A QUESTION OF RESPONSE: RESPONDING TO LITERATURE THROUGH SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

by

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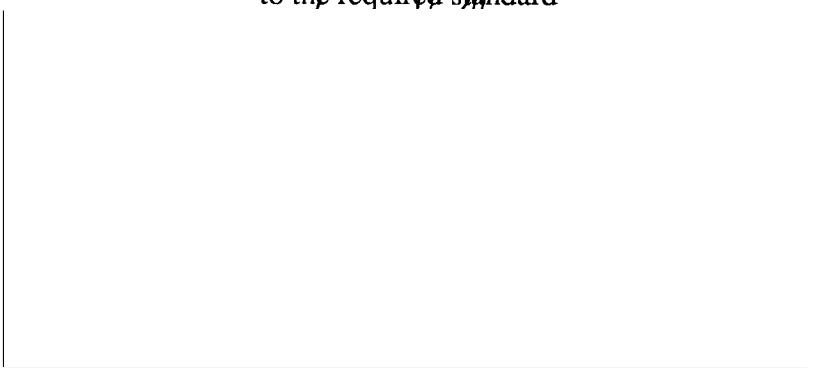

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Abstract

This study, *A Question of Response: Responding to Literature Through Small Group Discussion*, looked at the question of how do small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the context of discussing short stories. In order to investigate the above question, ethnographic case study methodology was used.

The study involved sixteen grade twelve students from a middle class, suburban community. The students worked in four groups of four students each to respond to short stories during four discussion sessions.

The small student-led discussion groups' responses to the short stories evolved almost in the shape of a typical five-paragraph essay. The initial responses, usually general in nature, expressed engagement with the story and evaluation and analysis of the story. The middle section of the discussions focussed on more specific details of the story, and the concluding segments often returned to topics similar to the opening segment, such as expressing evaluation, engagement, and interpretation.

While there was no definite pattern to each discussion session, it was possible to categorize the students' responses. There were four categories of response: (1) literary elements, (2) personal response, (3) interpretation, and (4) evaluation. More interesting than the broad categories of response were the meaning-making strategies used by the students within and across the categories. The most commonly used meaning-making strategies were analysing, inferring, referring to personal experience, questioning, evaluating, expressing engagement, and speculating. Use of the strategies was influenced by the style and content of the stories, the group process and composition, and whether or not the students liked the story and felt confident about interpreting it.

The students focussed chiefly on character in their small group discussions. They also focussed on theme, setting, plot, and symbolism. They displayed limited awareness of tone and mood, point of view, and style. As a means of discussing the short stories, the students were most comfortable using the literary elements as a frame for their discussions.

The choice of short story has an important influence upon the discussions. The story's content shaped what the students talked about, and the style in which the story was written influenced how the students went about making meaning.

The small groups varied in the way they approached and responded to the short stories. Personality, each student's personality and the combination of these personalities to form a group personality, strongly shaped how each group functioned. Each of the four groups also demonstrated four categories of behaviour: (1) agreeing and providing support for each other, (2) clarifying or elaborating upon a statement, (3) contradicting or offering a different opinion, and (4) directing the discussion either by one individually or collaboratively as a group.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that small student-led discussion groups are valuable starting places for students to develop their own responses to literature and confidence as interpreters of literature.

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A Question of Response: Responding to Literature Through Small Group Discussion

Chapter I: The Problem

A. Introduction

I embarked on this research study because of a strong interest in the theory and practice of response to literature. For some time I had been using response to literature techniques in my own teaching and had been encouraging other teachers to use the techniques as well. The theory sounded plausible and intriguing and the practice seemed to work with my students and other teachers' students. However, I wanted to know more about why it worked with students and, more importantly, I wanted to know more about how students went about making sense of literature. Because the practice of response to literature in the classroom lends itself to students working together in small groups and because a prime focus of literature learning in secondary schools involves short stories, I decided to investigate how students respond to literature when given the opportunity to discuss short stories in small student-led groups.

B. The Problem

Research and theory examining response to literature indicate that literature instruction has not fully achieved the goal of producing independent and thoughtful readers (Barnes et al.,1971; B. C. Assessment of Reading & Writing, 1988; Bullock Report, 1975; Jackson, 1982, 1983; Marshall, 1989; Protherough, 1983; Purves, 1973; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978; Thomson, 1987). As students develop as readers in school, they learn to talk about literature through the influence of teachers' talk and expectations. Studies have indicated that the predominance of teacher talk in classrooms inhibits students' abilities to formulate meaning orally for themselves (Barnes et al., 1971; Cazden, 1988; MacLure et al., 1988; Marshall, 1989). What literature instruction seems to have produced within students is the belief that they do not possess the skills to read and make meaning of a literary text. However, when students are given the opportunity to interact with literary texts in a personally meaningful way, research indicates that they adopt a variety of reading stances and respond at different levels according to their experience as readers (Dias, 1987; Langer, 1989; Protherough, 1983; Purves, 1973; Purves & Rippere, 1968; Squire, 1964; Thomson, 1987; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). Nevertheless, much remains to be learned about developing response, response styles, levels of response, effects of group interaction, and questioning strategies.

C. Research Questions

Because we still need to learn more about how students respond and make sense of literature independent of a teacher, I decided to investigate the overall question of how do small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the context of discussing short stories. In order to accomplish that, I conducted a qualitative case study of sixteen grade twelve students. During the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data, I also kept the following sub-questions in mind.

1. How does response to literature evolve in small student-led group discussions? For instance, is there an initial focus and where does it go from there?
2. Are there clearly identifiable patterns in students' responses during their small group discussions? For instance, what tends to be discussed; what strategies do the students use?
3. Which aspects of story do students in groups tend to focus upon?
4. What influence does the choice of short story have upon the group discussions?
5. Do groups appear to vary in the ways they approach and respond to a short story?

D. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that it addresses areas of research in response to literature where information is lacking. As indicated previously, more needs to be known about developing response, response styles, levels of response, and effects of group behaviour. The study will attempt to provide insights into these areas through its research questions, methodology, findings, and conclusions.

Not only will the study yield information about the nature of response to literature during small group discussion, it will also build upon the value of Dias's (1987) small group response procedure. Dias's research indicates the value of using small groups to encourage students to develop their own responses to poetry and to use talk as a means of exploring and articulating their ideas. By applying this procedure to short stories, it will be possible to learn more about response to short stories, oral discourse in small groups, and literature learning in general.

E. Conclusion

In the remainder of the thesis, I will review the theory of and research into response to literature, outline the methodology of this study, report observations and findings of the research, and present the conclusions and recommendations of the study overall.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

A. Introduction: Learning Through Language and Narrative

Language expresses our ideas, our dreams, and our questions. By asking questions we try to make sense of the world around us. Sometimes our questions are answered with facts, sometimes with stories, and sometimes with more questions.

Nevertheless, the fundamental process by which we answer our questions is through narrative (Hardy, 1977; Jackson, 1983; Meek, 1982; Rosen, 1982). As children, we participate uninhibitedly in the stories of our inner and outer worlds (Applebee, 1977; Britton, 1977). As adolescents and adults, we participate less freely in storying, preferring instead to express our ideas in the form of reasoned statements. But perhaps we do not abandon narrative. Perhaps, as Rosen (1982) states, inside every non-narrative statement there is the ghost of a narrative and vice versa. If this is the case -- and many language and literature theorists today seem to agree (Harding, 1977; Hardy, 1977; Meek, 1982; Smith, 1988) -- "narrative must become a more acceptable way of saying, writing, thinking, and presenting" (Rosen, 1982, p. 18). Otherwise, we negate the premise that

> stories are the primary basis of all our perception and understanding of the world. The way we perceive, comprehend and remember events is in the form of story structures that we impose upon them, even though events may not present themselves to us in such ways (Smith, 1988, p. 226).

But what does this mean for the English classroom? As teachers, we are concerned with fostering an aesthetic response to literature within our students. In order for them to become active readers of literature, and not readers about literature, they need to develop a positive belief in their abilities to transact with many forms of literature in a variety of ways. This means initiating response to literature by allowing students to express their own feelings, thoughts, stories, theories, predictions, and questions (Barnes, et al., 1971; Barnes & Barnes, 1990; Bleich, 1975; Dias, 1987; Fillion, 1981, 1983; Foreman-Peck, 1985; Gambell, 1986; Golden, 1986; Iser, 1980; Jackson, 1982, 1983; Probst, 1988; Rosen, 1986; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978, 1982, 1985; Smith, 1988; Stratta, et al., 1973; Webb, 1985).

One method of developing aesthetic response to literature is to have groups of students collaboratively generate questions about a text. Although questions from the various levels of cognition have typically been considered the teacher's responsibility (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Lamb & Arnold, 1980; Pearson & Johnson, 1978), self-generated questions may assist students in understanding their aesthetic responses by compelling them to ask, "Why do we feel this or think that about what we have read?" (Barnes, et al., 1971; Bleich, 1975;

Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fillion, 1981, 1983; Jackson, 1982; Nelms, 1988; Probst, 1988; Purves, 1973; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978, 1985; Stratta, et al., 1973; Webb, 1982). Freed from the dictates of the teacher's interpretation, student-generated questions open the doors for effective reading and aesthetic re-creation of the text. The affective and cognitive realms of comprehension are brought into play because the process fosters the imaginative and thoughtful fusion of predictions, anticipations, and hypotheses into questions. No longer passive recipients, the students transact with the text to create their own sense of the literature. And when teachers enable students to question and discuss literary texts in their own way, they create environments where language and story are real forms of communication, not pseudo-literacy events.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter will be to discuss and review existing theories and research regarding the role of narrative, response to literature, the value of talk, and the use of questioning.

B. Theoretical Perspectives

Role of Narrative

Narrative is fundamental to the various perspectives of reader-response theory not only because it is the basis of literature, but also because it is the basis of language, literacy, and thought. As stated so succinctly by Barbara Hardy, "narrative [is] a primary act of mind transferred to art from life" (1977, p. 12). For children, narrative suffices for all forms of discourse. For adults, narrative is the internal mode of organizing daily experience, while externally, narrative is only one of a variety of discourse modes . Narrative does remain important, however, in the form of literature. Through literature we experience vicariously many lives, experiences, and emotions. Hence, Hardy's interest in the "qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives" (1977, p. 13).

Another influential voice in the realm of narrative is Harold Rosen. Rosen believes that narrative is with us constantly, merging and forming with whatever we are doing. Because it is an intrinsic part of our language acquisition, he proposes that we never truly put away narrative; instead we refine it and broaden it (Rosen, 1982). "Stories become a way in which the story-teller appraises his experience" (Rosen, 1982, p. 10). Thus, Rosen believes that the English curriculum "should find generous space for the retelling of stories" (1986, p. 236).

The concept of the child's sense of story, as it relates to language development, literacy acquisition, and narrative experience, has many proponents. Arthur Applebee informs us that

by approximately the age of nine children no longer totally accept a story as being real; it is "just a story" (1977, p. 56). Age, however, is not the sole determinant of story sense. Applebee (1976, 1977, 1985) states that the individual's range of cultural and narrative experience is also influential in colouring the reader's response to the story. With experience, according to Applebee (1977), the individual's use of narrative moves from being almost completely participatory to being dominated by the spectator role. This theory draws heavily upon the work of James Britton who is responsible for the notion of the participant and the spectator in relation to our use of narrative and literature. Britton (1977) relates his spectator and participant roles to three forms of human behaviour: adaptive, reflective, and assimilative. The participant role, enacted through our adaptive behaviour, is our personal thoughts about the external shared reality. The spectator role, enacted through our assimilative behaviour, is the realm of fantasy and play, our area of "inner necessity," of which literature is an "organized activity" (p. 45). For Britton (1977), fantasy and narrative function as organizers of reality.

