10-1-2013

Biliterate Literature Circles: Talks as Tickets to Ride

Claudia Peralta
Boise State University

Biliterate Literature Circles:
Talks as Tickets to Ride

Claudia Peralta

Boise State University

claudiaperalta@boisestate.edu

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the impact of Literature Circles in a fourth grade bilingual classroom (Spanish and English) and investigate how classroom literary practices were framed and shaped by the classroom teacher. Further study revealed that community building, and shifts in questions affected the type of narratives constructed. During this five-month study, the researcher conducted weekly participant observations of instruction in the classroom, primarily during the language arts blocks. The researcher gave specific attention to observing a classroom practice: Literature Circles. Data was collected through the use of fieldnotes, informal and formal interviews, video- and/or audiotaping, and artifact collection. However, this paper focuses only on the fieldnotes, and video and audiotaping from classroom sessions focusing on Literature Circles. Each literate event was examined within the cycles of Literature Circle to obtain an insider perspective of literate actions, social interactions, texts produced and connections made between the texts.

INTRODUCTION

Research demonstrates that different types of discussion are important. In the case of Literature Circles, group discussion without the teacher allows students to work together to lead discussions (Peralta-Nash, 2003), and to work together to solve cognitive conflicts. Small group discussions allow for students to control the content and fluidity of the discussion among participants. Students are responsible for creating the questions, or in other words, to delve into ideas; they also ask for and provide clarifications during the discussion.

Laughter and talk echoed throughout the room; students gathered on the floor, around desks, and out in the hallway, talking about books. I zoomed my lens on a group of students eagerly planning their final project based on the book they had read. Would they select a board game or stick to a "safe" book talk? Perhaps they might consider a play or hazard a sculpture. I was eager to find out. Finally, after a lengthy voting session, the group agreed to construct a board game, and I was anxious to see how these students would change the antics of a mysterious bunny into their own version of an engaging board game.

This type of interaction was a common occurrence in Julie's fourth-grade bilingual classroom. Every morning students eagerly pulled out their books and notebooks, spread their bodies across the pillows on the floor or tucked them into small spaces as they immersed themselves in the books and prepared their writing for the group discussion of Literature Circles (Daniels, 1994). Literature

Circles are student-led grouped reading that encourages collaboration and genuine discussions about books.

During this five-month study, I conducted weekly participant observations of instruction in the classroom, primarily during the language arts blocks. I gave specific attention to observing a classroom practice: Literature Circles. I collected data through the use of fieldnotes, informal and formal interviews, video- and/or audiotaping, and artifact collection. I examined each literate event within the cycles of Literature Circle to obtain an insider perspective of literate actions, social interactions, texts produced and connections made between the texts.

Jerome Bruner (1990) argues that, while we may learn about the physical world through logical rules and abstract principles, we learn about the social world through narratives. He claims narrative is an organizing principle for human action, a means by which human beings structure and add meaning to the flow of experiences in their lives. From this perspective, humans explain the past and organize the future, to make sense of life. Thus, in a classroom setting where children are allowed to tell, hear, read and write many narratives, children are provided multiple opportunities to make sense of their lives. Bruner believes that people experience their lives as an overlapping of narratives, and the importance of this idea is that it helps explain how children become socialized in a culture. Listening to and reading narratives are activities which inform children about culture and provoke them to write and retell new narratives. Children listen to stories in order to understand and learn from the culture represented in the narratives. They experiment with this information in order to become more adept at functioning within their community.

As students tell stories, they are participating in and shaping the construction of a new classroom culture. Furthermore, learning to tell stories that take into consideration what people deem funny and interesting can reflect the norms that are expected in becoming a member of the group.

Researchers in the 90s focused on literary responses not simply as an interaction between texts and the readers, but as a construction of text meaning, and readers' attitudes and identities within specific sociocultural contexts. When responding to texts, students move beyond simple questions about the characters' motivations and goals to include social practices, drawing on historical knowledge of past cultural perspectives and models (Galda & Beach, 2001). In a sociocultural perspective students are given the opportunity to perceive and understand characters, drawing on their own expectations for appropriate lived-world language practices, expectations that are shaped by the cultures in which they live and work. They also use their own cultural experiences to note deviations or violations relating to narrative development or a story point.

Readers will draw on their own experiences as persons acquiring social practices constituting identities and competence in their worlds to interpret and make sense of the development of characters in text worlds. In this article, I will explore how classroom literary practices were framed and shaped by Julie through analyzing the fieldnotes and video- and/or audiotapes. Then I will concentrate on the key events [1] which helped to shape the Literature Circles. Finally, I will more closely concentrate on two themes: community

---

[1] A key event refers to a bounded activity around a particular topic and purpose (Gumperz, 1992).

building and shifts in questions, and how they affected the type of narratives constructed.

