

Fall 12-5-2014

# Investigating Student Discourse and Literacy Development Surrounding Peer Reading

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Investigating Student Discourse and Literacy Development Surrounding Peer  
Reading

By

Lillian Marino

May 2014

A thesis submitted of the  
Department of Education and Human Development of the  
State University of New York College at Brockport  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in education: Childhood Literacy

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

It was a Tuesday afternoon, and as I sat there observing a child for a case study I was writing I noticed Joshua was looking everywhere except his own book he had in front of him. The students were engaging in the Daily 5, which is a student-driven literacy block designed to help students develop individual literacy habits by fully engaging students in reading and writing (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Joshua was engaged in Reading to Self, which is where teachers scaffold their students to build stamina and introduce what good readers do to be able to use these strategies independently (Boushey & Moser, 2006). As I was observing him I noticed he hardly looked down at his book, but would turn a page every few minutes as to appear as though he was reading. A few times I noticed him moving closer to other students to look at what books they were reading, or trying to catch their attention. Then the bell rang, and it was time to meet back on the carpet to transition to the next station.

When the teacher asked who wanted to read with someone, I saw Joshua raise his hand in anticipation and saying “me, me, me!” The teacher chose him to read with someone, and when asked to pick someone to read with he chose his friend Matthew. When the two students chose a spot to sit I noticed Joshua reach in Matthew’s book box to choose a book rather than one of his own. Joshua immediately opened the book and started to read the first page. As he started reading he got stuck on the word puppies. He tried to sound out the word, and Matthew knew he was struggling and

said “Look at the picture. Here is a dog, and what else do you see (pointing to the puppies in the picture)?” Joshua was able to respond correctly by saying “puppies.” Matthew then told Joshua “Now go back and reread the sentence again.” Joshua went back and reread the sentence again. Matthew was able to help Joshua decode an unknown word. This shows how students can share strategies through talk. There were a lot of words in this story Joshua would not have been able to read without Matthew’s assistance. Throughout the reading and after they finished the book, the two students talked about what they read, the pictures they’ve seen and connections they made. Joshua was able to comprehend the book with Matthew’s support.

Joshua was in first grade, and was reading at text level A (Fountas and Pinnel leveling system). According to the district, first grade students are expected to be at a C/D text level by the end of first grade. All the books in the classroom were color coded based on level. Although the students did not know what the colors mean, Joshua knew he does not read the same books as his classmates. Each student had their book box in which each student had books to read. Joshua was allowed to pick one book for his box, and his teacher picked the other ones enabling him to have some choice. The books he picks out exceed his reading level. When I interviewed Joshua about reading, I asked him if he enjoyed reading, and he responded “No, reading is boring.” In actuality I don’t think he meant this about all books. The books at his level are very basic, and do not have much of a story to pique his interest. When he was chosen to read with someone or listen to reading he would get very excited because he was able to read books that are beyond his reading level and are of interest

to him. By engaging in peer reading Joshua was able to learn a strategy to use when coming to an unknown word which enabled him to read and understand a book he would not have been able to independently. I want to help students like Joshua have opportunities to read books with the support of peers if learning is influenced by social interaction.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Reading plays a fundamental role in the development and enjoyment in a person's life. As teachers we are always looking for new ways for students to practice reading, and how to increase literacy learning and enjoyment. Peer reading is defined as two or three students reading and discussing one book together (Flint, 2010). During reading time students can be seen spread around the classroom immersed in their books. While students are reading independently they are working hard to use their prior knowledge to make meaning and connections or using reading strategies to decode words. Reading independently serves its own purpose in the classroom, and our goal is to create independent readers. However, as a teacher I find myself wondering if students would learn the same, if not more by reading with a peer.

Classrooms are made up with children with a wide range of abilities and one way to pair readers are to group them by ability so that all children can benefit from the collaborative learning experience (Schmitz & Winskel, 2008). When pairing readers, research suggests pairing a stronger reader to coach and support a struggling reader to improve reading (Marr & Dugan, 2007). Peer reading helps to build relationships, encourages self-esteem and increases motivation (Macdonald, 2010).

Flint (2010) suggests that peer reading as a classroom tool can effectively promote literacy and learning in a cooperative setting. Students are able to help support each other through peer reading using collaboration. I believe classrooms need to be designed with collaboration in mind. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to interact with one another, such as during peer reading (Brown, 2006; Griffin, 2002; King, 2001; Pearson, 2010). Children use talk to facilitate their own thinking and learning, but also to construct meaning and knowledge with others (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). As teachers it is important to give students opportunities to have meaningful interactions with texts as well as each other.

This study is grounded in theories that view learning as being socially constructed. The work of Vygotsky (1986) helped establish the idea that learning is social and that children learn particular skills and mental processes when they engage with others. This type of learning is based on the idea that children can assist each other in joint activities through social interactions, such as discussions. Through these discussions children learn to make meaning and internalize skills. According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) learning takes place when interacting with a more knowledgeable or capable peer who provides them with support to facilitate and extend learning (Vygotsky, 1979). This type of interaction moves the child just beyond their current abilities and provides scaffolding for learning by providing the support necessary for the child to complete a task independently (Vygotsky, 1978). I think it is important to support student's literacy development through scaffolding, and one way to do this it to provide them with



opportunities to work with a more knowledgeable peer. Interactions between peer partners can contribute to both children having a higher level understanding than when working independently (Brown, 2006). Talk enriches children's individual and joint interpretations of a text, as well as aids their development of understanding themselves as readers (Pearson, 2010).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the quality and nature of the interactions that took place during peer reading and its relation to literacy learning. It was my hope that by exploring this topic, I would gain a better understanding to the kind of talk students engage in, and what forms might the talk take. I also wanted to gain insight to whether there was evidence of literacy development that could be seen from these social interactions.

Peer reading can be seen as a collaborative learning strategy, which is defined as two or more people working together to complete a task (Williams & Sheridan, 2006), to develop knowledge and understanding through talk with one another (Mercer, 2000). Talk is an integral part of literacy programs from the time children begin to read and write (Brown, 2006). It is important to understand how students transact with text and with each other. As a teacher I wondered what knowledge students bring to discussions that help them construct meaning and understanding of a shared text, and how they influence each others' learning when in pairs. This study has increased my own understanding of what kinds of talk students engage in, and what impacts talk has on student learning. My focus for conducting this study was to

determine ways I myself, and others can offer new ways and opportunities to help students become more successful readers. Through my analysis of my observations I hoped to use what I learned from research and my own study to incorporate into my own future classroom.

When I thought about how I wanted to structure reading in my future classroom here is what I wondered:

1. How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading?
2. How might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction?

### **Rationale**

This study focused on students' interaction and engagement in discussions during peer reading, as well as the impact these may have on literacy development. Using the data gathered from this study allowed a deeper understanding into the types of talk that students engage in and if the role that language plays support children collaboratively constructing knowledge. To be able to capture this, I collected data through observations, field notes, interviews and video recordings.

When interviewing teachers I worked one on one with them. The questions asked were open-ended questions leading to the solicitation of additional information from the participant. The questions asked were broad, which required more than one to two word answers making the interview more of a conversation than just asking questions. Open-ended questions are perceived as less threatening and allow for free

response from the person being interviewed. These types of questions also led to new information that I had not anticipated when designing the interview questions.

Through observations and field notes I was able to gain insight to the types of discourse students use when peer reading. I made my observations when students were engaged in peer reading. During my observations I took field notes based on these observations. My field notes were made in the form of a double entry journal. I documented the types of discourse students' used when peer reading, their conversations, body language, and any interactional competencies I noticed. While students were engaged in peer reading I also used video recordings to capture students' talk. Analysis first looked specifically on the types of talk students engaged in. Further analysis led to transcribing the video recordings to see if there was any evidence of literacy development shown through social interaction.

### **Study Approach**

This study was qualitative in nature when focusing and analyzing the types of talk students typically use when peer reading. In order to understand the role of talk and its influence on literacy development this qualitative approach includes observations as students collaborated during peer reading. My study took place over the course of six weeks, in which I observed students during peer reading. I observed in both a kindergarten and a first grade classroom. During my observations I recorded my data through the use of field notes. I also used video recordings as a way to record students' conversations in which I later transcribed. Interviews were given to the teachers of the classrooms I observed in to discuss their perspectives of peer reading.

During my data analysis I used a triangulation of data to look for emerging patterns or themes.

### **Summary**

Throughout my experience as a teacher I have begun to realize how important the concept surrounding talk is. I question how to increase children's pleasure in reading and talking about books. As a teacher it's also important to learn ways to support students' literacy development. This study was designed to gain a better understanding at to what kinds of talk students engage in, and what forms does that talk take. It also looked at whether or not these types of talk supported literacy development. This research is beneficial to me, as well as other educators when designing and implementing reading in our own classrooms.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

My research questions are:

1. How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading?
2. How might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction?

In this chapter, I have reviewed and synthesized literature related to peer reading. I will use this literature to describe what peer reading is, how it is set up and how peer reading can be structured in the classroom. I will also describe social interaction as a way to support literacy development. I will also discuss how peer reading and reading motivation are associated. The final section of this chapter will focus on the effect of peer reading on literacy development. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the focus of this study was to examine the types of talk students engaged in during peer reading, and how might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction.

### **Peer Reading Structures**

Peer reading is a classroom tool that can effectively promote literacy and learning in a cooperative setting (Flint, 2010). As teachers we should provide many opportunities for students to interact with each other through paired reading (Griffin, 2002). Peer reading is defined as two or three students reading and discussing one book together (Flint, 2010). Peer reading is based on modeling, prompting, encouragement, and praise, rather than on the act of teaching words (Macdonald,

2010). As teachers we should provide students with opportunities to interact with each other. Social relationships are essential for students' development as readers (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Peer reading provides opportunities for students to collaborate with one another (Griffin, 2002). When students collaborate with one another they share ideas, and through communication they are introduced to new ways of thinking and learning in order to construct meaning together (King, 2001; Miller, Topping & Thurston, 2010; Owocki & Goodman, 2002). Peer reading also helps to build reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

When the pairs of students are chosen to work together they can choose their own book to read together by choosing a book that is of high interest to them (Boushey & Moser, 2006; Topping, Miller, Thurston, McGavock, & Conlin, 2011). Both students should be able to see the book equally, and sit in a quiet and comfortable place (Topping et al., 2011). When engaged in peer reading students have someone to discuss the book with, and to share their thinking and learning with (Boushey & Moser, 2006). When reading the book students take turns reading, which can lead to an increase in reading involvement, attention, and collaboration (Boushey & Moser, 2006). When reading the book together students can take turns reading one paragraph or page and then have their partner read the next paragraph or page, or they can choral read, which is when partners read the same section of the book at the same time (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

When students are engaged in peer reading, teachers can pair students in a variety of different ways. Research suggests that pairing a weak reader with a stronger reader to take turns reading aloud independently to discuss text, simultaneously or in tandem will help to improve their reading (Macdonald, 2010; Marr & Dugan, 2007; Ferrara, 2005; Topping, 1995). Pairing students this way can benefit both the less proficient and the more proficient learner. Gilles and Pierce (2003) suggest that the more proficient learner will often take the lead by offering explanations and demonstrations that will support the less proficient partner. The less proficient partner also helps the more proficient partner by challenging them to reach a greater level of explicitness through questioning (Gilles & Pierce, 2003; Topping, 1995). Other research suggests pairing readers of approximately equal expertise provides opportunities for collaborative relationships when jointly constructing meaning from a text; teachers should also group and regroup students as necessary so that all students use this time collaboratively and can benefit from the collaborative learning experience (Flint, 2010; Griffin, 2002; Schmitz & Winskel, 2008; Topping, 1995).

