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Article

Revealing Relationships: First Graders Share Personal Literature

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Abstract

Literature holds the potential to significantly influence the lives of readers, but what is the nature of this influence for very young readers? This study investigated the question "What are the relationships between beginning readers and their personal literature?" A first-grade class of 18 students individually assembled a collection of personal literature, that is, literature that they chose to read for their own purposes, and shared their literature during presentations to the class. Data collection included observational field notes, multiple forms of literature, audio recordings, and photographs. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The findings indicated four main outcomes: Students' personal literature is a reflection of who they are as a child within a family structure; students' personal literature brings them comfort; students' personal literature is a reflection of their inner desires; and students' personal literature is selected for their entertainment. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords

children's literature, reader response, personal literature, beginning readers, reader interest, book choice, reading material, reading motivation, elementary education, multiple literacies, first-grade students

Introduction

In the early stages of literacy growth and development, young children make critical decisions about what they like and do not like to read, view, or listen to when it comes to literature (Dwyer & Neuman, 2008). Babies, by 6 months, already have the fine motor, visual, language, and hearing capacities to enjoy listening to literature (Hardman & Jones, 1999). I recall my youngest son, before he could verbalize his tastes, would slap or kick out of my hands an undesired book that I was about to read to him to the floor. Frequently, my elementary students would either cheer or groan when I held up a book that I was going to read aloud to them. To think that critical tastes in reading material only develops over time or is dependent on the child being able to read ignores what we have experienced firsthand as parents and teachers. Children use all of their senses, where emotion and intellect unite to make meaning of the world around them (Welty, 1984). Personal interest in literature is determined in large part by the personality of the reader, the characteristics of the text, and the interaction between the two (Bernstein, 1955) as well as background knowledge (Rosenblatt, 1978). Some research has demonstrated that students select their favorite literature based on psychological factors such as novelty, surprise, and the unexpectedness of events and/or ideas (Hidi, 1990), whereas other research has implicated that students' personal choices in literature relates more to the genre and format of the text (Worthy, 1996a, 1996b).

What happens so often within the context of literature selection is that there is a contradiction between what students view as literature worthy of reading for enjoyment and what teachers view as important and necessary to read for the sake of learning (Applebee, 1993; Langer & Applebee, 1988; J. A. Patton, 2001; Zarillo & Cox, 1992). Many teachers feel pressured to restrict students' choices to reading books that they consider challenging, presenting new information or vocabulary, or books from an approved reading list, for the sake of making the reading count (Worthy, Turner, & Morrman, 1998).

Past research has confirmed that students who are allowed to choose their own reading materials are more motivated to read, expend more effort, and gain better understanding of the text (Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie et al., 2007; Schiefele, 1991). A student's personal involvement in reading is an essential component of avid reading (Csikszenthmihalyi, 1990; Nell, 1988) and is a significant influence in the development of the reading processes (Allington, 1994). Following a survey of middle school students' attitudes toward reading, Worthy (1996a) concluded, ". . . that [student] interest must

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be a primary factor in book selection. If it is not, many students will choose not to read outside of school" (p. 211). Heath (2012) contended that students' special interests often lead them into reading a broad range of texts, including more genres than students read from previous decades.

We know that when students are excited about what they are reading, they quite naturally want to share their experiences with others. It is through this social interaction or communication with others that students find out about interesting literature, thereby piquing their curiosity and increasing their confidence in their ability to succeed in reading (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Turner & Paris, 1995). Researchers have found that instruction that incorporates social interaction about text increases students' motivation to read and reading comprehension achievement (Guthrie et al., 2007; Ng, Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, & Alao, 1998). Heath (2012) further confirmed that students sought out each other in relation to their shared literacy interests, and friendships grew, based on the amount of time any chosen friend was willing to put into exploring expertise with different forms of literacy.

Reading achievement and positive student attitudes about reading have both been linked to time spent reading self-selected reading materials during school (Carson, 1990; Farrell, 1982; Heller, 1940; Hunt, 1971; LaBrant, 1936; Langford & Allen, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984). However, instructional programs such as Sustained Silent Reading, Drop Everything and Read, Free Voluntary Reading, and Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading have been pushed aside and replaced with skills instruction and test preparations (Worthy et al., 1998). Teachers are being pressured to demonstrate student achievement through high-stakes tests. Therefore, teachers are preparing their students to take these tests rather than building lifelong aspects of reading enjoyment within their students (Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2009). To highlight this quandary, Serafini (2011) so aptly said, "Lifelong readers do not pick up books to get better at reading" (p. 241).

Classrooms have seen an upsurge in comprehension strategy instruction using children's literature as the primary source of material (Calkins, 2000; Collins, 2004; Daniels, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). This move no doubted was fueled by the need for students to show adequate progress in high-stakes comprehension tests. Another area of concern is the use of reading basals as well as reading strategy manuals, which tend to lump reading instructional strategies together without regard to matching text type or genre to the appropriate strategy. Story-related activities that would influence students to connect emotionally to the text might include dramatization (see Paley, 1981, 1990), visual representations of the story which could take the form of graphic arts or multimedia formats (see Bedard & Fuhrken, 2011), peer discussions, poetic interpretations, and community service projects. Through these types of responses, students are engaged in multimodal approaches to learning (Gardner, 2006), transmediation (Siegel, 2006), and aesthetic responses to texts (Greene, 2001; Johnson, 2008).