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING LITERATURE CIRCLES

Structuring Literature Circles takes time and consistency. It is important for the teacher to model each one of the roles, and this may take two or three weeks. Julie first explained that Literature Circles were groups of people reading the same book and meeting together to discuss what they had read. However, rather than a casual conversation, Literature Circles encouraged children to take on distinct roles in the discussion. For the following two weeks, Julie modeled these roles using both Spanish and English (languages spoken in the classroom) to make sure all of the students understood the unique characteristics of each role and how they all worked together.

For example, Julie read different picture books in Spanish and English to students. Afterwards she modeled, with the bilingual para-professional, each of the five roles outlined in *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* (Daniels, 1994). She explained that the five roles were: (1) Literary Luminator, (2) Connector, (3) Word Finder, (4) Discussion Director, and (5) Illustrator (see Table 1).

During this introductory phase, Julie emphasized that each member was accountable for his/her work and that the quality of group discussion was dependent on how well prepared each member was. In conversations with Julie she not only expressed the desire to

Table 1
Roles and Descriptions

Roles	Description
Literary Luminator	Identifies interesting sections of the text that the group would read aloud
Connector	Makes text-to-text, text-to-life, and life-to-text connections
Word Finder	Looks at special words in the story, words that are new, different, strange, funny, interesting, etc.
Discussion Director	Develops a list of questions to discuss with the group
Illustrator	Draws, shares and receives input about a section of the story that he/she found interesting

allow students to engage with rigorous text in both languages, but she also wanted to provide the space for students to connect literature with their own lives, and to position children to be responsible for their learning.

During the week, Julie put the children into pairs according to language to allow them time to practice the different roles. She assigned a picture book chosen from the school library that was available in both English and Spanish. Thus, everyone read the same picture book in their primary language, which allowed students to focus more on the logistics of Literature Circles than on the challenging task of reading in a second language. Julie passed out job-sheets[2] which included a description of the roles, emphasizing that every member of a literature circle was responsible for reading and completing a job-sheet and for performing a role during group

---

[2] The job-sheets in *Literature Circles: Voices and choice in the student-centered classroom*

discussions. In this way she was able to lower students' ''affective filter'' (Krashen, 1982), and allow them to concentrate on becoming academically oriented to a new way of doing reading. In addition, she asked each pair of students to take on the same role, though pairs differed in their assignments. Some practiced the ''Word Finder'' role, while other pairs practiced the remaining four roles. After this exercise, Julie selected several students who demonstrated a good understanding of what the jobs required to perform their roles in front of the class. Reinforcing the actions that marked each role also helped Julie to make her expectations clear for how students were to conduct themselves during group discussions.

During the last two weeks of the introductory phase, Julie did something quite different. She chose a story written in English, *Have a Happy ...*, (Walter, 1993) to be read individually by all students. This is a fourth-grade book that explores the theme of poverty during the celebration of Kwanza. Julie carefully constructed groups, evenly mixing students working in their second language with strong bilingual students, and spent lots of time reviewing different strategies that they could use in order to help their English language learner partners understand the book. This grouping provided appropriate language support for the reading and discussion of text, but it also gave students learning English an opportunity to experience reading a more difficult English book.

In setting up the Literature Circles for the first cycle, Julie gave a short book talk in English and Spanish about books that were available. Unfortunately, she was not allocated a budget for purchasing sets of books, so she relied on copies of titles that fourth grade classroom teachers had available, and copies available in the

district storage unit. Once she had a collection of books, she selected the most appropriate ones according to language and interest of the students. She wanted to make sure she provided a mix of topics so students would have a variety to choose from. She talked about the books, providing insights into their plots and characters as well as the text difficulty. She then asked students to write down their first, second, and third preferences for books, as well as their first, second, and third choices of students with whom they wanted to work. Julie also wrote three guidelines to follow when making a decision: (1) each group must have at least three members; (2) children should take into consideration if the book was hard or easy, and (3) children should mark whether the book or partner was more important. By asking students to choose a book and to reflect on its level of challenge, Julie signaled that students were responsible for monitoring and reflecting on their own learning. During the first cycle students tended to choose according to whom else had selected the book, thus the safety of working with friends tended to be a priority. Across time, students became more interested in selecting books according to interest in topics, and because they understood that even though they might select a book that was perhaps "too difficult," they had bilingual partners who would act as the unofficial translators and would scaffold understanding.

Building Community

Prior to the implementation of Literature Circles in January, Julie was in charge of monitoring students' reading and writing. Now, this pattern allowed for the construction of a community norm whereby students made decisions about language use based on the

theme of the book and their partner selection. Yet another essential feature of the community building cycle came with Julie's announcement of a culminating project, which was a way of showing the book to other members of the community. While students had a wide range of choices for showcasing their books, they also had to follow specific guidelines: (1) all members of the Literature Circle had to participate in the presentation of the culminating project, and (2) the presentation had to include the book's title, author, a summary, and personal opinions. An important consideration for group members was not to reveal the ending of the story to others in case someone chose to read the same book in subsequent Literature Circles. This practice made evident that children were responsible not only to discussion group members, but also to the community as a whole. It also signaled that the present event ultimately influences the success of future events. Finally, Julie modeled several possible types of presentations—poster, book talk, and board games—but reminded students that they could choose other forms such as diorama, dramatic interpretation, etc. As a result, the book projects provided a wide range of choices for students, including choices about the materials to use for the group presentation.

