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How do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry based pedagogy?

Michelle Cohen
Rowan University

HOW DO STUDENTS STRUCTURE THEIR SILENT READING WHEN SITUATED IN INQUIRY BASED PEDAGOGY?

by

Michelle Cohen

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Dedications

   I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my wonderful husband Jason and my two beautiful children Sierra and Mia. Jason, thank you for all you do and for allowing me this opportunity to further my education. Sierra and Mia, you both are my inspiration for everything. Remember girls, never stop learning.

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Abstract

Michelle Cohen
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Dr. Stephanie Abraham
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to document the engagement levels and classroom discussions students have after reading their independent reading novel. The specific aim was to see how students respond using their independent reading books when class discussions are centered around an essential question. Classroom reading behaviors, student-led classroom discussions, interviews, and exit tickets were analyzed. The students were engaged as active readers when reading their chosen silent reading book to find the answer to an essential question. After, the students engaged in meaningful conversations using their silent reading books as guides before some students offered personal responses while answering the essential question. The implications for teaching using essential questions to engage students when reading independent reading selections are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, said Jojen. The man who never reads lives only one."- George R.R. Martin, A Dance with Dragons

In high school, I would not call myself the best reader and the paper versions of CliffsNotes were definitely in my book bag. I might even say that I hated reading. I did not see the point of sitting down with a book if you could just watch a movie instead. I loved multiple-choice tests because I could at least have a chance at the answer. These tests did not require me to think. In 1996, I skimmed by in high school to graduate in the middle of my graduating class. Since Rutgers and Rowan did not accept me, I found myself at Camden County College. Large amounts of readings were required in a short amount of time and I found out that I could not CliffsNotes my way through these classes. I tried reading harder by knitting my eyebrows thinking then I would get it. This led to my new college freedom where I would skip a class here or there when I felt like it. After a one and a half years at Camden County College, my GPA was a 1.75 so I dropped out thinking the GPA would go away after five years. Twelve years later when my daughter asked, "why should I go to college if you didn't?" At that moment I realized I needed to be a role model so I called Camden County College and enrolled for classes that day. I also realized a GPA never goes away.

During my time away from college I started reading Oprah's Book Club books for pleasure. I figured if Oprah liked them, maybe I would too. I began to read many books, often purchasing books at BJ's Wholesale so I could mask my book habit as food purchases. Through reading books that I liked, I discovered I did not need CliffsNotes to

get me through. I began to like reading and I would tune into Oprah's show at 4 PM on channel 6 to follow the book club discussions. I felt like I finally liked to read and most importantly, I understood the story.

Around this same time when I found my love for reading, I reenrolled at Camden County College. When I had to declare a major I chose Secondary Education because I wanted to teach high school students that were just like me: students who hated reading. I thought maybe they hated reading because they just did not find the right book. Fast forward three and a half years, I graduated summa cum laude from Rutgers' 2013 class with an English degree, secondary and elementary education teaching certificates, and a special education certificate. A far cry from the student who hated reading in high school.

I landed my first job at the school that is the focus of this study the day after I graduated. From that moment, I often wondered how could I give back from what I learned in my life so I could reach students before the end of their high school career. Throughout the first half of the year, I started sharing the books I was reading with the students, I searched yard sales to add books to the classroom library, and I made sure I read along with them when I assigned silent reading. Students started borrowing books from my library and often told me about books I should read. I wanted to show students the books I was reading so my co-teacher and I hung up posters that said, "Mrs. Cohen is reading…" with a picture of the front cover. When I finished, I would mark a big red X through "reading" and put "finished" in its place. My students knew reading was a priority and an important part of their English class. Stemming from my enthusiasm, students were amazed when I said they could read whatever they liked. From comic

books to car repair manuals, I witnessed students reading instead of checking their text messages. Each time I set aside independent reading time with my class, they had the chance to experience a different life too. Sometimes it was a book they could relate to, and other times it was a book that taught empathy for a character and their situation. When students do not read, they can only pull from experiences from their own life (Martin, 2013).

During my first year of teaching, my school featured a school wide Sustained Silent Reading period once a month. Everyone in the whole school would stop their normal routine and read for the period instead. I looked forward to this period and I made a point to provide magazines, comics, and books to students if they did not have anything to read. I modeled good reading habits by reading along with the students instead of marking papers.

As much as I loved this period, other teachers were not so happy. They thought students did enough reading in English class and they should not read during science or math where they had to prepare for benchmarks. By the end of the year, administration scrapped the program and asked that we give students time to read in class at our own discretion.

If all teachers did not find value in this program, I thought, how could I make this time more educational so teachers would accept silent reading? I thought back to Oprah where everyone read a book and she would then pose questions for the panel to answer. At home, I was engaged, following along, and at times I wanted to write to her to share my opinion. When coming up with an idea for this thesis project, I wanted to

replicate the Oprah Book Club experience: students would read a book, and then we would have a class wide discussion following the reading session.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to document changes in student engagement when asked to answer an essential question after reading their independent reading book. Just letting students read a choice novel was not enough (Pilgreen, 2000). In the age of accountability, teachers needed to see the value behind an activity before dedicating valuable class time to it. After my own classroom observations, when given the chance, some students took the time to read and others did not.

I taught juniors when silent reading was no longer mandatory each month, so I randomly assigned silent reading time when I remembered. Sometimes two weeks went by before asking the students to take out their books again. This led to them choosing random books off the classroom library shelf. Some based their book choice on the thickness of the book and most did not consider the content since they intended to put it back on the shelf when finished. While they were reading, I took note of who was reading or not and I held students accountable by giving them a grade for reading for the session. While they read, I had the students mark down their starting page and ending page in a notebook that I passed around. In these haphazard reading sessions, students asked to use the bathroom or visit the nurse and others who chose to stay read text messages behind their books. After fifteen minutes was over, students put away their book until the next time I remembered to schedule silent reading time. There was no discussion, no sharing of a favorite part, or time to recommend the book to others. Most important, this silent reading session was disconnected to anything else I taught. It seemed as though silent

reading was a last minute reprieve from the mandated curriculum. Half way through the year, silent reading slipped off the lesson plans.

Right before I started this study as I was contemplating a study focus, one student helped me solidify this project. During the first week of school all students had to take a mandatory summer reading test by reading one book from a preselected list. A student said to me he read five books but not one of the required summer reading choices. I gave him sympathy, but I also had to give him a maximum grade of 50% since he did not write about one of the preselected novels. In my heart I knew it was not fair. This student liked to read, and this experience might lead to him not reading for pleasure again.

Learning from my own mistakes and seeing the disappointment in my student when he read the "wrong" book, I knew much more could be done with silent reading and I had to revive my love for free reading. Students saw my forced attempt at silent reading and they must have sensed it was not working. Their interruptions, lackadaisical behavior, and my own lack of silent reading research made me believe that silent reading just could not work in a high school classroom. However, thinking back to my own life and how much I enjoyed reading books that interested me, inspired me to give silent reading another chance. I learned silent reading should be nonnegotiable and consistent, and should not feel like "work" (Francois, 2015; Merga, 2013). I believed I could motivate students to read by letting them choose books that interested them and by having discussions after reading. Follow up discussions would foster excitement about the books they read (Pilgreen, 2000). To prepare, I started to build a classroom library with books that appealed to all students and I labeled them by genre (Francois, 2015).

In the age of technology, it seemed as if my tenth graders only talked to each other through their cell phone. I had to fight with texting, social media, and Snap Chat. Getting them to grumble "good morning" was an accomplishment. In addition, the students received Chromebooks that year and lessons were "pushed out" to the students and the only sound heard in the classroom were seventeen keyboards clacking away. The school day started at 7:25AM and sometimes English class was their first class of the day. My class was the last place a sixteen-year-old wanted to watch the sunrise.

Essential questions are often part of all teachers' instruction, but rarely did I see these questions present themselves in the classroom to promote inquiry-based learning. At times I spent so much time writing essential questions for them to only live in the online lesson planner. Essential questions challenge and engage students since they are not merely answering text dependent questions after reading (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). Essential questions cannot be answered in one sentence, and are often used to lead and hook students into thinking and discussion (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). Also, essential questions are the foundation of inquiry based learning by giving the student a purpose for reading (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Using an essential question as a guide, students could discuss the question after reading their independent reading books.