When students' needs are met through reading, this is something that they want not only to repeat but also to share with each other. It is through these student exchanges that students learn to understand themselves and those around them (Rosenblatt, 1982). Teachers can arouse students' emotions by reading aloud to them stories that build excitement, intrigue, mystery, and that are laced with juvenile humor. Teachers will know that students are fully engaged in a story when they look up from a read aloud book and see their students' wide-eyes, open mouths, and tense bodies. And, when this moment is experienced, what a pure joy it is! Most importantly, teachers can capitalize on their students' emotions to lead them into deeper understandings of the meanings expressed within the literature (Eeds & Wells, 1989).

With the focus of reading education today being on preparing students to take high-stakes tests, children's literature is being used for comprehension skill instruction, instead of for the aesthetic connections that students could be making (Guthrie, 2002). If children are going to become lifelong readers, they need to experience the value that literature holds for them. They need to be drawn to a good book like a bee to a sweet smelling flower. They need to get something out of the story that feeds and develops their imaginations, in essence, they need to be pulled into the story and become one with the story. Stories engage readers in experiencing fear, anguish, loneliness, along with joy and excitement as readers they imagine themselves living through what the characters are facing in the story. Equally important, there is a sense of power and accomplishment for the reader as the protagonist succeeds through his or her endeavors. In addition, the reader experiences the feelings of success that come from finishing a whole real book.

If children's primary experience with reading is for skills instruction, they will see reading as a chore and something only connected to schoolwork (Gambrell, 1996). Heath (1986) argued that developing a child's imagination through reading was the necessary component for comprehension and textual interpretation, and therefore, teaching to the imagination through children's literature should be the goal of reading instruction. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that imaginative thinking is the precursor of abstract thought. Children's imaginative play leads to the creation of a zone of proximal development that enhances problem-solving skills beyond what the child currently is capable. Cooper (2007) indicated that imaginative play and imaginative literature are connected through their mutual support for problem solving and other developmental areas. In addition, researchers such as Coles (1989) and Greene (1995) admonished the necessity of imaginative literature for the promotion of self-awareness, creation of new knowledge, and the awareness of social aims. Teachers who understand the need for children to express their imaginations can supplement and integrate

children's literature with commercially published literacy curriculum (i.e., textbooks, manuals, and workbooks) and guide children to experience authentic, lived-through engagement with a literature that would influence them to create the literary relationships necessary to foster a lifetime of reading desire and enjoyment.

Is there a way that teachers can prepare students for tests and at the same time, incorporate students' reading interests in the classroom? There is, if we realize that we are teaching children, who have feelings, thoughts, needs, and wants. In consideration to meet their needs and ours, we need to respect and include our students' personal choices in literature into our classroom environment and into our curriculum. We then are in a position of negotiating a balance with our students between literature we assign and literature that our students choose to read for pleasure (Worthy, 1996a).

Literature holds the potential to significantly influence the lives of readers, but what is the nature of this influence for very young readers? The purpose of this present study was to discover the relationships between beginning readers and their personal literature, thereby shedding light on this influence and revealing why they make the choices when selecting literature to read. This study is significant in that it examined relationships formed naturally between the reader and the literature, rather than categorizing types of literature responses.

Although there is a large body of research on elementary students' responses to literature (Marshall, 2000), few researchers have examined the responses of first-grade students, and even fewer have investigated the possible relationships between young children and their self-selected literature. Sipe (1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2002) studied first-grade children's responses to teacher read alouds of picture books. His research was focused on analyzing and categorizing oral responses to demonstrate students' construction of literary understandings, individual response styles, and types of responses. Pantaleo's (2002, 2003, 2004) research centered on first-grade students' responses to specific features of picture books that were read aloud to them. In both these bodies of research, adults selected the literature and read the literature aloud to the students. There is a paucity in research examining students' reading interests, especially young students, and why they select the literature they choose to read on their own. One of the possible reasons could be that young students do not have the language base that is strong enough to allow them to participate in deep discussions (Beck & McKeown, 2007); therefore, we need to rely on what empirical evidence we can to determine the responses and relationships that they are forming with their personal literature (self-selected literature). This study investigated the question: What are the relationships between beginning readers and their personal literature? What students choose to read is highly individualized and varies from reader to reader (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2001). Understanding the relationships between reader and text is very complex, and one that is even more difficult with very young students. Therefore, observations regarding the personal literature that students choose to read and developing observational notes about their choices are the most valid ways to identify underlying relationships (Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2009).

Method

The goal of the study was to describe and interpret social phenomena in a natural setting (Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, the study utilized the constructivist paradigm of being descriptive, qualitative, and naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) explained that researchers are not understood simply as objective cameras for recording data, but rather interpret the data through the perspectives of their own subjectivities and intellectual backgrounds, and become part of the context they are studying. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that researchers who act from the constructivist research paradigm do not approach data with rigid expectations, but rather build a grounded theory based on the conceptual relationships they construct from the data.

The School

The study was conducted over the course of 4 months in a first-grade classroom located in a public elementary school (kindergarten through fourth grade), located in a rural, working-class, Midwestern community of approximately 10,000 people. The secretary of the school gave me the following demographic information for the school: 93% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, and 2% African American. Nineteen percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced lunches, and 1% were students with limited English proficiency. The school had an articulated mission to provide engaging curriculum in a caring school community by providing a variety of multicultural experiences, promoting career awareness, fostering appreciation of the arts, helping children understand the importance of demonstrating good character traits, and heighten civic involvement through service to the broader community. The school was purposefully chosen (M. Q. Patton, 1990), because the phenomenon to be studied—the relationships between children and their personal literature—was likely to be revealed at this site.