At the conclusion of the first Literature Circle cycle, two groups presented on the books, *They Came from Center Field* (Gutman, 1995) and *Me Llamo María Isabel* (Ada, 1990). To reveal how the teacher and students were constructing the practices of what it means to be a presenter in this class, I selected the following key event because it was the first occasion where members of the class explicitly discussed the book project presentations. Table 2 shows the

Table 2

First Book Project Presentation

Mess. Unit	Speaker	What Speaker Said	What Speaker Accomplished
57	Julie	Could I hear some opinions too?	Signaling that their opinions are important
58		What did you think of the book?	Recognizing students as critical readers
59	Jack	How come they said came?	
60		Come?	
61	Pablo	Because the first time we read the book.	
62		that is what we saw.	
63	Julie	Because that is the designer's choice.	
64		Questions about the book?	Reminding students of the purpose for the presentations
65		Not about how they design their project.	
66		This may be a book you read.	Acknowledging that they will be in charge of their learning
67		You may want to ask questions.	Providing students with strategies
68	Josela	What were their names?	
69	Pablo	Burger King, Mc. Donald, Wendy.	
70	Jack	What is that over there?	
71		Is that where they play baseball?	
72	George	Yeah.	
73	Julie	Was it a challenging book to read?	Asking about the difficulty of the book
74		Like were there a lot of big words?	Signaling that difficulty may be associated with vocabulary
75	Pablo	Yeah.	
76	Mark	Did the aliens go back?	

Table 2
First Book Project Presentation (continued)

77	Julie	They can't tell you.	Reminding students the rules of the presentations
78	Miguel	Did they win?	
79	George	We can't tell you.	
80	Pablo	You have to read the book.	

discussion that took place after the presentation of *They Came from Center Field*.

In the beginning of this conversation, Julie explicitly asked presenters to share their opinions about the book, signaling that they were the experts and that they had a responsibility to the audience. Another strategy offered by Julie was in response to a question asked by Mark: "Did the aliens go back?" Immediately, Julie responded: "They can't tell you." Miguel then asked: "Did they win?" George and Pablo proceeded to use the same words selected earlier by Julie. George said, "We can't tell you," and Pablo said, "You have to read the book." This sequence of talk showed that they were listening closely to the teacher's instructions, and learning what would and would not reveal a story's ending. According to Tannen (1989) the repetition of sentences with no information added denotes participatory listenership. Thus, the presentations that took place at the end of the first Literature Circle cycle of activity provided students with strategies for interpreting content and level of difficulty in the narratives without revealing the "juiciest" parts.

At the end of the two presentations, Julie explicitly asked the class for ideas on how to improve the presentations by saying: "Let's

talk about something that they could improve on, or things that you could improve on so you could do better in these areas." With this comment the responsibility of the role of audience was distributed among teacher and students. Julie reassured the presenters that their efforts had been recognized, and that everyone in the group should feel very pleased about the presentation, but she didn't shy away from criticism. Table 3 illustrates the ways in which she framed the two presentations.

Table 3
First Discussion after Book Project Presentations

Mess. Unit	Speaker	What Speaker Said	What Speaker Accomplished
116	Julie	They talked about the book,	
117		and they both did what?	Inviting students' participation as critics
118	Esther	They talked loud.	Recognizing that guidelines were followed
119	Julie	Did both groups talk loud?	
120		Which group did a nice job talking loud?	
121	Esther	They Came from Center Field.	
122	Julie	People that went today,	
123		please don't let your feelings get hurt.	
124		and think about what you could have improved on.	Reminding presenters that they are role models
125		We didn't expect you to do it better than you did today.	Recognizing their effort
126		You did a great job.	
127		But since you've done yours	
128		we are going to use you to help the rest of us to do better,	Pointing out that learning is a social process
129		so you can do better next time.	

In the transcript segment above, Julie reminded students about their responsibilities both as presenters and as audience members. She implicitly reminded the class that speaking out loud was an important component of an oral presentation by asking, "Did both groups talk loud?" (see message unit 119). Then she went on to remind the group that learning is a collaborative job and that the presenter's job was "to help the rest of us do better so you can do better next time" (See message units 128-129). Once more she emphasized that teaching is not a responsibility of only the teacher, but it is everyone's responsibility.

After this conversation, students named what the presenters had done well. For example, Ariel said, "[They] told us the *nombres de las personas del libro*." Pablo shared, "[They told us] the name of the author," and Tom mentioned that "[They told us] the illustrator and the characters." Julie then asked them to focus on things that they could improve on "so you could do better in these areas." Her comments allowed her to once again communicate that learning is ongoing. She let them know that even though she expects the best, she understands that learning is a continuous process, and that there is always room for improvement.

