

## Peer-tutoring Interactions in a Book Club Program for Female Campers

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study examined how campers interact over text when paired up for a book club program. Participants for this study were all girls, all between the ages of seven and 14 and all came from backgrounds of poverty. Audio transcripts, observations, and interviews were used to explore interactions of campers as they read together and discussed the books, which promoted high self-esteem for girls. Emergent trends noted in qualitative data showed an increase in behaviors for big sisters indicating improved engagement and leadership, specifically in big sisters giving praise to little sisters, pushing little sisters for more complete answers to discussion questions and contributing to creating a discussion around the questions, rather than simply moving on immediately after a quick response by the little sister.

***Keywords:*** reading, summer camp, peer tutoring, poverty, girls

### **Peer-tutoring Interactions in a Book Club Program for Female Campers**

This qualitative study is different from other reading research because it took place at a summer camp, during those months of the year that have been shown to contribute heavily to the achievement gap between students of diverse socioeconomic groups (Alexander, Entwistle & Olson, 2001; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Robinson, 2007; Woolley, et al. 2008). The researcher attempted to explore the question: How will economically disadvantaged campers interact with their reading partners when participating in a big sister-little sister book club? It was anticipated that campers' similar backgrounds would lead to common ground in their discussions, and that they would demonstrate an interest in this project, and motivation to work with their partner in reading and discussion, in particular for the older campers who were given a leadership role.

Reviewed research examined the use of book club reading programs or peer tutoring programs on reader attitudes and self-perception (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009; Williams & Hall, 2010), as well as on the effects of poverty on student achievement (Alexander & Fox, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Robinson, 2007).

### **The Statement of the Problem**

Research (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Alexander et al., 2001) has addressed the issue of the *summer slump*, a phenomenon that results in lower reading scores after the summer break. This has been shown to be especially true for poor children, who often lack the resources of their middle- and upper-class counterparts to participate in educational

summer activities and summertime reading (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Further, research has shown that even when poor students are able to make reading achievement gains over the summer months, they still aren't able to catch up with their higher SES counterparts (Campbell, Sutter, & Lambie, 2019). This study sought to offer a unique opportunity to provide further support for the need for summer learning programs for economically disadvantaged children. Additionally, this gives a look at the value of book clubs in an unusual setting: a summer camp; and with a special population: young economically disadvantaged girls.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Language is social, created from individuals' experiences and cultural and familial influences. While many learners may face obstacles in learning to read, those living in poverty have fewer opportunities to overcome these difficulties. Research that highlights the importance of social interactions created a framework of theory for this study.

Vygotsky (1962) examined the development of children's thought and speech, finding that language development shifts from being primarily egocentric to more socio-cultural. Vygotsky continued his exploration to find that at a later point in children's language development the social element of language begins to have more of an influence, "Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child." (p.51)

Halliday (1994) expanded on Vygotsky's theory of the sociocultural elements of language by discussing the use and benefit of children's talk in developing meaning.

Halliday asserted, “meaning is a social and cultural phenomenon and all construction of meaning is a social process” (p. 133). According to Halliday, meaning is the creation of the shared consciousness of those individuals within a similar experience, or material phenomenon (p. 139).

Gee’s (2004) review of research discussed situated language. Gee argued that reading and writing cannot be separated from the other aspects of language (listening, speaking, and interacting). In addition, Gee made the assertion that the point of reading and writing is, ultimately, to interact with the world, create meaning, and “act on the world” (p. 116).

Gee’s (2004) Discourse theory (which is capitalized every time Gee uses it as a way to differentiate it from the general use meaning of the word *discourse*, i.e. language in use), addressed the socialization of a student’s language. According to Gee,

A Discourse integrates ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling (and using various objects, symbols, images, tools, and technologies) in the service of enacting meaningful socially situated identities and activities. (Gee, 2004, p. 124)

The way children are socialized, the way they are taught to interact with the world, will affect the ways they interact with other people and situations, including reading, for the rest of their lives. Gee also discussed the influence of cultural models on children’s understanding of text and the world at large. Gee stated, “Cultural models tell people what is typical or normal from the perspective of a particular Discourse” (p. 125). That is, where we come from, culturally speaking, creates who we will become and will inevitably shape and inform our understanding of and interactions with the world.

Much research has been dedicated to the socialization of emergent readers (Vygotsky, 1962; Halliday, 1994, 2004; Gee, 2004). Their use of speech and interaction occupies large portions of the school day with activities such as structured play and show-and-tell. As children grow, so do their needs to connect to their peers, to blend in, to be “normal” and “the same as” everyone else.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) presented an engagement model for reading development. This model showed the influence of several factors on students’ achievement, knowledge, and practices in the classroom. Among them were items such as real-world interactions, interesting texts, collaboration, and rewards and praise. According to Guthrie and Wigfield, engagement, and ultimately achievement, is dependent on motivation. They stated, “motivation is what activates behavior. A less motivated reader spends less time reading, exerts lower cognitive effort, and is less dedicated to full comprehension than a more highly motivated reader” (p. 406). This connects to the work of Gee (2004) and Halliday (1994), in that the motivation of readers is directly related to their social experiences.

Halliday’s (1994, 2004) assertions about the benefits of dialogue between readers fit into this model in that socialization, including for the upper grades, is an external motivator. Practices in classrooms where students are paired up or grouped in order to complete assignments respond to research that shows the cognitive benefits of cooperative learning (Forman & Cazden, 1986).

Vygotsky’s (1962) and Gee’s (2004) work on socialization and language, Halliday’s (1994) work on dialogue in the classroom, and Guthrie and Wigfield’s (2000) work on motivation comes together in the area under examination in this study. The

literature cited below summarizes research perspectives in the areas of poverty, peer tutoring and book clubs, and reader attitude and self-perception.