Literature circles are another form of using peer reading as a collaborative learning strategy teachers can use in their classroom. Literature circles are defined as small groups comprised of two to six students who work together to read the same text, and come together to discuss as a way to share their responses (King, 2001; Maloch, 2002; Pearson, 2010). In literature circles students have the opportunity to use all aspects of literacy including reading, writing, speaking and listening (Gilles,

Dickinson, McBride & Vandover, 1994). Students form groups based on selecting a group that is reading a book that is of interest to them (Maloch, 2002; Tompkins, 2010). These groups are formed for students to be able to help each other explore and understand the text and the potentials within the text (Gilles et al., 1994). After the reading groups are formed students then make choices about the roles they will play during group discussions. Some examples of these roles are, but not limited to, discussion director, passage master, word wizard, connector, summarizer, illustrator, and investigator (Tompkins, 2010).

When setting up literature circles in the classroom teachers should first scaffold students to learn how to respond, and how to transfer control of talk to the group (King, 2001). Within literature circles talk is the key component for participants to use to understand the text and to create deeper meaning. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) state that through mini-lessons, whole-group modeling, and carefully chosen books, teachers can successfully implement literature circles into their classrooms. Using literature circles in the classroom provides time for the teacher to monitor and assess aspects of children's reading (King, 2001). A majority of the time groups will meet independently, other times the teacher will join in with certain groups to help expand their thinking and conversations (Tompkins, 2010).

Literature circles provide opportunities for great discussions about books and get students interested in reading (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). Students may become interested in other books different groups may be reading which can encourage



students to want to read those books within their own literature circle groups (Avci & Yuksel, 2011). Children are influenced by their peers' tastes. Children are not literary experts, but they are experts about what appeals to them and others their age (Walsh, 1984). This can lead to an increase in reading motivation. According to Tompkins (2010) students become more engaged when reading when they are able to choose books that are of interest to them. Patall (2013) suggests that interest may influence motivation. Providing students with choices may be beneficial for those students who lack personal interest for the task (Patall, 2013).

Literature circles create a community of readers where both the reader and reading becomes valued; it's also a place where children learn from and support each other by making reading an active creative process (King, 2001). When in a community of learners students enjoy social interaction and feel more connected to their peers (Tompkins, 2010). Literature circles give students more leadership opportunities and more time to talk (Maloch, 2002). This can lead to students taking ownership of the learning, which can lead to higher reading motivation (Tompkins, 2010).

Peer reading and literature circles are two ways teachers can create opportunities for students to collaborate. As teachers it is important to know and understand how to structure and scaffold students to be able to use peer reading and literacy circles as an effective learning tool in the classroom. Collaboration amongst peers allows students to share ideas and build knowledge together. When discussing

new ideas in a text students are also sharing their own opinions and background knowledge in order to help make meaning of the text. It also creates a classroom community by giving students opportunities to share their ideas and make connections with their peers.

### **Social interaction/talk**

In this section, I present literature surrounding social interaction and talk to support peer reading. There are a lot of variables that can affect learning; socialization is one variable that can have positive effects on learning. Children use language to make their own individual thoughts into collective thoughts in order to make personal interpretations from a shared experience (Mercer, 2000). When students are engaged in dialogue with others they share their experiences, ideas, see things from different perspectives, evaluate their own knowledge, and learn how to deal with various situations in which they gain new knowledge and see things in different ways than they did before (Marton & Booth, 1997). King (2010) suggests during peer reading students support each other in exploring the texts they read together and themselves as learners.

In sociocultural theories, children's social interaction is seen as fundamental to their learning. A sociocultural perspective helps us to appreciate the relationship between an individual's thinking and the collective thinking activities of groups (Mercer, 2000). Children's own thoughts are influenced by the exchange of thoughts that take place when they are engaged in communicating with each other (Vygotsky,

1986). Our ability to talk and think is first influenced socially, and later becomes individual (Vygotsky, 1986). According to Vygotsky (1986) children who are guided by an adult or more capable peer while participating in cultural activities are given the best opportunities to build tools for thinking. When children are involved in joint activities it can lead to new understandings. The key to social learning is the capacity for imitating and developing higher mental functions because most of what we learn is learned through interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1986). This goes along with the idea of zone of proximal development in which children work with a more capable peer on activities that are above their own level of competence to master a goal with the help of others. Peers are capable of teaching each other to use more advanced methods, such as problem-solving, because they are given the opportunity to practice in a social context (Miller, et al., 2010). Classrooms should foster the aspect of talk by allowing students to work collaboratively, and encourage students to support each other as learners (Johnson & Keier, 2010).

When focusing on how children use talk Mercer (2000) distinguished three categories of talk: exploratory, cumulative, and disruptional talk. Mercer (2000) classified exploratory talk as when participants engage in co-reasoning and joint construction of meaning. That is that these partners are engaging critically but constructively with each other's ideas (Mercer, 2000). The relevant information gets offered for joint consideration, but can be challenged and counter-challenged which makes agreement a joint progress (Mercer, 2000). If students are using the words "because", "if" and "why" it could signal times when students are engaging in

exploratory talk (Mercer, 2000). Another researcher, Douglas Barnes, identifies exploratory talk as using language for reasoning (Barnes & Todd, 1995). When students use exploratory talk the speaker tries out new ideas to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, and then to arrange the information into different patterns (Barnes & Todd, 1995). There are a lot of reasons for wanting children to use this kind of talk when they are engaged in group activities. This type of talk lets students evaluate evidence and consider options in a reasonable way, which helps them work on problem solving (Mercer, 2000).

Cumulative talk is categorized as language used to build a joint identity, and to share the same perspective on a topic of conversation (Mercer, 2000). When students are engaged in cumulative talk students generally accept and agree with what each other have said (Mercer, 2000). The speaker can build off what the other has said, but does so in a positive and uncritical way (Mercer, 2000). Partners use cumulative talk to construct common knowledge through the use of accumulation (Mercer, 2000). Cumulative discourse is characterized by students using repetition, confirmations and elaborations based on what others have said (Mercer, 2000).

Disruptive talk is characterized by participants who are unwilling to take another person's point of view, and continues reassertion of their own point of view (Mercer, 2000). This type of talk is characterized by disagreement, and individualized decision making which makes the atmosphere competitive (Mercer, 2000). During this time partners do not attempt to pool their resources, or to offer any

constructive criticism or other suggestions other than their own. Disruptional talk has some characteristic discourse features such as partners engaging in short exchanges with each other that consist of assertions and challenges (Mercer, 2000).

When examining talk during literature circles discussions, Karen Gilles (1998) (as cited in Tompkins, 2010), categorized four types of talk. The first category of talk is categorized as talk about the book. Gilles (1998) describes this as when students are summarizing their reading while talking about the book by retelling events or big ideas, and examining the theme or genre. The second category is labeled as talk about connections, which is described as students making connections between the book with their own lives, the world, and other books they may have read (Gilles, 1998). The third category is labeled as talk about the reading process. When students are talking about the reading process they are thinking metacognitively and reflecting on strategies they used to read the book (Gilles, 1998). During this time students discuss their reading problems and how they solved them, identify their thinking as they were reading, and identify parts of the text they did and did not understand (Gilles, 1998). The last category is categorized as talk about group process and social issues. As seen in this category students use talk to organize the literature circle, as well as to maintain discussions within the group (Gilles, 1998). Students also talk about social issues and current events related to the book (Gilles, 1998).

The role of talk can be seen as a way of developing children's meaningful interactions with text (King, 2001). Talk is also a way for children to use language as

a tool to think and make meaning together (Pearson, 2010). If discussions amongst peers go well it can lead to individual and joint interpretations of texts, and with the development of children's understanding of themselves as readers (Gilles et al., 1994; King, 2001; Pearson, 2010). Discussing literary texts enables readers to engage in a joint conversation of meaning in which all personal contributions are valued (King, 2001).

### **Reading engagement and motivation**

It is important to consider the role of motivation in literacy learning. (Tompkins, 2010). Motivation contributes to reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2004). Reading motivation can be defined as one's individual goals, values, and beliefs in regard to the different topics, processes, and outcomes of the reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading motivation can be a result of several different factors. There is a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves reading purely for enjoyment, and the reader views reading as being important (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Extrinsic motivation refers to receiving rewards or incentives to obtain external recognition (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). A person's current motivation to read can be defined as his/her intention to read a specific text, while a person who repeatedly shows current reading motivation can have habitual reading motivation (Schiefele, Schaffner, Moller, Wigfield, Nolen, & Baker, 2012).

Research has shown motivation and engagement in reading to be key contributors that effect students' learning (Guthrie, et al., 2004). There is also a

positive relationship between motivation and reading comprehension (Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, Taboada, & Barbosa, 2006; Guthrie, Wigfield, Mersala & Cox, 1999; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks & Perencevich, 2004). The more highly motivated students who see reading as a desirable activity will be more engaged, thus becoming better readers (Gambrell, 2007). Teachers should be looking for ways to increase student engagement, because student performance in reading is affected by students' attitudes towards reading.

Students' reading motivation can be enhanced through engaging in cooperative learning activities (Guthrie et al, 2004; Tompkins, 2010). According to Piaget (1959) cooperation is the social interaction among individuals who regard themselves as equal and treat each other as such. Collaboration can be motivational; students need opportunities to socialize, share their ideas, and participate with their peers. Flint (2010) suggests that peer reading can make reading and learning experiences into a fun social setting which motivates readers to build upon their prior knowledge and extend literacy learning. Students who talk about what they are reading are more likely to be engaged in what they are reading (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). Students are more motivated to read when they have opportunities to socially interact with others about the texts they read (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Gambrell, 2011). Social interactions include reading books together, and talking about books. Turner and Paris (1995) suggest that social interaction supports motivation in a variety of ways; first, peer comments can pique students' curiosity. Also, student observations of their peers' progress may increase their own self-confidence and their

ability to succeed (Turner & Paris, 1995). Working with others also promotes student interest and engagement (Turner & Paris, 1995). Students who collaborate enjoy participating in group activities when they are reading, and they also enjoy talking about their reactions to books (Brown, 1997). When students are given the opportunity to work with a peer they are often more interested and engaged in reading than they are when they read independently (Tompkins, 2010). When students are working and collaborating together they are given opportunities to share ideas, and to learn from each other (Tompkins, 2010).