According to Margaret Meek (1982), children's play, an "essential activity", is their cultural memory and means of incorporating the pressures of the inner and outer worlds (p. 287). Play is the "shared text -- the first literature" of children (p. 287). Through play, children participate in narrative which she believes "stays with us as a cognitive and affective habit all our lives long" (p. 288). For Meek, the child's sense of narrative and children's literature contain the basic elements of "how a theory of literature may be a theory of reading" (p. 291). If this is the case, the process of reading literature in school needs to aid students in making the "discovery of the relationship of one's own 'storying' and the story of the book" (Sawyer, 1987, p. 36).

Process of Reading

Because the role of narrative is inextricably linked to literacy development, a brief consideration of the reading process seems appropriate before delving into the realm of reader-response theory. Essentially, the reader uses prior knowledge, schemata, and stance in an active process involving anticipation, prediction, and retrospection (Black & Seifert, 1985; Beach & Hynds, 1991; Harding, 1977; Iser, 1980; Jackson, 1982, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1978; Smith, 1983, 1988; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). "The reader casts backwards and forwards in the story at the same time, making meaning by actively building inside her head a coherent unity that ties together the beginning, the middle and the ending of the story" (Jackson, 1983, pp. 18-19). The use of prior knowledge is important to Black and Seifert as they state that "understanding and remembering a story depends upon knowledge of the world" (1985, p.

209). Or as Beach and Hynds state: "personal constructs formed from experiences in the real world shape readers' responses in the fictional world" (1991, p. 461).

Reading, according to Rosenblatt (1976), is a reciprocal transaction involving a reader who responds to letter symbols using his present and previous experience to enact a new experience (a living through) with the text. An important component of the transactional theory of reading is the reader's adoption of a stance. Depending on the purpose for reading, the stance may be efferent (an objective practical reading for information) or aesthetic (a subjective, sensuous lived-through reading).

> Since much of our linguistic activity hovers near the middle of the efferent-aesthetic continuum, it becomes essential that in any particular speaking/listening/writing/reading event we adopt the predominant stance appropriate to our purpose (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 102).

As well as adopting a stance, the reader reads selectively, developing a tentative anticipatory framework which arouses expectations influencing further responses and expectations until a final synthesis is achieved (Rosenblatt, 1978). Vipond and Hunt (1984) and Vipond et al. (1990) discuss modes of reading, point-driven reading, story-driven reading, and information-driven reading, that are comparable to Rosenblatt's transactive reading. They view point-driven reading and story-driven reading as similar to aesthetic response. For example, in point-driven reading, or dialogic reading, the readers imagine themselves in conversation with authors and texts. While story-driven reading involves experiential immersion in a story world. Information-driven reading, on the other hand, is similar to efferent-response because the purpose of the reading is to take information away.

Wolfgang Iser also expounds a reading process theory akin to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Iser states:

> The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader (1980, p. 50).

Iser's "virtual dimension of the text"(1980, p. 54) is similar to the poem that Rosenblatt's reader creates during an aesthetic reading. The process of reading is an expansive, knowledge-producing event for both Iser and Rosenblatt.

Reader-Response Theory

If our sense of story and experience with narrative are components of the active and creative reading process, then we as teachers of literature need to take a closer look at reader-response theory so that our students may become active, autonomous readers and appreciators of literature.

There are varying interpretations of reader-response theory. Some, such as Rosenblatt and Iser, are known as transactionalists; others, such as Bleich and Holland, are known as subjectivists; while others still are known as post-structuralists or deconstructionists. Each of these theoretical perspectives differs sharply from the formalist tradition of New Criticism. Because this study is chiefly concerned with the transactionalist theory of reader-response, the other perspectives will not be discussed except for a brief consideration of Bleich's subjective criticism.

Bleich believes that "a work of literature does not transform anything; only the person doing the writing or reading is doing the transforming" (1975, p. 749). Hence, the reason why he is associated with the subjectivist point of view. To Bleich, literature offers a special opportunity for engaging the thoughts and feelings of the reader. His four phase method of literature instruction includes thoughts and feelings, feelings about literature, deciding on literary importance, and interpretation as a communal act (1975). Although Bleich places emphasis upon the reader's feelings and thoughts which result from the reading experience, he does advocate the movement toward a communally agreed upon interpretation of the text (1975). However considerate his theory may be of the reader's response, it seems to offer rather limited regard for the author's created text. Another questionable component of the theory lies in how it may be practised by teachers. If subjective criticism is overused, psychotherapy in the classroom, instead of literature teaching, seems all too possible.

Bleich, however, does have something in common with the transactionalists, and that is, respect for the reader. Respect for the reader in the transactional theory of reader response necessitates that meaning be made, not found, by the reader (Probst, 1988). The reader strives to fit his sense of text together into a consistent pattern, but there is no guarantee that the process is smooth or that we know exactly what happens to us while we are entangled with the text. Nevertheless, the interplay of deductive and inductive operations in the aesthetic experience does seem to produce what Iser calls "the configurative meaning" (1980, p. 61).

The aesthetic transaction in Rosenblatt's reader-response theory acknowledges the vitality of the text and the reader.

> The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings (1976, p. 25).

For the reader, the evoked intellectual and emotional meanings result in 'the poem' which is essential in an aesthetic transaction with a text. Without the resulting poem, the reader does not have an aesthetic experience on which to base a response. Using Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading as a method for teaching literature is particularly appropriate because "the evocation together with the concurrent responses are the subject matter of interpretation, which is the effort to report on the nature of thought and feeling called forth during the transaction with the text" (1985, p. 103).