When I considered a research project, I thought it was perfect to combine those two underused components of education. By combining essential questions and silent reading, I could structure my classes to have focused discussions where students used their choice novel to answer an essential question. In these open discussions, students could understand the text by answering questions that may or may not have an obvious answer (Guthrie, 2008). In turn, when one student answered a question, other students

should follow suit and pose more questions to build upon the discussion. Through discussions, students constructed their own meaning by linking prior knowledge with new knowledge (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Having classroom discussions after reading caused social interaction among students where they were now motivated to read (Guthrie, 2008). In addition to classroom discussions, I wanted to have one on one interviews with the students because high school students were sometimes reluctant to speak in front of others. In this inquiry project, all students needed to participate and having one on one conversations allowed me to reach students and see where they could contribute to the class discussion (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). I hoped that using essential questions to guide classroom discussions motivated students to actually read instead of using silent reading time as their personal break period. In addition, I hoped students would put away their phones for twenty minutes and have an actual conversation with other people that did not involve typing.

Statement of Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to document the engagement levels and classroom discussions students have after reading their independent reading novel. The specific aim was to see how students responded using their independent reading books when class discussions were centered on an essential question. How do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry-based pedagogy? What motivates students to read independently when they are reluctant readers? What happens to classroom book discussions when guided by an essential question? How do students use their choice reading novel when answering the essential question? What happens if students do not

want to answer the essential question? How does the discussion, if any, move along when there are new questions introduced?

Organization of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is a qualitative exploration of my research questions. Chapter Two reviews and evaluates current research on Sustained Silent Reading, student engagement and motivation to read, and inquiry based practices in the classroom. Chapter Three delineates the context of the study, the design and methodology, and information on the study site and students in the study. Chapter Four is an analysis of data sources. Last, Chapter Five will summarize conclusions, limitations, and implications for the teaching field.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

What did *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005)*, A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 2002), and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 2002) have in common? These were the mandatory literature works students read and analyzed in their 10th grade English class at Sierra Springs High School this year. While some students enjoyed these books, others wished to read a book that interested them instead. Sometimes the mandatory literature was too difficult to understand and many times the pieces were disconnected from the students' experiences. Then, my students developed low self-efficacy where they thought they were bad readers (Guthrie, 2008). As a solution, students chose a Sustained Silent Reading book where the book gave them the "opportunity to develop enjoyment in recreational book reading" (Merga, 2013, p. 230). Letting students choose an interesting and comprehendible book to read during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time balanced the required literature in the class. When students chose their own books, they exhibited control over their lives when so many directives are non-negotiable in school (Guthrie, 2008).

If an enjoyable book helped readers develop reading stamina, then why was SSR not a prominent part of the curriculum? Did teachers not see value in this activity? This idea made me look into my own teaching practices as I formed questions about how to make silent reading "more educational." I created the following questions: How do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry based pedagogy? What motivates students to read independently when they are reluctant readers? What happens to classroom book discussions when guided by an essential question? To answer these

questions, I reviewed the literature concerning Silent Reading, inquiry based teaching, and student motivation. All three topics merged to show inquiry based pedagogy engaged students when reading their choice book and when having follow up conversations in the classroom.

Silent Reading

Not every teacher was a fan of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). For instance, some teachers claimed students appeared to be unmotivated readers when they fell asleep or read with the book upside down during silent reading time (Francois, 2015). Guthrie's (2008) questionnaire study of 12th graders revealed only 18% of students said they got class time to read choice books. In the current era of school accountability, Merga's (2013) study determined that 65% of Year 8 students in a West Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading (WASABR) experienced silent reading, while only 13% of Year 10 students were given time to read for pleasure. In both of these studies, students received less time to read for pleasure as they progressed through school.

Margaret Merga (2013) wanted to understand the benefits of SSR, so she conducted a study of high school students in Western Australia to measure the effects of silent reading in twenty different high schools. During Merga's (2013) study, she pondered if students should spend school time on recreational reading instead of completing curriculum-generated tasks. Instead, she discovered the high school students liked silent reading because it was better than working and they thought it was relaxing. Others liked the chance to read without being interrupted and they liked the break from the normal teaching routine (Merga, 2013). Through this study, Merga's (2013) definition of Silent Reading evolved and she stated a functional model of Silent Reading should

include "regular, uninterrupted reading to build stamina and facilitate concentration, a wide range of choice, teacher monitoring and encouragement, and opportunities for student-led discussion about books" (Merga, 2013, p. 241).

Likewise, Francois's (2015) study noted the potential in his adolescent readers at a New York City public secondary school. He started his study by interviewing twenty-three students of different ages and academic abilities on their motivation to read, and the school's culture of reading. Francois' (2015) study found that students enjoyed choice reading and enjoyed having multiple opportunities to talk about their book during classes. Students read 30 minutes in class during silent reading time and another 30 minutes at home each night. Reading every day and night builds the reading stamina that was required on benchmarks and standardized tests (Merga, 2013). When Francois (2015) interviewed a seventh grade student named "Latressa," she said Grant Street School is "big on reading" and how the school was always talking about reading (p. 69). Seeing the enthusiasm of the reading culture at the school Latressa became motivated to read (Francois, 2015).

Showcasing Books

After independent reading at home, Francois' (2015) secondary students in various grade levels engaged in conversations about their books and teachers gave book talks when they discovered new and interesting books. Book talks were important because students sometimes judged a book by its cover and a cover did not offer a story summary. In Francois' (2015) study teachers had the opportunity to conference with students about their reading progress. Seeing the students' interests, the principal showcased ten books in his office that appealed to his students, then he placed flyers

around the school promoting the books. The principal also shared his 800 book library

and hosted a lunch book club. Keeping a library of relevant books refreshed the old books

students disliked (Merga, 2013). Students saw their principal as a mentor when he read

along with the students, and the library gave a living room feel to his office (Francois,

2015; Merga, 2013). These events led the Francois' (2015) students to consider their

school as a "reading school" because choice reading became the culture of the school

(Francois, 2015, p. 69).

Motivation to Read

Before understanding what makes students read, teachers must first understand

the behaviors that turn students away from reading and there were multiple reasons why

students do not read. Fisher and Frey (2012) conducted a study on what motivated

adolescent boys to read by focusing on 115 ninth graders. After interviewing students

about their reading habits, Fisher and Frey's (2012) noted some students learned the

teacher just gave fact-type reading questions where answers were easily found on the

internet and thus the students decided not to read. Other students discovered they could

pass the class without reading, and some said they did not read because they did not like

the books assigned to them (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Another 9th grade student named

"Eric" in Fisher and Frey's (2012) study said in middle school he only read three books

because he learned the teacher would just read the book to him. Students then learned

they could just listen to the teacher instead. In the same study, "Nico," an English

language learner was labeled as "unmotivated" in middle school but read 11 books in

high school. "Nico" said the middle school books did not interest him. Teachers could

reverse this negative behavior by helping students become active instead of passive in

their education (Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore, & Bracewell, 2015). Their study

concluded found that students read when given choice and a focal essential question to

answer when reading (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore and Bracewell's (2015) created another study on

inquiry based teaching. Their study focused on 181 students and six teachers in high

school and the level of inquiry used in the classroom. The study results on student

outcomes in inquiry found that high school students engaged in classroom inquiry were

"most engaged, creative, and personally invested in their work" (p. 305). One way to

engage students in their work was by posing an essential question for students to answer

(Fisher & Frey, 2012; McTighe & Wiggins 2013). In Fisher and Frey's (2012) study on

motivating adolescent boys to read, a student read nine books because he had a purpose

for reading and wanted to find the answer to his essential question. Considering the

students in this study, interest and motivation were connected. When a student was

motivated to find the answer to something, or is interested in the book subject, he was

more inclined to read.

Student Choice and Reading Habits

Another way to reverse a lack of devotion in books was to give students choice

during SSR within the classroom (Guthrie, 2008). In addition, to giving students choice

during SSR, teachers can create mentally-active, engaged readers who are intrinsically

motivated to read books when they allow students to talk socially with other students

about reading. (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). By looking at the reading habits at home,

teachers could model this behavior and offer students a variety of texts in school, and

then allow students to talk about their favorite books. Also, several studies have shown

that students are motivated to read when they were personally interested in the book when given choice (Fisher & Frey, 2012), when teachers recommend books (Francois 2015), or when they were given books by others (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Sabina Rak Neugebauer (2013) discovered students read differently when at home versus when at school. The fifth grade students in two semi-urban public schools she studied were more motivated to read texts such as song lyrics, comics, magazines, notes, and religious texts outside of school. Her students in the study also thought they should read novels in school, but actually reading more informal texts motivated students to read more (Neugebauer, 2013). Just like the principal's 800 book library in Francois' (2015) study, teachers could collect materials from yard sales, book expos, inexpensive book clubs, and the internet to provide students with a wide variety of materials to choose from (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

Inquiry, Engagement, and Reading

Being an engaged reader lead to students being emotionally involved in the reading process. A student's "positive emotions positively affect academic achievement when they are mediated by self-regulated learning and motivation." (Mega, DeBeni & Ronconi, 2004, p. 128). Without independent learning activities and the motivation to read something of choice, a student did not have positive emotions about learning (Mega, DeBeni & Ronconi, 2004). A student's positive academic achievement then showcased the self-efficacy theory because the students believed they were confidently capable of completing the task at hand (Bandura, 1977).

