Student Book Clubs:

Can students in first grade talk about books?

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Description of the Teaching Context

For the 2008-2009 school year, I am working as an intern in a first grade classroom at Easterly Parkway Elementary School. I represent The Pennsylvania State University as one of fifty-nine elementary education majors chosen to student teach for an entire year in the State College Area School District. My class consists of twenty-one unique individuals, eleven boys and ten girls. Of the twenty-one students, two are African-American, one is from Saudi Arabia, one is from Egypt, one is from China, one student is from Japan, and the rest of the class identifies as Caucasian.

Only five students in the class are below average in their reading levels. Those five students receive reading support from the Title 1 reading teacher and one receives learning support instruction. Three students leave the classroom for instruction in the English as a second language classroom. There are five above average students; out of those, three are significantly higher than the rest of the class in their reading abilities. These students read well above grade level. The majority of the students in the class are average in their reading levels; therefore, the class is on target for first grade material.

The class consists of students with varying behavioral needs. There are eight students that have difficulty remaining on task. Almost half of the class needs explicit, simple directions and a place to work where they will not be distracted by things they can play with or by other students. The other students in the class set models of how students should act in the classroom. Our classroom thrives from working as a community. The students cooperate and assist one another to ensure that everyone understands.

The State College Area School District curriculum integrates social studies units through language arts. We began the school year with a unit about how to be a good citizen in our
classroom and beyond. Our next unit was American Album, where the students learned all about
the country just in time for the election of the new president. We just completed the third unit
about Pioneers and the life cycle of plants. Our final unit of the year explores wetlands and their
importance to our environment. Each unit includes a set of related books that teachers use for
reading instruction. Everyday we have literacy centers and the students spend time reading with
a teacher, working on phonics, and practicing spelling words. The students receive
individualized instruction in small groups based upon their reading capabilities. Throughout the
year, students have changed groups many times. (See Appendix A for full Inquiry Brief)

**Wonderings and Questions**

**Main Wondering**

As I set off on this inquiry journey, I thought that I was going to be focusing on how
students came to think about and understand books; however, my wondering changed direction.
Although, it would still be interesting to explore how children understand books; that extends
beyond what I am capable of measuring. My wondering began to centralize on one repeated idea,
“book club.” I really wanted to know more about how I could encourage children to talk and
listen to one another.

*What encourages first grade students to have meaningful discussions about a book with others?*

**Sub-Wonderings**

- What does a meaningful discussion for a beginning reader consist of?
- What is the value in being able to talk and write about books?
- How can a facilitator increase peer interaction so students are listening to one another and
  responding accordingly?
- How do adults discuss books; and can that relate to children?
- Can students in first grade talk to one another about a book without the teacher as a
  facilitator?
• How is a book club different from a reading group?
• What enables students to develop student talk in a book club setting?

Data Collection

Data Collection Narrative

I collected various kinds of data as I worked to discover how to encourage students to talk to one another about books. Throughout my inquiry, I was constantly analyzing my information and evidence to decide what my next step should be in my book club with children.

Before book club could begin, the first grade teachers had to evaluate their students based on running records and decide which ones needed an extension to their reading instruction. Then, as a group, we decided the kind of structure that would be appropriate for this student book club. I chose a book and introduced it to the students on Monday. On Wednesday morning I checked in with the students to monitor their reading progress and on Friday, we discussed the book. During our Friday meetings, I used my computer to video record the discussions. (See Appendix J for Video List and Analysis)

The first time I met with the students, I had a half hour to interact with them and start to learn what kind of students they were, what books they liked to read, and what their personalities were like. Out of the six students only two were in my class. I wanted to be able to tailor book club to the interests and strengths of the students and that meant I had to get to know them. That night, I wrote in a journal I kept next to my bed. I reflected on what happened, how excited I was, and what I learned about the students from that morning. (See Appendix B for Journal Entry)

Our second meeting was our first book discussion. I had no idea how it was going to go. I had great aspirations that the students would sit down and begin conversing with one another.
about the book I gave them to read. I planned out questions that I wanted to ask the students and I printed them out to have with me. I took time to carefully think of open-ended questions that they lend themselves to discussion better than literal questions. I brought my computer into the hallway and began recording a video of the interactions. For thirty minutes I asked the students questions and they responded. After we finished, I sent the other children back to their classrooms and I returned to my classroom with my students.

That evening I watched the video and wrote a reflection paper to capture how I was feeling about book club and to think about what areas needed improvement. I was unhappy with the way students did not listen to one another. I asked several questions, such as, “What was your favorite part?” or “Why do you think the author picked this title?” that the students gave the same answer as the person next to them. Not one student connected their answer to what another student said. It seemed as though six individual conversations were going on instead of one. I knew that was not my intention and I wanted to figure out how to facilitate better discussions for the students. (See Appendix C for Book Questions & Reflection Journal)

I spoke with my mentor and other colleagues in the building about what could make the discussions better for the students. My supervisor gave me a book to read by Debbie Miller called, “Reading with Meaning” and we talked about having a written response to the book each week. I created a sheet for the students to think about and share their understanding of the book on paper. On Monday morning of the following week, the students returned to me for a half hour in the hallway. They worked on creating the “next chapter” to the story that we read. At the end of the time, I collected the students’ work and took it home with me to examine. (See Appendix D for Student Responses)
After I reviewed the students’ work, I wanted another opinion. I shared the responses with my supervisor and mentor and they both gave me verbal feedback on how they thought it was going. I knew that I had to continue to make changes so I could create the most effective use of time for the students. I met with the student throughout the year with the same meeting structure. We added a written student response on Monday, before I introduced the new book. 

(See Appendix E for Complete Book List)

Throughout our time together, I tried many different strategies to encourage students to discuss what they read with one another. My first approach to book club lacked structure. I talked to the students about how I wanted book club to go but I had no previous experience to use for comparison. I asked the students questions and elicited responses from each one. When the results of the students’ discussion did not match my expectations, I decided to try something new. I reflected on the students’ interactions after watching the video and made the decision to implement a more structured approach.