James Britton, D. W. Harding, and Arthur Applebee espouse slightly different perspectives of reader-response theory. Their theories posit the active interaction between the reader and the text, but the use of the terms spectator and participant make the reader appear to be somewhat more passive than Rosenblatt's. Britton, for example, uses the term participant to designate the way we use language to "get things done in the outer world;" while on the other hand, the term spectator designates the way we use language in our inner world of fantasy (1968, p. 10). He claims that when the language of the spectator is used in the outer world it is spoken as gossip or is written as literature (p. 10). In Britton's point of view, the language of literature is vital "because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we have; in the role of spectator we can participate in an infinite number" (p. 10).

As a development from Britton's (1968) discussion of "Response to Literature" at the Dartmouth Seminar, Harding accepted his framework with the following conditions: response implies active involvement, not passivity; response may not only be immediate; and verbal response may not reveal the full inner response (1968, p. 11). Despite the proviso, Harding's notion of response, while active, is inherently less active and reciprocal than Rosenblatt's.

> The mode of response made by the reader of a novel can be regarded as an extension of the mode of response made by an onlooker at actual events (Harding, 1977, p. 72).

The onlooker, through experience, develops a greater capacity to attend and evaluate. Similarly, as our experience as responsive spectators grows, Harding contends that we develop a stronger sense of narrative, social values, and feeling comprehension (1977).

Applebee continues the consideration of our responses to literature and uses of story by investigating the shift in "our perspective from participant to spectator" (1977, p. 343). He theorizes that our transition from the child's realm of participant to the adoption of the spectator role may be understood "in terms of an attitude or approach to experience" (p. 343). In other words, our sense of story and language develops from being almost wholly the participant,

with an unformed ability to interpret and evaluate language experience, to being that of the spectator who is able to interpret and evaluate language experience.

It is important to remember that neither Applebee, Harding, nor Britton propose that we negate or discard the participant role as our ability to assume the spectator role increases. For them, our sense of story and ability to use language are integral to our ability to make sense of our lives and grow culturally, intellectually, and emotionally.

Although, the various theorists present different views about reader-response theory, each one consistently advocates the role of the reader interacting with a text and the need to honour the reader's initial response. Reader-response theorists posit that if student readers of literature do not experience a sense of enjoyment and understanding, literature faces a bleak future. Thus, reader-response theory calls for readers who read literature, and not readers who read about literature. After all, "it is literature, not literary criticism, that is the subject" (Harding, 1977, p. 392).

Value of Talk

If responding to literature means that we "think of language as an experience rather than as a repository of extractable meaning" (Fish, 1980, p. 99), then encouraging students to discuss and share responses is crucial. However, the creation of a classroom conducive to collaborative interchange between students and teacher is an imposing challenge. Barnes's (1971) descriptive study of "Language in the Secondary Classroom" garnered a strong impression of passivity in classrooms. This is a serious contradiction to the active participation required for language learning and literature experience.

> We want children, as a result of our teaching, to understand; to be wise as well as well-informed, able to solve fresh problems rather than have learnt the answers to old ones; indeed, not only to answer questions but also able to ask them (Britton, 1971, p. 81).

Perhaps, to enable students to use talk to solve problems, consider feelings, share responses, develop interpretations, discuss evaluations, and generate criticisms about literature, the teacher must step aside as the overt director of instruction, discussion, and questioning (Barnes, et al., 1971; Dias, 1987; Foreman-Peck, 1985; Golden, 1986; Jackson, 1982, 1983; Probst, 1988; Purves, 1972; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1985; Stratta, Dixon, & Wilkinson, 1973). More specifically, Rosenblatt (1976) directs practicing teachers of reader-response theory to refrain from imposing preconceived notions of how to respond to a text or direct the discussion in a predetermined direction. When an open and trusting atmosphere is created, students willingly embark upon the exploration of literature. Students' explorations of a literary text naturally

entail informal, flowing, friendly discussion. Initially, this type of discussion seems tangential and discursive; however, if talking about literature is a means of discovering thoughts and feelings, we must allow the students the freedom of joint exploration to arrive at conclusions that they would not have discerned individually (Britton, 1971; Dias, 1987; Foreman-Peck, 1985; Golden, 1986; Jackson, 1982). As Golden states, "discussion of the story after the reading process has occurred enables students to reflect back on the text and to sort out their thinking about the story" (1986, p. 94). Similarly, Dias (1987) views the process of sorting out the meaning of a poem and the verbalization of the process as being interdependent.

Use of Questioning

It seems, therefore, that we learn through talk, and more particularly exploratory talk. This means that students must be encouraged to hypothesize, predict, and question (Barnes, et al., 1971; Dias, 1987; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fillion, 1981,1983; Jackson, 1982, 1983; Probst, 1981, 1988; Purves, 1972; Rosenblatt, 1976; Stratta, et al., 1973). Theorists suggest that questioning is a natural component of the reading and discussion process and believe that students should be encouraged, even instructed, to generate their own questions about literature (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fiderer, 1988; Fillion, 1981; Jackson, 1982). Student-generated questions may also assist the process of clarifying thoughts and feelings. Christenbury and Kelly (1983) claim that "talking - asking and answering questions - often reveals our thoughts and feelings to us as well as to others" (p. 1). They consider it important for students to formulate their own questions in order to participate fully in the journey of learning.