Teacher and Researcher

The classroom teacher, Caroline (pseudonyms used throughout), was in her eighth year of teaching. Her teacher preparation program had emphasized the constructivist approach that involved children in actively constructing their own meaning and the use of children's literature for teaching reading. Her master's program had also focused on using children's trade books in the classroom and the importance

of engaging children in literature discussions. She continued to expand her own extensive collection of children's literature that she implemented in her classroom.

As the researcher, I added my own background to the social context of the classroom. My teaching experience included 14 years as an elementary classroom teacher and 6 years as a university professor. Because of our shared elementary teaching background, philosophy of teaching, and knowledge of children's literature, Caroline and I were able to easily work together. My role as a researcher ranged on the continuum of participate-observation (Spradley, 1980). When Caroline read aloud to the children, I functioned as an observer, but my role shifted to active participant when I read aloud to the children.

The Students

The classroom students were a heterogeneous group of 10 boys and 8 girls, all of Anglo European ethnicity. Based on the results of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (Good & Kaminski, 2002) assessment, this class had seven students reading below grade level, eight at grade level, and three above. All but one student's parents gave informed consent (Eichelberger, 1989). The parents of this one student wanted their child to be involved with all phases of the project, but did not want pictures or audio recordings made.

The Classroom Context

The classroom was organized with tables, books, and supplies, so as to allow and encourage the students to work together in small groups in workshop areas (Lindfors, 1991). In the mornings, students were engaged in writing stories, reading books related to a theme being studied, creating art projects, and other literature-related activities. While these workshop activities were happening, Caroline taught small group lessons based on students' literacy needs. It was during this language arts block that the data for the study were collected.

Data Collection

Observational field notes. I kept a researcher's journal (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) in which I wrote various types of field notes throughout the study. I wrote descriptive notes about the context of the setting, including the appearance of the classroom and the activities of the students and teacher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I recorded reflective notes regarding my ideas for the procedures for the study, which would best fit into the social context of the classroom (Richardson, 1994). I wrote summaries of conversations between Caroline and me, which later served as member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). While the students were involved in the event of sharing their personal literature, I wrote questions that came to me and thoughts that I had regarding the students' responses, especially their nonverbal behavior (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Literature. The students were asked to assemble a collection of personal literature from home or school (meaning literature that they select and read on their own). They were encouraged to discuss the literature at home with their families, and then bring the literature to class to share during individual presentations. The students were not limited in what they chose, but they were asked to only bring between three to five items to allow enough time for everyone to share. The published literature that the students brought was documented (see appendix), and in addition to published literature, the students also shared biographical photo-journals, hand-written cards, letters, and notes from family members.

Audio recordings. The students were audiotaped during their sharing of personal literature to obtain the best possible record of their words (M. Q. Patton, 1990). The students spoke in their own words to describe why they chose the selection of literature to share and what the literature meant to them, they were not prompted and discussion was not scaffolded by the teacher or myself. The students told their own story.

Photographs. I took photographs of the students while they were sharing their personal literature. The photographs provided rich descriptive data that were used to understand and interpret the nonverbal expressions of the children (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). When words may be lacking with young children, facial and body language can tell the rest of the story.

Phases of data collection. The study was organized in a series of phases over 4 months. During the first phase, the goals were to gather data specifics about the school, teacher, and students. During the second phase, I entered the classroom and gathered data relating to the classroom's culture, routines, and appearance. It was during this phase that plans were made between the teacher and me for the students' sharing event. The last phase of the data collection was the students' sharing of their personal literature. This is when the students were audiotaped and photographed while sharing.

The sharing event. The students were given the task to assemble a collection of about three to five items of literature from home and/or school that were important to them and to bring the literature to school for the purpose of sharing with their classmates what the literature was and why they selected it.

The sharing took place during one language arts block of time (i.e., approximately between 8:20 a.m. and 12:20 p.m.), which was normally broken up with a recess and lunch break. Students were told that they would have approximately 5-min to make their presentations to the class. Students sat in

a semi-circle facing a small table and chair, and they volunteered to come to the front of the circle to share.

Data Analysis

Preparation of the data for analysis. To make the data collected during the duration of the study readable, workable, and to provide for trustworthiness, the taped sharing event and comments the students made were transcribed, the students' personal literature was documented, the researcher's journal was typed, and the photographs were printed. Each page of data was coded in the upper-right-hand corner and included the types of data, the source of the data, and the page number (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Unitizing. The next phase of data analysis was to identify the units of meaning contained within the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described a unit of meaning as the smallest piece of information about something that can be understood without any additional details other than knowledge of the broader context from which it came. Unitizing is part of the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explained that the constant comparative method, identifying and categorizing specific units of information and comparing the units with previous information, provides the researcher with a clear direction for engaging in analysis of a quantity of data that is both challenging and illuminating.