When I met with the students again for our discussion, I focused my attention on having students talk to and listen to one another. I explicitly modeled how to respond to another person and I highly praised students that made reference to another student’s answer. For example, when one student explained why he thought the characters from the book bought gloves for their friend, I asked another student to tell me if they agreed and why. I wanted the students to hear what their peers were saying so they could learn from each other and understand that people can take a different viewpoint from the same situation. When I did not feel any better about the student discussions based on my facilitation changes, I began to implement other techniques.

For the next meeting, I took my own fear of speaking in public and generalized it to the students, thinking that putting them at ease would encourage more discussion. I took one entire
book club meeting to have the students get to know one another. I thought of a list of questions for the students to read and ask their peers. The students took turns pulling a question out of a cup and asking it to someone in the group. I felt that if the students knew the other children in the group better, they would feel more comfortable talking to each other. This approach did not create a discussion better than before and I sought a new idea.

Another week, I introduced the students to a bookmark that I created. I wanted the students to remember things that they read so I encouraged them to place post-it notes in their books. The bookmark listed reasons that the students should put a post-it note in their book. The post-it notes served as reminders for the discussion on Friday. I gave the students both the bookmark and the post-it notes and explained that people who own books will write in them when something comes to mind. I challenged the students to do the same, following the guidelines on the bookmark. That week as I reviewed the video for book club, I took note of who used the post-it notes and how many the students used. (See Appendix G for Bookmark)

After reflecting on the week, I remembered that we used to love telling stories when I was a Girl Scout. We would sit around the campfire and pass around the “talking stick.” A person could only add parts to the story if she was holding the stick. The rest of the group was quiet in order to make sure we could hear the storyteller and follow along with the story. I thought it would be a perfect idea to try a “talking stick” of my own. I created one that was bright green with stickers to ensure the students would want to use it. I explained to the students how we use a “talking stick,” while discussing the book. I quickly noticed that the students were not using the “talking stick” as intended. (See Appendix H for Talking Stick)

After trying several different approaches that were not effective with the group, I decided to seek help. I interviewed the Title One reading teacher as a resource for student reading and as
a member of an adult book club. She expressed that when students are having trouble with discussions she will, “give students a reason to read before they read the pages to make comprehension easier for them.” I thought this would be a grand idea, so I tried giving students a purpose for reading their book and then asking very focused questions. The students could speak to one topic and answer the questions, but it did not engage them in a meaningful conversation.

(See Appendix I for Interview Questions and Notes)

At the end of each book club session, I asked the students to respond to the story in some written form. This activity provided another perspective of what they understood from the story. I wanted to know if the students were unwilling to talk because they were shy or if they did not completely understand the book. To give the students variety, I created a different writing response after each book, such as creating a wanted poster for a character, explaining what he did wrong or expanding a favorite part of the story. I collected and compared all of their responses.

(See Appendix F for Student Response Activities)

One issue that arose was that several students did not read their book in preparation for our discussion. The rules of book club were very clear from the beginning, if a student does not read the book, they cannot participate. Since the majority of students did not read, we rescheduled our discussion for another day and I rewarded the students that did read with a special book club. They got to pick the book for the week and invite a friend that is not in book club to read and discuss with them. I wrote down what the student said when he invited his friend to book club. First, we talked about whom he would like to invite and then what to say to make sure he understood book club. This discussion highlighted the student’s excitement for book club and his feelings about it. (See Appendix K for Student Conversation)
Data Analysis

Steps Taken to Analyze the Data

When I began collecting data for this inquiry, I simultaneously began to analyze it as well. My wondering for the inquiry was how to facilitate better book clubs so that students talk more to one another. Every time I did something with the students, I had to reflect on whether it was effective for them. My primary concern was finding an effective structure that fostered student discussions. I watched book club videos on Fridays when I returned home from school. While I reviewed the videos, I looked for data that I could use as evidence to explain what I was noticing. Each week, I decided whether it went well or not based on how much time students actually spent talking to one another about the book. I used the weekend to reflect on interactions and create a plan for the upcoming week. I knew that I could improve book club with well thought out ideas.

On Monday nights, I reviewed the student responses and decided whether they understood the book or not. I looked to see if I could assess whether or not they comprehended the story from the activity. I began to notice that students were not completing the activities within the time provided and I was unsure about their comprehension. At the beginning, I did not want to send the students back to their classroom with any kind of work from book club. I decided that the students could take their work to their classrooms as long as I got it by the end of the day. This improved the completeness of their responses and my knowledge of their comprehension.

My best data collection tool was the recording of our sessions together. To analyze the videos I watched all of them and searched for common themes. First, I watched for how much facilitating I did. I quickly observed the large amount of talking I was doing versus the minimal
amount of talking students were doing. Then I compared the students’ off task behavior. As I continued to review all of the videos again, I took notes and wrote a synopsis for each one as an assessment of the students and the teacher. In the synopsis, I included my discussion and questioning approaches and techniques, student off-task behaviors, and student engagement. (See Appendix J for Video List and Synopsis)

**Explanation of Findings**

After collecting all of my data and putting it into perspective, I realized that I learned something about myself, and about students as learners and participants in book club.

**Claim #1:** *I am more knowledgeable about book club through my experiences and that makes me more confident as a book club facilitator.*

At the beginning of the inquiry, I barely permitted the children to speak. I was so adamant on getting my questions about the book answered that I did not utilize the students’ responses for discussion. In the very first video a student says, “This was the best book of my life.” I immediately turn around and say, “I need everyone to pull out their book and turn to the first chapter.” I missed a perfect opportunity to capitalize on this student’s comment. Now, I know that I would start a conversation about what made this book her favorite and other students could join in with their own personal connections.

When I sought to understand why I was not connecting with the children in the most effective way, I discovered that this came from my fear of the unknown. I do not like being unsure about anything, especially in regards to lesson planning. I like to know exactly how a lesson will play out and it makes me very nervous when I am unaware. I prepared a list of questions for the discussion to make sure that I would have something to say to the students. I was uncomfortable with silence and I could not handle allowing a discussion to develop, I just
wanted someone to be talking. This fear hinders my ability to create good discussions. I have a very difficult time letting go of my plan and going with the flow of a discussion. I realized when I reviewed every video, wrote comments about my facilitation of the process, and tallied the questions that I asked the students versus questions students asked, that I talked entirely too much. (See Appendix J for Video List)

Now that I am more comfortable with the students, and myself, I feel better about allowing my questions to be put aside. I do not care if we get to all of the questions on my page. I would say that I hope we do not get to all of the questions. That indicates to me that a discussion happened and we ran out of time.