Peer reading can incorporate play as a type of social interaction and motivational method. Incorporating play while reading can keep students actively engaged with the reading process, the book, and with each other (Flint, 2010; Griffin, 2002; Macdonald, 2010). According to Vygotsky (1978) children develop a better understanding of the world through play. Play provides a learning context for literacy development. Language offers children a way to enact different events together through play, which can help students to make better sense of the actual experience (Mercer, 2000). In one study, Flint (2010), suggests that play motivates students' interest in both reading of the text and the discussion by making it fun and interactive (Flint, 2010). Using play while reading together engages students in the reading process, and it encourages them to explore literacy in a way that is meaningful and motivating to them as well (Flint, 2010). Griffin (2002) examined verbal play during peer reading, which is defined as print-related verbalizations. When children were engaged in verbal play they used funny voices, singing, drawling, and playful talk



related to pictures (Griffin, 2002). Verbal play can result in laughter, dancing, and singing (Griffin, 2002). When using verbal play students can enliven the reading of text through playful elaborations to help them make meaning of the text in an active and engaging way (Griffin, 2002).

Peer reading can help build relationships, encourages self-esteem, and increases motivation (Macdonald, 2010; Marr & Dugan, 2007; Topping, 2001). Collaborative engagement can help increase students' sense of belonging, which has been associated with an increase in reading motivation (Brozo & Flynt, 2008). Students not only build self-confidence, but they also feel good about helping others to read (Macdonald, 2010). Collaboration for motivation refers to the social networks that support students' literacy learning (Brozo & Flynt, 2008). Peer reading is a social experience; children enjoy spending time with their friends. Students look forward to opportunities to socialize with their peers during the school day. Engaging in peer reading can increase students' reading motivation by allowing students opportunities to discuss books with a partner (Tompkins, 2010).

Interest in reading can be related to book choice (Tompkins, 2010). As teachers we want students to read for enjoyment. Text that addresses the reader's interest can promote engaged reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Tompkins, 2010). Nothing makes a reader want to read more than their own interest in the book they are reading. Students place more value on reading when they are allowed to choose text materials (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

In literature circles students are given choices by choosing the book they will be reading, and the group in which they will participate (Tompkins, 2010). When choosing which group they would like to be a part of, they do so by picking which group offers a book that is of interest to them (Avcı & Yuksel, 2011; Maloch, ;Tompkins, 2010). Students are also given choices when choosing the role they will be playing during the discussions. Literature circles create a community of learners in which they take responsibility of their learning and work collaboratively with their peers (Tompkins, 2010).

Literature discussion groups are seen as an equitable and engaging way for all students to share and discuss their responses to literature (Maloch, 2002). Literature circles offer all students with an equal opportunity to engage in discussions. Each student has a role to play in discussions which promotes equal participation amongst group members (Tompkins, 2010). Not all students are comfortable participating in group discussions. Literature circles give each student the opportunity to share his/her thinking and learning with peers.

### **Literacy development**

In this section, I present literature that relates to literacy development as a result of peer reading. The benefits of learning by working in groups have been researched and studies have shown a relationship between peer reading and literacy development. Children learn and develop through collaboration and togetherness (Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky, 1978). When students are engaged in peer reading it helps

them to grow as readers and helps them read independently (Boushey & Moser, 2006; Griffin, 2002). Boushey and Moser (2006) state that when using peer reading in the classrooms it helps readers, especially developing readers become more self-sufficient which makes them less reliant on the teacher and more independent. Most of the studies have shown that peer reading can lead students to gain confidence, as well as improving fluency, accuracy and comprehension (Flint, 2010; Griffin, 2002; Marr & Dugan, 2007).

In one study Marr and Dugan (2007) researched how using partners can build fluency. Fluency was defined as a reader's control over word recognition (Marr & Dugan, 2007). Marr and Dugan (2007) stated that "If children read smoothly, pausing at appropriate phrase boundaries and reading with expression and intonation, this indicates they have a level of control and ease with decoding and understand the text as their reading approximates speech" (p.52). Marr and Dugan (2007) reported that in their study they looked at second graders who were reading below 44 words per minute at the beginning of the school year. In this study Marr and Dugan (2007) paired these readers with a more capable reader. After participating in peer reading they found that students showed a significant growth in reading fluency compared to their peers in a control second-grade classroom (Marr & Dugan, 2007). Children also showed growth in self-confidence in their ability as they started making progress, and they also became excited about reading (Marr & Dugan, 2007). Marr and Dugan (2007) believe the success from their study can be contributed to having the more

capable reader model fluent reading for their partner, and then having them echo or choral read the section of text.

In another study Flint (2010) investigated peer reading in her own first grade classroom to focus on how literacy transaction and social interaction can work together to assist early readers through the use of peer reading. The study yielded three major themes, including using reading strategies to scaffold learning, making connections with and to texts in order to construct meaning, and using play as a type of social interaction and motivation method (Flint, 2010). The first two themes Flint found are directly linked to how peer reading and literacy development are connected. When looking at the first theme which uses reading strategies to scaffold learning, Flint (2010) found that students used these strategies that they learned in class and prior knowledge of decoding text to scaffold their learning by modeling and demonstrating strategies for each other. Together the students were able to socially construct knowledge with regard to their ZPD to be able to make sense of the books they were reading (Flint, 2010).

In another study Griffin (2002) researched how emergent first graders supported each other's learning while working in pairs. Grouping of students was determined by the teacher who grouped students of approximately equal expertise. Throughout the year pairing of students changed. Griffin (2002) found three influences on peer reading. The first was motoric actions, which is defined as children's body language during peer reading. During data analysis Griffin (2002)

found a wide variety of motoric actions that seemed to contribute to peer readers' interpersonal relationships. These nonverbal actions served as important communication and collaboration tools for students when engaged in peer reading (Griffin, 2002). Oral language was the second category of influence seen on peer reading. Analysis of oral language focused on any speech that did not involve reading of the actual text (Griffin, 2002). During peer reading students frequently held conversations; most of the conversations were in regards to helping readers organize peer reading (Griffin, 2002). The third category of influence was verbal play which was defined as print-related verbalizations that derived from the text, but was related to the reader's amusement and enjoyment of the text (Griffin, 2002). Some examples of verbal play were children's use of funny voices, singing, and playful talk related to pictures (Griffin, 2002). Students used verbal play to maintain strong interpersonal relationships, and revealed several indications of when new and shared meaning took place (Griffin, 2002). The data and findings from this study suggested that the children's use of language did contribute students' increased motivation. Peer reading also helped students scaffold each other's learning. When readers were faced with difficult text students were observed pointing, and giving clues while discussing possible strategies. When readers struggled with the text their partners would step in and assist by shifting responsibility for reading the unfamiliar word from one reader to the other (Griffin, 2002).

Research has shown that when students are given opportunities to read collaboratively they are able to support each other as learners. Studies suggest during

peer reading students scaffold one another's learning by using strategies when jointly constructing meaning of a text. Research suggests using peer reading as a collaborative strategy to increase reading motivation. Studies show that during peer reading students are able to make connections with the text as well as with their partners. These connections help students to make meaning of the text, and to share experiences with each other. Research shows how peer reading can promote growth in reading fluency. When students are able to read a text fluently they can concentrate on making sense of what they are reading.

### **Summary**

My review of the literature has revealed that engaging students in peer reading has documented benefits. Research has linked peer reading as being an engaging way for students to collaborate and create joint knowledge and understanding together. Students are able to support and scaffold each other's learning. The research has provided many insights to how language and social activity are related. Children use language to create meaning. Peer reading gives students opportunities to socialize, and build relationships. The research presented gave me reason to investigate how students use language to interact and engage in discussions during peer reading and how might peer reading impact literacy development. My research will help teachers when structuring and implementing peer reading in their own classrooms.

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

Children learn to make meaning and internalize skills through social interactions, such as discussions. The two main purposes of this study were to explore the types of talk students engage in during peer reading and if the types of talk discovered impact literacy development.

#### **Research Questions**

During my 6 week study, I explored the following research questions:

1. How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading?
2. How might social interactions during peer reading impact students' literacy development?

#### **Participants**

For this study I observed in two classrooms, one a kindergarten classroom and the other a first grade classroom. The classrooms were chosen by the principal of the school based on their use of peer reading in the classroom. The exact number of participants who were observed for this study was dependent on how many students obtained informed consent and assent. Throughout the study each child's identity was kept anonymous (see Appendix A). The kindergarten classroom contained 22 students. Primarily the students were Caucasian, except for two who were African

American. The first grade classroom contained 23 students. Primarily the students were Caucasian, except for one student who was African American. Students in both classrooms ranged from “below-grade-level” to “at-grade-level” in reading. These levels were reported by the classroom teachers.

Each teacher who was interviewed first completed an informed consent statement to participate in this study. Each teacher’s identity was kept anonymous throughout the duration of the study (See Appendix B). Prior to beginning my study I interviewed the teachers of the classrooms in which I conducted my observations. I interviewed teachers to get an in-depth insight into their feelings and perceptions about using peer reading in their classrooms.

### **Context of the Study**

The student participants for this study attended a public elementary school in western New York. This school qualifies as a Title I school. The school also has a bilingual program. As part of their community’s commitment to the success for all of their students, the staff and parents/guardians of the students have strong communication and high expectations for themselves and the students in the school. They foster parent involvement, engaging students in rigorous curriculum and instructional environment, monitoring and reporting on student progress, ensuring health and wellness and excellent attendance, and sharing the responsibility for improved student achievement. The school’s vision states that as a community they are a “Creative, dedicated learning community. We demonstrate and encourage



collaborative and flexible thinking which nurtures the gifts and potential of all” (retrieved from the school’s website).

The school enrolls students from pre-kindergarten through grade two. They currently have approximately 470 students enrolled in their school. There is a lot of diversity present within the school, with the majority of students being Caucasian with 74%, 13% are African American, 12% Hispanic, and 2% are Asian (retrieved from the school’s website). They have 36 full time teachers on their staff. The student to teacher ratio is about 13 students per teacher. They also have one principal, and a vice principal who is shared between this school and their sister school. Their sister school is located in the same district and enrolls students from grades three through five. They share many families and staff between both schools.

### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I am a 29 year old, Caucasian female who lives in New York State. I am pursuing a graduate degree from The College at Brockport, SUNY, in the childhood literacy program. I also attended The College at Brockport for my bachelor’s degree and certification for Childhood Education and Special Education in grades one through sixth. Professionally, I am currently a substitute teacher in several school districts.

As a teacher-researcher, my educational philosophies shape my beliefs as a teacher. First, I believe that all children have the ability to learn. In order for all students to succeed, teachers need to meet each student’s individual needs by using

differentiation. It is also important to create a sense of community, in which all students feel safe in order to learn. I believe when students are engaged in lessons and activities they learn more. It is my job as a teacher to give students a purpose when teaching a lesson and connecting it to real-world activities.

As a teacher I could share my own passion for reading and writing by sharing the books I am currently reading, and some of my own writing pieces. It is also important to find ways to increase students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for reading and writing. Reading and writing are closely connected processes that support each other, and growth in reading can have a positive impact on writing and vice versa (Routman, 2005). I believe reading and writing should be taught together. Reading and writing should also be integrated into all subject areas.