Once all the data were put into a workable form, I gathered several packages of blank 4" × 6" index cards, scissors, tape, pencils, and colored highlighters. I carefully read through the written materials and photographs three different times looking for repetitive refrains (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Within the repetitive refrains, I discerned the units of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). When a unit of meaning was identified, I circled it with a pencil, and in the margin noted the following: the data source, date, participant, page number or photograph number, and a word or phrase to indicate the essence of the unit's meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The documents were kept intact during this phase of the data analysis so that each source could be read and viewed in its entirety should further clarification be needed. When all of the documents had been unitized, I cut each unit of meaning from the text and taped them onto separate index cards. The next phase of the constant comparative method of analysis was discovery (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Discovery. During the discovery process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), I reread the unitized data cards that I had constructed, looking for the recurring words, phrases, and concepts that I saw repeated throughout the data. I constructed and reconstructed a discovery list three different times or took multiple soundings (Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1989) as I searched for the subtle meanings and complex perspectives expressed in the data. This is also described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as instead of listening *to* a story, I was listening *for* a story.

Inductive category coding. During this phase of the data analysis, I selected the prominent ideas from the discovery list. Each of these became a provisional category. The unitized data cards were then grouped under each category using the look/feel-alike criteria advanced by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Rules of inclusion. After several data cards had been grouped under a category, I examined them to determine the overall meaning contained within them. This information, or rule of inclusion, was then written as a propositional statement of fact grounded in the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and used to either include or exclude subsequent data cards for each category.

Coding data cards. Once the rule of inclusion was summarized from the data and the remaining data cards are included or excluded from a category depending on its rule of inclusion, data cards were then coded to their rule-based categories. This code was then written at the top of all the data cards included in that particular cluster.

Examining relationships and patterns across categories. My focus for the next phase of analysis in the constant comparative analysis process was to look closely at the relationships between categories and study the propositions for those that stood alone or formed salient relationships and patterns (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). During this process, it became evident that some of the categories shared ideas that were related. These ideas were grounded in the data and stood as evidence of what I was learning from my participants in the study and is what led me to the study outcomes.

Results and Discussion: Defining Relationships Between Reader and Text

During the sharing event, students usually summarized the best parts of the literature they brought, would hold up pictures and illustrations for all classmates to view, and read favorite parts aloud. Students took their time while sharing, relishing their moment. While talking, they would frequently hold the literature close to their bodies, hugging it. When they pulled selections from their bags, there were smiles of pure joy spread across their faces as they looked at it, and frequent comments from them were as follows: "I like it." "It is special to me." "I love it!" and "It's my favorite." While reading favorite parts, many students had a look of complete concentration. As witnessed in these students, and also

brought to light in the research of Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), intrinsic motivation to read is tied to a reader's pleasure in reading, which is characterized by excitement, interest, and enjoyment in the act of reading. Classmates reacted with spontaneous, softly spoken utterances such as "cool," "awesome," "wow," "I like that," and "I have that one." Classmates' eyes focused on the student sharing, and sometimes they stretched their bodies higher to see the pictures or illustrations. Also revealed in these students, and related to what Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found, was that children's intrinsic motivation in reading includes curiosity and involvement.

Four outcomes emerged from the data analysis process and revealed the nature of the relationships that the children had formed with their personal literature. Each outcome is discussed below along with the evidence grounding the outcomes within the data and past research.

Outcome 1: Students' Personal Literature Is a Reflection of Who They Are as a Child Within a Family Structure

This outcome or finding was evidenced in the data by those students who shared family photo albums and read aloud the captions to the pictures. Students read aloud hand-written letters and cards that were sent to them from family members living far away. Other students shared and read from books that family members had selected with the child in mind, signed, and had given to them as gifts. These items of personal literature were precious to the students who presented and read from them. The value of this personal literature to the students could be seen on their faces and heard in their voices. This outcome of the present study expands on previous research from Neuman and Wright (2007), in that the role literature often plays in the lives of children depends on why, how, and what their caregivers gave or read to them. Moreover, the data that formed this outcome further substantiate past research from Langer (1995) and Serafini (2003), suggesting that when children read about other children either like them or different from them, they come to understand and appreciate the world around them with a sharper more critical mind. Examples from the data that stood as evidence that appeared to be representative of this outcome included the following:

Brody: I like this book because when I was born in the hospital, they gave this to me. It is very special to me [hugging it close to his chest] because it has my name in it with my mom and dad's.

Derek: This is one of my favorite books because it is all about me when I was born. My grandmother ordered it for me.

Jena: This is one of my favorite books it's called *Armadilly Chili* [smiling with joy] because my grandma got it for me from Texas. And, this is another one my grandma got from Texas, it's called *Lucy Goose Goes to Texas*, and I like it because my grandma got it in Texas. I also really like this book [holds up a different book] because my grandma got it for me, and it's called *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*.

Joe: This is a book I like, it's called *How I Became a Pirate* [holding the book outward, open to an illustration and with a look of glee on his face] and I like it because there is a boy with my name and my brother's name together. And, this book is called *I Love You the Purplest* [holding up a different book], because it's about two boys like me and my brother and my mom. This book is called *It's Okay to be Different*, and it teaches you that everybody can be different, like everybody can have different colors of skin, and different moms and dads.

Connor: Here is one called *My Big Truck Book* [a very serious look on his face], and it is very cool 'cause my Aunt Carrie gave it to me it says *To Connor From Aunt Carrie*, on the back.

