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Gender, Literacy, and Elementary School Students with Reading Centers

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Abstract- Reading centers are an important and active part of most elementary classrooms. As a teacher of young children in Saudi Arabia, I observed that there were times when students did not benefit from their literacy experiences, and at other times there was a good deal of activity around their experiences in the reading centers I had developed for them. As a result of this experience in my own classroom, I have continued to have great interest in the role of reading centers for young children's learning. This study is focused on the literacy activities in the reading centers in the elementary classroom. Specifically it is focused on exploring the differences between boys and girls as they participate in reading centers in their classroom. There are differences between boys' and girls' reading interests that have been documented in the research. This study seeks to examine these differences in one elementary second grade classroom.

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Gender, Literacy, and Elementary School Students with Reading Centers

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Abstract- Reading centers are an important and active part of most elementary classrooms. As a teacher of young children in Saudi Arabia, I observed that there were times when students did not benefit from their literacy experiences, and at other times there was a good deal of activity around their experiences in the reading centers I had developed for them. As a result of this experience in my own classroom, I have continued to have great interest in the role of reading centers for young children's learning. This study is focused on the literacy activities in the reading centers in the elementary classroom. Specifically it is focused on exploring the differences between boys and girls as they participate in reading centers in their classroom. There are differences between boys' and girls' reading interests that have been documented in the research. This study seeks to examine these differences in one elementary second grade classroom.

I. INTRODUCTION

I chose this topic because I observed that the children who were in second grade in elementary school were weak in reading skills and they did not benefit from the reading center or the lab at the school. Thus, for the purpose of my educational study, I will choose the elementary school to do my research on how the teacher can develop the children's reading skills in elementary school by using the reading center. I will get permission from the elementary school administration to do my research and observe one of the reading classes for five weeks. I will make a survey for reading teachers and children's parents; I am going to interview the children and the reading center teacher, and I will use my own experience and my observations because I was a teacher and I taught Arabic reading with writing for girls in the second-grade classroom in the elementary school in my country, Saudi Arabia. A review of literature will also inform by research and understanding. Falk's and Blumenreich's book, *The Power of Questions: A Guide to Teacher and Student Research*, will guide the qualitative analysis of the data.

Since there is a relationship between the feminist movement and religions, I have chosen to work on feminism theory for my paper, which is a part of my culture as an Arabic Muslim woman. For example, there is Islamic feminism that is concerned with the women's role in Islam. It aims for equality of all Muslims,

irrespective of ethnic background, gender, and race. calls and appeals to find and create equality between the sexes in the society through the Holy Quran prior to one thousand, four hundred years ago (Badran, 2002). My methodology work is about how the teacher can develop the reading skills of children in elementary school by using reading centers. Since I have chosen feminism theory as one of the foundations for my study, I have to integrate subjects, reading and feminism, in one question. My main question for this study is: *How does gender influence children's engagement in an elementary classroom reading center?*

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

a) *Feminism, Gender Equity and Education*

Feminism is a collection of movements that attempt to qualify and defend equal social, political, and economic rights and equal opportunities for men and women (Boston & Mifflin, 1992). Feminist theory is an integral part of several Middle Eastern women's groups and has been for some. Feminist theory has also influence the women's movements in this region of the world. It includes: the theories about the origins of inequality and the social construction of sex or gender (Gilligan, 1977).

In addition, feminists' activities have struggled or contended for women's right. For example, feminists' activities have supported women's right to bodily safety, personal, social, and procreative rights. They also are against sexual harassment and domestic violence, and they have defended the rights of women in employment, including equal income and business (Gilligan, 1977). It is important to note that Islam, as it is represented in the Holy Qu'ran, gives women the right to education and encourages them to educate, but it is not co-education. For example, in Saudi Arabia, a woman has the opportunity and access to excellent higher education even though the education in a co-educational format; in other words, women are educated separately from men ("Women's education and work in Saudi Arabia", 2004).

According to general Saudi Arabian culture, women's situations educationally are different according to the cultural group from which they come. For example, in the past in Saudi Arabia, there was education segregation between men and women because of the traditions and customs of general Saudi Arabian culture, even though their religion is Islam, which encourages equal education for women. At that

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time, men's educational opportunities were superior to what was available to women. For example, men received their education in formal schools, while women could not have education in schools, they could have education from women who volunteered to educate them at either the mosque or their house. Today, the educational situation of both men and women and for boys and girls has changed dramatically. The government provides schools and education for both genders from pre-school through higher education. The education that is provided continues to be segregated by gender, but the education is equal in substance and quality. These changes have come because people have become more open-minded and better educated. As a result, women play an important role beside men in the development of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, many women in Saudi Arabia have high professional positions. For instance, they work in a variety of fields, such as doctors, teachers, nurses, stylists, business, and interior design, and they earn high salaries that may sometimes be higher than men. Nevertheless, there are some categories of educational jobs that women do not get hired due to cultural and religious reasons. For example, women can not teach males from elementary school age through higher education in universities even though they can teach them in kindergartens and daycares. In contrast, men are not allowed to teach females of any age, except in the university. In this case, women and men are taught together in the same room, but a screen divides the women from the men and the male professor. The women are able to view the professor on a projection screen, but the teacher is not able to see the women. The women attending a male professor's class communicate with him via microphone. Most recently, the government has allowed for male professors to work directly with their female university students in medical school because of the particular demands of this field and the need to demonstrate specific procedures and techniques for each medical student.

i. *From my perspective: Addressing gender inequality through education*

In my opinion, governments can decrease the inequality between the genders through education. Education plays an important role in reducing inequality between the sexes. For example, the government should unify the educational system in the country, rather than having each region or state operating independently. With this unity, the government can promote and support equality between the different genders and respect for diversity and multiculturalism for all sexes in preK-12 schools and in the universities. This has definitely been the case in Saudi Arabia. Education has become more equitable throughout the entire country through a unified school system directed by the central government.

In addition, the government should adopt the principle of equal educational opportunity and support higher education for both men and women who are unable to obtain it due to limited economic means. For instance, the Saudi Arabian government provides for a university education and scholarship abroad for both sexes. As a result, the government has opened the door of education for everyone of any social class, so there is feminism in the educational aims of the Saudi Arabian government.

b) *How Gender Differences Affect Learning to Read*

Several studies argue that gender inequality exists in education, especially in reading. One of them found that girls were better than boys in reading according to the differences between the two genders in their abilities with reading (Johnston & Logan, 2010). In addition, some studies report that there were differences between children in reading skills; that girls did better in specific reading skills, such as reading comprehension, equivalent word, and spelling scores than boys when they learned through analytic phonics. However, boys had better scores in vocabulary reading, spelling, and reading understanding than girls if they learned or were taught by synthetic phonics (Johnson & Watson 2007).

Some studies report that when boys were taught with a synthetic phonics method, their reading skills, like sounding and word reading, improved quickly. Moreover, a different study found boys' reading skills were better than girls when they learned by an approach that depended on phonics. Another study notes that gender difference plays an important role in different attitudes or positions in reading and reading motivation. There is a relationship between boys' attitudes toward reading and their reading comprehension performance (Logan & Johnson, 2009; McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth, 1995).

Some researchers found that boys' attention during reading is less than girls' attention after some researchers conducted several studies and observations of boys and girls in their reading classrooms. Thus, the difference between the sexes is related to reading skill development (Logan, Medford, and Hughes, 2011).

On the other hand, some studies show that girls have the ability to gain the oral skills of reading, so girls are better than boys in verbal ability in reading (Lagerberg & Westerlund, 2008). In addition, because girls in first grade have better optical memory, they will profit more than boys from visual reading methods related to important reading skills (Logan & Johnston, 2010).

Some of studies suggest that genetics play significant roles in gender differences in reading skills. At the same time they argue that gender differences affect the development of children's reading skills since

brain activation during reading is different for both sexes (Hawke, Wadsworth, Olson & Defries, 2007).

In contrast, 66% of the studies assert that gender differences are not important with oral ability in reading. Further, when Johnston and Logan (2010) made a test of 107 children on their vocabulary, word reading, and phonemic awareness, they found there were not important differences between sexes in reading.

