

Analysis of Writing in Connection to Reading with Primary Students

Stephanie Boyat-Chartier

University of Wisconsin, Superior

2011

Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for a

Masters of Science in Education-Reading

University of Wisconsin - Superior

Analysis of Writing in Connection to Reading with Primary Students

By

Stephanie Boyat-Chartier

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment
of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Science in Education-Reading

Dr. Suzanne Griffith

Major Sponsor

Debra L. Nardgen
Program/Department Chair

University of Wisconsin – Superior

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	21
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND SUMMARIES.....	25
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	32
REFERENCES.....	38
APPENDICES.....	40

CHAPTER 1

Reading comprehension is an area of great importance in the total realm of reading. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) states that all children will read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. However, learning to read and reading to learn are very different processes. The same goes for learning to write and writing to learn. Keeping in mind that the purpose of reading is to comprehend and the purpose of writing is to communicate, should this not also suggest that reading to learn and writing to learn are both imperative comprehension strategies? Unlike learning to write, writing to learn involves strategies that help students account for their reading and understanding. Strategies that support writing in connection to reading provide students the opportunity to recall, clarify, and question the text being read, and therefore, should lead to deeper and clearer understanding (Hail, Hurst, Pearman, & Wallace, 2007).

Research on writing in connection to text supports writing to enhance reading comprehension. The National Reading Panel (2000) found that comprehension strategy instruction as opposed to skill practice was important for students' reading growth. The strategy of writing about or in response to text was positively associated with student growth in comprehension according to the CIERA School Change Framework: An evidence-based approach to professional development and school reading improvement (Taylor, Pierson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005) and in the report by the Carnegie Corporation, Writing to Read (Graham and Hebert, 2010).

Problem Statement

Local data show that student performance in reading is lacking in the strand of comprehension. Nettleton School has been cited for not making AYP in grades three through five on 2010 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MDE, 2010), and a majority of students in grades one through five were not meeting proficiency in reading comprehension according to 2010 district benchmarks. According to the 2010 MCA II scores in reading, only 63% of Nettleton School students in grade three performed at or above proficiency in reading comprehension.

According to 2010 Duluth district spring benchmarks in reading, only 73% of Nettleton students in grade 3 performed at or above proficiency in reading comprehension. Experts (Taylor et al., 2005), suggest that strategic comprehension instruction that starts well before the third grade encourages students to become proficient users of the strategies. Students in grades 1 and 2 must also be coached and guided in the reciprocal process of reading and writing. Therefore, it can be argued that more meaningful writing to learn needs to take place in the primary classrooms to increase student comprehension. The purpose of this study is to analyze the affects of the reciprocal process of reading and writing on student comprehension, especially the effects of writing in connection to text in the primary grades.

Question

Can writing in connection to reading positively affect student comprehension scores? Several studies (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Hail et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2005; VanTassel-Baska, Bracken, Feng, & Brown, 2009) suggest that student comprehension is enhanced through the use of writing activities in connection to reading.

Rational for Study

Nettleton students are expected to be proficient in the Minnesota state standards in the area of Language Arts and Reading. These standards are measured by the MCA II and the Duluth district benchmarks in reading. When students do not meet proficiency on the MCA II for at least two years in a row, the school is cited for not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Nettleton has been cited for not making AYP for the third year in a row and has lost state funding because of it. One of the reasons Nettleton School did not make AYP is because students were not proficient in the area of reading comprehension in all subgroups of students being tested. Therefore, research based comprehension strategies should be taught at all levels to all elementary students to improve comprehension.

Hypothesis

This researcher speculated that the data in this study would suggest that writing in connection to reading, particularly through the activities of journaling, asking and answering higher level questions, using graphic organizers, and writing summaries would improve comprehension in elementary students who are in need of reading interventions in grades three, two, and one.

Summary of Study

The focus of this study was to examine comprehension strategies that involve writing in response to reading. The study looked at the success of students who used the strategies of writing to learn. The writing strategies included those closely related practices suggested by researchers (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009; Hail et al., 2007) to improve student comprehension such as: the use of reader response journals in connection to reading, the use of graphic organizers to map out thinking, writing a summary of what was read, and asking and answering

questions in writing about what was read and how they contributed to comprehension in the form of a retelling.

Limitations of Study

Numerous studies and articles (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Hail et al, 2007; Taylor et al., 2005; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009) suggest that writing in connection to reading improves student comprehension. These studies have particularly identified the activities of journaling, writing summaries, using graphic organizers, and asking and answering questions in writing about the text being read as being the most helpful. This study utilized the above mentioned activities with students in grades one through three who qualified for reading interventions, and then assessed their comprehension in the form of retellings. The retellings were only analyzed from the texts that students were allowed and encouraged to write about. In other words, some students would read and retell a story, and some students would read the same text, respond in writing to the text, and then retell that same story.

Delimitations of Study

The focus of this study was with students at the elementary level in grades one through three who are receiving reading interventions. This study did not evaluate the experience or the proficiency of teachers, but teachers participating in the study were provided staff development by the researcher to support the use of strategies for writing in response to text and on the use of the rubrics to support student writing. This study did not evaluate whether or not students have had prior experience with writing in response to text. It did not assess prior reading or writing proficiencies of students prior to the present grade, native born or family first language, or specific disabilities.