### **Research Perspectives**

Until recently, summer learning programs were focused on the remediation of basic skills in a teacher-centric setting that echoes the typical classroom routine of the school-year months. However, research has suggested that students will encounter more success in programs that are less like school and that incorporate a multitude of other activities, such as physical and social play (Terzian, 2007; Sinatra, 2004; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). P.D. Pearson (2002) outlined the history of reading research, noting that there was a definitive shift in focus as a result of the research and publications that arose in the 1960s to move away from basal readers and phonics drills to find the happy medium between programs that focus exclusively on explicit instruction and the whole language approach. Another recent push in the changing research landscape looks at outside influences such as family, neighborhood, and out-of-schooltime programs, as well as motivation and reading attitude (Woolley, et al., 2008; Berliner, 2009; Terzian, Moore, & Hamilton, 2009; Williams & Hall, 2010; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). This is the area where the current study was most focused, specifically on motivation, attitude, and out-of-schooltime programs as a supplement to what students, especially low socioeconomic status students, receive normally.

### **Book Clubs and Peer Tutoring**

Eeds and Wells (1989) studied literature discussion groups, called *grand conversations*, and found that fifth- and sixth-grade students engaged in deeper considerations of texts when the teacher allowed them to function on their own rather

than in a teacher-directed situation. This study has been influential in literature-based approaches to literacy instruction.

Raphael and McMahon (1994) outlined their experience with literature-based book clubs as an alternative to traditional reading instruction. Using views based in social constructivist thinking and the idea that “students should interact using oral and written language to construct meaning about what they have read” (p.102), the researchers designed a longitudinal study to observe student interactions and responses during book clubs. As the book clubs met over time the researchers found that student responses and interactions became more complex and mature. Students were more likely to draw their classmates into discussion, ask authentic questions, and participate in authentic conversations about the material they were reading. Also, students were more likely to modify and clarify their own previous statements to connect concepts in the current book to a previously read book and to their own lives and to compare the characters to themselves.

In another study that explored peer tutoring, Moore-Hart and Karabenick (2009) expanded on a previous study that dealt with volunteer tutoring for at-risk readers. This study examined what effect a tutoring program might have on students’ reading performance and their attitudes towards reading. The researchers wanted to know whether an increase in the frequency of the tutoring sessions would have an impact on any gains made, if the effects would be different from grade level to grade level, and the impact of such a program on student attitudes toward reading. Moore-Hart and Karabenick also looked to explore the reliability of the tutors and their abilities to



implement a reading and writing program effectively and in accordance with their training.

Tutors read student-chosen multicultural texts aloud with low-socioeconomic student participants, depending on the skills of the students, discussed reading strategies, and asked the students questions.

Teachers reported that students were reading more often and making more frequent use of the media centers in their schools. Analysis of student interviews showed that the students enjoyed reading with their tutors. All tutors in the program believed the sessions helped the tutees with their reading, as well as helped them grow as volunteers. Student participants reported positive feelings regarding their participation in the program.

More studies reviewed in preparation for this study focused on peer tutoring rather than on book clubs. Overwhelmingly, the studies focused on peer tutoring or book clubs reported findings that show gains in the target skill, despite their different approaches.

### **Reading Attitude and Reader Self-Perception**

McKenna and Kear's (1995) national survey of children's attitudes toward reading sought to further explore some of the most long-standing issues regarding reading attitudes among children. The researchers looked to discern the overall developmental trends in reading attitude toward both academic and recreational reading for elementary school students as well as the relationship between reading attitude and reading ability, gender, and ethnicity.

Researchers used the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), which uses pictures of the cartoon character Garfield to indicate four different stages of confidence (McKenna & Kear, 1990). Findings showed significant drops in recreational reading attitude for all grades except between second and third grade. Significant decreases were found across all grades for academic reading. When analyzing for attitude and gender, researchers found that overall girls had more positive attitudes towards reading than did boys for both recreational reading and academic reading. Reading ability was shown to have no significant influence on this difference.

McKenna and Kear discussed the trends present in their study by noting that their study disputed previous studies indicating there was a high point of reading attitude after first grade, after which the overall trend in reading attitude began to decrease. This study showed a steady decline in reading attitude for Grades 1 through 6, across races and between genders. This finding highlights the need for intervention that could work to improve reading attitude across elementary grades.

Henk and Melnick (1995) noted a renewed interest in research into affective factors that influence readers such as attitudes, beliefs, and motivation as their own purpose for creating the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS). Aimed at teachers of intermediate-level students, the scale is designed to measure how students feel about themselves as readers. Henk and Melnick cited the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) as being created especially for use with the younger grades, while they developed the RSPS for older students. It is noted that the ERAS measures attitude while the RSPS measures self-perception. The Reader Self-Perception Scale consists of 33 simply worded items that call for readers to consider their own reading skills. The

instrument uses a Likert scale with five ratings from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and includes such items as “I feel calm when I read,” “When I read I don’t have to try as hard as I used to,” and “When I read I need less help than I used to.” The 33 items are divided into four subscales—Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological Status—and all items are worded in a positive way in order to prompt direct responses.

Kanikua (2010) studied the relationship between effective instruction and student attitudes toward reading regarding the reading attitude and reading self-esteem of a group of low-performing third- and fourth-grade students. Participants were students at a historically low-performing suburban school. The researcher found that those students involved in the remedial reading program showed higher scores in reading self-esteem and attitude toward reading; however, no information is given regarding what the reading program contained.

Williams and Hall (2010) also examined student reading attitudes in their qualitative study, exploring questions including students’ reading attitudes, factors to improve reading attitude, and differences in reading attitude between students of different socioeconomic status. Results showed that more than half of the students reported reading after school, including students of lower socioeconomic (SES) status, refuting a previous study. However, more of the lower SES students reported reading than the middle to higher SES students. The researchers attributed this to the busy afterschool schedules of those higher SES students. Additionally, those students with lower SES were more likely to report enjoying being read to than students with higher SES.