I know that I am getting better at becoming a book club facilitator because this was the first time I had ever done it before. I reflected on my own practices after watching the videos and made a change. I had to learn what kind of structure best fits this particular group of students. My initial book club approach lacked the appropriate structure for the students. In the video they were off-task and I was the only one talking. I had to try different techniques with the talking stick, the post-it notes, and the prepared questions to find something that was effective for this group. Although some kind of talking stick works for others, I know that it was too distracting for me with this group of students. I know that asking students to write questions on post-it notes gives them a directive for when they want to return to the text. During the two weeks that we used the structure of the post-it notes with the bookmarks, the students could easily find something to talk about from the book. These sessions had the most student generated questions and the most use of the text when making a statement. (See Appendix J for Video List and Synopsis)
Another indication that I am getting better at facilitating book club is my ability to go back, watch the videos, and reflect on the situation. If I were not changing and growing, I would watch the videos and find nothing wrong. I would not be able to laugh at the things that I said and get frustrated with myself when I miss the opportunity to ask more questions. Book club is encouraging me to evaluate my teaching in terms of questioning techniques, monitoring student interactions, and creating environments conducive to discussion.

**Claim#2:** *Students in first grade are capable of talking about a book in a manner similar to adults, but they need a facilitator.*

After comparing my notes from the interview with the reading teacher, and what I observed happening on a daily basis with my book club students, I can say that many things are the same. Both groups talk about what they have read, make personal connections to the book, and foster social interaction.

As evident in all of my videos, the students were able to talk about what they read. Each week the students began our discussion with their reactions to the book. This is the same way adults begin book clubs as everyone gathers together and talks. The students could speak to what they read and answer questions that asked them to infer and analyze the book. For example, when the students discussed the Golly Sisters, I asked, “How would you solve this problem?” All of the students were able to give me an answer.

Also like adults, the students asked each other questions for clarification. For example, when we read the book “Meet George Washington” there were several challenging vocabulary words and concepts. In the video, when the students did not understand several words, they asked one another for meaning. When adults do not understand something, we look it up in a dictionary, on the Internet, or from another person. These students did the same thing.
My students also did an excellent job of making personal connections to the books that we read. Even when we read the book about Abraham Lincoln’s hat, I had a student say that she would like to wear a hat because, “things always fall out of my pockets. And if I wore a hat I could keep everything together in one place, just like Abraham Lincoln.” I was impressed by this comment and amazed that a young student could see the benefit in keeping everything together in one place. Adults also utilize making connections to their life. Making personal connections to a text, allows the reader to become fully invested in the material and want to continue the conversation.

Finally, my students can carry out conversations just as well as adults because they are developing their social skills and learning at the same time. They must listen and respond to others in way that does not hurt feelings. The students are excited to see one another and ask me on a daily basis when we will have book club again. The day I had to tell the students that they were not allowed to come to book club because they did not read, they were very unhappy. One student promised me that he would read the next time. I told him that I understood but that was the agreement we made at the beginning of the year and he did not keep his end of the deal. The students wave hello to book club members in the hallway and they talk about it during reading centers. The students are happy to get together and they always use the first few minutes before we begin our discussion to catch up with one another. Adults utilize book clubs to socialize and catch up with one another as evident in the interview with the reading teacher. “We have great discussions all night long- they just may not be about the book” (Appendix I). It is human nature to connect emotionally and conversationally before moving on to a different subject. The students care about one another and book club is helping them grow in social skills.
One difference with the two groups is that my first grade students need a facilitator to run the discussions. Someone needs to be there to encourage the students to sit down and focus their attention on the speaker. Although the students can discuss the book, their surroundings easily distract them. For example, in my book club discussions about “Digby and Kate” and “The Golly Sisters Go West” students made remarks about the things hanging on the walls. During our book discussion one student pointed to the wall and said, “There’s even the Thompsons back there on the wall. That is Samantha’s last name. She wouldn’t have to change a bit.” This comment was in reference to the new last names the students got for the pioneer unit, but it had nothing to do with our book. I had to steer the conversation back to the book. According to my interview, this sort of thing also happens in adult book clubs, however; they are not in a school setting, using valuable instructional time. My students also need redirection because of their age development. Students at this age are very egocentric and focus on themselves. They can have a difficult time taking the perspective of another person so they only want to share their ideas and not listen to another. I was there to give all the students that wanted to say something the chance to talk and be acknowledged by their peers.

The facilitator in the student book club is the bridge between the students that comes naturally in an adult group. Adults can focus their attention and function with several conversations going on at the same time. Students, in first grade especially, need guidance and direction as they try to make sense of a book and other students’ interactions.

Claim #3: Student book clubs are an effective way to understand how children think critically about a book.

Writing is a very strenuous and tedious process. It takes a great deal of planning and preparation to write something that conveys everything a person is thinking. It can take years for
an author to finish writing a piece. It can be even more difficult for a student, who is just learning to read and write. Through talking and discussions with the students, I feel much more confident saying that they understood a story than I would if I used their writing samples alone.

In the video of our “Digby and Kate” discussion, you can hear the students talk about the book in a much more sophisticated manner. I asked them to tell me which character they would rather be friends with and student A told me that, “I would rather be friends with Digby because I love to paint. I’ve painted my deck two times with my dad.” In the story Digby paints the outside of the house. This indicates to me that this student understood what the character did and he made a personal connection to the story. In the book, the characters give gifts to each other based on their own personal likes. Student B was able to answer the question about giving a gift to someone like Digby and Kate did with an amazing answer. She was able to explain that she would give her friend a Tinkerbell doll because it was her favorite toy. I was impressed with the answers that the students were able to give based on their reading.