Referenced Definitions of Terms:

The Minnesota Department of Education defines the following in regards to proficiency:

Exceeds: The student demonstrates advanced knowledge above the requirement to meet proficiency

Meets: The student demonstrates the knowledge that is competent to meet proficiency

Partially Meets: The student demonstrates knowledge that partially meets proficiency

Does Not Meet: The student demonstrates limited knowledge that does not meet proficiency

MCA II: (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment-II) Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), this state mandated test assesses students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school in the areas of reading, language arts, math and science to determine adequate yearly progress within school, districts and state.

NCLB: (No Child Left Behind) an act of congress signed in 2001 which requires states to conduct assessments that measure students' basic skill acquisition in order to receive federal funding.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of writing in connection to reading on student comprehension with students in grades one, two, and three who are receiving reading interventions. Past studies (Hail et al., 2007) indicate that reading and writing are reciprocal processes. They point out that writing practices should not take the place of effective reading practices, but writing should compliment reading instruction to increase student comprehension of the text. In other words, the two should support and strengthen each other. Writing to learn is often left out of the classroom because of an emphasis on learning to write (Graham & Hebert, 2010) and the confusion between learning to write and writing to learn. Writing to learn is an opportunity for students to recall, clarify, and question what they know about a subject and what they still wonder about.

The literature review includes the following areas: (a) studies relating the reciprocal process of reading and writing, (b) studies relating specific strategies of writing to increase reading comprehension, and (c) studies relating reading improvement in high poverty schools.

Studies related to the reciprocal process of reading and writing:

Graham and Hebert (2010) in their report to the Carnegie Corporation *Writing to Read* indicated that improving students' writing skills should result in improved reading skills. Graham and Hebert proposed to answer the following questions involving the reciprocal process of writing and reading:

1. Does writing about material students read enhance their reading comprehension?
2. Does teaching writing strengthen students' reading skills?
3. Does increasing how much students write improve how well they read? (p. 29)

Their meta-analysis examined the effects of different writing practices on students' reading performances. The findings were cumulative in that they built on previous research of only studies that employed an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Students in grades two through twelve were included. Each grade level was divided into two groups of students who received two different instructional conditions.

Graham and Hebert (2010) analyzed the results of studies that used response journals, studies that involved writing summaries, studies that involved students in note taking, and studies involving the generating and answering of questions in writing. The authors then compared the results of each of these writing activities to the results of reading, reading and rereading, reading and studying, and reading and discussing.

Graham and Hebert (2010) found evidence in fifty seven out of sixty one outcomes that having students write about the text they read does enhance reading abilities for all levels of students in all grades. The authors reviewed data showing that extended writing in the form of response journals produced greater comprehension than reading, reading and rereading, reading and studying, and reading and discussing.

In other studies that Graham and Hebert (2010) reviewed, writing summaries about texts showed consistently positive impact on reading comprehension for students in grades three through twelve. This finding was also compared to reading, reading and rereading,

reading and studying, and reading and discussing. Their data on note taking activities showed moderate and positive impact on reading comprehension, as did results on generating and answering questions in writing.

While the report by Graham and Hebert (2010) analyzed studies that involved students in grades three through twelve, this researcher was interested in studies with younger students and techniques such as using similar strategies with students in grades one through three.

In a study by Knipper and Duggan (2006), the authors provided information from studies that defined the difference between learning to write and writing to learn. Writing to learn differs from learning to write because the “product is not a process piece that will undergo multiple changes resulting in a published document” (p.462). The authors examined various research that lay out evidence and instructional strategies used by students in grades three through eight that enhance learning about text.

Knipper and Duggan (2006) reviewed prewriting strategies that motivate students by engaging them and drawing upon prior knowledge. Learning logs, quick writes, and structured note taking were the most successful strategies to activate prior knowledge about the text.

Knipper and Duggan (2006) then examined studies that included the use of micro-themes. The use of micro-themes was found to be useful during reading. A micro-theme is where the students put the main ideas and details into their own words, much like a summary.

Post reading strategies examined by Knipper and Duggan (2006) that increase student comprehension are word maps and ABC lists. These activities link new concepts or themes to prior learning.

Knipper and Duggan (2006) also found that students can create exemplary writing that enhances comprehension. This can be explicitly taught through modeling and the use of rubrics to guide students through the writing process. This evidence seems to be somewhat contradictory to the suggestions of Knipper and Duggan stated earlier in their study. However, this researcher realizes the importance of writing to learn to follow a systematic and purposeful format in order to keep the writing in a sequential order.

Related studies of specific strategies of writing used to increase reading comprehension:

In a 2007 study of writing for comprehension Hail et al examined the reciprocal process of reading and writing and its link to student comprehension. Unlike learning to write, writing to learn involves strategies that help students account for their reading. The authors argued that the strategies supporting writing to learn provide students the opportunity to recall, clarify, and question that which they have read, therefore leading to deeper reading, and ultimately a clearer understanding of the text. The purpose of their research was to examine writing strategies that aid in text comprehension.