Girls enjoy reading more than boys, so they have deduced that this is the reason the girls are better readers than boys (Twist & Sainsbury, 2009). Various studies conclude that there are cultural influences that create gender differences in reading in elementary schools. For example, in the U.S and Canada, studies have found that girls are better readers than boys; however, in England and Nigeria, their studies have found that boys have higher scores in reading than girls (Johnson, 1973-74). Further, other studies argue the gender roles of children showing that girls are better than boys in reading because the girls are encouraged to outperform in school academically, but the boys are encouraged to practice several other kinds of activities in addition to their academics, such as playing football (Fuller, Hua, and Snyder, 1994).

The Johnson (1973-74) study points out that there are a variety of differences in cultures, societies, and school environments that affect gender differences in reading. For instance, a study was conducted comparing American and German students in sixth grade to evaluate specific skills of reading, such as speed and reading comprehension. As a result, the female, American students had higher scores than the boys; however, the male, German students had better scores than the girls. Other studies confirm this strong cultural influence on reading fluency (Fuller, Hua, and Snyder, 1994). Therefore, this serves to illustrate that the cultural and societal environment and expectations may have significantly different influences on gender roles and performances in reading.

This search also shows that gender differences in reading skills are more cultural than physiological. Girls are achieving better scores in reading than boys in elementary schools. Therefore, "It seems apparent that sex differences in reading may be attributed primarily to cultural rather than to physiological determinants" (Johnson, 1973-74, p.18).

In addition, American and Canadian teachers in elementary schools believe girls are better readers; nevertheless, at the same time, Nigerian teachers believe that boys have more reading skills than girls. There are different studies that show gender differences in reading in different cultures. One of them reports parents in North America prefer their sons to practice many types of sports outside rather than staying inside to read (Johnson, 1973-74). Therefore, The International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement

(IEA) reports the girls in 28 of 31 countries are at a higher level in language and reading accomplishment than boys (Fuller, Hua, and Snyder, 1994).

Another research study conducted six tests in reading skills, like reading comprehension and vocabulary, at three grades levels in Canada. They found girls excelled and outperformed boys on 14 reading skills tests; nevertheless, boys surpassed girls on 4 of the reading skills.

i. *From my perspective: How gender differences affect learning to read*

Anecdotally speaking, according to my experience growing up, my mother gave birth to twins, my brother, Azam and my sister, Majed. Now, they are in fourth grade in elementary school. When they were in second grade, I taught them in our home and helped them in doing their homework, especially reading with writing because my major is in the Arabic language. I found my brother; Azam, has more reading skills than my sister; Majed, such as reading understanding and spelling even though my mother spent a lot of time teaching my sister, Majed. This personal experience has caused me to believe that gender differences may influence reading skills and experiences in schools.

c) *How Gender Differences Affect Attitudes Toward Reading Choices*

Gambell and Hunter note that girls are more successful in reading skills and better readers than boys. In addition, because girls are inclined to be more emotive and romantic than boys, they read more and prefer to read narratives that are fiction more than non-fiction, and they focus on characters in novels. In contrast, boys read less than girls, and they read a wider range of topics than girls (Gambell & Hunter, 2000).

A different study has concluded that there is a relationship between female reading and male reading; that female reading is related with leisure activity; whereas, male reading is related with the work environment and business. Further, this study reports reading attitudes and practices of 16-year-old English-Canadian students by gender. It shows that there are gender gaps in reading; that more girls (67.2%) than boys (53.1%) spend more than 15 minutes reading every day for their classes. Girls read every day for interest and enjoyment. Thus, girls like reading more than boys (Gambell & Hunter, 2000).

i. *From my perspective: Looking to the future*

Further, after reading many of these studies, I want to design special programs to encourage students from both genders in the elementary school to develop reading skills that will be enhanced by their experiences with the reading centers and activities at their school. If students are struggling with their literacy development, the programs I plan to develop will divide students' time between their general academic classes and tutoring

classes to improve their reading skills; the program will be appropriate for both genders. I expect that that results will be useful and create progress with the reading skills of the students in this elementary school programs. The programs will assess the students' reading and help them to read with greater ease, more skillfully, and clearly. The study that is described in the sections that follow will contribute to my knowledge of literacy as it interfaces with gender in the elementary school, and, as a result, will assist me in the development of the programs I plan to develop in the future.

d) *In Summary*

In short, gender differences in reading performance in school are an interesting subject, and there are many studies about this topic. Many studies report that females are better than males in reading skills. On the other hand, there are different studies concluding that boys have more reading skills than girls. In addition, some studies suggest that the culture of the students plays an important role in gender differences in reading. Because of the varied results in the research literature, I have come to believe that gender differences in reading are not a significant factor; everyone has special skills depending on his/her ability with literacy learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

a) *The Participants*

This research was conducted in a public elementary school in Kalamazoo, Michigan after getting permission from the school administration. I went to the school to meet the principal because I wanted to get written permission to do my research in the school he led. Also, I explained to him why I had chosen this school particularly, i.e. that I had found the required student population for my educational research there. I worked with the principal to choose one of the elementary classrooms to observe how the teacher developed children's reading skills at their reading centers and through other literacy activities. As a result of our collaboration, a second grade teacher volunteered to participate in this study. The teacher was African American, and she was 45-54 old years. She had been teaching elementary school for thirty years and was now the second grade. In addition to the teacher participant, all 23 students in the teacher's classroom also participated in this study after granting their written assent and receiving the consent of their parents.

This was a diverse classroom demographically speaking. The children ranged in age from seven to eight years. Approximately 55% of the children in the classroom qualified for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. The children came from a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, with several children speaking

English as their second language. There were 23 children in this class; twelve girls and eleven boys. Within this classroom, there was a child from China (boy), another from India (girl), and two children from Saudi Arabia (one boy and one girl). Seven of the children were African American (four girls and three boys) and two were American Indian (one boy and one girl). Three of the children were Hispanic (two girls and one boy). The other seven children were European American.

b) *The Setting*

This classroom had educational materials and comfortable furniture for both the teacher and the students that helped students to have great learning and educational experiences with their teacher. This classroom included: 2 big white boards, and 1 big book, all of which were used during whole group literacy time.

c) *Research Questions*

My main research question was: "What are the differences between girls' and boys' responses to the reading center activities and other literacy experiences that are designed to enhance and to develop their skills with reading?"

The three sub-questions for this study were:

- Which literacy activities in the reading center and elsewhere in the classroom do the boys most prefer?
- Which literacy activities in the reading center and elsewhere in the classroom do the girls most prefer?
- How can teachers of reading support both genders to develop their skills with reading through the literacy activities in their classrooms?

After I have researched the question and sub-questions, I collected the data for my study. I anticipated that the data I collected would provide information that was significant for my study, and that it would provide answers that directly addressed my research question and sub-questions.

d) *Data Tools*

I used observations, field notes from the observations, a teacher survey (see Appendix A) and both teacher and student interviews (see Appendices B and C) as the data tools for this study (Falk and Blumenreich, 2005).

i. *Data tool description*

Because I wanted to collect the data for my research that was about the differences between genders in the regular classroom as they engaged in reading centers and other literacy activities, I needed to focus on specific elements in the reading activity processes. These areas included how the reading centers and other literacy activities contributed to improving the children's reading skills according to their

gender, how the teacher encouraged the children to benefit from their literacy activities, what methods or strategies the teacher used to enhance their reading skills, and what reading skills improved through their literacy activities.

I visited the elementary classroom for four weeks from 8 am to 12 pm because the reading classes were held during this time. This allowed me to have ample time to observe the children's interaction and reading skills in their classroom. I wrote journals and notes about these themes or areas and kept them filed.

I prepared the survey for the classroom teacher whose room I was observing in (see Appendix A). The questions were divided into personal and professional questions related to age, race, gender, and the role the literacy activities (reading center) played in developing children's reading skills.

The third method I used to collect data was interviewing children in the elementary school classroom and keeping a running record of their answers in the interview. This was done during a time that the school administration determined (see Appendix B). I interviewed six children selected by the teacher who fit into these categories: one high performing girl, one middle range performing girl, one girl who struggled with reading, one high performing boy, one middle range performing boy, and one boy who struggled with reading.