In another study, Brown's (2004) high school students were not interested in completing a project about history revolutions. When she reflected on disastrous

outcomes of the work they produced, Brown (2004) knew she had to motivate her students more and she came up with the idea of having the students create a collaborative website on their Native American heritage centered around the broad essential question, what is your Native American heritage? Suddenly, the students had a vested interest in answering the question and this motivated them to complete the assignment. So much so, that students were using other classes' time to complete the project (Brown, 2004). The students conducted surveys and interviews, and located important documents pertaining to their heritage. Through this project, Brown's (2004) students became active learners and produced a website where others could learn from the material. Bennett (2015) claimed, "We need to engage students' prior knowledge and their ability to extend personal understanding to topics of interest" (p. 388). By tapping into their background knowledge, teachers could help students identify interesting themes they want to think about and explore (Bennett, 2015). Brown's (2004) students were so engaged that other teachers noted how Brown's students only did work for the English project during a common period in school.

As the example in the last paragraph showed, students should not be subjected to memorization of "fragmented bits of knowledge" (Onosko, 1992, p.193). Instead, when students found value in the instruction, and they were somehow related to the text, they were more likely to engage in the activity (Guthrie, 2008; Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore, & Bracewell, 2015). Engaged readers were also more willing to talk to others about what they were reading and students learned from these social interactions with one another (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Naturally, teens were accustomed to social interaction when discussing books and treating reading as a completely independent activity was a

disadvantage to some students (Guthrie, 2008). During classroom discussions, teachers

who used essential questions when reading gave students a purpose or a goal because

they provided students with guidance during the journey (Guthrie, 2008). By using

essential questions to guide reading, students cannot just look up answers on the internet.

Therefore, using essential questions and inquiry in the classroom created motivation or a

focused purpose for students to read (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Inquiry Pedagogy

David Saltman (2012) argued the work of learning needed to shift away from

teachers and be placed on students. The Common Core and the New Jersey Learning

Standards made this task easy because the standards already encouraged student-directed

learning instead of memorizing content (Saltman, 2012). He also said self-directed

students were critical thinkers when provided with challenging school work (Saltman,

2012). One way to motivate students to complete more challenging school work then was

to situate the lessons in inquiry pedagogy. Wilhelm, (2007), defined inquiry pedagogy as

"the process of addressing problems expressed by guiding questions" (p. 10). These

guiding questions gave students a reason to think about what they learned and it let

students explore the problem in depth (Onosko, 1992). In this model, the teacher no

longer disseminated information. Instead, the teachers made sure students were asking

guiding questions to solidify their thinking, and made sure students were the ones who

facilitated classroom talk (Wilhelm, 2007). Fisher & Frey (2012) cited Onosko's 1992

definition of inquiry as a way to organize curriculum around important adolescent issues

by asking open-ended questions. In a social studies class, this meant students were not

bombarded with a list of facts while they passively listened in class. Rather, the students

were active in their learning by taking the role of a problem solver that had specific purpose (Onosko, 1992).

To further break down inquiry, inquiry projects began with an essential question. Jay McTighe & Grant Wiggins (2013) defined essential questions as "questions that are not answerable with finality in a single lesson or a brief sentence" (p. 3). Essential questions should stimulate students to learn more about a topic (McTighe & Wiggins 2013). Further, an essential question was open ended, thought provoking, engaging, had students utilize higher-order thinking. It also highlighted important ideas that could be cross curricular and raised new questions. Finally, an essential question required justification for an answer, and was broad enough so it could be revisited over the course of the year (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). In addition to being broad, successful essential questions were applicable to the real world. An example Lillydahl, (2015) suggested was: "Should America be 'unconscious' of race?" (p. 37). This generic question allowed students' curiosity to evolve and explore sub questions related to the original question, and it allowed teachers to use this question across multiple units (Lillydahl, 2015). When using essential questions, students focused on the question instead of finding a finite answer. A good essential question allowed for an endless exploration of a topic.

Now, the role of the teacher then became the facilitator of questions, a listener who guided students to ask more questions, and a person who stopped judging student answers. The student must understand that classroom inquiry was like team work where they would not be graded on peer pressure or grades and instead great responses came from true and thoughtful responses (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). Fisher & Frey's (2012) study concluded besides giving students the option to choose a question to answer and

having the teacher model skills and strategies to use when reading, the students' interest in reading improved when given inquiry questions to answer. Inquiry allowed students to formulate their own ideas instead of completing memorization activities that had no educational value.

Inquiry Pedagogy Created Engaged Readers

Unlike cartoons, a light bulb does not go off above a student's head when they grasp a topic. Teachers may ask a student to read; yet, they cannot be sure they understood the material. In this case, learning was invisible, but inquiry-based learning allowed students to become critical thinkers (Bennett, 2015). Inquiry projects allowed students to access their background knowledge when they brought their own personal experiences into their learning**.** Instead of teaching to the curriculum, teachers helped students think beyond required content so students could "navigate their way into the future" (Bennett, 2015, p. 389). Inquiry based teaching and using essential questions let students think on their own instead of memorizing content so they could take ownership in their final product. In Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore and Bracewell's (2013) study on teaching with inquiry, students who engaged in the most inquiry instead of listening to a lecture when learning, felt they acquired more content knowledge by being able to lead their own investigations into their learning (Guthrie, 2008; Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore, & Bracewell, 2015). In addition, those students were also "more highly endorsed outcomes relating to Personal Motivation" and they "appeared to be most engaged, creative and personally invested in their work" (Saunders-Stewart, Gyles, Shore, & Bracewell, 2015, p. 305). Student choice and inquiry also opened the door for students to complete independent projects where they became activists for society. In another

example, Saltman's (2012) article featured a teacher named Hodges who used inquiry by having students question their world by comparing their reading book to the world. No longer was the student just a passive reader, they were now actively engaged in finding examples in the book that mirrored the real world (Saltman, 2012).

Inquiry Guidelines

In the projects mentioned above, teachers successfully implemented inquiry based teaching practices in their classroom. These projects motivated students by having relevant topics that were applicable in the real world. Students were active learners when they used their own background knowledge to construct new meaning (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). The students were also active learners because they did their own thinking instead passively collecting random facts and information meant solely for memorization. Using discussion techniques in the classroom lead to new learning where the students were engaged with each other. Most importantly, teachers offered guidance to students by checking in with them and they offered help when needed (Harris, 2017). When students could not generate an essential question, teachers provided students with one instead of falling back on comprehension check questions.

With the current research on the benefits of inquiry based pedagogy, independent reading, and student motivation, Jeffrey Wilhelm (2007) gave teachers advice on how to bring inquiry into an English classroom. From questioning schemes such as reQuest, and Question-Answer Relationships (QAR), to how to build successful essential questions, introducing inquiry became a turnkey event in the classroom (Wilhelm, 2007). Using a student choice book ensured students were engaged in the material because they chose their own topic of interest. Having students answer an essential question held students

accountable for reading when followed by class discussions (Wilhelm, 2007). Class discussions served as breaks from reading where all students had a chance to share their book while contributing their attempt to answer the essential question.

Conclusion

The literature indicated independent reading and essential questions were connected and integral. Students usually read their independent books, but teachers rarely knew if they were synthesizing the information unless they gave a test or project. This may turn students away from something they truly want to read and instead they chose a short book just to get the assignment completed. Instead, by making independent reading an instructional event where students answered an essential question, this teaching strategy engaged students to want to read a book to find the answer. Adding the layer of discussion made the activity a collaborative and social classroom event where learning was constructed together. The data I collected showed educators that guiding SSR time with essential questions fostered engaging discussions and a deeper understanding of the novels read.

Chapter 3

Context

Community

Sierra Springs High School, a pseudonym, was one of three high schools in a large school district in New Jersey. The study site served students from three suburban neighborhoods. The United States Census estimated in 2016 there were 8,362 people living in town one, 4,557 people in town two, and 11,478 people in town three. The United States Census bureau listed the median household income in town one as $61,885, $56,118 in town two, and $50,784 in town three. In the district, 66.8% of the residents in the labor force were employed, .2% were in the armed forces, 4.7% were unemployed, and 28.3% were not in the labor force. Of the residents employed, 22.5% worked in education or health related fields, and 13.1% worked in retail.