Hail et al. (2007) examined four strategies that enable students to connect reading and writing. According to the authors, students think more critically when given opportunities to summarize, to ask and answer higher level questions, to use graphic organizers, and to utilize journals.

First, Hail et al. (2007) discussed a summarizing strategy that requires students to condense a larger section of text into a smaller one by stating only the important information. The authors stated that summarizing strategies have utilitarian value because they can be used across content areas and in all grade levels to help students remember what is being read. Second, a questioning strategy was examined by Hail, et al. that encourages students to become active questioners and higher level thinkers by encouraging students to explain, interpret, apply, empathize, describe, analyze, and compare. This requires students to move away from the recall of facts towards thinking critically about topics.

Next, Hail et al. (2007) discussed the use of graphic organizers that support comprehension by allowing students to map out and organize their thoughts. Graphic organizers can be used before, during, and after reading and writing. The authors stated that graphic organizers are easy for students to use and support their overall comprehension. They also provide a framework for students to organize their writing. The last strategy Hail et al. examined is journal writing to support discussion. The authors contend that journaling increases comprehension by integrating reading, writing, and socializing. This strategy supports comprehension by combining reading, writing, discussing, and listening.

In conclusion, Hail et al. (2007) laid out the argument that reading and writing are reciprocal processes that support each other. Writing summaries, asking and answering higher level questions, utilizing graphic organizers, and recording in discussion journals are important strategies that help students gain more from texts and increase comprehension.

In a more recent study of writing to increase comprehension by Bulgren, Marquis, Lenz, Schumaker, and Deshler (2009), thirty six students in grades nine through twelve with and without learning disabilities were guided and taught how to use graphic devices for note taking, to write responses to critical questions, to identify key terms, and to ask and answer questions in writing about text they read. The purpose of this study was to identify if students will perform better on comprehension of content area reading when taught explicit instruction in the use of graphic devices.

Bulgren et al. (2009) randomly assigned students to experimental or control groups with the experimental group receiving explicit instruction in the use of graphic devices to aid comprehension while reading text in the content areas of science and social studies. Even though the study by Bulgren et al. used the strategies with students in grades nine through twelve, this method of delivering explicit instruction to a control group could be duplicated with younger students.

The results of this study by Bulgren et al (2009) showed significant differences and moderately large to very large effect sizes for students in the experimental group compared to students in the control group with regard to knowledge and comprehension of content using graphic devices to write responses to questions. More variation was found in performance of students having learning disabilities than those not having learning disabilities.

According to a study by Miller and Veatch (2010), in order for students to become proficient in comprehending expository text teachers need to focus on how to choose and use the most appropriate instructional strategies for their students. In this study, Miller and Veatch

performed research on students in a sixth grade classroom, many of whom have limited proficiency in English language.

The teachers created and used graphic organizers and summary writing using main ideas and details to increase comprehension and to evaluate learning. Miller and Veatch (2010) reported that students were given explicit instruction in the use of the strategies while they were implemented in the social studies classroom. The results of the study by Miller and Veatch showed that all but two of the students used the graphic organizers correctly. The written summaries did not show as much success, however. The authors came to the conclusion that more explicit instruction was needed on how to use the information from the graphic organizers to properly write a summary that conveys thorough comprehension.

Studies that show increase of reading comprehension in schools of high poverty:

In an article by VanTassel-Baska et al. 2009, various programs were reviewed for high school gifted students that included components of critical thinking. The authors noted that studies have not shown that these same components produced positive results for all learners, especially those from low income elementary backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to learn if an integrated language arts curriculum of higher level thinking and writing activities designed for gifted learners could impact the comprehension scores of all elementary students in Title I settings. This was a longitudinal study in that some students participated for 3 years while some students participated for 1 or 2 years.

The review of recent literature by VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) supports responsive based approaches to language arts curriculum and research that reveals the learning benefits of

integrating reading and writing tasks. The authors stated that integrating reading comprehension strategies with writing instruction is another approach that has shown significantly improved reading comprehension according to research.

VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) described their curriculum units of study in grades 3-5 designed for high ability learners which emphasize the use of short reading selections in the genres of poetry and short stories that encourage students to analyze their understanding of the reading selections in respect to vocabulary, reader response, meaning, images and symbols, and structure. The authors stated that student use of a writing model to compose essays based on prompts from the reading selections was a component. The authors expounded on instructional strategies that included the deliberate teaching of graphic organizers to help students structure their thinking about literature writing.

VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) then laid out the method for the study, a quasi-experimental research design including a randomized assignment of classroom teachers in grades 3-5, and described the participants in the study, consisting of a balance of male/female, minority and low income students from elementary schools across six districts in two states. In analyzing results, VanTassel-Baska et al. stated that the experimental students obtained higher mean scores than control students at each assessment data point on one test. The authors state that the data show a similar pattern of increasing performance on other tests, suggesting an increasing growth rate favoring the experimental group. The data show that promising learners did significantly better than typical learners, who did significantly better than low end learners.

VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) also stated that the results suggested that across 3 years of this curriculum intervention both experimental and comparison students made significant and educationally important learning gains on one test but not significant gains on the other. One explanation for the results given by the authors was perhaps due to the student attrition rate in grade 3 between year 1 and 2 in one district with high military families.

Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez (2003) investigated the effects of teaching on students' reading achievement in high poverty schools. More specifically, the study analyzed reading instruction that maximized students' cognitive engagement (reading, writing and manipulating) in literacy learning.

Taylor et al. (2003) examined past studies of classrooms populated by low income children and found that relatively few stimulating discussions or activities took place. The purpose of their study was to investigate the efficacy of a school based reading improvement model. The authors presumed that what teachers did to maximize students' cognitive engagement in literacy activities would matter as much as what they covered in instruction.

This longitudinal study by Taylor et al (2003) involved nine schools all of high poverty in which 70%-95% of the students qualified for subsidized lunch and 67%-91% of students were members of minority groups. A total of 88 teachers and 792 students in grades one through five participated in this study by Taylor et al (2003). Students were assessed in fall, winter, and spring according to grade level assessments, and teachers were observed on three occasions during the year to document classroom practices that included nineteen categories or practices.

For the purpose of focus, this review targeted the following practices of the study by Taylor et al. (2003):

- Lower level questioning and writing about text-vs-higher level questioning and writing about text
- Comprehension skill instruction-vs-comprehension strategy instruction
- Students passively responding -vs- students actively responding (p 5)

According to the study by Taylor et al. (2003), the largest growth on comprehension tests from fall to spring were shown in grade two. The following teacher practices were shown to be positively related to student growth in reading comprehension: Higher level questioning about text; Active responding to reading; Comprehension strategy instruction.

The study by Taylor et al. (2003) analyzed many teacher practices that were observed and suggests what areas and strategies teachers should focus their efforts on while teaching comprehension. These strategies include the use of response journals, the writing of summaries, the use of graphic organizers, and the asking and answering of higher level questions in writing.

Summary:

The review of related literature leads this researcher to believe that student comprehension achievement should be increased when teachers use both reading and writing reciprocally. The research shows that reading and writing are connected and they both rely on corresponding meaning. Therefore, they can be combined to support critical thinking and can be useful in making learning more efficient. When students are engaged in active responding

to text (reading, writing, and manipulating), more student growth was noted on comprehension tests and therefore was positively related to student growth in reading.

While limited English proficiency shown in the study by Miller and Veatch (2010) is not an issue at Nettleton School, poverty is. Children living in poverty have some of the same language issues concerning background knowledge and limited vocabulary. This researcher will keep this in mind while using some of the strategies employed in this study. The literature reviewed for this study suggests that reading and writing are reciprocal processes that complement each other and can be used together to increase reading comprehension.

The research reviewed points to several strategies that are shown to increase comprehension of reading through writing. Of these, the most commonly noted writing strategies used to aid in comprehension were: recording in response journals, writing summaries, asking and answering higher levels questions in writing, and the use of graphic organizers. Integrating reading comprehension strategies with writing instruction such as writing essays and using graphic organizers are approaches that have shown to significantly improve reading comprehension for all students. Students think more critically when given opportunities to summarize, to ask and answer higher level questions, to use graphic organizers, and to utilize response journals. These results are encouraging because it would seem to indicate that this approach would be helpful with students performing below grade level in comprehension but not identified as having learning disabilities.

The research reviewed also showed that the most effective writing activities that increase comprehension seem to be the use of response journals, the writing of summaries, the

use of graphic organizers, and the asking and answering of higher level questions in writing.

High poverty schools with teachers who consistently use writing in response to reading to keep their students cognitively engaged are shown to be the most effective schools (Taylor et al., 2003).

|

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Nettleton School has been cited for not making AYP in grades three through five on 2010 MCA II assessments, and a majority of students in grades one through five were not meeting proficiency in reading comprehension according to 2010 district benchmarks. This study focuses on the reciprocal process of reading and writing in connection to text and how it affects student comprehension. More specifically, this study analyzes the use of direct writing strategies in response to reading and how these correlate to comprehension of text with students in grades one through three who are in need of reading intervention. The students selected for direct instruction in writing in response to reading are representative of the Nettleton School population.

Sample

Nettleton Elementary School is situated in the heart of Duluth's Central Hillside community which, according to the Duluth Police reports, has the highest incidents of crime in Duluth. Nettleton School is part of the Duluth Public School system and has a total population of about 450 students consisting of a culturally diverse community of learners. 54% of Nettleton students are students of minority races and 82.4% are students of poverty according to students receiving free and reduced lunch. The students participating in this study were representative of the Nettleton community.

This study consisted of students in first grade through third grade at Nettleton School who qualified for interventions in reading according to previously administered district assessments. The students performing below grade level according to district assessments were

the main subjects of the study, and they were taught in a combination of whole groups, small ability groups, and one on one instructional group.

Procedure

A cover letter was sent to all staff working with student participants in the area of reading explaining the nature and purpose of this study (see Appendix A). A note to families was included in the school newsletter explaining the focus and purpose of the study (see Appendix B) with a release to be signed and returned from all families of students being the focus of the study (see Appendix B-1). A letter from the school principal was included stating that acceptable procedures would be followed (see Appendix C).