I also interviewed the classroom teacher (see Appendix C). Because I had experience in teaching, I used my past experience and observation skills to facilitate in this interview.

ii. *Data organization*

After I collected the data, I analyzed the data and organized the data in specific ways to help me sort the information, conserve and utilize the data in the most effective and efficient of ways. Since almost all of the data was qualitative, I used some strategies or methods, such as coding, charting, outlining, cluster mapping, and indexing to help me to organize and analyze the data easily and clearly. I read and reviewed the interview notes, articles, filed journals, observations, and records. Then I took notes while reviewing and interpreting the data by attaching importance to themes that emerged, and I wrote lists of important themes in the data by charting, outlining, or indexing. For example, I used the clustering map and outline to record and organize my observations, and I made a chart to conserve and consolidate the results of the interviewing and survey questions.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

a) *Detailed Observation and Description of the Classroom Environment*

This classroom was a *peaceful, safe place* for children. Each morning the teacher focused on

welcoming the children to her classroom and helping them to put their belongings away and to settle into the classroom and prepare for their learning. The children started the morning with a healthy snack and then the day of learning began. The teacher organized and led her classroom quietly. She consistently spoke with a quiet, calm voice.

The teacher's classroom leadership was strong, but not overly controlling. She provided children with feedback about their behavior by using a chart at the front of the room. If children were on task, their names were included on the green team. If they were struggling, then a yellow warning sign was placed by their name, and the teacher talked with them quietly about the ways in which they needed to change their behavior. She was persistent and she worked with the children who had warnings again and again to help them understand how they needed to work to rejoin the green team. If a child persisted in being off task and/or with disruptive behavior, a white warning sign replaced the yellow warning sign. This was the "last warning" sign. Always the teacher encouraged children to rejoin the green team and to focus on their learning. If the child with a white last warning sign persisted, then a red sign was placed by their name and the teacher accompanied the child to office to call their parent(s). I observed on more than one occasion as children placed the accurate sign by their name when they were struggling and/or replaced a yellow warning sign with a green as they rejoined the green team. The teacher's system to assist children to focus on their learning worked well and caused a minimum amount of disruption as the teacher and the children worked together to help them focus on their learning.



Figure 1 : Green team. This figure shows the teacher's way to monitor the children's behavior in the classroom

This was a *sharing classroom* where children felt comfortable to ask for help and to offer their help, and even their morning snack to visitors. As I observed during the week, children felt free to ask for my assistance as they needed and so I became, in some ways, a participant observer in this study.

This classroom was very complex. In the following paragraphs I have described the classroom setting and environment. A detailed diagram of the classroom follows the description.

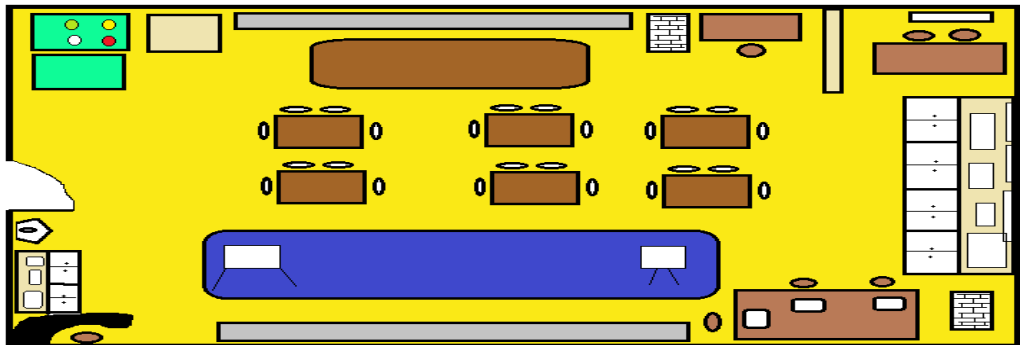


Figure 2 : Classroom diagram. This figure illustrates the full layout of the teacher's classroom

The classroom had a lot of educational equipment and materials. The teacher's desk was not in a prominent location; rather it was off to the side, and she used it for grading papers and meeting with people, but most of the time she was other places in the room. It was in the northwest section of this classroom.



Figure 3 : Teacher's desk. This figure shows the teacher's area to grade papers and meet with a variety of people. It is located in the northeast corner of the room. A T.V. is hung on the wall for classroom viewing during selected lessons

Moreover, this classroom had two big white boards, which were used to show information and lessons to all students in the classroom. One of them was on the left side in this classroom. The teacher used it to write the agenda every day and the name of teachers in the classroom and visitors. The teacher also used this board to show some information,

explanations, pictures, and examples of answers to the worksheets using digital the projector. Below this board, there was a long shelf that contained several levels and types of books. As you can see, the teachers used every available space to store and display the educational materials available to the children.



Figure 4 : Whiteboard 1. This figure shows the whiteboard, which the teacher used to write the agenda and show some information to the children by the digital projector



Figure 5 : The digital projector. This figure shows the teacher's method to show some information on the whiteboard to the children. It faces the white board on the north wall

Another big white board was on the right side in this classroom. This board was used specifically for the whole group reading lessons. The teacher used it to fill in the information about each story as she discussed the stories with all of the students in whole group. Near

this board, there was a carpet that was the place for all of the students to gather during whole group reading time. This carpet was a rectangle shape with dimensions of approximately twelve by twenty feet.



Figure 6 : Whiteboard 2. This figure shows the whiteboard, which the teacher used for the whole group reading lessons. It is on the north wall

There was a "big book" in this classroom that was in at the front of the carpet. It was used to display many color papers, words, and pictures that the teacher used to show the summary and important information of the story. Beside the "big book", there was a chair for the teacher that she sat on during reading time with whole group.



Figure 7 : Big book. This figure shows the big book that the teacher used for displaying the summary and important points of the story with the whole group reading lessons. It stands in front of the white board on the north wall

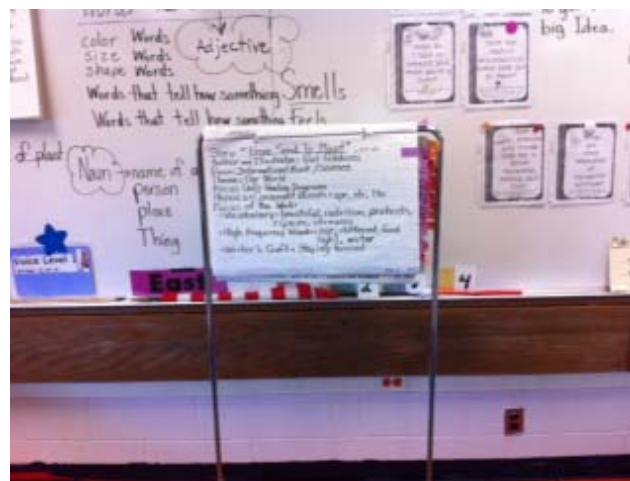


Figure 8 : Big book. This figure shows the big book from a different angle than Figure 7



Figure 9 : The carpet. This figure shows the children's place during the whole group reading lessons

There was also one semicircular table with a teacher's chair and six students' chairs that were behind the "big book". This table was used as a center for one of the literacy activities. The teacher sat with six students around this table to read and discuss the story and do

the worksheets associated with the story. In addition, there was a bell on this table that the teacher used to ring as a signal for the times the students needed to rotate to their next literacy activities at the reading centers.



Figure 10 : The semicircular table. This figure shows one of the reading centers, which is the literacy activity with the teacher. This was the favorite center for the children

There was also another technology resource in this class. There were four computers beside each other that were sitting on one table. This area of four computers was in the northeast section in the

classroom. This area of the classroom was used as a reading center for one of the literacy activities during small group literacy time. The students used this area to take a reading test after reading their books.



Figure 11 : Computers in the classroom. This figure shows a reading center for one of the literacy activities that children used to take a reading test after reading their books

This classroom also had natural light because it had a big window that spanned the entire length of one side of this classroom and allowed the sunlight to enter the room. This window was on the north side in the classroom. There was a long shelf that was under the window. There were several baskets on this shelf that

held a variety of materials and resources that were used for the literacy activities in each of the reading centers. Also, there were many cupboards under this shelf. The teacher used them to keep her classroom materials for the literacy activities that she prepared for the reading centers.



