LITERATURE CIRCLES AND THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARY

by

Joy H. Hoke

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

August, 2014
ABSTRACT

by

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Teachers have long struggled to engage students in reading. Literature circles are a method used by many teachers to not only engage students in reading but also to guide them in higher level thinking and discussion. The research explains what literature circles are and how they are used to improve reading and reasoning skills as well as ways school librarians take an active role in implementing literature circles. The following research also highlights the use of Web 2.0 tools to further motivate students and improve accountability.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Teachers assign readings, lecture, lead discussions, and create assignments for students to show what they have learned. A 2007 study estimated that the average American fifth grader spends 91 percent of the school day working alone or listening to a teacher (Harvey and Daniels 7). This level of teacher-centric education has left many students behind and without the necessary skills they need to become successful learners. Literature circles are a teaching method adopted by many classroom teachers to aid students in taking the lead in reading discussion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at what literature circles are and the important roles the school librarian plays in the implementation of literature circles. Literature circle, also known as inquiry circles, have the potential to make a powerful difference in teaching. The school librarian is an important addition to a literature circle. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that the school librarian can be an active part of the literature circle community. The pervasive nature of technology in the classroom as well as our students' everyday lives has spawned a movement toward literature circles in the Web 2.0 world. The purpose of this study is to explore ways to improve literature circles through the use of Web 2.0 tools. The result of this study will show that literature circles are a valuable tool to engage students as well as to develop valuable thinking skills.
Research Questions

The following questions guided the research of this study:

1. How are literature circles best used in the classroom?
2. What role can the school librarian play in implementing literature circles?
3. How can technology and Web 2.0 tools be utilized to more effectively implement literature circles?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study included the availability of resources on the topic of school libraries and literature circles. The datedness of the term ‘literature circles’ also limited the amount of current articles on the topic available at the University of Central Missouri library databases or James C Kirkpartick Library. However, using the term "inquiry circles" provided enough peer reviewed articles to provide a basis for the study.

Definition of Terms

Common Core State Standards: Standards developed to provide a common standard of education across the United States.

Inquiry circles: Cooperative groups of students reading the same self-selected materials from any core subject area while purposefully taking notes to share in group discussion. Also known as literature circles

Literature circles: Cooperative groups of students reading the same self-selected book while purposefully taking notes to share in group discussion. Also known as inquiry circles.

Web 2.0 tools: Online resources that allow the user create and to interact with other users.
Research Design

The study was designed to gather information on literature circles from previously published educational journals. No new research was conducted. Instead, existing information on the topic was sought for this study.

Articles were found in the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Education: A SAGE Full Text Collection, CENTRALspace Repository, Education Journals, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, and Library Literature and Information Science Full Text. Search terms included "literature circles", "inquiry circles", "literature circles elementary", and "literature circles and library".

Conclusion

This study contains three chapters focusing on literature circles and how they can be used in the elementary classroom and school library to engage students and improve students' thinking skills. The second chapter is a review of the literature. The third and final chapter looks at recommendations for literature circle implementation and answers the research questions posed in chapter one.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature circles are a teaching method implemented in many schools to enhance the reading process as well as engage students. This paper will explore how literature circles can be effectively used in the elementary school. Section one will define literature circles and describe how they are used to teach reading and other core subjects. The second section will explore the role school librarians can play in implementing and supporting literature circles. Finally, section three looks at the future of literature circles in a Web 2.0 world.

Literature Circles and How They Are Used

The name “Literature Circles” came into being in 1994 when Harvey Daniels, a teacher and author, published Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom. There are many names for these groups of students coming together to share ideas about a piece of literature. They are sometimes referred to as inquiry groups or book clubs (Sanders-Brunner 39). In his book Daniels laid the structure and roles for literature circles as they are used in many schools today (Stein and Beed 512). Literature circles have a specific timeline and framework that is modeled by the teacher and eventually put into practice by the students with little or no teacher intervention. The students become active participants in the learning process rather than the traditional receptacle for teacher knowledge.