Students in grades one through three had already been grouped according to similar instructional reading levels. Reading levels were established for students through the administration and results of Rigby Running Records, QRI-4 assessments, and district benchmarks in comprehension. The district benchmark assessments used for initial placement into intervention groups were developed by the Harcourt Publishing Company and are normed on a representative sample. The students performing below grade level according to these assessments were the main subjects of the study. One group of students at each grade performing below grade level was the group receiving additional direct instruction and strategy support with writing in connection to reading. Each group consisted of no more than ten students. This sample allowed for student transiency which is a problem at the school.

Instrumentation

The instruments employed for data collection in this research included a rubric for journal responses (see Appendix D), a rubric for graphic organizer use (see Appendix E), a rubric for written summaries (see Appendix F), a rubric for asking and answering higher level questions, and a retelling rubric for assessment of comprehension (See Appendix G and Appendix H). The rubrics were developed by the researcher for this study and were validated by a panel of experts for reliability. The retelling rubric was developed by the researcher based on a model of the Rigby Running Record and analyzed for validity and reliability by a panel of experts using a checklist. These instruments can be used to show the amount of student growth in comprehension with respect to writing in response to reading. All staff involved with administering retellings or using the rubrics for scoring received staff development in this area by the researcher.

Data Collection

All students in this study were assigned a number for identification purposes which allows for anonymity. The students receiving additional direct instruction using writing in response to reading used one or more of the above mentioned strategies during their instructional times with their classroom teachers or with their reading teachers. Depending on the grade level and the time needed to read each text, the amount of time spent with each strategy varied but did not exceed two months for the purpose of this study. All retellings were given during students' regular instructional times and by classroom teachers or reading

specialists. All district benchmark assessments were administered by classroom teachers prior to student placement into intervention groups.

Analysis of Data

The data from students involved in additional direct instruction of writing in response to reading was analyzed using the rubric scoring by their reading teachers, by the success shown by retellings. The data was shared with the district reading curriculum specialist, the school reading specialists, and the school during staff development days. It was hypothesized this research could reinforce the research and best practice of writing in connection to reading to increase reading comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Hail et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2005; Van Tassel-Baska et al., 2009).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND SUMMARIES:

Can writing in connection to reading positively affect student comprehension scores? This chapter will show the results and summary of the data collected through the writing activities of students in grades one, two, and three. The students in these groups were identified as not meeting or partially meeting standards in reading comprehension according to previous district assessments and therefore needing interventions in this area.

GRADE 3 RESULTS-

Eight third graders identified as needing reading interventions participated in this study. Each student participated in the study by retelling at least once using writing and at least once not using writing in connection to their reading.

Of these eight students, 28 samples were collected. Of these 28 samples, 14 samples were collected using writing in connection to reading. All third grade students in this writing group used a graphic organizer (Hail et al., 2007) in the form of the Story Map when writing in connection to text. The Story Map defines the main character, setting, problem, solution, and many details. The rubric for graphic organizers helped guide the students in their writing about the text they were reading. When writing in connection to reading the text, all 14 samples of third grade students scored in the Exceeds category on the retelling. None of these samples scored in the Meets, Partially Meets, or Does Not Meet categories. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1. GRADE 3: RETELLING USING WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
			Student #1
			Student #2
			Student #2
			Student #2
			Student #3
			Student #4
			Student #4
			Student #5
			Student #6
			Student #6
			Student #6
			Student #7
			Student #8
			Student #8

Of the same eight third grade students participating in this study, 14 samples were collected without writing in connection to reading. Two of these samples scored in the Exceeds category, four samples scored in the Meets category, six scored in the Partially Meets category, and two scored in the Does Not Meet category on the retelling rubric when not writing about their reading. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2. GRADE 3: RETELLING WITHOUT WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
Student #1	Student #4	Student #1	Student #2
Student #3	Student #4	Student #2	Student #8
	Student #5	Student #5	
	Student #8	Student #7	
	Student #6		
	Student #6		

GRADE 3 SUMMARY:

When writing in connection to reading, all third grade students in this study exceeded the standards on the retelling every time. When not using writing in connection to reading, the scores looked very different, with the largest number of the samples falling into the Partially Meets category. Only 43% (6/14) met or exceeded the standard when not writing compared with 100% when writing.

GRADE 2 RESULTS:

The second grade intervention group in this study consisted of nine students who returned consent forms. Of these nine students, 13 samples were collected. The writing that was done by second graders was in the form of graphic organizers used to map out the stories and journals (Hail et al., 2007; Miller & Veacht, 2010) used to answer higher level questions about the fiction and take notes about the non-fiction that was read. The rubrics for both methods helped guide student writing in these areas.

Of the six samples using writing in connection to reading, all six of these exceeded the standards on the retelling rubric. None of the samples scored in the Meets, Partially Meets, or Does Not Meet categories. The students used the rubrics for graphic organizers and journaling during the writing and reading time. (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3. GRADE 2: RETELLING WITH WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING:

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
			Student #1
			Student #2
			Student #3
			Student #3
			Student #4
			Student #5

Of the seven samples collected without using writing in connection to reading, no samples scored in the Exceeds category, two scored in the Meets category, five scored in the Partially Meets category, and no samples scored in the Does Not Meet category on the retelling rubric. (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4. GRADE 2: RETELLING WITHOUT WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING:

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
	Student #1	Student #6	
	Student #1	Student #7	
	Student #2		
	Student #8		
	Student #9		

GRADE 2 SUMMARY:

No student samples in this second grade group scored in the Exceeds category according to the retelling rubric when not writing in connection to reading. All samples not using writing scored within the Partially Meets and Meets categories.