In their criticism, the students focused on the importance of hearing and seeing the presenter's face. Julie's response to their comments was to remind the students that asking for help and collaborating with one another is part of the learning process. She suggested, "Maybe that means that you may need to ask a friend to hold your poster." In addition to demonstrating that cooperation can lead to increased visibility for the speaker, she shared other strategies that could enhance the presentation while creating community.

Shift in Questions

Once a sense of a literate classroom community had been initiated, Julie worked to refine her pedagogy to highlight her new understandings of questions. In this section, I will explore how new literacy practices were taken up by individual students, especially in the questions they asked.

A Literature Circle constituted a cycle with four events: (1) reading selected literature independently, (2) completing assigned job sheets, (3) participating in meetings where members alternated among the five different roles for discussing the selected literature with other students who made the same text selection, and (4) participating in a book project with these same Literature Circle members. The first two events—reading and completing the job sheets—were carried out individually, often at students' desks. The third and fourth events, discussion and project, were conducted in the group.

In order to show students' growth in Literature Circles, I explore the role of the Discussion Director in relationship to the kinds of questions asked and the types of narratives constructed.

Role of discussion director. Review of the data shows that Julie framed the Discussion Director's job as being the key role. She emphasized the importance of this role by stating that the director starts the discussion, and then chooses who is next as well as the topic of the conversations. She stressed that the Discussion Director was responsible for developing a list of questions to discuss with the group, sharing these questions, and continuing the conversation after all of the members had shared their roles. The goal of the questions was to focus on the big ideas in the story and to encourage others to discuss their reactions. Some sample questions included in the job

sheet handout are: "What was going through your mind…?" "How did you feel…?" and "What questions did you have…?" as well as "Predict what..." In order to understand how the role of the Discussion Director expanded across the three cycles, I examined the types of questions students asked. Analysis revealed that the extension of the role of Discussion Director depended on the types of questions asked. In addition, the types of questions asked either directly supported or constrained the construction of narratives that were grounded in students' lives.

It is important to recognize that questions play an important role in the learning process. The questions asked and the presentation of those questions can make a difference in how students learn. Different questions are required for different purposes (Dillon, 1987) including initiating discussion, reviewing information, and stimulating critical thinking. In this section, I will illustrate the kinds of questions asked during the first, second, and third cycles of Literature Circles and how these questions provided students with opportunities to extend their role as Discussion Director.

A group of five male students read *Bonícula*. All five students spoke Spanish as their primary language. Evan, who was the Discussion Director, asked the following questions of the group members (see Figure 1).

Factual questions are questions that require an answer that is provided in the text. These kinds of questions are low level, closed questions, i.e., do not require students' own interpretation or explanation. Low-convergent questions "call for transfer of information but in a predictable way….using operations such as comparing, contrasting, generalizing, transfering from, or explaining"
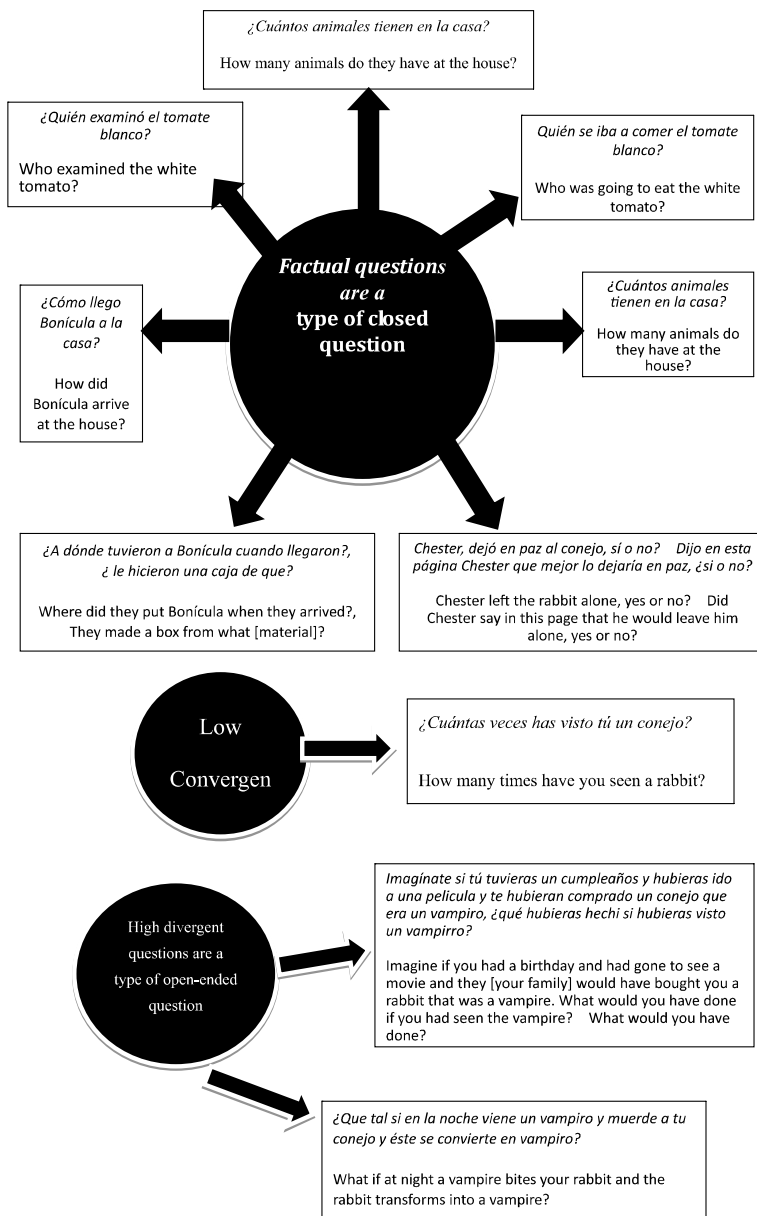
¿Cuántos animales tienen en la casa?