The traditional literature circle model is described as starting with a group of students that have chosen to read the same text. Often the teacher will provide students with choices, but the guiding force behind literature circles is self-selection. Students choose based on their personal connections with a text rather than what the instructor
thinks is best for them. The teacher may choose to give book talks or introduce possible selections in another way to provide background for students to use as they make their choices (Schlieck Noe). During book talks the school librarian shows the titles available and gives a synopsis of each book (Sanders-Brunner 40). Reading aloud to students can also inspire interest in a title. The read aloud sessions let the students to get a feel for the difficulty level of the text. A presentation can also be used to provide the students a look at the books. Lohmiller suggests incorporating artifacts and pictures when sharing books with students. She tries to capture the essence of the book in order to make students more aware of the contents. If a book has any content that students might find objectionable she wants them to make the choices they are most comfortable with (40).

Selecting appropriate titles is a process that each teacher or school librarian approaches differently. Clarke and Holwadel talk about finding books that stimulate conversation. When the book has value to students and has caught their interest, then they will want to talk to the members of their group. This honors the heart of literature circles: independent reading. Book selection went from what teachers wanted the students to read to what the students wanted to read. The books chosen are related to the students’ interests as well as mirroring the world around them (26). Maureen Sanders-Brunner describes the book selection process:

Literature circles can promote independent learning standards when students are allowed the freedom to choose information that they find interesting or relevant. Whether students make decisions about the theme or subject they will study, or which title they will
read, the power to choose motivates students to continue to be vested personally in future information seeking (40).

Databases can also be used to find articles on many different reading levels. Articles from databases that are used in literature circles coincide with a specific topic of study or student interests (Harvey and Daniels 88). Moving away from the textbook is refreshing for students. Finding magazine or journal articles that pique the interest of students also addresses the Common Core State Standards for using more nonfiction text. In her thesis Megan Bright stresses the need for innovation in teaching methods to promote nonfiction. Literature circles provide a method of implementing the use of more nonfiction into the classroom (26). Giving students a choice in mediums as well as topics encourages interest in the group.

After the students have chosen what they will read, they begin the reading process. There are many forms this can take. Books can be read as a group, individually, or listened to via a recording (Schlick Noe). Allowing students to read at their own pace on a self-selected text provides opportunity for differentiated instruction. Students who have difficulty reading can use the scaffolding provided by audio books where the inflection and tone of the narrator provides context they might miss when reading alone (DeVault 24). Bonnie Campbell Hill suggests partner reading with a peer or an older student (3). During the book reading process the teacher provides the guidelines. Students are expected to stay on the same pages as their peers and not read ahead (DeVault 2). It is also suggested that school librarians visit the classroom and watch the students engaged in reading. Being able to see how the groups work
together provides the feedback necessary to evaluate the process of selection (Lohmiller 40).

The group structure can be fluid and change to meet the needs of the students. Traditionally, each student is assigned a role in the literature circle. Each role has a specific job description that the student is expected to carry out. Daniels suggests the following roles: Connector (book, world, experiences), Questioner (wondering), Literary Luminary (memorable parts), Illustrator (draw an image), Summarizer (paraphrase reading), Researcher (background information) and Word Wizard (look up words). Role sheets can be given to each student to fill out prior to the meeting. This allows the student time to reflect and seek help making a choice if needed. The role sheets provide a foundation that students might need as they begin the unfamiliar task of group discussion. This foundation is essential when beginning literature circles (Cox and Lacey-Parrish 45). Roles can be adjusted to fit the size of the group as well as the focus.