To compliment what the students talked about, they wrote what they thought would make an exciting next chapter in “Digby and Kate” (Appendix D). Three students wrote words and pictures for their story to convey the meaning that they comprehended. After reading their responses, I knew that those students understood the story. Another child, Student B, only got a picture on her paper. This indicated to me that she knew who the characters were in the story, but the lack of writing made it difficult to assess her understanding. Another student had a picture and a description of the characters going to Best Buy. Based on this paper alone, I thought that this student did not even read the book. Finally, Student A doodled on his paper. This clearly indicated that he did not understand the story, especially because there was not even an
illustration. If I had not held a discussion with these students I would have no idea that some of
them even read the book.

Discussions give the students human contact and provide a social environment from
which humans thrive. These students were able to make personal connections to this book and
answer higher-order thinking questions in their discussions. Although their writing does not
indicate these advanced skills, the video indicates that it is true.

Book clubs are also helpful for understanding what children think about books because
the student is right in front of you. An effective moderator can probe the students and get them to
think deeply or explain their ideas better. If this were just a writing piece, the teacher would not
have the opportunity to ask additional questions. They have to go with what is on the paper and
use it. A discussion fosters a community of learners, and ones that can express themselves.

Reflections and Implications for Future Practice

Next year when I begin teaching my own class of students, I want to continue to use book
clubs. Although guided reading can provide a time for important discussions, in a book club
approach the teacher is not pressured to make sure the students learn consonant blends. The
discussion encourages students to work together and acknowledge that everyone has good ideas.
To make a good discussion, everyone in the group needs to have a say. Six people talking and
combining ideas is much more powerful that two. I foresee a problem figuring out the logistics
in having a book club in a room where I am the only adult, but perhaps this is something that I
can have after school or with other teachers.

I plan to continue meeting with my book club students for the rest of this year. I believe
that we are all growing and learning together. I feel good about the progress we have made, but I
want to extend it more. I will continue wondering and searching for ways to facilitate more
Student led sessions. I do not want to be the authority in the group, but instead more of a participant that keeps the group on track. I recently found a website that allows students to create book reviews and host discussions on the Internet. I think this would be a great way to extend these discussions beyond school. Students could communicate from home and possibly with children outside of their school. What a neat experience it would be for them.

I also still wonder about how this would go with students other than the high achieving readers. I believe that the reading abilities of my students allow them to do so well. They can understand a high level reading book for first grade. If I did this with lower achieving students, we would have to use easier books to make sure they could understand. Are lower level books going to have enough information and story line for a discussion? I would like to believe that this would be possible with any level, but I have no evidence to back up my conviction.

Another aspect of my inquiry that remains unanswered is how an adult book club really functions. I have never been in a book club and I think it would be very fun to start. If I had experience with an adult book club, I believe I would have a better understanding of how to structure the one with my students. I enjoy discussing books with the students. The students always amaze me with their ideas and knowledge. I hope to forever work with children, especially in reading. It is fascinating how they learn to read and understand books.
Appendix A: Inquiry Brief

Context

For the 2008-2009 school year, I am working as an intern in a first grade classroom at Easterly Parkway Elementary. I represent The Pennsylvania State University as one of sixty students interning for an entire year in a classroom throughout the State College Area School District. The first graders in my class are all very different individuals. There are twenty-one students, eleven boys and ten girls. Of the twenty-one students, one is African-American, one is from Saudi Arabia, one is from Egypt, one is from China, one student is from Japan, and the rest of the class identifies as Caucasian.

Only four students in the class are below average in their reading levels. Those four students receive reading support from the Title 1 reading teacher and one receives extra instruction from learning support. There are five above average students; out of those, three are significantly higher than the rest of the class in their reading abilities. These students read above grade level. Three students leave the classroom for instruction in the English as a second language classroom. The majority of the students in the class are average in their reading levels; therefore, the class is on target for first grade material.

The class consists of students with varying behavioral needs. There are eight students that have difficulty remaining on task. Almost half of the class needs explicit, simple directions and a place to work where they will not be distracted by things they can play with or by other students. The other students in the class set models of how students should act in the classroom. The students work well together and help one another to be their best.

The State College Area School District curriculum integrates social studies units through language arts. We began the school year with a unit about how to be a good citizen in our
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classroom and beyond. Our next unit was American Album, where the students learned all about the country just in time for the election of the new president. We just began the third unit about Pioneers and the life cycle of plants. Each unit includes a set of related books that teachers use for reading instruction. Everyday we have literacy centers and the students spend time reading with a teacher, working on phonics, and practicing spelling words. We work hard in first grade!

Rationale

At the beginning of the school year my mentor approached me and asked what I thought about hosting a book club with a group of high-achieving reading students. I was excited that she thought I could handle the responsibility but I was nervous. I never had been in a book club before and I certainly had never led a book club discussion. I had no idea what to expect.

Together, my mentor and I selected a book. Six students read the book and then met with me on Friday to talk about what they learned. The students were excited about what they read and had a lot to say. I was troubled because they all wanted to talk and no one wanted to listen to each other. They had great ideas and connections yet they did not connect. I wanted all of the students to have the chance to talk; therefore, I asked my mentor for help making it better. We brainstormed ideas and I got to try a few but there are many more questions that arose. I want to really explore the idea of a book club and what it means. I want to better understand the students and what they understand and communicate. Books are a common beginning for students to interact with one another and to make connections with content. Through a book discussion, I will believe that it will inform me as to how children understand what they are reading. It will be important throughout their lives, for my students to read and understand the information they read. I want this book club to help them set a foundation for lifelong reading and discussion.
Wonderings

Main Wondering: **How do kids think about and understand books?**

Sub-Wonderings:

--What role does technology play encouraging students to talk about books? How can it enhance the activities and instruction?

--Can students on a first grade reading level read fluently enough to talk about a book?

--What is the value in being able to talk and write about books?

--How can I increase peer interaction so my students are listening to one another and responding accordingly?