How many animals do they have at the house?

¿Quién examinó el tomate blanco?

Who examined the white tomato?

Quién se iba a comer el tomate blanco?

Who was going to eat the white tomato?

Factual questions are a type of closed question

¿Cómo llego Bonícula a la casa?

How did Bonícula arrive at the house?

¿Cuántos animales tienen en la casa?

How many animals do they have at the house?

¿A dónde tuvieron a Bonícula cuando llegaron?, ¿ le hicieron una caja de que?

Where did they put Bonícula when they arrived?, They made a box from what [material]?

Chester, dejó en paz al conejo, sí o no?   Dijo en esta página Chester que mejor lo dejaría en paz, ¿si o no?

Chester left the rabbit alone, yes or no?   Did Chester say in this page that he would leave him alone, yes or no?

Low Convergen

¿Cuántas veces has visto tú un conejo?

How many times have you seen a rabbit?

High divergent questions are a type of open-ended question

Imagínate si tú tuvieras un cumpleaños y hubieras ido a una pelicula y te hubieran comprado un conejo que era un vampiro, ¿qué hubieras hechi si hubieras visto un vampirro?

Imagine if you had a birthday and had gone to see a movie and they [your family] would have bought you a rabbit that was a vampire. What would you have done if you had seen the vampire?   What would you have done?

¿Que tal si en la noche viene un vampiro y muerde a tu conejo y éste se convierte en vampiro?

What if at night a vampire bites your rabbit and the rabbit transforms into a vampire?

Figure 1
Types of Question

(Cunningham, 1987, p. 72). High divergent questions allow more possibility for personal responses. According to Cunningham, high-divergent questions encourage students to freely generate ideas, having the opportunity to explore different possibilities without worrying about providing the right answer. High divergent questions are open-ended questions because they encourage students to make use of the information provided in the text and to develop hypotheses.

During this first cycle of Literature Circle, seven of the ten questions asked by the Discussion Director were factual questions. Examples of factual questions asked by Evan were: "Who woke up for a midnight snack?" and "How many animals do they have at the house?" Analysis of transcripts reveals that students relied on their close reading of the book in order to answer the questions because there was always a right and wrong answer. The answers were mostly short, providing the specific information presented in the book. It is evident that students did not have an opportunity to make text–to-life or text-to-text connections when reading the book; rather, they concentrated on the close reading of the book.

Yet Evan also asked a different type of question, a low convergent question: "How many times have you seen a rabbit?" This question required a different type of answer, for students could not rely on the text to provide an answer. Rather, they needed to tap into personal and background knowledge. Elias answered "I had lots," which Ariel challenged by calling him a liar. To this comment Elias added, "No, No, in Mexico," while Evan said, "I have one [a rabbit]." Still, this question was treated by the students as a closed question since they volunteered and insisted on specific and quantifiable answers.

Evan's remaining questions were: "Imagine if it was your birthday and you went to see a movie and someone bought you a rabbit that was a vampire. What would you have done?" "What would you have done if you had seen the vampire?" "What if at night a vampire appears and he bites you and the rabbit becomes a vampire?" These questions are high divergent questions because they allow more possibility for personal responses. Students are generating their own responses without having to worry if they are right or wrong because they are tapping into their knowledge and experience. Indeed, Evan's last two questions elicited different narratives—some horrifying and funny—from all group members.

As another example of how high-divergent questions can elicit highly personal responses, I will briefly turn to a discussion when Daniel took on the role of discussion director for the book *Shooting Star* (Wölfel & Rothfuchs, 1994). In the story, the main character, a Native American boy, was sitting on his horse up on a hill while he saw white people coming through the valley. Daniel asked students if the story reminded them of anything that had happened to them. Omar immediately shared that the passage reminded him of when he and his family were crossing the bridge to come into this country and they worried about someone seeing them. He further elaborated about spending the night outdoors and hearing lots of different noises.

During the *Bonícula* and *Shooting Star* Literature Circle cycles, Evan and Daniel, serving as Discussion Directors, asked peers to place themselves in the shoes of the characters and construct solutions for the predicaments presented in the stories. For these questions students couldn't rely on the book alone. Rather, the students had to provide believable answers with a convincing solution that came from

their personal experience (McElvain, 2010). On the other hand, the closed or factual questions that predominated the early Literature Circles required students to simply recall information presented in the book.