The studies presented in this section provide conflicting evidence. The study conducted by Kanikua (2010) found students participating in a remedial reading program to have higher scores in reading attitude and self-esteem but gives no information on the instrument used. Similarly, Williams and Hall (2010) found that low SES students were more likely to read after school, a finding that directly refutes McKool's 2007 study, which found that students experience a decline in motivation to read as the school years progress, leading to less out-of-school time spent reading, with no significant difference between students of varying socioeconomic groups.

### **Poverty, The Summer Achievement Gap, and Summer Learning Programs**

David Berliner (2009) discussed some of the out-of-school issues faced by economically disadvantaged youth in America today. Among those issues he included family and neighborhood effects, such as stress and pollution, which can lead to health problems, increased absences, and lack of adequate healthcare and nutrition. He also asserted that the transient nature of families living in poverty leads to an increase in changed schools for children and denies them the stability afforded their middle- and upper-class peers. Berliner also made a point to note that while there are several out-of-school factors that work to the detriment of student achievement and well-being, there are some out-of-school factors that can prove to be beneficial, such as pre-school programs, after-school programs, and summer learning programs.

The meta-analysis conducted by Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) explored the summer setback and its effects on the reading achievement gap. Describing "summer setback" as the phenomenon of students returning to school in the fall with diminished reading skills, the authors reviewed the research regarding this phenomenon, indicating

that children from economically disadvantaged families are more likely to experience this decline in reading skill over the summer months.

Not only does the research show a more pronounced setback between different socioeconomic groups, but the achievement gap gets more pronounced across the elementary school years.

Another reason found by Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) to be repeatedly represented in the literature as a possible reason for the summer setback is the fact that for low-income families books and other reading materials often fall into the discretionary category, meaning that their money needs to go to other places first, such as rent or food, leaving reading material left out much of the time and contributing to the out-of-school lack of literature options for children over the summer. This is likely true for many campers who participated in the present study, as often their families are not able to provide them with the clothing items they need for camp. If these families struggle to clothe their children, it can be expected that reading material would fall into the discretionary category. Access to reading material was also noted by Harris and Butaud (2016) as a strategy to combat the reading achievement gap; and when researchers Mee Bell et al. (2018) gave either books or tutoring to two separate groups, both groups saw positive results. This study combines the two, with the camper participants having access to both peer tutors and books they may not have at home.

According to Heyns (1978, 1987), the achievement gap is to blame at least in part on the lack of resources available to poor children. Additionally, Heyns asserts that most of the books poor children have access to come from their classrooms and school libraries. When schools are closed for the summer these resources are restricted.

Further, the authors cited Neuman and Celano's (2001) finding that children in poor communities have far fewer book choices during the school year, their school library and classroom collections being older, smaller, and less diverse than those at schools where the student populations are economically advantaged.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2001) researched whether there is a seasonal difference in learning and what, if anything, this might say about school-based achievement across groups of different socioeconomic status (SES). Results showed that the lower SES students begin first grade at an achievement deficit compared to higher SES students. When comparing school-year achievement to summertime achievement, results from the CAT show higher gains in the spring, when all students have been in school, compared to the CAT scores from the fall, after the summer break. When separated by SES, results showed that while low SES students might lose or gain a few points in score after the summer break, the scores of upper SES students improved considerably over the summer.

The researchers asserted that not only should summer learning programs offer academic enrichment, they should also include activities not directly related to academic achievement. For many children who struggle academically school can become punitive. Summer learning programs that include elements of fun will likely improve student motivation and engagement.

The present study offers a different scenario than the typical summer learning program in that the site has been running as a summer camp for many years, providing campers primarily with activities related to summer camp, such as arts and crafts, games, dance, and drama, without any formal reading program or other academic endeavor in

place. While other studies have focused on day camp populations (Garst & Ozier, 2015), none were available at the time of publication that focus on sleep-away camp, in which a more immersive experience is possible.

These articles don't make use of true experiments, but instead look at previously gathered data (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; and Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). Nonetheless, the consensus among these researchers is that there is a difference in academic achievement between the socioeconomic groups. While Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2001) and Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) found that this difference does exist, Woolley et al.'s (2008) findings indicate that this difference is not the result of a lack of financial resources on the part of individual families, but is instead the result of a lack of adequate environmental conditions and community resources.

In a meta-analysis that looked at the implementation of such summer learning opportunities, Terzian, Anderson Moore, and Hamilton (2009) noted President Obama's call for the expanse of summer learning opportunities and focus on findings from previous research which explain effective models and approaches for low-income students and families over the summer break from school. In agreement with the findings of Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003), the authors noted that summer camp experiences are rarely available to economically disadvantaged families who cannot afford to pay for a camp experience, but indicate that the benefits would be considerable if these programs were somehow made available to those families. For instance, the authors cited Thurber et al. (2007) who found that children who attended summer camp for at least one week at one of 90 day and residential camps showed improvements in areas such as social skills, physical and thinking skills, positive values, and spirituality.

Again, the authors also noted findings (Hayes & Grethers, 1983; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Berliner, 2009) that low-income children suffer greater losses in reading skill over the summer months than do their high-income peers. This is likely due at least in part to these lower-income students having limited access to motivating reading materials than their higher-income counterparts.

The availability of a camp program like that offered at the site of this study is unique, as campers attend at no cost to them, bucking the summer camp trend of populations that are overwhelmingly high SES. In fact, analysis of the literature reviewed found the majority of summer campers lived in two-parent households that were at least 200% above the poverty line. This is in direct opposition to the camper participants of the present study.

Terzian et al. (2009) were able to identify best practices for summer learning programs which included being affordable and accessible, involving parents and the community, improving social problem-solving skills, promoting character development and life skills, and rewarding good behavior. Typically, it was also found that those most successful summer learning programs included a multitude of elements.

