LITERACY BLOCKS: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN GRADE 7 AND 8 CLASSROOMS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This case study of two combined grade 7 and 8 classrooms investigated the qualities of student engagement during a modified *Four Blocks* (Cunningham, Hall & Defee, 1998) literacy blocks intervention. The teachers' experiences with implementing and engaging their students in literacy blocks were also examined. Qualities of student engagement were described using two sources of data: (1) transcripts of semi-structured interviews with student participants were analyzed, coded and classified into engagement processes; and (2) classroom observations coded as student engagement across four domains: affective, behavioural, cognitive and social. Transcripts from student and teacher participant interviews, professional development meetings and classroom observations were analyzed to describe instructional context and teacher experiences during the implementation of literacy blocks. In this research, teacher involvement and opportunities for choice seemed to positively impact student engagement. Findings from the research suggest that student engagement may be increased through the effective use of collaborative learning strategies and the explicit teaching of strategies and skills leading to the gradual release of responsibility. Data provided insight into the experiences of implementing literacy blocks. Findings suggested that further research into teacher professional development to support implementation is needed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

   A. Context of Study 1

   B. Significance of the Study 14

   C. Questions and Scope of the Study 17

   D. Definition of Terms 19

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 24

   A. Balanced Literacy 24

   B. Literacy Blocks 33

   C. Student Engagement 55

3. CHAPTER THREE: METHODS 78

   A. The Purpose of the Research 78

   B. Research Questions 82

   B. Participants 84

   C. Procedures 98

   D. Limitations of the Study 102

4. CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS 105

   A. Stage One of Analysis: Student Engagement Processes 106

   B. Stage Two of Analysis: Student Engagement in the Classroom ... 117

   C. Stage Three of Analysis: Instructional Context 127

D. Stage Four of Analysis: Teacher Implementation ……………… 143

E. Using the Data to Respond to the Research Questions ……………. 156

5. CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion ………………………………… 165

6. REFERENCES ……………………………………………………… 174

7. APPENDICES ……………………………………………………… 187

Appendix A: Literacy Blocks Planning Guide………………………. 188

Appendix B Table of Contents Teachers Literacy Blocks Guide 189

Appendix C: Student Engagement Rubric - Lutz, Guthrie, Davis, 2006 191

Appendix D: Preliminary Interview Questions, Teachers ……………. 193

Appendix E: Preliminary Interview Questions, Students …………….. 194

Appendix F: During and After Interview Questions, Teacher ……….. 195

Appendix G: During and After Interview Questions, Student ……….. 196

Appendix H: Student Engagement Rubric …………………………… 197

Appendix I: Classroom Lesson Observation Form …………………… 198

Appendix J: Descriptions of Literacy Blocks ……………………….. 199

Appendix L: Key Components of Literacy Blocks …………………. 219

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

My Story

I have had many education roles in schools for the past twelve years. I have taught grades 7-9 in self-contained classrooms; and I have taught a multi-level grades 4 to 6 class. I have been a support teacher for English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) students, a resource teacher developing individual education plans, and a vice-principal. Over half of this experience has been in schools where over 25% of the student population was deemed at-risk for a number of reasons such as learning disabilities, low socioeconomic backgrounds, recent immigration, and mental health concerns. During this time I have seen literacy as the number one factor contributing to student success in school. I have noted that if students have the ability to negotiate meaning with a variety of texts at their grade level, they are likely to have academic success in spite of their challenges. Unfortunately, many middle-years students leave grade 8 without the literacy knowledge and experiences they need to be successful in high school and beyond.

Through my experiences in my own classroom and my experiences in mentoring other teachers, I have observed another factor contributing to student success, and that is teachers' ability to engage students in learning. It is noteworthy that student learning and engagement are highly impacted by the qualities of teacher instruction. The research I have read throughout my graduate school courses has acknowledged this and deepened my understanding of the influential aspects of literacy instruction.

One of the difficulties I have always struggled with is how to ensure that I am engaging students in the explicit instruction they need while maintaining meaningful contexts for learning and teaching of all curricula. Other middle years teachers have shared my concerns. We know our students need literacy instruction, but figuring out how and when to do this instruction in an engaging way, while ensuring that content area instruction occurs, is a struggle. We continually search for solutions to address this problem. This search led me to learning about literacy blocks.

Early in my career I had heard early-years teachers talking about their success in literacy through literacy blocks. For the previous four years leading up to my thesis, I had been reading and researching for my course work and trying out many components of literacy blocks. Since literacy blocks had helped frame my own instruction, I had wondered if they might also help other teachers. Therefore, for the purpose of my research, I involved other teachers in the process, and observed what happened in their classes as they used the literacy blocks framework.

Theoretical

As I progressed in my graduate course work, two essential understandings stood out for me, which have formed the basis of my thesis. The first is that social constructivism is an important stance from which to view education, and the second is that balanced literacy is an approach to literacy instruction that ensures that students receive the instruction they need.

My readings and reflective thinking have returned again and again to Vygotsky's notion that we construct our knowledge within a social context. According to Ben-Ari

and Kedem-Friedrich (2000), Vygotsky believed that "the construction of knowledge happens by interactions of individuals within the society and learning is seen as the internalization of social interaction" (p. 154). Within this context, learning is seen as "changing participation in culturally valued activity" (Larson & Marsh, 2006, p.109). Viewing learning this way has an impact on how we come to understand learners and how we assess their learning.

Ideally, the changing participation of literacy learning should look like a move from reliance on the teacher to independence since there is a gradual release of responsibility on the teacher's part (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Throughout a school year, and even throughout their whole school lives, students should be moving towards independence and self-direction. When literacy is defined as "communicative competence, that enables students to pursue their personal, academic, and employment goals and to participate within their communities with dignity and purpose" (Manitoba Education, Citizenship & Youth, 2008, p. 112). Then, to be literate, students must be able to access a wide range of texts such as novels, textbooks, the Internet, and other media for a wide range of purposes. Therefore, students need to have multiple skills to help them decode different texts and to have access to many strategies for comprehension. As students learn, teachers must scaffold the development of student independence. In the middle years, a literacy-blocks framework that includes: (a) self-selected reading, (b) guided reading, (c) writing workshop, and (d) language and word study, is a framework of instruction that brings together strategic teaching of necessary skills and strategies while, at the same time, supporting the move of students towards independence. Paramount to this framework is engagement.

Irvin, Meltzer, and Dukes (2007) suggest that engagement is the critical factor in instruction "because the level of engagement over time is the vehicle through which classroom instruction influences student outcomes." (p. 32-33). When student engagement is a multi-dimensional construct of behavioural, affective, cognitive, social reactions, and processes (Lutz, Guthrie & Davis, 2006) students who are engaged and actively participating in activities are learning. Students find meaning in classroom activities that allow them advance their thinking through authentic discourse with others. Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) *Engagement Model of Reading Development* describes ten instructional practices that affect student engagement. In their model student engagement mediates learning.

A connection can be found between literacy levels, student engagement and dropout rates. Dropout rates are linked to literacy levels and in turn literacy levels (ABC Canada, 2008) and studies of adolescent engagement connect student engagement to drop-out rates (Irvin et al. 2007; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007). Engagement in school decreases as students move up through the grades (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). This connection is why student engagement has been a focus of an assessment initiative developed by Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth (2007). As students enter the middle years, educators need to ensure that they are providing education within an engaging context. At the heart of a social constructivist perspective is the idea that students must be active, engaged participants in their learning.

A second essential understanding that I brought to my research is the philosophy of balanced literacy. A balanced literacy approach is a means to achieving a literacy-learning environment that is engaging and supports the development of students'

essential skills. With balanced literacy instruction there is a balance between all facets of literacy instruction – reading, writing, speaking, listening, representing, viewing – and different approaches of instruction, whole class, group and individual. Above all, teachers ensure that a balance must be achieved between skill development and meaning making in both the emphasis of instruction and the time spent on different activities. Assessment guides this instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005; Rief & Heimburge, 2007; Squire, 2003; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). In the *Journal for Adolescent Reading*, in the "What's Hot" column, a quote from Biancarosa supports the need for a balanced literacy approach. She states that adolescent literacy instruction should include "direct, explicit instruction; instruction embedded in content area texts; reading activities that motivate students and promote self-directed learning; collaborative learning activities with a partner; strategic tutoring; a wide variety of texts; intensive writing; inclusion of technology; and ongoing assessment to improve instruction" (in Cassidy & Barrera, 2006, p. 33). A balanced literacy approach will ensure that students are given instruction in all facets of literacy, at their level, through a wide range of strategies. Literacy blocks, because of their inclusion of explicit strategy instruction across a wide range of literacy activities within a purposeful context, support a balanced literacy approach.

Literacy blocks originated in New Zealand in the early 1980s (Strech, 1995). International literacy scores placed New Zealand near the top of world-wide literacy rates. It was believed that literacy blocks were at least in part responsible for New Zealand's literacy successes (King, Jonson, Whitehead & Reinken, 2003).

Since that time, researchers developed and enhanced different types of literacy blocks. Examples of variations are: (a) Pinnell's *Literacy Collaborative* at Ohio State University (Williams, 1998), (b) Cunningham and Hall's *Four Blocks* approach (2001), England's Literacy Hour (Shiel, 2003), and (c) Slavin and Madden's *Success for All* (Success for All Foundation, 2008). Although there is no one definition of literacy blocks, they all have one point in common. Literacy blocks are a routinely scheduled, uninterrupted time of day when the teacher and students focus on literacy learning. Literacy blocks range from 60 to 120 minutes and include components of independent reading, guided reading, independent writing, guided writing, word study, or language study. There may be whole-class or small-group instruction.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) support the use of literacy blocks as a means of allocating time efficiently with cross-curricular instruction; thus, enhancing connection making. Literacy blocks are also a means of creating routines that support student independent learning. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) has a new initiative supporting the development of learning blocks in Ontario schools. This document cites the ideas of Fountas and Pinnell (2001) and adds further support for learning blocks. They claim that blocks allow teachers to differentiate learning because as students learn routines and become self-regulated it allows teachers to work more with small groups and individuals. This is a time when small-group guided reading and writing instruction and individual conferencing with students can occur. Also, as teachers integrate more content learning within the blocks, students will spend less time transitioning from subject to subject.

Literacy blocks have been researched widely in the early years. Quantitative studies show that Slavin and Madden's Success for All (SFA) block leads to increased reading achievement as defined by state standardized tests and a reduction in special education placements for kindergarten through grade 2 (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996; Slavin & Madden, 1999). In the early years SFA implementation has also led to increased word reading skills (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005).

Research with the Four Blocks approach (Education Commission of the States, 1999) also demonstrated success with literacy blocks in the original implementation school. After six years of using the program at the end of grade one, 80% or more students were reading at or above grade level using the basic reading inventory at the end of each school year. By the end of second grade only 2-9% of children were reading below grade level. This success has been repeated in multiple schools (Education Commission of the States, 1999).

The Learning Collaborative at Ohio State University has also had success with their literacy blocks with kindergarten to grade 2 students (Williams, 1998; Williams, 1999). The evaluations used by LC are Clay's Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (dictations), Benchmark Test Reading Assessments, Fluency and Gates McGinitie Reading Tests. In schools that have participated for four years the grade 2 students showed significant gains in all test scores. In terms of whole school benefits the report indicates positive changes in teacher talk. Teachers now have a common language to discuss problems and solutions. There is also more teacher collegiality and teachers have become better observers of children's learning.

More research in literacy blocks across all elementary years has increased as teachers and researchers move to transfer what we are learning in the early years to all school children. Research into England's national Literacy Hour (Machin & McNally, 2005) between partial implementation in 1996 and full implementation in 1998 show significant gains in reading, writing and spelling between the test group and the control groups. Results from 2002 testing show that students continue to maintain the improvements made during the initial implementation phase. Results are based on nation-wide standards tests done in all subject areas, including English that are done at ages 7, 11 and 14. By 2002 Shiel (2003) states that 75% of age 11 students have reached level 4 or higher (age-level appropriate literacy levels) on their nation-wide standards test.

Based on the success of these researchers a wide range of modified literacy blocks are being implemented in many elementary schools around North America, all declaring at least some level of success at increasing student literacy levels (Alberta Education, 2008; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk & Mallette, 2004; Wheaton & Kay, 1999).

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) recommend the use of literacy blocks for grades 3 to 6 with research in progress in grades 7 and 8 (LC, 2009). Cunningham, Hall, Arens and Loman, have created a modified Four Blocks for grades 4 – 8, called Big Blocks (2005). Rief and Heimburge (2007) also recommend using literacy blocks from grades 5 to 8 and across Canada there are governmental initiatives directing teachers in the use of uninterrupted times for literacy education from Kindergarten up to grade 7. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education (2007) is encouraging elementary schools to plan for learning blocks; they suggest 100 – 120 minutes of uninterrupted time for literacy learning. In

British Columbia the K-7 ELA document (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) states, "an extended and uninterrupted block of time for literacy learning is essential" (p. 34). And in Nova Scotia an ELA curriculum goal is "to ensure structured time every day in grades 4–6 for learning that support students' development as readers and expand their repertoire of strategies for reading a wide range of print for a variety of purposes" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002, p.3). They have designated a Learn to Read/Read to Learn Time comprising one or more blocks of time totalling a minimum of 60 minutes during each school day for "explicit instruction, demonstration and modelling of reading strategies and for their use in the context of both language arts and other subject areas" (p.5).

Although these statistics and recommendations are impressive there are some caveats coming out of the research with direct implications on student engagement. The first concern comes from Shiel's (2003) discussion of England's Literacy Hour. He wonders whether scores in these tests reflect real gains in literacy learning or just a narrow definition of what literacy is. Given the sociocultural definition being used in this study perhaps the idea of "kid watching" (Harste, 2001) and qualitative observational research as a means to describe the learning, or changing participation, that is occurring should be considered. Harste believes that through watching students closely we can make interpretations and develop hypotheses about student learning. He contends that these observations are more valuable than quantitative scores because they will lead to finding out how to further engage students in their learning.

It was hoped that literacy blocks, in providing a framework of instruction, would support teachers' instruction. Yet, caution must be exercised, one study suggests that this

is not the case. Datnow and Castellano (2000) observed that effective teachers used SFA effectively, but struggling teachers continued to struggle even when using a prescribed program. Further study found that many teachers made their own modifications and did not follow the program precisely as prescribed by the researchers. Both the Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 1998) and the Literacy Collaborative (Williams, 1998) demonstrate these same problems in their final research analysis. The data from only some of the schools originally involved in their research met their standards of instruction and were included in final reports.

Another problem, this time identified by teachers themselves, was that the SFA program appeared to be too rigid and prescribed. Datnow and Castellano (2000) found that teachers commented on how boring the materials were. They did not like using them and they believed that their students did not like them either. Teachers had a desire for personal autonomy over their curricular implementation.

With England's Literacy Hour, a concern voiced in research by Mroz, Smith and Hardman (2000) was that teachers were predominantly using teacher-directed instruction rather than the interactive methods described in the program objectives. The interactive methods described by the National Literacy Strategy promote student engagement such as collaborative learning and problem-solving. Unfortunately teachers in Mroz et al. (2000) were not using these methods and the researchers suggested that it was because the Literacy Hour framework did not allow the time and flexibility for them to utilize these methods.

The concerns presented both in Datnow and Castellano (2000) and Mroz et al. (2000) suggest that literacy blocks may lead to disengaging instruction if certain

conditions are not met. The blocks need to be flexible and allow for teachers to meet students' needs. Also, the specific instructional strategies used during blocks must be engaging for blocks to succeed.

In an article on effective teacher practices, Taylor, Pearson, Peterson and Rodriguez (2003) cite the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel, which points to the importance of strategic comprehension instruction. It states that most effective teachers are strategic rather than mechanistic, that is they evaluate what students need to know and their teaching is responsive to student needs. When literacy blocks are successful it is perhaps because teachers are able to use assessment-based instruction to meet student needs within a given framework; and, perhaps it is the frameworks that allow for this flexibility which will ultimately be adopted by teachers.

Despite the questions arising from these concerns, designating time for literacy blocks is part of the answer to providing literacy instruction to middle years students because, without this time, literacy instruction may not even occur in the middle years. As the emphasis moves from learning to read to reading to learn in the middle years, students begin to have teachers who see their jobs as content area specialists and who may not have the training or the inclination to teach literacy (Kamil, 2003). Irvin et al. (2007) state that in middle years, the lack of literacy instruction can be a problem:

> For students with poor academic literacy skills, this lack of embedded and explicit literacy support results in a downward spiral that can lead to academic failure. It is especially important to motivate students who arrive in middle and high school classrooms with a history of failure as readers or writers. People are

> understandably reluctant to persist at behaviours that they do not enjoy or that make them feel incompetent – adolescents even more so. (p. 31)

Literacy blocks prove a means of ensuring that students receive the literacy learning opportunities they need in grades 7 and 8; however, these frameworks must be implemented with clear descriptors of the kinds of engaging instruction that needs to occur. Irvin et al. (2007) list five key elements of engaging literacy programs for adolescents: (1) making connections to students' lives; (2) creating safe and responsive classrooms; (3) having students interact with the text and each other about the text; (4) focusing on authentic literacy tasks; and (5) encouraging critical literacy.

The literacy blocks framework most appropriate to adopt in grades 7 and 8 is the Four Blocks framework developed by Cunningham and Hall (2001). There are two reasons for this. First, this framework includes four components: (1) self-selected reading, (2) guided reading, (3) writing and (4) word study that are taught over a two and a half hour time periods. Within each component block there is flexibility to meet student needs, but the framework itself ensures that students will receive explicit instruction, opportunities for choice, differentiated instruction and collaborative learning – all essential elements of engaging literacy instruction. Successful literacy blocks at the grade 7 and 8 levels need to integrate content area learning and incorporate inquiry, critical literacy and technology to ensure that teachers create engaging learning opportunities and are able to teach all of the required curriculum outcomes.

Second, the Four Blocks approach is appropriate for the middle years because their guided reading block is made up of heterogeneous, rather than homogenous groups. In their research, Cunningham et al. (1998) showed that heterogeneous grouping is "as

important for the highest achievers in each class as it is for the lowest" (p. 663) in terms of reading comprehension results. Given that adolescents are peer-oriented, with a strong need to belong (Manitoba, Education, Citizenship & Youth, 1997) the practice of homogeneous ability groups at this level could be should be avoided.

The four blocks included in this research were: (1) reading workshop (30-45 minutes), (2) writing workshop (30-45 minutes), (3) language and word study (20-30 minutes), and (4) reading instruction (30-45 minutes). Reading workshop is a time when students read texts that they choose and that are at their independent level for developing fluency and enjoyment of reading as well as an understanding of the elements of texts. The blocks begin with a workshop of a short mini-lesson or a read-aloud followed by quiet reading. Students may read independently or with a partner. The teacher performs individual reading conferences during this time. To finish reading workshop, students share their reading in collaborative groups and log their reading in their reading journal. Once a week students write a reading response to their teacher in their journal.

Also included is writing workshop which is a mini-lesson on writing is followed by time for student writing. About half of the time students do personal-choice writing in their writing notebook and the other half of the time, students do writing connected to a designated content area. Students take a piece of their writing through the workshop approach to a final product at least once per month. Assistance comes through peer editing and teacher conferencing. Students also have opportunities to collaborate on their writing.

In language and word study, students do a variety of activities to develop knowledge of word patterns and vocabulary. Sentence combining is also included to

develop students' understanding of how to put words together to form sentences. Word lists and sentence combining include words and ideas from content areas. Many activities of these activities can also be collaborative.

Reading instruction includes whole class and small group guided reading lessons. During lessons, teachers explicitly teach before, during and after reading strategies to develop reading comprehension. Many activities are collaborative and approximately half the lessons have a critical literacy focus. A full description of each literacy block component in the modified Four Blocks approach used in this study is in Appendix J. Also, key components are listed in a table in Appendix K.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical

This study is built upon present understandings of balanced literacy instruction. (Fountas & Pinnell; 2001; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005; Rief & Heimburge, 2007; Squire, 2003; and Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). Balanced literacy is an approach that builds on the past eighty years of literacy research and practices. Inherent in this balanced approach is the idea that students all have different learning styles; thus, teachers need to approach literacy instruction through all modalities – reading/writing, listening/speaking and viewing/representing. Further, students need explicit instruction of strategies as the first step in becoming independent learners. For the past twenty-five years researchers have been investigating the use of literacy blocks as a framework of instruction that promotes a balanced literacy approach in the early years up through the elementary years (Education Commission of the States,

1999; SFA, 2008; Williams, 1999, 1998). Some researchers have extended the use of literacy blocks into grades 7 and 8 (SFA, 2008; Literacy Collaborative, 2009). This study adds to limited amount of research of literacy blocks in grades 7 and 8.

Since student engagement is an international concern as students enter adolescence (Fredricks et al. 2004) any instructional approaches used with adolescents must take into consideration what is currently known about student engagement. Research on engaging literacy instruction points to using instruction that makes connections to students' lives, creates safe and responsive classrooms, has students interact with texts and each other about texts, focuses on authentic literacy tasks, and encourages critical literacy (Irvin et al., 2007). The literacy blocks developed for this study, focus on implementing these key points.

In 2004, Fredericks et al. suggested that multi-method, observational studies of student engagement would be necessary to add to our understanding of the complexities of these phenomena. This study used the qualitative research methods of student and teacher interviews and observations of student behaviour, using a rubric developed by Lutz, Guthrie and Davis (2006). This rubric provided a comprehensive framework for exploring student engagement.

The teachers who participated in this study had limited experience with some of the component blocks of literacy blocks, so the results of the study paint a picture of the beginning stages for implementing new strategies through the framework of literacy blocks. This is a problem that all literacy blocks research have struggled with (Klinger, Cramer & Harry, 2006), which is why the qualitative aspects of this study are important;

the research examined the nature of how literacy blocks were implemented and what the challenges were for the teachers with literacy block implementation in grades 7 and 8.

Practical

Much of the prior research done in the areas of literacy blocks and student engagement has focused on quantitative data. The study was qualitative. Through incorporating qualitative data this study performed a broader function of looking into the changing participation that occurred in the classroom. In this study it was not just the students who were changing; the teachers were also learning new theories and adopting a new framework with new strategies. This organic opportunity to take theory into practice and reflect on what is effective, was a significant learning experience for the teacher participants.

In the school division where this study took place, there is regular discussion about timetabling for grades seven and eight students. Questions have been asked about what makes the most sense – self-contained classrooms, or subject area specialists? This study adds to that discussion as it examined the qualitative markers of implementing a literacy blocks framework in these classrooms. A question to answer with regards to timetabling is; What schedule results in optimum learning for students?

Prior to the study, at a discussion with grade eight teachers there was much talk of “How do we cover it all?” This was an essential concern for teachers. Literacy blocks are a strategic way to double up all of their instruction time so that they would be teaching multiple outcomes from multiple curricula all at the same time. The teachers in this study

struggled with integration and their experiences provide insight about how educators can support teachers in this process as they learn to work with the literacy blocks framework.

The Questions and Scope of this Research

Due to the rich nature of the data coming out of the study, some limitations were employed. First, the scope of the questions was limited to engagement and implementation in order to focus data collection and point to areas less studied in the past. This research addressed two questions about literacy blocks: (1) What were the qualitative markers of student engagement during literacy blocks?; and (2) What were the teacher experiences of implementation of literacy blocks?

To answer these questions this study looked at ten students and two teachers in two classrooms in one school. Therefore, this study is not generalizable to other populations; however, since the data is a glimpse into an area with little previous research following up on the need for exploration of new directions of research.

The implementation of literacy blocks was set to be a natural to the school settings as possible, with mindfulness of the researcher to not impose personal values in as much as was possible. With this, there was some variation between classroom timetabling of blocks. The literature speaks to there ideally being the implementation of four component blocks in one large, two-hour block so that it is easy for students to make connections between the different literacy areas. In the natural setting, no classroom was able to make this happen consistently because classroom timetables varied. The minimum expectations described for classroom participation in literacy blocks produced a wide

variety of when and how literacy blocks were implemented; and any generalizations made within the study are mindful of this limitation.

A critical aspect of the study was that teachers were in the initial stages of learning how to implement the four component blocks as described. For example, the teachers in this study were not yet comfortable with collaborative learning structures and thus, moving away from direct, whole-class instruction, was difficult at times for them because they were not yet comfortable with letting go of the instruction to students.

This study did not specifically look at, or separate out, groups of students who were second language or had disabilities. There is research on the effectiveness of literacy blocks with students with disabilities and students who are learning English as an additional language. In Manitoba, almost all students are included in all classrooms and any instructional framework needs to be viewed in its ability to meet the needs of all learners in the class. If literacy blocks are effective, students will be engaged and self-directed, meaning the teacher will have opportunities to differentiate learning as needed for each and every individual.

Finally, terms and definitions are an important part of any research study and each term is contextual to the setting of the study and the time of its performance. Therefore, a list of terms and definitions specific to this study follows.

Definition of Terms

Balanced literacy – Many authors use the term, balanced literacy, to describe the shift that literacy education has taken in the past 20 years (Fountas & Pinnell, 2003; Rief & Heimburge, 2007; and Squire, 2003) as educators move to create a balance between explicit instruction of skills and a whole-language approach. The Wikipedia definition is a comprehensive definition that incorporates the important ideas from the many balanced literacy concepts put forward. It matches the definition used in this research: "Balanced Literacy is an approach to literacy that integrates various modalities of literacy instruction. Assessment-based planning is at the core of this model. The balanced literacy approach is characterized by explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts. Through various modalities, the teacher implements a well-planned comprehensive literacy program that reflects a gradual release of control, whereby centricity and responsibility is gradually shifted from the teacher to the students" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_Literacy, definition online at November 15, 2008).

Collaboration – Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY, 2008) describes collaboration as when students are put into partners or group: "to generate and share ideas and strategies and to pool resources to maximize learning experiences in the classroom" (p. 111).

Cooperative learning – Cooperative learning is a "specific type of collaborative learning" (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). In this study teachers must meet

the five elements of cooperative learning as described by Johnson and Johnson (1984): (1) Positive interdependence between students, (2) Face-to-face interaction between students, (3) Individual accountability for students, (4) Social skills training, and (5) Group processing (adapted from Johnson & Johnson, 1984, p.2)

Cooperative structure – The collaborative structures referred to in this research are based on Kagan's structures. In his work on cooperative learning he has defined structures as "content-free, repeatable sequence of steps designed to structure the interaction of students with each other and/or the curriculum in ways which align with basic principles and efficiently realize specific learning outcomes" (2000). Although Kagan refers to them as "Kagan Structures" different authors have used a variety of similar structures in their writings on collaborative learning (Bennet, Rolheiser & Stevahn, 1991; Brownlie & Close, 1992). Some examples of collaborative structures are talk-pair-share, jigsaw and graffiti.

Content area – Subjects in which the majority of learning outcomes are focused on specific content, rather than processes.

Critical literacy – The definition used in this study comes from McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) as they cite Freire (1970): "Critical literacy views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites then to move beyond passively accepting the text's message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors" (p.14)

Differentiated instruction – "Instruction that acknowledges and responds to diverse learning needs, interests and strengths and that ensures the success of all students

(the result of formative assessment for learning). It includes a wide range of instructional strategies, techniques and approaches an educator may use (e.g., explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, etc.) to support student learning in groups or as individuals—differentiated instruction involves the gradual release of responsibility" (MECY, 2008, p. 111)

Explicit instruction – Explicit instruction is instruction that "focuses on a strategy, practice, or particular aspect of the reading process, calls to conscious attention what is being taught, and strives to clarify for students the expectations we have for their learning" (p. 3)

Four Blocks – a literacy blocks framework created by Cunningham and Hall. (Cunningham, Hall & Defee, 1998). There are four components of approximately 30 minutes each that make up their 2 ¼ - 2 ½ hour block: Self-selected Reading, Guided Reading, Writing and Words. The Four Blocks approach "is non-ability grouped and intermittently focuses on students' various levels of reading ability" (Education Commission of the States, 1999, np).

Gradual release of responsibility – MECY uses this term in reference to a quote from Pearson and Gallagher (1983) in their "Model of Explicit Instruction." It is "the process in which the responsibility for learning gradually shifts from the educators to the students" (MECY, 2008, p. 112).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) – A MECY teacher support document entitled *Literacy with ICT across the Curriculum* (2006) states that "Information and communication technologies include computers, laptops, digital cameras, video cameras, digital microscopes, scanners, cell phones, electronic

games, digital audio devices, global positioning systems, electronic whiteboards, the Internet, etcetera. ICTs in the classroom will continue to evolve as new technologies emerge over time" (p. 8).

Inquiry – The definition of inquiry used in this study comes from the MECY Social Studies curriculum document for grades 5-8 (2003). "Inquiry encompasses the habits of mind that promote learning, and the processes that can be woven through all classroom activities to enable students to broaden and deepen their understanding of the world. Inquiry processes begin and are sustained by student curiosity. They are supported by teachers who ask, "How can we find out?" Inquiry-based instruction fosters and sustains an attitude of inquiry that will guide students through a lifetime of independent learning" (p. 24). Problematizing subject matter is one aspect of inquiry.

Integration – The definition used in this study comes from the Government of Manitoba *Curicular Connections: Elements of Integration in the Classroom (1997)*. In this definition integration is described as the bringing together of different curricula. The integration of knowledge and skills "can be categorized according to three main types of curricular connections within one subject alone, between two or more subjects, beyond the subjects". The integration in this study refers predominantly to the bringing together of two or more curricula. For example students will meet outcomes in ELA at the same time as they are meeting ICT and Social Studies outcomes when they are learning how to navigate and critically reflect upon a website on ancient Egypt.

Literacy blocks – There are a wide variety of frameworks for literacy blocks, but a common definition for literacy blocks is "a block of time scheduled daily by the classroom teacher for literacy instruction or activities" (University of Windsor, 2007). A detailed description of the literacy blocks framework used in this research is included in Appendix J.

