & Beck 2003) shows, and as the seminal designers of Literature Circles emphasize (Daniels, 1994; Day et. al. 2002), these types of peer-led learning strategies are naturally more conducive to developing alternate perspectives and interpretations, in other words, a more dialogic form of discourse which traditional comprehension measures cannot accurately account for. "Desirable educational effects, particularly in English Language Arts classrooms, are often oblique rather than direct" (Nystrand, 2006, p. 393). And as Nystrand points out in a more general review of classroom discourse, positive effects of classroom discourse strategies, such as those produced by Literature Circles, cannot simply be studied as having "x practice producing y effect" (p. 393). The processes of student discussion and learning are messy and far from linear, producing multiple positive effects: multiple types of talk about text and ways of learning. Future researchers must therefore widen their scope and examine the effects of Literature Circles on critical thinking skills by categorizing the types of talk which transpire during the discussions and the levels of analysis present in post-circle writing, since much of what many modern standardized tests gauge can be considered critical thinking skills.

Future research must also examine the effects of Literature Circles in secondary classrooms where the reading and discussing of literature can tend to be much more clinical than at the elementary and middle levels. Since one of the most important aspects of Lit Circles seems to be the presence of student selection of texts which can expand upon the canon which is normally offered and present texts that are tailored to the personal, cultural, and age-appropriate experiences of the student readers, it would be interesting to conduct research which specifically measures the importance of student choice of text selection, with an experimental group running Lit Circles with tailored, non-traditional texts and a control group running Lit Circles with classic texts pulled from the existing canon.

With the ever-evolving nature of technology and it becoming more user-friendly by the minute, forward-thinking ELA teachers have taken many aspects of their classroom discussion online, or simply use online tools to enhance and expand their discussion outside of the classroom. Many teachers are implementing the use of class blogs and forum-style discussion sites such as Blackboard as another outlet for student discussion and writing. A logical step for future research on Literature Circles would be to

examine how effective they can be when used completely online or with online supplementary activities. Technology is not static and there are so many different online platforms available, so it would be difficult to make lasting judgments concerning the efficacy of specific online resources. But, a thorough examination of online Literature Circles is important for forward-thinking educators looking to enhance their classroom learning with innovative strategies, and the evidence is necessary because educators and researchers cannot simply assume that online Lit Circles will be as conducive to specific types of talk as real life Lit Circles are.

Judging from the massive body of literature on Lit Circles, which is still growing, even though it is still a relatively recently developed learning strategy, it is gathering momentum and praise quickly. The empirical research needs to catch up to the literature though, and fill in the gaps in order to fully validate Literature Circles as a practical learning strategy so that administrators who are calling for evidence-based pedagogy can be convinced and book purchasing monies will be forthcoming.

Table 1. Studies and Results

Author	Participants	Purpose	Methods	Findings
Brown (2002)	Eighth grade students	To determine the effectiveness of using Literature Circles to improve reading comprehension skills.	Students in the experimental group were placed in Lit Circles according to the novel they chose to read, while students in the control group received traditional drill and classroom practice. A second unit was examined in which the groups switched instructional methods.	The results were mixed, but students who participated in the experimental group made significant gains in reading comprehension and literacy skills, though the control group made gains as well. The study supports the use of Lit Circles in conjunction with other strategies.
Farinacci (1998)	Second grade students	To determine the effectiveness of using Literature Circles to improve spoken and written response to literature.	Literature Circles were implemented in a class of twenty-four students, with nine students being tracked closely. All students were given a reading questionnaire. The teacher also collected reading journals and kept a researcher's log of her observations of student discussion.	Improvements were documented in students' comprehension and openness to discussion. Students also learned to negotiate with multiple perspectives and learn collaboratively. Students are reported to have displayed positive attitudes toward lit circle discussion.
Davis & et. al. (2001)	Fourth and fifth grade students	To explore the effect of Literature Circles on students' motivation to read and comprehension skills, as well as how the use of specific roles facilitated the implementation of the circles.	Literature Circles were implemented in two classrooms: a fourth-grade classroom of twenty-one students and a fifth grade classroom of twenty-four students. Attitude surveys were administered and the teacher collected journals, while also recording her own observations of the circles.	The teachers in both classrooms found that Literature Circles improved reading motivation, students' ability to make personal connections to text, comprehension skills, and self-confidence in reading.
Short & et. al. (1999)	Upper level Elementary school students	To determine the relationship between teacher talk and student outcomes in Literature Circles when teachers were and were not present.	Students and teachers in four classrooms were observed in their regularly occurring Literature Circles. Audiotapes and transcripts were used to record Literature Circles in each classroom as each individual teacher moved from group to group.	Teachers involved in mediating and facilitating tended to rush the discussion from topic to topic, but without teachers present, students engaged in longer periods of analytical discussion, which was still

				focused and on topic.
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Table 2. Using Literature Circles in the ELA Classroom

Title	Source & Date	Author	Major Goal in Implementation of Lit Circles	Author's Conclusion & Findings
"Changing the Classroom Climate with Literature Circles"	Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy (1998)	Bonnie Burns	To change the classroom climate to be more supportive of greater academic risks, and to offer student choice.	Students were able to read at or above grade level, reluctant readers were empowered by being able to dictate their learning path, and mixed ability groups successfully interacted and learned collaboratively.
"Reading and Responding in Literature Circles"	Primary English Teaching Association (2003)	Catherine Day	To challenge higher level readers with different genres and to engage and support struggling or reluctant readers.	Students improved their oral communication skills and learned to collaborate without the presence of the teacher, while still building their literacy skills. Students furthered the development of circle roles and began to recognize that their ideas are valid and worthy of discussion.
"To Stand Up and Say Something: 'Girls Only' Literature Circles at the Middle Level"	The New Advocate (2000)	Holly Johnson	To enliven girls' discussions of female representations involving issues of race, class, and gender, and to disrupt the observed silencing of standout female students.	Literature Circles helped seventh grade girls overcome their silences and learned to enhance their readings of texts through discussion, as well as questioning prescribed gender roles in society.
"Not the Class Novel: A Different Reading Program"	Journal of Reading (1995)	Anne Simpson	To reach reluctant readers and allow students to read in genres which are not normally addressed with	Students involved in the Literature Circles professed to have finished reading a novel for the first time, as well as marked increases in reading comprehension and

			class novels.	improved attitudes toward reading and discussion of literature.
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