Literature Circles, Reader Response and the SLP:
Opportunities and Challenges

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What are Literature Circles

- Small group, student-lead discussions about literature
- Literature response groups, literature circles, literature study circles, peer-led literature groups, and book clubs
- Cooperative learning groups
- Dialogue approach to instruction
The Potential of Literature Circles

- Active in constructing meaning from text
- Promotes thoughtful stance
- Scaffold for thinking about text
- Develop questions and interpretations of text
- Develop multiple perspectives
- Practice conversational skills
- Foster constructive social interaction
- Integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening
Why would SLP be Interested?

- Support of students in the LRE
- Access to the general education curriculum
- To better understand classroom context
- Potential to facilitate development of oral and written language
- Practice social language skills
- IRA and NCTE recommended strategy for increasing literacy skills
- Growing documentation of effectiveness
Who is using it?

- **Drecktrah & Chiang, 1997:**
  - 44% of second grade teachers
  - 48% of fifth grade teacher
  - 24% of elementary teachers who work with LLD students

- **Alamsi et al, 2001**
  - 95% agreed with the value of peer discussions
  - 77% reported interest in using them
  - 33% used them
LC differ from traditional classroom discourse

- Teachers ask the questions
- Teacher requests information about known information
- Students respond to teacher initiation
- Teachers evaluate student responses
- Teachers dominate the interaction
- Teachers chose and control the topics of discourse
- Test don’t teach comprehension
The Theoretical Basis

• Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978)
  ◦ Meaning is created through transaction with text
  ◦ Readers read literature for the “lived through experience”
  ◦ Multiple interpretations
  ◦ Meaning is constructed
The Theoretical Basis (con’t)

- Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky)
- Internalize higher cognitive functions through social interaction.
- three principles:
  (1) higher psychological functions are social and cultural in nature,
  (2) knowledge constructed through interactions,
  (3) learning fostered through the assistance of more knowledgeable members through oral and written language.
What does the Research Say?

Research indicates increases in (e.g. Almasi, 1995; Berne & Clark, 2008; Gilles, 1990; Lloyd, 2004)

- response to literature
- personal connections with text
- Reflective and critical reading
- Comprehension
- Strategic reading
- Metacognitive awareness
Cooperative Learning Groups and Discussion

Advantages (e.g. Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1995):

- Motivation
- Cognitive growth
- Achievement
- Self-esteem

- Research base indicating that discussion increases achievement (e.g. Nystrand)
LC and students with disabilities

- Pull-out models create different learning environment
- LD students need exposure to literate conversations:
  - Fail to make inferences
  - Fail to take an active role in reading
  - Fail to make use of person experience to understand text
  - Less willing to work through confusions
Literature Circles can provide

- Opportunities to learn about conversational practices
- Express personal experiences and opinions
- Engage in complex thinking
- Take an active role in understanding books and develop strategies to increase comprehension
- Accept and value other opinions
- Engage in and enjoy reading
Support for using LC with students with disabilities

- LD students can participate independently

- Progress in (Blum, Lipsett & Yocum, 2002; Boyd, 2002; Gerla, 1996; Gilles, 1990; Goatley, 1996; Goatley et al., 1995; Kelly et al. 1996; Moller, 2004; Morocco et al. 2001; Morocco & Hindin 2002; Raphael et al. 1997; Throne, 1992)
  - Personal connections with Text
  - Moving beyond literal interpretations
  - Getting along with others
  - Accepting and valuing others’ opinions
  - Engage in and enjoy reading
  - Increase comprehension and literacy skills
Challenges for students with communication disorders (CD)

- High demand on verbal and written language
- Excluded, isolated or rejected
- Lower rates of participation
- Difficulty with social language:
  - resolving conflict
  - negotiation
  - obtaining speaking turns
  - making joint decisions
- Less collaborative both verbally and nonverbally
- Difficulty with peer interactions
- Requesting and obtaining clarification
Roles for the SLP

- Collaboration
- Evaluation
- Direct service
  - Pull out
  - Push in
- Consultant
Access to text:

- Several books on the same theme
- Pair reading
- Teacher read aloud
- Repeated readings
- Require fewer discussion groups
- Digital reading of text (Primier, AspireREADER, ReadPlease, Write:Outloud, Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation)
- Adapted versions
- Address comprehension of content, structure or vocabulary
Roles for discussion

- Discussion Director
  - creates questions to increase comprehension
  - asks who, what, why, when, where, how, and what if

- Vocabulary Enricher
  - clarifies word meanings and pronunciations
  - uses research resources

- Literary Luminary
  - guides oral reading for a purpose
  - examines figurative language, parts of speech, and vivid descriptions

- Checker
  - checks for completion of assignments
  - evaluates participation
  - helps monitor discussion for equal participation
Supports for Group Interaction

- Careful grouping
- Explicit directions in how to do discussion
- Whole class mini lessons: Membership grid, Shared airtime
- Direct intervention in social language e.g. active listening, give compliments
- Peer training
- Teach specific phrase such as “I think I agree with what you said because…”
- Teach to respond to peers
Still more supports

- Alternatives for recording questions and thoughts
- Sketch to Stretch (Whitin, 2002)
- Watching video of themselves
- Video Modeling (O’Brien & Dicker, 2008)
- Train students to use comprehension strategies e.g. Self-questioning (Lloyd, 2004)
Encourage teachers to:

- Uptake questions (asking about something the student said previously)
- Incorporate student comments
- Avoid evaluative comments (e.g. that’s good)
- Ask authentic questions
- Ask questions that have more than one response
- Provide authentic responses
- Be silent
- Expand, extend rephrase
Coaching Students

- Determine the discussion skills that need to be taught.
- Engage the student in identifying the problem.
- Engage the student in solving the problem.
- Focus on what the student is doing right.
Where Can I Find Out More?

- [http://www.litcircles.org/](http://www.litcircles.org/)
- LiteratureCircles.com