Alyssa: I like this book because my mom made it just for me when I was a little baby [this was a photo album/scrapbook and all the photos and cards had captions written in neat cursive, and she was able to read the captions upside down and from the side—she must have had them read to her a lot, because she appeared to know them from heart. Her classmates responded with *oohs* and *aahs*]. I like this card from my grandma because I don't see her often because it takes her a very long to get to our house.

Sarah: These are some notes from when my grandma was away, and I didn't get to see her. This is a really special book [holds up a different item] to me because it has my name in it, and it has my cousin's name it, and it has my brother's name it. This book is special to me [holds up a different book] because every year I go to my grandma's and she gives me Christmas presents and my cousin [names her cousin], she gets the same things as me, and it is called *Princess*.

Katie: This is called *My Tea Party* [she said this with excitement and sang the words like a song. There was a whisper from one of her classmates: *I have that one, Katie*]. This is my favorite because it gots my friend and grandma's name in it, and it is really special to me because it also has my mom's name in it. This [holding up a different book] is called *Tell Me Something Happy Before I go to Sleep*, and this is me and my brother [pointing to an illustration in the book of a girl and boy. She meant this figuratively and not in a literal sense].

Jake: And this is the title of this: *Green Eggs and Ham*. This is special because I used to have it when I was a baby, and I have two of them, because one of them are my mom's and one of them are mine. *This is Going Places* [holds up a different book] and it is special, is so special to me [he says this with a lot of emotion],

because my grandma got it for me. And this is what my brother gave to me [holds up a different book], it says *I'm Glad I'm Me: Poems About You* by Jack Prelutsky. This is Dr. Seuss *Sleeping Book* [holds up a different book]. I love [draws out the word *love* with long, emotional emphasis] because my grandma got it for me when I was a baby, and this is by Dr. Seuss, and I got lots of Dr. Seuss's books at my house.

Bryce: This other one [holds up a book] is special to me because my grandma gave it to me, and it is *Tongue Twisters*.

Outcome 2: Students' Personal Literature Brings Them Comfort

Patterns in the data revealed that many students shared and read excerpts aloud from books that were given to them by family members when they were younger, and said that they liked to hear the books read to them because it helps them fall asleep at night. Some students said that they take these books with them to the babysitter, and that she reads aloud to them when they are feeling lonely and missing their family. Other students brought personal spiritual literature and shared their favorite stories that made them feel good. The students who brought these types of personal literature often held the items close, hugging them, and when they opened the pages, their faces were glowing with affection. The students in the study often revealed their response relationships with their texts through how they behaved while holding their literature and what they said about the literature during the sharing time. This outcome builds on previous research by Sipe (2000), indicating that young children spontaneously show their emotional involvement with literature through gestures and facial expressions, if not words. Data examples that were categorized into this outcome are given below:

Joe: This is a book that my mom used to read to me when I was little [holding the book close and gazing it at with a loving expression] and it's called *No Matter What*, and I really like it because my mom used to read it to me all the time when I was little.

Connor: This is called *His First Bible*. I had it since I was two or three or younger, and it is my favorite [a whisper came from one of his classmates: *I like the manger*] because it's way old.

Alyssa: I like this Bible because it is fun [smiling as she gazes at the pages]. It is called *The Early Reader's Bible*. You're able to read it all by yourself. It's really easy. It is about God and it asks you questions. Like you have to read the book and answer the questions. I really like reading it.

Jake: This is *The Night Before Christmas*, and I like Christmas, and mom reads it to me when it's Christmas. This is a really hard book for me to read. This is [holds up a different book] *What About Heaven* and it's really cool because it's about Heaven, and about Jesus, too. There are questions on the back that mom reads to me sometimes. This is one [holds up a different book] that I got from my grandma, too, when she got dead, and then I got four, and they're really special to me because they're about Jesus, and there's grandma in heaven, and Jesus will, whenever I get dead, I will see my grandma and my grandpa, and it says *Who Is Jesus* [this is the book he is talking about], *What is God Lik*e [he drew a different book from his bag], and I can read almost all of it.

Emma: This is one of my favorites; this is *Dumbo The Circus Baby*. I really like this [holding it close to her chest with an illustration facing outward toward her classmates and pointing to it]. It helps me go to sleep at my grandma's. This is what I read at my grandma's house, and it's *My Favorite Little Book*, and it is called *Loving* [this is a spiritual book]. It helps me really go to sleep all night.

Bryce: I like this book because my mom gave it to me, and the name is *The Power Kid* [this is a spiritual book] and I bring it to my babysitter's and she reads it to me all the time. This one reminds me of God [holds up a different book], and it is *Bible Heroes*.

Weston: Raggedy Ann [holds this book up]. I like it because mom read it to me when I was five or six. *I Like Myself* [holds this book up]. I like it because it doesn't matter how you look or matter how you are [multiple whispers came from his classmates: *I like this book*]. *Who Wants a Dragon* [holds up a different book]. I really like this book because I, my mom read to me every single time I want, I want my mom to read it to me. It is special to me because I got when I was, since I was in kindergarten.