School

During the research period, Sierra Springs enrolled 1,096 students for the 2017-2018 school year in 9th - 12th grades. In the 2015-2016 school year, the demographics of the high school's 1,156 student population consisted of 74.4% White students, 7.4% Black students, 9.9% Hispanic students, 7.5% Asian students, and .5% of students considered to be two or more races. The enrollment breakdown was 589 male students and 566 female students. Of this population, the large majority of 92% of the students spoke English, 3.8% spoke Spanish and 1.7% spoke Gujarati. In the 2016-2017 school year, students with disabilities were 2% of the population. The staff to student ratio was 12:1 and the school employed 102 full time teachers. On the most recently reported Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test, 28% of

students met or exceeded the indicator for English Language Arts, and 22% of students met or exceeded the indicator for Mathematics in the 2015-2016 school year. Sierra Springs' college and career readiness was slightly under the statewide mean for SAT scores. The school's graduation rate, 92%, was above the statewide average and 68% of students enrolled in postsecondary schools after graduation.

The district's mission was to educate a diverse population while they prepared students for the future by teaching technological skills. The district also wanted the students to perfect their creative thinking skills and be confident in their abilities before they graduated. Similar to the mission, the vision of the school was to create lifelong critical thinking learners who were involved in the community as they prepared to lead fulfilling lives in an ever-changing world. Sierra Springs' vision was to educate the whole child while making sure students felt safe both physically and emotionally. The school also had a Title One funded literacy lab where students who read below grade level received additional help with reading skills. Through the literacy lab, students strengthened and supported their essential literacy skills so they could become successful in school, career, and in life.

Classroom

The students in my study were 10th grade students in a college prep English class. Sophomore English focused on American literature starting with the Puritans in the 1600s and Arthur Miller's (2005) *The Crucible*. Throughout the rest of the year students wrote essays and persuasive speeches, read stories that helped students understand their identity. They read American speeches such as John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech, and other works that celebrated open debate and free speech. Through these works, my

students explored the emerging identity of America shaped by industrialization and the Great Depression. Along with reading and writing, students learned sixty new vocabulary words, and students were required to read one independent reading novel per marking period.

In this inclusion classroom, five students had Individual Education Programs (IEPs) put into place, and their IEPs stated they should learn alongside regular education students. To serve these students best, the class was led by two English major teachers, and I held a certificate in Special Education too. In addition to two teachers, one student had an individual aid that assisted him when needed in class.

The classroom in this study was located on the second story of the school with large windows facing the east, which let in morning sunshine. Opposite the windows featured two white boards where students saw what they would learn for the week and the other white board featured a word wall of vocabulary words for the marking period. In the back of the classroom, there was a classroom library with recent fiction novels students could read. The room held a maximum of 25 students, however, the class in this study had 17 students. The desks all faced the center of the room with a large open space in the middle of the room. Students in this classroom had technology at their disposal. The classroom had a SmartBoard and projector, and each student learned on a district provided Chromebook. All teachers in the school used Google Classroom and Google for Education Apps for classroom assignments.

Students

Students at Sierra Springs High School followed a rotating wheel schedule. This meant they only attended each subject at most four times a week and sometimes only

three times per week. Due to the limited data collection period, I chose to collect data from nine focal students. The group consisted of three boys: Ricardo, DJ TJ, and Jason, and six girls: Mia, Caroline, Kristi, Leah, Candace, and Rebecca. Similar to the ethnic breakdown of the school, in this study three students were Hispanic, two students were African American, and four students were white. At the start of the study, each student completed a reading and hobbies interest survey. Knowing the students' interests allowed me to suggest books and articles that would have interested them during this study.

Ricardo was an 11th grade student repeating the 10th grade English course. He enjoyed reading both fiction and nonfiction books. For this study, he chose to read *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017), a young adult novel. In his spare time, Ricardo liked to play basketball with his friends. His favorite class in school was Italian because he liked the language.

Mia, a quiet student, had an IEP, and her favorite class was math because her friends were in the class too. She liked to hang out with her friends in her spare time. She liked to read nonfiction books and for this study she chose *Mean Girls* (Ostow & Fey, 2017), a novel based on the popular movie.

Caroline, a newscaster on the Sierra Springs morning news, also had an IEP. She liked English class and she liked to read out loud. Caroline liked to read poetry and she was already reading a poetry anthology before the study started. She mentioned she might get another book if she does not like the poems. On the third day of the study, Caroline chose the young adult novel *Everything, Everything* (Yoon & Yoon, 2017) instead and abandoned the poetry books.

In addition to an IEP, DJ TJ had a one on one aid in the classroom. He received

minimal help as he was working towards independence from additional services. DJ TJ liked to read comic books and chose a Spiderman comic for this study. In the Marvel series, Spiderman is Miles Morales, a mixed race super hero. DJ TJ was thrilled to know he could read comic books as his independent reading book. In his spare time DJ TJ liked to sing and perform rap music. In other classes, DJ TJ often read his comic books after he was finished his work.

Kristi's favorite hobbies included sleeping and watching Netflix. Her favorite subject is math because she said she was good at the subject. She liked to read fiction books and for this study she chose a nonfiction book titled *Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia* (Dunkle, 2015).

Leah loved English class, theatre, and she loved to write. She does not have a favorite book genre and she said it depends on the book subject. She was reading *Otherworld* (Segal & Miller, 2017), a young adult, science fiction thriller during this study.

Candace, a quiet student, also had an IEP. Candace enjoyed taking naps and watching videos on her phone. Her favorite class was art class because she liked the vibrant colors in paintings. On the interest survey Candace stated she does not like to read however in this study she chose the young adult book *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013).

Jason sat in the front of the class and always had a smile on his face. He loved science class and the fact he could read whatever he liked for independent reading. In his spare time Jason liked to watch videos about serial killers and psychopaths and he liked to read about these individuals as well. For this study, Jason purchased an $8.99 eBook on his iPhone titled *The Story of Jeffrey Dahmer: An American Nightmare* (Davis, 1991)

a true story about the notorious serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer.

Rebecca, liked to sing and her favorite class was History because it was interesting. She liked to read nonfiction books and she chose the book titled *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* (Bernall, 2000), a nonfiction book about the Columbine High School shooting.

Last, I was in my fifth year of teaching as a Special Education English teacher. This was my first year teaching 10th grade. I liked to read nonfiction books about hiking the Appalachian Trail and mystery books. For this project, I read the young adult book titled *Sip* (Carr, 2017). When I was not reading or writing, I liked to hike on the sandy trails of South Jersey.

Research Design/Methodology

Teachers do so much more than teach lessons and grade homework after school. This study is grounded in teacher research. Teacher research can happen naturally in a classroom because it is an extension of good teaching. In teacher research, teachers constantly observe their students and problems in the classroom and they adjust their lessons after their observations (Shagoury & Power, 2012). Teacher research is typically guided by observing a problem in their own classroom, finding solutions, and presenting their findings to the academic community. Teachers who engage in research are called teacher researchers. Their research starts by initiating an inquiry study after identifying a problem in the classroom by posing questions and gathering data on student work and observations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teachers engage in research to improve their teaching methods so students can receive a better education. Teachers do not research to improve test scores; rather, teacher researchers complete their studies to gain

a deeper understanding of how students learn (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009).

My study fell under the category of teacher research because I wanted to understand what motivated students to read and how using essential questions could be useful to guide classroom discussions. Through this study, I could change how I delivered my lessons based on the findings of this research. My research question that guided my study was how do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry based pedagogy?

Procedure of the Study

In the beginning of this project, I was optimistic about this adventure and distributed the permission slips. I gave the students a week to return them, and I had to remind two students to return their slips. In all, nine students out of seventeen in the class participated in the study. Alongside reading required curriculum content, vocabulary, and writing tasks, students were able to choose a book they enjoyed and time was set aside for independent reading. The first part of this study required students to brainstorm general questions they would have liked answered. These questions were broad enough where students reading any book could answer the question. After students chose an essential question and sub-questions to answer, twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays students read their independent reading book for ten minutes each reading period. After reading for ten minutes, students had whole class discussions for ten minutes while trying to answer their chosen essential question and sub-questions. During this process, I conferenced with the students once a week on Fridays to gauge their progress in both reading their book and their attempt to answer the essential question. Once, students had a regular classroom assignment where they had to compare and

contrast a character being judged in their book with a character in Miller's (2005) *The Crucible.* Finally, after each discussion period, I asked the students to answer three questions on an exit ticket that critiqued the discussion session, to answer the most important thing they learned that day, and what they wanted to learn more about. The study period lasted five weeks from late October 2017 to the end of November 2017.