Instruction should start by the teacher being explicit in manner. I believe students need first to see the teacher model a strategy, and then allow time for shared demonstrations through which the teacher can offer guidance. After, students should engage in guided practice with their peers before using the strategy independently. I believe students learn through language and social interaction, which is why it is important to scaffold their learning by incorporating a social component.

I also believe assessment plays an integral role in the classroom. Assessments should not just be placed in a student's portfolio, but should be used to drive instruction. I also see an importance of having individual and small group conferences with students regarding their reading and writing. Conferences allow

times for teachers to sit with students and monitor their progress in reading and writing activities. When working with students it is important to use specific praise, so students know exactly what they did well.

### **Data Collection**

For this study I collected data through the use of interviews, observations, field notes, and audio and video recordings.

#### **Interviews**

Interviews gave me insight about teacher's beliefs and perceptions about peer reading. I interviewed all teachers of the classrooms in which I observed for this study. These interviews took place at the beginning of the study. I interviewed them about how they set up peer reading in their classrooms, and how they scaffold students in learning how to effectively use this strategy. I also asked them what the purpose was of using peer reading in their classrooms, and what benefits they have seen as a result of peer reading. When interviewing each teacher I took field notes, as well as used audio recordings which I later transcribed for data analysis. The interview protocol is included as an appendix.

#### **Observations of Peer Reading**

In addition to the interviews, I made observations when students were engaged in peer reading twice a week over the course of a six week period. When observing I took field notes based on observations. I observed students while reading

with peers to document students' body language, types of discourse, and students' conversations while they were reading together. These observations gave me insight to the types of discourse students are using when peer reading. When making observations of peer reading I recorded my data by using a double entry journal. The observation format is included as an appendix.

I also used video recordings during my observations twice a week over the course of the study. When observing students I chose groups of students in which to record their conversations. These recordings allowed me to listen to their conversations at a later time to transcribe some of the student's conversations. I also used these transcriptions when analyzing my data. Through the use of audiotapes I gained insight to whether or not there was evidence of literacy learning due to peer reading.

### **Child Debriefing**

I also used participant debriefings after my observations. After I was done observing students during peer reading I checked in with students as a way to check my interpretations of what I observed with the perceptions of the participants to increase the validity of my findings. I asked students a few questions based on the observations about their thoughts based on their interactions during peer reading. I recorded the data in a double entry journal. The conversations were also video recorded, which I later transcribed for data analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

For the data analysis I transcribed and coded each set of data that I collected after I completed the data collection process. I manually sorted, categorized, and coded all of the data collected. During my data analysis I used the constant comparison method. According to Hubbard and Power (1999) the constant comparison analysis method is a well-known method to use for qualitative studies. The constant comparison method involves researchers to look at and code data in order to find patterns and create categories based on the data collected (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Samaras, 2011). When comparing data you constantly compare the codes you have already established against new data across multiple data sources (Samaras, 2011).

## **Interviews**

Prior to beginning the analysis process, I listened several times to the audio tapes for each teacher interview that was administered. I listened for any information I may have missed when taking field notes during the interview. I transcribed this information into a text document. After I converted the audiotapes into a text document I then read through the field notes multiple times. When reading through the field notes I wrote marginal notes. I also used memos to record my understandings and to look at an overall picture from my data.

After reading the text documents several times and when I had a detailed picture of all the data, I then began to code my data. While coding my data I was

looking for any patterns or themes. When I was coding my data I developed no fewer than three codes, and no more than six (Hubbard & Power, 1999). When coding my data I used different colors as a way to separate different categories or patterns that evolved. I coded my data visually to better see the patterns that emerged (Hubbard & Power, 1999).

### **Observations**

Throughout my study I looked over my field notes every week to note any patterns or themes I saw emerging. I made notes about what I was seeing in my data early on. After I had finished all of my observations I then listened to the audio recordings and transcribed the data into a text document. Then I looked across the data in my field notes to look for patterns to emerge. After reading through my field notes several times I then begin to code my data. I used a color coding method to differentiate the patterns or trends I noticed.

### **Child Debriefing**

Before I began with my analysis I first listened to the audio tapes and transcribed each debriefing into a text document. I read through my field notes multiple times to look for any themes. After, I coded my data using the same color coding I used when looking at my data from my observations. This data was then compared with my observations and transcripts of child observations and teacher interviews. I used a triangulation of data looking across my data to find any common themes or patterns I saw to increase the validity of my findings.

## **Procedures**

I collected data over a six week period. Listed below was the sequence of my data collection procedures.

### **Week One**

- I scheduled interview times with teachers to begin my data collection

### **Week two**

- Conducted first observations of students during peer reading, recording field notes
- Child debriefing

### **Week three**

- Conducted second observations of students during peer reading, recording field notes
- Child debriefing

### **Week four**

- Conducted second observations of students during peer reading, recording field notes
- Child debriefing

### **Week five**

- Conducted second observations of students during peer reading, recording field notes
- Child debriefing

### **Week six**

- Finished observations, followed by student debriefing
- Started coding and reflecting on my observation field notes
- Listened/watched audio/video tapes to start transcribing student conversations

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

As a teacher-researcher I ensured my research design is valid. This qualitative study was designed to help me, and other future teachers when designing and structuring peer reading in their own classrooms. Due to the length of this study, prolonged engagement helped lead to the reliability of this study. My role during this study was to be a participant-observer. This study was conducted over a six week period in which I made observations at least two times a week. I also used a triangulation of data, which is a method to check and establish validity by analyzing research questions from multiple perspectives, and using a variety of data collections and strategies. I also used interviews, observations, and audio/video recordings to document data. Throughout this study I engaged in participant debriefing after observations. This gave me a chance to check in with students after my observations



as a way to check my interpretations of the observation with the perception of the participants of the study to increase the validity of my findings. As a researcher when I analyzed my data I looked for multiple ways to interpret my data which let me look at the data from a different perspective than my own. When working with students I also used the same language and terminology as the teacher to create consistency. I also included a detailed description of my participants, as well as the context for this study so that other researchers will be able to make their own realizations. As for the research process, I made it clear and detailed so that any other researcher will be able to read my study and be able to reenact it in the same manner as I did. When describing the outcomes from the study I used examples from my data to show that my findings are confirmable.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Throughout this study there were some limitations. Due to this study being qualitative in nature, the researcher's perspective could be a limitation. As the researcher I was unbiased, and I did not want my own perspective to taint my findings. There may, however, be some discrepancies with my interpretation of the data I collect. I tried to avoid this by using student debriefing and theoretical knowledge to help interpret my data. Another limitation could be that this study cannot be generalized to a large population outside of the one studied.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the types of talk students engage in when peer reading, and if these types of talk lead to literacy development. In order to gain a better understanding of this I interviewed teachers to see how they set up peer reading, and if they find it to be an effective strategy to use in the classroom. I also observed students when they are engaged in peer reading for six weeks. During both the interviews, and observations I recorded data in a double entry journal as well as using video recordings. As a result of this study I gained better insights about peer reading, and whether it is an effective strategy to use in my future classroom.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality and nature of the social interactions that take place during peer reading and its impact on literacy learning. As a teacher it is critical to support students' literacy development in order for them to have success in school. Research has shown that children use talk to facilitate their own learning and to construct meaning with others (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). Learning is directly influenced by social interactions; students and learn skills and construct understanding when engaging with others (Vygotsky, 1986).

When answering my first research question: How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading, I discovered key themes from my data analysis that allowed me to be able to answer the question. When students were engaged in peer reading I found they would talk about the text. I found that students mainly talked about the text to help support each other in jointly making meaning of the text. When students were reading together they also made connections to themselves or other books they have read, and using their background knowledge to help enhance their understanding of the text. When students were interacting together I discovered three different roles students took on during peer reading. The three different roles were labeled as the collaborator, the leader, and the performer. During peer reading students also used play as a type of social interaction.

To answer my second research question: How might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction, I also I discovered key themes from

my data analysis that allowed me to be able to answer the question. When students were engaged in peer reading they would scaffold each other's learning by supporting each other when reading and discussing texts. Peer reading also was a motivational method for students to engage in reading.

The impact of using peer reading in the classroom to foster literacy development became evident through my analysis of observations, field notes, interviews, and audio transcriptions. Students enjoyed the time they could share their thoughts and ideas with others about specific texts they were reading. Peer reading provided students with opportunities to explore texts in a fun and meaningful social setting which allowed them to scaffold their literacy learning.

## **Research Results**

### **Research Question #1: How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading?**

The type of student talk varied among students, and was dependent on the situation they were in, who they were reading with, and the book which they were reading. The role of talk can be seen as a way of developing children's meaningful interactions with text (King, 2001). When children are working collaboratively it leads to new understandings. The key to social learning is the capacity for imitating and developing higher mental functions because most of what we learn is learned through interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1986).

In my research I primarily found that students talked about content-based material, and engaged in social talk. When students were engaged in discussions

about text they also made connections to other books and used their background knowledge which can aid in a student's comprehension of the text. Students also incorporated play during reading by acting out characters, or by singing the words of the text. Students' talk and engagement with peer reading was categorized into three different categories: the collaborator, the leader, and the performer.

### **Talk about Text**

The talk students engaged in during peer reading took shape in various ways. At times students would talk about the text in order to clarify the meaning; they would make personal connections to the text and use their background knowledge. Students learn from talking to others about what they are reading by supporting each other. I found this type of talk to be closely related to what Mercer (2000) referred to as exploratory talk. Exploratory talk is when students are engaged in co-reasoning and joint construction of meaning of the text. Students engage critically but constructively with each others' ideas (Mercer, 2000). Exploratory talk can be identified when students are using the words "because," "if," and "why" (Mercer, 2000). I observed this type of talk as being primarily used as a way for students to collaboratively construct meaning of the text they were reading.

During a discussion on 5/28/2014 Anna and Ryan were reading a book called *The Happy Egg*. The following conversation took place after Anna and Ryan finished reading the book and Anna was trying to help Ryan clarify his misconception of the hatching of an egg.

Anna:	<i>The mom bird kept sitting on the egg and wanted it to hatch.</i>
Ryan:	<i>That was not the mom, because the mom had blue feathers.</i>
Anna:	<i>Yes it was. The mom bird sits on the egg and waits for the egg to hatch.</i>
Ryan:	<i>Do all mom birds sit on their eggs before they hatch?</i>
Anna:	<i>Yes. That is how they keep them warm.</i>

During this conversation Ryan was confused about who was sitting on the egg in the story. Anna clarified this by stating it was the mother bird who was sitting on the egg to keep it warm until it hatches. This excerpt was an example of students using exploratory talk when talking about the text. Anna was able to help Ryan make meaning of the text, as well as giving him a real life application of the process of how an egg hatches and a chick is born. Anna and Ryan were able to engage in co-reasoning to help each other make meaning of the text by sharing their ideas. Without Anna's explanation Ryan would not have understood why the bird who was sitting on the egg in the story had to be the mother bird. Anna was able to show Ryan how you can use your background knowledge of a topic to help you when you are reading. All students have different levels of knowledge about different topics. Students can make better sense about what they are reading when they already know something about the content. When students can link new information with their prior knowledge it can give reading a sense of purpose. Since Ryan did not have any background knowledge about how an egg hatches it was beneficial to have Anna as his partner to help share her knowledge to help him make sense of the story.