Outcome 3: Students' Personal Literature Is a Reflection of Their Inner Desires

Evidence grounded in the data suggested that students' relationship with their personal literature was one in which they held the desire to learn information from the literature, so that they could do something with that information. These literature items included books about hunting, camping, and children's encyclopedias about animals. Some students brought and read excerpts from advertisement catalogs and newspapers that featured their desired collection items. Students not only showed that they desired to *obtain* certain items, but they also wanted to *learn* more about the items from the literature. This evidence from the present study expands on past research from Pitcher et al. (2007), suggesting that children like to read literature that relates to their personal interests and hobbies to gain more information. Examples from the data representing this outcome are as follows:

Derek: I like to read *Brain Quest* [hugging all his books close to his chest], because it makes me smarter, and it is a really good thing to read, and I like to read about mosquitoes, too. I like to learn about things.

Natalie: This is a book that I ordered and it is called *Amazing Dolphins*, and I really like this book because I really like dolphins, and I wish I could swim with them someday, and it is really cool and stuff.

Cole: This is one of my favorites to read because I like to go hunting, and it is called *Cabela's Outfitter Catalog* [holds up the catalog], and I have *Fun With Nature* [holds up a book]. It's really fun because you get to learn about nature. Here are encyclopedias called *Getting to Know Nature's Children: Hippos and Bears* [these were two separate books], I like them because they have a lot of details, and here is another called *Getting to Know Nature's Children: Lions and Pandas* [this was one book], and I like the details, they are really fun [he said with a smile].

Connor: This is called the *Big Book of Knowledge* [a whisper came from one of his classmates: *I have that book*], and it is the coolest, because it had my favorite animals that live in the jungle.

Randy: This is called *The Calls of Frogs and Toads*, and I picked this book because it has my favorite animals [he showed a picture of a toad and said: *Look at their eyes, they're like really-whew*! He showed a picture of a frog that he said he would like to catch. He had a very serious look on his face as he gazed at the book, and he only brought this one book. It obviously meant a lot to him].

Gavin: This is my *Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh!* card collection [he proudly held up a large 3-ring binder filled with his trading card collection in plastic sleeves and read a few of them aloud, turning to his favorite pages]. And this is a thing that is really expensive, and I have a coupon for five dollars off, and it is really cool [he held up the coupon. It looked like it came from a newspaper advertisement, but I could not see what the item was].

Outcome 4: Students' Personal Literature Is Self-Selected for Their Entertainment

Through the refinement of data, there emerged the outcome that many students shared and read from personal literature that reflected their own personal joys in being entertained. Some of this literature was enjoyed simply because they were easily capable of reading it by themselves, such as joke books and poetry books that sounded funny when they read them aloud. Students that shared these books frequently read aloud to their listening classmates the jokes or word phrases that they enjoyed the most. Some of the literature categorized with this outcome were activity booklets centered on their favorite hobbies. Weird, strange, and colorful picture books were also a favorite source of entertainment for them. Books written in a series about children like them or different from them were also very popular. These students expressed their joy and happiness as they read excerpts from their personal literature selections, and took pride in their own reading accomplishments, which could be seen on their faces and heard in their expressive voices. It was obvious from listening to them read aloud that they were mimicking the voice inflections of their caretakers who read aloud to them. The data for this outcome indicated that much of the literature shared was part of a larger body of work, which supports previous research from Stoodt-Hill and Amspaugh-Corson (2009), suggesting that children like to read and hear read to them literature that is published in a series. Moreover, evidence from the data connects and further builds on past research from Rosenhouse, Reitelson, Kita, and Zahava (1997), which suggested that children become familiar with the characters and the storylines embedded in the literature, thereby developing a deeper sense of attachment and pleasure. Humor, was another very important patterned relationship that emerged from the data, which also connects to findings from Stoodt-Hill and Amspaugh-Corson (2009) which indicated humor is an important element in literature that draws children's interest and aids in developing their sense of literary awareness. Included below are examples from the data that represented the categories that formed this outcome:

Derek: This is a really good magazine because it's about jokes, and I like to focus on things.

Brody: This book is my favorite because it's about Scooby Doo, and I collect Scooby Doo stuff. Scooby Doo is scary and funny.

Natalie: I like to read this book it's called *The Missing Tooth Mystery*. Scooby Doo, because it is very funny, and I like it so much. I like to read this book called *Butterflies and Caterpillars* because I can read it with my mom or dad, and I really like it because it's awesome.

Cole: This is one of my favorite books, it's *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, and I like it because it is so funny.

Tammy: This is a book called *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book*, and it's funny because it does different stuff, because it does a lot of different things that are funny, and sometimes my mom reads it to me. This one is called *Batty Betty's Spells*, it's like funny because it has a cat in it, and it like changes different colors, and it's very funny [smiling with joy]. This book is called *Go Dogs Go*, and they have a dog party, and it is very funny, too. They have a dog party [she raises her voice for emphasis, and her classmates laugh about the book]. This is a colorful book, it's called *Good Night Sweet Butterflies: A Colorful Dreamland*. Sometimes me and my mom find all the yellow stuff in there, and that's what we do, and they have red, and we

do this too, like the yellow, we look for all the red, and that is why I picked this, and that is why I like this.

Connor: Here is a SpongeBob called *Bubble Blowers, Beware!* It is kind of funny [a whisper comes from one of his classmates: *I know*].

Alyssa: I like this book called *Junie B., First Grader: Shipwrecked*. It's so funny 'cause they have a big fight, and I like the pictures of them dressed up in their costumes [whispered *aahs* erupt from her classmates].