Further analysis of the transcript showed that when Evan asked closed questions, he called on one person per question. However, when he asked open-ended questions, he called on all of his members to provide a response. Evan's change in approach may indicate that with open-ended questions, he was genuinely interested in hearing the multiple points of view presented by his peers because they were more interesting and relevant than answers which he already knew. Still, Evan's closed questions greatly outnumbered open-ended questions during the *Bonícula* Literature Circle by a ratio of eight to two. But Evan's choice of closed questions in the *Bonícula* group mirrored the actions constructed by the whole class during the introduction of Literature Circles. Indeed, during the first cycle, students in general were much more focused on following the processes enacted by the class than in learning about their peers' interpretation of text. Still, perhaps the predominance of closed questions was essential to establishing the students with a context for integrating their own experiences. Furthermore, these simpler questions gave them an opportunity to learn how to execute the role of discussion director.

For example, throughout the meetings of the first cycle, members emphasized the importance of following the rules by asking questions that related more to how to follow the format of the discussion groups than to the book. Examples included: "What if I say a question?" "Did you pick somebody?" "I don't have any more

questions, can we stop?" Some of the responses given to those questions were: "Keep the conversation going, ok." "You need to keep on going; you need to keep the conversation going." "*Tu sigues* [You are next]." "You got to pick somebody." "We can't talk." "No, I'm supposed to pick someone." "No, I have to ask the questions." It is evident that during these meetings students were closely following the guidelines given by the teacher and that learning how to carry out group discussions and taking up roles was foregrounded.

However, the types of questions asked by Miguel, Evan, Daniel and Elena during book discussions in the second and third cycle of Literature Circles were quite different, as they began to ask more and more questions which elicited narratives that drew from personal experience. During the third cycle, all of the students read *Wetsy the Hare Goes to the National Western Stock Show & Rodeo* (Pugh, 1994). Figure 2 shows a sampling of questions asked by the four focal students during the second and third cycles of Literature Circles.

During the third cycle of Literature Circles, many open-ended questions fell under the affective domain (Cunningham, 1987), a domain that is perhaps the most difficult one to tap during discussions because it requires that students confront their emotions in the context of the topic being explored. This domain makes demands on the reader such that he/she explores personal values, attitudes, interests and beliefs.

Several of the questions that emerged during group discussions asked students to confront important and yet difficult themes. For example, when reading *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985), Discussion Directors asked group members to discuss the death of a
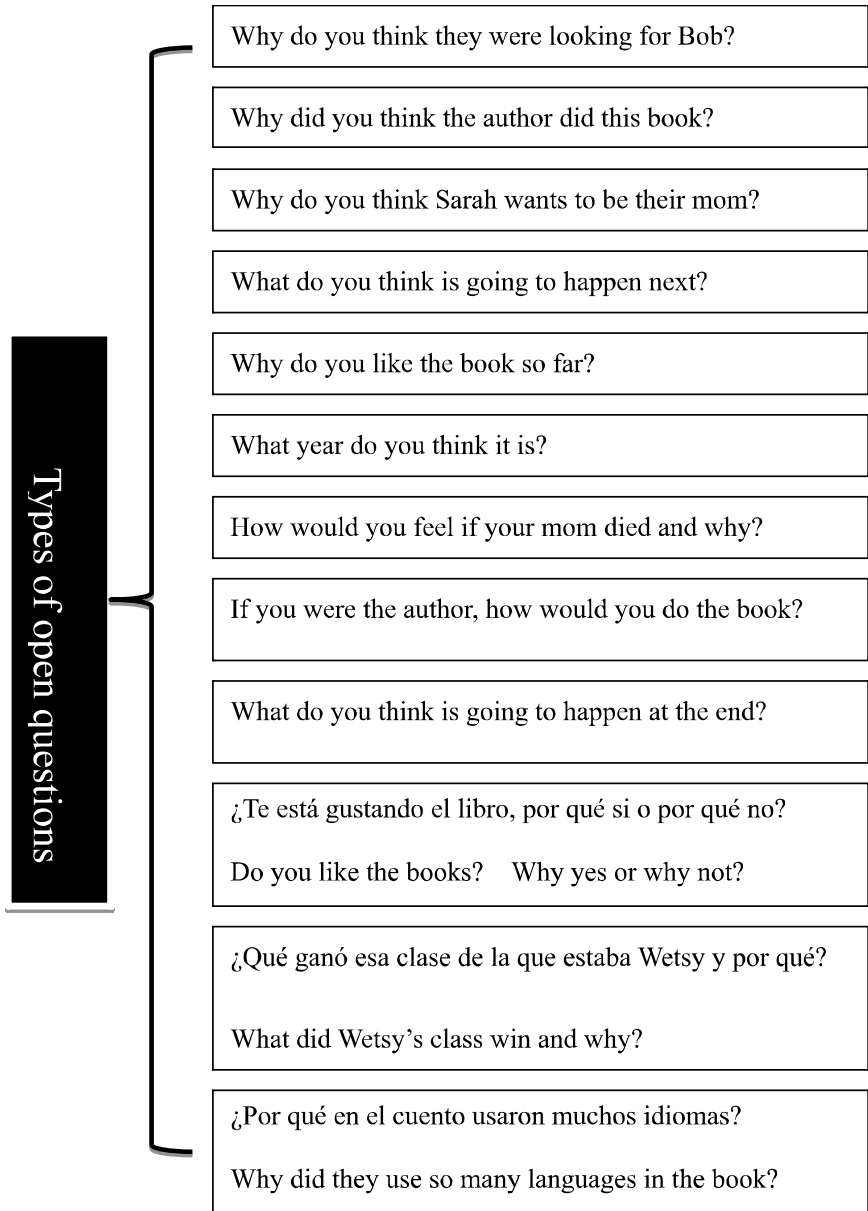
Types of open questions