Data Sources

My narrative data came in many forms and several patterns emerged over the data collection period (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). In this study, I collected data by observing the class during independent reading time (See Appendix A) and discussions (See Appendix B), by giving exit tickets (See Appendix C) after a discussion session, by having one on one interviews (See Appendix D) with students once a week, by assessing short answer writing prompts, and by referring to my teacher journal during this process. Throughout this research process I was guided by my research questions: How do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry based pedagogy? What motivates students to read independently when they are reluctant readers? What happens to classroom book discussions when guided by an essential question?

The data collection methods used in this research study were qualitative inquiry strategies such as reading observations, classroom discussions, individual conferences, teacher journal responses, and student reflection. My data collection tool for silent reading (See Appendix A) was created after my past experiences with students not taking silent reading seriously. I thought I would have similar results during silent reading so I wanted to track how many times students left the class, if they were sleeping, or if they were on their phone. When students were reading, I observed their behavior and noted if

students were actively reading by looking at the pages in the book and turning the page when appropriate. I set aside a few minutes each day to ensure I took accurate notes on my findings and I was consistent in this process as well as taking notes as students read and discussed (Shagoury & Power, 2012). During classroom discussions, I noted which students were answering the question and if they responded to another student's response. I also noted if students referenced the text in their answer, and if students had attentive listening behaviors. The discussion data collection form (See Appendix B) also recorded if students were alert during the discussion, and if they specially referenced the text when responding. If the conversation stopped or went into a different direction, these discussion tangents were noted as well. Once a week, I had individual audio-recorded conferences with students using the same interview questions for each student (See Appendix D). I asked students about their progress in attempting to answer the essential question and any new questions they created from reading. I also collected data on their motivation to read when trying to find the answer to an essential question, and if they were still engaged in reading the book because of the essential questions. After each reading session, students answered questions on an exit ticket (See Appendix C) as a reflection on the day's session. Last, I used my own teacher journal to record my own observations about the progress of the thesis project and the progress of the students.

Data Analysis

In this study, I analyzed what happened when students structured their silent reading when situated in inquiry-based pedagogy. My narrative data came in many forms and several patterns emerged over the data collection period (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). In this study, I collected data by observing the class during independent reading

time and discussions, by giving exit tickets after a discussion session, by having one on one interviews with students once a week, by assessing short answer writing prompts, and by referring to my teacher journal during this process. I collected data for one month, from the end of October, to the end of November. Throughout this process I was guided by my research questions: How do students structure their silent reading when situated in inquiry based pedagogy? What motivates students to read independently when they are reluctant readers? What happens to classroom book discussions when guided by an essential question?

This study focused on analyzing qualitative data through multiple narrative data points (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The data collected was used to draw conclusions when students used inquiry based pedagogy when reading a choice novel. I used inductive coding by highlighting the data to discover themes and patterns that emerged in my data sources (Thomas, 2006). Seeing repeated data on the sources helped me triangulate my claim and it informed my teaching practices. The reading habits observation form allowed me to chart what choices students made when given the time to read during independent reading time. By observing their classroom conversations, I could determine if students were using textual evidence from the book to answer the essential question, and if students were having a continuous conversation about the essential question or not. Having conferences with students allowed me to ask them about their reading progress and their attempt to answer the question. I analyzed the exit tickets to determine if new questions should be posed to the class for discussion. Finally, I analyzed my own teacher journal to identify patterns among the students' participation in the study and to chart my own progress as a teacher.

Chapter 4

Introduction

In the beginning of this study, I was unsure if I would find useful tidbits that would impact my teaching style. However, my analysis revealed major themes connected to silent reading, using essential questions, and classroom discussions. When analyzing silent reading, students preferred consistency in the sessions and the ability to choose their own books. These decisions allowed students to be active readers. Through analyzing student discussions, the males in this study dominated the discussions, and students made connections from their book to the real world. Through looking at the how students were interacting with essential questions, I found that students used the questions to guide reading and discussions and even written responses. In addition, students took this opportunity to discuss their own personal lives as it related to the essential question, and they started analyzing situations in their books instead of summarizing the plot. Finally, something that I did not expect, the students formed their own essential questions to answer when reading in addition to the essential question the class was using to guide discussions. Interestingly, the students used the essential questions to discuss personal matters in their own lives.

Silent Reading

All students in the study had to choose a book to read for silent reading. After giving a book talk on several new books, Ricardo, Mia, and Leah chose books from the book talk session. Ricardo said he chose his book, *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017), because it was relatable to the police shootings happening in the United States. Rebecca, Kristi, DJ

TJ, Candace, and Caroline visited the school library to check out a book. Jason decided to purchase a digital book on his iPhone.

Table 1

Student book choices and racial identity

Student	Book Choice	Racial Identity
Rebecca	*She Said Yes:The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* (Bernall, 2000)	Hispanic
Mia	*Mean Girls* (Ostow & Fey, 2017)	White
Caroline	*Everything, Everything* (Yoon & Yoon, 2017)	African American
Jason	*The Story of Jeffrey Dahmer: An American Nightmare* (Davis, 1991)	White
Kristi	*Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia* (Dunkle, 2015)	White
Candace	*Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013)	Hispanic
Leah	*Otherworld* (Segal & Miller, 2017)	White
Ricardo	*Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017)	Hispanic
DJ TJ	Miles Morales Marvel Comics	African American

Table 1 shows the student book choices and their racial identity. When analyzing student book choices, three students of color chose books that mirrored their identity. DJ

TJ could identify with the main character, an African American/Puerto Rican Spiderman known as Miles Morales. Mia, a quiet girl, read *Mean Girls* (Ostow & Fey, 2017), and viewed high school bullying through the eyes of teenagers. Ricardo's book told the story of a young African American caught in the crosshairs of a white cop during a traffic stop. The main character in Caroline's book, Maddy, is an African American teenager struggling with an illness and her desire to have a relationship with the boy next door. Jason, Rebecca, and Kristi read nonfiction books about murders, and Kristi read a nonfiction book about anorexia. When students read books about real life tragedies, they can learn from the experiences of others without experiencing the hardship firsthand. Students valued the ability to choose their own books and DJ TJ's excitement showed when he exclaimed, "You mean we can read comic books in class?" Whether or not they used their book choices to find characters that mirrored their own lives, or chose books where they could peer into another world, knowledge of themselves led them to want to know more about the experiences of other characters (International Literacy Association, 2017). From their responses, I can conclude the students chose their books based on their own interests.

Silent Reading Progress

My data collection tool tracked negative behaviors since I encountered them in the past with silent reading. I did not plan on reading along with the class because I thought I would be busy cueing students to read again. However, I set the timer for ten minutes and I was able to serve as a model and read along with the class because every student was attentive and reading their book. What I found surprised me. Not one student decided to sleep and only one student used his phone twice during the six reading

sessions. One student left the class before the reading session to get his book from his locker and another student went to check out another comic book from the library. Besides those instances, each student read for the entire ten minutes. In fact, before the reading sessions, and during some of the discussion periods, some students continued to read their book. After this observation, I asked the students if they wanted to read for longer than ten minutes and if they liked to read in class. All nine students said they would like to read for at least fifteen minutes instead of ten.

Table 2

Exit ticket questions from reading sessions five and six

Name	Do you like reading in class? Say what you like about it!	How far are you into your book?
Rebecca	(No response)	Not that far, I'm still in the beginning.
Mia	(No response)	Not half way, a little less.
Caroline	I like to read in class.	Towards the end.
Jason	Yes, because I have someone to talk to about what I just read.	I am half way through the book.
Kristi	Yes, I like reading in class. I get more into my book and I am able to concentrate. I wouldn't read at home though.	About 3-4 chapters into the book; my chapters are pretty long.
Candace	I like how we have time to read in class.	Not far

Table 2 (Continued)

Name	Do you like reading in class? Say what you like about it!	How far are you into your book?
Leah	I really wonder what's going on in my one character's house right when her stepdad moved in that caused her to abandon her best friends when he didn't do anything.	Almost done
Ricardo	Yes, because it gets me to read my book and it helps me get questions for the discussions.	Page 97 of 201.
DJ TJ	I love reading in class because I love reading books that I like to read.	I finished it already.

The table above shows the students' progress during the fourth week of reading. These responses showed me that students were enjoying the classroom reading experience and they might not have read at home. Instead of answering the question, Leah formed her own wonderings to guide her through a section of her novel. Besides Caroline switching to a new book after the second reading session, all students continued to read the same book. No one had to visit the classroom library to choose a new book during the study, however, Caroline chose a new book from her town's library two weeks into the study. This data shows the students are engaged in their reading selection and not abandoning their book for something new. Besides Rebecca and Candace who were both absent twice during this study, students also made considerable progress in their books.