Problematizing subject matter – Engle & Conant (2002) describe the concept of problematizing subject matter as one principle of student engagement. In citing multiple researchers (Lemke, 1990; Warren & Rosebery, 1996) they state that problematizing content is the idea "that teachers should encourage students' questions, proposals, challenges, and other intellectual contributions, rather than expecting that they should simply assimilate facts, procedures, and other 'answers'" (p. 404). Problematizing subject matter is one aspect of inquiry.

Self-directed learning – Guthrie (1996) describes self-directed learning as student autonomy and involves student choice.

Student choice – Guthrie (1996) states that giving choice within parameters, such as a theme, is a way to help develop student autonomy. Choice can be given to students by "providing options for what, how and who of learning activities. . . choosing their topics, tasks, peer groups, criteria for attainment, time of completion, and place for learning" (p. 438).

Student engagement – The definition used in this study is the one discussed by Lutz, Guthrie and Davis (2006). They describe four dimensions of engagement: affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social. They define affective engagement as "positive affective reactions towards teachers, classmates and school" (p. 5).

Behavioural engagement is seen as “active participation and demonstrated through attention, persistence” (p. 5) and participation in questioning. Cognitive engagement is seen as “mental investment in learning, effortful strategy use, and deep thinking” (p. 5). Social engagement is described as “the exchange of interpretations of text and other ideas about reading and writing with peers in a ‘community of literacy’” (p. 5). The rubric developed by Lutz et al (2006) will be used to guide student observations. This rubric is in Appendix C.

Text – In this study, text is defined by the expectations of the curricular documents in the context where this study took place. Therefore, text “refers to all forms of communication: oral, print, visual, and multimedia. Examples of texts include a movie, a conversation, a comic book, a musical performance, a novel, a poem, and a sunset—anything that conveys some thought or emotion to the person who attends and responds to it” (MECY, 2008, p. 112).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literacy blocks are seen as compatible with a balanced literacy approach. This literature review provides an overview of our comprehensive understandings of balanced literacy in relationship to literacy blocks. Presently there are many variations of literacy blocks (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee,1998; Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; King, Jonson, Whitehead, & Reinken, 2003; and Shiel, 2003). To help decide the framework most appropriate for this study and to understand the qualities of effective literacy blocks, this review describes the different frameworks, the related research and questions that have arisen from the research. Inherent in the decision for the framework and the specific components of the literacy blocks used in this study is our understandings of student engagement. This review follows through with defining student engagement and describes the instruction that promotes it.

Balanced Literacy

A balanced literacy approach "is a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments by using various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control" (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005). Further to this, Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez (2003) note that effective primary grade reading teachers provided a balanced literacy program. Within these programs they "taught skills, actively engaged students in a great deal of reading and writing and fostered self

regulation through a combination of modeling, scaffolding and providing informative feedback to students as they tried to apply strategies" (p. 4). Balanced literacy has come about through research in the past eighty years that enhanced our understandings of the nature of reading and learning. To fully understand what balanced literacy is, it is necessary to look at some of the major ideas that have affected the development of this term.

In the 1930s, the Progressive Education movement questioned the emphasis on students learning to read as an isolated skill out of context from real literature and purposeful learning. John Dewey is seen as the leader of this movement that initiated talk about the project method of teaching in which the language arts were integrated in "meaningful" classroom activities (Squire, 2003). At a time when others were focusing on prescriptive teaching and rigid curricula, Dewey believed that curricula should "extend beyond the three Rs" (Titley, 1990, p. 90) and Dewey promoted the science of education as the means to enrich "the teacher's capacity for heightened understanding and intelligent decision making rather than the control of his or her behavior" (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992, p. 42). Dewey constructed the notion that if teachers were well educated in the science of education, they would also be able to use this knowledge in conjunction with observations of their students to design student-centered learning environments that engaged students more so than a prescribed curriculum ever would.

Louise Rosenblatt, who also began writing about this in the 1930s, was interested in the role of the reader in relation to text and her transactional theory of reading advanced her reader response approach to studying literature. Rosenblatt's ideas were widely accepted, and she continued through her career to assert that meaning is a

transaction between text and reader; therefore, readers' individual responses and understandings of a text needed to be acknowledged as valid. This was in contrast to the way basal reading series directed teachers to look for correct answers to the comprehension questions that followed their stories. Initially Dewey, Rosenblatt and their contemporaries influenced what was happening in universities, with little impact on classrooms. Later the movement grew to embrace schools (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Another great thinker of the 1930s whose ideas did not come to fruition in North America until the 1960s was Lev Vygotsky. A Russian psychologist, Vygotsky examined the relationship between learning and development. He found that there was a difference between what a child could do independently and what s/he could do with guidance from an expert, who could be either an adult or a peer. Vygotsky labelled this difference the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The important idea that came out of understandings of the ZPD is that, to propel learning forward, the learning environment should be a little in advance of development. Vygotsky did not see development occurring before learning, rather the learning which occurs in the child's social environment is integral to the developmental process. The teacher's role is to be aware of the ZPD of her students and to provide the scaffold they need to reach the next level in their learning. Thus, construction of knowledge happens "by interactions of individuals within the society and learning is seen as the internalization of social interaction" (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000, p. 154). Vygotsky was not translated into English until the 1960s and it was at a later point that we see social constructivism became a larger force in literacy instruction.

In the 1970s Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a book that introduced the idea of critical literacy as a problem-posing approach to literacy learning in which students are asked to question the text, explore identities and recognize bias. He compared this type of learning to the traditional, transmission model of education in which the teacher is like a banker who deposits information into the student's mind and students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. For Freire, who was concerned with people achieving humanity, this banking approach was considered dehumanizing, as students are not active, or called upon to critically reflect on their realities. With the initial writing of his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire was seen as the father of the critical literacy movement. Yet, it was not until the 1990s that this work was widely translated and disseminated. Freire's ideas of critical literacy, problem-posing, and active student participation have been closely linked to research on student motivation in reading.

In the 1960s there was a shift from phonics instruction to comprehension instruction. Vogt and Shearer (2007) noted that comprehension instruction was treated as an isolated skill in much the same way phonics was, such that "a discrete list of comprehension skills was identified and it was recommended that the skills be taught and that students practice them frequently through a variety of skills exercises" (p. 13). Although there was concurrent talk of the English Language Arts (as distinguished from the previous singular notion of English to include a broader spectrum of texts) and a whole language movement, as well as a shift in focus from phonics to comprehension, reading instruction did not change significantly throughout the 1900s. Well into the

1980s teachers were using basal programs in over 90% of elementary classrooms (Squire, 2003; Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

In the 1980s and 1990s the coming together of research in a range of fields created a shift in thinking and practice (Shearer & Vogt, 2007). Cognitive psychologists found that a reader's schema and prior knowledge about a topic affect comprehension. This echoed what Rosenblatt had said in the 1930s and what she expanded on in 1978 with *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*. Meaning-making is a complex and unique transaction between each individual and any given text. Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD, which was now translated and part of educational psychology courses, explains how children's learning and development is affected by the scaffolding provided by experts. Rogoff extended this concept through the notion of guided participation (Bjorklund 1995, p. 447). The philosophy and theories of social constructivism led to a definition of learning which says "learning is defined as changing participation in culturally valued activity" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p.109).

Understandings about the construction of knowledge and what learning truly is, led to an increased interest in collaborative learning. Research in the classroom supported these theories (Gilbert & Driscoll, 2002; Kagan, 1993; Reimer, 2001; Straw, Craven, Sadowy & Baardman, 1993; Watson, Baardman, Straw, & Sadowy, 1992; Zapp, Straw, Baardman, & Sadowy, 1992) as it was found that in most instances gains in academic learning were equal to the transmission mode of learning with the increased benefit of the opportunity to learn social skills. Part of the reason behind the success of collaborative learning strategies is that they foster oral language. Since the processes of the language arts are integrated, the development of one dimension will foster the development of

another with oral language being the foundation upon which all other literacies are built (MECY, 2008).

As media became more and more a part of students' lives the call for media literacy increased and many who call for media literacy put it within the context of critical literacy; students must develop the skills to critically reflect on the multiple media presentations they see every day. Freire called upon teachers to guide their students to critically reflect on their realities and in the world of instant and continuous digital communication it is becoming even more important for teachers to bring their students' lives into the classroom and help them to question their world. Critical literacy necessitates a problem-posing education. The discussion of a problem-posing education in the context of social contructivist framework reflects back to Dewey and his experience curriculum; children learn by authentic involvement in tasks under the guidance of teachers.

As research and theory came together a completely different vision of what literacy is and how it should be taught was beginning to unravel. Reading instruction began to focus less on skill development and more on the need to "build students' backgrounds, promote concept formation, instill joy and delight in reading and forge connections among the language processes of reading, writing, listening and speaking" (Shearer & Vogt, 2007, p. 14). The whole language movement which had been started earlier now began to take hold with classroom teachers as research supported practices that focused less on teaching discrete skills and more on creating integrated, authentic literacy learning experiences that incorporated problem-posing and inquiry.

By the mid 1990 computers were evident in schools and MacLuhan's concept of multimedia (Squire, 2003) was being fully realized as children were bombarded with images on television, in video games and on the computer. The proliferation of multimodal texts forced a change in thinking about literacy such that it is now defined as the ability to view images and represent ideas (MECY, 1995) as well as reading, writing, speaking and listening. This expanded view of literacy has led to the term "multiliteracies" (Barrell & Hammett, 2002; McClay and Weeks, 2002; O'Brien, 2001; Rowswell, 2006; Semali, 2001; Sheridan, 2001; Snyder, 2000). Valuing these multiple literacies is an essential component of any literacy program in the twenty-first century (NCTE, 2004 ; Alvermann, 2001). Sheridan (2001) explains why teaching multiple literacies is so important when she says, "our minds are designed to work in a cross-modal manner, shunting information back and forth from one mode of representation to another." Semali (2001) and Pailliotet (2001) call this multi-modal process intermediality and according to O'Brien (2001) explain it as "the ability to work with diverse symbol systems in an active way where meanings are received and produced" (p. 1). The world our students live in requires the ability to comprehend across many media therefore it is important that we bring these many different media into our classrooms.

A new area of study, merging constructivist and literacy thinking is called the New Literacy Studies. In this study reading and writing are "viewed not only as mental achievements going on inside people's heads, but also as social and cultural practices with economic, historical and political implications" (Gee, 2003, p. 8). Within this context literacy is as much about understanding the context as it is decoding the symbol.

Given the historical context of balanced literacy we can now fully understand that in the Frey et al.'s (2005) definition reading and writing implies the reading and writing of various texts, in multiple modalities. It also implies meaning making from and decoding these texts. It is assumed this meaning making takes place in a social context in which students bring their prior knowledge to respond to the text personally. Their meaning making will also include learning to question the text. The instruction and support will be provided by teachers who will scaffold students and by peers who will work collaboratively with one another as they engage in their learning. Students will move along a continuum, initially requiring explicit instruction, moving through guided practice and eventually being able to initiate and practice strategies independently. The multiple environments suggested in this definition mean that reading and writing are not relegated to the ELA class. Literacy learning happens everywhere.

In addition to our understandings about what balanced literacy is, more recent research has shown that the previous assumption that students did not need literacy instruction beyond the elementary years is proving incorrect. Part of this research has led to the increased importance of content area literacy instruction for Middle and Senior High students over the past twenty years (Vacca & Vacca, 1997). Going beyond even that instruction Donna Alvermann (2000) talks of the challenges facing middle grade literacy education and stresses the need for schools to ensure that literacy education is a priority at this level. In their 2004 *Call to Action: What We Know About Adolescent Literacy and Ways to Support Teachers in Meeting Student Needs* the National Council of Teachers of English discusses the need to focus on literacy instruction in adolescence and key findings about effective instruction. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) also

supports the need for literacy education in middle and senior schools quoting research that states “approximately 1 in 4 young people are struggling to read and comprehend grade level textbooks and subject matter as they enter middle and high school.” Given this statistic and the strong statements being made it is inevitable that schools will have to take stock of how they are ensuring that all of their students are receiving the instruction they need.

It is clear that literacy education and the balanced literacy approach need to move beyond elementary school and into middle and high schools. In the early years the balanced literacy approach has led to the development of a number of different instructional frameworks, called literacy blocks, (Cunningham et al.,1998; Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; King, Jonson, Whitehead, & Reinken, 2003; Shiel, 2003). At this point we will examine the research on these blocks to develop a clearer understanding of why and how they may be used in the middle years.

Literacy Blocks

The term, literacy blocks, refers to an approach to teaching literacy in which the teacher, or school, or division, designates a particular amount of time, each day, to teaching different components of a literacy program. Blocks vary in their content and last for as little as one hour and as much as three hours. In most, but not all, the different components of the literacy program are joined together so that it is easy for students to make connections between reading, writing, word study and oral language development. During this time no pull-outs or specialist classes such as physical education or music are allowed.

New Zealand's Daily Literacy Blocks

Since the early 1980s all elementary school children across New Zealand have participated in a two-hour literacy block. New Zealand has some of the highest literacy rates in the world; King, Jonson, Whitehead and Reinken (2003) attribute the majority of this success to their literacy block. The two hour, daily literacy block in New Zealand is made up of small-group guided reading lessons, shared reading, independent reading, read alouds and writing. There is a lot of flexibility within the two-hour period and there are no strict guidelines about how much time is spent on each activity. Guided reading is done in homogeneous groups who read an appropriately leveled book together with the goal being to increase word recognition within a meaningful context. Teachers are required to do monthly running records on each student so that they can match student reading levels to the books in their classes. There are no basal readers or texts in New Zealand, but they do have large classroom libraries and access to a wide range of books of different levels. Strech (1995) suggests that it is the inclusion of guided reading within a whole language approach that provides the balance to this framework. A factor that King et al. (2003) suggest contributes to the success of their literacy block is that in New Zealand students remain with the same teacher for a number of years. In New Zealand Reading Recovery is also an important intervention for any students in kindergarten and grade 1 who are performing below grade level.

Despite the overall success of the nationwide literacy block, in 2003 the New Zealand Literacy Strategy was adopted to address some concerns. A main goal of the strategy is teacher development to improve literacy practices especially into grades 7 and

8 and beyond into high school. Teacher development will also focus on literacy instruction for non-English speaking students.

Success For All

Success for All (SFA) is a school reform model designed to address the needs of "at-risk" students in low SES areas. SFA includes a ninety-minute block of time devoted to structured reading instruction (LaMartina, 2002). The content of this time varies from level to level, with an increase in writing as the levels progress. Within the ninety-minute block, students participate in structured cooperative learning activities, with writing activities frequently being completed in pairs or small groups. Students are grouped by reading ability during this time. The reading groups combine students from different classes and have between 8 – 24 students. This highly-scripted reading program was developed through the Success for All Foundation, spearheaded by Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden (SFA, 2008). Each level has its own set of readers and teacher guides. At lower levels, the emphasis of instruction is "direct teaching of letter names and sounds, sight words and phonics pattern drills and repeated reading of *Roots* readers, often chorally or in pairs" (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005, p. 438). Included in the SFA reform model is a cooperative, social problem-solving curriculum and supplementary staff supports to help with teacher education, student assessment and family support. Any grade 1 students in a SFA project who are reading below grade level receive extra one-on-one tutoring. Due to the structured nature of the program there is no time for independent choice reading at school; however, there are opportunities to talk about home reading during weekly Book Club time.

Creators of the program say the strengths of it are the scaffolding provided to students through research-based lesson designs. There have been many quantitative studies that show this program increases reading achievement as defined by state standardized tests and reduces the number of special education placements (Slavin & Madden, 1999). A comparative study in the early years (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005) showed that, like other literacy block models, SFA increased word reading skills without significant impact on vocabulary or comprehension. A study discussing the implementation of SFA in England (Hopkins, Youngman, Harris & Wordsworth, 1999) in inner city primary schools shows that students made as much progress in one term of SFA, as they do in one year of England's Literacy Hour. They also showed improved behaviour and motivation.

Despite these successes, SFA has some detractors. One detractor of SFA is Stanley Pogrow (2002). He claimed that studies of SFA are misleading because they are conducted either by the program's creators or by employees of the SFA Foundation. Klinger, Cramer & Harry (2006) state that research done by Walberg and Greenberg (1999) demonstrated that SFA programs were only effective with kindergarten and grade one and were no more effective than more cost-effective programs. In one comparative study (Bifulco, Duncombe & Yinger, 2005) neither SFA, nor another program, increased reading scores. The researchers concluded that the participating schools did not fully implement the programs and this is a possible reason for their lack of success. One of the difficulties with SFA is that it is difficult to implement because teachers must follow the prescribed program in the prearranged manner which requires a lot of training, support and teacher buy-in.

Datnow and Castellano (2000) used qualititative methods to examine how teachers in two California schools responded to SFA. They found that they could group teachers into four categories: (1) Teachers who were strong supporters of the program, (2) Teachers who generally supported the program, (3) Teachers who simply accepted the program, and (4) Teachers who were vehemently against the program. Sixty-four percent of teachers were in the categories that supported the program. It was thought that these teachers would implement the lessons as prescribed, but it was found that even these teachers made adaptations to the lessons, as they felt necessary, to meet the needs of their students. There was a fit between what these teachers believed an effective literacy program looks like and the SFA program. The fact that it is research-based appealed to many of the teachers in this group. These teachers saw growth in students' reading and attributed it to the SFA program. The teachers who simply accepted the program did not make any more adaptations than the first two groups. The majority of them understood that the changing nature of their students (many low SES) necessitated changes in the school, they just did not believe that they needed a prescribed program to help them meet the needs of their students. Only 8% of teachers were vehemently opposed to the SFA program. The only part of the program that they liked was the ninety-minute, school-wide reading block and they attributed any reading gains to this. One teacher opposed the program due to the emphasis on direct-teaching; he even quoted Freire, saying that the SFA is following a banking model of education. Another teacher did not like the one-size-fits-all approach of SFA. Due to the many programming adaptations being made in the school it is difficult to sort out which attributes of the program contributed to any gains made in reading achievement.

In another qualitative study using interviews and observations, Klinger, Cramer & Harry (2006) investigated the implementation of SFA over two years at four urban schools and noted many concerns. They also noted that many teachers did not fully implement the program and that teachers were making adaptations to suit the needs of their classes; effective teachers were making adaptations that made sense for them. One of the hopes of SFA is that it will support better teaching, but the researchers found that effective teachers used SFA effectively, whereas struggling teachers continued to struggle even when using a prescribed program. Teachers commented on how boring the materials were; they didn't like using them and they believed that their students did not like them either. Another program component that the researchers saw lacking was in the support available to struggling readers beyond grade one. Grade one students who were struggling got one-on-one support, but students in grade three who were not progressing did not get this support and this meant that they were stuck in the same level with the same materials, likely dampening their enthusiasm for reading. Researchers observed "numerous students who appeared to be languishing" (p. 340). Schools also did not fully implement the program school-wide as it is intended; and, in some cases were grouping students by behaviour rather than level. As such, one teacher had three levels in one group and all of her students had behaviour issues. Teachers were also concerned about the SFA assessments that leveled students. They frequently re-assessed and moved students according to their own assessments. With regards to grouping, another point that teachers made was that it was inappropriate to have a third grade and a first grade student in the same reading group just because they were at the same reading level. The mixing of students from different classrooms also made it difficult to implement SFA as this

requires extra planning and scheduling. Many teachers did not like this aspect of the program because students were being taken out of their classroom on a daily basis. Also, integrating services for students between the school and the SFA framework became difficult and students who needed referrals to special education were not getting these referrals.

It is difficult to evaluate SFA as a literacy block model because it is a whole-school reform model of which a literacy block is one component. Nevertheless, there are some positive results that even detractors acknowledge as at least attributable to the extra time spent on reading that the literacy blocks provide.

SFA has also been further developed as a program for the middle years, and the SFA Foundation has done some research at these levels (Daniels, Madden & Slavin, 2004). As part of their middle school reform project, a 60-minute literacy block is provided to all students. During this time students are placed in homogeneous groups of grades 6 – 8 students based on their reading levels. Students read a basal reader at their level and teachers follow a prescribed lesson. Lessons use collaborative learning structures to facilitate peer interaction and oral language development. Part of the whole-school reform, that compliments the literacy learning, but is not part of literacy blocks, is structured units of instruction that integrate content-area themes. After three years of data collection at their pilot schools the independent evaluator, the National Opinion Research Center, found that all seven of the pilot schools showed significantly higher increases than their paired control school in state high-stakes reading assessments. It would seem, at least part, that the results could be attributable to the explicit instruction on reading that is given during the one hour literacy block provided in the SFA model.

Literacy Hour in England.

In 1996 through the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), the Literacy Hour (LH) was adopted in a select group of primary schools across England. The purpose of this LH was to change the kind of school reading instruction from very passive, with students quietly reading independently, to active and defined (Machin & McNally, 2005). The rational behind the program was government reports that stated the quality of literacy practices varied greatly across schools and literacy rates were dropping. By 1998 the LH program was adopted nation-wide.

Teachers are given materials to guide them in the specifics of the program: 10 – 15 minutes for whole-class reading or writing, 10 – 15 minutes of whole-class, word-level and sentence work, 25 – 30 minutes of directed group activity (guided reading and independent reading) and 5 – 10 minutes for a summary meeting to reflect on the lesson objectives.

Research by Machin and McNally (2005) between partial implementation in 1996 and full implementation in 1998 shows significant gains in reading, writing and spelling between the test group and the control groups. Results from 2002 testing show that students continue to maintain the improvements made during the initial implementation phase. Results are based on nation-wide standards tests done in all subject areas including English that are done at ages 7, 11 and 14. The effects were greatest for low-performing boys. There appeared to be significant positive spillover effects into math scores. Machin and McNally are overwhelmingly positive of the program and in their costs-benefits analysis, state that the program is well worth the money spent.

Shiel (2003) stated that through consistent implementation, by 2002, 75% of age 11 students had reached level 4 or higher (age-level appropriate literacy levels) on their nation-wide standards test. Although this is an impressive statistic, Shiel wonders whether scores in these tests reflect real gains in literacy given the narrow definition of literacy represented by the tests.

Over time other concerns have been brought forward with further research into LH. The main area of concern is the discrepancy between the NLS stated goal of increased interactive teaching in comparison to what was actually happening in classrooms, working toward the tests. In an initial study of this phenomenon, Mroz, Smith and Hardman (2000) found that the ten teachers they observed used predominantly teacher-directed instruction. The framework of LH, therefore, had not increased interactive teaching in their small sample.

Further to that study, English, Hargeaves and Hislam (2002) conducted a qualitative study of 30 primary teachers, using interviews and observations to investigate the discourse that was occurring in the classrooms. They found similar results to Mroz et al. (2000). In interviews, they explored the idea about whether the rigid framework of LH is contrary to the goal of interactive teaching. The majority of teachers in this study stated that there was a conflict for them in that they just did not have time in a lesson to pursue and validate students' questions and concerns.

Hall, Allan, Dean and Warren (2003) observed and analyzed the discourse that occurred in two poetry lessons in LH Year 6 classrooms from a sociocultural perspective. They found the discourse predominantly followed a monologic, initiation-response-evaluation pattern, with an emphasis on recitation, although in the smaller group there

were more opportunities for dialogism. The researchers noted that teachers are unaware of the way classroom discourse impacts learning and that if they had opportunities to learn about "the role of classroom discourse, specifically the notions of literacy stance, interpretative authority, the control of turn-taking and the control of topic" (p. 296) they would move away from recitation as a dominant form of discourse. This research supports Mroz et al.'s (2000) initial findings that LH does not support more interactive teaching.

In their analysis of interviews and observations of 51 teachers teaching LH, Parker and Hurry (2007) found that direct-teacher questioning of text was the strategy most often used for teaching comprehension and although modeling of comprehension strategies was done by teachers, it was not made explicit to students. Also, students were not encouraged to create their own questions. Parker and Hurry reference research that claims that explicit teaching of comprehension strategies and that teaching children to self-regulate their learning through generating questions are two approaches that improve reading comprehension. The lack of these two teaching approaches was a concern for them, and they believe that teaching approaches can be changed through more teacher professional development for teachers, and that there is nothing inherently wrong with the LH.

Another concern was addressed by Wearmouth and Soler (2001), and that is the nature of inclusion for all students in LH classrooms. The researchers noted that there are contradictions between the national policy for inclusion and the nature of the whole-class, directed teaching as described by LH. They strongly suggested that there needs to be coherence between all levels of policy and called for inclusion of professional input into

educational policy at all levels of discussion, rather than through centralized decision making that is now the norm.

Supporting the idea of inclusion, is a case study of four immigrant children. In this study, Wallace (2005) asks the questions, does LH supports the children's home literacies and what concepts from LH are resonating with the children? She found that due to the tight time constraints of the hour there was "only partial acknowledgement of the multilayered history of experiences with language and content which Langer (2001) conceptualizes as key to the version of literacy she proposes" (p. 336). The impact of LH on the students' understandings of literacy seemed to be very limited. The children used some of the words from LH (blurbs, dedications, acrostics) but did not verbalize more complex concepts. The most verbal student, when asked directly about his literacy influences, said he got them from reading and from the ideas in his head. Overall, Wallace thinks that LH play a minor role in students' "socialization into literacy" (p. 337).

Another area of concern was the transference of learning from LH to other classes. Peacock and Weedon (2002) discuss research showing that, despite the focus on non-fiction text during LH, students were still struggling with reading science texts. In their own research, Peacock and Weedon observed and interviewed Year 5 students and their teachers. They also surveyed teachers about text-use strategies. Peacock and Weedon found that students continued to have difficulty in making meaning of science texts, especially the visuals. They also observed that strategies taught in LH were not transferred to science class.

The concerns voiced about LH reflect research-based understandings of student

engagement (Hall et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2003). Based on what is known about student engagement, the concerns about classroom discourse, the fact that there is not time to listen to student voices, and the lack of connection to students' home literacies is an important reflection on student learning. Then again, the sixty minutes a day spent on literacy, regardless of the content of the lesson, seems to have an overall positive impact on reading comprehension as demonstrated by a standardized reading test. The ultimate question is, which could also be asked of SFA; Do standardized reading comprehension tests really measure literacy rates? Going back to the new literacies and the expanded definition of literacy, it seems that although reading comprehension is relevant, it may not be the only correct standard on which programs should be basing their results. Researchers and curriculum designers forge ahead with trying to resolve this dilemma. Complexity may be the answer.

The Four Blocks

Patricia Cunningham and Dorothy Hall designed the Four Blocks approach and first implemented it in 1989 in a first grade classroom. Four Blocks is made up of four different teaching strategies or blocks including guided reading, self-selected reading (also termed reading workshop), writing, and working with words. Guided reading is done in small heterogeneous groups and can include whole-class shared reading. Each block receives 30 – 40 minutes of instruction each day. Teachers are encouraged to create as many connections across blocks as possible. One way to do this is with a thematic approach to the Four Blocks. Children are not put in fixed ability groups and the aim is to present multilevel instruction. The basis of the program is that children do not come to

literacy in one way, so there must be daily exposure to multiple paths to ensure that all students are receiving the experiences they need. Four Blocks is compatible both with Reading Recovery and Facilitating Reading for Optimum Growth (FROG) and the program creators support the use of these support programs for students who need them.

In the original school Cunningham and Hall (1998) report that across six years at the end of grade one 80% or more students were reading at or above grade level using the basic reading inventory at the end of each school year. By the end of second grade only 2-9% of the children were reading below grade level. The researchers admit that a lack of control group limited their study. They also stated that the stability of the results over time, with changes in teachers and administration, lend support to the strength of the program. Standardized tests on the grades three to five students at this same school have placed over 90% of the students in the top two quartiles. Students in this school were a heterogeneous mix of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Cunningham et al. (1998) also reported on a study in a South Carolina suburban school district. When Four Blocks was initially introduced, teachers were given a choice about whether to use it or not. This enabled the researchers to have a control group. In January of the first year they randomly chose 100 students in grade one who had participated in Four Blocks and 100 students in grade one who did not receive the treatment. Using the BRI to compare, it was found that on average the treatment group was at beginning grade two level, while the control group was only at the second month of grade one level. The district Board was encouraged, but wary of these results, so in May of the research study year, they re-tested all 557 students in grade one using a standardized test. They made a cohort control group by pairing each of the grade ones

from 1996 with a student from 1994 and made a statistical comparison of the two groups. The Four Blocks treatment group showed a significant increase in reading comprehension even in these comparisons. With further analysis, the study also showed that gains were as great for middle and upper achieving students as for the lower students, lending even more support for non-ability grouping.

Another study from a rural school in South Carolina, led by the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 1999), tells a different, but equally powerful story. In 1992 this school had been placed on the state's list of lowest achievement scores. Over four years they tried four different programs to increase achievement but with very little improvement. Only 9% of second graders scored above the 50th percentile in Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) scores. However, after two years of mandated implementation of Four Blocks in grades one and two, 40% of grade 2 students were above the 50th percentile on MAT scores. The researchers admit that these results are open to debate since there was no control group and no pre-test scores on the grade 2 group. Were the changes attributable to the instruction or something else? Despite these cautions about correlation of the success of the intervention, the school district was convinced that Four Blocks were the reason for this school's success.

In St. Louis, Missouri two schools participated in a study of Four Blocks (ECS, 1999). One school was the control school and one the treatment school. In the fall the Gates McGinitie test showed no difference between the control and the treatment groups; however, in the spring the treatment school showed significantly higher scores. The NCE scores followed a similar pattern and in the fall. The two schools had relatively similar scores, but in the spring the Four Blocks school's scores went up significantly, whereas

the control school's scores actually dropped a little.

A study in Michigan compared Four Blocks with a basal reading program in grade one classrooms (ECS, 1999). Sixty-two students from 14 classrooms were randomly selected for a wide range of testing (alphabet recognition, words known, dictated sentences, an IRI, a spelling test, Botel Word Opposites) and writing samples were collected. Even though more children in the Four Blocks group were male, on medication or bilingual, the Four Blocks group still significantly out-scored the basal group.

Cunningham et al. (1998) state they receive positive feedback from teachers when working with them on implementation because this program is do-able within the time frames given and with the materials that most teachers already have in their classes. Further, even though teachers have their favorite blocks, they will incorporate all four blocks into their teaching because the program in action does not eliminate anything they value. The program is flexible and allows teachers room for creativity to meet the needs of their students.