Wilfong recommends moving literature circles from the language arts classroom into other content area classrooms and incorporating different roles: discussion director, summarizer, and vocabulary enricher, (Wilfong, 2009). The discussion director is in charge of guiding the group as they meet to discuss the text. The summarizer takes the text and summarizes what has been read. This role also requires the student to summarize with the group discusses. The vocabulary enricher takes the words new to the class presented in the text and shares them with the group. The slight adjustments to these roles allow the model to fit a different type of classroom and text. Roles can be shifted for each meeting of the group to allow students an opportunity to
think about the text from different angles. Some teachers may also choose to assign each student a task from each role (Marchiando 15). “The roles are not intended to limit students’ thinking to one particular cognitive strategy at a time but instead are simply intended to mirror the thinking that readers truly do (or should do) while reading a text” (Marchiando 15). The roles may also be abandoned during discussions. When the scaffolding provided by the sheets becomes routine and the roles become ingrained in the students’ discussion there may no longer be a need for them. Role sheets can often become a "hang up" of implementers. Daniels intended the use of these to be temporary, but often they were used exclusively. In his own work Daniels has abandoned these sheets for bookmarks and sticky notes (12-13).

Writing activities can be included in literature circles and they can take many forms. Some students keep a reading log as they read. The log can contain comments, questions, quotes, or reflections of personal experiences. Sticky notes may be utilized to mark the text and take notes to be shared within the discussion group (Marchiando 16). This shift teaches the students higher levels of thinking. Janine Certo, et al. talks about how research has shown that students writing in logs and journals develop those skills. There are also findings that show small notes and questions written on note pads, “...both motivated students to prepare for literature circles and reportedly improved self-confidence in struggling readers and writers” (256). Daniels is also exploring the benefits of moving the discussion to a written one. Students take a moment to quickly jot down their thoughts on a text and pass it to a partner. These back and forth dialogs create genuine conversation that is sometimes lacking in the traditional literature circle where a few might dominate the conversation while others zone out (14-15).
Other benefits are found when students and teachers invest time in literature circles; this paper will touch on a few. Certo, et al. found that cooperation and respect was demonstrated time and again. Students were expected to hear the views of all and respond appropriately. The researchers also reported that students reluctant to participate in large teacher-led discussions found a voice. Other pupils broadened their tastes. Students who normally stuck to a specific genre or author discovered new ones.

Bright explored using book clubs as a way of helping students become more interested in non-fiction books. Students and their teacher were interviewed to see what their interest in non-fiction titles was before and after the implementation of a non-fiction book club. Students expressed a new interest in talking about books. They also expressed a new interest in nonfiction titles. More students were choosing to read nonfiction titles when selecting their own materials than before (33-39).

Another thesis by Elizabeth Vanelli looked at reading motivation and achievement as it related to a traditional library book club. Students were given a survey to complete about motivation before they participated in the book club as well as after. The results showed that there was an increase in motivation to read by 9.1%. Vanelli also tracked how student achievement was affected by being a member of a book club. Students were given a Maze reading comprehension test before and after the club. Scores increased by 25% in the group over the course of the book club participation (62-65).

Higher-level thinking also plays a role in literature circles. Students are expected to question and discuss what they read. Hearing responses from others in the group forces them to question their own perceptions of the text (256). Critical thinking is
practiced again and again while engaging in discussion groups. Students also gain more meaning from text when prompted to discuss and listen to others discuss it (Hill 1). New connections to the literature are made. Students often believe they may be the only ones experiencing what they are feeling. By finding commonalities with the characters in a book students know they are not alone in their experiences (Certo et al.252).

Students are the focus when literature circles are in full swing. The teacher is secondary to the discussion. The text is not the primary focus either. The discussion and learning that take place during these times are what drives literature circles. Students participate in becoming independent learners and thinkers when put into this type of book club setting (Hill 2). This independent learning is at the core of the American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st Century Learner. Again and again students that participate in literature circles are called upon to think critically and ask questions. As they read they are constantly drawing conclusions. Executing a role in a discussion group requires the student to share their knowledge as well as being a contributing member of a group (12). Teaching students to select their own texts, form questions, and dialog with peers is foundational to creating life-long learners (7).