Why do you think they were looking for Bob?

Why did you think the author did this book?

Why do you think Sarah wants to be their mom?

What do you think is going to happen next?

Why do you like the book so far?

What year do you think it is?

How would you feel if your mom died and why?

If you were the author, how would you do the book?

What do you think is going to happen at the end?

¿Te está gustando el libro, por qué si o por qué no?

Do you like the books?   Why yes or why not?

¿Qué ganó esa clase de la que estaba Wetsy y por qué?

What did Wetsy's class win and why?

¿Por qué en el cuento usaron muchos idiomas?

Why did they use so many languages in the book?

Figure 2
Types of Open-Ended Questions Asked
in the Second and Third Cycles

parent. More specifically, they gave group members an opportunity to explore their feelings toward their mother and discuss how they would feel if she were to die. For example, when Liz posed the question, "What would you do if your mom died and why?" Sherry said: "I wouldn't come out of my room. Even though we argue I wouldn't want her to die because she is my mom." Tasha responded: "I would feel sad because I would like to see her. To spend time together." Robin commented: "I would feel sad because I wouldn't get to see her a lot. I would want her in the house." And Esther said: "I would feel sad. I wouldn't know what to do." All of the responses revealed the values and beliefs of the students when faced with such a stressful situation.

When reading *The Secret Life of the Underwear Champ* (Miles, 1997), the Discussion Director asked students to examine their values regarding friendship and to explore how they would react if they were to take the character's role: "Would you ignore your friend if he was laughing in (at?) your commercial and why?" "Would you kick him out the window?" "Would you ever talk to your friend again?" Patty responded that she would dismiss her friend because "if he was your best friend, it would make you mad and I would ignore him." Other students responded that they would "kick him" and "throw him out the window." And Patty added that it reminded her of bullies, "because you worked very hard for the commercial and then they would just make you feel small." The responses show that when asked open-ended questions, students were able to relate to the topics explored in the text and draw from their own experiences to make meaning. Patty's response, in particular, shows that her personal

experience helped her relate to the feelings of the character in the story.

These examples demonstrate that the questions promoted the exploration of the text in relation with life experiences, while simultaneously encouraging new meaning. Students were engaged in interpreting the text and learning about their peers' feelings, opinions, and values. Furthermore, students help each other clarify ideas and negotiate meaning as they engage in discussions. In this process, students moved beyond the text by making text-to-life connections and discussing issues of importance, and their comprehension increased because of these connections (McElvain, 2010). Furthermore, students were interested and curious about how their peers would react under the same circumstances. Thus participation in Literature Circles across time provided students with opportunities to confront subjects not often discussed in a fourth-grade classroom and to explore their thoughts and opinions with peers from similar and different cultural backgrounds.

When discussing *Estrella Fugaz* (Wölfel, 1994), students shared fears about crossing the border without papers. When reading *Me Llamo María Isabel* (Ada, 1990), students shared stories about the treatment of some friends at school. Reading *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) provoked students to think about the loss of a parent and to reflect on their own personal familial relationships, and *The Secret Life of the Underwear Champ* (Miles, 1997) encouraged them to talk about the value of friendship. The affective-domain questions introduced by the Discussion Directors also reflect how students moved from a close reading of the text (e.g., "What was the name of the character?") to reviewing the main issues in connection

with their lives. Through these questions, then, we see how members continued to shape opportunities for sharing knowledge during group discussions. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questions signaled that students valued the knowledge that is located within their own group or community.

Connecting to life experiences was more evident during the second and third cycle of Literature Circle. During the first cycle, students made few life-to-text connections. Students stayed close to the story and questions related to information available in the text. During the second and third cycles, students made more text-to-life connections. A strong correlation was shown between the type of questions asked and the narratives produced.

As the Curtain Falls

Opportunities for students to construct and interact with narratives were explored through the literate event, Literature Circles. Through these literary experiences, the students in Julie's classroom developed their own identities as readers (Hynds, 1990). And their identity as critical readers was even more enhanced because they were encouraged to move beyond the facts presented and explore their attitudes and beliefs about the topics raised in the books in relationship with their lives (McElvain, 2010). Students were also given the opportunity to share their views within the classroom community through their stories and ideas. For an extended discussion on critical readership in elementary reading and writing please see Anne Haas Dyson (2003).