The only research reviewed about Four Blocks shared thus far has been conducted by the program creators. Although this research is fairly rigorous, other researchers have also investigated the efficacy of Four Blocks. Popplewell and Doty (2001) compared the reading comprehension of grade two students in two different schools. One school used a basal reader approach and one school used Four Blocks. Results from the Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory were analyzed to control for the variability in reading levels between the two classes. Re-tellings and comprehension questions were used to determine story comprehension. The students who received Four Blocks instruction

performed significantly higher than the basal reader group. Angell (2001) used the Four Blocks approach with a class of grade one students in an at-risk school. The researcher enhanced the Four Blocks model with the addition of cooperative learning strategies, vocabulary enhancement, and language support and acquisition. Results showed improvement on sight word recognition and reading comprehension. The teacher-researcher felt that the confidence gained in sight word recognition through the use of the Word Wall was one of the reasons for success. She also believed that the daily, varied literacy activities helped build on all of her students' strengths. In another study, Mackh (2003) also had positive results when she used Four Blocks with her grade six students with improvements shown in reading comprehension, fluency, and metacognition.

The Four Blocks approach has good results because it focuses on four different components of literacy with time and flexibility to incorporate student choice and voice. Teachers see that they are able to incorporate the framework into their classrooms and meet the needs of their students. Program creators have extended the Four Blocks program into the middle years with a program called Big Blocks (Arens, Loman, Cunningham & Hall, 2005). This program is designed for grades 4 to 8. When specifically asked about research on this middle years program, Hall responded that "research is not on the Big Blocks model but there is research on each of the blocks or part of the model" (personal communication, October 18, 2009).

The Literacy Collaborative

The Literacy Collaborative (LC) was originally called the Early Literacy Learning Initiative (Williams; 1998). Gay Su Pinnell spearheaded this research at Ohio State

University. The instructional component of this initiative is comprised of three different blocks: (a) reading workshop which includes independent reading, guided reading, and literature study; (b) writing workshop which includes independent writing, guided writing, and investigations; and (c) language and word study which includes interactive language and literacy, conventional use of written language and word study. Reading and writing workshops both last one hour and language and word study continue for a half hour to one hour. The entire instructional framework takes 2 ½ - 3 hours per day. Guided reading groups are leveled; and, as much as is possible, readers are matched to corresponding leveled texts.

The LC grew out of the need for a professional development model to support teachers in learning new ways of teaching reading and writing. As a school reform effort, a trained literacy coordinator supports the implementation of teaching at schools, there is a home outreach program. Students who are falling behind receive Reading Recovery support in grade one.

Evaluation is a key component of LC toward informing daily instruction, establishing baselines, measuring progress towards goals, and revising school curricula. Evaluation is also used to inform the school administration and the public about efficacy of the program. Current evaluations are Clay’s Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (dictations), Benchmark Test Reading Assessments, and Fluency and Gates McGinitie Reading Tests.

The initial study was started with kindergarten teachers in 1989-1990. A five-year report of schools participating in the initiative from 1993-1998 (Williams, 1998) was compiled and released in 1998. Five schools out of a possible 177 were included in this

study according to the criteria that the school had to have been part of the initiative for four years, the LC model was being followed and implemented accurately by teachers and the literacy coordinator was still at the school. The schools were from a range of SES communities. In one school 43% of students received free lunches, and in another school 99%. The grade 2 students showed significant gains in their standardized test scores demonstrating 5.6 NCEs in reading comprehension and 5.3 in total reading. Not surprising, a sub-group of students who attended school less than 141 days out of 176 in grade 2 scored less than those whose attendance was higher, but the group of students new to the school in grade 2 showed the lowest reading levels. In terms of whole school benefits, the report indicates positive changes in teacher talk; that is, teachers now had a common language to discuss problems and solutions. From this, there was also more teacher collegiality and teachers had become better observers of children's learning.

In the Literacy Collaborative 1999 Research Report (Williams, 1999) twelve schools met the criteria listed above and were included in the study. Seven of the twelve schools demonstrated a strong upward trend in NCE reading scores at grade two. These seven schools all had the following characteristics: a five year commitment to the program; a high level of implementation of the specialized practices of guided reading, interactive writing and word study; a high level of commitment from administration; regular training and in class support for teachers; over 2 hours per day for the uninterrupted literacy block; and, the use of data to inform instruction. The results were positive across eleven schools when students new to the school were dropped from the analysis. This could be because students with high transience were always lower on reading scores, or it could be that participation in the program over three years was a

strong indicator of reading success. As in the previous year, interviews with school staff indicated a high level of teacher growth around literacy education, this in turn, had also increased teacher collegiality.

In addition to these self-studies, the LC was also reviewed by the Center for Education Evaluation and Policy (CEEP) housed at Indiana University (Dexter, 2007). They found that in third grade assessments, Literacy Collaborative schools had slightly higher passing rates than other schools and had substantially greater year-to-year passing rates. CEEP also found that LC schools had lower numbers of grade 2 retentions and fewer special education referrals. Overall, CEEP found the LC has most consistently demonstrated success when compared to other funded interventions.

Another research study that included LC was the study of four different models in grade one classrooms and conducted by Tivnan and Hemphill (2005). The outcomes of this study showed that LC students were the strongest out of all four programs in writing; however, all programs were behind in vocabulary and comprehension. Since the release of that report, LC has increased its emphasis on these portions of their framework (Dexter, 2007). LC is also involved in three more studies comparing LC schools to non-LC schools independently conducted by Universities of Memphis, Stanford, and Chicago.

The LC has recently developed a middle years literacy blocks program and is presently researching this framework in grades 7 and 8 (Literacy Collaborative, 2009).

New Directions in Literacy Blocks

The previously described literacy blocks and related research have inspired educators to look at using their own modifications of literacy blocks within their schools.

One example of this is Stephen Kay (Wheaton & Kay, 1999) who with his “1,000 Days” program looked at ways to improve literacy in his school. As part of this initiative all schools in the network have implemented an uninterrupted morning literacy block. Kay states that this block is based on research from Ohio State’s Literacy Collaborative and The California Early Literacy Learning.

Likewise, Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk, and Mallette (2004) describe using the principles of Reading Recovery and of the Four Blocks model to create a unique model for their school district, Anna School District. In their implementation, each classroom visits the Reading Room once per day for 30 minutes. During this time the students are divided into four groups and each group works with one of the three reading specialists or the classroom teacher on a schedule that closely follows the Reading Recovery model of instruction, but does it in heterogeneous groups. In this way all students are receiving daily small group instruction in literacy. The classroom teacher works with the specialists to ensure that the reading is connected to the classroom learning. Before starting this plan only 50% of students were meeting state standards for reading. Afterwards 90% were meeting standards.

Burnham, Discher and Ingle (2003) describe how two-hour daily literacy blocks were implemented to help a school district meet the needs of its diverse, at-risk student population. During this period, teachers received1.5 hours of paraprofessional support and .5 hours of special education support. This literacy block was one of the results of a comprehensive reform process that took place and was called the Circle of Collaboration.

More and more schools are seeing the implementation of school-wide literacy blocks as one way to meet the challenges they are facing. Evidence of schools using

literacy blocks in Canada is seen in the research literature. A study in Ontario of urban schools talks about literacy blocks as one of the common literacy activities that occur at all schools (Jang & McDougall, 2007). In an Alberta government school-planning document (2006), St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 38 (Alberta Education, 2008) outlined the implementation of a literacy block to promote balanced literacy in their grades 1 – 6 schools. Their framework closely followed the LC model, structured through a reading block, a writing block, and a word study block. Teacher professional development was an integral part of their plan. In the first year of implementation, the results were positive and 80 % of their target goals were met in reading and writing.

The Ontario Government (2007) has a new initiative supporting the development of learning [sic] blocks in their schools. Their document cites the ideas of Fountas and Pinnell (2003) and adds further support for learning blocks. Blocks allow teachers to differentiate learning because as students learn routines and become self-regulated it allows teachers to work more with small groups and individuals. This is a time when small-group guided reading and writing instruction, and individual conferencing with students can occur. Also, as teachers integrate more content learning within the blocks students will spend less time transitioning from subject to subject.

Across Canada, as newer curricula are developed in the English language arts, positive results from research around the world on literacy blocks are reflected in implementation documents. Literacy blocks are being described as effective frameworks of instruction from kindergarten up to grade 7. In Ontario, for example, the Ministry of Education (2007) is encouraging elementary schools to plan for learning blocks in both

literacy and numeracy. They suggest 100 – 120 minutes of uninterrupted time for literacy learning. As well, British Columbia's K-7 ELA document (2006) states that, "an extended and uninterrupted block of time for literacy learning is essential" (p. 34). In Nova Scotia, an ELA curriculum goal is "to ensure structured time every day in grades 4–6 for learning that support students' development as readers and expand their repertoire of strategies for reading a wide range of print for a variety of purposes" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002, p.3). Nova Scotia has designated a Learn to Read/Read to Learn Time comprising one or more blocks totaling a minimum of 60 minutes during each school day for "explicit instruction, demonstration and modeling of reading strategies and for their use in the context of both language arts and other subject areas" (p. 5). Educators realize that the balanced approach that literacy blocks can provide is a path to increased literacy learning.

Literacy Blocks and the Content Areas

As described throughout the review of the various literacy block programs, there are both supporters of and detractors from the idea of literacy blocks. One of the biggest areas of concern is the amount of time that literacy blocks are taking away from content area studies. In their research in grades 3 – 6, Fortino, Gerretson, Button and Johnson (2002) found that there is a connection between science and literacy achievement when "teachers are provided the time, appropriate instruction and resources to learn the science content and the pedagogical skills necessary to design and implement an integrated, inquiry-based science unit" (p. 18). They state that limiting science teaching to make

more time for literacy blocks may not be the sound practice, although they do support integrating the teaching of literacy into science classes.

Hirsch (2007) explains that literacy is not a skill to be learned in isolation and "lack of relevant prior knowledge will hinder comprehension, no matter how many long hours a child has spent learning to monitor, question, or summarize" (p.19). In citing Jeanne Chall, he states that real subjects need to be brought into language arts because language is more than fiction and poetry.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a topic of great interest across all fields of education today, because it is seen as "an important and well-documented predictor of academic achievement in general, as well as in specific subject areas including reading" (Lutz, Guthrie & Davis, 2006, p.3). Studies connect student engagement to specific increases in literacy skills (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). For these reasons it is important to consider student engagement when discussing the implementation of a new framework of instruction such as literacy blocks. Many researchers share the opinion that student engagement is essential (Appleton, Christenson, Kim & Reschly, 2006; Azevedo, 2006; Reed, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanish, Creed & McGregor, 2006).

In Manitoba curricula, student engagement is seen as a desirable outcome of learning and a recent initiative has teachers across the province assessing the engagement of their grade 7 students (MECY, 2007a). Ben Levin comments on the outcomes of student engagement and emphasizes the importance of engagement in learning in general:

> Student engagement refers to the degree to which students are actively involved in and take responsibility for their education; whether, in short they see schooling as "theirs." A considerable body of research, as well as educators' own experience, shows that students' sense of involvement in their education is vital to their effort and success. Moreover, engagement with learning is critical to students' capacity to be lifelong learners and is likely to be predictive of their ability to take on new challenges after they leave school. (MECY, 2007a, p.13)

Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris, (2004) explain that student motivation declines across grade levels. In Manitoba, the emphasis on student engagement at grade 7 is an effort to stop this decrease and support teachers in their practices.

Research shows a correlation between adolescent literacy and dropout rates (ABC Canada, 2008) and a correlation between dropout rates and student engagement (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007). Specific to reading, Taylor et al. (2003) explain that engagement increases text comprehension and reading achievement and citing from Guthrie (1996) they state that when teachers know how to increase reading engagement, students are "motivated, read to learn, use cognitive strategies, and interact in a classroom community" (p.4). Guthrie (1996) emphasizes the importance of student engagement in literacy as a priority in our society on many levels. One statistic he cites from Brown (1991) is that "80% of the population over 12, in our society, need higher order literacy competencies for full participation in society" (p.435). On a different level he talks about literacy engagement being the first step towards self-direction. If a child is

engaged in literacy and reads with purpose, then that child will have the ability to direct his/her learning in the future.

Defining Student Engagement

There is some debate about how different student motivation is from student engagement and in fact many of the student engagement studies noted by researchers are from the field of student motivation (Guthrie, 1996; Hidi & Harakiewicz, 2000). Appleton, Christenson, Kim and Reschly (2006) describe student motivation as being more directly related to the psychological processes "answering the question of "why" for a given behavior" (p. 428), whereas engagement describes a "person's active involvement in an activity" (p. 428). Given this distinction, it is possible to be motivated and yet not engaged in an activity; but, it is highly unlikely that someone would be engaged without also being motivated.

Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick and Littles (2006) investigated reading comprehension as the result of an extended amount of engaged reading. They defined engaged reading as motivated, strategic, knowledge-driven and socially interactive. In this case, motivation is also seen as one component of engagement. This reflects the engagement model for reading development that Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) advanced, in which motivation, strategy use, conceptual knowledge and social interactions are all described as processes of engagement that mediate learning.

Before deciding how best to define and study student engagement, it is necessary to take note of a caveat from Vibert and Shields (2003). Both Vibert and Shields have been involved in studies across Canada that investigate student engagement and they note

that definitions of engagement must be seen through the lens of ideologies. Their experiences in researching this phenomenon and the tensions they experienced working in teams of people with different ideologies helped them to realize that "student engagement, like school improvement and school effectiveness, is a catch-phrase that begs a number of qualifying questions, questions such as engagement in what and for what purposes?" (p.238). Therefore, examining the ideology of whether student engagement described as students being on-task and actively involved in teacher driven activities, or whether it something different must be put forth. Vibert and Shields (2003) state that the answer to this dilemma depends on educators' point of view, and their beliefs about the purpose/functions of student engagement. Vibert and Shields consider that there are three perspectives through which to examine this issue:

1. The rational-technical perspective in which educators create activities for students, and they are seen as engaged if they "participate willingly and relatively enthusiastically" (p. 227)
2. The student-centered perspective in which teachers provide choice to students within a narrow range (the curriculum), and students learn the skills valued by "the professional class" such as:" individual choice, individual responsibility, independent work, order and organization, politeness, cooperation, team-work, turn-taking, productivity and good management" (p. 233)
3. The critical perspective in which the teacher provokes students to question and analyze their experiences and the students reflect on and learn within this dialogue how they can create a more just society.

In their discussion of the three perspectives, it is clear that Vibert and Shields value the critical perspective of student engagement. Brenda McMahon (2003) outlines three similar perspectives; and, similar to Vibert and Shields, she sees the critical perspective as the most valuable at this point in time, given the sociocultural definition of learning "as changing participation" (Logan & Marsh, 2003, p. 109) it is most in line with a social constructivist view. McMahon (2003) describes a classroom where this view of student engagement is valued as a "think tank, an institution in which important knowledge is produced that has value outside of the classroom" (p.261). In our multicultural society she sees critical pedagogy "as a means of opening the door and inviting all students to fully engage" (p.262).

Bohn, Roehrig and Pressley (2004) share this interest in what is engaging students during their discussion of effective classrooms. In talking about one teacher's class, they noted that students were engaged, but they were engaged "by procedures rather than the procedures increasing the likelihood that students would be engaged by the content they were to learn" (p.285). It seems possible that if a researcher were observing this class from a rational technical perspective, the evidence would show that the students were engaged. From a critical perspective, however, this is not engagement because students are not actually engaged in questioning, analysis, and reflection.

Recognizing this link between ideology and definitions of student engagement, the support document for Manitoba teachers about student engagement (MECY, 2007a) explains that there is no single definition of student engagement; however, as a working definition used in their practice, the multidimensional one described by Fredricks et al. (2004) appears to combine the cumulative research to that point and is therefore useful in

describing what student engagement looks like. As well, this definition includes emotional, behavioural and cognitive components of engagement.

Lutz, Guthrie & Davis (2006) were most concerned with creating an observational definition of engagement as they researched student engagement in relation to specific learning tasks. Therefore, they changed the term from Fredricks et al's (2004) research from "emotional engagement" to "affective engagement". They considered this term more accurately describes what this type of engagement looks like. Ainley (2006) also argues for the use of the term affective engagement rather than emotional engagement.

An important addition to the definition was made by Lutz, Guthrie & Davis (2006) who included a social domain, which refers to the exchange of ideas with others. In a constructivist paradigm this aspect of engagement is necessary. Student engagement can then be described by behaviours across four domains simultaneously (Lutz et al, 2006): affective, behavioural, cognitive and social. Affective engagement is viewed as "positive affective reactions toward teachers, classmates and school and conceptualized as facilitating students' sense of connection with school and commitment to their schoolwork" (Lutz et al. 2006, p.5). The behavioural dimension of engagement is seen as active participation. This participation is viewed as students involved in asking and answering questions, as being attentive and showing persistence. Cognitive engagement is described by Fredricks et al. (2004) as the "idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills" (p.60). Since we cannot actually see this cognitive component, it was inferred by the "quality of students' verbal answers and on inferences from their manner while they interacted with teachers, classmates and texts" (Lutz et al. (2006, p.5).

Social engagement is viewed as "the exchange of interpretations of text and other ideas about reading and writing with peers in a community of literacy . . . . as important social behaviors of students who are engaged in reading" (p.5). This additional dimension of engagement connects to the previously described social constructivist understandings of literacy learning in which learning is viewed as the internalization of constructed knowledge. This multidimensional definition of engagement also seems to address Vibert and Shields concerns that students would not be considered engaged if they were just active in one dimension; the cognitive dimension implies thinking and learning must be taking place, the affective dimension implies that students are involved emotionally in a personally relevant task, and the social component implies dialogue is occurring.

Fredricks et al. (2004) discuss many of the difficulties of researching student engagement. One concern is that, at this point, we have some ideas from research about the kinds of teacher or school activities that lead to increased engagement, but we do not know what the mediating factors or why of the interaction may be. Connected to this concern is the measurement of student engagement. To this point researchers have used multiple methods with surveys being a popular choice. These surveys are leading us to the what, but not the why or how. Fredricks et al. (2004) suggest that the focus of research, forthwith, should be on qualitative studies so that a deeper look at this complex phenomenon may be observed.

What Promotes Student Engagement?

Interest and Inquiry

Guthrie (1996) notes three shifts educators must take to ensure that students are engaged. The first shift he describes is the need for teachers to see their students beyond

their immediate cognitive needs. In terms of their motivational needs; students need to feel they have some control and a purpose. He calls this “seeing literacy as the self-determination of a person with purpose” (p. 435). The second shift is seeing students not just as individuals, but as members of the community. In citing from Heath, Guthrie explains that “participation in a variety of social patterns of communication broadens literacy engagement” (1996, p. 434). The third shift is a move to thinking about literacy as inquiry, where there would be less emphasis on narrative in literacy instruction and more emphasis on questioning and knowing. These three shifts would focus teachers into designing learning frameworks for their classrooms that incorporate the following:

1. Real-world observations.
2. Encourage students to create concepts by synthesizing what they know and observe. This requires that teachers use conceptual themes, not themes limited to genres, authors or topics.
3. Student self-directed learning as he states that studies show autonomy enhances motivation.
4. The choice for students to express their learning in personally relevant ways.
5. Strategy instruction within the contextual learning.
6. Opportunities for collaborative learning.
7. Integration of learning to create coherence for students. (Adapted from Guthrie, 1996)

Guthrie does not suggest that a teacher incorporate all of these points at the same time, but that over a six to ten week planning cycle, there would be a stronger emphasis

of one component over another until all components had been engaged. In 2000, Guthrie and Wigfield added to this list in the development of their *Engagement Model of Reading Development*. Guthrie made use of these essential elements of an engaging classroom and, through collaboration with science teachers, developed a framework for teaching literacy within integrated science units. He called this approach Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). Research into this approach supports CORI as an effective method for increasing motivation across a number of domains and in turn also increasing reading comprehension (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick & Littles, 2006).

Engle and Conant (2002), much like Guthrie et al. (2006), connect literacy learning to science content to increase student engagement. They describe four essential elements of a classroom that support student engagement: “(a) problematizing subject matter; b) giving students authority to address such problems; (c) holding students accountable to others and to shared disciplinary norms; and (d) providing students with relevant resources” (p. 399). These principles are based on their study of classrooms using the Fostering Communities of Learning (FCL) principles, an instructional framework designed by Brown & Campione (1994).

Petrosino (2004) also studied student engagement within a science instruction framework. Using the National Research Center’s *How People Learn* framework, Petrosino found that a project-based approach within a technologically-rich environment engaged students in their learning. This was a case study of an experienced teacher teaching an astronomy class to students in grades nine to twelve. He explored the notion that the framework is the essential element in creating successful learning environments. The *How People Learn* framework provides four different intersecting lenses for viewing

and questioning what is happening in classrooms. The first lens is knowledge-centered. Do teachers provide students with projects and meaningful, integrated activities? The second lens is learner-centered. Do teachers start with where their students are at and make sure to build on any preconceptions of a concept? The third lens is assessment-centered. Do teachers ensure that they are creating opportunities for regular feedback to students about their learning? It is essential that the majority of this assessment is formative. The fourth lens is community-centered. Is the teacher aware of the students within their community? Does s/he help them to negotiate their understandings within this community? The community is defined broadly, as both within the school and outside of it. The teacher observed in this case study met all of these criteria and his students appeared to be fully engaged in their learning.

CORI , FCL and How People Learn frameworks are similar to inquiry frameworks as students are encouraged to self direct their learning around topics or questions that are meaningful to them. Strickland and Feeley (2003) discuss the benefits of an inquiry stance in the literacy classroom:

> "Inquiry teaching, a strategy frequently used in social studies and science, is an interactive method that has been expanded and refined in recent year. Hillocks (1986) reports that inquiry methods – teacher and student question/discussion-generating techniques – underlie numerous studies in which students show writing improvement. The trend toward encouraging students to generate questions for each other and share responsibility for determining topics and the course of group discussion are a major breakthrough in promoting competence and confidence in oral language." (p. 344).

The interest in and support for an inquiry approach is evident throughout curricula and teacher support documents created by Manitoba, Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY) in the areas of ICT with Literacy (2006), Science (2000), Social Studies (2003), differentiated learning (1996), and multi-level learning (2003).

In the inquiry cycle, as envisioned by Short, Harste and Burke (1996), students are engaged in literacy learning, and their voice is the starting point for learning. Through personal involvement, students begin to observe, wonder, and "wander" about a topic. Students reflect on what they know, and the perspective they have, as they begin to research and collaborate. Through dialogue and conversations, tensions come to the surface, creating deeper and deeper questions. Students share their new understandings, transforming not just what they know, but the knowing of others. This brings them back to the start of a new cycle as they celebrate and reflect on their learning. Thoughtfulness about their stance opens new opportunities for inquiry. The inquiry cycle, as envisioned by these researchers, was developed at the Center for Inquiry in Indianapolis. Within the inquiry cycle, literacy learning is seen as something impossible to measure with standardized tests and numbers, because students' own starting points and growth within their community is personal and contextual. Through "kid-watching", researchers at the Center for Inquiry in Indianapolis have come to the conclusion that the inquiry cycle creates engaged learners.

A similar theme about student engagement in literacy practices emerges when one examines the relationships among research done by Contant (2002), Guthrie et al. (2006), Engle and Petrosino (2004), and Short, Harste and Burke (1996). They observe that students must have a personal interest in what they are doing. Interest is created through

the opportunity to ask and answer student-initiated questions. Opportunities for choice and autonomy heighten the sense of personal relevance for students. Integrated learning, as opposed to learning out of context, increases the meaningfulness of what is being learned. Opportunities for collaboration and dialogue within a learning community are important in all models.

Other researchers support the importance of student interest in what they are learning, as a factor of student engagement. Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert and Gubbins (2007) describe their School-Wide Enrichment Model in Reading Framework (SEM-R) as an enrichment program based on students' self-selected reading choices and interests, and as a means to increase oral fluency and positive attitudes to reading. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2001), cite numerous studies that have "shown that children as well as adults who are interested in particular activities or topics pay closer attention, persist for longer periods of time, learn more and enjoy their involvement to a greater degree than individuals without such interest" (p. 153). Inquiry, choice and interest are difficult to separate, and perhaps should not be, because inquiry that is initiated with student questions is based on student interest and student choice. When teachers regularly incorporate these components into their classrooms, student engagement increases.

A further example of the power of these three components working together is found in Azevedo's (2006) study of the engagement of adolescent students during a summer computer course. He found that when students were allowed to self-direct their learning and take "personal excursions", this act of self-efficacy positively affected their engagement. It allowed students to connect the curriculum to their personal learning

goals and to build competence. They stated that the variables most connected to successful personal excursions is a match of student competence to the activity, the open-ended nature of the classroom activity, the amount of time available for students to work on an activity, and the necessary conditions for flexibility being met in the environment.

If educators ensure that students are interested in what they are doing by giving some choice and creating a sense of purpose, the likelihood of engagement in learning is sponsored. An example of this is found in the Reggio Emelia perspective, as described by Fraser (2006). In this approach, it is necessary for teachers to go beyond simply providing students with experiences, that they must engage students in discussions and ask questions to find out what children are thinking about and why. Further, teachers work with students to create a negotiated curriculum. The Reggio Emelia approach was designed with young children in mind; however, it seems that what Fraser explains is the essence of what research is telling educators about adolescent engagement. Educators should not be prescriptive; should listen to and observe students to uncover their interests, and facilitate learning that reaches through the curriculum to student interests. The Reggio Emelia approach is in line with what research in both middle years education and brain-based learning is telling us.

Brain-based learning suggests that teachers must design learning around student interests and make learning contextual (Funderstanding, 2001). With adolescent learners, this becomes even more imperative due to the nature of the adolescent brain. MECY’s Grades 5 – 8 English Language Arts Curriculum (1997) incorporates information about middle years teaching from the National Middle School Association which states that to

meet the intellectual needs of their students, teachers need to focus classroom inquiry through student curiosity and interests to focus classroom inquiry.

Relationships and Discourse

Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipeur, Hanisch and McGregor (2006) investigated the relationship between adolescent students' engagement and school fit. These researchers used school-fit as the mediator between both teacher-student relationships and peer-student relationships. They found that authentic relationships assist students to be engaged and students felt there was a good school-fit when they had positive relationships with their peers and teachers. The connection between peer relationship and school-fit was higher than the connection with teachers and school fit; however, teacher connection had a very direct impact on student engagement. These researchers suggested that a student's experience in a particular subject with a particular teacher can affect the student's engagement in that subject without affecting how he or she feels about the school. They conclude that changes in school structure that promote autonomy, connection, and feelings of competence within a classroom would increase student engagement.

Australian researchers, John Smyth and Lyn Fasoli (2007) conducted further research demonstrating the need for strong relationships for adolescents at school, especially at-risk students. Citing the Australian Centre for Equity through Education and the Australian Youth Research Centre, they acknowledge the importance of relationships for adolescents. Through interviews, classroom observations, and focus groups the researchers studied a school implementing change with the purpose of increasing positive relationships for students in the school. A goal of the implementation was to ensure that

adults always acted with respect towards students. One strategy was to create opportunities for teachers to get to know students and students to get to know teachers. By the end of a year, all participants felt positively about the changes that had occurred. This research has echos of Freire and his notions of critical literacy. When educators hear students' perspectives and demonstrate respect towards their points of view, the discourse patterns change; in turn, changing relationships and increasing student engagement.

Specific literacy education, Fecho and Botzakis (2007) describe how changing discourse in the classroom can create feelings of mutual respect between teachers and students and increase student engagement. Their article summarizing Mikhail Bakhtin's writing from 1981 – 2004 places Bakhtin's ideas into the classroom context and describes how teachers might engage students in discussions about literature. The first point that Fecho and Botzakis make is that classroom dialogue must occur and this dialogue must respect the students' questions and answers, accepting them as unique to the context of the student. Secondly, there will undoubtedly be multiple perspectives; and, rather than discouraging this, teachers should acknowledge the tensions inherent in these differing perspectives. Thirdly, throughout dialogue, teachers should strive to keep all voices equal such that no one person is more important or privileged over another. Learning is active and dynamic because language is; it is impossible to learn literacy without active participation. Involvement fosters understandings. Teachers who adopt Bakhtin's theories into practice open up dialogue in the classroom and foster teacher-student relationships.

Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez (2003) also investigated the affects that varied teacher interactions had on cognitive engagement and reading comprehension in schools from areas with high poverty. They developed a framework based on research

into student engagement and reading comprehension that incorporated four key components: (1) through their questioning teachers need to support higher level thinking in both talking and writing; (2) independent use of word-recognition and comprehension strategies should be encouraged by teachers; (3) the focus of literacy lessons should be a student support stance rather than teacher-directed in which teachers coach and model for students instead of telling; and (4) literacy involvement needs to be active, such that passive filling in of work sheets is not the method of instruction. Nine elementary schools participated in their study with student assessment taking place in the fall and spring. Teachers participated in weekly study group sessions during which they read articles, viewed videos, and participated in discussions about framework components. A consistent finding from the study was that higher level questioning increased reading comprehension and engaged students more cognitively. Results also showed that phonics instruction in grades two to five actually decreased students' reading achievement. The researchers suggest this is because most students actual had good decoding skills, so that time spent on phonics was actually a waste of their time. This points to the importance of assessment guiding instruction. An interesting result was that routine practice of comprehension skills also negatively impacted student comprehension. The researchers stated that teachers who taught skills strategically, rather than routinely, and within the context of other learning, were more effective and their students made greater gains.

The common thread running through all of this research was that students must be active participants in their own meaning-making. Relationships and discourse in the classroom make evident how cognitively and genuinely active students are. How teachers interact with students and the communities they create within the classroom, makes a

difference in student engagement. Hall, Allan, Dean and Warren (2003) cite from Nystrand when stating that "classroom discourse tends to promote pupil achievement when it actively involves them in the production of knowledge and when the discourse is highly interactive" (p. 293). The National Middle School Association (MECY, Grades 5 – 8 ELA, 1997) concurs with this position. In this document, teacher behaviours that promote active learning, open communication and valuing of all student perspectives are encouraged. Educators also understand through brain-based research, that it is impossible to separate emotion from cognition (Caine & Caine, 1991). Caine and Caine state, "in general, the entire environment needs to be supportive and marked by mutual respect and acceptance both within and beyond the classroom" (p. 82). Thinking and engagement are linked by discourse focused on active learning.