Figure 12 : Windows and literacy activity materials. This figure shows the potential natural light in the classroom (note the contrast in light when the shades are drawn) and some materials for the literacy activities in the reading centers

There were six table centers in the middle of this classroom. The teacher put two rectangular tables together to form a larger working space for each group of children (12 smaller tables combined to create six table centers). Each table center contained a small basket to hold pencils and pens as well as a container

to hold the individual folders for each of the students. In addition, each one of these tables was used as a reading center for the literacy activities. These six table sections were also where the children sat for their other small group and whole group lessons during the day.



Figure 13 : Table centers for the students. This figure shows each one of these table centers that was used as a reading center for the literacy activities and the children's daily work

There was a sink in this classroom, which was near the door, and there was another shelf that was beside the sink. There were also some cupboards under this shelf for keeping the classroom's materials. A T.V was also located in this classroom and was hung on the wall above the teacher's desk.

i. *Detailed description of the whiteboard used during literacy time whole group*

On the other hand, there were important reading objectives and skills that the teacher planned to address with her students because they contributed to the development of the students' reading skills. Related

to the teacher's plan, there was a board in this classroom, which was in this classroom where the specific objectives for science, social studies, spelling, handwriting, and writing were listed. Some of these objectives are listed below:

- Science: To measure volume, which container has more?
- Social Studies: To understand what contributions are made to American history by African Americans?
- Spelling: To write words correctly on our assignments.
- Handwriting: To make our letters legible in words on our daily assignments.
- Writing: How can I make my stories better through revision and editing? How can I write a narrative story with my new words?

Also, this board contained key concepts in language arts, such as directions about how to make a good question and how to ask questions about the content of their reading in language arts. Two examples of these key concepts listed at the board follow:

- ii. *Making questions is an essential part or process to understand the story and improve the student's questions*

Note that the teacher asked them to start their sentences with one of these words to make a question (who, what, when, how, which, why, and where).

- iii. *There are essential questions to ask in order for a student to understand what they read*
- Examples of these essential questions are:

- How do I use text features to find information or facts from a passage?
- What are some examples of figurative language?
- How can I use context clues to understand story meaning?

How do pictures and words help me to know characters, setting, and plot?

b) *Detailed Observation and Description of Classroom Literacy Time*

The Mariam Elementary School (a pseudonym has been used to maintain confidentiality for the participants) was the location where I collected the data for my master's degree capstone research. The first step in my data collection was to begin formal observations of the classroom literacy time. I observed 23 second grade children for five weeks, two times per week, for two hours each time. The literacy time started at 11: 00am and ended at 12:30 each day. The schedule for the literacy time was as follows:

- 11: 00-11:30 Whole group times with children on the carpet for reading.

- 11: 30-12:30 Small groups at the reading centers.

The observations took place during their reading time. These observations included both whole group reading time where the teacher used traditional methods as well as reading time with literacy activities where the children gathered in small groups and participated in reading centers. While some students are in small groups with the teacher, the remaining students are at centers working on reading skills. In addition, there are groups directed to their assigned reading centers. At the end of whole group time, the teacher directed each group to a particular center. For example, the Red group was directed to a small group center reading table, the Yellow group to Center 4 where they were involved with the Rainbow Spelling activity, the Blue group went to Center 2, and Green group Center 3, etc.

It is important to note that this class of 23 children was divided into two literacy categories, intensive and strategic. The intensive group included the children with the highest need in the development of their literacy skills. The strategic group included the children who were reading on grade level or above. During the small group period, the teacher always met first with the intensive group. She always met second with the strategic group in small groups as planned.

There was a change in groups, which also included the group at the reading table. At the end of small group the teacher rang a bell once and the students in each center had to quickly clean up their area and lineup. The teacher rang the bell once more and students moved around the perimeter of the room to the next center in numerical order from where they had been. For instance, the red group was at center 2, after the second bell, they would proceed to center 3.

There were several literacy stations. Each student was supposed to have a reading accountability journal to write in. The literacy stations that were included in this study were:

- *Center 1-* Small reading groups werewith the teacher for instruction at the reading table.
- *Center 2-* The student read to himself/herself while seated on the carpet. After reading a book, the student would fill out a log sheet (writing in the narrative elements). Finally, the student took an accelerated reading test on the computer. A paraprofessional was at the computer to help or read with individual students.
- *Center 3-* "Fry the Word"- Students pulled five words for the other students, said the word and laid them in the frying pan; lastly, the student made a sentence with each of the words in their reading accountability book.
- *Center 4-* "Go Fish or Concentration"- The cards were pulled or turned over as the students said the

Fry Words. After the game was finished, the students would make a sentence with each of the Fry words in their reading accountability book.

- *Center 5- Rainbow Spelling-* The child wrote the spelling words with a multicolor pen and then made a sentence with the word in their accountability book.
- *Center 6- CVC Game (Consonant Vowel Consonant game)* was a different literacy station. Under the teacher's direction, the students moved to the large classroom white board, wrote on selected words on the white board, said the word and wrote the word in a sentence in their accountability book.

i. *Materials and resources the teacher used*

There were many resources and materials that students used in the literacy stations and activities.

These resources helped students to be more effective and benefit from the reading centers. For example, there were different materials for literacy activities, such as books for all learners (leveled readers), sounds of sunshine and decodable books (Harcourt book), Fountas & Pinnell leveled literacy intervention, phonics for the week (KPS curriculum 2nd grade calendar schedule), high frequency words (Harcourt), making words (Cunningham and Hall), technology resources (accelerated reading, Raz-Kids, Read Naturally), trade books, school library book collection and their own Mariam Elementary School books which were AR books, personal Accelerated Reading book collection, public library book collection, and paraprofessionals to assist students with literacy.



Figure 14 : Materials storage for the reading centers. This figure shows the variety of materials for the literacy activities in the reading centers

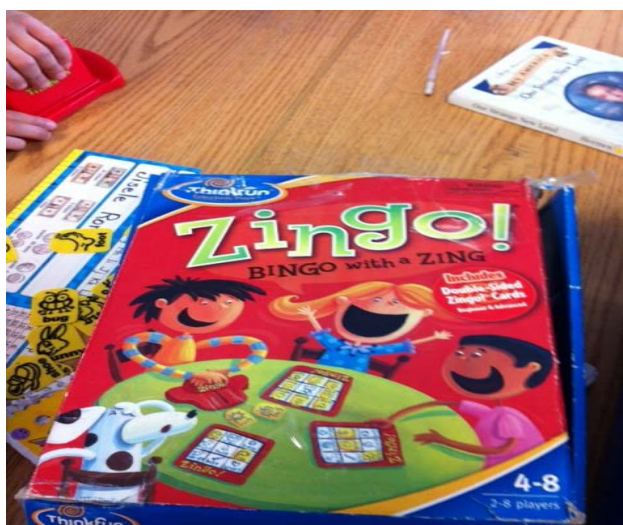


Figure 15 : A specific example of material for a reading centers. This figure shows one type of literacy activity in a reading center



Figure 16 : One more section of the same activity. This is another page in the literacy activity featured in Figure 15; the children matched words with their corresponding pictures

ii. *Summary description of the literacy centers*

The classroom where observed the children as they engaged in their literacy activities at reading centers was provided with all of the materials that were useful and necessary to develop their reading skills, such as several types and levels of books, many kinds of literacy games, four computers, a white board, and a variety of literacy worksheets. The teacher always prepared these materials before the literacy time started. The students knew ahead of time which center they should join and which materials they use. This allowed for a punctual beginning for the literacy time each day.