Data Collection Ideas

1. **Interview**- I would like to interview two different groups of people. First, I am interested to find out what the students that I worked with first semester have to say about book club. I want to find out more about their feelings regarding different books, ways of sharing, and responses to the books. It would give me a base of knowledge about their enjoyment and the relevance of book club. Second, I would like to interview teachers. I want to interview the reading teacher as well as other first grade teachers to find out what they believe it means to successfully talk about books. One of the most important parts of this inquiry is identifying what I mean by successfully holding a conversation and being able to discuss a book. I have my own idea but I am also interested to find out what the teachers in my building say qualify as a successful conversation.

2. **Survey**- I will survey my entire class of first graders to find out what they think about books for children. I want to know their feelings about different genres and what they like to read most. I also believe it would be beneficial to find out what way they enjoy responding to a book, whether that is in writing, talking, etc. I would also like to survey parents of students in book club to see if their child talks about book club at home and any effects they may or may not have observed in their child.

3. **Student Work**- I have a collection of student work from the beginning of the year. After each book that we have read, I had the students complete some kind of written response and I have a compilation of those. I plan to continue this practice of collecting student work after each book club that I do with students.

4. **Video Evidence**- Each time that I hosted book club, I took my laptop into the hallway and recorded what happened. The first videos will be very important to review and discuss as I try to improve book discussions. I also plan to record all of the sessions that follow.
They will document exactly how activities and discussions go with each group of students.

Timeline

**February**
February 16\(^{th}\)-20\(^{th}\)
Develop student and parent surveys
Get surveys checked by both mentor and principal

February 23\(^{rd}\)-27\(^{th}\)
Send home parent survey-to be completed before March 6th.
Give each student survey-to be completed
Start a new book with original book club members, and also have Friday discussion
Interview 2 students about their feelings in book club
Review videotape of students

**March**
March 2\(^{nd}\)-6\(^{th}\)
Collect surveys from parents
Interview 2 more students about ideas in book club
Interview teachers about what they believe is positive talk about books and what indicates comprehension
Host book club with new students, not those in the top reading level
Review videotape

March 9\(^{th}\)-13\(^{th}\) (Spring Break)
Organize and compare student and parent surveys to one another.
Find more research literature
Review collected information
Prepare information and books for coming book clubs

March 16\(^{th}\)-20\(^{th}\)
New book club with poetry group
Pick new students for book club
Talk to teachers again about what are noticing with students talking about books.
Try a new technique with students in book club- using a talking stick.
Review videotape
Interview 1 student about book club reactions

March 23\(^{rd}\)-30\(^{th}\)
New group of students for book club-possibly try a different genre
Talk to teachers about ideas with book talk
Continue to understand data collected
Review videotape
Begin writing paper

April
March 30th-April 3rd
Interview and survey students again
Interact with students and host book club again
Try a more challenging book
Talk to teachers about what they notice
Continue writing paper

April 6th-10th
Create follow-up survey for students
Host book club with group of students, try to remain quiet and observe the students
Revise paper
Rough draft due April 11th

April 13th-17th
Take a final survey of mentor and other teacher feedback
Incorporate information into final book club
Host final book club with original students
Revise paper
Begin working on presentation

April 20th-24th
Finalize Paper
Continue working on presentation
Final paper due April 22nd
Inquiry Conference April 25th
Appendix B: Personal Journal

October 13, 2008

Today I got to start a book club for the first grade. The advanced readers needed an extension for their abilities so the teachers asked me to be in charge. I have six students from our 3 classrooms.

- Student A & Student B—Room 252
- Student C, Student D, & Student E—Room 251
- Student F—Room 249

The students told me all about their reading. I could not believe when they told me that they read chapter books like Cam Jansen, Magic Tree House and Junie B. Jones. We talked about the privilege this is to be in our book club. If the students cannot handle being in our club, they can go back to class. The students have until Friday to read the book. This week they will read “Digby and Kate.” I read it over the weekend. I wasn’t overly excited about the storyline, but the kids will jazz it up in the discussion on Friday.

Student A was not well behaved today. He is not the center of attention and we will have to talk about that. I need to really send him back inside when he acts the way he did. I am excited; I cannot wait to see how the discussion goes. My mentor wants me to record it; we will see how that goes 😊

First Impressions
Student C- loves Tinkerbelle and books about animals. Seems to be very quiet. Good friends with Student D
Student D- needs a little redirection, expressed friendship with Student C, enjoys laughing, likes Cam Jansen Mysteries
Student F-sweet boy, helpful, likes Magic Tree House
Student A-attention seeking, plays soccer, requested Magic Tree House books (read 38 of them), easy to talk to
Student E-loves Magic Tree House (read most of them), seems to enjoy talking, waits to be called on, big smile
Student B-gentleman, works well with others, favorite series- Junie B. Jones
Appendix C: Digby and Kate

Questions & Reflection Journal

Digby and Kate Questions

- Collection of short stories about the lives of Digby and Kate, great friends. Digby is a dog and Kate is a cat.

First, I want to hear your thoughts about the story.
- Did you like it?
- What was your favorite part and why?

Why do you think the author picked this title for the book? Does everyone agree, or do you have another idea?
What are some examples from the story that gave you that idea?

It says on the last page that this cat and dog were wonderful friends, how could you tell that from reading the story?

What are some characteristics of a good friend?

Which of the characters would you rather become friends with?

Can you connect this story to your own life?

In the story, the present, both friends want to give a gift, can you use the same thinking they used to tell me what gift you would give your friend? (They gave away something they loved—bone & mouse—because they thought the other would enjoy it just as much)

In the Lunch story, talk to me about what each partner contribute. Evaluate the work that Digby and then Kate did. Would you be happy?

If you were Kate’s Aunt Hazel would you be excited that she was bringing along a friend? What kind of animal do you think Aunt Hazel is? What might she have planned that they could/ could not do with Digby along?

Reflection Journal

October 18, 2008

My mentor helped me to form a book club with the advanced readers from the three first grade classrooms. This Friday was my first meeting and discussion with the students and I had a great time. On Monday morning, I met with the students and introduced the book club. I told the students that this was a privilege and if they wanted to stay, they had to show me their best first
grade behavior. I also told the students that this was something special for them, but not something to brag about to their friends. We discussed how we would go back into our classrooms and not disrupt other students. The six students agreed that they could follow the rules and that they would like to be part of the club. At the end of our meeting, I gave the students their first reading assignment, called “Digby and Kate” to have ready for Friday.