Peter Johnson (2004) describes that the language we use is at the heart of this environment. In *Choice Words*: *How Our Language Affects Children's Learning,* he describes the ways teachers can open up discourse and create opportunities for learning in the classroom. Johnston's assertion is that language creates realities. Using appropriate words is needed to help students notice and name their thinking and learning in the classroom, thus aiding in the creation of student identities as learners. Educators create a sense of agency for students when they respond to them with, "What if? That's like, . . . How else?" Johnston reminds us that words are powerful, but if words do not reflect our beliefs, the insincerity of them will ultimately roadblock discourse rather than promote it.

The relationship and discourse between teacher and student is important, but discourse between students is also important. Research suggests that collaborative groups are an effective way to increase active participation (Slavin,1990; Kagan, 1993; Johnson

& Johnson, 1994). The following research, specific to literacy activities, advises that collaborative learning is also effective for developing literacy learning. Bear and Invernizzi (1984) showed how a directed, reading-teaching activity (DR-TA) can create a supportive and challenging environment for learners when they explain how they have modified DR-TA to include peer teaching as a means to develop independent reading. In their classrooms, the teacher leads group DR-TAs for the first months of schools, Students remain in their reading groups for approximately two months at a time. Once students are familiar with the framework, student-directed reading groups are put into place. Students form pairs and choose a text from the materials made available in the classroom. Student instruction dates are assigned and pairs get started in preparing their instruction. They read a text and choose how they will divide it up, what the important ideas are that they want to highlight and questions they can ask to help other students develop their thinking about the reading. During this time, pairs are re-reading the text themselves thereby developing speed and fluency through repetition. Bear and Invernizzi explain that student accountability is built into this activity in that the peer instructors have to be prepared to teach their group and they know that boring and irrelevant questions will not be tolerated. It is also safe for risk-taking because they have each other. Peer instructors meet with the teacher before teaching their group, to help students assess the lessons they have designed thus far. Some focus questions that can be used when assessing student lessons: Are the questions targeted to the main idea of the story?; Are the questions open-ended to invite discussions?; and, Are the questions reformulated in a variety of ways to make the intent clear?

Approximately once per week, students lead the group DR-TAs. The sessions

generally last about 30 minutes and are followed by a group discussion. The teacher observes each lesson. Bear and Invernizzi suggest that a lesson can be evaluated using the following seven objectives: preparation, quality of questions, how the text was divided, degrees of probing, tact and politeness, organization and teamwork, and resolution.

A study by Almanza (1997) suggests why Bear and Inverizzi's framework may be successful. In her study, Almanza compared the effects of DR-TA to the effects of cooperative learning on reading comprehension. Fifty-three sixth grade students in heterogeneously mixed classrooms in a middle school in a low to middle income area were the subjects of her study. Fifteen students were English as a Second Language and spoke little or no English. All students participated in a short story unit using text from a grade six basal reader. At first three stories were taught using cooperative learning strategies and then three different stories were taught using DR-TA. A formal assessment was completed individually after each story. The means of the cooperative learning assessments were significantly higher than the means of the DR-TA assessments. Although lack of counter-balancing of treatment affects and the novelty of the cooperative learning strategies in the class limit the implications of this study, it is nevertheless interesting. It is a possible explanation of the perceived success of the framework that Bear and Invernizzi were using in their class. By combining a cooperative learning strategy with DR-TA, they increased its effectiveness because they increased levels of social engagement in the students' learning.

In another study, Reimer (2001), compared and contrasted the affects of three different instructional approaches, a transactive approach (traditional, teacher-centered), a transactional approach (student-centered using writing) and social constructivist approach

(collaborative learning groups), in the teaching of grade twelve literature using student responses on a multiple choice test, short answers, and an essay. Two different grade twelve classes received the three treatments in varying order. Each treatment lasted three weeks and students were evaluated at the end of each treatment. The results from the social constructivist approach were significantly higher than the other approaches, with the transactive approach resulting in the lowest scores. This research, along with Bear and Invernizzi's (1984) student-led DR-TA, illustrates the power of students working together in student engagement in learning.

The research discussed thus far indicates that classroom discourse is a powerful component of student engagement. Traditional, didactic discourse patterns, in which all talk is teacher-directed, must change if educators wish to see their students engaged. Student questions must be encouraged and validated so that students feel that their voice matters. Both inquiry and critical literacy approaches meet this requirement. Students must also be allowed to carry on learning conversations autonomously from the teacher. Collaborative learning strategies will ensure that students are given these opportunities.

Expanded Literacies

Much of the literature about student engagement discusses at-risk, low SES, or urban youth. Gaztambide-Fernández (2007) argues for the inclusion of arts and popular culture as a means to engage these groups in learning. He sees the primary role of art and popular culture as forms of cultural production where students can be encouraged to analyze and question in terms of what they represent in our society. By participating in cultural production, students are encouraged to “engage in *inner* explorations, producing *outer* representation and communicating *in between* the boundaries that encompass their

everyday lives" (p. 36). This speaks to the needs that students have to explore multiple literacies that they encounter in every day functioning; and, to fully engage students in the use all of their senses that these multiple literacies require for interpretation.

Technology and its associated multiple literacies, is seen as a way to create student engagement in classroom learning. Shenton and Paget (2007) researched the use of interactive white boards (IWBs) in grade six classrooms in England. They cite research by BECTA that IWBs increase student engagement. Shenton and Paget advise that student engagement is a factor of student interaction. In their classroom observations they found that it was not the white boards themselves that encouraged interactivity, but how the teachers used them. The idea was that technology has the potential to increase student engagement; yet, it is how teachers use technology that is the greatest factor in determining sustained student engagement. These researchers recommend that teacher training with IWBs be equally focused on mastering the technology, as well as how to use it interactively and integrate use across the curriculum. This recommendation is reminiscent of Barrell and Hammond's (2002) discussion about technology in the classroom. They said that "poor teachers will use computers poorly and good teachers will find emancipatory ways to use new technology" (p.15). As such, teacher education that focuses on how to use technology is a priority.

A pilot study completed by Lightner, Baber and Willi (2007) in a university accounting course used a technologically-rich classroom as the setting for a program of study that required students to work in groups to solve real-life accounting problems. The ultimate purpose of the study was to increase student engagement. At first, it seems that this study would be irrelevant to this discussion of adolescent engagement in literacy

activities; however, what is interesting to note is that similar themes to previously cited research appear. The rational for the course design was based on the authors' understandings of research. They cite numerous studies that support that technology use is motivating for students. They also talk about research on collaborative learning that states that creating classrooms where students work together promotes active learning and student engagement. When technology and collaboration are combined, opportunities for students to construct knowledge together increases. Through surveys and observations the researchers found that students enjoyed teamwork, that they found it purposeful and engaging for deep thinking. This study reinforces the concepts that a problem-solving curriculum, a social constructivist approach, and accessing real world literacies in the classroom, together, shape the conditions for high levels of student engagement.

Likewise, Boss's case study (2008) describes a teacher, Elise Mueller, using project-based learning combined with a multi-media approach to engage grades 3 to 5 students in their learning. In support of this approach, Boss cites a five-year study by the Center for Learning in Technology at SRI International. It was found that a project-based learning approach that incorporated multimedia "increased student engagement, greater responsibility for learning, stronger peer collaboration skills and increased achievement by students who had been labeled 'low achievers'" (p. 8). Boss also cites research from England and New Jersey that had demonstrated increases in learning when project-based learning was used. In Mueller's multi-media projects, students use digital storytelling to share their learning in interdisciplinary projects. Indicators of success, for Mueller, were that her students expressed passion for their learning. They looked for solutions to problems and they took initiative in their learning.

Whether it is through art, popular culture or technology “in order to make education meaningful for middle school students, teachers must recognize students’ competence with out-of-school, private literacies” (Faulkner, 2006, p.l08). By bringing multi-modal texts that students are reading outside school into the classroom, educators are making their learning more personally relevant and thus, more engaging. With at-risk or struggling students this aspect of using multiple literacies in classrooms is doubly important (Alvermann, 2003; O'Brien, 2004). Educators connect one type of literacy with another. Just as reading improves writing, and writing improves reading (Alvermann, 2003); all literacies will support and enhance the others. Sheridan (2000) notes all "literacies nourish each other." The more educators build bridges between out-of-school and in-school literacies the more they are nourishing students’ literacy learning.

In the next chapter, methods for this research will be presented.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In this chapter the purpose of the research is explained. The methods used in this study are accounted for with reference to the literature review. The research questions and how they developed from an analysis of the literature on literacy blocks are also explained and research methods are described in full.

Purpose of the Study

Research on literacy blocks has previously measured the positive effects of a variety of literacy blocks formats using quantitative measures of reading ability with the majority of the research focused on kindergarten to grade 2 (Cunningham, Hall & Defee,1998; Education Commission of the States, 1999; Machin & McNally, 2005; Shiel, 2003; Slavin & Madden, 1999; Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005; and Williams, 1998, 1999). The Literacy Collaborative, Four Blocks and Success for All have middle years programs, yet only Success for All has researched their program at these levels. Since many curricula in Canada (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) are suggesting that literacy blocks should be used as a framework of instruction in the middle years this research was designed to examine grade 7 and 8 classrooms and thus, add to the research on this age group.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) and Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007) reveal that student engagement is the mediating factor through which learning occurs. Further to this, other researchers state the importance of adolescent engagement in learning

(Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007). In their review of studies of student engagement, Fredricks et al. (2004) explain that survey methods have been the predominate form of measuring student engagement. They suggested that qualitative studies that would investigate the processes of student engagement would be valuable. Therefore, this research investigated student engagement. An observational rubric (Lutz, Guthrie & Davis, 2006) was used as lens for observation, and student and teacher interviews were employed to further examine student engagement.

A problem that had been identified in research on the implementation of literacy blocks was teacher training. Datnow and Castellano (2000) observed that some teachers had difficulty following the guidelines of the components of literacy blocks. Both Cunningham et al. (1998) and the Literacy Collaborative (Williams, 1998) only reported on schools whose teachers fully adhered to their literacy block guidelines into their final analysis. The small percentage of schools in their final reports suggests that they also recognize concerns in teacher training. However, teacher training is a major goal of the Literacy Collaborative and Success for All literacy blocks program. Since teacher implementation was identified as a concern, this research made use of observations of classroom practices, interviews, and notes from professional development meetings to frame an understanding of the teachers' experiences at the beginning stages of a literacy blocks implementation process.

Rational for this Study's Literacy Block Framework

The Four Blocks framework (Cunningham et al.1998) was chosen as the framework for this study for a number of reasons. First, in the Four Blocks framework self-selected

reading is a separate and distinct block from reading instruction. This ensured that students would get both types of reading opportunities. Second, Cunningham et al. (1998) state that they received positive feedback from teachers on the implementation of Four Blocks because it is do-able within the time frames given and with the materials that most teachers already have in their classes. Third, the program is flexible and allows teachers to put their own stamp on it to meet the needs of their students. Fourth, the inclusion of heterogeneous groups is an important factor of the Four Blocks approach. Cunningham et al. (1998) described heterogeneous grouping in guided reading as effective in the early years. Research on heterogeneous grouping of middle-years students in guided reading is unavailable; however, given what is known about adolescent learners' heterogeneous grouping, it seemed best to use heterogeneous groupings for guided reading in the middle years. As well, this was the natural setting for the school that eventually participated in the research.

Manning (1993) describes ability grouping as harmful to adolescents. A report on middle ages education from the North Carolina State Board of Education (2004) explains that students who "feel that their teachers believe them incapable of academic success, will lower their own expectations accordingly" (p. 22) and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (1997) describes adolescents as peer-oriented, with a strong need to belong. Due to the developmental stage of adolescents, placement in homogeneous groups may be detrimental to their development.

The Four Blocks is made up of four different literacy strategies, or blocks. The first block, called self-selected reading, meets learners' need for choice and autonomy (Denton, 2003) while giving students opportunities to read books they are interested in at

their level to develop fluency and enjoyment of reading. Teachers begin the block with a short reading or mini-lesson and students end the block by sharing either with the whole class or in small groups. This block was modified to include a reading response journal as recommended by Fountas & Pinnell (2001) and informal reading conferences as recommended by Routman (2003). In the study, this block was called reading workshop.

The second block, called guided reading in the Four Blocks, was an opportunity for the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies. All reading selections were at or below the average level of the students. Students were put into heterogeneous groups for small group guided reading. This block was modified to include whole class, shared-reading activities (Routman, 2003). All of the reading selections in this block were integrated with content area subjects to ensure that teachers were able to meet learning outcomes, across all subject areas, in spite of the amount of time spent on literacy blocks. In this research, this block was called reading instruction.

The third block, in this study was called writing workshop. It began with a teacher-led mini-lesson followed by time for student writing. A modification to this block was that students had choice 50% of the time; and, the other 50% of the time, they were writing on subjects connected to content area learning. Students were also involved in peer sharing and editing of their writing.

The fourth block had the most variation from Cunningham and Hall’s model. It was called language and word study and included a wide variety of activities to learn about word knowledge, vocabulary, and language use. Students studied words with a focus on patterns, morphemes, and word origins. Students developed their vocabulary and many of their individual study list words came from content area units. This helped

them make connections to their learning. Students were also involved in sentence combining activities to develop their understanding of syntax and grammar.

The framework itself ensured that students would have opportunities for choice, differentiated instruction and collaborative learning. These are all essential elements of engaging literacy instruction. Successful literacy blocks at the grade 7 and 8 level should also integrate content area learning and frequently incorporate inquiry, critical literacy and technology to ensure that teachers created engaging learning opportunities and are able to teach all of the required curriculum outcomes. The blocks in this study were planned to embrace this framework.

The *Literacy Block Planning Guide* for this research project appears in Appendix A. All of the literacy blocks component parts and student engagement requirements are described in detail in Appendix J. As well, a table describing key components of the literacy blocks is in Appendix K.

Research Questions

Student engagement is described in the research as a mediating factor through which learning occurs (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Irvin et al., 2007) and it is of utmost importance in adolescent learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007). Any learning framework suggested for use in the middle years must contribute to student engagement. Therefore, this research focused on describing student engagement throughout a literacy blocks implementation. This led to the first question that directed the study:

(1) What are the qualitative markers of student engagement and student learning in a literacy block?

In the review of literature on literacy blocks, Datnow and Castellano (2000), Cunningham et al. (1998) and the Literacy Collaborative (Williams, 1998) all make note of the challenges faced by teachers in implementing literacy blocks. Learning the components of literacy blocks and implementing the assessment and instructional strategies requires a deep understanding of literacy and knowledge of effective practices. In the middle years, increased content area outcomes make it more difficult to schedule for literacy blocks, so timetabling is complicated. Concerns raised by some researchers (Fortino, Gerretson, Button and Johnson, 2002; Hirsch, 2007) about the implementation of literacy blocks negatively affecting the teaching of content areas suggests that integration of content area learning into literacy blocks needs to occur.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe ten instructional processes that create an engaging learning environment for students. In the literature review it was also found that there were specific strategies that teachers could use to engage students: integrating student questioning (Engle & Conant, 2002; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick & Littles, 2006; Petrosino, 2004; Strickland and Feeley, 2003), collaborative learning (Almanza, 1997; Bear and Invernizzi, 1984; Reimer, 2001), integration of ICT (Boss, 2008; Lightner, Baber and Willi, 2007; Shenton and Paget, 2007), allowing for student choice (Azevedo, 2006; Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2001; Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert and Gubbins, 2007), and student self-directed work (Fraser, 2006; Petrosino, 2004; Short, Harste and Burke,1996).

Since there are many challenges facing teachers who wish to implement literacy blocks that are engaging for their students, the second question of this research addresses this concern by asking:

(2) What are the teachers' experiences of implementation of literacy blocks in grades 7 and 8, especially in reference to: (a) working with timetabling; (b) integrating content area learning; (c) implementing student questioning strategies; (d) implementing collaborative learning; (e) integrating ICT; (f) allowing for student choice; and, (g) utilizing student, self-directed work. Questions for this research were designed to cast a wide net that would provide rich descriptive data from which to sort themes and concepts arising from the initial implementation of literacy blocks.

Participants

The School

The study took place in two combined grade 7 and 8 classrooms in a multi-age, kindergarten to grade 8 school. The school was in the inner part of a large prairie city, surrounded by industry and commerce. The school had approximately one hundred students, six classroom teachers, ten educational assistants, two part time specialists for physical education and music, a half-time early literacy support teacher, a full time resource/guidance teacher, a library technician, a secretary, and a principal. It was a very welcoming school with a strong feeling of community readily evident to visitors. The staff members supported one another by stepping in to help supervise students and sharing pedagogical expertise with one another, as well as lending a shoulder to lean on and a friendly ear to listen. The school had a special "at-risk" designation within the

division because of the following high incidence of at-risk indicators; namely, low SES, learning disabilities, and behavioural challenges of many of its students. This designation meant that all classrooms had fewer than twenty children. Most of the students came from single-parent families with a low socioeconomic status. Approximately 60% of the students had some Aboriginal heritage. About 5% of the population were first generation immigrants and the remainder were of various European descent. Just over 10% of the students received funding because of behavioural or cognitive challenges. Every classroom had multiple students with Individual Education Plans (IEP). Therefore, their work was modified to address their individual challenges supported through funding. Some of these students received funding for extra instructional support and some do not, depending on the level of funding they had received. The resource teacher worked with classroom teachers and parents to develop IEPs that outlined goals, specific learning outcomes, and individualized strategies for each IEP student. The staff received a lot of professional development to deal with the wide variety of needs of students. For the most part, the staff was highly motivated to pursue Literacy Blocks training and in the division itself, the school was a pilot school for many divisional initiatives.

A snack program was started during the time of this research, providing students with healthy snacks twice per week. A teacher in the school planed the menu and also purchased the food. An educational assistant (EA) and a funded student prepared the snacks for all students and delivered them to the classrooms on Thursdays and Tuesdays between 9:30 and 10:00 AM. In the classrooms, teachers gave students a snack break and it was students' choice as to whether or not they decided to eat the snack on any given day.

Staff, from the clinical services unit and the behaviour support services of the school division, were frequent visitors since they provided social work, psychological and academic testing, occupational therapy, and additional support to meet the wide range of needs of the students and their families. Staff discussions tended to focus on student behaviours rather than student learning.

The school had moved to multi-age programming seven years before this study. There were many reasons this school switched to multi-age. One reason was purely logistical. Low student numbers and combining classes made it easier to balance classroom and staff numbers. Other reasons included having a philosophical basis in social constructivism and brain-based learning as outlined in the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth document entitled, *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community* (2003). Historically, when students had been with one teacher for two or more consecutive years, the teacher had more flexibility in programming and was more easily able to integrate curricula through an inquiry approach. Brain-based research (Jensen, 1998) has shown that integration makes learning more meaningful for students and allows for the possibility of increased language and literacy skills. As students work together with a teacher who knows them well, and developed their understandings over multiple years, they tend to show an increase in affective and social indicators compared to their peers. The focus on continuous progress and diversity of learning needs takes the pressure off of student achievement, creating a less competitive environment. Older, or more able, students become helpers and leaders in the classroom who role model and provide support for the younger, less experienced, students. Over time all students get to take on leadership roles in the classroom.

All of the classrooms in this school were self-contained; classroom teachers taught all subject areas except for physical education and music. In grades 7 and 8 students went to a high school for training in Industrial Arts and Human Ecology for one half day per six-day cycle.

Despite being a small, community school of only one hundred students it was very difficult to get parents involved on committees. For the past two years there had been no school Parent Advisory Group. In the Early Years, there was high parent attendance at Student-Led Conferences; and, in the Middle Years the attendance at these conferences drops, especially by the second conference of the year.

Next, the teacher participants will be described.

Teachers

Rob Enns (pseudonym)

Rob was an outgoing person who enjoyed talking. He was of an imposing height (well over six feet) and had an air of confidence that his students respected. Rob entered teaching as his second career and brought a wide range of experiences and strong opinions to the classroom. He was the father of young children and the husband of a working spouse, so he has limited time to participate in extra-curricular activities or to meet with colleagues.

Rob liked to entertain his students with stories and enjoyed tangential conversations with them. When working with students one-on-one, he demonstrated patience and caring. In the classroom, he rarely sat still as he circulated regularly to monitor all student learning. He saw his class, with some exceptions, as a group of

predominantly "at-risk" children due to the demographics of the area they came from. He believed that, for this reason, many of his students struggled with opportunities for choice, self-directed learning and inquiry learning.

He had been a term teacher for approximately three years now and due to teacher leaves he started teaching the multi-age grade 7 and 8 class in January for the past two years as a term teacher. He had expressed frustration because he is not able to achieve what he would like to with the students, since he only started in January, rather than September. Nevertheless, he has focused on what he believed were a couple of the key outcomes, to get students ready for high school. These were writing paragraphs, using critical reflection, and understanding literary terms. He believed that getting students prepared for high school was his main priority.

Rob enjoyed teaching English Language Arts (ELA) and had a big picture view of literacy for his students. He described this as the ability to "understand and express themselves using language." He supported the need for integration; however, he admits that he was still learning how to do this effectively and struggles with finding the time for this integration. Even before participating in this study, Rob stated that he understood the need for routines and structure within the classroom. For him, this research reinforced his belief and he had said that, literacy blocks "is something that I will do for the rest of my career."

Bill White (pseudonym)

In contrast, Bill was a soft-spoken, reserved person. His sense of humor endears him to his students and his quiet observations of them help him to respond with empathy

to their varied needs. His low-key approach and calm manner helped to create a relaxed atmosphere in his multi-age grade 7 and 8 classroom. Bill got his first permanent contract as a teacher at this school five years before the study and has been that this school ever since. Through his extended time at the school, he had developed a strong connection to the students and to the school community. He was at the school until after 6:00 most evenings, coaching various sports and participating on school committees. He believed that he could make a difference with these children.

Bill believed that students needed to understand why we are teaching them a topic, and he worked hard to make real-world connections to student learning. In his teaching, Bill would try almost anything to help his students see connections and to engage them in making those connections themselves. He saw that relationships are at the core of engaging students and he strove to develop personal, caring relationships with all of his students. His students liked to tease him and he enjoyed this banter with them throughout the day. Students sought Rob's immediate feedback on most work and were willing to go back and try again to meet his expectations.

When I asked Bill about his views on literacy, he stated that students "can be literate in more than just reading. . . . media literacy, literacy in any number of areas, mathematical literacy, literacy related to sports." Specific to literacy in ELA he believed that literacy as inquiry was a goal. Bill believed that many of his students were lacking basic reading, writing and critical thinking skills they would need to inquire independently. He saw that helping students to develop these skills was among his top priorities. He acknowledged that he, himself, was struggling with effectively teaching

some of these basic skills and this was, in part, his motivation for being involved in the research.

The following section describes and contextualizes student participants in this study.

Students

Classroom A

Anne (psedonym).

Anne was a grade 8 girl who had been in this school since kindergarten. She did not seem to get a lot of intrinsic enjoyment out of most academic work and stated that she did not really like reading or writing (especially when she was told what she had to read or write). In most cases she completed the work to get it over with as fast as possible. Despite this, she saw herself as a good student and was one of the students that Mr. White could count on to study for tests and to try to meet expectations on assignments. This athletic girl was socially motivated and freely stated that friends and sports were the only aspects of school that she found enjoyable. She was a kinesthetic learner stating that her favorite teachers are the ones who give students many hands-on activities. Her performance motivation orientation sometimes got in her way as she was reluctant to take risks. She did not often volunteer to answer questions in class and was happy to let others take charge.

Bradley (pseudonym).

Bradley was a grade 8 boy who had also been in this school since kindergarten. He thought of himself as a good reader but understood that he struggled with getting

words down on paper. He did seem to get intrinsic satisfaction from learning; however, he was also motivated by performance goals. He talked about being better than Mr. White in math and was proud that he could read books aimed at high school students. One of the things Bradley enjoyed most about school was sports. He also loved math class. He was a bit intolerant of others in his class at times when he felt they are wasting his time, but a generally friendly demeanor balanced this. A quick joke and a smile from Bradley could light up the class. Working in groups was not Bradley's favorite activity as he found it frustrating when others "take credit for his work." He was not anti-social; however, and frequently took on a leadership role within groups. He also voluntarily worked with partners of his choice. He was one of the top-achieving students in the class.

Rhianna (pseudonym).

Rhianna was a grade 8 girl who had a positive self-concept of herself as a writer. She enjoyed talking about learning, could reflect on her growth as a writer, and easily identified reading and writing goals for herself. One of the highlights for her was when Mr. White made her the editor of the class yearbook. She can stick to tasks since she was still working on the yearbook with a friend and chatting with Mr. White at the end of the summer. Rhianna thought of herself as more of a "creative person than a learner" but was also very confident about her academic abilities. Her intrapersonal reflections indicated more maturity than the rest of her peers. At the same time, she is struggling through normal adolescence. During a couple of the observations she demonstrated some intense sulks doing everything she could to get Mr. White's attention in a negative way. She enjoyed working in groups because she was a very social person, but she had also had

problems when people did not pull their weight, and that happened frequently in her class. At the end of the research, Rhianna was the only student who had something she really wanted me to say, "Choice makes all the difference."

Doug (pseudonym).

Doug was a grade 8 boy who had been in the school since kindergarten. The school resource teacher explained that Doug had an IEP but was not funded. Doug had some difficulties processing text. Doug stated that he enjoyed reading but was observed to spend little time reading. He also said he liked writing his own stories but, in general, he believed that he is not a good writer. Due to his IEP, Mr. White sometimes let Doug create video critiques for assignments in place of writing. School, for Doug, was a necessary evil, he knew he needed it but, other than being with friends, did not enjoy it. He is always polite and followed through with what is expected – but did nothing more. This quiet boy was socially motivated and was quick to choose a work partner when that was an option. All the other students in the class, as well as Mr. White, seemed to really like Doug. Doug found the research interviews almost painful since he neither enjoyed talking about nor reflecting on his learning. It was difficult to get more than a one-word answer from him and, at times, it was not clear that he fully understood the questions asked. He would never ask for further explanation or clarification as most students did, and he seemed to be quite defensive.

Classroom B

Laura (pseudonym).

Laura was a grade 8 girl who was new to the school this year. She was intrinsically motivated to read and write and had a high sense of self-efficacy in both. Laura's mother was a good writer and Laura believed that this was a trait she probably inherited. It appeared to be easy for Laura to identify learning goals for herself in both reading and writing. Laura was very interested in history and was especially interested in the Holocaust, a subject that she learned about in grade 7 and continued to pursue outside of class time. The school librarian was helping Laura by getting books for her about the Holocaust from other libraries. Laura was socially motivated and caring towards others. She saw herself as someone who got along with everyone and even though she was a newcomer to the school, she had already developed friendships. By March, she was included in mostly all the groups' social activities. She was even able to get her boyfriend, a boy who two years ago would not read anything, interested in reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Laura reflects critically on what she read and followed her own ideas about right and wrong, with little regard for peer pressure. She got along well with her teacher, but Laura recognized that she did not have the same kind of close relationship with him as other students in her class who had been at the school since kindergarten.

Kara (pseudonym).

Kara was a grade 7 girl who had been in the school since kindergarten. She got some intrinsic enjoyment out of reading and writing but was predominantly motivated through performance goals. She knew she is a good reader because she observed that her performance of oral reading was better than others in her class. She understood that she is

a good writer because of the feedback she had received from her teacher. Her favorite subjects were ELA and social studies because she "just seems to pick up on the information really quick." The only time she talked about a topic with enthusiasm was when she was describing her choice of research on frogs. Kara had friends at school but, away from school, spent her time with family-based activities. She was not particularly socially motivated and during classroom observations, she mostly kept to herself even during group work. Kara was a top student in her class. Although this is important to her, she did not draw attention to herself over this, since she did not like this type of attention. Nonetheless, she stated that she was definitely not a "dork"; a term she used in reference to students who were introverted, always focused on getting good grades and socially inept. This demonstrated some control over her social interactions.

Shaun (pseudonym).

Shaun was a grade 8 boy of Aboriginal descent who came to the city from his northern reserve to live with his grandmother and go to school here. He had been in the city for about a year when the research started and he stated that, at the end of grade 8, he would be going back to the reserve to live with his father for grade 9. Generally, Shaun seems to have little intrinsic motivation for school and other literacy activities. Yet, he stated that he likes to read when he is bored. He also talked with enthusiasm about a PhotoStory assignment that combined his favorite song and images. He did not associated this activity with literacy. The main purpose he saw for school was that he needs some of the skills he learns to be able to have the career he wants for himself – "either a lawyer or a cop." Shaun, an avid video game player, had attendance and lateness issues because he

was staying up late playing video games. It was difficult to develop a good rapport with Shaun. He tended to answer questions with one word and sometimes he was so tired that he could not even keep his head up during interviews. At times, his responses showed a keen sense of humor and insight, such as when he talked about group work. A sly smile came over his face and there was a twinkle in his eye, as he explained he liked groups because everyone else did the writing, something he disliked. It became evident that, as the year progressed, he was socially motivated; and, as he developed friendships at school, he was happier and more inclined to attend school. Shaun said his teacher was terrific because he took the class out to a restaurant for lunch and later bought them Slurpees.

Mary (pseudonym).

Mary was a grade 8 girl who has been at this school since kindergarten. Mary loved reading, even more than watching television. She said she especially liked to write fiction and poetry. Her teacher told her she is “right-brained” and she agreed with this stating that she was like her mom who also liked to read and write. Mary liked writing on computers because computers have spell check and a convenient thesaurus. Her comments demonstrate that she was able to make connections and reflect critically on what she is learning. At times her teacher had to ask her to stop contributing during discussions and to give other students a chance. Mary recognized her tendency to take over and knew that, in groups, she struggles because of this. Her relationship with her teacher was very important to Mary. She felt that he pushed her to be her best, was always able to help her if she is having trouble, and was always making class interesting.

