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Effects of Integrating Literature Circles and Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning on Students' Reflective Writing and Intellectual Content in the Discussion[1]

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Abstract

This research project investigated the effects of using Literature Circles and Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning on students' writing and discussion. The study focused on the reflective components of students' writing assignments, the intellectual content of their literary discussions and explored students' views concerning the benefits of this activity. A framework by Pasternak and Rigoni (2015) was used to evaluate students' reflective writings and a framework from Marshall (1995) was used to analyze the intellectual content in discussion. It was found that students were able to produce Analytical Reflections and Descriptive Writings with high frequency. In addition, students performed well in the categories of Inform-interpret, Inform-evaluate and Response in their discussion abilities.

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1. Introduction

Learning cooperatively provides students with some extent of undoubted benefits. Learning cooperatively while utilizing an active learning activity like a Literature Circle simulates real life scenarios and has produced positive effects on reflective writing abilities in the previous study (Monyanont, 2016). To strengthen the use of the cooperative approach in Literature Circles, Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning (GRPQ) is a promising method which could be used to promote students' engagement in interactive discussions (Gelmini-Hornsby et al., 2011). The method relies on students' individual questioning as preparation before the discussion. According to Choi, Land and Turgeon (2005), peer interaction enables novice students to obtain different perspectives and recognize differences and weaknesses in their understanding, this process results in students' enhanced ability to discuss effectively and understand content. Therefore, the integration of Literature Circles and Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning is expected to maximize the cooperative learning outcomes verified in reflective writings and the intellectual content of literary discussions.

2. Related Research, Theoretical Framework and Purpose of Study

2.1 Literature Circles

Ordinarily, people read and share their opinions about their reading. To make this process more systematic in a classroom setting, there is an activity called the Literature Circle. When participating in a Literature Circle, students have the freedom to choose their reading materials as well as the topics to be discussed. Learners will take notes on the story's interesting details and share them with their group and class. Teachers take a supporting role and act as facilitators and observers. Lastly, an evaluation will be completed using both the teachers' observations and the students' self-evaluations. Daniels (2006) suggested the preliminary five roles for literature circles which best portray a real-life reading discussion, namely: Questioner, Connector, Illustrator, Word Wizard and Literary Luminary. The roles are suggested models rather than firm patterns for the literature circle.

Previous research has confirmed that the Literature Circle is a beneficial activity that fosters students' reading comprehension, reading proficiency, attitude, and

collaborative process; these are important factors in encouraging students to be effective readers. Elhess and Egbert (2015) proposed that Literature Circles promoted reading comprehension and language proficiency. Similarly, Chow (2011) found that Literature Circles improved students' general reading proficiency and also improved students' habits of self-access learning. Furthermore, it was found that students who achieved a higher degree of learning autonomy were those who often used self-access material. Yahya and Abd Rahim (2009) found that an increasingly positive attitude towards Literature Circles was fostered but that overall attitudes toward literature remained the same.

The concept of learner-centeredness is the key to helping solve students' problems when reading literature. Barone and Barone (2012) emphasized that the strength of Literature Circles lies in developing background knowledge. This process allows students play the role of investigator and treat the story like a puzzle to solve. Students listen and respond to expand their knowledge and eventually become critical readers. Boa (2012) explored the use of Literature Circles to inquire about a bigger theme. In order to do this, the questions were given prior to the reading acting as a map to investigate the story throughout the reading. Here, the key elements are the teacher's model as a reader and thinker and willingness to show perspectives and opinions. Shelton-Strong (2012) argued that Literature Circles provided a collaborative process which nurtured learner involvement and encouraged language learning. Bernadowski (2013) found that Literature Circles helped students engage in texts and foster a greater commitment to the classroom community. Thus, it has been found that Literature Circles greatly contribute to students' achievements in reading proficiency and habits as active learners.