Their answers to the essential question in the discussions and interview sessions tell me they were actively reading during the reading sessions.

Active Readers

Just seeing students not on their phone and looking at their book was not enough for me to determine if the students were active readers. Based off my own observations, each reading session students kept their book flat on their desk, and they turned the pages while reading. However, it is still possible to look like an active reader, but not do any actual reading. Their thorough written responses and classroom discussions proved they were actually reading. When answering the essential question about judgement in a discussion session, students had detailed conversations using character names and specific text details. By posing essential questions as a guide before reading, the students were engaged with the text and the discussion as shown in the details of their discussion responses (Wilhelm, 2007).

Essential Questions Guide Reading and Discussions

The essential questions the students chose to answer gave them a purpose for reading and discussing with their peers. The questions kept them engaged and motivated to read (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The students chose general essential questions to answer and they found they were applicable to everyone's books. By studying their discussion responses and examining the exit tickets, each student had a character that was being judged. Two students read nonfiction books about murders and they noted how the book was portraying the murderers in a positive way. The student's discussion that day focused on how people can judge others for various reasons. This led the students to introduce the new essential question: Should we judge someone based on their appearance? This

brought on a flurry of conversations as the students wanted to get their say in. The

following teacher journal entry depicts the discussion session.

I thought today they could come up with the questions to lead the class.

During the last session, it was quiet and I noticed the same students always

did the talking. Today I gave everyone a slip of paper and asked them to

briefly summarize a section where someone was being judged and to write

a generic question that we could discuss. The results were phenomenal.

Students made general questions such as "can you fall in love at first

sight" and "why do people treat someone bad when that person makes a

good decision to help others?" Both of these questions generated a lot of

student discussion, with new participants too. One question turned into:

"Can we judge someone's character by their appearance only?" Some

students said yes, and explained why, but two students are reading

nonfiction books about Jeffrey Dahmer and the Columbine shooters. In

both of these cases, the killers appeared to be normal to public, yet inside

they were brewing up something malicious. The students had their ah-hah

moment and they came to the conclusion they shouldn't judge a person

based on their personality, appearance, race, color without getting to know

them first. Having the students discover this on their own was a great life lesson.

It didn't come from me; it came from the students. As with any teenager, I

know they do not like to listen to the advice of their elders, or at least my

14 year-old does not. In that particular class, we had a sub for the 1 on 1 aide.

He's a regular sub and familiar with how lessons go down in classes. I didn't tell

him about the research project because I was sick and didn't have the energy to explain it. At the end of the class he said, "WOW, those students were really engaged in the conversation, and they were polite when responding to their peers." I'm happy this outsider saw that what I am doing is having a positive outcome on the students (Michelle Cohen, Teacher Journal, November 17, 2017).

Letting the students choose their own discussion questions was pivotal to the study. I saw how much conversation ensued and after each session I asked what new questions they wanted to answer for the next session.

After the first discussion session, I asked the students how they liked using an essential question as a focus for reading. Jason responded that it was easy to answer because someone is always being judged in books, and Rebecca said she likes how we can all relate the books by answering the same question. Jason chimed back in and said the books can be completely different, yet the class is all talking about the same topic. Each book allowed students to hear a different perspective on the question (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

In the fourth discussion session, students came up with new essential questions to answer, but they had to fall under the main category of judging others. They settled on five questions: Why do people make fun of others? Would you be willing to be a judge in a dangerous game? Are you motivated by money? How does love at first sight work? Can we trust someone from their appearance? In other instances, students focused on essential questions relating to stereotypes and African Americans in their books. After seeing characters being judged in their books, they were applying essential questions to help them understand the world around them. Not only were they creating essential questions

for the class to answer, but they were guiding their own reading by personal essential

questions that were particular to their own books. All students created their own essential

questions to guide their reading which gave them a purpose for reading. Specific

questions ranged from wanting to know more about a general topic in the book, to

questions related to judgement.

Table 3

Students create their own essential questions when reading

Name	Book	Own Essential Question
Rebecca	*She Said Yes:The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* (Bernall, 2000)	What brings people to discriminate and judge others? What brings people to do something like that [mass shooting]? Why hurt the lives of innocent people? Who are the boys who did the shootings? Why do people like to judge- meaning, what thrill do they get out of judging?
Mia	*Mean Girls* (Ostow & Fey, 2017)	Why is she judging other people when she is getting judged too? Why are people being so mean to her? What other books are my classmates reading?
Caroline	*Everything, Everything* (Yoon & Yoon, 2017)	When will she be done being sick? Is she ever going to stay in love with Ollie? What is SCID? Is it rare? How can people come together and be nice?
Jason	*The Story of Jeffrey Dahmer: An American Nightmare* (Davis, 1991)	What drove Dahmer to do the things he did? What makes a sadistic psychopath? Why didn't anyone speak up about Dahmer?

Table 3 (Continued)

Name	Book	Own Essential Question
Kristi	*Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia* (Dunkle, 2015)	What mental illness does the daughter have? Why do we judge ourselves?
Candace	*Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013)	Will she have new friends? Will she miss her dad? Will the main character get used to college life? Will the main character continue to write?
Leah	*Otherworld* (Segal & Miller, 2017)	Why did his one friend abandon him for no reason? [After stopping at a good part] Will my character be ok?
Ricardo	*Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017)	How does this [police shootings] escalate so quickly? What is going to happen to him going to Yale? How can I get into Yale?
DJ TJ	Miles Morales Marvel Comics	Why is it that people automatically assume stuff about me?

The data in table 3 showed the various questions students used to guide their reading during the study. On the exit ticket responses and during the one on one interviews, students wanted to learn more about the specific outcomes of characters and how a plot point would be resolved. For example, Rebecca wanted to answer the broad

question of, why someone would hurt the lives of innocent people, and Caroline wanted to answer a very specific question about the main character's sickness in *Everything, Everything* (Yoon & Yoon, 2017). DJ TJ's question is personal and it relates to judging. On an interview question, Caroline also said she makes new questions to answer because it helps her when the book gets "deeper and deeper."

During the last interview session, discussion session, and exit ticket, I asked students if trying to answer the essential question is still motivating them to read. Three students said the essential question about judging others is not motivating them to read anymore. Jason noted he just wants to read, and Candace said her book is "just interesting." On the other hand, Ricardo said the questions give him a set goal to keep reading, and Rebecca said the essential question allows her just to focus on one aspect of the book at a time.

Written Responses of Active Readers

In this section, I will show how students analyzed a judgmental character in *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005), and compared that person to a judgmental character in their silent reading book. By reading their short answer compare and contrast response based on their book and *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005), students were direct with their responses. Their answers were not vague and instead they were direct and to the point. Instead of getting plot summary of the play, students chose an instance where someone was being judged and they analyzed the situation by citing the text and referring the instance back to the essential question. This is important because the students were answering the essential question using their independent reading book and *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005),

and that answer certainly could not come from the internet. Leah made the connection in her book between Mrs. Proctor and the main character's mom from her book.

> "Mrs. Proctor and Simon's mom do kind of relate to each other. They are being judged by false pretenses. People think they are doing something that they are not. For example, Elizabeth is being judged by people thinking she is a witch, and people are talking about her because of Abby's lies. Simon is judging his mom because of what he thinks she's doing (ignoring him), and causing him to be mad at her. They're both not given the benefit of the doubt, and that's how I think they relate." (Leah, Personal Essay, November 3, 2017).

Here, Leah synthesized how both characters were being judged and determined both were being judged by false pretenses. In another example, Rebecca formed an inference about why the character Tituba was being judged as a witch in *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005). "Tituba is from Barbados and is also a slave. A reason as to why Tituba is being judged is because of the simple fact that she is black. … In addition, because of the fact that Tituba is of color, it is easier for her to get judged or punished for the most simplest actions." (Rebecca, Personal Essay, November 3, 2017). Rebecca used her background knowledge and information from the book to form an inference about Tituba. Instead of giving plot summary, Rebecca gets right to the point with her analysis. Similarly, Candace contrasted Mr. Proctor to a main character in her book and she starts her paragraph off with analysis instead of summary.

> "Both of the characters in both of the books are being judged differently. The main characters are the ones that are judging. In *The Crucible,* Mr.

Proctor is judging Parris based on a religion, but in the book *Fangirl,* Cath

is judging based on appearance. Parris is being judged because he talks

more about Hell than about Heaven, but Cath is judging based on the

situation she's in right now. An example, Cath was judging Wren's pixie

cut but in a good way. She is saying that she looked good with her haircut

but that Cath herself would look good in it too. … In the two books, I feel

like nobody should be judged because at the end we are all human beings

and that's what we should be treated equally and with respect." (Candace,

Personal Essay, November 3, 2017).