The nature of the literature circle is constantly changing. Harvey Daniels writes about the ways literature circles have evolved as educators take what works and discard what does not (12). Many teachers are no longer using role sheets. Others have stopped using projects to extend literature circle readings. The use of projects was found to be a form of busy work that teachers were using to provide tangible grades
There has also been noted a need for more instruction. Students do not take naturally to roles they are expected to play as once was assumed. Teachers provide specific instruction to students who work cooperatively in a group as well as to model appropriate and meaningful talk (13). As mentioned previously, Daniels has also explored using written conversation as a way of conducting groups (14). This idea is has been elaborated upon by educators and taken one-step further into the Web 2.0 world. The new face of literature circles is going by the name "inquiry circles" and branching out to all areas of the curriculum (Harvey and Daniels).

**School Librarian Support for Literature Circles**

School librarians can be instrumental in the planning and implementing literature circles as well as address Common Core and AASL standards. This section will analyze ways in which the unique skills of school librarians can be utilized to enhance literature circles. The success of literature circles can often hinge of the effectiveness of the school librarian. Collaboration, book selection, text acquisition, and staying current with trends are all ways school librarians contribute. The cooperation of the school librarian is often key to the success of the readers and the literature circle format.

Collaboration is at the core of what the school librarian does. Literature circles act as a natural segue for the school librarian to enter into a partnership with the classroom teacher. Bussel breaks down the collaborative process,

...they all begin the same way, with a conversation between the classroom teacher and me. It is important that...both understand and agree upon the particulars, such as: the curricular objectives to be taught or emphasized, the length the literature circle lasts (a month, a quarter, etc.), the frequency of
meetings, the amount and type of work expected of the students, and, by whom and how students' work should be assessed (18).

Working with the classroom teacher to determine possible texts to be used is fundamental. A bad selection can derail the learning process for many. Harvey and Daniels discuss the value of the school librarians in the selection process. Finding credible sources and engaging texts are the forte of the school librarian. Harvey and Daniels encourage classroom teachers to collaborate with the school librarian to find possible selections for students (69). "Literature circles are only as good as the selection, and book selection is the school librarian's specialty" (Lohmiller 38). The process can also be approached proactively by putting together possible selections and advertising them to the staff as a way to initiate collaboration (Moreillon & Fontichiaro 65). It is up to the school librarian in most schools to take the initiative and become an active participant in literature circles. Word will spread when a collaboration is successful.

Literature circles and book clubs can also provide benefits for the school library. Vanelli found that the school librarian sponsored book club brought emphasis to the school library and opened up new channels for collaboration. Students also began to see the school library in a more positive light (67). Bright noted an increase in trips to the school library as well as students "discovering" new nonfiction sections. In this case "...students increased the amount of nonfiction they selected from 50% to a high of 84% of their check outs" (40). Bright also pointed out how the collaboration between the school librarian and the classroom teacher offers students more "...opportunity to
explore their own individual interests and passions outside of the classroom walls, while
drawing upon each educator's area of expertise" (42).

The natural bridge between literature circles and the school library involves the
collection of book sets. Providing the students with quality choices can be hindered by
lack of resources. Lohmiller suggests beginning in your own library. Look for multiple
copies of books that have student appeal as well as those that provide food for thought
(Lohmiller 39). If there is nothing for students to discuss, there is not much hope for
student success. Acquiring more copies of these books can prove challenging.
Sanders- Brunner suggests grant writing and accessing public library collections as
ways of expanding book sets (42). The school librarian can also provide links to online
texts. Databases can be used to access articles on multiple reading levels as well as
wide student interest (Harvey & Daniels 88). Online eBook services that many schools
subscribe to are another way to find enough texts. The school librarian has a unique
connection to vendors and other resources from which to access books. These
connections are also valuable to the teacher who is implementing book groups in the
classroom.

Once the collection has been built it is time for school librarians to promote what
they have to teachers. Creating a spreadsheet with available titles and their reading
levels allows the staff to get a clear picture of what is available.

Distribute the list to your teachers, preferably at staff, department or team
meetings. Explain the role of literature circles and how you as a librarian
can help them succeed. Be sure to let them know that any subject area
can benefit from a study of related literature. You can even sort the
spreadsheet by subject, or highlight the titles that you think will work best for a particular class (Lohmiller 39).