Smith and Geil (2016) suggested that students enjoy reading when they can choose their reading material. Moreover, choice can affect students' engagement within a classroom. Similarly, DeWitt, Pratt-Fartro and Pinkie (2014) argued that the traditional model should be turned upside down to influence students to effectively demonstrate their discussion skills by enabling them to choose and structure their own discussion groups. Furthermore, Thein, Guise and Sloan (2011) stated that student-led discussions are complex and students should be encouraged to read multicultural texts in Literature Circles. Sanacore (2013) submitted that students should understand and

appreciate the reflective nature of reading and writing. Effective literary learners are the result of reflective practices. Factors contributing to students' personal responses in discussions concern the students' confidence and personality combined with their respect toward other members of the discussion. Thus, the freedom to choose and organize small group discussions is a key element that leads to successful literary discussions.

2.2 Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning (GRPQ)

King (1990, 1991, 1992) developed a small, group-learning discussion activity called Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning (GRPQ). The method was designed to promote collaborative skills, communication skills and problem-solving skills under the principle of cognitive strategy instruction (Lock, 2004; Vaghar et al, 2009). The process starts when students study expository passages individually and generate their task-specific questions through the use of generic questions which are about the understanding, interpretation and evaluation of the text. After they have finished the self-questioning process, students make small groups and collaboratively take turns asking and answering each other's questions. Verbal interactions in this process are believed to help elaborate explanations in small group learning. Peer questioning aids students who may have different abilities in developing their understanding of the text as well as their abilities in operating a small group discussion (Gelmini-Hornsby et al., 2011).

The key elements of Literature Circles are self-study and engagement. Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning also focuses on individual study first. What makes GRPQ different from LC is the use of generic questions. In this study, generic questions were applied before the presentation and the whole class discussion while students discussed in small groups.

2.3 Importance of Different Levels of Reflective Writing

Pasternak and Rigoni (2015) developed a framework for reflective writing particularly to serve teacher candidates. It was argued that reflective writing that helps with the learning process should be comprised of the following characteristics. Firstly, descriptive reflection reports facts and gives context to the readers. For a literary class, it helps to recheck that the students understand and can summarize a story. Secondly,

analytical reflection shows that students can explain the reasons of why the event happened in a certain way. It is important to understand characters' reasoning to comprehend their motives and actions. Thirdly, hypothetical reflection presents that students consider events from alternative viewpoints and how this event could happen differently. This element is especially important for literary courses especially in Studies in Speculative fiction where students need to speculate or guess the possibilities from the present context. Last, critical reflection emphasizes that students understand how the events in the story are shaped by the socio-cultural-political context which is very important to study literature as a reflection of human nature and society.

2.4 Purpose of Study

This study investigated students' reflective response abilities in both writing and speaking after the implementation of Literature Circles with Guide Reciprocal Peer Questioning. The specific research questions are as follows:

1. What are the results of utilizing Literature Circles with Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning on students' reflective writing and intellectual content within the discussion?

2. What are students' perceptions towards a guided method and their learning experience with this format of discussion?

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Target Group

The target group was thirty volunteer English majors who passed 1) Foundations and Analysis of Literary Works and 2) Short Stories and Novels. They are well familiar with the use of Literature Circles as these two are discussion-based subjects. The university is located in the northern part of Thailand and English is used as a medium for instructions. In Thailand, English is a foreign language (EFL).

3.1.2 Instruments for Data Collection

The research instruments for data collection are 1) lesson plans using Literature Circles and GRPQ 2) reflective responses and 3) audio records.

Literature Circles

Participants met three times to discuss the three stories, one story per time. They are provided with the reading passage one week prior to the meeting. In the first meeting, participants were well-prepared with their self-study notes; the researcher explained the method of using generic questions. On this occasion participants were allowed to look at the questions while they performed the discussion. During the discussion sessions, the researcher took a minimal role as instructor and recorded the discussion. The discussion was recorded while the students performed group discussion for intellectual content analysis. After the small group discussions, group representatives presented the results of their discussions and the whole class exchanged ideas. The researcher then summarized the important points and add additional lessons that were not mentioned by the students. After the summary, students wrote a paragraph reflecting on what they had learned from the story. The writings were collected for reflective writing analysis. The process was nearly identical for the second and the third meetings. However, in the second meeting students were allowed to look at the questions only when they could not think of issues to discuss further. In the third meeting, the questions were completely absent from the discussion process.