iii. *Detailed observation of the students engaged in whole group reading time*

As a result of my observation, I found all students in this class liked and preferred to participate in reading through their involvement in the reading centers and the literacy activities they experienced there; they preferred this kind of literacy experience over whole class literacy time. During whole class literacy time, the children gathered on a carpet and the teacher read a story to them from what is called "a big book." This is an enlarged format book that is identical to one of the text sets they had in the classroom that each of the children had read and were familiar with. This was a time for the children to sit quietly and to listen to the story as it was read to them. It was a time for them to talk with the teacher about key elements in the story, such as setting, characters, new vocabulary, the theme of the story, and

how the story related to the children's lives. When students participated with all of the class on the carpet, some of the children were bored, and these particular children did not pay attention well as the teacher read and discussed the story with the students. This was especially the case for two of the six boys in the classroom. One of the boys, in particular, struggled most of the time with the whole group literacy experience. Two of the fourteen girls in this classroom also struggled to engage in the whole group literacy time. Twelve of the fourteen girls were consistently more interested and interactive in the whole group exercises than six of the boys and two other girls when they were with the whole class on the carpet. In fact, the six boys were more than ready when the time came for dismissal to the reading centers, to the point that they would leave the carpet prematurely and their teacher had to call them back.

iv. *Description of one whole group "big book" literacy session with the teacher*

For this particular session, the teacher chose the story entitled *China World*. The story was in a "big book" format that allowed all of the children to see (see photo on page 21). This particular story fits within the multicultural genre for children's stories. The intention with this particular session is focused on five different reading areas: 1) *Phonics*, specifically "er" and "est", was a focus in this whole group lesson. The teacher had the students go through the story and give examples

from the story of words that contained “er” and “est” endings. She also asked the students to share other words they had in their minds that also had “er” and “est” endings. 2) *The teacher referred to this second reading area as a “big idea”* which was related to the theme of the story. In this case, the theme or “big idea” was focused on the idea of “neighborhood news” or the sharing that goes on in neighborhoods because the members of the neighborhood know each other and share what has happened in their lives. The story took place in a neighborhood in a Chinese community. The teacher used this as an opportunity to talk about neighborhoods in other countries and in the United States, how those neighborhoods were the same and how they were different. Several children in the class were from different countries, and so they could speak to the commonality from direct experience. 3) *Asking Questions* was an important part of this whole group experience. The teacher asked these questions as the students gathered on the carpet each time to read and discuss the story:

- Introduction: After the teacher and children were seated on the carpet, the teacher started the new lesson after reviewing the last lesson by introducing the new story with questions, asking the students to relate the story with their reality, and by showing the pictures in the story).
- Reading the lesson: The teacher read the story or lesson and the children listened to the teacher’s reading. Also, the teacher discussed the story with children as she read the story.
- Discussion of the story or lesson: The teacher asked the children about the story or lesson: She asked the children to visualize what they had read and heard. For example, the teacher asked them:
 - o What do you hear in the story? e.g. music, fireworks sounds, and several sounds of characters and events.
 - o What do you watch or see in the story? e.g. pictures of characters, dancing, and characters talking.
 - o What do you smell in the story? e.g. food and smoking of fireworks.

4) *Inferences* were also a part of this whole group session. The teacher called inference “making a smart guess.” In this particular session the teacher discussed the whole story with the children, and she asked the children if they could figure out the meaning of different things that occurred in the book that were not explicit or directly spoken of. In other words, she was teaching them how to infer from what they read and from what the illustrations included as well. There was a Chinese student in the class who the teacher called on to share additional information to help the class have even more detail about Chinese neighborhoods; he became the

class expert on this topic. All the students were excited to ask their Chinese classmate questions about his country and his neighborhood. At the conclusion of the discussion, the teacher asked the students to develop a new question that they had not addressed during the discussion. She guided their question asking, by explaining different kinds of questions, such as “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” and “how.” As the students developed their questions, she invited the Chinese student to help her answer the questions that were raised. The Chinese student was able to address most of his classmates’ questions. At one point in time, he turned to me while they were discussing the Chinese calendar and the Chinese New Year, and he asked if Saudi Arabia also had a New Year celebration. I shared the Saudi Arabian celebration and other events that were similar and different from what the Chinese celebrated. I then turned to the two Saudi Arabian students and invited them to share about how the Saudi Arabian people celebrated the events that I had introduced. The teacher, along with the students and I, were delighted with this entire whole group experience because the whole class shared a deep interest in the diverse cultures represented in the “big book” and in their own classroom. As the teacher began to close this whole class discussion, she asked the students, “How does thinking and wondering help us to understand what we are reading?” We talked about how our thinking and wondering helps us to solve problems, to figure out new ideas, and to understand the books we read. At the conclusion of this content discussion, the teacher returned to some technical aspects of the story. 5) *Vocabulary* was discussed. The teacher asked the students to share the new words they had learned as they read the story together. She also had the students use each word in a sentence. 6) *Word Frequency* was the last focus of this whole group session. The teacher asked the students to think about how and when they might use the new vocabulary words they had learned. She encouraged them to pay attention to the times when they heard the words or when they might use their new words as they talked and wrote in class.

After the whole group session ended, the teacher asked the children to join with their small groups in literacy activities located in six classroom reading centers. At the same time, the teacher reminded the children about the classroom and reading centers rules. For instance, all groups had to clean up their table and centers and each group had to change its literacy activities at the reading centers every fifteen minutes.

v. *Detailed observation of the students engaged in the reading centers*

Both the boys and girls were more interested in reading centers where they engaged actively with their literacy activities. Also, I found that boys and girls were interested in a particular reading center where they read

a book, wrote about the book or filled out a worksheet with questions about the book, and then took a test about the book at a classroom computer.

The boys preferred to read books, which involved animals or action stories. Boys were more interested than girls in the Consonant Vowel Consonant (CVC) game (see page 18 for a description for a description of this game). The boys appeared to enjoy the opportunity that they had to compete with each other and be challenged as to who would win the game. It is important to note that this was a matching game and it did not require participants to write.

As I attended this class two times per week for five weeks, I observed that girls were more interested in the Rainbow Spelling game (see page 18 for a description of this game). The girls appeared to be drawn to this game because of their skills with spelling and their interest to write words and use the multiple colors of pens at the center. For example, the girls who worked at this center came consistently prepared with their notebooks so that they could write. It was common for girls at this center to use more than one color when they wrote and to go to their teacher if a color had run out or was missing. In contrast, the boys who worked at this center did not care to come prepared, often did not have their notebooks, and had to be sent to their desks to retrieve them.

Both boys and girls were interested in the math games that were also included in the literacy activities. For example, children could match the picture of a watch and the sentence, which expressed the specific time that the picture showed.

vi. *Description of the most interesting center for the children*

I observed that both boys and girls were most interested in the reading center where they had the opportunity to sit at a special table with the teacher that was designed for small group work. The teacher would tell them something to do with their reading books. She would show the four children who were in this reading center the story and read it to them. Next, the teacher asked students about the author of the story. Also, the teacher asked children about the type of story it was, fiction or nonfiction. Then the teacher discussed the pictures in the story with the children, specifically whether they were real or not. She asked children several questions about the story. She also tried to connect the story and its pictures with the children's lives. After this, the teacher gave each child at the reading center a copy of the story to read silently. The teacher gave each child in this center tool, such as a hand-held headset for each child that allowed the child to listen to him or herself as they read the story out loud in a quiet voice. The teacher also gave each child at these center small sheets of paper to write his/her questions or notes about the story. Finally, the teacher

gave children who were at this center a worksheet about the story and gave them a specific length of time to complete it. Then the teacher discussed the answers to the worksheet questions with them.

c) *Final Results Emerging from Observations of the Reading Centers*

I observed that the reading centers with literacy activities played an important role in the development of the reading skills of children in the second grade because the reading centers provided them with the opportunity to improve their skills and strategies in reading. For example, I observed that some of the girls' reading skills developed through their literacy activities, such as comprehension, understanding what they read, grasping new words, and making new sentences and phrases. On the other hand, I observed some of the boy's reading skills were improved, such as using new words in several different sentences.

i. *Teacher interviewing Results*

A teacher interview was the second research tool of my collection data. I asked the teacher some questions about how the classroom reading centers with their activities developed the children's reading skills in elementary school, which were:

- Which of the reading skills of the girls and boys were developed through the literacy activities in the reading centers?
- What differences were there between the ways in which the girls responded to the literacy activities in the reading centers as compared to the boys?
- What types of material or resources in the reading centers improved the child's reading skills in her classroom (see Appendix D).