Jake: I have my favorite books in here that I love [referring to his bag of literature that he brought]. And some of them I read here [at school] and some at my house. This is my favorite. This is Dr. Seuss, and it says *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, and this is my favorite book because I can read it, and I like rhyming books [He says this while holding the book close to his chest, pictures facing outward toward his listening classmates, and a look of sheer delight across his face]. This is *Hop on Pop* by Dr. Seuss, and I love all Dr. Seuss because it's way fun to read! [he says with great excitement].

Bryce: The last one [holds up a book] is really funny [multiple whispers come from his watching classmates: *oh, yeah!*]. This is the Monster at the end of this book.

Weston: *Learn About Shapes* [holds up this book]. This is one I really like because it has the box of the shapes in them, and you put them in those holes [multiple whispers erupt from his watching classmates: *cool, ooh, awesome, Weston, so cool*].

The references for the published literature that the students shared can be seen in the appendix.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has important, pedagogical implications concerning the context in which teaching literacy occurs. Literature holds the potential to significantly influence the lives of readers, but what is the nature of this influence for very young readers? This study investigated the question: What are the relationships between beginning readers and their personal literature? The study was significant in that it examined relationships formed between the reader and the literature, rather than categorizing types of literature responses. Additionally important to this study was that the students spoke in their own words to describe why they chose the selection of literature to share and what the literature meant to them, they were not prompted and discussion was not scaffolded by the teacher or myself. The students told their own story, therefore the study outcomes were situated within the readers, and through the data analysis processes, the underlying relationships between reader and literature were discovered.

Study outcomes revealed that students place a great value and build relationships between themselves and literature that represents them, their families, and their cultures. With this in mind, it is important for teachers to seek out information about the families and cultures within the classroom context and build on this knowledge by selecting and integrating literature that students can culturally relate to. This practice has the potential to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity among students.

The data from this study indicated that students become emotionally involved with the literature that is spiritual in nature and literature that is intimately familiar to them. The student relationship revealed through this literature was one of comfort and security. Teachers can discover from students' families about spiritual literature and allow individual children to free read from this area of literature. Teachers can also find out about family favorites and set aside classroom time for students to share these with each other. This practice has the potential to build fluency along with providing students with a sense of comfort and belonging to the classroom community.

Study outcomes suggested that the inner desires students possessed lead them to certain literature that fulfilled their desires. Educators can explore students' personal interests, hobbies, and activities to discover types of literature students would most likely be attracted to. When teachers acknowledge the multiple literacies that students engage in outside of the classroom and find ways to incorporate them in the classroom, students will feel more motivated to read and therefore increasing the likelihood of becoming lifelong readers.

Evidence refined from the study data showed that the students developed relationships between themselves and literature that they self-selected for the sake of entertainment. Primary among literature's values is enjoyment, and students have to find pleasure in what they read if they are to experience the values literature offers (Sloan, 2002). Teachers can capitalize on the types of literature that students find most entertaining and enjoyable and incorporate them into their teaching. This study indicated that the students were entertained by joke books and poetry that sounded funny when read aloud. They also enjoyed weird, strange, colorful picture books, and books that were part of a larger series. Literature that was funny and that they can easily read on their own was very important to them. They also enjoyed being able to read aloud and share this literature with their classmates. Students enjoy seeing and listening to themselves read and discuss literature, so it is important for teachers to record these sharing events through the use of photography, tape recordings, or video, and share these with students, so that they can relive the moment and gain confidence in themselves as literate human beings. When teachers create and facilitate opportunities for young students to share their literature, students' responses are enhanced and they become more critical readers (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000; Galda, Shockley, & Pellegrini, 1995;

McGee, 1992; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Roser & Martinez, 1995; Short & Pierce, 1990; Wiseman, Many, & Altieri, 1992).

Limitations and Future Direction

The participants of this study comprised one first-grade classroom situated in one elementary school. Future investigations could examine a different grade level, across grade levels, or across schools. The participants in this study were predominately European Americans. It would be beneficial for future studies to include a more diverse population with regard to ethnicity. The setting for this study was a small, rural community located in a region of the United States that is sparsely populated, and the town was not connected to a larger city; therefore, the community has characteristics of a microcosm. It would be of interest for future research to look at urban settings that include participants that come from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

Past research has shown us that when students read literature, a transaction occurs between the student and the author's text, and the two create meaning together (Krashen, 2004; Rand Corporation, 2002; Serafini, 2003). We have also learned from past research that students use this interaction with the text to cultivate their own unique responses. Their responses can be emotional or aesthetic in nature, or they can be intellectual, or efferent in nature depending on how the student is interacting with the text (Rosenblatt, 1982). The two responses, however, are not mutually exclusive to each other, but instead, work together to create a meaningful and enjoyable reading experience for the student (Rosenblatt, 1969, 1982). The response to reading literature emerges from the interconnectedness between the reader's past experiences, knowledge, and beliefs, and the content, genre, and language of the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). But what is the nature of the relationships embedded within the responses between young children, who are beginning to read independently, and the literature that they self-select? That is the question this current study sought to investigate.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this present study further advance past research by suggesting that young children build personal, interconnected relationships with their self-selected literature that can be demonstrated as relating to their family structures and cultures, comforts and securities, inner desires and personal goals, and their joy that comes from being entertained by the literature. In essence, this present study indicates that young children possess internal relationships with literature that when given the chance can be expressed within the social context of the classroom setting, and when this happens, it will bring joy, not only to them but also to those who are listening and watching them.