Reading Materials

The reading passages used in the study were short stories with speculative elements (fantasy that speculates about human nature). The texts included: 1) The Maiden with the Rose on her Forehead (fairy tale); 2) The Feather Pillow (horror); and 3) All Summer in a Day (science-fiction).

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Reflective writing

A framework by Pasternak and Rigoni (2015) as cited in Monyanont (2016) was used in content analysis of the students' reading responses. The elements of reflective writing were identified based on the following explanations:

Table 1

Types of writing and characteristics (Pasternak & Rigoni, 2015)

Types of Writing	Characteristics
Descriptive writing	Summarize the story using own words
	Describe one's own feeling without providing evidence from the original text
	Keywords: This story is about…
	I think… I feel…In my opinion…
Analytical reflection	Analyze how events happen the way they do
	Make a conclusion about the lesson learned
	Keywords: This story implies that…
	The theme of this story is…
	This happens because…
Hypothetical reflection	Provide possibilities of alternative outcomes
	Hypothesize how events may turn out differently if some conditions change
	Keywords: If …., then …
	If I were a character, I would …
Critical reflection	Recognize the influence of the socio-cultural-political context of the story
	Criticize the story in terms of other influences
	Keywords: This happens due to the society of that time…
	This reflects the cultural values of the people…

The students' writings were analyzed according to the characteristics of reflective writing in a sentence unit.

3.2.2 Classroom Discussion

A framework from Marshall (1995) was used to examine the transcribed intellectual content of small-group discussions. The categories are explained below.

1. Direct: Any remark that drives others toward actions, alters attention or change in focus of the discussion.

2. Inform: Any statement of fact or opinion that represents a person's knowledge, beliefs or thoughts concerning the topic of the discussion. The subcategories are explained as the followings.

a. Knowledge source

(1) Personal-autobiographical
(information drawn from the speaker's own experience)

(2) Text (information drawn from the text under study)

(3) Text-in-context (information about the author of the text, the historical period in which it was written, or its genre)

(4) General knowledge (information drawn from the media or contemporary culture that is widely available)

(5) Previous class discussions, lectures, or readings

(6) Other

b. Kind of reasoning

(1) Summary-description (statements which focus on the literal features of an experience or text)

(2) Interpretation (statements which make an inference about the meaning or significance of experiences or information)

(3) Evaluation (statements that focus on the quality of an experience or text)

(4) Generalization (statements that move toward theoretical speculation about the nature of characters, authors, and texts)

(5) Other

3. Question: Any verbal or nonverbal gesture (as indicated in discussions that were videotaped) that invites or requires a response from an auditor.

4. Respond: Any verbal or nonverbal gesture that acknowledges, restates, evaluates, or otherwise reacts to the nature, quality, or substance of preceding remarks. A remark coded as a response to a question would ask for clarification or explanation of the question itself or would comment on the value of the question. The subcategories are explained as the followings.

1. Acknowledgment (simple indication that a remark was heard)
2. Restatement (an effort to repeat a previous remark)
3. Positive evaluation (a positive comment concerning a previous remark)
4. Negative evaluation (a negative comment concerning a previous remark)
5. Request for explanation-elaboration-clarification (any remark that asks the previous speaker to speak more clearly or at greater length)
6. Elaboration upon a previous remark (any remark that moves beyond a simple restatement of a speaker's contribution by substantively changing the original speaker's language or by offering an interpretation of what the speaker was saying)
7. Other: Any utterance that cannot be coded within one of the four major categories

The students' conversations were analyzed using a pausing unit i.e. every time the students pause or were interrupted, it was counted as one content.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Results of Reflective Writing Elements

After analyzing all 30 samples of reflective writing, the overall results are shown in the following table. (See appendix for examples of students' writing)

Table 2

Percentage of reflective elements in each reading response

Discussion	1	2	3
Descriptive writing	35%	44%	45%
Analytical reflection	55%	42%	48%
Hypothetical reflection	4%	3%	1%
Critical reflection	6%	11%	6%

Table 2 shows the following results: Firstly, for all assignments the highest percentage of reflective elements belongs to descriptive writing and analytical reflection. This data implies that students can describe the story using their own words and respond to the text analytically.