On Wednesday morning, I went around to all of their classrooms to check in and find out their progress on the book. The Title One teacher wanted me to make sure they were reading so that on Friday I did not have anyone saying that the book was not read. All of the students told me they were in the middle of the story, or that it was done. The students who finished reading the story at least once were encouraged to read it again, thinking about which character they would rather be friends with. I had three students tell me that they loved the book and that made me very excited for Friday.

I was very excited for Friday morning. I had no idea what the students would be able to do and how the discussion would go. I prepared a list of questions and ideas that I thought were important in the story for the discussion. The students all came out of their classrooms, sat down, and started talking. One student said that, “this was the best book of my life.” Looking back, the discussion did not go as I planned it to, but it was very interesting.

Every student had read the book and that was evident in his or her answers. I asked them many different questions, and students gave meaningful answers. All of the students told me their feelings and ideas about the book. As we went through each question that I had, I would try different ways to get the students to interact with one another. I was glad to be there, but I would like them to eventually facilitate the discussion all by themselves. In a few questions I went
around the circle and asked each student to respond. Other times, I would only choose a few people to talk and explain their ideas.

The issue I discovered is that the students do not know how to talk and respond to one another. They were willing to share with the group but the students did not respond to what another person said. When I asked the students why they thought the author picked the title, one student answered. I asked the group if anyone agreed or had a different idea. Another student told me they agreed for a similar reason. I had the student find evidence in the book to support what they said, but this was not the student’s idea. My goal in working with this group is to help them develop this and other communication skills. These students are very bright and full of ideas. I want them to share with one another what they know and feel. I really believe this group can talk about a book just as adults can but they just need some guidance.
Appendix D: Student Work Examples

Digby and Kate were playing in the snow. And Digby and Kate cast a shield. They sent a chopped branch up the hill.

[Images of student work examples]

Digby and Kate had a picnic and sat outside. They had tomatoes and bread.
I think Digby show Kate how to paint on the wall. And Kate show Digby how to catch a mouse.
Appendix E: Complete List of Books
(In chronological order)

Appendix F: Student Response Activities

1. Digby and Kate
   Student Response: create what you would like to be the next chapter in this book

2. A Know-Nothing Birthday
   Student Response: pretend that you are a character from this book and fill in the “All About Me” page

3. Little Polar Bear and the Brave Little Hare
   Student Response: write what it means to be a good friend to someone

4. The Biggest (and Best) Flag That Ever Flew
   Student Response: practice using the post-it notes from the bookmark

5. Abe Lincoln’s Hat
   Student Response: color in Abe Lincoln’s Hat any way you would like and write three things you learned about Abraham Lincoln underneath

6. Meet George Washington
   Student Response: two discussions and a website exploration about the flag

7. Capital Mysteries #3: The Skeleton in the Smithsonian
   Student Response: draw and describe what you would do with $1,000,000 and create a wanted posted for Leonard Fisher, explaining what he did wrong

8. Martin Luther King Day
   Student Response: write important things about Dr. King and then explain how students could help carry out his dream

9. The Golly Sisters Go West
   Student Response: expand your favorite part of the story

10. The Josefina Story Quilt
    Student Response: create a sympathy card for the main character with details from the story

11. Hooray for the Golly Sisters
    Student Response: perform favorite part of book for other group members
Appendix G: Post-it Note Bookmarks

Post-It Notes for Success
As you read, mark the pages in your book with a Post-It for our book club discussion!

1. Mark a page that you really like with a smiley face.

2. Mark a page that makes you wonder with a question mark.

3. Mark a page that has happened to you with the word ME.

4. Mark a page in the book with a word you do not know with a circle.

5. Mark a page where you would like to check with another friend about what they think with a check mark.

Post-It Notes for Success
As you read, mark the pages in your book with a Post-It for our book club discussion!

1. Mark a page that you really like with a smiley face.

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3. Mark a page that has happened to you with the word ME.

4. Mark a page in the book with a word you do not know with a circle.

5. Mark a page where you would like to check with another friend about what they think with a check mark.
Appendix H: “Talking Stick”
Appendix I: Reading Teacher Interview

How often do you meet with your book club? We meet once a month except in the summer when we meet every 2 weeks.

Who picks the book? People suggest books that they themselves have read or that they have read good things about. We usually try to stick to books in paperback.

Is there someone in charge? (i.e. does someone ask questions?) No. We are looking into getting book bags that the library offers for book clubs. There are 6 books in the bag along with discussion questions. In that case, the person who checked out the bag would be in charge. In this group the only thing you have to do is let the group know where and when we are meeting if the meeting is at your house.

What do you do during your discussions? Do you have any particular method? No method. We just discuss the book and people respond, ask questions, or react to comments made by others. Mostly we eat during discussions.

How do you know if you have had a good discussion? We have great discussions all night long - they just may not be about the book. A good book discussion lasts longer than the discussion about school or kids or family.

What makes it good? The discussion lasts long enough for us to respond to and question each other. Often times there are people who LOVED and book and others who couldn't get through it. An example, but not from this book group, is a book called The Shack. I was at dinner with some friends earlier this week and The Shack came up. Five people raved about it, 2 of us tried to read it but couldn't get through it because it was too sappy, and one of usnever even heard of it. We had a great discussion about the book, the author's life, and how those who read it reacted to it personally.

Do you ever have people that did not read? What do they do? Often. Like I said before, this is more of a social gathering group than a book discussion group. We just have a good time being together. But even if you haven't read the book, you can still respond. Like book discussions with kids, you make personal connections.

I have never been in a book club before and I am just trying to get a sense of what it is like for adults. My group is just a group of women who enjoy each other and look forward to seeing the group members each month. We are much more than just a book group because we support each other for weddings, funerals, and sickness - just life.