The teacher told me that by the results of the last Dibels test revealed that 90% of her students had advanced 2 to 3 grade levels in reading. In addition, she told me that the literacy activities in the reading centers contributed to improving the reading skills of both girls and boys. However, she distinguished between the girls and the boys where specific kinds of reading improvement were concerned. For example, she said that the girls might become "more independent in reading activities." In addition she said that girls might develop in these ways, "comprehension; understand and interpret stories—respond to questions; recognize new words using phonics—fluency; follow written directions—can retell main idea; sequencing events—reading compound words and contractions" (Teacher Interview, Response to Question 2—see Appendix D).

On the other hand, the teacher believed that there were some reading skills the boys might improve through their literacy activities in the classroom. She said, "reading comprehension, using phonics for new words, follow written directions, sequencing main ideas, respond to questions, reading to self center—read an

accelerated [book]; reading book—fill out log sheet on narrative elements finally take an AR test on computer; Fry word checker game, vowel consonant and word pattern game (see Appendix D).

The teacher noted that there were differences between the ways in which the girls responded to the literacy activities as compared to the boys. For example, some of her boys and girls were more tasks oriented and somewhat more mature than five of her boys who were identified as being in either the intensive or strategic category in reading skill and needed to be guided through the centers. She also said that these boys were inclined to be more impulsive (see Appendix D).

Lastly, the teacher reported that there were several materials in the reading centers which contributed to improving the children's reading skills in her classroom. She gave examples of these materials, including: Fry phrases, making sentences, and reading short passages and identifying main ideas, sequencing events, making predictions, inferences, identifying the narrative elements and more (see Appendix D).

viii. *Teacher Survey Results*

The Teacher Survey was another tool to collect the data for this research. In the Teacher Survey, the teacher indicated that she strongly agreed that the literacy activities in the reading center played an important role in improving the children's reading in elementary school, generally both girls' and boys' reading skills. In addition, the teacher strongly agreed that children benefited from the literacy activities in the reading centers toward the improvement of their reading skills in elementary school.

On the other hand, the teacher strongly agreed with the statement on the survey (see Appendix D) that her observations of children during literacy activity at the reading center led her improvement of methods in the classroom and that she successfully encouraged the children to benefit from their literacy activities in the reading centers each day. Also, she strongly agreed that the literacy activities at the reading centers helped children become better readers in her elementary school classroom.

The teacher kindly agreed with the survey statement that the boys responded to her encouragement with literacy activities in the reading centers differently than the girls. She thought it depended on the academic as well [as] the social behavior of each student. At the same time, she strongly agreed that there was a relationship between developing the children's reading skills and their involvement with literacy activities in reading centers in the classroom.

The teacher agreed that there were differences in the boy's responses to the literacy activities at the reading centers when compared to their responses

during the general reading class. Thus, the boys who were low in reading usually needed much guidance going through the centers and staying on task in the centers. However, she kindly agreed that there were differences in the girl's responses to the literacy activities at the reading centers when compared to their responses during the general reading class. The girls generally enjoyed working through activities together. As a result, the children who were strategic and met the benchmarks on the Dibels at the beginning of the year usually showed 2 or 3 whole years or more growth.

Student interviews (see Appendix F) were another tool that I used when I collected the data for this research. After the teacher provided me with the names of two students who were excellent, two students who functioned in the middle range, and two students who struggled with literacy in her class, we identified the date, time, and location of the student interviews.

I conducted the students' interviews and the transcript prepared by Dr. Lynn Nations Johnson who is the supervisor of my master's degree capstone research. I conducted the interviews in the Mariam Elementary School library. Student Interview Questions were:

- What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?
- What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?
- Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?
- What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?
- What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

The Mariam Elementary school library was the best place to interview students because it was a quiet and comfortable place. All students were happy and enthusiastic to be participating in the interview. They were natural and spontaneous when they talked with me. Moreover, all students who were in this class desired to have an interview, but we simply did not have the time to do this. It does, however, indicate that the children perceived the interviewing process in a positive light. When I came back to the classroom to call another student to go with me to the library, all students asked me to choose them.

After interviewing the students, I found all students preferred the literacy activities at the reading centers more than the whole group reading classes. In addition, almost all of the students were happy when they participated in the literacy activities in the reading centers for more than one reason. The reasons that one

or more of the student interviewees gave are listed below:

- The literacy activities were fun.
- They learned new things from them, such as handwriting, writing, and reading.
- The literacy activities gave one student confidence about him/her self.
- Another student stated that these activities in the reading centers sometimes seemed easy and other times, they appeared hard; however, in the end, s/he passed the reading test most of the time.
- One of students said these activities provided him/her with more quiet when s/he was reading.
- They learned together with their partner and friend. For example, if students did not know what to do, they explained that they could learn from and help one another.
- One said the reading centers gave him/her opportunities to write and try to figure out what s/he did not know how to do.
- They had a chance to choose and pick different books and then read to each other.
- Another student told me a different reason why s/he was happy with the reading centers; s/he did not ever get nervous since s/he did not want to rush. S/he knew most of answers already, and s/he usually got done before a lot of other students. Thus, s/he had time to check his/her work, which evidently meant a lot to her/him.
- They learned new things and words, such as longer words.
- They liked the idea that they helped each other and worked together through using the materials and resources at the centers.
- One said s/he enjoyed the literacy activities because s/he could read about animals and how they live.
- They became faster readers through the literacy activities.
- One student said that these activities caused her/him to love reading more. S/he could read any books that s/he was interested in and chose books which were different levels from the library.
- The activities were like playing, not like learning.
- One student told me that s/he liked reading centers because the literacy activities helped her/him to learn and get smarter as s/he learned.
- Another student liked that we the students were allowed to have partners.

Later in the interviews, the students had the opportunity to talk about specific activities that they liked

at the reading centers. The activities that students chose are outlined below:

- They liked sitting at the table with their teacher who told them something to do related to reading their book that was called *The Boxcar Children*.
- They liked choosing books where they were reading at higher levels.
- One student said s/he also selected reading a book and taking the AR Test.
- One student told me that he/she chosen the reading and writing because they were his/her favorite activities in literacy at reading centers.
- One of the students told me that s/he liked reading the books then talking with people about what s/he was reading.
- Another student liked reading books at the reading centers. S/he said that s/he read to the teacher and the teacher called on him/her and s/he answered the questions.
- One of them told me that /s/he selected the games about numbers.
- One student he/she liked reading about meals. I connected this to a class activity that they had focused on reading a book about Chinese New Year that included special meals for the holiday and he/she participated in the discussion a lot, talking about her favorite meals. S/he told us her favorite meal was pizza.
- One student said s/he was at a high level in reading and s/he liked being one of the highest readers (S/he said she was at the 7.6 level.). S/he was in 7.6. S/he liked the idea that s/he could read more and more books and get a higher and higher reading level.
- One student liked the reading test. As s/he described it, "We read the books and listen to the books and take tests on the books to see if we understand the book. If we pay attention our scores become some of our grades."
- One student liked the word game at one of the centers; it was kind of like a crossword.
- Finally, another student told me that s/he liked language arts. S/he read and wrote about it. S/he worked on suffixes of words, and s/he had the papers of the language arts were actually kind of fun. Also, s/he had to look at the book for different words that it said. If it had "ing" suffix and then add it to the end.

V. RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

a) *The Teacher in this Study*

As a result of these findings, I believe that the literacy activities at the reading centers played an

important role in developing children's reading skills in this classroom. The teacher who participated in this study had developed a classroom environment that was helpful to the children, a peaceful place to learn, a fully trusting environment where children cooperated with each other, built friendships, and loved to learn. She had a great background about how to develop the reading skills of the children through the reading center approach. She had an extensive background about the materials and books that could be used, and she had developed an expansive library of reading center choices that she could select from each day. She also had three main professional sources she drew her reading center activities and processes from, 1) *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades*, 2) *The Café Book: Engaging All Students in Daily Literacy Assessment and Instruction* and 3) *Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work*. Clearly she had been working to develop her expertise in this area for many years (thirty, to be exact), and she was highly effective with teaching literacy through the reading center approach.

b) *What We Have to Learn from the Teacher in this Study Regarding Literacy Teaching*

This serves to illustrate that in the reading centers with their literacy activities, the teacher is a significant factor to improve the children's reading skills because s/he has taken special courses and training in the development of the reading skills of children. A teacher with this expertise and training understands that s/he should make the reading center interesting. For example, the teacher may share both girls' and boys' activities and experiences in reading centers as well as provide for small group, large group, or independent work according to what the children need to enhance their reading skills. The teacher also understands that she should give the children free time to choose their books, and s/he encourages children to have interest in reading and in the books they choose, so the children may become good readers who also enjoy reading.