In their study that also used a day-camp setting, Schacter and Jo (2005) again pointed to research that shows that while reading achievement increased or stayed the same for economically advantaged students, those students at an economic disadvantage suffer a loss in reading achievement during the summer months. Citing research that shows no significant increase in achievement scores for students who attend summer school, the researchers developed a summer reading day camp with the purpose of evaluating what impact, if any, a summer reading day camp intervention might have on



the performance of economically disadvantaged students. The intervention consisted of seven weeks of summer camp, with two hours per day devoted to reading instruction, while the rest of the day was spent in traditional camp activities.

Results showed that the intervention group performed significantly better than the control group in the areas of decoding and comprehension. Schacter and Jo concluded that their results show the potential benefits for a summer reading day camp program, despite the effects of that program being found to diminish over time.

White, King, Kingston and Foster (2013) looked at the Reading Enhances Achievement During Summer (READS) program to see what effects it might have on a lower SES population in terms of summer reading loss. Unlike the previous studies this study was meant to replicate, the majority of participants were from low-income households. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a control group, a group to receive the basic treatment with books and teacher lessons, and a group to receive treatment with books, teacher lessons, and teacher phone calls.

Results were measured using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) Reading Comprehension Test, which was administered to students in the spring of third grade and again in the fall of fourth grade. Findings included significant positive differences in high-poverty schools for students who received teacher lessons and books and for those students who received teacher lessons, books, and teacher calls. However, negative results were found for students in moderate-poverty schools.

Given the wealth of research highlighted above showing the need for interventions to close the summer achievement gap, this study aimed to present one possible option to improve reader confidence and motivation.

## **Methods**

### **Population and Sample**

Participants were girls between the ages of six and fourteen, all from families living in poverty. While all 146 enrolled campers participated in the implementation of the book club, with interactions between all participating campers observed by camp counselors who took field notes, audio data was taken for only 24 campers in total. This residential summer camp operated in four two-week sessions. Because of the needs of the camp, data was taken for only three of the four sessions. In total the participants spent 11 nights and 12 days at camp.

All campers qualified for free or reduced lunch, as reported through the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) application. In this way, the campers all had similar socioeconomic backgrounds, therefore, a similar point on which their backgrounds might align, reinforcing opportunities for situated language (Gee, 2004). It was anticipated that these shared experiences would likely be talking points for discussion as they work on their reading together.

Analysis of frequencies showed that there were 43 African American, 17 Caucasian, and 14 Hispanic campers in the older group. The mean age of the older group of campers was 10.86 years old. In the younger group of campers, or the little sisters, there were 44 African American, 18 Caucasian, and 10 Hispanic campers. Mean age for the younger group was 8.0 years old.

### **Instruments and Materials**

***Audiotaped camper interactions.*** For each of the three sessions four pairs of readers were audiotaped as they read and as they completed the culminating activity paired with

each book. Analysis consisted of open-coding procedures and generating categories of characteristics of camper interactions.

***Counselor focus group.*** After training but prior to the implementation of the reading sessions, interviews were conducted with the counselors as a focus group (Appendix A). At the end of the summer, after all campers had received treatment, a second focus group session was conducted, with questions for the second focus group emerging from trends noted during the intervention. The purpose of the focus group with the counselors was to gain a different perspective on the book club program.

***Books for the book clubs.*** Books were chosen for this study based primarily on the content of their storylines, with a focus on characters and plots that in some way challenged or broke stereotypes that are negative toward girls. After much searching, four books were chosen that worked well together and were able to foster the inter-textual connections needed in order to tie the concepts of breaking stereotypes and strong female characters together.

***Discussion questions.*** The discussion questions created to help guide the talk between the sisters were developed using Sipe's (2008) five categories of response. While questions were developed using only the analytical, personal, and inter-textual categories of reader response, it was anticipated that analysis of field notes may reveal spontaneous interaction with the literature that will fall into the categories of the performative and transparent.

### **Researcher's Stance**

It must be disclosed that the primary investigator was also the director of the camp that served as the site for the study. As such, best efforts were made to limit

influence. In particular, the primary investigator worked to train the counselors on how to implement the book club sessions, and was not a primary participant in these sessions.

### **Research Design and Data Analysis**

This study used a qualitative design. Data included audio recorded during the reading sessions. Recordings were transcribed with an open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and were closely examined with a focus on the interactions between campers and between each camper and the texts to determine similarities and differences in behaviors and interactions. From the examination of the audio file transcripts, camper interactions and behaviors were categorized into trends. Those trends were used to develop theories that might help explain the interactions of the campers. Field notes and interviews were used to supplement the trends found after open coding was completed.

### **Procedure**

**Camper Training.** The big sisters were trained on their interactions with the little sisters, the use of questioning to prompt discussion, helping little sisters if the reading was too difficult, and the use of positive praise. Each book was equipped with discussion prompts, starred at several points throughout the book with corresponding discussion questions located in the back of the book (see Appendix B for book titles, brief summaries, discussion questions, and activity information).

**Observer Training.** While campers read, camp counselors served as observers, choosing a pair of readers at random and taking note of their interactions with the text and each other. Counselors were trained on their responsibilities as observers and how to take field notes. Data analysis consisted of looking for patterns and emergent themes in the field notes.

### **Book Club Sessions**

The pairs met twice per day, once in the morning for the reading portion of the project, and once in the afternoon for the development of artifact that aligned with and reinforced the lesson or theme of each book (Appendix B). Over the course of each camp session, which lasted approximately 12 days, the campers were able to complete the reading, discussion, and creation of artifacts for four books.