Providing a diverse and differentiated collection is a responsibility of the school librarian (Prince 50). As shifts in how reading is taught continue to influence schools, the school librarian is likely to stay abreast of what it going on.

Not only do the materials chosen need to be engaging, they also need to be on the appropriate level for students. Prince stresses the current trend toward leveled reading, which is another area familiar to school librarians and provides a reason for teachers to collaborate when selecting potential books and texts for discussion groups (49). Providing a list of "hot" books that provide an insight into the students and their interests is foundational to the work of the school librarian and provides ample opportunity for collaboration when planning a literature circle.

The struggling reader can also benefit from the school librarian's intervention during literature circles. Finding books that interest students is vital to the success of literature circles in general but the struggling reader needs more than high interest books. The school librarian has unique access to text alternatives. Special needs students find eReaders and audio books helpful when reading (Herdelin 25). Struggling readers are also more successful when they feel they are an active part of the group. Literature circles provide them an active role in a group where, with some shrewd intervention, they can be put on equal footing with their peers (Blum et al. 100 and 107).

During collaboration school librarians meet with teachers to establish goals and identify needs. The school librarian can also be a recruiter, seeking teachers to work with the literature circle. Many teachers are unaware of the resources available to them
via the school library, so if the school librarian seeks out potential customers, this is an activity that also promotes the school library with its resources and services. This advertiser role is another part in the process. In this role the books must be “sold” to the students too before they make a selection. Successful book clubs can also lead to increased circulation. The school librarian is the expert, knowing the students and what they prefer to read. These are just a few of the numerous ways that the school librarian can become a part of the literature circle community in their schools.

**The Future of Literature Circles in a Web 2.0 World**

As society shifts toward the virtual learning model, many educators are also making this shift. The future of literature circles can be focused within the Web 2.0 social media sites accessible today. The face-to-face literature circles are beginning to have a new face. From instant messengers (Day and Kroon 19) to discussion boards (Bowers-Campbell 559) educators have taken book groups online. Students are constantly online and interacting with media as well as each other. The online literature circle seeks to harness this natural interest. This section will focus on how an online literature circle functions, why to move the discussion to the virtual realm, ways to incorporate other technologies, problems that may arise, and whether or not online literature circles work.

There are several educators who have struck out on their own looking for ways to take advantage of the students’ love of social media while incorporating the higher levels of thinking encouraged by literature circles. All roles and methods used in the face-to-face groups remain in online literature circles. The differences lie in the execution of the discussion. What was once in the classroom has moved to the virtual
There are many platform options available: instant messengers, discussion boards, and blogging sites. Some school districts have preferred sites that can be identified through the technology department. There are numerous online tutorials for individuals who are not familiar with these platforms (Dilitz 38).

Whittingham preferred to use chat rooms rather than discussion boards. He found that discussion boards caused students to just restate what had already been stated. On the other hand chat rooms allowed for genuine interaction. Students were asking questions as well as answering them (55). However many of those that choose to use discussion boards have also found success. The “asynchronous” nature of wikis or blogging sites for these conversations provides students the opportunity to reexamine conversations as further thoughts evolve (Bowers-Campbell 565).

There are many benefits to the online book club, the most obvious being motivation. Day and Kroon point out that many students are drawn to technology and eagerly prepared for each group session so that they might be a part of the discussion. They also found that some students who traditionally did not participate became excited and completed assignments in anticipation of an online discussion (22). Herdelin points out that students are already using handheld devices at school. Taking what students are already doing and putting it to use in literature circles is ideal. It also gives the students a sense of power to use methods so familiar to them (26).

Collins points to the nature of the “digital native” that draws students to Web 2.0 tools (14). Some students feel left out in the traditional circles. They are not as loud or as domineering as their peers and therefore refrain from comments or questions. Also less time is spent off of topic and more discussion takes place in online discussions.
(Day and Kroon 24). In face-to-face discussions students might be apt to drift from topic or exhibit inappropriate behaviors once a teacher has left the circle. The online circle prohibits this type of behavior because every conversation has the potential to be monitored (Bowers-Campbell 558).