Considering the success of the teacher who participated in this study, it is important to note that for a teacher to be successful with literacy instruction through a reading center approach, that the teacher should be familiar with the literacy activities at reading centers and the kind of environment that must be developed for success with this method. The teacher should also record his/her observations about the children's reading skills and responses in the regular classroom and at the reading centers, so s/he can choose, create, or find a new method that helps to develop the children's reading skills. As a result, the teacher should exploit the reading center's material to enhance the children's reading skills.

I believe the literacy activities at the reading centers are the best way to encourage children to like

reading and to improve their reading skills, and it is a good method to observe and measure the development of the reading skills of children in the elementary school. In addition, there are several materials that are important in the reading centers, such as high attraction, very interesting games, multi media equipment and materials, as well as workbooks and personal notebooks for each child to write in. All of these materials and equipment were readily available in this classroom. The teacher also needs to integrate thinking strategies when s/he plans and uses the reading centers. Thus, the literacy activities at reading centers provide both girls and boys with several skills that are necessary, such as acoustic literacy skills (oral reading skills), compositional writing and analysis skills, and comprehension skills and strategies.

I think that the literacy activities classroom reading centers are a potentially useful way to improve the children's skills in reading, writing, or math in elementary school provided, 1) the teacher creates a classroom environment that fosters trust and independence among the children 2) the teacher has the expertise and does the planning and observation that have been described here. For example, the teacher must be strategic in her/his planning of the literacy activities at reading centers in her/his classroom; each center should have the specific sections that help the children to develop the reading skills they each need to focus on, such as brainstorming and creative thinking, vocabulary building, critical thinking, spelling, dictionary usage, independent writing skills, silent reading, oral reading, structural analysis where students analyze the structure of the stories they read, and effective listening. Learning with the literacy activities at these reading centers should take place in small groups. There is also the possibility to include workshop activities that include a larger number of students (approximately 6-8 students) who work together on a focused reading project that the teacher has planned according to the students' literacy needs. Both the reading centers and the workshops should always be focused on the development of both the boys' and girls' abilities and skills in reading.

c) *What We Have to Learn from the Teacher in this Study Regarding Children*

Where the children are concerned, it is most important to create a classroom environment that nurtures them, that builds trust in their teacher and each other, that inspires them to enjoy learning and being at school, and that motivates them to work independently on their own learning. The teacher in this study had developed this kind of environment and it was this environment that allowed the reading centers to be successful. The literacy activities at reading centers with the collaborative environment they create are a good place to motivate children to be good readers because

they encourage children to enjoy and practice their reading skills through different kinds of activities. The literacy activities in the reading centers should include nurturing goals for each child that are both sensitive and responsive to their needs, such as providing children with an appropriate and comfortable place of reading, and giving them chances to practice and improve different skills of reading in a pleasant, supportive way.

d) *What We Have to Learn from the Teacher in this Study Regarding the Use of Reading Centers for the Observation of Children's Development and Measuring Their Progress*

I believe that the literacy activities at the reading centers in elementary school is the best method for a teacher to take notes, observe and measure the development of the reading skills of the children, both boys and girls. When the children join the literacy activities at the reading centers, they should have pre-tests to set their levels in reading and what they need to improve on while they are in their reading center activities. This means the teacher has to pay close attention to the literacy activities at each of the reading centers and be aware of which centers boys and girls prefer to use. The children's responsiveness to the centers will obviously affect their learning experience positive learning experiences will help them to develop, as they should. After all, the main point is that the teacher will use these literacy activities at the reading centers to improve the reading skills of the boys and girls in her classroom. Reading centers allow for this kind of close attention to student development and need.

VI. CONCLUSION

In short, gender differences in reading performance in school are an interesting subject, and there are many studies about this topic. There are many studies that report females as being better than males in reading skills. On the other hand, there are different studies concluding that boys have more reading skills than girls. In addition, some studies suggest that the culture plays an important role in gender differences in reading. However, in this study, gender differences in reading were not as important a factor because each of the children had special skills depending on his/her ability to learn, and these abilities and their growth as readers were addressed individually. There were differences by gender in responsiveness and engagement in whole group reading activities, particularly with five boys and one girl. Girls on the while, with one exception, were more engaged and responsive in whole group activities. Close to half of the boys struggled to engage during whole group reading time. The gender differences were minimized even further in the reading centers. All of the children responded to the reading centers and the reading

centers were their preferred literacy experience. The same five boys who struggled with engagement during whole group reading time were described by the teacher as needing "more direction" during the reading centers times. The one girl who struggled with engagement during whole group time did not have this difficulty during the reading centers times. All of the children, both boys and girls, enjoyed being at school, enjoyed being in this classroom, and they engaged in the reading centers well, although five boys needed extra direction during reading centers time.

As I look to the future, after reviewing the scholarly literature and conducting this study, I will design special reading programs that incorporate the results of this study in my own practice and in the classrooms of the teachers with whom I work. This means that I will aim to develop a program where a nurturing classroom comes first and then the development of a strong set of teaching materials and reading center plans that respond to the needs of the students is put into place to encourage students of both sexes in the elementary school to develop their reading skills through the cooperative experiences that reading centers have to offer them.

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Appendix A

Teacher Survey

Name:

Date:

Directions: Circle the correct answer for each question below:

1. I am a
 - Female
 - Male
2. My race/ethnicity is
 - African-American
 - Asian/Asian American
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic
 - Native American
 - Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
 - Other: Please specify.....
3. My age is
 - 23-27
 - 28-35
 - 36-45
 - 45-54
4. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the children's reading in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree

5. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the girl's reading in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
6. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the boy's reading in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
7. Children benefit from the literacy activities (reading center) in developing their reading skills in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
8. The teacher's observations of children during literacy activities (at the reading center) guides teacher's improvement of methods in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
9. The literacy activities (reading center) help children become good readers in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
10. The teacher can successfully encourage the children to benefit from their literacy activities (reading center) in elementary school.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
11. The boys respond to your encouragement with literacy activities (the reading center) differently than the girls.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree

Please explain your answer to Question 11 above:

12. There is a relationship between developing the children's reading skills and their involvement with literacy activities (the reading center) in my classroom.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree

13. There are differences in the boys' responses to the literacy activities (reading center) when compared to their responses during the general reading class.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
14. There are differences in the girls' responses to the literacy activities (reading center) when compared to their responses during the general reading class.
 - Strongly agree
 - Kind of agree
 - Disagree
 - Totally disagree
15. Which of the children's reading skills improve through their involvement in literacy activities (the reading center) in your classroom?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for answer the survey questions

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Protocol

Name:

Date:

1. How do the reading activities that you have in this classroom improve the children's reading skills in elementary school?

.....

.....

.....

2. Which are the reading skills the girls may develop through their literacy activities in your classroom?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Which t are the reading skills the boys may develop through their literacy activities in your classroom?

.....

.....

.....

4. Is there a difference between the ways in which the girls respond to the literacy activities as compared to the boys?

.....

.....

.....

5. What kinds of materials in the reading center develop the children's reading skills in elementary school?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for answering these questions

Appendix C

Children's Interview Protocol

Name:

Date:

1. What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes? Why?
.....
.....
.....
2. What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?
.....
.....
.....
3. Do you enjoy reading in during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or Why not?
.....
.....
.....
4. What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?
.....
.....
.....
5. What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for answering these questions

Appendix D

Results of Teacher Survey

Name:

Date: 2/12/201

Directions: Circle the correct answer for each question below:

1. I am a

☒

Female

☐

Male

2. My race/ethnicity is

☒

African-American

☐

Asian/Asian American

☐

Caucasian

☐

Hispanic

☐

Native American

☐

Multi-racial/Multi-

☐

Other: Please specify.....