On 6/18/2014 Sam and Nate were reading the book *The Magic Tree house: Carnival at Candlelight*. In this discussion Sam was reading when Nate interjected with a comment that needed clarification from his partner Sam.

Sam:	<i>(Reading) Oh, great! Said Jack. He took the little book from her. It was damp from the floodwaters, but all the writing was as clear as ever.</i>
Nate:	<i>They found the book of rhythms! Now maybe they can use it to get home.</i>
Sam:	<i>It's not a book of rhythms. It's a book of magic rhymes. Remember they say different rhymes like when they wanted to turn into ducks.</i>
Nate:	<i>So they all rhyme?</i>
Sam:	<i>No they use the magical rhymes to help them when they are on their mission. But they can only use them when they really need them if they get into trouble.</i>

During this discussion Sam helped Nate clarify what the purpose the book of rhymes served and how it was used in the story. This helped Nate to make meaning of what they were reading. Nate will be able to use this information while continuing to read the book as well as make adjustments based on his previous reading of the book. Sam was able to clarify Nate's misconception about what the book of rhymes was by telling him what it was and also by giving him an example of how the characters used the book previously in the story. The reason why Nate was unclear about the book of rhymes was about was because he was saying the word rhythms instead of rhymes. His partner was able to correct and clarify his misconception for him, which would

have gone unnoticed if Nate was reading independently. This shows that reading with a peer can lead to better understanding of a text when given opportunities to talk with another student. Sam was also able to share and explain to Nate what the book of rhymes was and how the characters used the book in the story. This was also an example of exploratory talk because the two students were able to collaborate to make joint construction of the meaning of the text.

### **Making Connections and use of Background Knowledge**

Being able to use background knowledge and making connections to the text helps students to enhance their understanding of the text. It also allows students to make connections to their own lives to help understand characters, events and plots when reading. If students are reading something that is familiar to them they can make connections to their own lives, and other books they have read.

During a discussion on 6/19/14 Mary and Joe had just finished reading the book *The Ugly Duckling*. Mary and Joe pointed out self-to-text connections between the character in the book and their own lives.

Joe:	<i>It reminds me of when my little brother was born he did not have the same eyes as me, but then they changed.</i>
Mary:	<i>That's like me! When I was born my hair was blonde, but it changed and now I have brown hair like my mom.</i>
Joe:	<i>So when the ugly duckling was born he looked different and then changed when he got older like you, and my brother!</i>



This conversation shows how Mary and Joe were able to use their prior knowledge to make meaningful connections to the characters and events that took place in the story to help gain insight into the story. Mary and Joe were able to use text-to-self connections to help make meaning of how a person or animal can change in appearance from when you they are born and when they get older. They were also able to make connections with each other. The more connections students make with each other the more they will realize their peers are not so different from themselves.

On 6/19/14 Jack and Brittany were reading the book *Red and I Visit the Vet*. In the following discussion Jack and Brittany make connections between the book and their own lives by using their background knowledge.

Jack:	<i>(Reading) Today we need to take Red to the vet.</i>
Brittany:	<i>I had to go with my dad to take our dog to the vet, but her name is Molly.</i>
Jack:	<i>My dad had to bring our dog Charlie to the vet, but he was very sick. He had to leave him there, and he did not come home. I hope Red is ok and they don't leave him there.</i>
Brittany:	<i>When I went with my dad he told me Molly was there to see the vet just like how I go to the doctor. The vet helps animals.</i>

In this conversation both Jack and Brittany were able to use their prior knowledge of taking their dogs to the vet to make connections to the text. When students have

background knowledge about the topic they are reading about it creates a bridge to the new text they are reading. Brittany and Jack showed how they made connections between the story they were reading and their real life in order to support their understanding of the text and to make it meaningful to them.

In these examples students were working collaboratively to make sense of the text by connecting the story to themselves and making the reading meaningful to them. Students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the text when they are able to make connections to the text. It is important for students to know how to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences to be able to connect with the text they are reading. Some students may not be proficient in making connections to texts, and need to learn how to use it as a strategy when reading. When reading with a partner they could model this strategy for each other. In the example with Mary and Joe, Joe first made a text-to-self connection to the book *The Ugly Duckling*. After Joe made his connection it looked like a light bulb went off and Mary said “That’s like me!” If Mary had been reading this book independently she may not have made this connection without Joe first sharing his connection and prompting her think of her own connection to the text. By sharing these connections with each other it also made them realize that they have something in common with each other. These observations of students talk provided me with insights about how students can work together collaboratively and make connections with the text to help them construct meaning.

## **Peer Reading Roles**

During peer reading I discovered three different roles students would engage in during peer reading. Each student's role would depend on the circumstance and the partner they were reading with. For instance the same student may not always take on the same role with every person they read with. I labeled the three roles I discovered as the collaborator, the leader, and the performer.

### **The Collaborator**

The first role students engaged in was labeled as the collaborator. This role is characterized by students who wanted to work together, and would work cooperatively with others. They would participate in turn taking when reading, whether they took turns reading pages, or by choral reading. They would also work with their partners to pick out which book to read together, or take turns picking a book to read. When reading together they would sit close to their partners with the book on both of their laps so they could both see the book equally. They equally took part in discussions and allowing their partners to share their thoughts and feelings well. They would also assist their partners when reading as needed. For example if their partner was stuck on a word they would support them by decoding the word.

An example of a student in this role is apparent during a conversation on 6/12/14 between Carla and Joe:

Carla:	<i>What books do you have in your book box?</i>
Joe:	<i>I have this book (pulling out the book <i>The Happy Egg</i>). Do you want to read this one?</i>
Carla:	<i>Sure. You can start.</i>
Joe:	<i>Ok. There was a little little bird.</i>
Carla:	<i>It was just born and still was an egg.</i>

This example showed how the two students cooperated when working together. Carla and Joe both cooperatively decided on a book to read together, and took turns reading pages of the book. During and after their reading both Carla and Joe continued to collaborate by equally participating in conversations and discussions. They both seemed to value each other's opinions and let each other have opportunities to share their thoughts. This led to both students to successfully work as collaborators. When students collaborate they are working together in order to learn something together by sharing each other's ideas and skills.

On 6/11/14 Jillian and Olivia were reading the book *How to grow a Hyacinth/Sunflower*. While the two girls were reading they had a conversation about the text in which they both were equal participants.

Jillian:	(Pointing to the picture ) <i>I planted a sunflower like this at school.</i>
Olivia:	<i>I have sunflowers at home too, and a vegetable garden.</i>
Jillian:	<i>I don't have a vegetable garden, but my grandma does.</i>
Olivia:	(Pointing to the picture) <i>This is how big my sunflower is. How big is yours?</i>
Jillian:	<i>I think mine is not that big.</i>

This example showed how the two students equally participated in a discussion about the text. Each student had opportunities to share their thoughts with each other, while also giving their partner opportunities to share their own thoughts. When sharing their thoughts and ideas each student made sure they valued each other's ideas.

On 6/19/14 Ben and James were reading the big book *The Jigaree*. Instead of taking turns reading page by page Ben and James choral read.

Ben:	<i>Can we read <i>The Jigaree</i>?</i>
James:	<i>That's my favorite. Can we read it together like we did before?</i>
Ben:	<i>Yes!</i>
Ben and James:	(Reading together) <i>I can see a Jigaree. It is jumping after me.</i>  <i>Jumping here, jumping there, jigarees jump everywhere.</i>  <i>I can see a jigaree. It is dancing after me.</i>  <i>Dancing here, dancing there, jigarees dance everywhere.</i>

This excerpt shows how together Ben and James chose a book to read, and decided they wanted to read it together (choral read). It also shows how they decided as partners that they would read the book together as they had previously done in class. Ben and James read with great expression. They were also using a big book in which they laid out in front of both of them on the floor so they could equally see the book.

When students are engaged in this role both students are working together as collaborators. When students are reading together they are either taking turns reading or choral reading so that they each are engaged in the reading process. They are both getting an equal amount of time reading, and they are both equally involved during discussions. When both students are engaged in conversations and discussions when reading it can lead to them helping each other scaffold their learning and create joint meaning of the text. Students took into consideration their partner's opinions when picking books, how to read the book, and during their discussions. During their discussions they also valued each other's thoughts and ideas which can lead to a more open discussion. These discussions also seemed to lead students to share their knowledge with each other to help each other make meaning of the text.

### **The Leader**

The second role students engaged in was labeled as the leader. In this role one partner would be the boss of the other. When a student took on this role they wanted to make the decisions for both them and their partner. This was categorized by the student picking what books they would read with their partners, or they wanted to do

most of the reading themselves. They might also want to dominate the conversation, limiting the discussion between themselves and their partner. They also wanted to be in control; for example if their partner did not know a word they would jump right in and tell them what the word was instead of letting them figure it out on their own or by supporting them by helping them use reading strategies.

An example of a student in this role is apparent during a conversation on 6/11/14 between Laura and Jessica. As soon as Laura and Jessica sat in their reading spot, Laura took charge of the situation.

Laura:	<i>Ok. Let's read this book</i> (taking the book <i>Weather Today</i> out of her book box).
Jessica:	<i>I have that book, how about we read this one</i> (pointing to the book <i>I can't sleep</i> in Laura's book box).
Laura:	<i>No, this one is my favorite.</i> (Said while she has already opened the book, and begins to read).  (Reading) <i>I looked outside and it is going to be sunny today</i> (She then flips the page and continues to read the next page as well).  <i>I stepped outside..</i>
Jessica:	<i>It's my turn to read. We have to take turns reading.</i>
Laura:	<i>Well I already started reading that page. You can read the next one</i> (and continued to read the next page).  (Reading) <i>I stepped outside to see what the weather will be.</i>

This example shows how Laura took the role of leader. She wanted to pick the book she and her partner would read, as well as trying to read more than one page without giving her partner a chance to read. When in this role the student wants to be in charge, as well as doing most of the work.

The following example shows Tori and Allison reading the book *Our Sandcastle* on 6/18/14.

Tori:	Have you ever built a sandcastle before?
Allsion:	Yes, I-
Tori:	I went on vacation to Florida and I build a HUGE sandcastle.
Allison:	I built a really big sand castle too before.
Tori:	The one I built was really big.
Allison:	How-
Tori:	My dad said it was the biggest one he's ever seen.

This excerpt shows Tori and Allison who were reading and discussing a book together in which one student dominated the conversation. When Allison would try to engage in the discussion Tori would either cut her off or ignore her comments. This shows that she was not very interested in what her partner had to say, but wanted to share her story only. This limited the discussion the two students could have had together.



In this example Max and Carly are reading the book *Over in the Meadow* on 6/18/14.