Accountability is also something that students struggle with in face-to-face groups. Many will rely on others to fill them in, not cooperate with others, or simply not do their part. Going online provides teachers with the ability to monitor online interactions among group members, “Accountability is inherent in the wiki space [for example]; the history for each page records what and when each team member contributed. Students’ integrity was immediately apparent to their teammates and to their teachers” (Moreillen 27-28). Transcripts of group discussions can also be used as a teaching tool. Day and Kroon copied discussions and had the students analyze the results. Each student would label a part of the conversation based on what type of response it was (question, personal reaction, retelling, etc.). After focusing on the conversations, the class would discuss ways to improve the discussions (26). Written responses require students to take time to construct their thoughts and transfer them to the written word (Bowers-Campbell 565). Day and Kroon found that students would find a way to take part in discussions even when they were not at school. Whether sick or visiting relatives, many found ways to go online and be a part of the discussion (23).

Integrating other Web 2.0 tools into online book clubs as extension activities allowed students to create as well as exercise higher levels of thinking. The purpose of these projects, according to Collins, is to be shared with the class. These can be embedded in the conversation or used to promote a title to another group. Collins
suggests having students create book trailers using Animoto to promote the chosen book. She also introduced them to Glogster, which allowed them to link pictures, audio, and video clips to their posters (13). Voicethread was another tool used for giving a book talk, and Wordle can be used by students to make word clouds about their books (Moreillon 27). Students who feel they lack artistic ability are provided a more equitable opportunity when using digital resources. These also provided a chance for those that were creative with a platform to show their skills (Day and Kroon 22).

Skype is Web 2.0 tool that Collins used to make connections for her students by inviting authors to join in the conversation (14). Many authors will Skype with students for little or no money. Various websites provide lists of these authors. These tools were used to engage students beyond the discussion board. Making the connection between what was read and the creative process was the initial goal in using these Web 2.0 tools. Students had to dig into what they read in order to create a quality product (Moreillon 24).

Heather Daniel also shares many other online options for creating a Web 2.0 book club. Shelfari.com is an Amazon site that allows the user to create a community and discuss with a selected group as well as explore titles for future discussion. Goodreads.com is a site very similar to shelfari.com that also provides book exploration as well as discussion. Anobii.com is another option that has a smartphone option as well. Google Groups is another very popular choice for creating online literature circles. For younger students in2books.epals.com is recommended. This "pen pal" service connects students with screened adults to discuss books with. There is also an option that allows a teacher to lead in-class discussion via in2books (5-6). Stacks for Kids is
Scholastic's version of Good Reads that students use to create profiles and review books as well as discuss books with others (Steward 29-33).

Paulette Stewart documents the experiences of a high school librarian experimenting with Facebook as a literature circle medium. She chose Facebook because most of her students were already avid users. The closed group option allowed her to create a space only for the members of the book club. The chat option also allowed for members to have a live discussion from different locations. Students were still assigned the traditional roles and rotated through them over the course of the trial. This experiment was successful in drawing out shy students and giving them all a sense of respect for the fellow members in the group.

Online discussion groups are not without their challenges. A variance in digital literacy skills became evident for Day and Kroon. Many students were not fast typists and some became lost in the discussion. Other group members chose to aid slower students by asking specific questions and waiting for responses (23,24). Glitches in certain tools created obstacles. Many tools are also discontinued as they fall out of popularity so choosing one that has had staying power and been adopted by multiple users is beneficial.

Bowers-Campbell brings up the issue of making connections. There is a school of thought that presupposes that student interactions in the virtual world are preventing them from making real world connections with real people. In a world full of online experiences do our students need one more (559)? The benefits seem to far outweigh the difficulties. Many AASL standards can be covered through the use of online literature circles. Thinking critically to gain knowledge, drawing conclusions, sharing
knowledge are a few of the standards reinforced through literature circles (AASL 7). Digital citizenship is constantly modeled and monitored in these online discussions (Dilitz 37). Bringing literature circles and book clubs online is creating yet another link that will prepare students for lifelong learning.