What do you look for in your students to know that they comprehend what they read? Mostly that they can be a part of the book discussion. They raise their hands and want to answer my questions. I give kids a reason to read before they read the pages to make comprehension easier for them, but some kids struggle to understand even though they sound like great readers. I know who struggles with comprehension and try to zero in on them several times during the discussion. Otherwise, they'll just sit there.
Appendix J: Complete List of Video Recordings

1. Digby and Kate Discussion Video (29:47:16)
   First meeting of book club after the students have read a book. I focus on my sheet and make sure I ask all of the questions. I do not do a wonderful job of scaffolding the questions from the students. One student talks about that this was her favorite book and I do not acknowledge her comments and ask more. Students act silly. I should have sent them back to their classrooms or stopped book club. I so badly wanted it to work that allowed silliness to occur. It is obvious from student responses that they have read the book and liked it. It was an easier book to read so that I could foster better discussions with the students. I ask all of the questions, no students do.

2. A Know Nothing Birthday (25:39:01)
   Students really enjoyed reading this book because the characters are silly. Students like to share their own favorite part, but do not listen to others as they share. I once again focus on my questions and in an effort to get through all of them, it seems as though I do not really listen to the students. Questions are very short. I tried seven times to ask another student if that is what they also thought about a response. One time a student responded to another student. Two students rolled around on the ground and I did not encourage them to sit up. Students are not focused on the discussion, one is checking out the walls, one is spinning book around, and one is rocking back and forth. I ask all of the questions, no students do.

3. Little Polar Bear and the Brave Little Hare (26:40:06)
   We begin the discussion with talk Halloween. All of the students in book club were dressing up for Halloween and they wanted to share what they were going to be with me. I knew that we were not going work together, if everyone wanted to share the entire time. It snowed that week, so the book about snow was fitting. Students seem full of excitement for the holiday. They are eager to open their book and look for information that we talk about. There is a small discussion (three students) that forms based on the characters in the book and what makes a main character. One student eats her hair; one student balances a book on her head. I led the entire discussion, no students ask questions.

4. The Biggest (and Best) Flag That Ever Flew (28:11:12)
This discussion is when I introduced the bookmarks to the students and explained how we would use them as we read. I demonstrated with a book about the Statue of Liberty and then had them use the bookmarks in their own book for practice. Students review the uses of each symbol and where I put them in my book. Students agree to try it with a new book for the next time. They agree to put one post-it note of each kind in their book. I give the students post-it notes, bookmarks and send them back.

5. Abe Lincoln’s Hat (23:11:25)
This was our first discussion with a historical fiction book. The rest of the books have been stories. This book was more difficult and longer than the others. This is the first discussion that we have after the students used post-it notes to mark information in their book. They had to find a page they liked and mark any questions that they had while reading. The students have mixed emotions about whether they liked it or not, a good discussion point that I do not fully allow to develop. I guide students to use bookmarks and find a page that they liked, based on their post-it notes. Students share and talk about it. Students are looking through their own book and helping one another tell the whole story. One student needs redirection and should have really been moved to another location in the circle. Student is disrupting others by putting her hand in their face. Students guess why it is one member’s favorite page and make personal connections to the book. Although I prompted each student for their question, three students used their post-it notes to ask questions to the group. One student even asked another question in response to a student. I am in the video talking way too much.

Students read the first half of the book Meet George Washington and we gathered in the hallway to talk about it. Students joined the circle and told us about the post-it notes that they put in their book. I allowed other students to talk over the important questions that could have really sparked good discussions among the students. One student asks the group four questions, and the other students respond to that student. Only two students brought back their book. We discuss the use of post-it notes in the books and how they help us understand. Students work in partners to pick their favorite part of the book. They will have the chance to act out what they noticed and enjoyed from the book. Two students did not read their book, and that merits missing book club. I foolishly allowed
them to stay at book club and watch the performances. The students wanted to perform as well, but I told them they had to wait until they read the book. I am beginning to talk a little bit less.

Student sits down and reminds me that he did not get to act out his favorite part last time. He was one of the students that did not read. We begin the discussion with the students looking through their books for post-it notes about things they read. All of the students take their turn to ask the group a question. The students talk about what it means to be independent. Student agrees that he knows what it means because of comments from his peers. I move around the circle, asking the students to share their questions with the group. I volunteer my own ideas and do not allow the students to speak as much as I would like. There are 10 questions generated by the students. They ask questions about words that are challenging, congress, independence, continental, and general. Students are not engaged in conversations about the book and what happens, they talk about their own selves. Students are allowed to act out their favorite part again.

8. The Golly Sisters Go West (23:38:08)
This day was the introduction of the talking stick. I hoped that the stick would encourage a student led discussion because they had the power of speaking. Students loved the book that they read for today. It was a silly book about two sisters that are from pioneer times. Student misuses of the talking stick include shoving hands inside the tube, three times hitting self in the head, throwing it at another person for an answer, and finally yelling through the tube. At 9:07:23 the talking stick disappears for good. The beginning of the video is difficult to watch because the stick is very distracting. It was a great way to get their attention; it unfortunately got more attention than the book. I asked all of the questions and the students did not ask any.

9. The Josefina Story Quilt (8:39:06)
This video is embarrassing to me. In this video I find out that four out of the six students in book club did not read their book. This day really made me consider why I was having book club and if it was a good use of student time. When I met with the students before, I asked them to think of three questions about the book that they could ask someone else. I told them that we were going to be using the questions like a game show to see if
everyone read the story. I figured that if the students were motivated to quiz one another, they would gladly make up questions to ask. I gave them all post-it notes to write their questions on and leave in their book. No one had any questions when I asked, and so I began to question the kids about what they liked as they read. One by one the students admitted they did not read and my heart sank. I could not believe they did not read. The students volunteered to read over the weekend and talk about it on Monday. They asked to play games during our time because we could not have our discussion. I told the students how upset I was that we could not discuss the book. It is the rules of book club that the students have to read the book before they come. We spent the last few minutes book looking at the cover to get some ideas about what the book would be about. They are to come with questions for the next session so I do not have to lead it.