Candace's response was detailed and thorough, by comparing and contrasting Cath's

appearance in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013) and Proctor and Parris' religion. After her analysis,

Candace had a real world connection and realized that no one should be judged based on

looks, and everyone should be treated equally. By viewing characters that are not like

herself, Candace is beginning to eliminate discrimination by forming an understanding of

others (International Reading Association, 2017). Comparing and contrasting characters

and situations in two different novels allows students to have a deeper understanding of

their readings and their responses show me they have an understanding of the topic

(Wilhelm, 2007).

Students Create Their Own Discussion Questions

The students chose the essential questions they wanted to answer for this study,

and then they chose their reading books. I asked them to think of general questions in life

they wanted answered. After a brief description of what qualifies for an essential

question, the students wrote their choices on the board. The questions they wanted

answered were: Why do some people lie? Why do people hunt animals? Why do people become evil? Who can be a role model? Why is life hard? Why do I have to come to school? Why does school start so early? Why do people judge others? How can we overcome racism? There were general questions on their minds, and there were deep discussion topics that dealt with the real world. After eliminating the questions dealing with hunting and school, they decided they would like to answer the following questions: Why do people judge others (skin color, personality, gender, religion)? How can we overcome this and accept others? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are people quick to judge? The students might have had these questions on their mind already since we were reading Arthur Miller's (2005) *The Crucible* in class. In the play, Abigail accuses Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft so she can have a relationship with Elizabeth's husband, John. Throughout the reading, the students would ask, why is this happening to Elizabeth when she is innocent? Considering *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005), The students thought questions about judgement were general enough that any book would help them find the answer. These questions they created raised more questions throughout the study, they were relevant to the world today, they encouraged our conversations, and were applicable to any novel (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013).

Personal Responses from Essential Questions

Not every student liked to talk during the discussion times especially when a few students dominated the discussion. To make sure every student was heard, a one on one interview let me hear what students had to say when they were silent during discussion (Shagoury & Power, 2012). The students saw me as a listener and some opened up on what was really bothering them by using the essential question to hash out their own life.

Their personal responses showed the students understood the concept of judging and they began to make claims about their own lives (Wilhelm, 2007). One student gave the following account when I asked him what he would like to contribute to the class but was afraid to do so:

> To be honest, that I am always judged. People are quick to judge me,
>
> Sometimes even by my own race. They think that I'm supposed to act
>
> All hood and ghetto and all that. And I am only supposed to like rap and
>
> Pop, but not like white people. I was made fun of because people make
>
> fun of me because I listen to white people music. It's crazy. … I hate
>
> when people keep judging me. It makes me want to scream. It wrecks it
>
> up" (DJ TJ, personal interview, November 3,2017).

This student used the essential question to find the answers in his own life. He understood judging others was wrong and he could identify when he was being judged. Another student made the connection between her character's inability to make new friends and she mentioned that she does not know how to make friends either. I did not expect students to open up and share personal details of their lives with me. Books gave these students voices, and personal interviews gave them a chance to be heard.

Engaging Discussions

Having discussions after reading let the students share their books with their classmates and it gave them a reprieve from technology. These discussions let the students talk about the real world issue of judging by finding examples in their books. The discussions were successful because the students knew they would not be graded,

and instead they were free to answer however they liked provided the discussion continued (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013).

By taking notes during every discussion session, I noticed most students had attentive listening behaviors such as looking at the student speaking, nodding their head in agreement, and not using their phone. During three sessions, one student used their phone, one student chatted quietly to her neighbor, and one student kept reading her book.

During the first discussion, students described a situation in their book where someone was judging others.

Table 4

Student comments during the first discussion session

Name	Discussion Comments
Ricardo	My book is about discrimination about a group of friends. Each chapter it escalates more. There is a popular girl with no money. This is where they are judging others. They were raised with prejudices, born with them. (Second Response) Other people judge others on what they don't have. Like a kid with a brand new car or a kid with a beat down car. I would judge that person. But maybe he is trying to save money. I shouldn't judge him.
Rebecca	The book I am reading is the result of self- hatred [The Columbine shooting]. Two kids went into the school with guns and killed innocent people. Those two kids weren't happy- why do bad things happen to good people? It's about self-hatred. You want everyone around you to be just like you, but they can't, so you get mad.
DJ TJ	Bad things happen to good people. In my comic a bad guy smashed a character with all his strength. He also took away this man's daughter and so she could not be part of his harem. The old man was crying.

Table 4 (Continued)

Name	Discussion Comments
Jason	I am reading a book about Jeffrey Dahmer. Why do bad things happen to good people? A kid had a full ride for soccer. Dahmer convinced the cops this was just his boyfriend. Bad things happened to this kid. [Second comment]: I want to answer why are people quick to judge. It is how people portray themselves. Dude lived in an apartment building. He is portraying himself as a good person, but he was killing and raping people. We are judging him a positive way- this mask he shows. [To Ricardo]: People are quick to judge on what they grew up with. Parents are saying things and that gets into their heads. Beating it into their heads.
Leah	I want to answer how people judge other people. This kid spends 6,000 of his parent's money because he thinks his parents aren't there for him, but they really do care. He is judging his parents. [To Jason]: There is a movie about Jeffrey Dahmer. It looks good.

These comments from the first discussion session showed how students were already finding instances of judgement in their books after just reading for ten minutes. Ricardo described an instance where one person judged another in his book, and then he transitioned right into making a real world connection. Rebecca also started off by describing her book, and then she attempted to answer one of the essential questions by giving a broad generalization about self-hatred. In addition to six of the nine students joining the discussion on the first day, students looked at me when they spoke instead of looking at their classmates. I reminded them to talk to the class as I wanted to just be an observer. I had to prompt the class for the next person to speak and after they spoke, the class was silent. It was not much of a back and forth discussion, but an opportunity for everyone to answer the essential question.

For the second session, everyone spoke except for Leah, yet she still listened attentively to her classmates. Each student that responded used a specific reference to the text when giving their response. Ricardo said, "I got to the part where his friend got shot. His friend Trey was arguing with a cop. The cops thought he had a gun, but he was reaching for his phone and he got shot. They thought he was reaching for a gun just because he's black" (Ricardo, class discussion, November 6, 2017). Caroline discovered a person in her poem was being judged in different ways by different people. Paraphrasing a poem, she said,

> "In my poem, one character is putting herself down. The cops think she is
> a burden, and her parents think she is a symphony. Different people think
> different things about her. Her friends call her fire. She isn't letting people
> judge her. This is relevant to today because people call you different
> names based on what they look like in school based on color, clothes.
> Does that define you? It varies. Sometimes it defines you" (Caroline,
> class discussion, November 6, 2017).

In this example, Caroline determined that people can be judged differently. She specifically referenced the text by paraphrasing it for the class. Next, she synthesized the poem and made her own conclusions about people judging others.

Instead of the students just talking to me, the students started talking with each other. Rebecca, DJ TJ, and Jason dominated the conversation when Candace brought up a new question to answer: Does it matter who we date, and should a person be judged on who they dated before? Candace commented how a girl was being judged by someone she used to date and how other characters would not let it go. This new discussion started

by Candace using a specific reference to her book, but what came next were a flurry of personal responses. Jason and DJ TJ differed in their opinions on who people should date and whether or not people had a "type." Another student said people will judge you if you date someone of a different color and he noted how that was wrong. These students had a lot to say about the matter and the conversation was lively that day.

Real World Connections

During the third discussion session, the conversation started by talking about jealous characters and the need to harm others, then it moved to police brutality, and finally, racism. In both DJ TJ's comic sand Ricardo's book, their characters have negative interactions with police. One student asked the question, what can we do if the police point a gun at us? Responses ranged from practical to irrational from three male students in the class. Ricardo said he would react right away by kicking the police officer in the privates. DJ TJ said to act like a super hero and dodge out of the way. Jason said the best way to not get shot was to avoid situations where the police would point a gun at you. Using their books to spark conversation, their conversations were turning into other real world problems. They were comfortable with each other and decided to ask each other for advice. Next, DJ TJ asked "Do we think it's appropriate to judge people on their skin color?" In harmony, three students yelled out NO! Through today's conversation, they were tackling heavy topics, but they were discussing how they personally felt about real world situations. Seeing how they were responding to new questions they think of, I asked the class to come up with a new essential question they could answer for the next session.