3. My age is

☐ 23-27

☐ 28-35

☐ 36-45

☒ 45-54

4. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the children's reading in elementary school.

☒ Strongly agree

☐ Kind of agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Totally disagree

5. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the girl's reading in elementary school.

☒ Strongly agree

☐ Kind of agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Totally disagree

6. The literacy activities (reading center) play an important role in improving the boy's reading in elementary school.

☒ Strongly agree

☐ Kind of agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Totally disagree

7. Children benefit from the literacy activities (reading center) in developing their reading skills in elementary school.

☒ Strongly agree

☐ Kind of agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Totally disagree

8. The teacher's observations of children during literacy activities (at the reading center) guides teacher's improvement of methods in elementary school.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Kind of agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

9. The literacy activities (reading center) help children become good readers in elementary school.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Kind of agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

10. The teacher can successfully encourage the children to benefit from their literacy activities (reading center) in elementary school.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Kind of agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

11. The boys respond to your encouragement with literacy activities (the reading center) differently than the girls.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Kind of agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

Please explain your answer to Question 11 above: I think it depends on the academic level as well the social behavior of the student.

12. There is a relationship between developing the children's reading skills and their involvement with literacy activities (the reading center) in my classroom.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Kind of agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

13. There are differences in the boys' responses to the literacy activities (reading center) when compared to their responses during the general reading class.

☐

Strongly agree

☒

Kind of agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Totally disagree

Please explain your answer to Question 13above: The boys who are low in reading usually need much guidance going through the centers and staying task in the centers.

14. There are differences in the girls' responses to the literacy activities (reading center) when compared to their responses during the general reading class.

☒

Strongly agree

☐

Kind of agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Totally disagree

Please explain your answer to Question 14 above: The girls generally enjoy working through activities together.

15. Which of the children's reading skills improve through their involvement in literacy activities (the reading center) in your classroom?

The children who were strategic and benchmark on the Dibels at the beginning of the year usually show 2or 3 whole years or more growth,

Thank you for answer the survey questions

Appendix E

Result of Teacher Interview Protocol

Name: Date: 2/12/2013

1. How do the reading activities that you have in this classroom improve the children's reading skills in elementary school?

By the last Dibels test 90% of my students will have excelled 2 to 3 grade levels in reading.

2. Which are the reading skills the girls may develop through their literacy activities in your classroom?

- More independent in reading activities—comprehension
- understand and interpret stories—respond to questions
- recognize new word using phonics—fluency
- follow written directions—can retell main idea
- sequencing events—reading compound words and contractions

3. Which t are the reading skills the boys may develop through their literacy activities in your classroom?

- Reading skills
- Reading comprehension
- Using phonics for new words
- follow written directions
- sequencing main ideas
- Respond to questions.

- Reading to self center—read an accelerated [book]
 - Reading book—fill out log sheet on narrative elements finally take an AR test on computer
 - Fry word checker game, vowel consonant and word pattern game
4. Is there a difference between the ways in which the girls respond to the literacy activities as compared to the boys?

Some of my boys and girls are more task oriented and somewhat more mature than 5 of my boys who are either intensive or strategic in reading and need to be guided through the centers. These boys are more impulsive.

5. What kinds of materials in the reading center develop the children's reading skills in elementary school?

- Fry Phrases
- Making sentences
- Reading short passages and identifying main ideas, sequencing events, making predictions, inferences, identifying the narrative elements and more.

Thank you for answering these questions

Appendix F

Results of Children's Interview Protocol

Interview (Student 1)

Question 1

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?

Student 1: Literacy

Interviewer: Why?

Student 1: Because it's fun. Cause I get to learn new things.

Interviewer: Give me an example of what you learn in literacy?

Student 1: Handwriting, writing, reading.

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 1: I feel happy and confident about myself because sometimes it seems easy, and sometimes it feels hard and in the end I pass most of the time.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 1: Because I learn new things and new words when people help me.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 1: I like it. It feels like playing. It doesn't feel like learning.

Interviewer: Which activities do you like?

Student 1: The first center. It's where my group sits at the table and Ms. Tompkins will tell us something to do. It's mostly reading. Right now we're reading a book it's called *The Boxcar Children*.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 1: Reading, reading higher levels.

Interview (Student 2)

Question 1

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes? Why?

Student 2: Activities.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 2: I like to read to them and it's like more quiet. Because when it's noisy I can't read the words because it's too loud

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 2: Happy

Interviewer: Why?

Student 2: I learn new things.

Interviewer: Give me an example.

Student 2: Maybe something about reading. Something that I don't know about and I can learn about it. Like when I read about animals...I didn't know about like where they go and stuff.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 2: Yes (nodded her head). I enjoy the books about how the books are telling about animals and how they live.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 2: I like reading. I like the reading center with Ms. Tompkins.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 2: I choose the books.

Interview (Student 3)

Question 1

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?

Student 3: Reading centers.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 3: Because we can read by ourselves and figure out words by ourselves to learn how to read.

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 3: Happy

Interviewer: Why?

Student 3: Because I get to be with my friends.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 3: Yes

Interviewer: Why?

Student 3: We can read much faster. To learn longer words.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 3: Reading the books. Talking with people about what I read.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 3: Reading a book and taking the AR Test.

Interview (Student 4)**Question 1**

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?

Student 4: Activity.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 4: Because you get a choice, you could read, you could do science, you can play.

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 4: Happy Why? Because sometimes we get to do partners, and if we do partners and we don't know what to do we can write it down and try to figure it out.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 4: Yes.

Interviewer: What?

Student 4: Because it helps you learn. You learn new words. If you need help with something you can look in a book and find the answer.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 4: You get to learn and get smarter as you learn.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 4: Reading and writing is my favorite activity.

Interview (Student 5)

Question 1

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?

Student 5: Small group activities

Interviewer: Why?

Student 5: Because so I can read to them, to Jasmine, my reading partner. I like to read books.

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activity (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 5: Happy.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 5: Because we both read to each other and we then we pick different books and then we read to each other.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 5: Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 5: Cause we both love reading.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 5: Reading books. Reading to the teacher and the teacher calls on us and we answer the questions.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 5: Games. Reading about numbers. I like reading about meals.

[Note: I connected this to a class activity that they had focused on reading a book about Chinese New Year that included special meals for the holiday and this student participated in the discussion a lot, talking about her favorite meals.

She told us her favorite meal is pizza].

Interview (Student 6)

Question 1

Interviewer: What do you prefer—your special literacy activities (reading center) or your general reading classes?

Student 6: Small groups.

Interviewer: Why?

Student 6: I like taking them because instead of just having partners. We all do it in our small groups (in whole group we have partners) and we change some of the rules.

Interviewer: What are the rules?

Student 6: Since there are more people playing, we play it in a different way.

Question 2

Interviewer: What do you feel when you participate in the special literacy activities (reading center) in your classroom? Why do you think you feel this way?

Student 6: I don't ever get nervous. I feel normal, but I don't want to rush, because I know most of them already. I usually get done before a lot of other students so I have time to check my work.

Question 3

Interviewer: Do you enjoy reading during the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why or why not?

Student 6: I do because I like to read and to choose the levels in my reading. The books I choose they like they are very interesting and from the library. They're just different from the other books we have.

Question 4

Interviewer: What do you like about the special literacy activities (reading center)? Why?

Student 6: I am in a high level. It's like the reading level, the numbers. I'm in one of the highest. I'm in 7.6. I like to because I can read more and more books as I get higher. I like that we are allowed to have partners. I like the test, we read the books and listen to the books and take tests on the books to see if we understand the book. It tells if we pay attention and our scores are some of our grades. I p like the word game, it's kind of like a crossword.

Question 5

Interviewer: What do you choose to do during the special literacy activity choices (reading center choices)?

Student 6: I like language arts we read and write about it. We work on suffixes of words and we have the papers of the language arts are actually kind of fun. Question 5 Student 6 cont.

Student 6: We have to look at the book for different words that it says. If it has "ing" suffix and then add it to the end.