### **Morning Reading Session**

In pairs, the sisters read together. The campers had 45 minutes to read through a short picture book twice. The first time through the girls read the book with no planned interruptions. The campers decided together which of the pair, the big sister or little sister would do most of the reading. Because of time restrictions it was not possible to test the campers for reading level, so their comfort with reading aloud was likely a factor in deciding whether they wanted to read or not. Any spontaneous questions from the little sister were addressed by the big sister as they came up. The second reading was a stop-and-discuss reading. Each book was equipped with discussion prompts, starred at several points throughout the book with corresponding discussion questions located in the back of the book. As the camper came to a star, the big sister stopped the reading, looked to the back of the book for the prompt and guided the little sister through a discussion about the prompt.

### **Afternoon Application Session**

In the afternoon of the same day as the Morning Reading Session the campers met again to use what they learned through the self-esteem theme of the book that they discussed with their sister. Each camper worked individually and with the help of camp

counselors to create an arts and crafts project or written piece about the book of the day (Appendix B).

## **Results**

### **Audio Files and Observer Notes.**

In order to address the research question of this study, it was necessary to look at the data gathered through the transcribed audio tapes and counselor observations. After transcribing the audio files an open coding method (Merriam, 2009) was used to determine how the campers interacted with each other and the texts. From the open coding, several patterns of interaction were apparent (see Appendix C). These categories of interaction were then analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to help explain what campers focus on when discussing books and the characteristics of those discussions.

When viewed in terms of camper engagement in the book club project, trends can be broken up into three major categories: Indicators of engagement in the project by Camper 2 (big sister), indicators of engagement in the project by Camper 1 (little sister), and indicators of disinterest in the project by either partner.

### **Indicators of Engagement by Big Sister**

The highest number of occurrences for the first category, indicators of engagement in the book club project by Camper 2, was in the trends of Camper 2 giving praise and Camper 2 pushing Camper 1 for more complete answers to discussion questions or contributing considerably to the discussion (see Table 1). These categories indicate that the older sister was interested in the project and took her job of helping the little sister read seriously. Several trends emerged that demonstrated the older campers'

involvement in the book club project and specifically the leadership role they were encouraged to assume. These included Camper 2 pushing for more complete answers to discussion questions and contributing significantly to discussion generated by the questions. The older campers also frequently stopped to make sure the younger camper understood the book club plan and that they understood the discussion questions. The older campers took opportunities to offer praise to the younger campers either while the younger campers were reading or as they answered questions (Table 2). There were several examples where the older camper pushed significantly to draw the younger camper into the conversation and to help them understand (Table 3).

### **Indicators of Engagement of Little Sister**

The category that deals with the engagement of the younger campers during the book club consists of only a few trends. Most noticeable responses for this area deal with the campers' interactions with the text and illustrations (Table 4). One category, Spontaneous question or comment related to text or illustration, leads other trends by more than 50 occurrences.

### **Indicators of Disinterest by Either Partner**

Finally, some trends demonstrated that the campers were unhappy with having to participate in the book club or were frustrated with parts or all of the process. As seen in Table 5, the most prevalent trend here was neglecting to respond or correct a miscue. There were two pairs of campers in particular in which the younger camper did not want to adhere to the directions of the older camper, and most arguing and many incidences of frustration came from those pairs.

### **Counselor Focus Group**

The focus group with the counselors provided another perspective on the program. As expected, the counselors reported that some of the campers enjoyed the program, while others seemed to find it to be too much like school, and they felt many of the campers were frustrated with reading the books twice through. It was also reported that in some cases the younger sister was a stronger reader than the older, but as this study did not make use of participant reading levels there would be no way to determine that when assigning campers to work together. The counselors overwhelmingly stated that the campers preferred *Purplicious* and *The Paper Bag Princess* to the other two books. When asked to predict whether or not the campers might have experienced any change in confidence as readers they reported that they believed they would show improvements.

### **Discussion Question Analysis**

The questions used to prompt discussion between the campers were developed using Sipe's Categories of Response (2008). It was anticipated that campers would respond more readily to the Personal (self-to-text connection), Analytical (questioning or trying to figure out the words or actions of characters or the author or illustrator), and Inter-textual (text-to-text connection) types of questions, while Performative (when the reader acts out parts of the text) and Transparent (when the reader seems to have entered the world of the text) interactions might appear organically. Upon analysis, discussion question responses were deemed high quality if they featured participation by both the older and younger camper in a more extensive discussion following the asking of a question. Those responses that featured simple one-word, or "yes," "no," or "I don't know" answers were considered low quality. By these standards questions that fell into



the category of Personal had the highest frequency of high-quality responses, followed by the Analytical and then the Inter-textual. As can be seen in Table 6, low quality responses were often those where the older camper did not participate in the discussion. There were no incidences of camper responses that would fall in the categories of the Performative or the Transparent.

Further analysis of the spontaneous questions and comments made by the campers during reading showed findings similar to those of Sipe (2008), who found children's talk to be primarily composed of analytical responses in a read-aloud setting. The spontaneous comments and questions that arose during the reading between the campers fell into the analytical category 75% of the time.

### **Discussion**

The research question sought to examine the kinds of discussions campers had in relation to the books they were reading and the characteristics of those discussions. Several important categories of interaction were separated into three groups: Indicators of big sister engagement, indicators of little sister engagement, and indicators of camper disinterest.

Most of the trends that emerged during analysis showed big sister engagement. It was found that big sisters gave praise, pushed for more complete answers to discussion questions, and contributed to the discussion more than anything else. This is important because while many times the older sister did contribute to the discussion, there were also times (as shown in the category of camper disinterest) that the older sister allowed one word or "I don't know" answers, which created a dynamic where the campers weren't really interacting with each other, but were just going through the motions of reading and

questioning. The idea that positive discussion interaction behaviors were the highest in number shows that for the most part the older campers were engaged in the process.

Other trends that emerged showing the older camper's engagement included the correction of attention or miscue, and redirection or explanation of the discussion question. All these point to the leadership role taken by the older camper and echo Halliday's (1994) theory of socialization as an external motivator.