Appendix

The Published Literature That the Students Shared

Barbo, M. S. (2002). *The missing tooth mystery* (Scooby Doo! Picture clue book, No. 11). New York, NY: Scholastic.

Bea, H. (2005). *Lucy goose goes to Texas*. Novato, CA: HJ Kramer/ New World Library.

Beaumont, K. (2004). *I like myself!* San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Beers, V. G. (2001). *Early readers Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz.

Bently, D. (2007). *Good night, sweet butterflies: A color dreamland*. New York: Little Simon.

Berger, M. (2008). *Butterflies and caterpillars*. New York: Scholastic.

Boring, M. (1998). *Fun with nature: Take along guide*. New York: Cooper Square.

Bostrom, K. (1998). *What is God like*? Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House.

Bostrom, K. (2000). *What about heaven*? Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House.

Bridwell, N. (2007). *Clifford's first Christmas*. New York: Scholastic.

Cabela's: World's foremost outfitter. (1961-2014). Sidney, NE: Cabella's.

Carlson, M. (2001). *His first Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz.

Chester. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Christelow, E. (1989). *Five little monkeys jumping on the bed*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Cleary, B. (1990). *The mouse and the motorcycle*. New York: HarperCollins.

Dill, B. (2007). *Brain quest grade 1 reading*. New York: Workman.

Disney Enterprises. (2009). *Disney princess collec*tion. New York: Disney Press.

Disney, R. H. (2003). *The little mermaid. Disney princess*. New York: Golden/Disney.

Ditchfield, C. (2004). *Bible heroes*. New York: Golden Books.

Dodd, E. (2008). *No matter what*. New York: Dutton.

Eastman, P. D. (1996). *Go, dog, go!* New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.

Elliott, L. (2004). *The calls of frogs and toads*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.

Farndon, J., & Koo, A. (2002). *The big book of knowledge*. New York: Parragon.

Gerth, M. (2001). *Ten little ladybugs*. Atlanta, GA: Piggy Toes Press.

Gliori, D. (1999). *Tell me something happy before I go to sleep*. New York: Picture Corgi.

Gruelle, J. (2005). *Raggedy Ann & Andy: A read-aloud treasury*. New York: Little Simon.

Hoff, S. (1986). Hall, M. (2006). *Mosquitoes (bugs, bugs, bugs)*. Mankato, MN: Capstone.

Hogg, G. (2002). *Spencer's adventures: Don't bake that snake*. New York: Little Buckaroo Books.

Ihara, S. (2008). *Pokemon: Diamond and pearl adventure! Vol. 1*. San Francisco, CA: VIZ MEDIA.

Johnstone, G. (2003). *Christmas snow magic*. Belrose, Australia: Book Company Publishing.

Joosse, B. M. (1996). *I love you the purplest*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Kageyama, N. (2007). *Yu-gi-oh! GX, Vol. 1*. San Francisco, CA: VIZ Media.
Ketteman, H. (2004). *Armadilly chili*. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.
Kushner, L., & Kushner, K. (2000). *What does God look like?* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths.
Lewman, D. (2004). *Bubble blowers, beware! Spongebob Squarepants*. New York: Simon Spotlight/Nickelodeon.
Long, M. (2003). *How I became a pirate*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
MacLeod, E. (1990). *Getting to know nature's children: Puffins/hippopotamuses*. NY: Grolier.
MacLeod, E. (1998). *Getting to know nature's children: Lions/pandas*. New York: Scholastic.
Martin, B., Jr. (1967). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see*? New York: Henry Holt.
Mayhew, J. (2004). *Who wants a dragon*? London, England: Orchard.
McCann, J. L. (2002). *Scooby-doo and the trick-or-treat thief*. New York: Scholastic.
Moore, C. C. (1990). *The night before Christmas*. New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
Muldrow, D. (1993). *Walt Disney's Dumbo: The circus baby*. Golden sturdy shape book. New York: Golden Books.
Muldrow, D. (2000). *Career series: My favorite teacher*. New York: Golden Books.
O'Connor, J. (2007). *Fancy Nancy and the posh puppy*. New York: HarperCollins.
O'Connor, J. (2009). *Fancy Nancy: Tea parties*. New York: HarperCollins.
Omartian, S. (2005). *The power of a praying kid*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
Park, B. (2005). *Junie B., first grader: Boo . . . and I mean it!* New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
Park, B. (2005). *Junie B., first grader: Shipwrecked*. New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
Parr, T. (2009). *It's okay to be different*. New York: Little, Brown, & Company.
Prelutsky, J. (2006). *I'm glad I'm me: Poems about you*. New York: Scholastic.
Priddy, R. (2002). *My big truck book*. New York: Priddy Books.
Robinson, H. (2005). *Batty Betty's spells*. Citrus Heights, CA: Brighter Child.
Rosenbloom, J., & Artel, M. (2007). *A little giant book: Tongue twisters*. New York: Sterling.
Ross, J. T. (1990). *Getting to know nature's children: Loons/Black bears*. New York: Scholastic.
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Seuss, Dr. (1962). *Dr. Seuss's sleep book*. New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
Seuss, Dr. (1963). *Hop on pop*. New York: Beginner Books.
Seuss, Dr. (1990). *Oh, the places you'll go!* New York: Random House.
Seuss, Dr. (1996). *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An amazing alphabet book!* New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
Seuss, Dr. (2005). *One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish*. New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.
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