

Reflective Literature Circles

Summary: A powerful way to boost the effectiveness of literature circles and the ownership of the students participating in them is by leading students in a reflective process about the circles themselves. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, professors from the University of South Carolina and Colorado State University discuss ways to help even young students become self-reflective.

Practical Applications

The authors focus their writing on a school in South Carolina that is particularly known for fostering a culture of inquiry amongst its students and staff. The key elements of the authors' approach to helping students reflect on literature circles is to show them videotape or audiotape of their own and/or other students participating in literature circles. Sources for these might be:

- Videotaping or audiotaping the students' circles, then watching/listening to them as a class or in circle groups
- Showing videotape or listening to audiotape from other classes
- Watching a professional development video on literature circles (in one class the authors highlight, the video was *Looking Into Literature Circles* (Daniels, 2001))
- Visiting other classrooms and observing their literature circles

Students, even in 3rd and 4th grade, were led to reflect on these experiences by taking notes about them in two dimensions, Observation notes and Interpretation notes, after drawing a vertical line down a piece of paper: "Observation notes focus on what can be described through one's senses, whereas interpretation notes invite the writer to think about what she or he has observed by making connections, asking questions, and speculating about particular observations." These notes formed the basis for high-quality discussions about how to improve the classes' circles.

The authors then list several other strategies for provoking this kind of self-reflection, including:

- Have students begin circles by discussing what they want it to look, sound and feel like
- Invite students to create self-evaluation forms for how effectively their group reached the qualities of a strong circle, and have them fill it out at the end of each session
- Involve students in creating literature circle response forms
- Lead students to generate a list of positive qualities from literature circles in years past
- Regularly have class discussions where the class can give feedback on and propose changes to literature circle structures

Conclusion and Citation

Despite the youth of elementary school students, they can be led into deep self-reflection that helps them own their learning. Using metacognitive strategies to guide students in analyzing the strengths and areas for growth in their own literature circles leads to greater ownership and ultimately more effective circles that lead them to learn more.

Jennings, L. & Mills, H. "Talking About Talk: Reclaiming the Value and Power of Literature Circles." *The Reading Teacher*, 64.8 (2011), pp. 590-598.
<http://tinyurl.com/3smkjz> (subscription only).