Within this classroom community, the children took on the five roles of Literature Circles. But through their talk they also learned to

expand on these roles and rules. In addition, they could step aside from their own stories to make room for others' voices. Discussion Directors could continually raise the ante on questions, and thus inspire even more critical thinking. In their multi-roles and many-layered conversations, everyone's contribution to discussion of text was valued.

Theory and research in reader response (e.g., McGinley, 1990; Rosenblat, 1991; Wolf & Heath, 1992) stresses the importance of having readers respond to literature in a variety of ways in order to expand and deepen their experience. Literature Circles provided this variety, and took it well beyond as children brought their own values and beliefs to the forefront, as well as reconsidered their ideas in light of new information.

Through reading, listening, and substantive conversation, the children were able to express their opinions, share their stories, question the way things are, and imagine what might be in the world. They told stories of exploding cats and vampire bunnies, of crossing the border, nervous about who might be watching. They stepped backwards and forward, from the text to their lives and back to the text again to weigh the "weirdness" of words and to learn the definition of a tough term.

Thus, through a myriad of opportunities for personal expression, they learned to balance the nature of texts against their lives--and come to their own well-reasoned conclusions. Written texts were no longer the domain of a teacher's explanation, but part and parcel of their own individual as well as collaboratively-constructed interpretation. They had become, in essence, critical readers (Mills & Jennings, 2011).

REFERENCES

Ada, F. A. (1990). *Me llamo María Isabel*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks/Libros Colibrí.

Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cunningham, R. T. (1987). What kind of question is that? In W. W. Wilne (Ed.), *Questions, questioning techniques and effective teaching* (pp. 67-94). Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Dillon, J. T. (1987). The multidisciplinary world of questioning. In W. W. Wilne (Ed.), *Questions, questioning techniques, and effective teaching* (pp. 49-66). Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Dyson, A. H. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Galda, L. & Beach, R. (2001). Response to literature as a cultural activity. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *36*(1), 64-73.

Gumperz, J. J. (1992). Contextualization and understanding. In A. Duranti & C. Goodwin (Eds.), *Rethinking context* (pp. 229 - 252). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Gutman, D. (1995). *They came from center field*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Hynds, S. (1991). Questions of difficulty in literary reading. In A. C. Purve (Ed.), *The idea of difficulty in literature* (pp. 117-139). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford, England: Pergamon.

MacLachlan, P. (1985). *Sarah, plain and tall*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

McElvain, C. M. (2010). Transactional literature circles and the reading comprehension of English learners in the mainstream classroom. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *33*(2), 178-205.

McGinley, W., & Madigan, D. (1990). The research "story": A forum for integrating reading, writing, and learning. *Language Arts*, *67*, 474-483.

Miles, B. (1997). *The secret life of the underwear champ*. New York, NY: Knopf.

Mills, H., & Jennings, L. (2011). Talking about talk: Reclaiming the value and power of literature circles. *The Reading Teacher*, *64*(8), 590-598.

Peralta-Nash, C. (2003). Literature circles in a bilingual classroom: The power of language choice. *The New Advocate*, *16*(1), 57-61.

Pugh, A. B. (1994). *Westy la liebre, va a the national western stock show & rodeo*. Denver, CO: Western Stock Show Association.

Rosenblatt, L. (1991). Literary theory. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 57-62). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Tannen, D. (1989). *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Walter, M. P. (1993). Have a happy. . . . In *Dinosauring* (pp. 152-217). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Wolf, S. A., & Heath, S. B. (1992). *The braid of literature: Children's worlds of reading*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wölfel, U. (1994). *Estrella fugaz*. Madrid, España: Madrid: Susaeta Ediciones, S. A.

Wölfel, U., & Rothfuchs, H. (1979). *Shooting Star*. London, England: Andersen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claudia Peralta is Associate Professor in the Literacy Department at Boise State University. Her research interests focus on bilingual education, literacy and biliteracy, multicultural education and social justice. She has published extensively in both English and Spanish, and her latest work focuses on the schooling experiences of Latino and refugee students both in the U.S. and in their country of origin.

雙語文學圈的實踐

摘要

本文旨在研究文學圈的實踐，對四年級雙語（西班牙文與英文）教室的影響，並探究教師是如何建構，及引導教室的文學實踐。進一步的研究顯示社群營造及問題的轉換會影響所敘述的種類。在五個月的研究中，研究者實施一週一次的教學參與觀察，主要是觀察語言結構。研究者尤其注意教室之文學圈的實踐部分。研究資料來自於觀察筆記，非正式及正式的訪談，錄影及錄音，和舊資料之收集。然而，本文重點在分析觀察筆記，及課堂中文學圈相關之錄影及錄音。所收回之研究資料都是在文學圈的概念下檢視，以獲得識字行為、社會互動、所產生的文本，以及文本間連結的專業觀點。

關鍵詞：文學圈　高分歧問題　社群