GRADE 1 RESULTS:

The first grade intervention group consisted of nine students that returned their consent forms. From these nine students, 14 samples were collected. 10 samples were collected from students using writing in connection to their reading. Four samples were collected from students not using writing in connection to reading. The students using writing in connection to reading in first grade all used the summary method to respond to their reading. Their summaries included: a beginning-characters and setting; middle- including the problem and its details; and the end-including the solution and its details. The students used the rubric to help guide them in writing their summaries about their reading.

Of the 10 samples collected using writing in connection to reading, five samples exceeded the standards on the retelling rubric, three samples scored in the Meets category, one sample scored in the Partially Meets category, and 1 sample scored in the Does Not Meet category. Student #1 and Student #2 have since qualified for Special Education services. (See Table 5.)

TABLE 5. GRADE 1: RETELLING WITH WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING:

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
Student #1	Student #2	Student #3	Student #6
		Student #4	Student #1
		Student #5	Student #7
			Student #8
			Student #9

Of the four samples collected without writing in connection to reading, no samples scored in the Exceeds category, one sample scored in the Meets category, one sample scored in the Partially Meets category, and two samples scored in the Does Not Meet category. This group of samples was considerably smaller due to high absenteeism, and it was very hard to get more than one sample from some of the students. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6. GRADE 1: RETELLING WITHOUT WRITING IN CONNECTION TO READING:

DOES NOT MEET	PARTIALLY MEETS	MEETS	EXCEEDS
Student #9	Student #6	Student #5	
Student #3			

GRADE 1 SUMMARY:

A total of fourteen samples were collected from first graders in this study. A majority of the samples were collected from students using writing in connection to text. A smaller sample was collected from students who did not use writing strategies in connection to reading.

The data from students retelling using writing strategies in connection to reading show that a majority of students scored in the Exceeds and Meets categories. Two students scored in the Partially Meets and Does Not Meet categories while using writing in connection to reading. When students did not use writing strategies in connection to reading the data show that no one scored in the Exceeds category and only one student scored in the Meets category. Three students scored in the Partially Meets and Does Not Meets categories when not using writing strategies while reading.

The study asked does writing about reading aid in greater comprehension than not writing about reading when measured by a retell of the text? Students in grades one through three who qualified and had permission were tested with and without using writing on their comprehension of texts. In summary, at each grade level the numbers in the Meets and Exceeds was greater following the Writing Intervention than was in the Non-Writing Intervention.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This researcher studied students in grades one through three who qualified for reading interventions according to district assessments prior to the study. The purpose of the study was to find out if students did better in comprehension when writing about the text they were reading than those students who did not write in connection to the text they are reading. In other words, does writing about reading aid in greater comprehension than not writing about reading when measured by a retell of the text?

When writing in connection to reading, all third grade students in this study exceeded the standards on the retelling every time. When not using writing in connection to reading, the scores looked very different, with the largest number of the samples falling into the Partially Meets category. Only 43% (6/14) met or exceeded the standard when not writing compared with 100% when writing.

No student samples in the second grade group scored in the Exceeds category according to the retelling rubric when not writing in connection to reading. All samples not using writing scored within the Partially Meets and Meets categories. Of the six samples using writing in connection to reading, all six of these exceeded the standards on the retelling rubric. None of the samples scored in the Meets, Partially Meets, or Does Not Meet categories. The students used the rubrics for graphic organizers and journaling during the writing and reading time.

The data from first grade students retelling using writing strategies in connection to reading show that a majority of students scored in the Exceeds and Meets categories. Two students scored in the Partially Meets and Does Not Meet categories while using writing in

connection to reading. When students did not use writing strategies in connection to reading the data show that no one scored in the Exceeds category and only one student scored in the Meets category. Three students scored in the Partially Meets and Does Not Meets categories when not using writing strategies while reading.

Several points became apparent throughout this study. First, the results of this study generally support the previous research about this topic. Graham and Hebert (2010) found evidence in fifty seven out of sixty one outcomes that having students write about the text they read does enhance reading abilities for all levels of students in all grades. In this study, 28 out of 30 samples or 93% of the samples in grades one through three showed that students met or exceeded the standards in comprehension on the retelling rubric when using some form of writing in connection to their reading.

This researcher found that first grade was the only grade level in the study that did not consistently exceed the standards using writing in connection to text. The first grade data reveal that writing in connection to reading does not seem to be as effective as in second or third grade. No first grade samples of retelling without writing in connection to reading show that students exceed the standards on the retelling. With writing, several first graders did exceed the standards. Two of the ten first grade samples using writing in connection to reading fell into the Partially Meets or Does Not Meet categories. However, the data is still all over the board, with some in the Does Not Meet and Partially Meets categories as well.