Using a tablet device for literature circles provides many benefits to the teacher as well as the student. There are many applications available for tablet devices that lend themselves to literature circles. For reading Kindle, Nook, and iBooks are all free applications that are easy to use and popular. Beyond reading with tablets students are also able to take notes, look up words, search the Internet for information. Evernote and Notability are just a few of the note taking applications available. Students are able to move smoothly from reading to researching to taking notes all with one device when using a tablet (Pierce).

Overall, most educators feel that online literature circles work. The skills collected while participating in book discussions online are apropos to the world students will be a part of in the future (Collins 14). The appealing nature of the format is a draw for many reluctant participants (Dilitz 38). Students become more critical of their own work when they see it in print. Looking at the responses to online postings, forces students to edit and evaluate as they discuss (Bowers-Campbell 566). Being an active member and learner in this type of community is ideal preparation for the future (Moreillon et. al. 28). Many skills that today’s students will need as tomorrow’s adults are taught and learned through the use of online book groups. As the technology specialist in a school, the school librarian is aware of the trends. The future of education is trending toward the virtual world. Education is shifting from the classroom to the Web. Literature circles
provide the perfect opportunity for school librarians to set the digital standard for their fellow teachers and for students.

**Conclusion**

The school librarian wears many hats. Literature circles are the ideal platform for the profession to demonstrate a vast skill set. “The Literature Expert” can help in book selection. “The Researcher” digs up texts beyond books. “The Teacher” can be a part of instruction and supervision. Finally, “The Media Guru” brings the discussion online. In the ever-changing world of education there are few certainties. Literature circles have the flexibility to roll with the changes and meet the standards and expectations required of them.

Inquiry circles are the future of literature circles. Taking the basics that educators have perfected and making them a part of all subject areas has been a successful breakthrough. That flexibility is evident in the way that these groups are constantly evolving and staying relevant. Educators continue to refine and perfect the implementation of book groups.

Overall, the literature circle works for students by providing choice, responsibility, and engagement. All basic skills that educators seek to instill in students to create the lifelong learners they are charged with inspiring. Just as the school library is intended to central to the school and all that goes on there, so the school librarian is also central to the education of students. Literature circles and book clubs are real ways that school librarians become an active part in the learning process as well as promote what is core to education: reading. The school librarian has the unique opportunity to be an integral part of student learning through the medium of literature and inquiry circles.
CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the needs of the world change, so do the needs of our students. The traditional teaching model is no longer valid in our project-based, technology-driven world. The purpose of this research is to seek out alternatives to the classic methods of teaching reading and comprehension through the use of literature circles. Literature circles are groups of students that are formed when students choose to read the same book, article or any other text. While in the groups students are required to contribute to the discussion either through assigned roles or from notes they have taken during the reading process. Literature circles have been implemented in many schools to engage students and provide the needed connection between reading and comprehension.

Exploring this topic has brought forth these questions:

1. Why should literature circles be used in the classroom?
2. What role can the school librarian play in implementing literature circles?
3. How can technology and Web 2.0 tools be utilized to more effectively implement literature circles?

The Classroom and Literature Circles

The nature of literature circles is to take the focus from the teacher and transfer the focus to the needs of the student. Literature circles have long been touted as student centered. This switch from the traditional classroom format has been a draw for teachers and students alike. By allowing students to choose texts for themselves, a natural bond is created between the student and the material. Groups are formed from those wishing to read the same texts. This creates another connection between students of similar interests and abilities.
The self-selection process fosters independent thinking and learning. Having the power to choose enables the student to think about what they are interested in. Being able to make choices can also inspire students to read more and seek out books on subjects they have found engaging. Choosing poorly can also lead students to take more time when they are selecting texts. A bad choice may lead to frustration in the topic and the student’s ability level but provides students with a chance for self-examination.