Typically, questioning to foster reading ability and aesthetic response has been the teacher's domain. Teachers are instructed to consider the levels of questions which they ask in relation to formulated taxonomies of thought (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Lamb & Arnold, 1980; Pearson & Johnson, 1978). As a result, the teacher held the key to the interpretation of literature, which conflicts with the spirit of reader-response theory. The atmosphere of an inquisition does not invite students to share their responses to literature. Therefore, if we wish to encourage the growth in attitudes and insights that asking and answering questions entails, the responsibility of asking questions must become the students' (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fillion, 1981; Jackson, 1982). "Reading for learning then becomes a 'conversation' with the text in which the student asks his own questions, finds the answers, and makes his own comment" (Fillion, 1981, p. 708).

Fillion (1981) suggests that teachers develop a grid to chart students' questioning strategies. In this way, students broaden the scope of their learning, and teachers note and

guide the students' progress. Working in small groups to question literature validates the students' responses to literature and enables more students to participate in the learning process (Barnes et al., 1971; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fillion, 1981; Jackson, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1976; Stratta et al., 1973).

Jackson (1982) proposes a theoretically based methodology where small groups of students generate questions to develop reflective awareness. Using this process, students move inside the story to construct personal interpretations. Jackson states that when students generate their own questions about a story, they rarely ask questions that call for lower level thinking skills. With greater competence and comfort in generating questions, students may eventually stop imitating the efferent types of questions to which they have become accustomed (Fillion, 1982; Jackson, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1976). In this fashion, asking questions about literature may actually promote aesthetic response.

Reader-response theory advocates a pedagogy of literature study that will result in students who enjoy reading literature because they are comfortable with their ability to read with competence and understanding. If this is our goal, students need to be given many and varied opportunities to read, discuss, and question literature. Furthermore, "students must come to realize that to be left with questions is a far better state to be in than not to have any questions at all" (Dias, 1987, p. 75).

C. Research in Response to Literature

According to Purves and Beach (1972) and Beach and Hynds (1991), researchers in response to literature have generally based their studies on the transactional reading theory. An outgrowth of that research has been various perspectives of response containing cognitive, personal, and social aspects. In order to discuss further the notion that collaborative groups of students discussing short stories may foster effective readings and aesthetic responses, three areas of reader-response research will be reviewed. The three categories are written response to literature, oral response to literature, and response to literature through questions.

Written Response

Numerous studies have used written responses to literature to ascertain more about the nature of aesthetic response. In fact, writing about literature is an established method of determining students' levels of comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation. As well, many studies of written response are not only interested in learning about readers' responses, but are also interested in learning more about the connections between reading and writing.

Purves and Rippere (1968) used responses written by students after reading a literary text to conduct a content analysis study. Recognizing that this type of study does not provide a complete picture of response to literature, they caution that the elements of writing about literature described in their study are not exhaustive nor taxonomical. Because Purves and Rippere found other existing categorization schemes inappropriate for their purposes, they identified four main categories of response: engagement-involvement (the reader's submission to the work), perception (the reader's sense of the work as a separate object), interpretation (the reader finding meaning in the work), and evaluation (the reader assessing the work). Within each of the four categories, specific sub-categories allow for more discrete analysis of responses to literature.

The study discusses four methods of analysing and reporting data. For example, when thirteen and seventeen- year-olds' responses to literature were analyzed by categories, they discovered that the thirteen-year-olds wrote more evaluative responses (35%) than any other category (p. 50). However, the seventeen-year-olds wrote more perception responses (46.6%) (p. 50). Purves and Rippere indicate that the reported change in the content of written responses may be a result of high school curriculum and personal development. This conclusion seems related to an idea of Wilson's (1966) that college freshmen would rarely misinterpret literature to the degree that high school students might. Even though written responses are only one component of the process of reading and responding to literature, Purves and Rippere (1968) demonstrate how students' writing about literature, and teachers' insightful reading of their written responses, may aid the development of aesthetic reading of literature.

> One asks students to read the novel to develop their response and their capacity to respond, and they develop these things by examining themselves, their world, and the novel. The teacher's function is to strengthen this examination and to make it exciting and stimulating (p. 63).

Using Purves's categories of response, Somers (1972) analyzed free written responses of readers in grades seven, nine, and eleven to two different short stories. In order to determine possible changes in the responses from one grade level to the next, Somers coded the responses to obtain a grade profile. The differences in responses by grade level were generally not significant except that grade seven students had more engagement responses than did grade nine and eleven students. The students' preferred form of response was evaluation, but the complex theme-oriented story elicited more interpretive and wide ranging responses than did the less difficult plot-oriented story. Somers's study reveals the need for more studies of how students' responses are affected by different genres, forms, and styles.

A study of one senior high school student's written responses to three novels was undertaken by Odell and Cooper (1976). One of the study's central concerns was to learn more about the nature of written responses so that teachers would be more open in their reading of responses and less inclined to look for what they considered to be right and wrong. Using four categories: personal statement, descriptive statement, interpretive statement, and evaluative statement, Odell and Cooper found that the student's responses focused on personal engagement, description, and interpretation of parts. Statements about setting, language, form, interpretation, and evaluation were rarely written. The writing was also analyzed according to the intellectual strategies revealed. Generally, Odell and Cooper did not find that their systems of analysis guaranteed insight into written responses to literature; however, they suggest that the Purves's scheme might be used as a teaching aid for varying responses.

Geisler (1990) also looked at response through essay writing. Her four subjects, two PhD philosophers and two second year university students, read eight articles and then did a think-aloud while writing an essay addressing a topic common to each of the articles. She determined that the experts responded in a highly abstract way while the students responded at a literal or everyday level. Not surprising, she concluded that readers need to be able to respond in more than one mode.

An interesting development from the research conducted using schemes to categorize written responses is a study on determining response styles to literature by Cooper and Michalak (1981). They used three measures to analyze written responses in order to determine the effects of classroom instruction on preferred response modes. Of the three, essay analysis, response preference measure, and statements analysis, essay analysis was the most valid measure because it enabled the reader to see the essay's thesis and details, rather than the supporting details only.