Mary is also interested in engaging socially with her peers. She seems to need to talk to learn. When not given this opportunity by the teacher, she will make it for herself by having side conversations with others, something she is able to do without getting in trouble from her teacher. She also enjoys helping her fellow students in their learning.

Tom (pseudonym).

Tom was a grade 7 boy who has been in this school since kindergarten. Tom appeared to struggle with processing auditory information. During interviews, I frequently had to restate questions and reword them before Tom could provide an answer. In the classroom, Tom seemed lost during discussions and he appeared unable to participate in a meaningful way, even though he tried. As a result, he had a very low self-concept as a learner and seemed to get little intrinsic enjoyment from school literacy activities. Tom thought that he is an "okay reader" and when given some choice about what he was reading, got some enjoyment out of it. He hated writing unless it was a story of his choice. When put in the low group for guided reading, Tom was disgusted with the "kiddie books" and felt that he got nothing out of the work done in that group. He stated that he only comes to school because he has to. Art was his favorite subject. Tom craved social interaction but was so inappropriate with his peers that he is constantly rejected and picked upon. He did not have any close friends at school and he regularly fought with some classmates. His teacher also exhibited frustration towards him at times; however, Tom generally liked his teacher and thought that he cared about him as a learner. He did not like working in groups because he was confused and frustrated when "some people tell me to do this, but then the other people tell me not to do that." Tom hated "using the

computer more than writing" because he is a "slow typer." He also seems unable to understand how computer programs worked or how to manipulate them to do what he wanted them to. Tom seemed to receive little support or accommodations in the classroom for his learning needs.

Sandi (pseudonym).

Sandi was a grade 7 girl who came to the school in grade five and was leaving at the end of grade 7 because her parents were moving. Sandi was on an IEP due to cognitive challenges but was not funded. She read and wrote at about a grade 3 level. She was a very kinesthetic learner and hated reading because "you're just sitting there." She liked writing because "I can use my hands and because I know how to write." Her favorite activities at school were music, gym, and art. She liked using the computer because it was "easy to erase her mistakes". Sandi received a lot of attention from the educational assistant and was out of the class regularly helping in the Family Center at school. Sandi enjoys helping out the young children and had a strong sense of self-efficacy as a care-provider. At home, she also helped out with making dinner and cleaning. Sandi enjoyed her teachers and knew that they would help her if she was having problems. She did not always get along with the students in her class and stated that they made fun of her. She said that she was not bothered by this; and, if given a choice, would never do her work in a group or with a partner. Most of her social needs at school seemed to by met be the adults in the building.

The next section describes procedures for gathering implementing literacy blocks and gathering data.

Procedures

Professional Development for Teachers

Teachers received three, one-hour professional development (PD) sessions. The teachers in the school who were interested in literacy blocks in the middle years, but not part of the research, were invited to come to the PD sessions. Bill White and the 5/6 teacher, Jackie Hunt, attended the first PD session held on March 17. At this point, Rob Enns was not part of the research and did not come. Binders were made for each teacher containing descriptions of each block (Appendix J) and filled with many useful resources. Appendix B contains a Table of Contents from the Literacy Block Resource binder used in this research. Teachers requested additional supports for sentence combining and received these resources within a week of the PD session.

As researcher, I led the PD sessions and reviewed the key components of each literacy block in the first session, talking about and engaging teachers in how to incorporate each of the engagement strategies. Teachers spent time talking about collaborative learning and about how to structure it in their own classrooms. We also discussed the need to explicitly teach students the routines of literacy blocks. There was a lot of information presented at this time, so extra support was offered to teachers as they worked through the planning process. Neither teacher took me up on this.

A second PD session was held later in April. Rob, Bill, and Jackie attended this session. Prior to this session, Rob received his binder and a short one-to-one lesson on each of the literacy blocks so he was somewhat caught up on the discussions from the first PD. This session, the teachers talked about what they had implemented thus far in

their classrooms, what was working for them, and what questions they were having. We spent some time, this session, planning for a language and word study block.

Due to scheduling problems, the third PD session with both Bill and Rob was held separately. Separately, we talked about what they were each implementing in the blocks and the changes they had made to their instruction. The teachers talked about some of their on-going problems with the blocks and brainstormed solutions. Both teachers were encouraged to try informal reading conferences during their reading workshop time. The framework for this conference was discussed.

Interviews

Teachers

Teachers were interviewed three times. Both teachers were first interviewed using Preliminary Interview Questions (Appendix D) before the initial implementation of the literacy blocks. The second interview took place during the literacy blocks in May, and a third interview took place in late June at the end of the school year. Second and third interviews followed the During and After Interview Questions (Appendix F). All interviews were semi-structured. All but one interview took place after school and each interview generally lasted about forty minutes. The final interview with Rob was held during his lunch break and lasted only twenty-five minutes.

Students

Students were interviewed three times. All students were interviewed first using the Preliminary Interview Questions (Appendix E) before the initial implementation of

literacy blocks began in their classrooms. Their second interview took place during the literacy blocks in May, and the third interview took place in late June. The second and third interviews followed the During and After Interview Questions (Appendix G). All interviews were semi-structured. Most interviews took place during the students' lunch break and lasted about twenty minutes. Sometimes students were called out of class to be interviewed. In all cases, the school secretary called students to the office (a regular occurrence in the school) and students were then escorted to a private room to be interviewed. Participant identities remained unknown to the teachers throughout the study.

Observations

Each classroom was observed four times for one hour throughout the study using the Classroom Lesson Observation Form (Appendix I). On this form, the type of lesson was recorded and brief observation notes were made about what teachers were doing. During the student observations, a Student Engagement Rubric (Appendix H), developed by Lutz, Guthrie and Davis (2006), was used to observe students. Approximately every two minutes, a different student was observed in rotation. Each observation was recorded by its number (first observation was denoted with a one) on the rubric in all four domains: affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social engagement. Next, a short descriptor of what the student was doing at that point in time (e.g., 1 - reading silently) was written. If students were late, the time they arrived was recorded and the students were included in observations from that time on. There was only one student absent in all

of my observations and one student who was over a half-hour late two times. At a later time, I wrote up field notes based on these observations.

Three out of four times, Classroom A was observed from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. and once from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.. All of these observations started with reading workshop and on one occasion switched to language and word study; on another switched to reading instruction after thirty minutes. Classroom B was observed at a variety of times in the morning, therefore revealing more variety in lesson type. There were observations of language and word study, reading workshop, reading instruction and some writing workshop.

Outlined in Table 1 is the timeline of the consent process, interviews, observations and PD sessions. Both classes went to camp in the second last week of May, which did interrupt the schedule.

Table 1
Schedule for Activity throughout the Study

Month	Activity
February 5	Received Ethics Approval
February 12	Received assent from Superintendent
February 13	Sent out Invitation to Participate
February 23 & 25	Met with all teachers who indicated interest in being involved in research and had 4 teachers fill in consent forms.
March 3 - 6	Received assent from principals to participate in research
March 4	1st Interview with teacher from Classroom A
March 9 & 10	Delivered script and consent forms to schools 1st Interview with teacher from suburban school
March 17	Received 4 complete student consent packages & 1st PD Sessions at inner-city school
March 19	1st PD session at suburban school
March 20	Communicated with principal and teacher from suburban school re: student consents.
March 24	1st interviews with 4 students from Classroom A
March 28-April 5	Spring Break

April 9	1st Observation, Classroom A Visited Suburban school classroom to try to gain consent
April 15	Asked 2nd teacher at inner-city school to agree to participate in study. His class became Classroom B.
April 16	Student Service teacher spoke to Classroom B and gave out consent forms.
April 21	1st Interview with teacher from Classroom B
April 23	Received six complete student consent packages from Classroom B
April 24 – 25	1st Interviews with students from Classroom B
April 29	2nd PD session
May 7	2nd Observation Classroom A 1st Observation Classroom B
May 12-15	Both Classes at Camp
May 20	3rd PD Session
May 22	2nd Interview with teacher from Classroom A 3rd Observation Classroom A 2nd Observation Classroom B
May 27	2nd Interview with teacher from Classroom B
May 27 – 29	2nd Interviews with students
June 3	4th Observation Classroom A 3rd Observation Classroom B
June 16	3rd Interview with teacher from Classroom A
June 17	4th Observation Classroom B
June 19	3rd Interview with teacher from Classroom B
June 20 -22	3rd Interviews with students
June 29	All interview transcripts given to participants for their approval.
July – September	Data analysis

Limitations of the study

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study of two teachers in two different combined grades 7 and 8 classrooms in an inner-city school. Ten students participated in the study; four students were from class A and six students from class B. This study is not generalizable to other populations; however, since it is a glimpse into an area with little prior research, the data provides information for further research.

Initially this research addressed only two questions about literacy blocks: (1) What were the qualitative markers of student engagement during literacy blocks?, and (2)

What were the teacher experiences of implementation of literacy blocks? As the analysis of data progressed, an additional question arose: What are the affects of the instructional context on the student engagement processes? The third question is addressed in the analysis section of this thesis.

Participant selection was a limitation of the study. The study required a significant commitment from teachers and initially only four teachers, from two different schools, showed interest. Student consent was given in only one of the schools. Both teachers were in their first five years of teaching, had been trained as senior and middle years teachers and neither had knowledge of literacy blocks prior to being involved in this study. The backgrounds of these teachers, had an impact on their ability to implement the literacy blocks framework as conceptualized in this study.

The implementation of literacy blocks in natural settings led to a lot of variation between classrooms. One area of variation was timetabling. Ideally the four component blocks are best presented in one large, two-hour block so that it is easy for students to make connections between the different literacy areas. No classroom was able to make this happen consistently. The minimum expectations described for classroom participation in literacy blocks produced a wide variety of when and how literacy blocks were implemented, making it difficult to come to generalizations even within the study.

There has been research on the effectiveness of literacy blocks of students with disabilities and students who are learning English as an additional language. This study did not specifically look at these groups of students though they were a greater part of the grouping within the classes. In Manitoba, almost all students are included in all classrooms and any instructional framework needs to be viewed in its capacity to meet

the need of all learners in the class. If literacy blocks are effective, students will be engaged and self-directed, and their teacher will have opportunities to differentiate learning as needed for each individual.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

After completing the data collection and transcription of the interviews the data began to fall naturally into a framework for analysis. As I began to analyze the data, the student comments about motivation and interactions with peers reminded me of the *Engagement Model of Reading Development* by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) that had been part of the initial literature review. In this analysis, student comments reflected the engagement processes described in this model so much so that, to initiate data analysis, I began to sort the data through the help of this model.

The first stage of the data analysis was an attempt to understand internal/inside-the-mind processes of student engagement by using the processes of engagement, described in Guthrie and Wigfield, as codes. All of the student interview data fit into the four processes and resulted in an interesting picture. Some questions also arose out of the analysis, and I addressed these in stage three of the analysis.

In the second stage of analysis observational data on student engagement, specifically the rubrics and field notes, were analyzed and compared against student self-reports and teacher reports. This analysis describes the external-observable aspects of student engagement across four domains: affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social. These first two stages of analysis were used to answer the first research question: what were the qualitative markers of student engagement during literacy blocks.

The third stage of analysis did not directly address the research questions but arose from the analysis of student engagement processes. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) stated that the instructional context directly affects student engagement processes. If this

were the case, I wondered if there were elements of the instructional context that could account for the interesting picture of student engagement that came of out the data. I also wondered if the model would be effective for describing engagement in literacy blocks in addition to reading. Student interviews, teacher interviews, and field notes were coded according to the instructional processes described by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000).

In my fourth stage of analysis, student interviews, teacher interviews, observational notes, and professional development transcripts were analyzed and coded according to the components of literacy blocks that teachers had been asked to implement. This stage of analysis addressed the second research question, "What were the teachers' experiences of literacy block implementation?" with respect to timetabling, integration of content, implementing student questioning strategies, implementing collaborative learning, integration of ICT, allowing for student choice and student, self-directed work. The categories of coding within each of these components were: teacher beliefs about students with regards to this component, teacher beliefs about practices and teacher practices that were observed or stated during interviews.

Stage One of Analysis: Student Engagement Processes

The transcriptions from student interviews were analyzed through repeated readings followed by coding. Guthrie and Wigfield's *Engagement Model of Reading Development* (2000) was used to frame the coding. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe the engagement processes of students as (a) motivation, (b) social interaction, (c) strategy use and (d) conceptual knowledge. Sixty-two percent of the student interview statements fell within motivation; and with this large percentage, motivation was further divided into

the types of motivation that Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe in their discussion of engagement processes. Motivation may be dependent on a learning goal or mastery orientation, a performance orientation, an extrinsic or reward orientation, an intrinsic orientation, a self efficacy orientation or a social orientation. Social interaction was also a large student engagement process category, composing 28 % of the statements. Social interaction data was subdivided into two categories: social interaction with the teacher and social interaction with other students. Strategy use and conceptual knowledge were both small categories and hard to distinguish from each other with the generic and category-interlaced types of comments students made, so these two categories were collapsed into one category in my coding. A second reader, who was equally familiar with Guthrie and Wigfield's *Engagement Model of Reading Development*, reviewed the initial coding. The second-reader followed the same coding procedures in looking at the data and found the same categories except for one statement. That statement was a comment about an effective group work experience and the statement was then moved from social interaction into self-efficacy to achieve consensus between us.

Next, a table of the codes was created, noting the number of student comments made in each category to see which processes were most prevalent. The percents were rounded off to the nearest whole number. This table clearly showed that motivation was the process most students comment on. Intrinsic motivation was most frequently discussed, as was self-efficacy; further analysis showed that students were intrinsically motivated in activities for which they felt self-efficacy. Student comments indicate that social interaction was about half as prevalent as motivation as an engagement process. One of the most interesting features of this table is how infrequently students note the use

of strategy use and conceptual knowledge as engagement processes. Their awareness of these concepts appears to be limited and explained by observations that these concepts were not the main focus of explicit instruction. This might be explained by either a lack of strategy instruction in the classroom, or a lack of metacognitive awareness about how strategies and conceptual knowledge contribute to reading and writing. Though there are hints that this is there, very little surfaced through observation and interview data, so some of this may be more inside-the-head.

Table 2
Coding of Student Interviews Using Engagement Processes: Number of Comments in each Category.

Category Engagement Process	Sub-Category Engagement Process	# statements	% statements of sub-category	% statements of total
Motivation		281		62
	Intrinsic	96	34	
	Self-Efficacy	80	28	
	Learning Goal	46	16	
	Social	34	12	
	Extrinsic	15	5	
	Performance	10	4	
Social Interaction		139		31
	With Peers	96	65	
	With Teachers	43	35	
Strategy Use and Conceptual Knowledge		31		7

What follows is a description of the data from the student interviews and how it fits into each category of the engagement processes. First, there is a discussion of the

magnitude of each aspect in reference to all the interview statements and then examples of the language students were using is presented.

1) Motivation

Sixty-two percent of statements in student interviews implied a motivation orientation. Guthire and Wigfield's (2000) many types of motivation applied here. Statements fell into the categories as they had suggested.

a) Intrinsic Motivation

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe intrinsic motivation as the "dual qualities of enjoyment or interest in performing an activity" (p. 407). Thirty-four percent of the motivation category fell under intrinsic motivation. Most of the statements in this category were positive statements about what students found intrinsically motivating include statements such as:

"I liked them because they let us do more hands-on work." - Anne

"I usually only read a book if I'm interested in it." - Doug

"I'm starting to like reading which I never did before." - Rhianna

"I was pretty into that – I like writing and stuff." - Kara

Eighteen percent of these comments described what students found intrinsically un-motivating. Examples of student comments in this category were:

"I don't enjoy reading when somebody says I have to read." - Anne

"Sometimes I was just not wanting to write." - Bradley

"It's boring and you're just sitting there, not talking and reading words." - Sandi

"When I'm forced to read a book it just isn't that much fun." - Rhianna

b) Self-Efficacy Orientation

Self-efficacy, a term coined by noted psychologist Albert Bandura, are about "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performances" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 407-408). Twenty-eight percent of the comments in motivation were in this category. The comments from students in this portion were either declaring their self-efficacy (75%), or stating their lack of it with regards to a certain skill (25%).

Examples of positive comments were:

"I can read them easily." - Bradley

"I know how to write." - Sandi

"I can write a lot and I just put lots of ideas and everything." - Laura

Examples of negative comments in this category are:

"I can't stay focused." - Anne

"I always have bad writing." - Bradley

"It was really hard 'cause the words were like Greek." - Laura

Of note, 31 % of the comments in the self-efficacy category were connected to technology use. Technology made all but one student feel more efficacious. Some positive examples of these statements were:

"I get more ideas when I'm on the computer than on paper." - Anne

"It definitely helps me write faster." - Bradley

"It's easy to Google and search it up really quickly." - Rhianna

Three of the girls related their ability in writing to their mother's ability to write with statements like: "My mom was a good writer so I get it from her," – Mary.

All students had some connection of positive intrinsic motivation to the skills they were most efficacious in.

c) Social Motivation

Social motivation can be described as the motivation students have to interact socially with others in the school community. Only 8 % of the comments during interviews made reference to social motivation; however, during observations I noticed that the students had a high need to interact with one another and with their teacher. This process was not as evident in the interviews, as in classroom observations. For example, Doug had only two comments suggesting that he was socially motivated, but in the class he moved quickly to get partners, finished work quickly to have free "chat" time and smiled happily during class discussions. Some comments that fit into this category are:

"I always worked with a friend." - Bradley

"One of the reasons I like school is I have friends here." - Laura

"It's better to interact with people and learn." - Laura

"The teachers are fun, or they laugh and they make you laugh." - Sandi

Two students who were motivated socially, but were constantly rejected by their peers, made negative comments and for the most part, kept to themselves in the classroom. During interviews, they were sad when talking about this; one had tears in his eyes and the other tried to change the subject quickly.

"I don't have very many friends at this school." - Tom

"They're mean sometimes." - Sandi

d) Mastery or Learning Goal Orientation

Fifteen percent of the motivational statements could be considered learning-goal oriented. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe the mastery or learning goal orientation as one in which students show a "dedication to content understanding and learning flexible skills" (p. 407). All statements in this category were positive and included statements such as:

"Now I get which one is which." - Anne

"I got better at writing because before I couldn't even write a paragraph." - Bradley

"I like being able to learn things in a different way than you would expect." - Rhianna

"Cause you get to know the words better, say the words better." - Shaun

"A writing goal for me is to get more skilled and try to get a certain thing that helps me, a plan almost." - Mary

Most students were able to state reading and writing goals that they had for themselves; but, when asked about this, none of them had thought of it previous to the asking of the question. Thus, they only expressed goals when prompted to do so.

e) Extrinsic Motivation

This category of comments was small, making up a mere 5 % of the comments. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe extrinsic motivation as "the desire to receive external recognition, rewards or incentives" (p. 407). The types of comments included in this category were ones descriptive of the notion that student knew they had to do school work to get ready for high school or get a good job. Examples include:

"It will probably help me for next year cause they force us to read certain books." - Rhianna

"You need to listen if you want to become a lawyer or something." - Shaun

An immediate extrinsic incentive for four students was to finish work quickly to either just have it done and over with, or to have free time for socializing.

"I summarize it fast so I can get on with other stuff." - Anne

The most negative comments were when students did not see any potential reward for the work. An example of this kind of statement was:

"I hated that cause they were huge words and I'll never use those words again." - Kara

f) Performance or Ego Motivation

There were not many ego-driven statement in this category. Only three students had comments in this category, making up only 4 % of the total of motivation statements. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) explain the performance orientation as an "attempt to outperform others and maximize favorable evaluations of their ability" (p. 407). Most of these students were not motivated by competitive feelings, or the need to be better than the student next to them. Statements included in this category are:

"I was proud of reading that book because it's supposed to be a high school book." - Bradley

"I get to go home and say something that my mom didn't even know." - Rhianna

"I'm in the higher level of reading in my class." - Kara

2) Social Interactions

Social interactions included “collaborative practices in a community and the social goals of helping other students or cooperating with a teacher” (Guthrie& Wigfield, 2000, p. 417). Twenty-eight percent of the student statements referred to social interactions. In coding the student statements, the data showed that the social environment affected student learning either positively or negatively but never neutrally. In coding, therefore, student learning was further divided into student-teacher interactions and student-student interactions categories in case interactions were the root of these affects.

a) Student-Student Interactions

Sixty-five percent of the comments in social interactions fit into this category. This category focused on comments that explained how students perceived their interactions with one another as learners. Forty-eight percent of the comments in this category were either comments that were clearly negative or showed that students did not work collaboratively. Examples of these comments are:

“We get off-task.” - Anne

“I don’t like reading in groups.” - Mary

“Sometimes it seems that in groups only one or two people are working and the rest are sitting back.” - Mary

“One person does it all so nobody else really learns.” - Shaun

For two of the ten students, all of their comments about the social interactions were extremely negative. They said things like:

“They always make fun of me.” - Sandi

"Never, I never want to be in a group." - Sandi

Positive comments connect with positive interactions students feel that they have with one another. These were times when they did share the work load in positive ways, the times when they asked one another for help, and the times when they enjoyed getting to know different people better through group work. Some examples of these statements were:

"We just all work on it and we get the answers together." - Anne

"I have friends helping me." - Doug

"Working with students in groups actually opens up new things with people." - Rhianna

b) Student-Teacher Interactions

Comments in the student-teacher subcategory refer to how students feel their interactions with teachers support their learning. Thirty-five percent of the comments in social interactions fit into this category. All of these comments were positive. The students in this study unanimously expressed that they felt their teachers cared about their learning, and they all felt comfortable going to the teacher for help. Examples of comments in this category were:

"We can talk to him if we don't understand it and he'll help us figure it out." - Anne

"He wants me to do good." - Doug

"They know exactly how to help me." - Rhianna

"He's fun to work with." - Mary

Student perceptions were that both teachers in the study created positive relationships with their students and engendered trust with the students in their knowledge as teachers.

2) Strategy Use and Conceptual Knowledge

During interviews, students made few comments about how strategies and conceptual knowledge had helped them so these two categories were collapsed into one. These statements made up only 7 % of the total statements. Students showed strategy use when they talked about being able to use a strategy to comprehend a text. Students showed conceptual knowledge when they stated that what they know about a topic helped them to comprehend what they were reading. Just over half of the statements were about how a strategy had helped them:

> "I'm good at opening sentences." (A strategy the class had spent a lot of time on.) - Doug
>
> "It's just starting to make more sense since he's making us go through the process." - Rhianna
>
> "Making questions helps me learn 'cause then I have some kind of guideline." - Kara

Many of the comments showed a lack of strategy or concept knowledge getting in the way, such as:

> "I usually can't think of ideas so I get stuck at that point." - Anne
>
> "I feel fine with the words I already know." - Laura
>
> "It was hard, I didn't know what to write." - Tom

According to student perceptions from interviews, strategy use and conceptual knowledge were two engagement processes that were rarely in action, though they may have been undetected and inside-the-head.

Stage Two of Analysis: Student Engagement in the Classroom

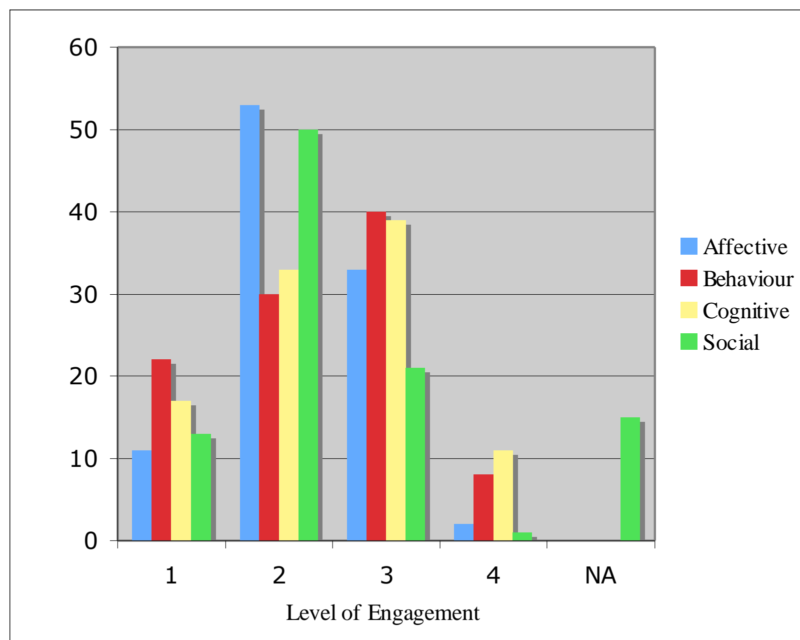
Four types of information describe or situate student engagement in the classrooms. The first source was the observations made and sorted using the student engagement rubric developed by Lutz, Guthrie and Davis (2006). This rubric describes four levels of engagement in four dimensions of engagement: affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social. On this rubric, one indicates no engagement, two indicates partial engagement, three indicates clear engagement, and four indicates very engaged (Appendix H). A bar graph was used to show the percent of total observations in each level for each domain across all observations in each classroom. The bar graph view demonstrates that in each domain, the percentages in the lower half of the rubric (level one and two) are equal to, or in most cases greater than, the upper half of the rubric (level three and four). Since level one describes unengaged students and level two describes only partially engaged students, this suggests that students were either not engaged or only partially engaged for fifty to seventy percent of the time across all domains.

The graphs also show that social engagements were low in number; however, this does not reveal the social capital of each one of those social engagements. The power of these would need to be sorted in another study. Many of the observations for social engagement did not fit into the rubric (off-task talking, or talking during free time) and were put into the category of not applicable (NA). Level two included observations made

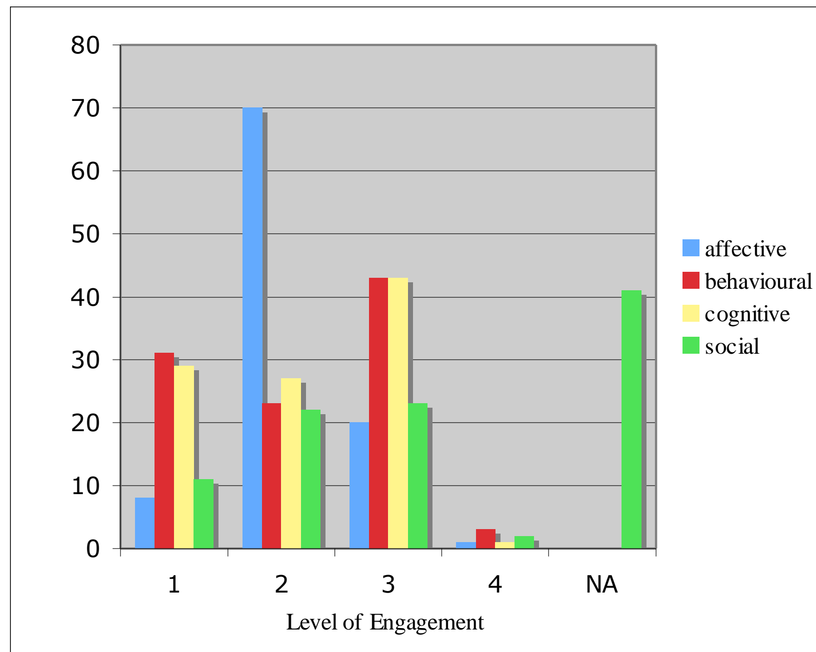
during times when social interactions were not inherent in the activity, such as silent reading or a teacher lecture. Behavioural and cognitive engagements were almost equal; if students were on-task, they were generally cognitively engaged in the lesson, according to observations using the rubric. There is some difficulty or imprecision in sorting these comments by number since comments hold weight and cannot be perceived as equal to one another. For the purposes of this study, the count itself is significant.

Differences in classroom percentages could be attributed to either teaching and the instructional tasks, or the student participants within each class. The student participants in Classroom A tended to follow teacher direction and complete work with little resistance; whereas the student participants in Classroom B included three students who struggled both academically and behaviourally to varying degrees, and they were generally described by adults in the school as challenging students.

Graph 1, Classroom A: Level of Engagement Across All Domains



Graph 2, Classroom B: Level of Engagement Across All Domains



The second source of information for student engagement was field notes made following observations. During observations, after scoring students on the rubric, a reminder note was made of what the student was doing at the time he or she was scored. Field notes that gave a picture of what each student was doing throughout the lesson were recorded. These notes added to the picture, by explaining which behaviours were exhibited most commonly within the different categories. Field note observations were included in the following discussion of engagement in each domain.

The third and fourth sources of information for student engagement came from student and teacher interviews. In the final interview, students were asked to self-report their levels of engagement during different literacy blocks using the Lutz et al's (2006) rubric as a guide. Average self-report scores were created for each domain of engagement for each of the blocks. In some instances the self-reporting of students was higher than

scores on the rubric. There were possible reasons for this: (a) student behaviour might not have accurately reflected their internal state; (b) students may have wanted to report themselves in the best light possible; (c) students might have wanted to report their teacher in the best possible light (these students liked their teachers and at times it seemed that they were defending them); and (d) there may have been too much lag time between interviews and observations. Teachers were also asked what they perceived student engagement was in different domains in different blocks. Since teachers did not know which students were being observed so the scores they gave were based on whole-class observations. In most cases, teacher reports of engagement were close to student self-reports, and all were slightly higher than the observational reports.

1) Affective Engagement

Affective Engagement			
1. Displays negative emotion; sighs; looks very bored; prolonged yawn; head completely down on desk	2. Even expression; head partially down but may still be looking toward teacher/classmates; responds in monotone	3. Smiling (perhaps just briefly); looks pleased; appears interested; tone suggests some pride/interest	4. Grins broadly or suddenly; tone suggests great excitement or interest; makes noises (e.g., “ooh”) which suggest great interest

Seventy percent of affective engagement was scored as two on the rubric in Classroom B and 53 % as two in Classroom A. This meant that for most of the time students exhibited an even expression on their face or through tone. These students were not expressing pleasure or enthusiasm about the activity they were doing at that point in time, nor were they expressing displeasure. However, the looks on their faces, or their tone of voice may not be reliable indicators of actual internal state, especially during reading time, which took up 44 % of the observed time in Classroom A and 18 % of the

observed time in Classroom B. All but two students stated in interviews that they felt they were at a three or four level during silent reading. Field notes indicate that when eight students were reading, they had even expressions so they were scored at level two. Teacher-led discussions (26%) were another time when affective engagement was neutral.