Secondly, in the period from the first assignment to the third, the presence of descriptive writing increased, meaning students are better able to describe the story. The fairy tale reflected the lowest percentage in descriptive writing (35%), while the horror (44%) and science fiction stories showed the highest instance of descriptive writing (45%).

Thirdly, the first assignment (fantasy) and the third assignment (science fiction) offered similar results. For the fantasy story, the reflective element with the highest percentage belonged to analytical reflection (55%), followed by descriptive writing (35%), critical reflection (6%) and finally hypothetical reflection (4%). Similarly, the science fiction assignment offered the following percentages: the highest percentage belonged to analytical reflection (48%), then descriptive writing (45%), critical reflection (6%) and ultimately a miniscule percentage of hypothetical reflection (1%). The results imply that for fantasy and science fiction stories students can effectively reflect analytically and describe the story in their own words. In addition, the nature of the stories may hinder students' abilities to reflect hypothetically and critically.

In contrast, the horror story (the second assignment) offered results that are distinct from assignments one and three. For the horror story, the reflective element with the highest percentage was descriptive writing (44%), followed by analytical reflection (42%), critical reflection (11%) and hypothetical reflection (3%). These results suggest that horror stories have unique features that engage students to write analytically, descriptively and critically.

To summarize, the reflective writing results after implementing LC and GRPQ show that descriptive writing is the most common element across all three types of story. Fantasy and science fiction offered similar results, with analytical reflection presenting the highest percentage of reflective elements (35.53%, 45%) and hypothetical reflection presenting the lowest percentage (4%, 1%). Conversely, the horror story offered different results with the highest percentage occupied by descriptive writing (44%). In addition,

students' horror story reflections showed a high percentage of analytical reflection (42%) and critical reflection (11%). The values for the horror story are higher than the other two types of story. Despite expecting to see an increase in the more sophisticated elements of reflection as the experiment progressed, there was no clear improvement in the reflective elements. This is possibly due to the diverse content of the stories. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that horror is the genre of story that led to the highest percentages of critical and analytical reflection.

4.2 Results of Table 3 Percentage of intellectual content in each discussion

Table 3

Percentage of intellectual content in each discussion

Intellectual Content Type		Discussion		
		Story 1	Story 2	Story 3
Inform	Direct	2%	2%	3%
	personal	3%	5%	2%
	text	12%	19%	15%
	text-in-context	3%	13%	4%
	general knowledge	5%	3%	11%
	class/reading	4%	1%	-
	interpret	42%	38%	21%
	evaluation	2%	4%	7%
	generalization	-	-	2%
Question	personal	-	6%	-
	text	6%	3%	5%
	text-in-context	1%	3%	1%
	general knowledge	-	-	1%
	class/reading	2%	2%	-
	interpret	5%	5%	4%
	evaluation	-	-	2%
	generalization	-	-	2%

Intellectual Content Type		Discussion		
		Story 1	Story 2	Story 3
Other	Response	6%	8%	10%
	opinion	9%	10%	7%
	assumption	14%	5%	12%
	example	-	3%	3%
	other	2%	3%	3%

Firstly, for the intellectual content category of Inform, the highest percentage of intellectual content was found in the subcategory interpretation. In this subcategory students performed at 42%, 38% and 21% respectively in the three discussions. The second highest intellectual content percentage belongs to subcategory text, with percentages of 12%, 19% and 15%. Additionally, science fiction (story three) presents higher percentages than the other two stories in students' general knowledge (11%) and evaluation (7%). These results suggest that students can be informed about the text and check their interpretation while participating in a small group discussion. This is especially true for the science fiction story; students discussed general knowledge and evaluated the content of the story. On the other hand, the subcategory of evaluation presented fairly low percentages for the fairy tale and horror story (2%, 4%).