For the last three discussion sessions, Leah spoke and commented each session multiple times. When I asked her what she liked about how the discussions were going, she said she liked how we were answering new questions. This let me know the conversations were getting stale, and changing the essential question would bring life back into the conversations. Rebecca quoted her character's words when the class discussed judging people by appearance and Ricardo referenced a past book he liked. For the next two discussion sessions, new questions were introduced from reading the exit ticket responses and the conversations continued to flow. Their discussions ebbed from discussing judgement in their book, to discussing issues in the real world.

Males Dominate the Discussions

Besides Rebecca, the three males in the study spoke during every discussion session when they were not absent. Either they responded directly to each other, or they continued the conversation by responding after a female student spoke. The table below represents their absences and the number of times they contributed to the discussion. The females in the study are also listed for comparison purposes.

Table 5

Number of times students contributed to the discussion

Name	Discussion contributions	Absent
Ricardo	12 times in 6 discussion sessions	Once
DJ TJ	13 times in 6 discussion sessions	No absences

Table 5 (Continued)

Name	Discussion contributions	Absent
Jason	13 times in 6 discussion sessions	Once
Rebecca	9 times in 6 discussion sessions	Once
Mia	3 times in 6 discussion sessions	Once
Caroline	3 times in 6 discussion sessions	Once
Kristi	1 time in 6 discussion sessions	Twice
Candace	1 time in 6 discussion sessions	Twice
Leah	10 times in 6 discussion sessions	No absences

Ricardo, DJ TJ, and Jason all spoke multiple times during each discussion session as shown in the table above. Research showed that males speak more than females in classroom conversations (Tannen, 1992). I found similar results in my study where the males dominated the discussions in every discussion session. Tannen (1992) states that women are more comfortable talking in private conversations and boys are more apt to speak publically.

In Fisher & Frey's (2012) study about motivating boys to read, giving boys choice and an essential question to answer while reading gave them a purpose to read. I found similar results since the males all continued to read and participate in each study. At the end of the study, I asked Ricardo, DJ TJ, and Jason what they like the most about this reading activity. Jason said he is interested in reading about murders and that is what motivated him to read. Ricardo said his book was interesting and the essential questions

gave him a set goal to answer. DJ TJ said he likes to read comic books and he was happy

that he could read them in class. Just like Fisher & Frey's (2012) study, they said they

liked to choose their own books and the essential questions gave them a reason to read.

Conclusion

Student choice and essential questions motivated students to read. While

classroom conversations were slow to start, once students were comfortable with each

other, their classroom discussions focused less on book summary and more on answering

the essential questions using text evidence from the books. As seen in discussions, exit

tickets and interviews, the students related to their book by giving real world examples

and even giving personal responses for a similar situation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

"All endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time." – Mitch Albom *The*

Five People You Meet in Heaven

Teacher research can transform how teachers teach and understand their students

(Shagoury & Power, 2012). Without teacher research and the willingness to change,

students might be subject to the same outdated lessons. Through this teacher research, I

discovered the need to update silent reading in the classroom to incorporate classroom

discussions. The benefits of silent reading and giving student choice have been

established in research (Francois, 2015; Merga, 2013). Before this study I had my doubts

about letting students read freely in the classroom since the school dropped the activity

and students used the period for their free time my past experience. However, after

looking at the results of the time they spent reading and how engaged they were with

their books, silent reading had a place in the high school classroom. The students were

motivated to read when they discovered they could read a book of their choice. Having

students read the same novel might not render the same results in a study. Fisher & Frey

(2012) stated essential questions created the need for students to read. The evidence from

student writings, their exit tickets, and interview questions all suggested this was critical

in propelling conversations and motivating students to read. In addition to the class

essential question about judgement, the students engaged themselves in their books by

creating their own essential questions to answer.

A general essential question guided classroom discussions when students all read

different books. These essential questions let students have a focused discussion while

mostly all students were engaged each session. In addition, using essential questions lead to students answering higher order thinking questions, not just answering fact based questions in their discussions and in writings. Wilhelm (2007) said essential questions generated new questions to answer. The numerous amount of essential questions students created in this study during the discussions supports this statement. When students did create a new question to carry the conversation, they particularly liked debatable questions that dealt with issues surrounding race and appearances. This deserves attention because students began to focus on real world issues by using their books to start the conversation.

There is evidence to suggest students have thorough responses using textual evidence and quote analysis when answering an essential question for a written assignment. Along with this study, students stayed abreast of the curriculum demands by attempting to understand judgement in *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005) by comparing judgement in their own silent reading book. This study allowed me to see how students have a voice and they want to be heard. As noted in their conversations, interviews, and exit tickets, students are using their books to understand their identity and they want to understand others (International Literacy Association, 2017).

Limitations

Shagoury & Power (2012), state there was never a good time to start teacher research so there was no time like the present to begin. Teachers would always face challenges during the year. Each failed lesson offered the possibility of learning something new when analyzed. This study offered challenges as well, but persistence led to new ideas about silent reading and discussions. Because the study size focus was nine

students, concluding generalizations cannot be made across the entire student population. Further, this study was conducted within five weeks and analysis was made within the three weeks after the study. In addition, this study took place during the month of November where the students had four scheduled days off from school. Given the rotating bell schedule, students only met for English at most four times a week and as little as three times per week. This limits the results to only a short window within the ten-month school year. In addition to time constraints, the curriculum at Sierra Springs mandated that students finish reading *The Crucible* (Miller, 2005) and write a compare and contrast essay during the first marking period. This gave limited time for students to read their independent reading book in class other than the official research sessions.

Implications

This teacher research project came to an end but I realized it does not have to be the end of my research concerning silent reading. In my classes, this is the beginning of regular silent reading periods followed by a group discussion. The conclusions from this study suggest that a functional model of silent reading is possible in a high school classroom. A silent reading session might include a set time frame and day for reading. Teachers must be consistent by making silent reading a priority and not cancel the reading session because of other curricular demands. In addition, teachers should read along with the students to model good reading habits. When students are comfortable with reading for ten minutes a day, increase the reading time to fifteen minutes and eventually twenty minutes. Allow students to choose their own book to read and keep a classroom library stocked with books where they can identify with the characters (International Literacy Association, 2017).

Using essential questions creates the need to read (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Allowing the students to create their own essential questions to answer when reading motivates them because it is relevant to their lives. Having students think of additional essential question to answer after reading gives them a purpose to read.

Although students may be quiet in class, they have a lot to say. Students need to discuss meaningful topics along with their peers. As seen in this study, students wanted to answer questions relating to judgement. Their books gave them examples to use before giving personal responses. Conversations concerning one essential question could get stale. Teachers can breathe new life into a classroom discussion by changing the essential question periodically. While some students might dominate discussions, all students deserve the chance to be heard. Instead of a traditional discussion, offer students the choice to participate in a silent discussion where everyone responds to the same question in a journal (Wilhelm, 2007).

One enduring implication of this study is letting students have a say in their education by offering them choice. The chance to choose what they read, and the chance to choose an interesting topic to discuss. So many decisions are made for students that teachers should let students choose which books they read. Teens are teetering between childhood and adulthood and they need to explore their own identity as well as learn about others around them. In the real world, they will need to communicate with other adults and have sustained conversations on varied subjects. High school should be the place where students practice discussions with classmates so after they graduate, they are armed with the knowledge and powerful prose to change the world.

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Appendix A

Reading Observations

Reading Habits Observation Form Date:

Student Names	Actively reading- looking at book, turning pages	On phone	Bathroom/Leave the classroom	Sleeping
Ricardo				
Rebecca				
Mia				
Caroline				
Kristi				
Candace				
DJ TJ				
Jason				
Leah				

Appendix B

Classroom Discussions

Discussion Observation Data Sheet Date:

Student names	Added new insight	Uptake of another's comment	Specific reference to the text being discussed	Attentive listening behaviors
Ricardo				
Rebecca				
Mia				
Caroline				
Kristi				
Candace				
DJ TJ				
Jason				
Leah				

Source: Wilhelm, J. (2007). *Engaging readers & writers with inquiry*. USA: Scholastic.

Appendix C

Exit Ticket

Name:

The most important thing I learned today:

What do I want to learn more about? (What is something I have questions about/ am

puzzled about, etc?)

What was good about today's discussion?

Optional: do you like reading in class? say what you like about it!

Interview Questions

Name: **Interview Questions**

How motivated were you to read the book before introducing an essential question?

Has using essential questions helped you understand the book better? How so?

Is there anything you wanted to contribute to the class discussion but were afraid to do so?

Interview after second reading and subsequent readings

What questions do you find yourself asking when you are reading the book?

What could be done to change or improve [this situation], or similar ones in the world?

What would you like to know more about in your book?

What evidence can you show me that helps answer the essential question?

What can you contribute to the next discussion that will help the class answer the question?

Is seeking the answer to the essential question still motivating you to read?