Some thoughts come to mind concerning this issue. First, several of the students in the first grade group were absent from school on a consistent basis. It took several attempts to get

samples that were valid to use in the study because students had to see this modeled and then do some guided practice with writing a summary and then retelling before they could do it independently. Second, two of the samples collected that did not meet the standards were from students that eventually qualified for Special Education. Perhaps the written summary method does not work the best for them. In the study by Miller and Veatch (2010), written summaries also did not show as much success. They concluded in their study that more explicit instruction was needed on how to properly write a summary that conveys thorough comprehension. Similar results were found in this study. This leads this researcher to believe that a graphic organizer may have been more appropriate for these first graders to visualize the text in the form of a story map. Another consideration is that these students may be too new to writing for it to be a supplemental support. They may still be struggling with the fine motor skills of writing, and this in itself may be a more difficult task than the comprehension piece.

All second grade samples not using writing scored within the Partially Meets and Meets categories, leading this researcher to surmise that these students were somewhat comprehending already and just needed that extra boost of writing to lock in the comprehension with more details. This confirms the data found in the study by VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009), which showed that promising learners did significantly better than typical learners, who did significantly better than low end learners.

The third grade data consistently show that when students write about the text they are reading they comprehend more of the story and details than when there is no writing about the text. The third grade data also show that when students do not write about the text they are

reading most of them do not exceed the standards on the retelling rubric. They do not display enough comprehension of the story to retell it properly. In fact, a majority of them do not even score in the Meets category.

Specific strategies of writing were used to increase reading comprehension. The students in this study used the strategies of graphic organizers in the form of story maps, writing summaries, and responding in journals to various higher level questions provided by the teacher and other students in the group. The research reviewed points to several strategies that are shown to increase comprehension of reading through writing. Of these, the most commonly noted writing strategies used to aid in comprehension were: recording in response journals, writing summaries, asking and answering higher levels questions in writing, and the use of graphic organizers. For this study, students in grade three responded by filling out graphic organizers or story maps, students in grade two responded in journals by answering higher level questions, and the students in grade one responded by writing summaries consisting of the beginning, middle, and end of the text that was read. All of these strategies were found to be successful ways to respond in writing about the text that was read according to the data in this study. Therefore it could be hypothesized that using all of the strategies in all of the grade levels could increase comprehension about reading.

Of the students needing intervention that participated in this study, 36% were students of color and 44% were students living at or below the poverty level according to school records. In studies by Taylor et al, (2003) of high poverty and high minority schools, the following

findings were shown to be successful in regards to increasing student comprehension in reading:

- Higher level questioning and writing vs. Lower level questioning and writing
- Comprehension strategy instruction vs. Comprehension skill instruction
- Active responding vs. Passive responding

These strategies were utilized through writing in connection to reading in this study with students at Nettleton School and have shown, at least within the limits of this study, to be successful to student comprehension during reading and writing about text in a short term study. It is assumed that because these strategies were successful in a short term study with students needing reading interventions they would therefore be as successful with all students in all settings to improve comprehension about text.

The study had its limitations of small, select samples, the use of non-normed measures, and the difficulties of student attendance and turnover. Some classroom teachers may also have been using similar but different interventions with these same students which may have influenced the outcomes. Even considering all limitations, the results of this study still seem to be strongly in favor of writing in connection to text as an intervention that helps improve reading comprehension.

REFERENCE LIST

- Bulgren, Marquis, Lenz, Schumaker, & Deshler (2009). Effectiveness of question exploration to enhance students' writing expression of content knowledge and comprehension. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 24: 271-289.
- Graham, S., & Hebert M.A., (2010). *Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading. A Carnegie Corporation Time to Act Report*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- Hail, C., Hurst, B., Pearman, C., & Wallace, R. (2007). Writing for comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*. 48(1), 41-56.
- Knipper, K.J., & Duggan, T.J. (2006). Writing to learn across the curriculum: Tools for comprehension in content area classes. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(5), 462–470. doi: 10.1598/RT.59.5.5
- Miller, M., & Veatch, N. (2010). Reaching literacy in context: Choosing and using instructional strategies. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(3), 154-165.
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2010). Retrieved from <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/index.html>
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Retrieved from <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook>.

Taylor, B., Pearson, D., Peterson, D., & Rodriguez, M. (2003). Reading growth in high poverty classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104, 3-36. Retrieved 11-9-2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3203047>.

Taylor, B., Pearson, P., Peterson, D., & Rodriguez, M.C. (2005). The CIERA school change framework: An evidence-based approach to professional development and school reading improvement. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40(1), 40–69. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.40.1.3

VanTassel-Baska, J., Bracken, B., Feng, A., & Brown, E. (2009). A longitudinal study of enhancing critical thinking and reading comprehension in Title I classrooms. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. 33(1), 7-37.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A

LETTER INFORMING STAFF

Dear Nettleton Staff,

I will be conducting a research project that will address the issue of using written responses to increase student comprehension in reading. Participation in this study will involve minimum risk to all participants. Data will be collected during intervention reading blocks with classroom teachers or reading specialists. All materials and procedures used for this study are approved by the school district or are part of the regular reading curriculum. Data and personal information collected during this study will be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

Any questions concerning this study may be directed to IRB #661:

Jim Miller, IRB Coordinator, at 715/394-8396.