Secondly, the Questions category found that students asked about the text in the highest percentage for story one, the fairy tale (6%). They asked the highest percentage of personal questions in the horror story (6%) and questioned interpretation the most in the science fiction story (4%). These results imply that the content of the fantasy story required students to check their general understanding of the text somewhat frequently, while the horror story encouraged students to share their personal experiences and science fiction demanded students to interpret the hidden meaning of the story. Also of note, questions about text-in-context presented low percentages in both the fairy tale and science fiction (1%, 1%).

Thirdly, for the category of Response, students demonstrated the increasing trend in intellectual content 6%, 8% and 10%. Meaning that they responded more to horror and science fiction than they did to fantasy.

Additionally, for the category Other, the highest percentage belongs to the subcategory of assumption for both fantasy (14%) and science fiction (12%). On the other hand, the highest percentage for horror was opinion (10%). This can be explained in that fantasy and science fiction motivated students to have greater assumptions, while the horror story encouraged students to share their personal experiences.

4.3 Relationship between reflective writing elements and intellectual content in small group discussions

The primary principle of literature circles is cooperative learning which provides students with useful resources in small group and whole class discussions in order to write individual reflections. The researcher expected to see the connection between the intellectual content of small group discussions and reflective writing elements. However, with the different focus of each text, it is difficult to see a trend of improvement. What can be discussed here are the presence of reflective elements and intellectual content as observed in different proportions according to the different types of story.

Firstly, the horror story produced different results for both intellectual content and reflective writing elements. In small group discussions, students informed at high percentage relating to the text (19%). Students informed concerning their interpretation (38%) and asked about their personal experiences (6%) as well. Furthermore, when analyzing reflective writing elements, the horror story demonstrated high frequencies of descriptive writing (44%), analytical reflection (42%) and critical reflection (12%) respectively. It can be assumed that a greater occurrence of discussion about the text, interpretation and personal experience resulted in a higher percentage of analytical and critical reflection.

Secondly, the fairy tale and science fiction stories generated similar results for both intellectual and reflective writing elements. In small group discussions, the fantasy and science fiction stories displayed higher percentages of informed interpretation (42%, 21%). Students asked questions about the fairy tale text (6%) and asked about interpretation related to the science fiction text (4%). Additionally, for other content, both the fairy tale and science fiction texts demonstrated high percentages of assumption (14%, 12%). Concerning reflective writing, both fairy tales and science fiction show high percentages of analytical reflection (55, 48%) and descriptive writing (35.53%, 45%).

It can be postulated that greater frequency of discussion concerning interpretation, text and assumption resulted in higher percentages of analytical reflection and descriptive writing.

4.4 Students' perceptions

Writings by the participants reveal their perception towards the guided method and their overall learning experience with this format of discussion. Participants' opinions can be summarized in figure 1:

Figure 1

Students' Perception towards the Guided Method

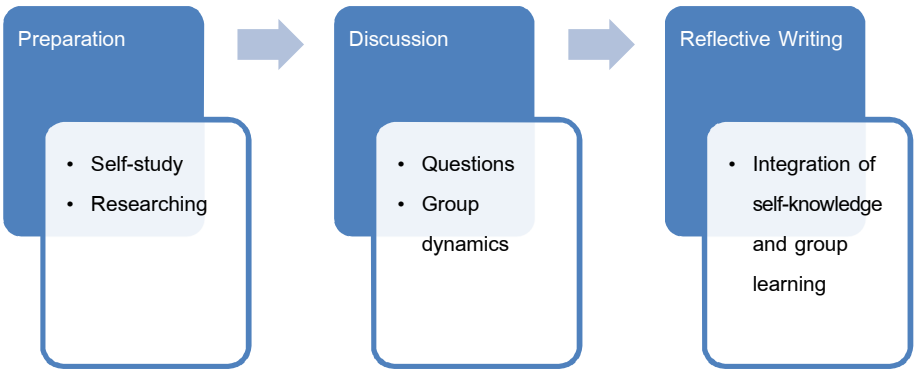


Figure 1 shows that the students understood the purpose of participating in group discussion that they need to prepare themselves by making notes individually and when they feel they do not understand something or they need more information, they would do some research in order to be well-prepared for group discussion. When students join small group discussion they understood that the discussion flowed based on the questions posted by the group members, so students took turns asking questions and when they could not think of the questions they turned to generic questions. As the Literature Circle offered discussion in a systematic way, students understood their roles of Leader, Note-taker, Timer and Presenter. With the clear roles in their mind, the conversations moved towards a mutual understanding of the content that engaged group learning as well as inputting students with a set of knowledge to be resourceful