Within the structure of literature circles students are called upon to use skills they might not have if they were following a traditional reading model. The role assignment of ‘note taker’ forces the student to look at texts from different viewpoints. The student in the role of ‘connector’ is looking for links between the text and past experiences. The group ‘questioner’ is focusing on the questions that the text inspires. The ‘literary luminary’ records the most memorable segments of a book. The ‘researcher’ is looking for more information. Unknown words are researched by the ‘word wizard.’ These flexible roles that students move in and out of, allow for higher level thinking skills that challenge students to look deeper while reading.

Roles are not always necessary and many teachers have ceased to use them. Instead students might be asked to mark texts with sticky notes or bookmarks. Notes can also be made about questions the student has or unfamiliar vocabulary words. These tasks are reminiscent of the original roles but are more fluid. Teachers can adjust the lesson more easily without the structure of prescribed student roles.

Literature circles are not just for fiction books. The format can adjust and shift to for use with nonfiction texts in different content areas too. Non-fiction is a natural fit for
literature circles. The same strategies used for fiction easily apply to non-fiction.

Students are able to choose what they wish to read. They are also required to play a role in discussions or take notes. Teachers can offer students a variety of articles from periodicals, textbooks or databases.

Literature circles can teach writing skills. Many teachers require students to keep logs as they read to record thoughts, questions, and vocabulary. There are also teachers that have taken the oral discussion and moved it to the written word. These conversations can be on paper or through online chat groups.

Literature circles are not just one thing. They are an ever changing form that teachers can monitor and adjust to fit the learning needs of their students. As literature circles have changed, they have become widely known as inquiry circles. This title might be more to the point. Students follow a line of inquiry; whether it is found in a book, an article, or a vocabulary word.

**The School Librarian and Literature Circles**

The successful implementation of literature circles in a school is largely dependent on the school librarian and his or her ability to collaborate with classroom teachers. Literature circles provide the school librarian an open door to collaboration. The school librarian has access to the tools as well as the knowledge needed to access them. Books, booklists, articles, databases, and eReaders are all within the realm of the school library. This access allows for the school librarian to become an active part of the literature circle team.

Often teachers are not aware of what students are reading. The school librarian has ready access to records that can pinpoint the books students check out the most.
Students also come to the school librarian looking for books on specific topics. This information is vital when selecting books to present to students for literature circles. Having a poor selection of materials can change the outcome of the literature circle. Students will be less engaged as well as discount future materials. Joining together with school librarians to plan can meet the goals of the teacher as well as engage the students.

Students that take part in successful literature circle experiences have been known to become more active library patrons. Finding a love of books or a subject through literature circles pushes students to search further in the school library. This provides an opportunity for the students to explore new interests and ideas.

**Technology and Literature Circles**

The evolving nature of literature circles has prompted many educators to use Web 2.0 tools. This shift was prompted by the online world available to students. The draw of technology makes online literature circles motivational as well as engaging.

Facebook is one platform that teachers have found success using for literature circles. The majority of students already have Facebook profiles, so the teacher can create a private group for students to join. Wikis can be created for the same purpose. Some prefer the real time option of using instant messaging sites. All platforms take advantage of the prevalence of social media in the classrooms and students' lives.

Another advantage to using Web 2.0 tools for literature circles is inherent accountability. It is obvious to the teacher when monitoring an online conversation who is participating and who is not. Students that are not prepared or uncooperative are easily identified. In addition shy students are more able to express themselves and take
a more active part in an online literature circle. Some students might feel left out of the conversation during the traditional literature circle. These students have been shown to have more of a voice when using Web 2.0 tools for discussion.

Online literature circles are not without their disadvantages. Students often miss real world connections, and the online platform keeps students from taking advantage of the social nature of school. Students are constantly online or texting and some see online literature circles as overkill. There are also the "glitches" that come along with relying on technology, such as; Internet issues, equipment shortages, and broken hardware.

The use of literature circles or inquiry circles is beneficial to all. Students are not only engaged, but also learning skills for lifelong success. Teachers and school librarians are meeting goals and standards aligned with Common Core State Standards, NETS and the AASL’s Standards for 21st Century Learners. The benefits far outweigh the shortcomings.
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