Max:	(Reading )Where the s-st-
Carly:	<i>Stream. Where the stream runs blue.</i>
Max:	(Rereads sentence) Where the stream runs blue.
Carly:	<i>Streams are made of water.</i>
Max:	<i>I know that.</i>

This shows Carly in the role of the leader. When Max comes to a word he does not know instead of giving him adequate time to try and figure out the word she jumps right in and tells him the word. When telling him the word stream she said it as she was exasperated, and couldn't wait any longer for him to try and sound it out. Max went back and reread the sentence after Carly did, but before he could move on she told him that streams are made of water. Max was not unclear about the meaning of the word, but Carly wanted him to know that not only did she know what the word was but she also knows the meaning. Carly could have shared insights into strategies that Max could have used to help him decode the word, but she wanted him to know she knew what the word was and what it meant.

When students are in this role they want to be in control. They want to pick which books to read, how the book will be read, and tend to want to dominate the conversation. This can lead their partner to not feel comfortable. It can also lead their

partner to feel frustrated when the partner in control will not even take into consideration any of their ideas about what books to read, how to read it, and during their discussions together. After awhile they may tend to just give up and not participate. During their discussions, if only one student wants to dominate the conversation it defeats the purpose of peer reading. The students will not benefit if they are not discussing the text to help each other in making joint construction of the text. Students will also not benefit from having their partners decode words for them without giving them a chance to try themselves. If a student gets stuck on a work their partner should be modeling strategies to use to solve the word. A student in this role is not benefiting themselves or their partner. They are taking away the advantages of using peer reading in the classroom.

### **The Performer**

The third role students engaged in was labeled as the performer. This role is characterized by the student who when reading would concentrate on the presentation of the reading. I noticed that sometimes the reader would be so involved with the presentation of reading and acting out that they did not pay much attention to the content they were reading and did not comprehend a lot of what they read. They would use voice, body language, and facial gestures when they were reading. In some instances they would be performing for their peer, or acting silly to get their peer's attention.

An example of a student who was engaged in performer role was apparent on 6/4/14 when Jackie and Aiden were reading the book *Walking Through the Jungle*. When Aiden was reading “What do you see? I think I see a lion, Roar! Roar! Roar!” He read with a deep voice as if acting as though he was the lion. He also made his hands into claws and was scratching at the air like a lion. Jackie laughed, and then continued to read the next page “Chasing after me, chasing after me.” As Jackie was reading this Aiden then leapt towards her as if chasing her. Aiden continued to use his voice and use body language to depict the rest of the animals mention in the book.

Another example of a student in the role of the performer can be seen on 5/28/14 when Laura and Marissa were reading the book *Over in the Meadow*. When the two students were reading this book together instead of taking turns reading the story page by page they choral read the book together. When students are engaged in choral reading they read the book in unison. Instead of reading the words they sang the words of the text together. At times they would be laughing while singing together.

A third example can be seen when Todd and Marissa were reading the book *The Hungry Giant* on 6/11/14.

Todd:	<i>When we read let's read like the giant!</i>
Marissa:	<i>No, I don't want to.</i>
Todd:	<i>What if I pretend I am the giant and you can read the other parts?</i>
Marissa:	<i>Ok.</i>
Todd:	(Reading) I WANT SOME BREAD! Roared the giant. GET ME SOME BREAD OR I'LL HIT YOU WITH MY BOMMY-KNOCKER.
Marissa:	(Reading) So the people ran and got the giant some bread.
Todd:	(Reading) I WANT SOME BUTTER! Roared the giant. GET ME SOME BUTTER OR I'LL HIT YOU WITH MY BOMMY-KNOCKER.
Marissa:	(Reading) So the people ran and got the giant some butter.

In this excerpt it shows how Todd and Marissa decide they want to read the book after they decided together on a book they wanted to read. Todd wanted to read the book by having both of them taking turns reading pages but reading as how the giant would talk. Marissa said she did not want to do that so Todd suggested that he read the part of the giant while Marissa would be the narrator. When Todd read he read in a deep and low growl of a voice to portray how he thought the giant would sound like. He also used facial and body language as he was reading as well to help play the part of the giant.

## **How Student Roles are Affected by Different Contexts**

As seen in my analysis student roles may vary depending on who they are partnered with, or what books they are reading. In the above examples I showed two excerpts involving the student Marissa. In the first example when Marissa and Laura were reading the book *Over the Meadow* she seemed excited to be able to sing the book along with her partner. They had fun singing along and laughing, and they were even bouncing around. The next example Marissa and Todd were reading the book *The Hungry Giant*. In this case Todd asked Marissa if when they were reading the book they could act out the characters in the story. Marissa politely declined, but she did agree to read the narrative parts of the story. Part of the change in roles that Marissa showed could be due to the fact that she felt more comfortable when she was reading with Laura than she was with Todd. People tend to be more apt to step outside the box or to be more outgoing when they feel comfortable with the people they are with. Another reason could be the book choice. It could be a possibility that she really liked the book she read with Laura, and was not particularly interested in the one she chose to read with Todd. Or it could be that she was more familiar with the book *Over the Meadow* and felt comfortable using play when reading that book. If she had never read *The Hungry Giant* before maybe she did not feel comfortable incorporating play during a cold read. It could also be that she was more comfortable singing along with someone versus reading in a different voice by herself to someone else. There are a lot of factors that could have affected the roles Marissa decided to take on in different contexts.

### **Using play as a type of social interaction**

During peer reading students would use play as a type of social interaction. I noted on several occasions students who used using play during peer reading. Using play kept them engaged with not only the text, but with each other as well. This gave students opportunities to explore the literature in different ways. During my observations I noted students who were acting out the characters of the book by using voice, facial expressions, and body gestures. Other students chose to read their books by singing the words.

On 5/29/14 Ben and Anna were looking through the different big books that were available for them to read. They came across the book *The Little Red Hen*, and Anna said “Let’s read this book so we can play the characters using our hats.” The two students then went over to the table where all of the students’ hats were to find their hats they had made earlier that week. The hats were made of construction paper and depicted several different characters from the book. Once it was on their heads they could spin the hat to portray the different characters as they read. The students then decided which characters they would play. Before starting to read Ben said to Anna “Now make sure you read like the characters.” Both Ben and Anna took turns reading their parts and read with great expression and changed their voices for the different characters. They also used facial expressions and body movements to help them act out the characters.

On 5/28/14 Sarah and Lily were reading the book *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*. After they brought their book to their reading spot, Lily asked Sarah if they could sing

along to the book. Sarah who said “Yes!” seemed very excited about this, and went and grabbed a pointer. As Sarah pointed to the words they sang “Little Rabbit Foo Foo riding through the forest. Scooping up the field mice and bopping them on the head.” When they sang about Little Rabbit Foo Foo bopping the field mice on the head Lily turned to Sarah and mocked bopping her on the head. The girls giggled, and continued to sing the rest of the story and using their body language to help act out the text.

A third example can be seen when Todd and Marissa were reading the book *The Hungry Giant* on 6/11/14.

Todd:	(Reading) I WANT SOME BREAD! Roared the giant. GET ME SOME BREAD OR I’LL HIT YOU WITH MY BOMMY-KNOCKER.
Marissa:	(Reading) So the people ran and got the giant some bread.
Todd:	(Reading)I WANT SOME BUTTER! Roared the giant. GET ME SOME BUTTER OR I’LL HIT YOU WITH MY BOMMY-KNOCKER.
Marissa:	(Reading) So the people ran and got the giant some butter.

In this excerpt Todd suggested that he read the part of the giant while Marissa would be the narrator since she did not want to act out the characters in the book. When Todd read he read in a deep and low growl of a voice to portray how he thought the giant would sound like. He also used facial and body language as he was reading as well to help play the part of the giant. This example shows that not all students were

comfortable incorporating play when engaging in peer reading. In this example Todd was still able to incorporate play while Marissa engaged in the reading process. By having Todd read the part of the giant and Marissa reading as the narrator created a situation where both students felt comfortable.

Either way incorporating play during peer reading kept the students engaged in reading by keeping their interest in the book. The students were still engaged in the reading process, and were able to make the reading meaningful and enjoyable. Students were excited to act out characters, or sing when reading books. In one example students used hats as props to take on different characters from the story. When students act out the different characters it brings them to life. Students also added facial, and body gestures which enabled students to visualize the story. This helped students to increase their ability to understand the text by acting out the different characters of the story. When students were singing the words of the text it enabled students to choral read which can lead to increased fluency.

Incorporating play kept students interest in the text as well as aiding in making meaning of what they are reading, but it also helped students to keep engaged with each other. It enabled students to interact with each other in different ways. When reading I noticed there was a lot of giggling, and laughing between partners. They would be more animated by trying to act out the characters which involved the students making facial gestures, or body movements. When reading there never seemed to be a dull moment when the students were searching for something to say



they always seemed to be engaged with the text. This type of interaction between peers can lead to an increase in reading motivation.

## **Summary**

Students interacted and engaged in a variety of different ways during peer reading. During discussions children were found talking about the text to help each other make meaning of the text. They also used their background knowledge to make connections to the text to make the reading meaningful to them, and to gain a deeper understanding of the text. When students were engaged in peer reading they also took on different roles depending on the context they were in. Students also incorporated play which enabled them to keep engaged with their partner and text.

### **Research Question #2: How might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction?**

#### **The Use of Reading Strategies to Scaffold Student Learning**

Placing students in pairs when reading enables students to help scaffold each other's learning. Students were able to provide support for each other when reading and discussing texts. During one of my interviews with a teacher whose classroom I observed in I asked her if she thought peer reading was an effective strategy in her classroom. Her response was that "Peer reading helps students to become more independent readers who do not have to rely on the teacher as much." Peer reading is based on modeling, and encouragement from peers rather than the teacher actively

teaching. Listed below are examples of how students who were engaged in peer reading can help scaffold each other's learning in a co learning environment.

On 6/4/14 Carrie and Joshua were reading the book *The Magic Tree House: Carnival at Candlelight*. When Ryan was reading he came to an unfamiliar word, he started to sound out the first letter and then guessed at what the word could be and continued to finish reading the sentence. Below is the conversation that followed:

Carrie:	(Reading) <i>Behind him was a three p-pr-prompt fishing spear.</i>
Joshua:	<i>No. That does not make sense. You have to go back and read it again.</i>
Carrie:	(Reading ) <i>Behind him was a three pr-prong-pronged fishing spear.</i>  <i>What is a three pronged fishing spear?</i>
Joshua:	<i>Um, a fishing spear is used to hunt fish, maybe it has three points?</i>

This conversation is an example showing how students can support each other when reading in pairs. Joshua noticed right away that when Carrie was reading it did not make sense and had stopped him. He then prompted her to go back and reread the sentence. Carrie then went back and reread the sentence and sounded the word out. After she reread the sentence she was unsure what a three pronged fishing spear was and she asked Joshua if he knew what it was. Joshua enabled Carrie by helping her to make meaning of what she was reading. It could also teach her a reading strategy to remember when her reading does not make sense to go back and try rereading the sentence again.