Student self-reporting on affective engagement varied from block to block. The average self-reported affective engagement in Reading Workshop was 3.15. The average self-reported affective engagement in writing workshop was 2.55. The average self-reported affective engagement in language and word study was 2.15. The average self-reported affective engagement in reading instruction was 2.65. Self-reports of affective engagement were slightly higher than observations using the rubric.

In the field notes, there were two times that smiles were most frequently observed: (1) during group work when students were talking off-task; and (2) when students finished their work quickly and had free time to talk with friends. There was only one student, Mary, who smiled when she was on-task and this was generally during class discussions. This data stands in contrast to the common notion that teachers can read student expressions and know if their students are affectively engaged.

Most of the negative affective expressions came from only one student, Tom. He freely expressed his frustration by negative comments, defiance, rolling his eyes, or other demonstrations of frustration through body language when he did not know what to do. This happened on occasion with other students, too. Bradley, for example, crumpling his paper during writing. Kara grimacing at a writing task, and Rhianna defiantly crossed her arms during reading workshop.

In their interviews the teachers tended to agree with the students, stating that they thought most students were at a level three on the rubric in their affective engagement most of the time. Both teachers identified two to three students as mostly never engaged.

2) Behavioural Engagement

Behavioural Engagement			
1. Distracted by something unrelated to task; head completely down on desk (i.e., not participating in task);teacher has to tell student to get to work; prolonged yawn	2. Hard to judge whether student is truly behaviorally engaged; not off task, but does not appear particularly involved; eyes may or not be on teacher, but does not seem to really be following discussion or actively engaged in activity; may be slouching	3. Clearly on-task, as suggested by eye movement and posture toward speaker; raising hand (perhaps just briefly);writing; speaking; clearly listening (suggesting that student is attentive at least behaviorally)	4. Waving hand; hand "shoots" into air to answer question; making noises that suggest great enthusiasm and eagerness to participate; otherwise seems "super-engaged"

In both classrooms, behavioural engagement was divided almost equally between the lower end of the rubric, levels one and two and the higher end of the rubric, levels three and four, with the largest number of observations (40% in Classroom A and 43% in Classroom B) at level three. At level one, students were clearly off-task, at level two it was difficult to judge whether they were really on-task based on their behaviours. Level three was clearly on-task and level four was "super-engaged" behaviourally. The descriptions on the rubric for behavioural engagement were easy to classify for the researcher.

Most students consistently self-reported being at a three for most activities across all blocks, with self-reporting averages of behavioural engagement ranging from 2.61 – 2.9. This self-reporting aligns with observations using the rubric.

Teachers also reported that they thought students were mostly at a three, with the exception of the students at the far ends of the spectrum; super-engaged and totally-disengaged students.

Even though all data indicated the highest incidence at level three on the rubric, it was important that for 52% (Classroom A) and 54% (Classroom B) of the time in both classes, students were off-task or not actively participating. Only three students had more than one instance of off-task behaviour, but all students had many instances of "not particularly involved." The participants in the study were very good at feigning learning at certain times. This type of behaviour came in many forms. Some examples were Doug flipping through a book before resting his head quietly on his desk with his book open to the side. Another was Anne looking up from her book regularly while reading, or Laura, Shaun, Kara, Sandi, Anne and Doug sitting quietly through a class discussion that is dominated by one or two students. Behaviourally these students appeared unengaged or partially engaged according to the rubric. This does not take into account inside-the-head measures, however.

Observations showed that one of the most frequent reasons students were off-task was when they were unclear about directions or did not have strategies to cope with the tasks at hand. In these cases students would sit, sometimes patiently, sometimes not, and wait for help – usually from an adult. On occasion, students asked one another for help. Another reason students were off-task was when they were being distracted. The distractions were sometimes music on the Internet when working on the computer, other students talking and sometimes even adults in the room. A final reason students were

sometimes off-task was when one person in a group was working to finish, while the others were not, the non-working student(s) was recorded as off-task.

3) Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive Engagement			
1. Response reveals student was not paying attention to question or instructions; completely off task (suggesting that student is not thinking about given task)	2. Hard to judge whether student is truly cognitively engaged; flipping book pages quickly without really looking at any	3. Raising hand; writing; speaking; provides brief answer (e.g., one or two words); reading; eye movement and posture suggest that student is following along with activity; clearly listening (suggesting that student is processing information)	4. Response reveals student was thinking very hard; response is extensive (Note: student must speak in order to receive this rating)

The cognitive engagement category was most difficult to assess using the rubric. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) agree with the difficulty in observationally measuring cognitive engagement because it is impossible to see people's thinking. Inferences based on behaviour are potentially unreliable. Much of the evidence of cognitive engagement on this rubric was based on participation in discussion. On the rubric, level one was described as being unable to answer a question; however, in observations, students who had done their work, knew the answers and were following the discussion, still stumbled and gave incorrect responses when the teacher called on them during class discussions. There was also difficulty in differentiating between a level two and a level three on the rubric suggesting that some other measure would be helpful in another study. When a student was reading and they were across the room from the researcher, it was difficult to estimate student eye movement suggesting that they were reading intently; and, if students were flipping the pages or were they actively searching for some information, it was difficult to ascertain if they were feigning or actually

reading. The benefit of having classroom experience as a researcher was evident in this observational task.

In both classrooms, the total percentage of scores was divided almost equally between the lower half of the rubric and the upper half of the rubric, with level three having the highest score in both classrooms (39% for Classroom A, 43% for Classroom B). Even though it was difficult to determine cognitive engagement using the rubric while positioned to the side or back of a particular participant, the self-reported scores that students gave themselves matched with researcher observation scores, adding credibility to the notes.

Students' self-reported levels varied, depending on the block. Writing workshop seemed to demand the most cognitively of students, with the average self-reported score being 3.15. Next demanding was reading workshop. Most students said they were thinking about what they were reading; the average self-reported score was 2.9. Language and word study and reading instruction showed self-reported student scores of 2.45 and 2.6 respectively. In interviews, comments were divided between "I was just doing it to get it done," (Bradley) and "I felt like I learned something" (Anne) with these blocks.

The teachers rated the students as being between two and three on the cognitive engagement rubric. Teacher perceptions correlated with student perceptions and as close, if not exact, to those observed and recorded in the field notes.

It is important to note that for 50% (Classroom A) and 56% (Classroom B) of the time, students were either not cognitively engaged or had minimal engagement. This included students who could not do the work because it was above their level, students

who were more interested in distractions than in the learning, and students who listened but did not actively participate in whole-class discussions.

There were only three students who exhibited any cognitive engagement at level four. These students were the ones who participated enthusiastically in teacher-led discussions. In small groups, these students tended to hold themselves back. Mary, one of the super-engaged, even stated that during group work she did have to hold back, otherwise she took over and other students would get mad at her.

4) Social Engagement

Social Engagement (based primarily on student–student interactions or situation in which response to teacher is public)			
1. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and students do not respond; student teases, laughs at, or criticizes another	2. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and interaction that results is minimal; student turns toward classmate that is speaking; student half raises hand when responses are solicited by the teacher; student is called on without raising hand and responds readily; social interaction not explicitly warranted by current activity and student does not initiate it on his or her own.	3. Students exchange activity-related comments; *students* initiate interaction; *teacher* initiates interaction and student interacts positively and/or with eagerness; student fully extends hand, reflecting desire to share response or unsolicited comments	4. Similar to 3, but interaction is extended or marked overall by great enthusiasm or intensity

Most observations for social engagement in learning were at the second level on the rubric because level two includes the indicator that "social interaction not explicitly warranted by current activity and student does not initiate on his or her own." In Classroom A where 44% of the observed time was taken up by silent reading, it made sense that 50% of the scores were at level two. In Classroom B, 18% of the observed time was silent reading and only 31% of the scores were at level two.

The rubric did not include a descriptor of off-task talking, or talking with a peer when work was completed during free time. These incidences were scored separately in a fifth column, “not applicable” (NA). In Classroom A, which had 14% planned group activity time, 15% of the observations had off-task talking. In Classroom B, which had 33% planned group activity time, 41% of the observations had off-task talking.

The majority of students self-reported that, when they had the opportunity to work together, they were at a level three or four in social engagement. They perceived that they participated and helped each other. Despite this, the average self-reported scores for social engagement were 2.15 for writing workshop, 2.05 for language and word study and 2.9 for reading instruction (reading workshop, in this case, did not provide opportunities for social engagement). The averages were brought down by the three struggling students, who gave self-report scores of one or two for social engagement.

Teacher reports of student social engagement showed that the majority of students were between two and three. These scores are in agreement student self-reports, but did not agree with observational data. Possibly, the reason behind the discrepancies in the data was due to student misconceptions about collaborative work. Students who got along with each other saw themselves as helping each other and working together, even though little evidence of this was seen. During interviews, if a student commented that they were at a four for social engagement, that comment would be probed with a prompt such as, “So, when you were working with friends you were on-task and helping one another?” (researcher) and the answer would be a definite, “Yes.” Out of sixty-two episodes of social interaction in the class, only nineteen of these were on-task, with twenty-seven

being off-task. The rest of the episodes were when students were talking after finishing work.

Stage Three of Analysis: Instructional Context

Three sources of data, (1) field notes from classroom observations, (2) student interviews, and (3) teacher interviews, were used to capture the breadth of the instructional contexts of the classrooms as set out in Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) ten instructional priorities. These instructional priorities are described as by Guthrie and Wigfield as strategies that can increase student engagement. Since the student engagement processes have been described in detail, it was considered important to also detail the instructional priorities described by Guthrie and Wigfield. The intention in describing the classrooms using these priorities was to determine to the impact the instructional contexts had on student engagement. The ten instructional priorities are (a) teacher involvement, (b) learning and knowledge goals, (c) real-world interactions, (d) autonomy support, (e) interesting text, (f) strategy instruction, (g) collaboration, (h) rewards and praise (i) evaluation, and (j) coherence. All data were coded using these ten processes. The first source of data was observational data from field notes. The second source of data was from teacher interviews. The third source of data was student interviews, during which, students commented on what was happening in their classrooms. A second reader affirmed the coding.

1)Teacher Involvement

The data gathered suggested that teacher involvement was high, but different, in both classrooms. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe teacher involvement as a

"teacher's knowledge of individual learners, caring about their progress and pedagogical understanding of how to foster their active participation" (p. 406). In the following discussion, the uniqueness of each classroom context in relationship to engagement will be described.

Classroom A, Bill

All four students interviewed from Bill's classroom stated that their teacher cared about them and wanted them to do well. Students stated that they felt comfortable going to their teacher for help with their learning and two of the four students also stated that the strategies he gave them were useful. In interviews, Bill always expressed his caring for the students;

> "I'll try to act a little silly. I try to have a good, positive relationship with the kids so that they are willing to be engaged and listen when I start talking about something."

Sometimes this was expressed as frustration about not being able to help them more:

> "There's a group that because of, or for some reasons, home or whatever has gone on in their life right now, it's just that school is fourth or fifth on the list so they're just not engaged at all."
>
> "How do you have a continuation and build on anything when the attendance, when they've missed 25% of the school year?"

He demonstrated his caring, as well, through the many hours he put in after school coaching teams and with the patient and positive language and tone he consistently used with the students. Latecomers were welcomed and students who were struggling on any given day were treated respectfully.

During observations, Bill demonstrated how well he knew his students. Twice, Rhianna came into class obviously upset and within a half hour, Bill had her on-task, smiling, and working with her group. Doug, who struggled with reading, got to be "the expert" when Bill asked him about a car. As well, Bradley, who was frustrated with his classmates at times, received individual attention from Bill to keep him focused on positive tasks.

Bill's caring and knowledge of his students meant that behaviourally, his students were not often acting out. He admitted, however, that he was struggling with how to take the students to the next level. He asked,

> "Once the students are behaving, how do you engage them in their learning?"

He stated that only two of the students in his room really had any intrinsic motivation for learning and could actually benefit from self-directed learning opportunities.

> "I think these guys, their intrinsic motivation is, what can I get away with?"

Bill was able to connect with these at-risk students and develop relationships. The next challenge for Bill was to help students develop intrinsic motivation for learning.

Classroom B, Rob

All of Rob's students agreed that he cared about them and that he was able to help them with their learning. In interviews, Rob expressed his passion for teaching and clearly outlined specific learning objectives he had for his students.

> "I can look at their faces and I can see the tracking on me, the eyes looking at you and sort of being excited about what they've done."

> "I'm teaching them the things they are going to need in order to be successful in high school."
>
> "I treat them with respect and they give it back to me."

He was consistently patient and enthusiastic when teaching. Rob demonstrated a thorough understanding, through keeping his eyes on them, of his students as he circulated around the classroom. No student was left out of his eyesight for more than a couple of minutes. The fact that Rob was a term teacher, who started in January and came into a class with many behaviourally-challenging students, made it difficult for Rob to know all the students individually.

As with Bill, Rob's caring relationship with the students created enough respect so that students behaved for him. There were no major discipline issues observed in the class. Like Bill, Rob also expressed frustration that his students did not have the skills to inquire independently.

> "So it's not bad for the higher level kids, but it's really bad, it's zero, for the others.

He believed that the majority of his students had many obstacles preventing them from being successful.

> "I don't think they've been exposed to reading . . . they can't believe I read with my own kids."
>
> "You can see that they've been provided some nourishment and shelter and that's it."

With regards to self-directed learning Rob stated,

> "It's a pretty big skill set for them to be self-directed. Some of the kids that I have taught have it, but most of them don't, so it ends up being a large waste of time."

He believed that literacy blocks could be part of the solution due to the creation of routine and structure for students.

> "The kids just know what they're supposed to do and they get into a bit of a routine and it helps that way."

He had already, at these early stages, found success with how he was teaching his writing program due to the consistency of routine provided in the program.

Teacher involvement was quite high in these classrooms. This led to students cooperating with the teachers, thereby aiding in the development of a supportive learning community and this, in turn, supported the engagement process in social interactions. The one area of teacher involvement that was still developing was teachers' ability to use strategies to increase student participation.

2) Learning and Knowledge Goals

Students and teachers in both classrooms were more focused on learning goals than performance goals. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) refer to learning and knowledge goals as the student belief that teachers care more about the learning that happens than whether students just get the right answers or complete the work. In all the student interviews only one student mentioned marks that the teacher gave her, and she even mentioned it only in the context of her teacher pushing her to learn more and do better. The students did not have any personal reading or writing goals, but when asked to think of them, all but one student was able to verbalize a few appropriate goals. This suggests

that the teachers had not explicitly asked students to make goals, but that they discussed general learning outcomes they wanted students to achieve. It was clear that the students did not think teachers were focused on performance objectives.

When teachers were asked to describe evidence of learning, they talked about a wide range of student activities that demonstrate different learning objectives.

> "Can you write a paragraph? . . .Can you respond to text with a question? . . .Can you create a poster, tell me verbally? . . .Can you express it in some other way that you've understood what is going on?" - Bill
>
> "Individualized rubrics . . . that students design. I did some reading comprehension." - Rob

Especially in writing instruction, the teachers had specific performance goals they were working towards. They believed these clear targets gave evidence to students of their own growth. In their interviews, many students even indicated that they had improved at some of these specific skills, such as topic sentences in paragraphs, or organizing information for an essay.

The teachers never talked about what students had to do to get marks though they gave formative feedback and reinforced learning with encouraging comments. It was not unusual to hear a lesson start with, "Today we are going to learn about . . ." followed up at the end of the lesson with "That looked good, I think you now have got this." The teachers were definitely focusing on learning goals. In assessing learning goals the teachers were the class experts whom the students always had to come to for confirmation. This responsibility was not given to students and thus, authority was retained by the teachers.

3) Real-World Interactions

Students cared about real-world interactions in a variety of ways. In student interviews, three students described a favorite teacher from the past who had used a real world object or experience to create curiosity and intrinsic motivation for their learning. There was no mention of this from the present year. All but one student enjoyed working on the computer because of the perceived real-world value of technology use. Rhianna talked with excitement about doing the real-world literacy task of creating the yearbook. Conversely, Kara talked with frustration about the pointlessness of learning Greek words that she would never use again.

In teacher interviews Bill talked specifically about how important it was to help students make connections from school to the real-world.

> "I try to explain to them at the beginning of class why we're doing this, why we're talking about the human body . . . this is actually real, you're going to use it." - Bill

Rob talked of getting students ready for the real world by preparing them for high school.

> "I'm teaching them the things that they are going to need in order to be successful in high school so I think they appreciate that." – Rob

In observations, it was noted that both teachers tried to connect to students' real-world interests by giving them choices in their reading and writing. When talking about purposes of different texts, Bill brought in a huge variety of texts from his own house. Students could look through manuals, magazines and books. Bill read for entertainment and knowledge. Rob created a real-world opportunity for his students by asking them to

write about fundraising ideas for the school barbecue. These activities connected to the real-world, but did not actually get students to interact with that world. Neither teacher talked of creating immediate sensory or experiential interactions for their students to create the anticipation and excitement for an upcoming unit.

4) Autonomy Support

Students talked about the many different choices they were given. The support teachers give students in helping them to make appropriate choices to achieve learning goals is autonomy support (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). There were many examples of this in the data. Students had the choice to read whatever book they wanted during reading workshop (both classes). They had the choice to write about what they wanted as long as it was the type of writing the teacher was looking for. They had the choice to do projects on specific topics within a unit of study. Most students felt they had enough choice within a range of choices provided by their teachers.

Teachers also talked about the value of giving students choice. Bill saw a significant increase in reading motivation in his classroom when he started giving students time everyday to read whatever they wanted for twenty to thirty minutes.

> "I think I offer choice as often as I can . . . so it's like something they're doing instead of being done to them." – Bill

Both Rob and Bill stated that choice could not be left wide open.

> "A certain amount of choice is good . . . it's difficult for them to make appropriate choices." – Rob

In the classroom, both Rob and Bill gave students some element of choice in every lesson. In language and word study students chose the words they would study in-depth, or chose which order they completed the work. In reading instruction, students chose the section of text they would summarize or whom their partner would be. In reading workshop they chose which text they would read. In most instances, students used their choices wisely on their own or were guided to make better choices if they were having problems. Students did not have opportunities to reflect on why they made certain choices, or how well their choices worked for them.

5) Interesting Texts

Interesting texts, according to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), refers to teachers providing a wide range of texts that are relevant to the learning goals and at students' reading levels. This condition was certainly met with reading workshop. Students had total choice in what they read at this time and received help in finding these books. Bill really noticed the difference this made to his students. Other than their self-selected reading books, textbooks and the Internet seemed to be the only other texts in the classroom. In his reading instruction, Rob used texts that were interesting and at student levels, but were not relevant to the learning goals of the unit of study. Bill used textbooks for reading instruction, which were relevant, but not interesting or at level.

When Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) description of interesting text is expanded to include writing, it can be seen that interest, relevancy and level are applicable. Many of the students stated that they liked writing stories, but the only opportunities for writing that were seen in both classes were non-fiction paragraphs and essays, so at times the

writing was not meeting student interest levels. Writing assignments were geared to meet student ability, so student level was considered. Both teachers explained that most of their writing was integrated with units of study in social studies or science, so the condition of relevancy was met.

6) Strategy Instruction

Teachers discussed explicit strategy instruction with regards to writing workshop.

> "You know 'cause it's writing it's a little bit different dependent of the person, but this (text structures) is a nice, basic and I call it the cookie cutter approach to writing paragraphs." – Rob
>
> "In writing they can actually see the product in front of them and I can say now you gotta add this, this and send them back and that can be moved along." – Bill

In their comments some students also talked about specific writing strategies that they had learned throughout the year.

> "It's easy. It's pretty much just a clear essay – three things we liked, three supports." – Rhianna

The teachers stated that they preferred teaching writing to reading because they felt like they were more engaged in the teaching process themselves.

> "There's a lot more for me to do." - Bill

When teaching writing Rob had a strategy, teaching text structures, that he was confident in, stating,

> "It made a lot of sense and I noticed a difference." - Rob

Between teaching strategies, process and giving feedback the teachers were busy and interacting with the students; they felt competent and relevant throughout the process.

When asked about reading instruction both teachers expressed some struggles.

"To be perfectly honest I don't feel overly successful because I don't think the kids see the point to it." - Bill

"With reading assessment it's anecdotal, just observation. They're reading." – Bill

"I'm really kind of struggling as far as that's concerned." – Rob

"The reading is really hard to get a good read on." - Rob

Students did not talk specifically about strategies they knew and were not able to demonstrate an understanding of their own learning or metacognitive strategies when talking about reading. In many instances when students said activities were boring or stupid it seemed that it was because they did not have the strategies to successfully complete them.

In reading workshop teacher comments also indicated that they did not know how to use mini-lessons and conferencing to teach reading strategies.

"It was kind of frustrating watching kids have a different book every two or three days." - Rob

"The kids would just sit quietly and read." - Bill

The challenge that teachers were expressing around the instruction of reading strategies was confirmed during classroom observations. Bill gave lessons on making connections to the reading and teaching students about reading for different purposes without connecting it to how these understandings affect reading comprehension. Rob's guided reading lessons were product oriented, with the goal being to get students to complete

questions or activities. He did not engage students in talking about how to read the text. Both teachers saw students having difficulty when they were asked to summarize or take notes from text books without being given a specific strategy to do these tasks, nor time to reflect, through talk, about the process.

7) Collaboration

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) describe the collaboration that increases student engagement as the "social discourse among students in a learning community that enables them to see perspectives and to socially construct knowledge" (413). In both classrooms students were often given a choice to work on their own or with partners. Students frequently chose partners and students were often observed working in pairs. In these pairs students would frequently divide up the workload and then give each other answers. They were not constructing knowledge together. Bill demonstrated an understanding of this when he expressed that collaboration was a challenge for him in this setting.

> "I personally don't see a lot of real collaborative learning . . . I don't spend a lot of time on that . . . for management's sake, keeping it structured is important. If we do group work then we always end up with the same issues: one person won't do their work and in the community there's no support for it." – Bill

Despite these frustrations, Bill talked of the discussion groups he created for reading workshop, stating that those were fairly successful. Rob expressed that collaborative learning was successful in his classroom.

> "The kids, because they've worked together for long periods of time, they're in classes together for a few years at a time, they learn the strengths that each other

> has and I think they try to work with that . . . for example one students everyone knows can't write but he is a terrific presenter so his group will pump him up to be able to do this." - Bill

He was also pleased with the group work occurring in his guided reading groups.

During interviews, students in both classes stated that the teachers did not frequently put them into groups and when they were put in groups it was not usually a positive experience. For example, one person would do all the work and in other cases students ended up arguing over who would do the work. Students appreciated the opportunity to self-select partners or groups when working on different assignments.

In-class observations supported the student and teacher statements about the amount and type of collaboration that was occurring. In both classrooms, students had opportunities to work with friends. In both classrooms, teachers put students in groups for specific tasks such as guided reading or filling in a post-discussion sheet. In both classes teachers were challenged to ensure individual accountability for work completed in groups and face-to-face interaction so that students were constructing knowledge together.

8) Rewards and Praise

Praise and reward were not topics that either students or teachers brought up when asked about engagement. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) explain that praise and reward used inappropriately make students feel like they are being manipulated and instead of increasing student engagement, actually decreases it. Praise and rewards need to be viewed by students as genuine and sincere. During interviews all students stated that they

liked their teachers, so one can assume that students did not feel manipulated by their teachers. For example, taking students to a restaurant and buying them Slurpees was not interpreted as a bribe, but rather as a genuine gesture of caring and generosity. Mary commented on how Rob used marks to push her to do better; he never gave her 100% because he was always trying to push her to do the best she could. In both classrooms, students felt that the rewards were sincere, that the teachers meant what they said and that the teachers did not have ulterior motives.

When asked about the ways they tried to engage students, teachers did not mention the use of effective praise and rewards. Rob recognized that his writing instruction was effective because there were clear steps and objectives that all kids had success in achieving. Bill felt his writing instruction was successful because he was able to give precise and immediate feedback to students.

During observations, teachers were sincere in their praise and feedback they gave to students. During work time both Bill and Rob circulated around the class giving students feedback and encouragement for the work they were doing. During discussions they acknowledged correct answers and encouraged students to add to answers that were lacking. During writing, students lined up to get feedback for Bill about whether their work was adequate. At these times, Bill gave specific instructions about what students needed to do before they were finished.

In Bill’s class, a reward of free time to talk was given to students who finished their work quickly. Most students found this motivating, but this strategy also resulted in students feeling compelled to turn in work more quickly instead of attending to work of high quality. An example of this was when Rhianna, a person who thinks of herself as a

writer, wrote five sentences in five minutes in her reading response journal and believed this was an adequate reflection on her reading. She had met the minimum expectations; and therefore, put her journal away and started chatting.

9) Evaluation

There was little emphasis on grades and tests in classes and evaluation did not surface as a discussion topic with regards to engagement with either students or teachers. Students and teachers talked about portfolio assessments, although there was no observation of this process during the time of the study. When asked specifically about assessment, Rob talked of students creating individual rubrics for public speaking and being able to assess themselves using that rubric. Bill talked of giving his students multiple ways to demonstrate their learning. On-going self-assessment or self-reflection was not observed so it seems that the teachers in this study were still learning to develop on-going student self-reflection and metacognition strategies to make portfolios effective.

10) Coherence

There was some coherence across the instructional processes and across subject areas that contributed to student engagement. In terms of integration across subject areas, students observed how learning to write essays in ELA would help them in science and social studies when they had to write reports in these subjects. In many cases the students' choices of writing topics was connected to content area topics. Students recognized that they did a lot of reading in the content areas and the better they became at

reading the more this would help them to write in these areas. These students did see the connection of literacy learning to learning across content areas.

The teachers also recognized the importance of integration and stated that they attempted to integrate frequently.

> “I have always been a big fan of killing as many birds with as few stones as possible.” – Rob
>
> “I think it (integration) is the only way to go if we’re doing multi-graded classrooms and you’re having to hit all the curricular outcomes.” - Bill

One thing they talked about was how challenging it was to find a wide range of interesting texts for reading instruction so that teachers could effectively integrate teaching reading into the content areas.

Coherence across instructional processes was also evident. It was evident that practices in one process affected other processes, whether positively or negatively. The positive aspects of teacher involvement affected the impact of teacher praise and reward and evaluation in the classrooms. The need to develop metacognition and self-assessment practices so that students started to take responsibility for their learning was a theme that showed up across strategy use, student autonomy and evaluation.

Stage Four of Analysis: Teacher Experiences of Literacy Block Implementation

Four sources of information were used to analyze teacher experiences of the implementation of literacy blocks. Teacher interviews and professional development meetings helped to explain the teachers’ thinking and feeling about the process. Student

and teacher interviews as well as observations clarified exactly what the teachers were able to implement in their classes. The aspects of literacy blocks that teachers were asked to incorporate were: (a) the key components of the four blocks, (b) timetabling requirements of the four blocks, (c) integration of content, (d) implementation of student questioning strategies, (e) implementation of collaborative learning, (f) integration of ICT, (g) allowing for student choice, and (h) allowing for student, self-directed work. Within each component, data was coded into three categories: teacher beliefs about students with regards to a specific component, teacher beliefs about practices, and actual practices as noted through observations and statements.

1) The Four Blocks of Literacy Blocks

Literacy blocks looked different in each classroom as each teacher was independently able to implement different components of the four blocks. This next section discusses what the blocks looked like in each classroom separately, beginning with Classroom A, Classroom B and then the common and contrasting features of each block as implemented, compared to the block as conceptualized in the study.

Classroom A

The teacher in Classroom A, Bill, started with the implementation of a silent reading program with some components of reading workshop. Students were given choice about what to read and reading occurred almost daily, excluding the normal interruptions occurring in schools. Reading occurred at a regularly scheduled time, first thing in the morning. Some lessons were given after the silent reading to help develop

student understandings about reading. Students were writing reading responses once every week or two. Towards the end of the study, the teacher began informal reading conferences. Components of the reading workshop yet to be implemented at this early stage of literacy blocks implementation were: (a) regular mini-lessons; (b) daily opportunities to talk student-to-student about reading; (c) maintenance of a Reading Log; and (d) regular feedback from the teacher through written responses to student journaling. Despite missing some components all students stated that they were enjoying reading more at school, with self-selected reading, than when they had been forced to read specific books.

Bill started to implement language and word study. Students completed a grammar worksheet booklet, some vocabulary work with a word list taken from social studies, and a unit on Greek and Latin roots from science. Daily practice of language and word study was not constant. Students would finish the word list, or the booklet and there would be a week or two lag before Bill provided them with a new language and words study unit.

> "We did a little bit of word study in science . . . since then we've been high-jacked in almost everything else."
>
> "They really liked my grammar sheets . . . we were building vocabulary, we're learning how to apply and use the words later." - Bill

Two essential components Bill was still working on in language and word study implementation were sentence combining activities and a wide range of daily word study activities. This block was difficult for Bill to implement because he had such little prior experience with the concepts of language and word study.

Students were writing two or three times per week. Bill would give the students a lesson on the writing assignment that was being assigned, students would write a rough draft by hand and then work on a final draft on the computer. Between first and final drafts students would come to Bill for feedback about what needed to be improved. The components that Bill was working on implementing were: (a) regular choice writing in a writers notebook done two or three times a week; (b) the opportunity to choose which of the first drafts in the writers notebook was worked on to a "published" copy; and (c) the opportunity for students to receive and give peer feedback about their writing. With the implementation of literacy blocks a positive change that had occurred was that writing workshop ensured that Bill's students were writing regularly. Three of the students from classroom A stated that the instruction in writing workshop was making them better writers.