Thank you,

Stephanie Boyat, UWS Researcher

APPENDIX B

Paragraph in Newsletter

Dear Families,

We are fortunate to have a research project being conducted in our school with our staff and students. The study will focus on writing strategies that may enhance reading comprehension. The study will take place during the students' regular reading blocks and will involve materials and procedure that are part of our regular curriculum or approved by the school district, therefore involving minimal risk to participants. All data will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of the study. We are hoping that the results from this study will enhance current and future learning and teaching.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Stephanie Heilig,

Nettleton School, Principal

218-733-2172

Appendix B-1

Document of Informed Consent

(Minor Child)

This form is to obtain your consent for your child to participate in a research study through the University of Wisconsin, Superior on ways to enhance student comprehension in reading.

- The purpose of this study is to examine comprehension strategies that involve writing in response to reading. The study will look at the success of students who use the strategies of journaling, using graphic organizers, and writing summaries in response to reading.
- Students will receive direct instruction and strategy support while using response journals, graphic organizers, and written summaries to help clarify and interpret their reading. Retellings will indicate the amount of growth in the area of reading comprehension.
- The study will last approximately twelve to fifteen weeks in duration and will take place during the reading block using materials and procedures that are approved and within the district reading curriculum.
- The study will present minimal risk or discomfort to participants.
- Students and staff could possibly benefit from participating in the study by learning if and how these strategies of writing improve reading comprehension.
- Informational records and data gathered in this study will be kept confidential to all but the person(s) conducting the study. Participants will be assigned a number for identification purposes.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) at UW-Superior and has been designated as IRB #661.

If you have question related to this research, please contact:

Jim Miller, IRB Coordinator, at 715/394-8396.

I give permission for my child _____ to participate in this research study. I realize that participation is voluntary and understand that I or my child may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

Parent's/Guardian's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL

THAT ACCEPTABLE PROCEDURE WILL BE FOLLOWED

I assure that during the research project by Stephanie Boyat-Chartier all acceptable procedures will be followed during the collection of data and analysis of results. Procedure will take place during the regular reading block using materials and procedure that are approved by the school district and reading curriculum. All personal information concerning subjects will be kept confidential.

Signed and dated:

Stephanie Heilig, April 14, 2011

Appendix D

RUBRIC FOR JOURNAL RESPONSES

3-The response shows that the reader is highly engaged with the text.

(Describes characters, plot, setting, problem, solution with great detail and insight)

2-The response shows that the readers is somewhat engaged with the text.

(Describes character, plot, setting, problem, solution with some detail and insight)

1-The response shows that the reader is has little or no engagement with the text.

(Description of characters, plot, setting, problem, solution is sketchy or non-existent)

Appendix E

RUBRIC FOR GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

3-The graphic organizer is filled out completely. Describes characters, setting, plot, problem/solution with great insight.

2-The graphic organizer is somewhat completed and with some insight.

1-The graphic organizer is minimally or not filled out with little or no insight.

Appendix F

RUBRIC FOR WRITTEN SUMMARIES

1-The summary includes a beginning, middle, and end, or problem, solution with great insight.

2-The summary includes a beginning, middle, and end, or problem, solution with some insight.

3-The summary includes no beginning, middle, or end, or problem, solution with little or no insight.

Appendix G

RETELLING RUBRIC	0 POINTS	1 POINT	2 POINTS	SCORE
MAIN CHARACTERS	Inaccurate or no characters by name	A few characters by name	All main characters by name	
SETTING	Inaccurate or no reference to place or time	Some reference to place and time	Proper reference to place and time	
PROBLEM	Inaccurate or few events about the problem	Some events and details about the problem	Most or all events and details about the problem	
SOLUTION	Inaccurate or few events about the solution	Some events and details about the solution	Most or all events and details about the solution	
SEQUENCE	Inaccurate or no events and details in proper	Tells some events and details in proper sequence	Tells most or all events and details in proper sequence	
			Total score =	<hr/>
0-4 = DOES NOT MEET	5/6 = PARTIALLY MEETS	7/8= MEETS	10 = EXCEEDS	

Appendix H

RETELLING ASSESSMENT SHEET

STUDENT NAME AND DATE _____

BOOK TITLE _____

	0 POINTS	1 POINT	2 POINTS	SCORE
MAIN CHARACTERS	Inaccurate or no characters by name			
SETTING	Inaccurate or no reference to place or time			
PROBLEM	Inaccurate or few events or details about the problem			
SOLUTION	Inaccurate or few events or details about the solution			
SEQUENCE	Inaccurate or no events or details in proper sequence	Tells some events in proper sequence	Tells most or all events in proper sequence	
			Total score =	_____
0-4 = DOES NOT MEET	5/6 = PARTIALLY MEETS	7/8 = MEETS	10 = EXCEEDS	

Did the student use a writing strategy in response to this literature? YES ___ NO ___

If so, which of the following were used? G.O. ___ JOURNAL RESPONSE ___ SUMMARY ___ H.L.Q'S ___

