CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

A STUDY ON LITERATURE CIRCLES

AND THEIR

EFFECTS ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

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ABSTRACT

This research study was conducted among a group of Form Four students in a Band 3 school in the New Territories. It was implemented over a period of six months from mid October, 2000 to mid April, 2001. This thesis seeks to explore what will take place in the reading classes when literature circles replace the traditional extensive reading programme. More specifically, this thesis addresses the following research questions: How do students learn in reading classes using the literature circles? In what ways and to what extent do literature circles differ from the traditional extensive reading programme? Do students really converse more in literature circles and find reading more interesting and meaningful as a result? Can literature circles function and be effective in the local Hong Kong context where students are non native speakers of the language?

In order to see the effects of literature circles on second language learners, five tasks were designed for the reading class. Initially, the first two tasks were loosely structured. However, since the students were found to be reciting rather than sharing and discussing about the stories, I decided to provide some scaffolding for tasks three to five. As a result, the students were making good progress in acquiring different discussion skills in the last three tasks. A coding scheme had been designed to identify those skills. The frequency of the skills being used, the quality as well as length of the discussions also increased with the progress of the tasks.

The students were asked to write learning log responses, personal responses as well as interviewed to get their feedback on the literature circles activities. Most of them preferred literature circles to the traditional extensive reading programme. They think that the traditional extensive reading scheme is more of an individual work where they do a lot of copying whereas literature circles emphasize on group work. According to them, literature circles helped them talk more in English, reflect on their feelings, listen and respond to members of their groups and think more deeply. There were more opportunities for equal participation. Many of them found literature circles to be more fun, interesting and informal.

This research has shown that literature circles can work among second language learners of English, especially since the tasks can be designed to cater to the students of different English proficiency levels. It is because of the many benefits of literature circles that I strongly recommend the implementation of literature circles to transform the traditional extensive reading scheme.
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