The literacy blocks component that Bill acknowledged he had the most difficulty implementing was reading instruction.

> "No, that is the one thing I never really got to. I managed the three other blocks and felt like I was doing them well and if one doesn't get done, well . . ." - Bill

He never did small-group, guided reading, although he reported that occasionally when students were reading science, math or social studies textbooks he had a reading goal, as well as a content goal for them. He was observed teaching a whole-class, guided reading lesson like this at the end of the year. During this lesson, students were asked to verbally summarize the main ideas from the text and write a paragraph based on the summary. The instructions did not include strategies to help students achieve their goal and students performed with varying degrees of success. Perhaps scaffolds of instruction were

removed too early. Based on this observation and interviews, one component of reading instruction that Bill had yet to achieve was the instruction of specific strategies with a gradual release of responsibility to develop independence with the strategy. Bill demonstrated an understanding of this challenge when he said,

> "I don't think you can get to full independence until the kid actually has a real understanding of what it's about and understands why we're doing this stuff."

Classroom B

The teacher in Classroom B, Rob, implemented the reading instruction block. He arranged his students into three homogeneous groups of readers, a below-grade-level group, an at-grade-level group and an above-grade-level group. Each group was given a reading selection and questions, or assignments, to complete after their reading. Rob believed that his students were very engaged during this time

> "They (students) were feeling that whatever they were doing, they could answer questions and have success with it."

The teacher and two educational assistants were in the room at the time, so each group had an adult supervisor. Students became familiar with the routine of their group work and Rob was happy to see that by the third session the students got into their groups and got to work right away without prompting. Once Rob had small-group, guided reading functioning smoothly in his class, it occurred once per week. A challenge for Rob was to ensure that his reading materials were connected with content-area themes. He was also learning to ensure that discussion in the guided reading groups focused on process and strategies, rather than answering questions and completing a product. A decision that Rob

made was to go with homogeneous, instead of heterogeneous groups. This seemed to work well for all students, except the lowest group. One of the boys in the study resented being put in that group and complained bitterly about the "kiddie books" he was reading. He was resistant and non-compliant with his group.

Rob was also concerned with the use of writing workshop. He focused on teaching students how to write paragraphs using different text structures. He used Diane Dillabough's *Text Structures: Teaching Patterns in Reading and Writing* (2008) to guide the formula for his delivery of writing workshop. Rob instructed the students about the text structure and then gave students opportunities to write their own paragraphs using the models provided. He believed that students were engaged in this block.

> "The way I taught it, they realized it was very little steps that they could handle so I think they really enjoyed it a lot." - Rob

Students had choice about the topics for writing. These lessons generally occurred two times per week and would last for approximately one hour. Students were generally instructed to write paragraphs or essays on topics related to content areas. All writing was submitted to Rob for feedback. Some components that Rob was still working on implementing as part of his writing workshop were opportunities for students: (a) to write in a writer's notebook on any topic, in any form; (b) to share their writing with one another and give feedback; and (c) to choose which one of their first drafts they would take to final publication. Half of the students from this class stated that the explicit instruction from this block helped them to become better writers.

Silent reading in Classroom B was done when it fit into the day and as a time-filler, rather than as a routinely scheduled block. If a lesson was finished and there were

fifteen minutes until the next class, students were asked to pull out a book and read. At least five minutes of this time was spent with adults helping some of the students find something to read, as many students did not have books with them. While students were reading, the adults in the room were completing administrative tasks. Rob felt frustrated with this reading time because he believed most of his students were not really engaged in reading.

> "A lot of the kids don't have the ability to make very good choices . . . some of the kids can't focus long enough." - Rob

He acknowledged that he did not consistently maintain this block due to this belief. Rob was working on developing routine, regular mini-lessons, reading logs and a reading journal. One element not observed was opportunities for students to talk to one another about reading. Despite missing components, four of the six students in this study regularly had books and stated that they enjoyed this reading time.

Rob focused on word study in his language and word study implementation. One of the units dealt with learning Latin and Greek roots with a question sheet package. The next unit was a list of forty words from their unit on the Middle Ages where students found definitions of twenty-five of the words to make a computer Jeopardy game. Students did not respond well to either unit and as a consequence, Rob acknowledged that this was the other block he never really embraced.

> "We did it a few times and they enjoyed it the first time and were engaged but not for long periods of time . . . it would be good to do in short blocks." - Rob

As with Bill the two components that were missing were sentence-combining activities and a wide range of daily word activities. Rob, like Bill, struggled with this block due to the lack of prior experience he had with the components of this block.

2) Timetabling Requirements of the Four Blocks

Teachers were asked to timetable each literacy block four times per six-day school cycle. Initially the teachers said they thought that would be one of the most challenging things they were asked to do. In the final interviews, they said that it was not as bad as they had initially thought. When asked if two hours per day for literacy blocks (not necessarily as one block) were doable in grades 7 and 8, they both responded positively.

> "I think it's necessary and it's all about structuring and developing patterns so that kids know what's coming." – Rob

> "It's a matter of getting the time and resources to put it all together (integration). That would be something where I could see it going." – Bill

Teachers believed that the main problem they had with timetabling occurred because they started the research in the middle of the year rather than at the beginning. If they had planned for the blocks at the beginning of the year with their initial timetables they could have been more thoughtful and purposeful in their planning. Both teachers agreed that the structure imposed by the blocks helped to create routines within the class that to which the students had started to respond.

Despite their statements that timetabling was not as problematic as teachers had assumed, neither teacher was able to teach all four blocks four times per cycle. One

reason they may not have been able to do this was because the teachers frequently spent more time on each block once they became engaged with it. Rather than keeping blocks to twenty to forty minutes, the blocks frequently extended to one hour. This meant that teachers were able to have the blocks less frequently and that the blocks extended beyond the students' attention spans. For the short frequent blocks to work, students would have to become acquainted with transitioning from block to block which means that students have to be explicitly taught expectations and routines about transition. Teachers addressed these expectations occasionally.

3) Integration of Content.

Integration was considered important by both teachers and was achieved in writing workshop consistently, and occasionally in language and word study. Both teachers stated that integration was the key and the only way teachers could teach the entire curriculum, yet the amount of time for planning and gathering resources was overwhelming to them.

> "Where do you get the time to plan that, where are the resources, how do you link all the outcomes together?" - Bill

Writing was the easiest block to integrate. If students were learning about Rome, they could write an essay on Rome.

Reading instruction was the most challenging block to integrate. The readings that Rob's reading groups were doing were at the students' reading level and interesting to students, but unrelated to the units of study. The only reading instruction that Bill did was

using the textbooks, which even though integrated into content areas, did not provide experiences for students with using a variety of texts at different levels.

Both teachers tried to do some word study activities connected to their units of study. The language and word study unit that Bill created that he felt was most successful, because of the variety it had, was unconnected to any unit of study. Reading workshop in both classrooms was a time when students could read any material of their choice so it was never integrated.

4) Student Questioning

Both Rob and Bill saw the importance of using student questioning processes such as inquiry, critical literacy or the design process as methods to increase student engagement.

> "I think it's really important in grades 7 and 8 to let them have the questions that they want answered." – Rob
>
> "I think that is a really big part but I think kids need to be taught how to get there." – Bill

They both encouraged students to ask questions in class discussions and in many cases discussions went off on interesting tangents as they discussed student questions. Teachers believed this increased student engagement. Also, if students had ideas for assignments that they wanted to pursue, they were encouraged to do that, although the teachers stated that there were only two students in each class who had done this on occasion. In these initial stages of learning literacy blocks, neither teacher had achieved a systematic approach to teaching inquiry, nor building questioning skills or critical

perspective taking skills. Both teachers recognized the need for this kind of approach, but believed that most of their students could not ask questions effectively.

> "A lot of the kids that I worked with this year don't have the skill to be able to do that." – Rob
>
> "When I can I've been doing that with the kids who are ready but there are two kids in my room who I really feel are ready to go ahead and do that." – Bill

5) Collaborative Learning

This component was also talked about in Stage Three of the analysis (p. 135). In the discussions about implementing collaborative learning, both teachers revealed some misconceptions they had about the meaning of collaborative learning. Bill believed that his students needed more structure than collaborative learning would supply. In his community he also felt that parents did not support it. If one student did not do work, other parents were upset about this child getting credit for other students' work. In this explanation, the two misconceptions are revealed, that collaborative learning is unstructured and that it allows for one child to do nothing. Whereas, Slavin's (1990) explanation of collaborative learning is built around the ideas of structures that support individual accountability. Collaborative learning is not about group work without structure but about structures in place to guide work. Assessment, he recommends, should always include some level of individual evaluation.

Rob, on the other hand, when asked about collaborative learning said that he had implemented it well because he let students set up groups with friends half the time and the other half of the time he created the groups in which students did what they were best

at. Hence, the concepts of group work and the precision of roles in collaborative groups were not fully in place in the initial stages and would likely to be a topic for professional development down the road.

6) Integration of ICT

Both teachers saw the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) as important.

> "This is how kids function. This is the world we are in now." – Rob
>
> "ICT isn't just about writing and typing and PowerPoint, if you can drive it through video cameras and music and PhotoStory . . . it can be the hook. - Bill

In the both classrooms classroom students regularly used the Internet for research and typed up written assignments on the computer. They also created electronic portfolios. In an integrated music/ELA project students created silent movies using the digital video camera and the computer film editing program. Rob used the LCD projector frequently for his teacher-directed lessons and he found ways to integrate ICT into language and word study. Bill talked about it being important for his students who struggled with other literacy activities to be able to use technology for alternative ways to communicate. Bill also talked about how in reading instruction students could be taught how to view many types of text, such as art, movies and music.

7) Allowing for Student Choice

Both teachers thought that they allowed for student choice as much as was realistic for the students they had. The data collected confirmed this; students had an element of choice in most aspects of literacy blocks. These students had choices about reading materials in reading workshop, choices in writing topics, choices in how to do their work – individually or with a partner – choices in the order of doing work and choices in which section of a text to read. Teachers did not guide students to reflect on why they made choices or how well these choices worked for them. In Responsive Classroom, a research-based classroom management approach developed by the Northeast Foundation, the concept of academic choice is one of their ten most important teaching strategies. The process of academic choice is described as a three step approach in which students (a) explain why they made a specific choice, (b) make a plan for following through on their choice and (c) reflect on whether their choice and the plan they made worked for them. Denton (2005) describes that following this process leads to engagement and growth that moves the instruction from teacher-directed to student-directed. This process supports the development of student metacognition.

8) Student Self-Directed Work

The teachers applied more of their time to teacher-directed activities rather than designing opportunities for student self-directed learning. They appeared to not believe that most of their students could handle the responsibility.

“If you are going to make kids responsible for their own learning, they have to

> want to be responsible for their own learning." - Bill
>
> "Most of them (students) don't have it (the skill set required for student-directed learning) so it ends up being a large waste of time." – Rob

When reflecting on this dilemma, Rob stated that he saw the routines of literacy blocks as potentially contributing to the students being able to develop some responsibility and independence because then, "they know what they are supposed to do." In the final interview, both teachers expressed a continued desire to learn more about creating classrooms that are less teacher-directed and that support student self-directed work.

Using the Data to Respond to the Research Questions

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the four stages of analysis provide a framework for examining the research questions in relationship to existing models. The following section expressly concerns the two research questions and the question that arose from the data analysis regarding the impact of the instructional context on student engagement.

Question 1

What were the qualitative markers of student engagement in literacy blocks?

The first stage of analysis, the description of student engagement processes, allows insight into the internal, inside-the-head markers of student engagement during literacy blocks. Sixty-two percent of the comments suggested that students were engaged in activities that they were motivated to do. Intrinsic motivation was the most prevalent

type of motivation (34%); students were motivated to do things they liked doing or had an interest in. By looking closely at which students were expressing intrinsic motivation and under what circumstances it seemed that self-efficacy motivation and having choice about their learning both contribute to feelings of intrinsic motivation. These students were also clearly more motivated by learning goals (16 %) than by extrinsic rewards (5%).

Social interactions in the class had a significant impact on the students' engagement with 34 % of the comments being in this category. Almost half of these comments expressed dissatisfaction with the interactions students had with their peers. They complained about being part of groups where they did all the work, or where only one person really had the opportunity to learn. The other half of the comments demonstrated how, on occasion, students enjoyed working with friends and sharing the workload. The data suggests that positive teacher-student interactions were an important part of the engagement process since 35% of the social interaction comments were about the students' relationships with their teachers and all of these comments were positive.

One of the most interesting pieces of data is the low numbers of comments in strategy use and conceptual knowledge. Only 7 % of the total number of comments related to these two categories and almost half of these comments indicated that a lack of strategic thinking, or a lack of knowledge was getting in the way of being successful. Most of these students were not able to talk about the strategies they used, or what conceptual knowledge they had in any given situation. When probed for answers around these questions, answers like "I don't know" of "I just can't explain it" were expressed.

The second stage of data analysis, the observational rubric, presents a window into what the students looked like in the classroom. In looking at the number of observations at each level in the rubric, across all domains, the number of scores in the lower half of the rubric equalled 50 – 70 % of the total observations. Only three students were assigned scores at level four. All students scored at level three on occasion. Affective engagement was highest when students were talking about non school-related subjects. Most other times students had even expressions and seemed neutral. Behaviourally 10 – 30 % of the observations were overtly off-task and for approximately 70% of the time they were either partially or clearly on-task. Observations suggest that cognitive engagement was almost identical to behavioural engagement. Indicators for cognitive engagement were based predominantly on the verbal responses students gave during class and it seems that this was not always the most accurate reflection of student thinking. Social engagement was lowest and many of the observations fit into a "not applicable" (NA) category because the rubric did not have a spot for off-task talking, or talking that occurred when students were finished their assignment and had free time. All observations that occurred during activities that did not inherently warrant social engagement were placed into level two on the rubric. Level two and NA had the highest scores for these reasons. Student self-reporting of engagement and teacher reports of perceived student engagement were both slightly higher than the observed student engagement.

These two stages of analysis feature the qualities of student engagement in these two classrooms during literacy blocks. The data seems to indicate that for these students intrinsic motivation and social interactions are key processes of engagement. Talk of

strategy use and conceptual knowledge was not prevalent. The rubric describes a picture of students who are going through the motions and completing what they need to do, without being excited, or really interested in their learning for 50%, or more, of the time. Despite this, all students did have moments when they were clearly interested and engaged in classroom activities. Data suggested that students were clearly or highly engaged across all domains for approximately 25% of the time.

Question Rising from the Research

How did the instructional context impact student engagement in literacy blocks?

The data collected on student engagement processes suggests that motivation and social interactions (especially with the teacher) were the most prevalent positive processes for the students in this study. Students rarely commented on strategy use and conceptual knowledge as engagement processes. Negative social interactions with peers seemed to be a barrier for engagement and social motivation. It seemed that an analysis of the instructional context may be able to explain some of the patterns of engagement that were seen in this classroom.

Motivation, as an important engagement process in these classes, could perhaps be attributed to a number of instructional priorities working together. Teachers supported autonomy by providing choice to students. Both teachers used evaluation and praise and reward in ways such that students were not highly focused on extrinsic or performance rewards, thus increasing intrinsic, self-efficacy and learning goal motivation for activities.

Interactions with teachers seemed to be viewed as positive in part because of the same priorities that supported intrinsic motivation in the class. Choice, effective evaluation and praise and rewards all led students to believe that teachers cared about their learning and about making learning interesting for them. In addition, the teachers in this study had high levels of teacher involvement and worked hard to develop positive relationships with their students. The coherence between these instructional priorities increased the overall effect so that all students commented positively on their relationship with their teachers. The students respected and cooperated with their teachers as a result.

Students commented that negative interactions with peers during learning was a factor that did not support their engagement. Social motivation was also rarely indicated as an engagement process. When the instructional context was analyzed the data suggests that, although students were encouraged to work together, teachers did not use the collaborative strategies and structures recommended by Slavin (1990) or the cooperative learning strategies and structures recommended by Johnson and Johnson (1994) and Kagan (1993). It seems that the lack of strategy use in collaborative learning may have negatively affected the student engagement processes of social interactions with peers and social motivation.

In interviews, students rarely talked about strategy use and conceptual knowledge as engagement processes. There are two possible factors that may have contributed to this. First, students may not have been aware of the strategies they had and how knowledge of concepts supported their engagement. This reflects the students' metacognition. Second, students may have needed more explicit instruction and scaffolding of strategies and skills than was provided. An analysis of the instructional

context suggests that both factors contributed to student engagement. Opportunities for student self-assessment and self-reflection were not observed in either classroom in regards to evaluation, student choice, or strategy use. These are all moments when student metacognition might have been addressed. Explicit instruction occurred in writing class and it seemed that teachers were gradually releasing responsibility to the students. With regards to the components of reading workshop, reading instruction and language and word study, this same explicit instruction and gradual release of responsibility was not evident.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) use their model to describe how all of the instructional priorities affect one or more processes of engagement. The data from this study seems to support Guthrie and Wigfield's model and suggests that an analysis of the instructional context can, to some extent, explain the student engagement patterns that occurred in these classrooms. When instructional processes were evident, there were positive effects on student engagement processes. When instructional processes were not fully developed there seemed to be a negative impact on student engagement processes. This analysis also suggests that the model developed by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) is perhaps applicable to engagement in literacy blocks and not just to reading development.

Question 2

What are the teachers' experiences of the implementation of literacy blocks in grades 7 and 8?

The fourth stage of analysis was used to describe teacher experiences of literacy blocks implementation. The Concept-Based Appropriation Model (Sweeny, 2004)

describes the stages of adoption that teachers experience as they adopt changes to their practice. The data suggests that these teachers were at the beginning stages of adoption of literacy blocks. They were learning what literacy blocks are and developing plans for how to use the blocks in their context.

Despite the difficulties presented by the time constraints of the study, the research did prompt the teachers to implement changes to their practices and to develop an awareness of the components of each block. In their framework of professional learning Grossman, Smagorinsky and Valencia (1999) describe the activity setting as the "social settings in which learners are engaged" (p.6). In the case of the research, the classroom became an activity setting in which the teachers were learning. Being observed and interviewed encouraged self-reflection and growth in this setting. As Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) explain, "Change does not necessarily mean doing something differently; it can mean a change in awareness . . . Change is not immediate or complete" (p. 5). This awareness will gradually bring about change in teacher practices as long as the setting continues to support this change.

Teachers had varying degrees of success with implementing the six different engagement strategies. Teachers were able to integrate ICT into all of the blocks. The teachers also ensured that they had an element of choice within each block. Student autonomy will be further developed when teachers guide students through self-reflection about their choices. Integration was successful with writing workshop but lack of resources and planning time prohibited consistent integration in the other blocks.

Teacher beliefs about students seemed to have an impact on the implementation of self-directed learning and inquiry strategies. Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001)

explain that teacher beliefs about students have a strong affect on teacher behaviour. Schoenfeld (1998) explains in his model of teaching-in-context that teachers' actions at any point in time are based on their emergent beliefs, goals and knowledge. If a teacher believes that his students are incapable of a certain task, lesson goals will reflect these beliefs. In the interviews, teachers expressed some tension between what they wanted for full student engagement in learning and what they believed could happen. Teachers stated that they believed that most of their students did not have the necessary skills for self-directed learning or inquiry, thus they did not investigate ways to implement these strategies with students,

It seems that teachers did not fully implement collaborative learning into the literacy blocks because they did not have a complete understanding of how to effectively implement this strategy. In Grossman et al. (1999) the different levels of appropriation of conceptual and pedagogical tools is described. The teachers in this study seemed to have an understanding of some of the surface features of collaborative learning but a deeper conceptual understanding of the processes involved could potentially lead to more effective practices.

Literacy blocks and especially the one designed for this study, require a tremendous amount of pedagogical tools due to the breadth and depth of what is asked of the teacher as they integrate content area learning and engaging practices, across four different literacy blocks with each block requiring a deep understanding of that level of literacy and a broad understanding of the intertwined variables. Grossman et al. (1999) suggest that the active participation of a teacher as they learn to use a tool is imperative as a means to becoming competent. When teachers are in an environment where they can

reflect on their learning as they begin to use a tool, they will grow. During the study, teachers moved along the continuum of the appropriation of many of the tools needed to implement the blocks.

Despite some of the challenges, Bill and Rob expressed that they would like to continue using literacy blocks in the future and hoped to continue building their own skills and strategies so they could implement them more fully.

> “The structure of it, some of the experiences I have had with students . . . Make this something that I will do for the rest of my career.” - Rob
>
> “This has been good to reflect on what worked, which was obviously choice and what didn’t work, which was the timetabling and to be more plan-ful for next year . . . I like having the routine. It’s good for the kids, they know what it looks like and what’s expected.” - Bill

From this analysis, it appears that teachers’ initial adoption of literacy blocks is challenging and at the same time, something that they find valuable. Observation of these initial stages of adoption is helpful in setting up structures for the adoption of new literacy practices in the classroom. The implications and beginning responses of teachers and students will be discussed in the next chapter. As well, Chapter V, will discuss this in terms of teacher learning and what it means for future research and the implementation of literacy blocks.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter addresses some of the questions that have arisen from the analysis of the data and the implications in terms of teacher practice, teacher learning and future research. First what does this research tell us about student engagement during literacy blocks implementation in grades 7 and 8? Second, what does this research tell us about the qualitative study of student engagement and literacy blocks? Third, what does this research say to teachers, administrators and researchers about literacy blocks implementation? Fourth, what are the implications for further research in literacy blocks and student engagement?

What do the results mean?

The teachers in this case study were at the beginning stages of implementation of literacy blocks and still developing the strategies and skills they would need to fully implement the blocks as conceptualized. Thus, the descriptions of student engagement were only reflective of the beginning stages of implementation and do not necessarily reflect what student engagement may look like in classrooms where full implementation of the blocks is in place. The data on student engagement and instructional context supports the research-based model that Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) present in the *Engagement Model of Reading Development*. Perhaps what can be said is that it is likely that literacy blocks that meet all ten conditions of the instructional context described in Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) will lead to high student engagement. But then, perhaps any

instruction that meets these ten criteria would probably also be engaging. So the question remains, why use literacy blocks?

Comments made by the teachers in this study point to the reasons why literacy blocks are a valuable framework in terms of teacher practices, student learning and student engagement. One reason is that the English language arts curriculum can be overwhelming:

> "It's (ELA curriculum) too big and it can be frightening. I don't know how to teach it." – Rob

A literacy blocks framework gives the curriculum some structure in context. Another reason is that a literacy blocks framework ensures that students are having regular opportunities to read, write and work with words all year long. Many middle years teachers, like Bill, limit their instruction of these key skills to certain times of the year:

> "I did most of my writing in the fall and so we have been focusing on reading." – Bill

Using literacy blocks ensured that Bill's students received a more balanced approach to instruction in reading and writing until the end of the year. A final reason that literacy blocks are useful frameworks of instruction is that autonomy support is an instructional priority that increases student engagement. It is possible that the routines and structures of literacy blocks led to independence:

> "It's weird because it structured independence." – Rob

If students know the routines then they can do them autonomously.

Literacy blocks have the potential to be a framework of instruction that can support student learning in grades 7 and 8. Research on student engagement in

adolescence suggests that it is important that literacy instruction is engaging in grades 7 and 8 (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes 2007; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007; and Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). If literacy blocks are implemented with the ten instructional priorities that support student engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) then it is likely that literacy blocks will lead to high levels of student engagement and learning.

What has a qualitative study added to our understandings of literacy blocks and student engagement?

A review of research in literacy blocks revealed that qualitative studies of student experiences in literacy blocks were scarce. Fredricks, Blumenthal and Paris (2004) also stated that qualitative studies are missing from research on student engagement in schools. This research was a case study that examined student engagement in literacy blocks. This type of research revealed some different understandings that could not be gained from quantitative research. Observations of students in this natural setting created a strong picture of what students found engaging, or not, in their instruction. Student interviews gave students a voice and this voice clearly stated what was important to them in their learning.

Relationships with their teachers were very important to the students in this study. In interviews, all students spoke positively of their teachers. They knew that teachers cared about them and teachers were important adults in their lives. In classroom observations, the conversations between students and teachers, the shared smiles and jokes all contributed to this understanding. These positive relationships led to consistent

behavioural engagement. Students were rarely overtly off-task and for 70% of the time were either partially or clearly engaged.

The predominant engagement processes for these students appeared to be intrinsic motivation. They engaged in activities they found innately enjoyable. The word “choice” came up often as a factor in intrinsic motivation. They were interested in learning that connected to their world and the word “hands-on” surfaced a number of times. Marks and extrinsic rewards had little impact on their desire to engage or not. During observations, activities that connected to their intrinsic motivation led to the greatest levels of engagement.

Students wanted to work together and enjoyed talking with one another. The time of greatest affective engagement was during any group work. The struggle was, as suggested by interviews with students, that they did not know how to work together in groups. It was observed that students quickly got off-task in their groups unless an adult was present to monitor/direct their progress.

The students in this study did not seem to have the ability to persevere in a task if they had any uncertainties. Students voiced frustration at having to do things they did not know how to do; and, in the classroom, off-task talk or resistance occurred when instructions did not give students all the information they needed to be able to proceed. When students understood the expectations and had the scaffolds in place to support their learning, engagement fluidly occurred.

This study supports what is known about engaging practices. Relationship, choice, real-world interactions, peer interaction, and explicit instruction all support

student engagement. Teachers are encouraged to include these elements in literacy blocks instruction.

What does this research say to teachers?

Literacy blocks can be an effective way to frame literacy instruction. Using a literacy blocks framework ensures that students receive daily literacy instruction. As the teachers in this study said, integration is the key to making literacy blocks doable. Grade 7 and 8 teachers do not have enough time to spend two hours on literacy instruction every day unless they were willing and able to integrate another content area into their instruction. Integration takes resources and time. Both of these were barriers for teachers in this study.

The depth and breadth of knowledge required to effectively implement literacy blocks is extensive and complex. Teacher backgrounds impact the starting points for this practice and PD should be considered before embarking on implementation of blocks. The teachers in this study were both within their first five years of teaching. In university programs, one teacher went through the high-school stream and the other went through the middle-years stream. Neither teacher had remembered their university learning about literacy blocks until approached to do this research. Nor did they recall the processes of reading or writing workshop approaches taught in their English language arts classes. Partaking in this study was a huge undertaking for these teachers because they now had to put into action, a complete range of literacy activities, learning, and supports.

Teachers need support and training that is appropriate for their level of knowledge. The professional development sessions the teachers in this study received

were not adequate based on their background knowledge. It would be helpful for teachers to do a personal inventory about literacy block practices, start with the block they are most comfortable with and continue to add blocks as they develop the skills necessary to implement them effectively. Since collaborative learning is a strategy used across the blocks teachers should consider pursuing professional development in this first. Teachers also need to be familiar with the gradual release of responsibility model and develop effective practices using this model.

What does this research say to administrators?

To help teachers be successful in the implementation of literacy blocks, it would be helpful for the administrator to understand the Concepts-Based Adoption Model (Sweeny, 2003) developed by Hord and Hall in 1987. This model describes teacher attitudes and concerns at different stages as they learn to adopt something new into their practice. The model also describes the kinds of instruction that supports teachers at the different stages. According to this model the teachers in this study were at the initial stages of concern as they began the implementation of literacy blocks. At this stage they were developing an awareness, gathering information, and developing plans for use of implementation blocks. At this stage more help with resource/materials acquisition, planning to use strategies and modelling would have better supported the teachers in this study.

Both the Concepts-Based Adoption Model and the framework of professional learning described by Grossman, Smagorinsky and Valencia (1999) talk about the setting in which teacher learning occurs. Teachers must perceive the activity setting to be

supportive and non-judgemental for the on-going learning and appropriation of tools to occur. This would suggest that it is important for administrators to create a safe learning environment. Bringing in a literacy coach whose role is non-evaluative may be beneficial (Shanklin, 2006).

Creating a block of time called literacy blocks does not automatically mean that effective teaching practices will occur. Teachers will need time and resources to develop their own skills, to gather resources and to plan for integrated learning.

What does the research say to researchers?

Teacher backgrounds have an impact on the outcomes of the research. Professional development for a study must take into consideration teachers' knowledge about literacy blocks. For this study, given the background of these teachers, it would have been beneficial to access some resources from the school division to ensure that teachers had more supported time to plan their blocks and to gather resources.

In future studies it may be helpful to introduce one of the blocks at a time to ensure that teachers are not overwhelmed with too much information at any time. By introducing one block at a time the researcher can ensure that teachers have a deeper conceptual understanding of the practices within a block so that all of the key components of each block are fully implemented. The researcher might also prepare to take on the role of a literacy coach by explicitly instructing teachers involved in the study. The coach could scaffold teacher learning and gradually release the responsibility as teachers learn the strategies and routines within a block. It is difficult to say how much

time teachers would need to reach effective independent practice in a block but knowing teacher backgrounds would aid researchers in making that decision.

Learning how to implement one block at a time will extend the length of the study. The ten weeks of this study was too short for the teachers to learn all four blocks. The teachers also expressed that starting the study in September would have made it much easier to plan for the literacy blocks and to adopt the routines.

Directions for future research.

This study was able to portray the qualitative markers of student engagement at the initial implementation stage of literacy blocks in two classrooms. Further research that investigates student engagement in grades 7 and 8 in a classroom where full implementation of literacy blocks was occurring would be a worthwhile research direction.

Based on the literature review on student engagement, this study incorporated six engaging literacy instruction practices into literacy blocks: collaborative learning, integration of content areas, integration of information and communications technology, choices in learning, student questioning strategies, and self-directed learning. This list overlaps many of the practices described in the list of ten instructional priorities that support student engagement in Guthrie and Wigfield (2000). Evaluating the instructional context and comparing it to student engagement processes using Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) was a valuable process and added a further level to understanding how student engagement can be supported in the classroom. I would suggest that in future studies on

literacy blocks the ten instructional priorities be incorporated as key components of literacy block design, rather than the list of six used in this study.