Some studies of written response to literature have focused on on-going responses. For example, Hancock (1991), Kooy (1988), and Angelotti (1972) studied on-going written responses to novels. Although Kooy's and Angelotti's studies are dissimilar in purpose, they found that response altered according to the form and content of the novels. This is similar to Somers's (1972) finding that the responses differed between a thematically oriented story and a plot oriented story. Hancock found that "the content of the written responses to literature generally reflected the active role of the reader in the meaning-making process and supported the idiosyncratic nature of response" (1991, p. 1239-A).

Written responses to poetry have also been studied. Colvin Murphy (1987) found that fostering subjective engagement with the poem by an extended written response prior to discussion had a greater effect on readers' engagement with the text than answering short-answer questions or no writing at all. In Casey's (1977) study of responses written about a

poem, the responses from the group who had discussed the poem without a teacher present were the most divergent. As well, the nature of the question: "Did the poem affect you in any way?" evoked varied affective responses. Both of these studies contain information that teachers should consider when asking questions, assigning writing, and facilitating discussions.

The relationship between gender and response is the focus of Pappas's (1991) study. He used written response and oral interviews to discern the gender-related responses of two male and two female college students to characters and relationships in six short stories. He found that relationships with families and friends do influence response. As well, he noted that (1) men assign strengthening characteristics to men, (2) women see male characters generally as insensitive and unemotional, (3) readers sometimes rely on stereotypes, and (4) men tend to admire characteristics found only in male characters and women admire characteristics found only in female characters.

Creating a classroom environment conducive to responding to literature is the focus of studies by Otto (1987) and Kearney (1987). They report that students in classrooms structured to facilitate personal responses to literature wrote about literature, discussed literature, and read literature with a greater sense of confidence, skill, and enjoyment.

In conclusion, research of written responses to literature reveals that writing about literature may enhance the transaction between reader and text. As well, information discerned from studying written responses contains implications for teaching and research: for example, the differences in responses with relation to different literary forms, the influence of discussion upon writing and reading, the use of questioning strategies by readers, writers, and teachers, the different nature of expressive and transactive written responses, and the value of developing the range of literary response through using categories of response schemes.

Oral Response

There are many methods and purposes used by researchers to study oral responses to literature. Some studies focus on oral information to learn about the on-going process of response. Other studies use oral responses to obtain a retrospective look at response or to study the use of talk and/or discussion in response to literature.

An important study of response to literature is Applebee's "Children's Construal of Stories and Related Genres as Measured with Repertory Grid Techniques" (1976). Using repertory grid techniques, Applebee interviewed and administered questionnaires to students after they had read stories. Chiefly interested in discerning the dimensions of what students like about literature, he discovered that developmental changes occur in children's responses as

they grow older. For instance, teenagers, in comparison to young children, are more tolerant in their evaluations of literature; their concept of simplicity is related to the complexity of the content, rather than the reading difficulty; and their concept of realism changes from a concern for whether it is true or not, to judging the distance between the reader and the work. Applebee claims that the repertory grid technique allows for the range of possible response rather than directing the content and nature of the response which may be accurate, but there is a lack of other similar studies for comparison. Nevertheless, the study provides further information about the developmental nature of readers' responses.

Miall (1985) also used repertory grid measures to determine the points of commonality and points of individuality in undergraduates' responses to a poem. He found that the grids revealed much about the students' common responses. Individual differences in response were revealed by interviewing the student. As a result, Miall suggests using repertory grids as a way of mapping the boundary between individual idiosyncrasies and group commonalities.

Even though oral discussion is not the main component of Applebee's and Miall's studies, the conducting of interviews indicates a recognition of the importance of readers articulating responses to literature so that more may be understood about how we read and make sense of literature.

Conducting interviews with a study's subjects pre- and post-reading is another means by which researchers have gathered information about the response process and the social context in which it takes place. For example, Cothern et al. (1990), Rhodes (1991), and Rogers (1991) interviewed adolescents prior to reading to learn more about them as individuals. In the study by Cothern et al. (1990), the students stopped three times during the reading process to discuss the literature. Rogers's (1991) subjects did think-alouds as they read short stories. While in Rhodes's (1991) study, the students read a novel uninterrupted. After reading, each study's interviews focussed on how the students made sense of the literature and what meaning they had constructed. The researchers found that students construct their own sense of the literature based on their prior experience and knowledge and text content and type. They also felt that the setting in which the response occurs is crucial for students' ability to develop as aesthetic readers and interpreters of literature. Rogers, perhaps, best summarized the three studies' findings when she wrote, "a reader's critical stance is highly individual" (1991, p. 417)

One common method of obtaining information about readers' on-going responses to literature is to interview readers at pre-determined points in their reading or to record their thoughts as they read in what are known as think-aloud-protocols (TAPs) or read-aloud-protocols (RAPs). The seminal study in this area is James Squire's (1964) *The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories.* Squire divided the four stories to be read by

ninth and tenth graders into four segments. At the end of each segment, the student was interviewed to obtain information about the on-going response. Although the study does not reveal a completely accurate picture of on-going response because of the interrupted nature of the reading, it was the first to provide a picture of developing response. Analysis of the interview protocols resulted in seven categories of response: literary judgment, interpretational responses, narrational reactions, associational responses, self-involvement, prescriptive judgments, and miscellaneous.

Squire's study is not only interesting for its methodology, but also for the information learned. Most significantly, the study revealed that the interpretational response was the most common, over 42% of all responses; reading ability scores and sex differences were of little importance; self-involvement was strongly correlated to literary judgments; the nature of developing response varied widely among readers; and there were six common areas of difficulty experienced by these readers when interpreting literature. As well, Squire found "considerable evidence [which] suggests that individuals continually organize, sift, and evaluate their perceptions when these are incomplete" (p. 29). Consequently, Squire's study provided a solid foundation for further research.