The category of indicators of little sister engagement included trends such as spontaneous question or comment related to text or illustration, camper using evidence to support their response to discussion questions, and directly asking for help. The most prevalent of these trends was that of the younger camper spontaneously asking a question or commenting on the text or illustrations. More than the other trends, this shows camper engagement with the text and with her partner, as the reading of the books and the discussion questions are in a social setting. While the older campers were given the job of interacting with their partners, spontaneously asking questions or commenting demonstrated the younger campers making a choice to be social and interactive, which supports the theories of Gee (2004), Vygotsky (1962), Halliday (1994), as well as Sipe's reader response theory (2008) and exhibits the campers' engagement with the text, their partners, and the book club program. While not directly related to the specific research question, campers making a spontaneous comment or asking a question about the text or illustration seemed to indicate the campers' ability to understand the reading. Questions and comments ranged from simple observations, "She's painting a picture," to questions about the actions of the characters, "She asked [the dragon] to do that?" Some campers made connections between the characters and themselves ("I'm afraid of talking back to

my mom”) and made predictions (“She gets brave at the end, right?”). Other indicators of comprehension included the campers’ use of the text or illustration to support their discussion of the questions asked: “I’m gonna read the passage... ‘Grace’s heart sank. Thomas was the school spelling bee champion. His experiments always took a blue ribbon at the science fair. And he was captain of the soccer team.’ So that’s probably why she’s upset, because he’s so good at everything....” Campers also demonstrated their comprehension of the text through the use of intonation and expressive reading.

Finally, the last category of emergent trends was that of camper disinterest in the program, though this category included a small number of incidences. Trends that fit into this category included the big sister allowing one word or “I don’t know” responses to discussion questions, skipped discussion questions, camper arguing, resistance to asking or answering questions and expressions of frustration with the process. Reasons for campers’ disinterest in the program might have included the program detracting from the usual camp schedule, individual camper’s dislike for reading in general or structured reading times, or their dislike of their reading partner.

In considering the discussion questions developed using Sipe’s (2008) “Categories of Response,” most high-quality responses were generated from questions that were geared toward the campers’ personal experiences. These were the responses where both partners were part of the discussion, and the conversations that grew out of these questions were more balanced between partners, rather than simple one-word answers or participation from one partner more than the other. According to Sipe, questions that fall into the category of the “Personal” are those that allow the student to make connections from their lives to the text and from the text to their lives (p. 86). The

second category of response with the highest-quality discussions was the “Analytical,” which according to Sipe “includes all responses that seem to be dealing with the text as an opportunity to construct narrative meaning” (p. 85).

The category with the smallest number of high-quality responses was the “Intertextual” category, which Sipe says “reflects the children’s abilities to relate the text being read to other cultural texts and products.” This finding may have been because the campers were not familiar with children’s books that focus on strong female characters. It was difficult to find books that were appropriate for the ages of the campers and that were centered on the lives of strong girls. It is also possible that there would be more high-quality intertextual responses if the campers had been able to choose the books themselves.

In a read-aloud setting younger children are more likely to call out their thoughts and questions, but as children get older and become more accustomed to what is considered appropriate classroom behavior they are less likely to speak out of turn, and as a result may be more likely to monitor and edit their thoughts and questions before speaking. If a similar study were conducted with younger children, using peers to read aloud and discuss in a less structured setting, it is possible there may be more spontaneous responses in general and that the discussions that grow from the interactions between the campers may be more comprehensive.

Further analysis of the spontaneous comments and questions made by the campers reveals findings more in line with what Sipe experienced in his data. That is, of spontaneous comments or questions asked, 75% fit within the analytical category and 25% fell into the category of the personal. This difference indicates that when

responding to discussion questions the campers were more comfortable with the conversation being of a personal nature, but their spontaneous comments and questions sought to understand and make meaning out of the narrative. The discussion questions were generated to prompt socialization during the book club, which might explain why the “Personal” category of response was prevalent in the responses to those discussion questions.

In sum, the findings suggest that positive interactions can occur using a peer-tutoring/book club intervention even in a short period of time. This reinforces the findings of Raphael and McMahon (1994), Harris et al. (2000), Kourea et al. (2007), and Moore-Hart and Kabarenic (2009). Further, the setting of the present study, a residential summer camp, adds to research that suggests gains can be made in the summer months that may counter the negative effects of the so-called "summer slump" on low-income students (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Sinatra, 2004; Schacter & Jo, 2005, White, King, Kingston, & Foster, 2013). The results of the analysis of the qualitative data of this study, especially the examination of the categories of response, indicate that the social aspect of conversation may be stronger when the discussion is guided by some kind of question or prompt.

Implications for camp programs aiming to improve the reading motivation of campers, and to stave off the losses in reading achievement that can occur during the summer months might be to implement a similar book club program. Implications for teachers given the expected outcome of this study might be that a school may choose to implement a program where students in the upper grades visit with students in the lower grades two or more times a week in a tutoring capacity, as it may fit with the curriculum

and scheduling needs of the school. It is important to note that this peer tutoring method is inexpensive and would work for a school or out-of-school program that has limited funds.

### **Limitations**

One possible limitation to this study includes camper apathy in the book club program. As many of the campers were returners from previous years they were aware that in some instances the book club was cutting into their free time, which some were not happy about. As previously discussed, results indicated that there were occasions where campers were frustrated with the process, and some campers truly did not get along with their partners, which might have skewed results of both the quantitative and qualitative data, but given the limited amount of time for the study, having a change to partners was not an option. There is also a possibility that the older campers, who were trained in how to interact with their little sisters, were not paying attention during the trainings, did not find their job to be important, or forgot their role.

An additional limitation may have been the camper's individual experience with and understanding of the term *sister*. Those campers who have sisters at home themselves would likely have a different understanding of the term than those who are only children, live separately from their siblings, or don't have what might be considered a good relationship with their sister. This difference in understanding might have shaped what they saw as their role in the camp book club sister relationship, regardless of training before the intervention began.