information for their reading response. When it came to writing, students were well-equipped with self-study knowledge, small group discussion knowledge and whole class discussion knowledge. The majority of students reflected on the mechanic of the use of Literature Circles and Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning in a similar manner to the process that they participated in, they became more accountable of their own learning and hence making the learning of literature meaningful.

5. Conclusion

The application of Literature Circles with Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning resulted in changes in students' reflective writing and the intellectual content of their discussions. For speculative fiction as reading material, it was found that fairy tales and science fiction showed similar results while horror expressed different results; however, all types showed high frequencies of analytical reflection indicating that students responded to the stories using well contemplated reasons rather than just repeating or summarizing the stories. Concerning the intellectual content of small group discussions, students performed well in interpretation and questioned the texts. However, the percentage of questions is low compared to the percentages expressed by the inform and response elements. This point should be the next focus in encouraging students to ask questions critically and ask questions about the context of the text.

In the era of Thailand 4.0 (an economic model to unlock the country's economic challenges), where students' learning outcomes are emphasized, students' reflective writing and the intellectual content of their discussions are two alternative assessments for literature courses or other relevant reading courses. The roles of teachers now have to be adjusted. Teachers are not only providing knowledge, it is essential that they provide and facilitate the means of learning for students. With the aim of using cooperative learning focused on students' learning outcomes, those who are interested may want to conduct further research on the different types of texts and how students interact with the texts in certain kinds of discussion to explore the essential elements that engage students' learning in specific courses. More importantly, when students appreciate why the method is implemented in their learning, they will welcome and accept the process more, resulting in effective learning.

For further research, it is compelling to focus on methods which encourage analytical reflection, hypothetical reflection and critical reflection as well as encourage students to produce greater interpretation and evaluation as intellectual content in small group discussions. Moreover, for qualitative research, it is possible to explore the content of each of the reflective elements that were presented differently based on different kinds of text. The correlations between the discussion and reflective writing can also be investigated to further maximize students' productive ability; i.e. how different roles lead students to produce different reflective writing.

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Appendix

Types of Writing	Characteristics & Students' Writing Samples
Descriptive writing	Summarize the story using own words Describe one's own feeling without providing evidence from the original text Example: 1. This story is about keeping the secret by giving a promise and breaking it. 2. It started when the prince had a garden and no one was allowed to go in there.
Analytical reflection	Analyze how events happen the way they do Make a conclusion about the lesson learned Examples: 1. One of the most outstanding themes for this story that leads to conflict is human relationship between the prince and the princess who were siblings and great friends. 2. According to the story, we also believed that her unidentified causes of death may cause by the sorrow, lack of love from husband and loneliness.
Hypothetical reflection	Provide possibilities of alternative outcomes Hypothesize how events may turn out differently if some conditions change Keywords: If I could change something in the story, I would change the way her husband treated her to see how the story goes. I believe that if he takes care of her better by showing his concern and care, she wouldn't have died this way. She would be healed from the inside (her feelings) and maybe would recover.
Critical reflection	Recognize the influence of the socio-cultural-political context of the story Criticize the story in terms of other influences Keywords: 1. Our group believed that the story was set in the Victorian era, the period of time when men were more powerful and performed greater gender roles than women. Women, on the other hand, were not allowed to do certain things.

Types of Writing	Characteristics & Students' Writing Samples
	2. Personally, as I read and discuss with my group, I realize that such thing (getting bullied) actually happens in the real world when someone who shows a different way of thinking, they would certainly be bullied by majority of those who have the same mindset.