On 6/11/14 Annie and Sarah were reading the book *Our Sandcastle*. While Annie was reading she came to a word he did not know. Below is the conversation that followed after she attempted to solve the word:

Annie:	(Reading) <i>Our castle needs some t-towels.</i>
Sarah:	(Pointing to the word) <i>That does not say towels; look at the picture</i> (points to the picture).
Annie:	<i>Oh, towers. Just like in Tangled, she was stuck in a tower in a castle.</i>

In this discussion Sarah helps Annie by drawing her attention that she needs to go back and look at the word towels. She does so by prompting her to look at the picture to help her figure out what the word is. By doing this she has shown her a strategy in which she shows her you can use picture clues to help her decode words in the text. Annie was also able to make a connection which helps her make meaning of the word tower.

The following example took place on 6/4/14 when Sarah and Jane were reading the book *Zookeepers*.

Sarah:	(Reading) Zookeepers make meals for the animals.
Jane:	<i>No, they don't make meals for the animals. Mrs. Jenny said you should go back and read it again. Like this</i> (points to beginning of sentence and pretends to read it) <i>Go ahead.</i>
Sarah:	(Reading) Zookeepers make me- oh meals for the animals.  <i>Just like my mom does!</i>

When Sarah was reading Jane noticed that something she had read did not make sense. She directed and modeled for her partner to go back and reread the sentence again to see if it made sense. After going back to the sentence Sarah noticed right away that the word was meals, and not males. She then made a text-to-self connection to help make meaning of the text.

During peer reading the students modeled and demonstrated several reading strategies when working with their peers. When working in pairs one partner may be more knowledgeable in figuring out difficult words, and can support their partner by offering to assist them in decoding words when they get stuck. Students were able to scaffold each other by helping them use different strategies in order to decode words and make sense of the book they were reading. When students model reading strategies they are not just giving each other the answers but supporting them to figure out how to solve it on their own. This is why talk is an important factor during peer reading and for the students' reading process. Different students may use different strategies when decoding words but peer reading allows students to pool both students knowledge of reading strategies while engaging with the text. Some of these students may even have learned new strategies to use the next time they are reading and get stuck on a word. When interviewing one of the teachers about if she has noticed any developments in students' literacy development as a result of peer reading she replied "Because of peer reading I have noticed an increase of usage of a

repertoire of reading strategies. I love this strategy because the children not only learn from each other, but they discuss stories to work on their comprehension, and upon occasion work on fluency together when they choral read together.” The increase in reading strategies can be transferred to when they are reading independently, and will help them to become independent readers. Through the student’s social interactions and talk it seemed that learning can be social and their talk seemed to be an important factor in their learning to read.

### **Using Peer Reading as a Motivational Method**

There are many factors that can contribute to a student’s reading motivation. Collaboration is one strategy to use to enhance reading motivation. Peer reading allows students to share their ideas, and to learn from each other. Students like when they are given opportunities to talk with their peers. Incorporating play in peer reading is also highly motivating to students. During peer reading students are also given opportunities with their partners to choose which books they would like to read.

On 5/29/14 after Ben and Anna finished reading the book *The Little Red Hen* (mentioned under play as social motivation), they put the book back on the shelf and went to search for a new book to read. Mark and Lucas who were reading another book quickly noticed and ran over and grabbed the book off the shelf and went searching for their own hats they made. They were so excited as they sat down and when discussing who would act out which characters. While reading the book Mark and Lucas also used different voices to depict each character they were acting out. After they had finished reading the book they went over to their teacher and Lucas

asked “Are there and other books like Little Red Hen that me and Mark can read?”

This shows that using play when reading can be motivating and engaging to students when reading.

On 6/19/14 Olivia and Rachel were looking through the books trying to figure out which book they wanted to read. They came across the book *The Leaves are Falling One by One*. Olivia said to Rachel “Can we please please read this book? Mary and I read it last week and we sang, it was so much fun!” Rachel responded by saying “Ooh ok. That does sound like fun!” Olivia then went over and grabbed a pointer in which she used to point along to the words as they were singing the words. Both girls were sitting on their knees with the book on the carpet in front of them. The girls not only sang along, Rachel was also clapping along while bouncing on her knees.

On 6/18/14 Adam and Nate were deciding looking through the big books to decide which book they wanted to read. They came across the book *Leaping Frogs* and Nate said to Adam “I love frogs! I have a pond near my house and there are always frogs in my yard.” Nate responded “Did you know that frogs start off as tadpoles?” Adam replied with “Yes. I have seen them. Let’s read this book.” As the boys were reading the book they were having a discussion about how frogs breathe and Nate pretended as though he was breathing like a tadpole when their gills close and coming to the surface for air.

Motivation plays a strong role in reading engagement. Reading motivation is when a student's intention to read a text in specific situations. Student's attitude towards reading affects their reading behavior. Engaging texts are important to have in the classroom to engage readers' interests, and provide enjoyment. In all of the above examples students seemed excited to engage and interact with text. In the examples above it shows that by letting students engage in play during reading can be highly motivating. Incorporating play during peer reading can increase students' engagement with the text and each other. It can make reading more meaningful and enjoyable. Incorporating play during reading can increase students' ability to understand the text.

Another way to motivate readers is to provide texts that are of interest to them. As indicated above students may be highly motivated to read because of an interest in a particular topic. When Adam and Nate were looking through books to decide what to read the book about frogs immediately caught their attention. Before they even began reading they discussed their background knowledge about frogs showing they were interested and already has some previous knowledge about them. This caused them both to agree and want to read the book to find out what else they could learn about frogs. When Olivia and Rachel were deciding on a book to read they made their choice based on how they could interact with the book. They chose to read *The Leaves are Falling One by One* because Olivia told Rachel that they could sing along to the book. That seemed to motivate both girls to want to read the book.

Providing books that students can interact with in different ways can also be engaging to students.

## **Summary**

Peer reading did have an impact on literacy development through the use of social interaction. During discussions with each other students were able to help scaffold their learning. Students were able to assist each other when coming to an unknown word by helping them to use different strategies to solve the word. They also assisted each other with making meaning of the text using co-reasoning. Peer reading was also highly motivational for students. Students were engaged in the reading as well as each other. Students seemed to enjoy their time being able to read and discuss books with a peer.

The purpose of this study was to study the quality and the nature of the social interactions during peer reading and its impact on literacy learning. As a result of this study I found that when students were engaged in peer reading students focused their talk about talking about the text. Students were also able to make connections with each other, other books they have read, or the world. This helped students to be able to make meaning while reading through discussions with each other. Students were also able to incorporate play as a type of social interaction. When engaged in peer reading students also took on various roles. I also found that students helped scaffold each other's learning by supporting each other during reading and discussions with



each other. Peer reading was also found to be highly engaging and motivating for students.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the quality and nature of the interactions that took place during peer reading and its relation to students' literacy learning. I focused on what kinds of talk students engaged in during peer reading over a six-week period. I also focused on students' social interactions with each other during peer reading and whether these factors had any relation to literacy learning.

During this study, I explored the following research questions:

1. How do children interact and engage in discussions during peer reading?
2. How might peer reading impact literacy development through social interaction?

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions I have made based on the research I conducted. I describe the ways in which students benefit from the findings of this study. I also describe ways in which my own teaching can be affected as a result from this study. In conclusion, I make recommendations for further research based on my topic of research.

## Conclusions

### **Students' talk during peer reading involved conversations that were meaningful and helped students to make meaning of the text**

When students were engaged in peer reading students sought to make meaning or to enhance their understanding of the text through talk. Barnes and Todd (1995) examined the role of talk and found that meaning was open to exchange and was developed during peers' collaborations which resulted in the reconstruction of knowledge. Brown (2006) stated that children learn naturally by interacting with each other, and can be supported by allowing students time for talk in the classroom. By giving students time to have discussions with another peer during reading allowed students the opportunity to have discussions about the text they are reading by asking questions and together making meaning of the text.

The students' conversations during peer reading involved students making meaningful connections while applying their background knowledge to assist students to help each other make meaning of the text. Connections included making connections between texts, between one's self and the text, as well as the text to the world. Dudley-Marling and Searle (1991) stated that through talk students are able to bring their own experiences while learning together by using language to construct and shape their views of the world. When students use their background knowledge to make connections to the reading it can enhance their understanding of the text.

### **Students used play as a type of social interaction during peer reading**

When students were engaged in peer reading, students would use play as a type of social interaction. A child acquires language through social interactions with their peers and this is the means through which meaning is constructed (Chapman, 2000). Vygotsky's (1978) view of play is that it involves the social use of making meaning by allowing students to use their imagination. Children develop an understanding of the world they live in through the medium of play (Vygotsky, 1978). Children's play seems to aim at understanding the meaning of books, in personal inquiry events that they used for exploring their own questions about the world (Roskos, & Christie, 2007).

Using play kept students motivated and engaged with the text, and with each other. By using play students were able to explore the text in different ways that led to an increase in motivation and for literacy learning. During my observations I noted students would act out the characters while reading by using voice, facial expressions, and body gestures. Other students would sing along with their book by singing all the words. Play offered a variety of opportunities for children to make connections to the text. These opportunities to make connections to the text helped students to jointly construct meaning. When students acted out characters in a text it brought them to life, and helped students visualize the story and make meaning of the text.

### **Students help scaffold each other's learning during peer reading**

During peer reading students were able to help scaffold each other's learning by providing support for each other when reading and discussing texts. During peer

reading students were able to help assist students by modeling and helping them to decode unknown words. Students also assisted students by scaffolding them to understanding the meaning of words. Talk supported students by helping them to resolve word difficulties by sounding out words together, using picture clues, or by telling each other the unknown word.

Through social interactions with each other the students were able to scaffold their partners when they reached a point of difficulty. When one student was having trouble comprehending or making sense of what they were reading their partner would make a contribution to the discussion to help their partner understand the text. Griffin (2002) found that during peer reading peers put themselves in a position to scaffold one another. Classrooms should be designed to allow space, time, and opportunities to share literacy assisting strategies (Griffin, 2002).

### **Implications for Student Learning**

#### **Students take ownership of their learning, and become more independent readers**

When students are engaged in peer reading they are learning how to take ownership of their learning, and to become more independent readers. When teachers are meeting with small groups students need to be able to independently complete tasks. When students execute skills of independence they have been taught, teachers are free to then use this time to focus on working with small groups or on instruction (Bouschey & Moser, 2006). When students are not able to work independently, it can be challenging for a teacher to run and maintain a balanced literacy block. Within a

balanced literacy block students are required to be independent as they read and write either by themselves, with a peer, or within small groups. To enable students to become independent readers and to take ownership over their learning teachers must first provide guided practice and scaffolding. Boushey and Moser stated that guided practice enables teachers to gradually help students build behaviors that can be sustained over time so that students can be trusted to manage on their own (2006).

The way peer reading was set up in both of the classrooms I observed was that the teachers have structured their classrooms to be student-driven. Students were in control of picking their partners, where to sit, and which books to read. When they were reading with their peers they chose how to read the book, and how their discussions took shape. Students did not seem to rely on the teacher to do what they were capable of doing on their own. During peer reading students knew what was expected of them and got right to the task, and were able to stay on task with minimal direction from the teacher. This gave teachers time to work with small groups for either conferencing or guided reading groups. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), students are capable of being independent, managing their own learning, and following their own interests. Providing peer reading in the classroom can lead students to become independent, take ownership of their learning, and to follow their own interests.