Findings from this study also suggest that teacher professional development must be addressed with literacy blocks implementation. One question that could be addressed is what are the resources and supports required to help teachers move through the stages of adoption as they appropriate the conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy blocks? Another important question is, what is the activity setting that will support teacher learning of literacy blocks and how can we create this type of setting? Both of these questions address the need for continued teacher professional growth in the area of literacy teaching.

Conclusion

When reflecting on this research, I cannot help but go back to my personal reasons for undertaking this endeavour. I was looking for a framework of instruction that would help me and other teachers teach literacy and content area outcomes within a meaningful and engaging context. This research suggests that literacy blocks, which include engaging practices to create the instructional context described by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), have the potential to provide this type of instruction. The challenge, it seems, is for teachers to learn and adopt practices that will support student autonomy. If students do not have the strategies to become self-directed learners it is difficult to give students the choice they need for their learning to become meaningful. Student voice reminds me of this point. A very engaged student participant stated, “Choice makes all the difference.”

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Literacy Blocks Planning Guide

Program Components / Student Engagement	**Reading Workshop**	**Guided Reading**	**Writing Workshop**	**Language and Word Study**
Choice Students get to make some decisions about what they are doing.	Always	Sometimes (as often as you can do it!)	Always	Sometimes
Integration Content is connected to other curriculum.	Sometimes	Frequently	Frequently	Frequently
Student Questioning (Inquiry, problematizing the subject matter, critical literacy)	Sometimes	Frequently	Frequently	Sometimes
ICT Students are using technology to complete their work.	On occassion	As frequently as possible – but the use must be authentic and purposeful.		On occassion
Collaboration Students are working with one or more other students.	Sometimes	Frequently	Sometimes	Frequently
Independent from teacher Students are self-directed.	Frequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Sometimes

Always – everyday
Frequently– 3 – 4 times per week
Sometimes – 1-2 times per week
On occasion – not regularly, but when it really makes sense to do so.

Appendix B

Teachers Guide: Literacy Blocks for Grade 7 & 8 Students

Table of Contents

PART A – Reading Workshop Block

1. Description of Independent Reading Block
2. Independent Reading: The First Twenty Days of Teaching (Fountas & Pinnell, 2003, p. 143)
3. Reading Conference (Routman; Fountas & Pinnell, 2003, p. 140)
4. Response to Reading – example letters

PART B – Reading Instruction Block

1. Description of Reading Instruction Block
2. Examples of Before Reading Strategies
3. Examples of During Reading Strategies
4. Examples of After Reading Strategies
5. Critical Literacy Strategies
6. Social Skills, and Lessons to Teach
7. Collaborative Structures

PART C – Writing Workshop Block

1. Description of Writing Workshop Block
2. Writer's Notebook – excerpt from What You Know by Heart, K. W. Roy,

3. Writing Conferences- excerpt from Writing Essentials, Regie Routman
4. Guided Writing – Summary

PART D – Language and Word Study Block

1. Description of Language and Word Study Block
2. Word Study – Black Line Masters for:
    a. Three Pont Definition
    b. Exploding Words
    c. Concept Frame
    d. Excerpt from Fountas and Pinnel re: Buddy Study System
3. Sample Sentence Combining from Content Areas

Appendix C

Student Engagement Rubric

Lutz, Guthrie, Davis, 2006

Affective Engagement

1. Displays negative emotion; sighs; looks very bored; prolonged yawn; head completely down on desk
2. Even expression; head partially down but may still be looking toward teacher/classmates; responds in monotone
3. Smiling (perhaps just briefly); looks pleased; appears interested; tone suggests some pride/interest
4. Grins broadly or suddenly; tone suggests great excitement or interest; makes noises (e.g., “ooh”) which suggest great interest

Behaviorial Engagement

1. Distracted by something unrelated to task; head completely down on desk (i.e., not participating in task);teacher has to tell student to get to work; prolonged yawn
2. Hard to judge whether student is truly behaviorally engaged; not off task, but does not appear particularly involved; eyes may or not be on teacher, but does not seem to really be following discussion or actively engaged in activity; may be slouching
3. Clearly on-task, as suggested by eye movement and posture toward speaker; raising hand (perhaps just briefly);writing; speaking; clearly listening (suggesting that student is attentive at least behaviorally)
4. Waving hand; hand “shoots” into air to answer question; making noises that suggest great enthusiasm and eagerness to participate; otherwise seems “super-engaged”

Cognitive Engagement

1. Response reveals student was not paying attention to question or instructions; completely off task (suggesting that student is not thinking about given task)
2. Hard to judge whether student is truly cognitively engaged; flipping book pages quickly without really looking at any

3. Raising hand; writing; speaking; provides brief answer (e.g., one or two words); reading; eye movement and posture
suggest that student is following along with activity; clearly listening (suggesting that student is processing information)
4. Response reveals student was thinking very hard; response is extensive (Note: student must speak in order to receive this rating)

Social Engagement (based primarily on student–student interactions or situation in which response to teacher is public)
1. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and students do not respond; student teases, laughs at, or criticizes another
2. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and interaction that results is minimal; student turns toward classmate that
is speaking; student half raises hand when responses are solicited by the teacher; student is called on without raising hand and responds readily; social interaction not explicitly warranted by current activity and student does not initiate it on his or her own
3. Students exchange activity-related comments; *students* initiate interaction; *teacher* initiates interaction and student interacts positively and/or with eagerness; student fully extends hand, reflecting desire to share response or unsolicited comments
4. Similar to 3, but interaction is extended or marked overall by great enthusiasm or intensity

Appendix D

Preliminary Interview Questions, Teachers

1. What do you believe literacy is?
2. What are some of the activities you do in your class to teach literacy?
3. What is some of the evidence that you collect of student learning?
4. What part of your literacy instruction program do you feel is most successful?
5. What part of your literacy instruction do you struggle with the most?
6. How would you define student engagement?
7. What do you do in your classroom to ensure student engagement?
8. How engaged do you think your students are?
9. What is some evidence of engagement in your classroom?
10. From what you know about literacy blocks so far, what are your concerns about implementing them?
11. What is your motivation for being involved in this study?

Appendix E

Preliminary Interview Questions, Students

1. Do you like reading? Explain why/why not.
2. Do you think you are a good reader? Explain why/why not.
3. Do you like writing? Explain why/why not.
4. Do you think you are a good writer? Explain why/why not.
5. Do you like using the computer at school? Explain why/why not.
6. What kinds of activities do you do on the computer?
7. Do you like working in groups? Explain why/why not.
8. Do you like school? Explain why/why not.
9. What do you like best about school?
10. What is your favorite subject at school? Explain why/why not.
11. Explain what you like the most about your favorite teacher.
12. Describe your relationship with your ELA teacher.
13. Describe your relationship with other students in your class.

Appendix F

During and After Interview Questions, Teacher

1. Use the rubric to describe the level of engagement you believe that most students in your class have.
2. Which instructional blocks do you think are more or less engaging for student? Why?
3. Which instructional block do you enjoy teaching the most? Why?
4. What evidence do you have of student learning?
5. How have you found fitting literacy blocks into your timetable?
6. What was it like to integrate ICT into the literacy blocks? Were you able to follow the planning guidelines?
7. Have you been able to integrate content into your instructional blocks? What difficulties have you had, if any?
8. How have you found it to integrate student questioning by using inquiry, problematizing subject matter or critical literacy?
9. Describe your experiences with using collaborative learning in literacy blocks.
10. Describe your experiences with allowing student choice in literacy blocks.
11. Describe your experiences with promoting student self-directed work during literacy blocks.

Appendix G

During and After Interview Questions, Student

1. Which instructional block do you like the best and why?
2. Which instructional block do you like the least and why?
3. Overall how are you feeling about literacy blocks?
4. Do you feel like literacy blocks are making a difference for you in your learning? Explain your answer.
5. How often do you think you are doing group work, once a week or less, a couple of times a week, or every day? Are you doing group work too much, just right or not enough? Why?
6. How often are you using the computer - once a week or less, a couple of times a week, or every day? Is this too much, just right, or not enough for you? Why?
7. How often do you get to make a choice about the work you do in literacy blocks – rarely, sometimes, often. Is this too much, just right or not enough? Why?
8. Describe your relationship with other students in the class?
9. Describe your relationship with your teacher.
10. Do you get to read and write about your own interests in literacy blocks. Explain or give an example.
11. What is a reading goal that you have for yourself?
12. What is a writing goal that you have for yourself?

Appendix H
Student Engagement Rubric

Student (number)

Affective Engagement			
1. Displays negative emotion; sighs; looks very bored; prolonged yawn; head completely down on desk	2. Even expression; head partially down but may still be looking toward teacher/classmates; responds in monotone	3. Smiling (perhaps just briefly); looks pleased; appears interested; tone suggests some pride/interest	4. Grins broadly or suddenly; tone suggests great excitement or interest; makes noises (e.g., "ooh") which suggest great interest
Behavioural Engagement			
1. Distracted by something unrelated to task; head completely down on desk (i.e., not participating in task);teacher has to tell student to get to work; prolonged yawn	2. Hard to judge whether student is truly behaviorally engaged; not off task, but does not appear particularly involved; eyes may or not be on teacher, but does not seem to really be following discussion or actively engaged in activity; may be slouching	3. Clearly on-task, as suggested by eye movement and posture toward speaker; raising hand (perhaps just briefly);writing; speaking; clearly listening (suggesting that student is attentive at least behaviorally)	4. Waving hand; hand "shoots" into air to answer question; making noises that suggest great enthusiasm and eagerness to participate; otherwise seems "super-engaged"
Cognitive Engagement			
1. Response reveals student was not paying attention to question or instructions; completely off task (suggesting that student is not thinking about given task)	2. Hard to judge whether student is truly cognitively engaged; flipping book pages quickly without really looking at any	3. Raising hand; writing; speaking; provides brief answer (e.g., one or two words); reading; eye movement and posture suggest that student is following along with activity; clearly listening (suggesting that student is processing information)	4. Response reveals student was thinking very hard; response is extensive (Note: student must speak in order to receive this rating)
Social Engagement (based primarily on student–student interactions or situation in which response to teacher is public)			
1. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and students do not respond; student teases, laughs at, or criticizes another	2. *Teacher* prompts social interaction and interaction that results is minimal; student turns toward classmate that is speaking; student half raises hand when responses are solicited by the teacher; student is called on without raising hand and responds readily; social interaction not explicitly warranted by current activity and student does not initiate it on his or her own.	3. Students exchange activity-related comments; *students* initiate interaction; *teacher* initiates interaction and student interacts positively and/or with eagerness; student fully extends hand, reflecting desire to share response or unsolicited comments	4. Similar to 3, but interaction is extended or marked overall by great enthusiasm or intensity

Appendix I

Classroom Lesson Observation Form

Date: ____________________________ School: _______________________________

A. Lesson Description

Instructional Blocks taught (+ brief description of activity)

- Self –selected reading ____
- Guided Reading ____
- Writing Workshop ____
- Language and Word Study______________________________________

Student Engagement Component Included in Lesson

- Student Choice ____
- Integration ____
- Student questions are encouraged _______________________________________
- ICT ____
- Collaboration ____
- Independent work ____

B. Discourse Description

Type of Discourse	Time	Comments
Teacher Lesson		
Student-Teacher discussion		
Student-Student Discussion		

Appendix J

Descriptions of Literacy Blocks

This section will describe the components of the modified Four Blocks approach that will be used in this study.

Reading Workshop

Purpose

A 30 minute block to improve reading fluency, to increase students' enjoyment of reading, and to increase students' abilities to make-meaning from what they read through making connections and having discussions.

Resources Needed for Reading Workshop

1. Student access to lots of reading material – either in a class library or in a school library.
2. A format for students to write weekly letters to the teacher – either electronically or on paper.
3. A format for students to keep weekly records of what they are reading – either electronically or on paper.
4. Clear guidelines about behaviour expectations, and consistent routines.

What it Looks Like

Reading workshop will change as the students get better at becoming self-directed. Initially the block may require significant teacher direction, depending on the routines

that are already established in the class around reading. Over time the teacher may choose to use this time for self-selected inquiry reading or Literature Circles as well as students' choice reading.

The First 20 Days:

1. 10 minute mini-lesson. Depending on the experience base of the students teachers will need to have lessons to help students understand the expectations, and management of Reading Workshop.
2. 15 minutes of independent reading. During this time students are allowed to read their choice of book, magazine, comic or graphic novel. Reading materials need to be at students' reading levels. During the 15 minutes of reading the teacher will conference with 2 – 3 students. An important part of the individual conferencing is ensuring that students are reading books that are just right for them.
3. 5 minute group sharing/evaluation. For the first 20 days this will be a time when the teacher checks in with the class as a whole about how their reading went referring back to the goal of the mini-lesson at the beginning. This is a time to encourage reflection and connection making.

Once the routine of Independent Reading has been established:

1. Mini-lessons will be on "as needed basis" – probably about once a week to remind students about reading goals.
2. 15 – 25 minutes reading. Students will continue to read independently, and the teacher will continue to conference with students to help them create goals for reading.

3. The 5 minute sharing/evaluation could be done in partners, or small groups as students understand what reflecting and connecting looks like. This can also be a time when book recommendations or book reports are shared with the class. *Teachers should not skip this part of Reading Workshops because it is an opportunity to make connections to oral literacy development, which is the basis upon which other literacies are built.

Making Connections

Writing Connections:

1. Once a week students will write a letter or email to the teacher about what they are reading during the independent reading block. It is important that teachers write a letter to each student responding to their letter. The teacher's response will model reflecting, connecting and critical thinking, and create a dialogue with the student.
2. Record keeping – once a week (could be on the same day they do the letter to the teacher) students need to make a record of what they have been reading.

   Ideas to consider when making writing connections

   1. Students can also contribute to a class data base of books and write reviews/recommendations about good books to read or bad books to avoid. This writing could be one of the choices made in the Writing Block.
   2. Writing up and presenting book reports can also be part of reading workshop. This makes oral, as well as writing connections.

ICT Connections

1. The letter to the teacher can be done in a notebook, or it can be done electronically; dependent on your resources.
2. The data base for book recommendations can be a class book or an electronic form. The teacher can create a blog, with students adding to the opinions of others, a wiki, with additions made to different genres; or it could even be done as a database.
3. Record keeping can be done electronically as well. Students can create a table in a Word document.
4. Book reports can be done electronically. Students can make videos, use Photostory, or even make a Power Point for their Book Report if either they or your school has the resources to do so.

Inquiry/Integration Connection

Variety is the spice of life, especially for Middle Years students. Once students are familiar with the structures, and are able to be self-directed readers the teacher may want to consider using Reading Workshop as a time when students are required to read a non-fiction book that relates to their theme of inquiry. They still have choice about what they are reading; the choice now has some parameters. For this to work the teacher must ensure that the students have access to a wide range of books on the topic of their interest. This may require a field trip to a Public Library.

Collaboration Connection

1. To motivate reluctant readers partner reading is a possibility. The rules for partner reading are that both students have a copy of the same book, they sit side by side and they take turns reading out loud to each other. Their voices must be quiet enough to not disturb others.
2. Literature Circles – Reading Workshop can be used for Literature Circles. This is especially valuable if the teacher wants all students reading books on the same theme.
3. Book Clubs – The difference between Book Clubs and Literature Circles is that Book Clubs are student-initiated. A group of students may choose to form a book club that reads the same book, and then discuss it together, much the way adults form book clubs. Rules for book clubs are that all students need their own copy of the book and even if a small group starts the club, an offer must be made to the whole class to join the club so that it does not become a way to reinforce a clique. Students must make a plan of how they plan to read and discuss the book, and submit it to the teacher for approval.

Choice Connection

Students will always have some choice in what they read during Reading Workshop. Sometimes this choice may have parameters (the book must be a particular genre, or on a specific topic).

Guided Reading Block

Purpose

A 30 - 45 minute block to provide instruction in reading so that reading fluency, comprehension and critical thinking improves. In grades 7 and 8 the focus of instruction for students who are at a grade 3 reading level or higher will be on learning strategies for making meaning from a wide variety of texts with an emphasis on critical literacy skills (See *Critical Literacy Connections* below).

Resources Needed for Guided Reading

1. It is best to choose shorter reading passages for guided reading.
2. For whole class, guided reading use text that all students will be able to comprehend, keeping in mind that with appropriate scaffolding you can use text above students' independent levels. When doing small group guided reading each group does not need a different reading passage – depending on the levels within a class the teacher may have only 2-3 different passages.
3. Collecting reading materials that groups can use independently or with teacher help can be a challenge, however teachers can enlist the help of resource teachers and librarians at school, public libraries or education libraries to access resources.

<u>*What it Looks Like*</u>

The First 20 Days

Students will be taught as a whole class with many opportunities for collaborative group work.

Whole class, guided reading

Guided reading instruction, involves before, during and after reading activities. With the whole class the teacher demonstrates the skill, and leads student groups through collaborative activities. Teachers will need to teach the social skills and collaborative structures so that students can learn to work collaboratively (see *Collaborative Connections* below). Each student needs a copy of the text to follow during guided reading. Each activity is strategically chosen (based on student assessment) to instruct students about specific reading strategies.

a. Before reading involves activities that activates students about the content or structure of the text.
b. During Reading involves activities that help students decode the text, or images, build comprehension and help them to make connections while they read.
c. After Reading involves activities that help student to make connections, reflect on, analyze and evaluate what they have read.

Once the Routines of Reading Instruction Have Been Established

Once students are familiar with collaborative structures and are somewhat self-regulated in their group behaviours it is time to start guided reading groups.

Making Groups

The purpose of guided reading groups is to teach students at their instructional level; however it is always good to make groups somewhat heterogeneous so that groups are not heavily weighted with weak students and no role models (Cunningham and Hall, 1998; Stretch, 1995). Also, in many cases weak readers are not weak thinkers so they provide some excellent insights and perspectives to their groups. The reading level material must be at the instructional level of the lowest reader in the group. Cunningham and Hall's (1998) research showed that this did not have a negative affect on the higher level readers. Surprisingly the highest level readers showed the most growth in their non-ability grouped literacy blocks.

If you have support from a Resource Teacher, and/or educational assistant during this time, you may have more than one group with adult supervision.

Small Group Guided Reading Framework

1. 10 minute whole-class mini-lesson, which may involve shared reading from a text, focusing on a particular text structure or strategy you want students to learn.
2. Follow with 15- 30 minutes of group or partner work. You will work with one group, while other groups or partners work collaboratively on a specific before, during or after reading task without supervision. You should work with groups 1 -3 days, spending more time where necessary.

3. 5 minutes of reporting back to the class. Groups may have a specific task to report back on, or they can state any points of interest or problems they have encountered. This can help to guide your instruction the next day.

<u>*Making Connections*</u>

Writing Connections

Many of the before, during, and after activities will involve writing.

Inquiry Connections

1. Teachers can choose reading materials that connect to whole class or small group inquiry topics.
2. Many of the skills and strategies the teacher teaches at this time will be specific to the inquiry process.

ICT Connection

1. In Guided Reading Block you are not always teaching reading but also teaching listening and viewing. Bring in video and audio clips to teach viewing and listening strategies. Do this regularly as variety does maintain student interest.
2. The 10 minute, whole class instruction could be done using an LCD projector as you demonstrate to students how to do a particular skill (navigate a website, cite a source, use a particular graphic organizer . . . the possibilities are endless).
3. Many of the ICT outcomes around navigating websites and analysing websites can be built into the Reading Instruction Block.

4. At times you can have a break from group work by having students work independently on a “Webquest” assignment. Make sure the assignment is not just a “find the right answer” assignment, but focuses on teaching students a specific reading (analysing multiple graphs)/critical literacy (explaining bias) skill. Students can also partner up for Webquests.

Critical Literacy Connections

Many of the before, during and after reading activities that you chose should come from the strategies described in “Critical Literacy”(McLaughlin & DeVoos, 2007) that help students to pose problems and see alternative perspectives. Students learn to question the text, explore identities, recognize bias, and see a whole new world.

Collaborative Connections

In the first 20 days teachers need to emphasize social skills. It is important to give lessons on the skills that students need to work in collaborative groups, so that they can work in groups with less support later. It is also important to teach the structures students will be using later without teacher supervision.

Some social skills that may be taught are active listening, encouraging words, quiet voices, taking turns, body language, empathy, fixing mistakes, problem-solving. Some collaborative structures are think-pair-share, round robin, round writing, graffiti, carousel, placemat, inside-outside circle, jigsaw (Kagan, 1994; Bennet, Rolheiser, & Stevahn, 1991).

Choice Connections

1. Texts can be based on a small group’s choice of inquiry topics.

2. Sometimes teachers may have 3 choices of text available for groups, and let the group choose which one they want to read, rather than the teacher always selecting for them – as long as each text focuses on the same strategy it does not matter. Teachers may have to scaffold more if a weaker group chooses a more difficult piece.

Writing Workshop

Purpose

The 30 minute daily writing block is to ensure that students have daily opportunities to write. This not only improves their ability to use the written word to express themselves it also strengthens the reading-writing connection, and helps to increase overall literacy.

Resources Needed for Writing Workshop

1. Students need a Writer's Notebooks, for all of their writing. This can be a special notebook, but a scribbler will work too. Students should be encouraged to take their Writer's Notebook home. Ideas for future writing and actual writing go into the notebook.
2. All students will also need a binder or duo-tang for writing mini-lessons and group writes.

3. Nancy Atwell's *Lessons that Change Writers*, Ruth Cullham's *6 +1 Traits of Writing* and Regie Routman's *Writing Essentials* are all excellent resources to use in planning your writing lessons.

Important points to consider:

- Writers should have many first drafts to choose from when they are picking one to fully develop and publish (Roy, 2002). Daily writing in a Writer's Notebook will give students many ideas for their writing.
- It is up to the teachers and students to decide how many pieces of writing need to be brought to final publication in a year. The more this is done for authentic purposes the more engaging the writing will be (e.g. Movie Reviews for Freeze Frame, Letters to the Editor, a story for a younger friend, writing for a school newspaper, script writing for a play they will produce).
- Writing should connect to the thinking, talking and reading that is being done daily in the classroom.

<u>*What it Looks Like*</u>

The First 20 Days

By the end of the first 20 students need to understand the expectations and procedures for both individual writing, and Group Writes.

Individual Writing

1. 10 minute mini-lesson. The first mini-lessons will be to teach students the expectations and procedures of the Writers Workshop. Teachers need to be clear about expectations such as where students can sit to write, when they can talk with peers during the block, what they do if they have a piece ready for an audience, etc.
2. 15 minutes of writing. This writing can be independent, directed writing, choice writing, or peer reflecting.
    a. In the first 20 days get all students writing independently in their Writer's Notebooks. Doing free writes to build fluency (Chapman, 2006). Free writes can be totally free (non-writers find this very difficult) or they can be guided by a choice of topics or questions the teacher asks, they can be guided by pictures that students choose, or they can even be a response to a class discussion about something.
    b. During this time teachers can conference with individuals.
    c. Peer reflecting that leads to re-writes, and editing will occur during this 15 minutes.
3. 5 minute report back to the class. Students may share what they have written. The teacher will reinforce students' self-reflection and self-assessment with reference to the goals of the mini-lesson.

B) Group Writes

1. 10 minute mini-lesson (shorter if groups are continuing work from the day before)

2. 15 minute group write. Students will work on a group or partner writing task. The teacher can work with a group and guide them during this time or do whole class observation. For students who find expressing themselves with words very difficult, it is beneficial to give partner or Group Write assignments. Writing that focuses on an inquiry or problem is most appropriate for group writes. For example, after teaching about descriptive language, groups can write a paragraph describing an object without telling what it is and then see if other groups can guess what they are describing. (e.g. Each group can have a different feather, then all groups have to match up each description with the correct feather).
3. 5 minutes group reflection.

Once the Routines of Writing Instruction Block Have Been Established:

Choose between –

A) Individual Writing

1. 10 minute whole class/or small group mini-lesson – as needed.
2. 15 – 25 minute Writing Workshop. Students will be working on a variety of activities during this time as described above.
3. 5 minute Reflection/Sharing

or

B) Group Writing

1. 10 minute whole class lesson
2. 15 minute group write
3. 5 minutes reflection/share

<u>*Making Connections*</u>

ICT Connections

1. Some students will not write anything by hand, but will write easily when they are at the computer. Writing first drafts on the computer, and having a writing folder, instead of a Writer's Notebook, can make all the difference for some students.
2. Some final publications can be done on computer such as brochures, illustrated stories, Power Point presentations, or just use Word documents.
3. Some examples of the authentic writing your students can do are to create Wikis on specific topics, or to communicate with experts on different topics using Blogs or email.

Inquiry Connections

Writing Block can be used as a time when students use writing to communicate about their own "investigations" or topics of inquiry.

Content Area Connections

Although at the beginning writing time may involve more free writing, the more purposeful writing becomes and the more connected to content area instruction, the more engaged students will be. When you are studying the Middle Ages getting students to write a journal entry for a person of that time period is an example of this.

Choice Connections

1. At times students may do free writes with complete choice of genre and topic.
2. Even though the teacher may frequently give some parameters around writing students can still have an element of choice. For example, if they have to write a journal entry of a character from the Middle Ages they choose which character, and what events to write about.

Language and Word Study Block

Purpose

The 30 minute Language and Word Block is to ensure that students have opportunities to increase their word recognition skills and strategies, to develop their vocabulary, and to increase their understanding and ability to flexibly work with words.

What it Looks Like

There are two parts to this block: Word Study and Sentence Combining. It is the teacher's choice whether this is done as 15 minutes of each every day, or 30 minutes of each on alternating days.

1. Word Study

1. Students actively learn the rules and principles of phonics and spelling and build their vocabulary. This should include a systematic approach to spelling instruction such as Fountas and Pinnel's (2003) Buddy Study System.

2. Lessons and activities need to help students understand the five strategies there are for solving words: phonemic, visual, morphemic, connections, and inquiry.

3. Word Study Centers are an active way to engage students in words. Some stations might be word sorts, word explosions, three point definitions, concept frames, word pattern scavenger hunts, making words with "chunks", word games (crosswords, scrabble, boggle) and buddy study.

Making Connections

Choice Connections

1. Give students a list of words to choose from for their spelling words.
2. If you do centers students can choose the order they go through the centers in.
3. Students can be given a choice of games to play in centers.

ICT Connections

One of the centers can be a word computer game. There are many different games including games that focus on learning Greek and Latin roots of words.

Collaboration Connections

When doing centers students can work in collaborative groups.

Inquiry Connections

Students can learn to use resources to define words, and find word origins.

Content Connections

1. All words and word lists should come from content area themes.
2. All writing done in word study activities can all relate to content areas.

Reading Connection

1. Word or word pattern scavenger hunts in texts can help students learn to recognize words in context. Word hunts also develop skimming and scanning skills.
2. As students vocabulary and word recognition improves, their reading level will improve.

Writing Connections

1. Most activities will involve some kind of writing.
2. There should be opportunities to write reflections and self-assessments.

3. As students vocabulary and spelling improves, their writing will improve.

2. Sentence Combining

Research has shown that sentence combining is the most effective way to improve students' understanding and ability to use correct grammar (Hillocks, 1986). Students actively work with sentences as they learn how to put ideas together to create more complex sentences. An example of this is:

Students are given these 3 sentences and must decide how to combine them into one sentence:

The dog is brown.

The dog jumps over the fence.

The fence is high.

Students also learn to work the other way too as they deconstruct complex sentences to create simple sentences.

The teacher names the concept behind the combining technique (putting adjectives in front of noun, using conjunctions to join ideas) while the students actually actively work with the technique.

For more information on sentence combining see *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book*, (1994) by William Strong.

Extensions to Sentence Combining:

1. Have students create sentences using progressively more words as they learn how to create more complex sentence. For example on day 1ask students to create 3 sentences. Each sentence must be 4 words long. No sentence can begin with the same word. (I like cheese pizza, Pepperoni pizzas are good, Do you like pizza?). By day 10 students may have to write 3 sentences about cars. Each sentence may have to be 7 words long. No sentence can begin with the same word. Increase the number of sentences, and the length of sentences as students develop more skills.
2. Do sentence scavenger hunts in which students have to find the type of sentence structure they have just made through combining.

Making Connections

Collaboration Connection

Let students work in groups sometimes.

Content Connection

Teachers should use examples from content area reading to create sentence examples.

Inquiry Connection

The reason this technique is so effective at improving grammar is because figuring out how to combine sentences is a problem which students must actively engage in to solve.

Appendix K

Key Components of Literacy Blocks

Block	Key Components
Reading Workshop	• Mini-lesson about reading focus (5 – 10 minutes • Students reading books they choose (15 – 25 minutes) • Teachers performing Informal Reading Conferences during student reading time • Peer/collaborative discussions about reading focus following reading • Students recording reading in a Reading Log • Students writing a reading response to the teacher on a weekly basis. • Teacher responding to student reading responses on a weekly basis. • Students may be asked to read their choice of book on a particular theme. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2003; Routman, 2002)
Writing Workshop	• Mini-lessons on writing (10 minutes) • Students writing in Writer's Notebook (first drafts, brainstorming). This writing must have some element of choice. (10 – 20 minutes) • Sharing writing with peers with a focus on the mini-lesson. (5 – 10 minutes) • Taking a first draft to a final product once per month (minimum) with the help of peer and teacher conferencing. • Creating audiences for final drafts. • 50% or more of the writing should be connected to student learning in the content areas. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2003; Ray, 2002)
Reading Instruction	• Whole class or small group reading lessons using text from other subject areas; teachers will have reading goals and content goals. • Reading lessons will have plans that include before, during and after reading strategies. • Every lesson will include collaborative learning. • 50% or more of the lessons will have a critical literacy focus. (Routman, 2003; Fountas & Pinnell, 2003)
Language and Word Study	• Sentence combining • Word lists that use words from content area reading. • Differentiation of student study lists. • A variety of activities that help students understand the five strategies there are for solving words: phonemic, visual, morphemic, connections, and inquiry. • Vocabulary development • Daily collaborative learning activities (Hillocks, 1985; Fountas & Pinnell, 2003)
Collaborative/Cooperative learning activities need to include the following components: • Interdependence of group members • Individual accountability for work within the group • Face to face interaction • The teaching social skills • Group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)	