10. The Josefina Story Quilt (17:33:08)

I expressed my concern again about not reading. It is very upsetting when students do not read and I told them that it was a privilege to be in book club. Reading the book before we talk about it is the only way we can have a good discussion. I wanted the students to share when they read their book so everyone got an idea. A student posed a question about the book and it sparked a conversation among the children. The students talked about how a small animal could startle a large animal. It was something that happened in the story and a few students made a personal connection to their own animals. I stayed out of the conversation and allowed the students to take control. Two students worked through the answer together. I redirected all of the students to sit up and I’m glad that I made them focus. Students also begin to work on their written responses to this book. Students bring up the word funeral, and discuss what it means.

11. Hooray for the Golly Sisters (22:11:06)

This book club was a special treat for the one student that read his book the week before. He got to invite someone new to book club and they chose the book that they wanted to read. The student picked to read, “Hooray for the Golly Sisters” because he enjoyed the first one so much. It was more difficult to get the students to take control of the questions because there were only two of them. I had to ask all of the questions, but the two students were able to talk together and come up with answers. The new student commented that he did not agree on an answer four times and added his opinion several different times.
**Appendix K: Student Conversation**

Teacher: Remember last week when you and Student C were the only ones that read the book for the week?
Student A: yeaa, we couldn’t talk about it
Teacher: Well that was not fair to you. I am very proud that you read your book. Thank you for being prepared and following the rules. I appreciate it.
Student A: ok
Teacher: Wait a second, as a special treat; you get to pick a student to join us for book club this week. Who would you like to ask?
Student A: uhhh, Student G.
Teacher: Great! (Calls over Student G)

Teacher: Hey, we would like to ask you something; will you come out in the hallway?

Teacher: Student A will you explain to Student G what we want?
Student A: Every week we meet to have book club with Miss McCracken. She gives us a book to read, you read it during the week either at home or school and then we meet on Fridays to talk about it. You have to make sure you read the book or we can’t talk about it.
Teacher: Do you think that sounds like fun? Student A was one of the only ones that read his book last week and so he got to invite someone to book club this week.
Student A: It’s fun to go out in the hallway
Student G: Will there be anyone else?
Teacher: Not this week, it will just be the three of us. Student A, you get to pick a book. Do you have one in mind?
Student A: I know there is another Golly Sisters book.
Teacher: O, you liked them?
Student A: yea, they were very funny and I want to read another.
Teacher: Ok, let’s go check out the library.
Appendix L: Annotated Bibliography


My students get along well with one another. This article provided a sharp contrast to the behavior issues that I am having. My students are still struggling to listen and respond to one another but in this article the students are nasty to one another. They call one another names and insult classmates. The lack of tension between my students makes it easy for them to get along. They are able to be nice to one another, but this article gives me a few ideas about how to encourage their kindness. This is a good article to have in case such a problem were to develop with the students.


The article online discusses the importance of reading. She combines that we should be teaching students how to read with the idea that they should be learning something from what they read. I know that I just focus on what they are comprehending from the story. I do not ask questions and clarify problems with reading strategies and ways that students are reading. This would make for an interesting addition in my inquiry.


The refreshing nature of this book, encourages teachers to get their students into discussion groups. I particularly like the part that gives ideas for what teachers should do if they are talking too much during the group. I think that I talk more than I should when I host book club. This could be a reason for why the students seem to be shy. I am taking up too much time with my own voice and not allowing the students time to use their own. The book discusses allowing students to respond to text in a way that is meaningful to them. This is another part of book club that I am working on; getting the students to put effort into their response.


This article focuses on one teacher that used literature to teach her students about diversity. It is a great example of what students can learn from reading and how they respond to the literature. The article also contains original work from the students. The best part of the article focuses on the use of book discussions in the classroom. The description of what the children were able to accomplish is where I would like my students to be at the end of the year. I want them to be able to bring up other books, ideas,
and themes for discussion. I know that they are capable of this, it will all depend on how I present the situation.


My favorite portion of this book is when the author explains the success she has had with book clubs in the primary grades. She describes how she makes it work in her own classroom. It would be great to try her idea and have a model for the students. I do not know how to guide my students to talk about the books because I do not know what I would do. This book also gives many examples of ways kids respond to books in writing and drawing. I’m working on developing a meaningful and exciting way to respond to each book that the students read. I thoroughly enjoy the section on mental images. When I have book club, this is something that I would really like the students to try and see what they create. This would be an excellent discussion beginner.


This book is instrumental in helping me discover how children understand books. First, students have to be able to read the books. This book discusses how to teach children to read and what they already have to make the most of reading. It is important for me to remember that my students are still learning to become better readers. They need all of the instruction and encouragement that I can give them. Although I have been working with the higher capability students, I will work with everyone to compare their abilities in a book club.


This website is a great connection to several topics and many resources about reading. This can help me think of more ideas for my struggling readers or a better way to approach comprehension. I really enjoy the resource section on technology because it encourages teachers to use it with reading. We traditionally associate reading with books and now what other technology can do to help learning and enhancing reading. Reading no longer means just what students find in books, it also means what is on TVs, computers, ads, magazines, and video games.


This book was an important resource for me to examine because it gave me many ideas of book that were successful in other book clubs. This book offers books for different club context such as mother-daughter and family book club. This makes me wonder if there is a way I could incorporate parents into my inquiry. I could see parents and families providing an interesting component to my questions. Each book featured, has a plot summary, discussion of the main characters, themes, books with similar themes,
and discussion questions for the book. This proves to be very helpful for developing my own questions when I use this book as a model. The end of the book has helpful resources such as the theme index and the grade level index. I did find it interesting that the lowest grade level listed in the book was third grade.


This article highlights the use of book discussions in an inclusive classroom. The teacher was a crucial part in facilitating the discussions but the students were able to talk about books in a competent and meaningful way. I like this article because it displays how a book discussion can work. It may not be the same as an adult book club or one in an older grade, but it is possible.


Although I had language and literacy classes at Penn State University, I was in search of more activities that the students could complete while they were reading; I found many in this book. The authors compiled an extensive list of activities to do before, during, and after reading a book. I really enjoy the character maps. The students would create a graphic organizer with the main character in the middle and important information branching from his or her name. These would make a great conversation starter and also a great informal assessment to see what the students understand from a book. I appreciate the lists at the end of the book that highlight Caldecott and Newberry award winners for each year.