More recently, other researchers have utilized think-aloud-protocols or read-aloud-protocols to learn more about the processes of reading and responding to literature. Dias (1987) and Kintgen (1985) used RAPs to gain insight about how readers make sense of poetry. Not only did Dias use individual RAPs to discern four patterns of reading, he also used small group discussion to enhance the students' levels of comfort and articulation of responses about poetry. Dias's study reveals a belief in the value of talk for encouraging students' developing responses to literature, as well as being a means of gaining insight into readers' methods of processing poetry. Kintgen (1985) discovered that when reading poetry, readers make decisions about syntax by considering meaning and semantics first. Thus, "linguistic analysis may provide a description of the syntax of the poem, but it does not describe how readers perceive that syntax" (p. 134).

Think-aloud-protocols of students reading Dante's *Inferno* were used by Church and Bereiter (1983) to understand the psychological processes of attending to style while reading. They found three modes of attending practised by readers, one particularly related to Rosenblatt's aesthetic response. These readers paid attention to content and style while relating holistically to the text. Compared to the other readers who read chiefly for information, the aesthetic readers did more analysis, question asking, and linking of the text to other texts and personal experiences. Because the aesthetic readers responded to the text more fully and more like writers, Church and Bereiter think that aesthetic reading should be encouraged as an instructional practice.

Another study which used think-aloud-protocols is Hynds's (1989) "Bringing Life to Literature and Literature to Life." Although the central focus of this study was not the on-going responses of the participants, the oral information was crucial for understanding how readers respond to a text and how they use their social contexts and constructs to interpret a text aesthetically. By using this methodology, Hynds recognized the socio-psycholinguistic nature of reading and the relationship of literature to life.

Langer (1989) also used think-aloud-protocols (TAPs) to develop a sense of the processes that students use to understand literature. Analysis of the TAPs revealed that readers actively create meaning and change reading stances as they read. Langer identified four major reading stances that operate recursively. They are (1) being out and stepping into an envisionment, (2) being in and moving through an envisionment, (3) stepping back and rethinking what one knows, and (4) stepping out and objectifying the experience (p. 7).

Miall (1990) conducted a think-aloud-protocol using short stories in order to determine if literary texts possess an intrinsic structure that can be demonstrated in readers' responses. He found that the readers' responses demonstrated commonality in three areas: (1) in phrases requiring interpretation, (2) in relationships between phrases, and (3) anticipations of phrases or themes to occur later in the story. At the same time, however, the interpretations of the readers differed because readers bring different experiences and values to bear on texts. Andringa (1990) also conducted think aloud protocols using short stories. Similar to Miall's study, Andringa found that readers have expectations with which they want stories to conform. In particular, naive readers did not experience the "rapprochement of the reader's horizon and the text's horizon" (1990, p. 252).

Some researchers have used students' oral responses in interviews to formulate developmental models of response. Protherough (1983) discusses the Hull Enquiries in which children were interviewed about literature. Their responses were categorized according to a three level model of evaluation. Protherough speculates that there seems to be an apparent developmental process of response because with "each successive year of the secondary school up to 14, more children give answers at the higher levels" (p. 53).

Similarly, Thomson (1987) interviewed adolescents to create a tentative model of developmental response and to determine reading strategies associated with each level of development (p. 167). His developmental model consists of six levels: (1) unreflective interest in action, (2) empathizing, (3) analogizing, (4) reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour, (5) reviewing the whole work as a construct, and (6) consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes (p. 360).

Many response to literature studies have used group discussion as the primary method of gathering data. In "Talking to Learn," Britton (1971) tape recorded small group discussions about literature. The most important finding of this study is that teachers need to orchestrate the kinds of situations where students in groups may talk to learn from one another. Even when the talk in the groups seems trivial and circular, "at its most coherent points it takes on the appearance of a group effort at understanding" (p. 97), and it is "by means of taking it [the exploratory learning journey] in speech that we learn to take it in thought" (p. 114).

Another study which used oral discussion to foster aesthetic response is Wilson's (1966) *Responses of College Freshmen to Three Novels.* After reading each novel, the students participated in class discussions where the influence of the professor's interpretation was limited. During the early stages of the discussion, the students' responses indicated a strong degree of self-involvement. As the discussion continued, the level of interpretation increased. Wilson found similar changes in the students' written responses pre- and post-discussion. Wilson equates the development of interpretive abilities with a decrease in empathy for the literary text which either reflects upon the degree of interest engendered by the instructional strategy or a continued degree of belief in the objectivity of the text as being important for literary analysis. Nevertheless, both Wilson's and Britton's studies provide interesting information about the value of literary discussion as a vehicle for exploring and deepening responses to literature.

In support of the knowledge gained from Britton's (1971) and Wilson's (1966) previously discussed studies, Dias (1987) writes that a study he conducted "involving small groups in generally undirected discussion of poetry over ten sessions, realized significant gains in the ability of the groups' members to read and apprehend poetry independently" (p. 10-11).

Research using groups engaged in different forms of oral discussion is another method used to learn about the stages of response, developmental level of response, and types of response. Beach (1972) compared the responses of three groups who had been given different directions for preparing to discuss a poem. The first group audio taped a free association response to the poem immediately after reading it; the second group wrote a free association response to the poem immediately after reading it; and the third group simply read the poem. He observed that the groups who had completed the free association responses conducted discussions which were more interpretational and less digressive. Whereas, the third group's discussion began at a different level of response. Their discussion contained more evidence of engagement and digression. Beach suggests that this may be because the group had not undertaken any form of assigned free association prior to the discussion. A final insight from this study concerns the influence of group behaviour upon discussion participation. He found that the group's attitude toward the poem and the task affected the responses in the discussions.