Possibly the most impactful limitation may have been related to the restrictions in time, as this study was run during a short period of two weeks.

### **Future Research**

Future research may look at a similar program run at a camp or summer program with longer-running sessions, or one where the campers are not assigned to the same partner for the duration of the study but can be moved around to a different partner each time.

Additionally, research might be conducted that mirrors the girls-only atmosphere of the present study by conducting a similar program at a boys-only camp or summer program, or a mixed-gender program.

Finally, a study that compares middle or high SES children and low SES children may shed light on any differences between the two groups in terms of reading attitude and self-perception.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Focus Group Session 1 Questions:

1. How many of you are reading something right now?
2. What are you reading?
3. Do you mostly read for school or work, or for pleasure?
4. When you're looking for something to read what do you look for?
5. Why do you think you like to read certain types of material and not others?
6. Do you find any type of reading to be challenging?
7. Do you like to read? Why/why not?
8. Did you like to read when you were younger? Why/why not?
9. Was there a time when your enjoyment of reading changed?
10. If you are not required to read for work or school how likely are you to read on your own for pleasure?

#### Focus Group Follow-up Questions

1. What were your thoughts on the book club in general?
2. Did the campers like the books?
3. Was there anything that they really did not enjoy from what you could tell?
4. Which book would you say was their favorite?
5. Do you think the big sisters were able to help the little sisters?
6. If you had to predict the results of the study in terms of their improved reading self-perception or reading attitude what might you expect?
7. In terms of the activities, what do you think was the favorite and what was the least favorite?
8. Outside of the book club program did the campers seem to want to read while they were here?
9. Did you notice any changes in behavior from when we started the book club? For instance, did you notice during observing the campers anyone who was more likely to want to read or discuss? Or less likely?
10. Did you see a lot of praise happening?
11. Did you hear any feedback directly from the campers?
12. How did you feel you did as an observer? Was it what you expected it to be?

## Appendix B

### Purplicious by Victoria Kann and Elizabeth Kann

Synopsis: Purplicious tells the story of a girl who loves the color pink. When some girls at school start to make fun of Pinkalicious, she begins to question her love for pink because she wants to fit in with the other girls. In the end Pinkalicious learns to love herself the way she is and even makes a friend who understands her.

### Morning Reading Session-Discussion Questions

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1. Name something that you love or a favorite thing of yours. Does anyone like the same things you like? (P)
2. Have you ever been made fun of for liking something? How did that make you feel? (P)
3. Use one or two words to describe the girls making fun of Pinkalicious. (A)
4. Do you know any bullies? What makes a person a bully? (P)
5. Does Pinkalicious remind you of any other characters from books you've read before? (I)
6. How is Pinkalicious' Tuesday note different from her Thursday & Friday notes? (A)
7. Why do you think Pinkalicious makes fun of her brother? Do you think that is the right thing to do? Why or why not? (A)
8. How do you think Pinkalicious feels at the end of the story? Why do you think she feels this way? (A)

### Afternoon Session Activity-Acrostic Poems

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After being shown a model of an acrostic poem and brainstorming some expressive words that the campers could use to describe themselves, they were provided with colorful paper and crayons and markers and asked to create acrostic poems using some of those expressive words.

### The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch

Synopsis: This story is about a beautiful princess who is in love with a prince name Ronald, who she wants to marry. When Ronald is carried away by a dragon Elizabeth sets out to rescue him, wearing only a paper bag because her clothes were burnt up in the dragon's fire. When Elizabeth, who is dirty and still wearing a paper bag, outsmarts the dragon and rescues prince Ronald, he tells her to come back when she looks like a real princess. Elizabeth, who is a smart girl, decides he is "a bum" and chooses not to marry him after all.

### Morning Reading Session-Discussion Questions

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1. What do you think makes a princess beautiful? (A)
2. What makes you beautiful? (P)
3. What would you do if a dragon took your boyfriend away? (P)
4. Do you think Elizabeth is scared of the dragon? Why/why not? (A)
5. How is Princess Elizabeth different from Pinkalicious? (I)
6. What would you do? Would you go back again to save Ronald? (P)
7. What do you think Elizabeth will do to get Ronald back? (A)
8. How is the dragon like the girls who made fun of Pinkalicious? (I)
9. What makes Elizabeth beautiful? (A)
10. Do you think Elizabeth should have married Ronald? (A)

### Afternoon Session Activity-Paper Bag Dresses

---

Campers were given large sheets of butcher paper and were given time and materials to decorate the bags, which were then wrapped around the campers as if they were "dresses," just like the paper bag princess. Campers were encouraged to use words on their dresses that included personality attributes rather than physical ones. Campers participated in a fashion show to display their dresses in front of their cabins.



### Sheila Rae, the Brave by Kevin Henkes

Synopsis: Sheila Rae is a brave little girl who seems to not be afraid of anything, while her sister Louise is a “scaredy-cat”. When Sheila Rae finds herself in a situation where she isn’t very brave at all Louise comes to the rescue and shows that she can be brave too.

#### Morning Reading Session-Discussion Questions

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1. What are you afraid of? (P)
2. Can you think of a character from another book we’ve read who was very brave? (I)
3. Is there anything you used to be afraid of that you’re not afraid of anymore? (P)
4. Is Sheila Rae brave? Is her little sister Louise brave Why do you think this? (A)
5. Is Sheila Rae making fun of Louise? (A) Does this remind you of what happened to Purplicious? Why? (I)
6. How are Sheila Rae and Louise different now than they were at the beginning of the book? (A)
7. Do you think Louise is brave? (A) What makes her brave? (A)
8. Do you think a person can be afraid of some things but still be brave at the same time? (P)

#### Afternoon Session Activity-Everyday Bravery

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Campers were asked to brainstorm and draw pictures of times they were brave in every day situations. The pictures were displayed gallery-style in the camp dining hall.