### **There is a positive impact on students' social and emotional development due to peer reading**

Due to peer reading students were able to grow both socially and emotionally. Peer reading helped students to be able to share their thoughts and opinions with their peers. They also learned that they could trust their peers to help support them when coming to unknown words or if they needed help when making meaning of the text. Students seemed to feel comfortable with each other when they were reading by asking for help when needed, or by letting their peer help them when they noticed they needed assistance.

Peer reading provided students with a supportive environment. Students were able to build relationships with their peers which they may not have done otherwise. Although students were able to choose their partners I noticed that the students did not always seem to choose the same student to read with but instead chose different students to work with. I never witnessed an occurrence when a student asked another student to be their partner and they made them feel uncomfortable. The students always seemed excited when choosing or getting called on to be someone's partner. This gave students the opportunity to work with a variety of their classmates, some in which they may not have had other opportunities to work with. When students had discussions about the books they were reading, a lot of students made connections to the book to help with their comprehension. These types of connections also lead students to make connections with each other as well. Friedland and Truesdell (2006) said that peer reading provided students with a supportive environment that did not

lead to competition amongst students or embarrassment, but rather created opportunities for all students to be successful. Peer reading is a way for students to connect to literacy as well as to develop relationships with others.

### **Peer reading leads to an increase in reading motivation**

Peer reading kept students highly engaged with the text and with each other. Boushey and Moser (2006) stated that choice is highly motivational to students and that it puts them in charge of their own learning. Letting students choose their reading partners and what books to choose when reading seemed to increase reading motivation in students. Not only did their reactions show me that they were excited when it was time to read with a peer or when choosing who to read with.

During the duration of time provided for peer reading students were engaged the whole time. Students were actively reading with their partners the whole time. Their discussions were also related to the book they were reading. The discussions students had were quality discussions that aided students to scaffold each other's learning and to help make meaning of what they were reading. I did not notice a lot of off topic conversations going on. Students seemed to enjoy this time to read and discuss books with each other and not to socialize.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

#### **Explicit instruction is essential for implementing peer reading**

Prior to introducing peer reading in the classroom I think it is important to first talk about what peer reading looks like and to model it to the class. According to



Boushey and Moser (2006) modeling is important, and teachers should model what the skill looks like when done properly. Teachers should model what peer reading should look and sound like. Teachers should not only model to students how they should sit during peer reading, but how students can choose books to read together. It is also important to show students different ways they can read the book together, and what their discussions should sound like. When explicitly teaching and practicing of these skills can have influences on the types and quality of interactions students have with their partners during peer reading. This will ensure success for all readers.

When students are engaged in peer reading teachers are usually working with small groups for guided reading or conferencing. It is important for students to know what is expected of them when engaged in peer reading, and also how to be independent and not relying heavily on the teacher so he/she can work with their small groups.

### **Encourage students to use their background knowledge to make connections during peer reading**

As teachers it is important for us to encourage students to use their background knowledge to make connections based on their prior experiences when they are reading with their peers. Enabling students to use their background knowledge while reading allows students to make connections with the text and with each other to help them better understand the text. Fountas and Pinnell (2009) stated that “When you prompt students to use what they know (background knowledge),

other books they have read (text knowledge), or their previous experiences, you are helping them use this knowledge to further their understanding of the text they are reading” (p.424).

Teachers should first model how to use this strategy with students so that students will not get off task during their discussions. It is important that students know how to make connections to the text without getting distracted and leading their discussions to get off-topic. Teachers can explain and model the different types of connections students can have to the text when reading. It is also important to share with students that sometimes when one student makes a connection it can lead to their partner making their own connection which can help them to make meaning of the text in their own way.

### **Offering choice during peer reading can be an important factor**

Throughout my study I was able to see how motivational providing choices to students were. Providing students with choices is highly engaging and puts students in charge of their own learning (Boushey & Moser, 2006). I think it is important to provide students with choices by letting students choose who they want to read with, and by letting them choose what books they want to read together. I think if the teacher chose who the students had to read with, and what book they had to read together, peer reading in their classroom would not have been as motivational or as successful as it was. According to Boushey and Moser, as a result of giving students choices in their classrooms they saw greater productivity, students completing quality

work, cooperation and collaboration amongst peers, and instead of being off-task students were working towards their own literacy goals (2006).

During my observations the same students did not always chose the same partner to work with. I think they liked reading with a variety of their classmates possibly for different reasons. When students have a choice they are more motivated to complete the task. Choice makes students engaged, and holds them accountable for their own learning. Providing choice also keeps students motivated to read.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Representation of all Elementary Grade Levels**

For the purpose of this study I focused on a kindergarten and a first grade classroom. For future research it may be beneficial to look at more of a variety of grade levels, including more of the upper elementary grade levels. The results of this study can only be applicable to students in the early elementary grade levels. It would be beneficial to investigate the same research questions with a larger sampling with a more balanced number of participants across grade levels. The types of talk students engage in may change, and become more complex as they get older. Students may also take on different types of roles when they are reading together as well.

### **Final Thoughts**

Over the course of this study, I learned a lot about the role of talk during peer reading and how essential it is to provide students with opportunities to have discussions about text. I found that students were engaged in the reading process and

that the majority of student conversations were in relation to the text they were reading. Students were able to help each other construct meaning of the text by making connections to the text or by using play during their reading. Students were also able to scaffold each other by assisting them to help make meaning of the text or to use strategies to solve unknown words. Students were also able to experience the text in different ways by incorporating play, and it can also be used as motivation for children to read. In my own future classroom I plan on incorporating peer reading during my literacy block. I have only witnessed positive results, and would be willing to share my findings with future colleagues. I could share with them the benefits of using peer reading in their own classrooms.

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## Appendix A

### CONSENT FOR OBSERVATION, INTERVIEW, SURVEY AND AUDIO/VIDEO

#### RECORDING OF STUDENT

The purpose of this research study is to explore the influence that talk has during peer reading on students' literacy development. The person conducting this research is a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY. This study will not disrupt your child's classroom routine. If you agree to have your child participate in this research study, he/she will be observed during regularly scheduled ELA lessons when he/she is participating in peer reading. Your child may be video recorded during the regularly scheduled peer reading times as well. Your child may also be selected for an interview/ or debriefing. This interview will take place in the classroom and will be audio recorded.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the study. If you would like for your child to participate, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time and your child may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun. Your child can determine participation in the study even with your consent to participate.

I understand that:

- a. My child's participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions.
- b. My child's confidentiality is protected. Her/his name will not be recorded in observation notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the observation. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants, not the school, can be identified.
- c. There will be not anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
- d. My child's participation involves participating in regularly scheduled classroom literacy activities in his/her classroom.
- e. The researcher will observe my child during reading time twice a week for approximately six weeks.
- f. The results will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.
- g. My child's participation my involve being video/audio taped during an interview answering questions. It is estimated that it will take 5 minutes to complete the interview; the researcher will transcribe the audio tapes. If any

publication results from this research, he/she would not be identifiable by name.

- h. My child's participation may involve being videotaped during his/her regularly scheduled reading workshop times. The researcher will transcribe the videotapes.
- i. If at any point a child who does not have informed consent is inadvertently video-recorded those sections of the recordings will be erased.
- j. Data, audio tapes, and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Only the primary investigator will have access to the notes, tapes and corresponding materials. Data, audio tapes, video tapes transcribed notes and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding, when the research has been accepted and approved.
- k. Participation or non-participation will have no impact on grades or class standing.
- l. Parents can give informed consent for observations, interview and videorecording, or for observation only, or for interviews only, or for videorecording only.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participant in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. If you have any questions, you may contact:

Lillian Marino

Primary Researcher, Graduate Student

The College at Brockport, SUNY

[Lmaril@brockport.edu](mailto:Lmaril@brockport.edu)

585-269-0854

Dr. Sue Robb

Thesis Advisor

The College at Brockport, SUNY

[Srobb@brockport.edu](mailto:Srobb@brockport.edu)

585-395-5935

Consent to Observe: Signature of Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Consent to Interview: Signature of Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Consent to Audiotape/Video tape: Signature of Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

The purpose of this research project is to examine student's interaction and engagement in discussions during peer reading, as well as the impact that may have on their literacy development. This research project is also being conducted in order for me to complete my master's thesis for the Department of Education at the College at Brockport, SUNY.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to participate in this project. If you want to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided in the end. You may change your mind at any time and leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have to right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. I will be audio taped, and the researcher will transcribe the audio tapes. There will be no way to connect me to my responses. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. There will be no benefits because of my participation in this project. There is a minor risk in the time that it takes to complete the interview.
4. My participation involves being audiotape during an interview answering eight questions. It is estimated that it will take 15-20 minutes to complete the interview.
5. Approximately 40 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis by the primary researcher.
6. Data, audio tapes, and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Only the primary investigator will have access to the tapes and corresponding materials. Data, audio tapes, transcribed notes and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study realizing I may withdraw without penalty at any time during the survey process.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary researcher  
Lillian Marino  
585-269-0854  
585-395-5935  
Lmari1@brockport.edu

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. Sue Robb  
Department of Education,  
Srobb@brockport.edu

I agree to participate and understand that I will be audio taped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate, but do not agree to be audio taped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

1. How do you implement peer reading in your classroom?
2. How do you pair readers when using peer reading? Why do you do it this way?
3. Do you use literacy circles in your classroom? What do literature circles look like in your classroom? Do they seem to be effective?
4. What are your feelings about peer reading? Do you like using this strategy in your classroom? Why or why not?
5. Do you think peer reading has been an effective strategy in your classroom?  
Please explain.
6. Have you seen any developments in students' literacy development as a result of peer reading? Please explain.

7. Do you think peer reading has led to an increase in reading motivation? Please explain.
  
8. What is your role as the teacher during peer reading?

## Appendix D

### Teacher Interview Protocol

Participant Identification Number\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview and Time\_\_\_\_\_

#### Purpose Statement: (Begin audio-recording)

The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a better understanding of teachers' thoughts about using peer reading in their classrooms. Any insights and perspectives that you are willing to share that will allow me to effectively implement peer reading in a future classroom. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, you have the choice to not respond. Our interview will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes. I will be taking notes as well as recording this conversation for my data collection and analysis, if you have consented prior to this interview.

#### Interview Questions:

1. How do you implement peer reading in your classroom?
2. How do you pair readers when using peer reading? Why do you do it this way?



3. Do you use literacy circles in your classroom? What do literature circles look like in your classroom? Do they seem to be effective?
  
4. What are your feelings about peer reading? Do you like using this strategy in your classroom? Why or why not?
  
5. Do you think peer reading has been an effective strategy in your classroom?  
Please explain.
  
6. Have you seen any developments in students' literacy development as a result of peer reading? Please explain.
  
7. Do you think peer reading has led to an increase in reading motivation? Please explain.
  
8. What is your role as the teacher during peer reading?

## Appendix E

### Observation Protocol

Observation Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of  
Observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Interactions/conversations between students when engaged in peer reading

Description of Activities (Students and students)	Reflective Field notes

Closing:

I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to participate in this study. As indicated in your consent letter, your identity will be kept confidential.