### Grace for President by Kelly DiPucchio

Synopsis: When Grace is learning about the presidents she wonders why none of them are girls and the rest of the class laughs at her. Her teacher creates a class election and Grace decides to run for class president against Thomas, a boy who seems to be good at everything. Grace runs a tight campaign and in the end is elected class president because in the end she is the better person for the job.

### Morning Reading Session-Discussion Questions

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1. Why do you think there has not been a woman president yet? (A)
2. Have you ever had an election at your school? (P)
3. Why do you think the students laughed when Grace said she wanted to be president? (A)
4. Does this remind you of anything from *Purplicious*? (I)
5. Why is Grace so upset about Thomas running for president too? (A)
6. Does Grace seem like she's not sure she can win? (A) Does this remind you of anything from *Sheila Rae The Brave*? (I)
7. Who do you think will win the election? Why? (A)
8. Why do you think the author decided to write this page like this? How does this style make you feel as you are reading it? (A)
9. Do you think Grace believes she could be president of the U.S. someday? Why does she believe this? (A)
10. Do you think you could be president of the U.S.? (P)

### Afternoon Session Activity-Perfect for the Job Campaign Posters

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Campers imagined their dream job and created campaign-style posters like the ones in the book to advertise why they'd be perfect to be given that job. High-value words were brainstormed first. Posters were displayed in the campers' cabins.

## Appendix C

## Categories of Interactions

Qualitative Trend	Number of Incidences
1. Spontaneous question related to text/illustration	46
2. C2 corrects C1's attention	16
3. Incidence of C2 correction of miscue	44
4. Incidence of non-correction of miscue	91
5. Incidence of inclusion of illustration as part of reading (Grace for President especially)	26
6. Incidence of discussion of illustration as part of reading (Grace for President especially)	13
7. Incidence of self-correction	38
8. Hesitancy to read aloud	4
9. C2 pushing C1 for more complete answers to discussion questions	130
10. C2 allowing 1 word or "I don't know" responses to discussion questions	40
11. Skipped discussion questions	21
12. C2 significant contribution to discussion questions	41
13. Camper 2 unsolicited input/interruption/correction	344
14. Camper asks counselor for help	4
15. Camper confusion over text/illustration	2
16. Spontaneous comment about text/illustration	53
17. C2 explanation of the reading/question plan	68
18. C2 gives praise	142
19. Campers fail to make a connection to another text	2
20. Camper uses evidence from the book to support their response to discussion questions	19
21. Camper identifies with character spontaneously or makes a connection to their own life spontaneously	2
22. Reader emphasizes text for effect through expressive reading	67
23. C2 restates/explains discussion question	60
24. Campers express frustration with process	22

25. Resistance to asking/answering discussion questions	7
26. Camper arguing	18
27. C1 asks for help explicitly	16
28. C2 resistance to help C1	2

Table 1

*Indicators of Camper 2's (Big Sister) Engagement in Book Club Project*

	Number of occurrences
Camper 2 corrects Camper 1's attention	16
Incidence of Camper 2 correction of miscue	44
Incidence of Camper 2 pushing Camper 1 for more complete answers to discussion questions/Camper 2 considerable contribution to discussion question	212
Camper 2 gives praise	142
Camper 2 restates or explains the discussion question	60

Table 2

*Sample Interaction: Reading Sessions Offering Praise*

Book: The Paper Bag Princess	
Discussion question read by Camper 2: Do you think Princess Elizabeth's scared of the dragon?	Camper 1: Um, I don't think she's scared because...I think she's scared but she's being brave.
Camper 2: She's scared but she's being brave?	Camper 1: Mhm.
Camper 2: Good answer! You're doing a good job reading.	

Table 3

*Sample Interaction: Reading Sessions Offering Direction*

Book: The Paper Bag Princess	
Discussion Question read by Camper 2: Do you think Elizabeth should have married Ronald?	Camper 1: No
Camper 2: Why not?	Camper 1: 'Cause he's a bum?
Camper 2: Why is he a bum?	Camper 1: 'Cause he called her... he said her hair is a mess.
Camper 2: He was mean right? He didn't accept her for who she was.	Camper 1: He could have asked her nicely.
Camper 2: Yeah. He could have asked her what she was wearing or what happened or why did she look like that right?	Camper 1: Mhm.
Camper 2: Ok. We're all done. Good job. This is the writer and that's the illustrator.	

Table 4

*Indicators of Camper 1's (Little Sister) Engagement in Book Club Project*

	Number of occurrences:
Spontaneous question or comment related to text or illustration	99
Incidence of self-correction	38
Camper uses evidence from the book to support their response to discussion questions	19
Camper 1 directly asks Camper 2 for help	16



Table 5

*Indicators of Disinterest in the Project by Either Partner*

	Number of occurrences:
Camper 2 allowing one word or “I don’t know” responses to discussion questions	40
Skipped discussion questions	21
Campers express frustration with process	22
Resistance to asking/answering questions	7
Camper arguing	18

Table 6

*High-Quality vs. Low-Quality Responses to Discussion Questions*

Question	High Quality Response	Low Quality Response
Grace for President Question: Does Grace seem like she's not sure she can win? Does this remind you of anything from Sheila Rae the Brave?	C1: Yeah. Yes because she was in the forest...No, first she was confident, then she, when she was actually doing it she wasn't and that is the same with Sheila Rae. C2: Yeah, 'cause Grace was all confident she could win, and then what's his name, whatever Cobb, Thomas Cobb joined, and now she isn't so confident, like Sheila Rae. C1: She thinks he's better C2: Yeah	Response to part one of question: C1: Yeah  Response to part two of question: C1: Yeah. Sheila Rae the Brave? She didn't give up.