Therefore, Beach's study highlights the importance of using a variety of strategies for engaging response before students participate in group discussions and the need to be aware of the influence of group dynamics upon the development of aesthetic responses.

Reid (1991) compared individual and small group response. From the think-aloud protocols and discussions, she discovered that only one cognitive strategy (inferences) and two social strategies (social skills and solicit approval) were used by all readers in all cases. As well, she found four factors which influenced response: poem, reader, situation, and teacher.

Casey (1977) and Fisher (1985) also used group discussion to analyse responses to literature. Casey's (1977) three groups, teacher-led, student-led, and private response with no discussion, were studied to learn about affective response to a poem. Writing in response to a question assigned after the discussions, the subjects' writing displayed varied and extensive affective responses. He also found that the patterns of response were similar despite the group situation. However, the language of the teacher-led discussion influenced the language of the response, whereas the student-led discussion encouraged more divergent responses. Casey's study is an example of how teachers influence students' responses and how teacher assigned questions may direct the type of response. In Fisher's (1985) study four groups discussed short stories. Three of the groups consisted of tenth grade students and the fourth group consisted of adults. One of the student groups discussed short stories under the direction of the teacher using a structured questioning strategy; a second group used the same questioning strategy to discuss the short stories without the presence of the teacher; while a third group had a free discussion without any directions from the teacher or questions. Fisher concluded that the free discussion group "offered responses that were categorically more like the responses of the adults in their final free discussion" (p. 2062A).

Marshall (1989) used videotapes to record discussions about literature involving the whole class and teacher. He found teacher influence on the discussions to be quite pervasive. Students chiefly provided information in relation to the questions they were asked, while teachers questioned, elaborated, and generally dominated the discussions through the amount that they talked. Marshall speculates that "there will be a shift in roles when no teacher is present to guide the discourse in specific directions" (p. 42).

Roberts and Langer (1991) studied a whole class discussion about a literary text where the teacher functioned solely as a facilitator. They found that the grade seven students engaged in the process of understanding the literature through social interaction and were able to speak more about the literature. As well, the heterogeneous composition of the class offered all students the opportunity to use the discussion to deepen their level of understanding, no matter at what level they entered the discussion (1991, p. 63).

Townsend (1991), looked at how high school juniors wonder about literature. She studied three class discussions and found that the nature of wondering about literature was idiosyncratic.

A further group of response to literature studies used small group discussion as a classroom strategy to enhance reading and aesthetic response (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Golden, 1986; Johnston, 1987; Otto, 1987; Strickland et al., 1989; Wilson, 1975). Eeds and Wells's (1989) observations reveal that the group discussions encouraged risk-taking to construct simple meaning, deepened the personal significance of a text for students, and revealed the active questioning strategies being practised by students to uncover meaning.

> The depth of insight and feeling shown by these young students was a revelation. As they spent time contemplating meaning and digesting it, many children did show that they were generalizing - that they were working through what they perceived to be the author's message to them in writing the book (p. 24).

Other studies' findings emphasize the value of students talking about their responses to literature in groups (Golden, 1986; Johnston, 1987; Otto, 1987; Strickland, et al., 1989; Wilson, 1975). For example, Strickland, et al. (1989) state:

> Literature response groups helped students learn to interpret literature and extend their literary awareness. Students learned to use talk more effectively and to use it as a medium for learning (p. 200).

Essentially, observations of small group discussions about literature indicate that sharing responses broadens students' perspectives of texts and contributes to the reader's active re-creation of the text (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Golden, 1986; Johnston, 1987; Otto, 1987; Strickland, et al., 1989, Wilson, 1975).

Research involving the gathering of information about aesthetic reading through oral response has provided a solid stimulus for future research and classroom practice. Despite the fact that there is always a degree of artificiality or incompleteness in any form of research, oral protocols are one of the most effective means of learning about the thoughts and feelings of readers. Based on the information revealed by such studies it seems that if we are truly concerned about encouraging our students to become active, autonomous readers of literature, it is vital to nurture students' aesthetic evocations and responses through small group discussion and self-generated questions.

Response to Literature Through Questions

Teachers have traditionally asked students questions about literature to generate discussion, to prompt writing, and to examine understanding. Usually the purpose of the questions is to assist the students' interaction with the text, but too often questions stultify the development of felt responses and the enjoyment of literature (Bullock Report, 1975).

Questions about literature have become synonymous with right and wrong interpretations. Students become inhibited about expressing their thoughts and feelings because the text is viewed "as a repository of answers to which [the teacher] possesses the key" (Bullock Report, 1975). D'Arcy (1973) writes that the 1968 comprehension assessment conducted by the London Association of Teachers of English (L.A.T.E.) found that questions may not test comprehension of a passage as much as comprehension of the teachers' questions. Nevertheless, the established practice of using questions to determine comprehension levels and correct interpretations remains strong. For instance, the assessment of reading and writing in grades four, seven, and ten undertaken in 1988 by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia states:

> it was somewhat distressing to find that a substantial number of teachers and students ascribe to a rather narrow definition of student assessment which assumes that only questions which have answers which are clearly "right" or "wrong" in terms of text content are appropriate (p. 2).

The semantic misunderstanding and practical misapplication of questioning for comprehension may be the basis of the problem of how questions and comprehension have often come to signify segmented skill development instead of unified understanding (D'Arcy, 1973).

Questions, however, may promote aesthetic response, or unified understanding. They play an influential role in fostering the transaction between the reader and text because "to read intelligently is to read responsively; it is to ask questions of the text and use one's own framework of experience in interpreting it" (Bullock Report, 1975). Thus, if the reading process is a creative act of composing meaning (or "evoking the poem") by constructing and reconstructing a text then students need the opportunity to deepen their aesthetic response by consciously formulating questions about a text in class.

Studies of questions and response to literature have utilized a variety of procedures to learn about the affective and cognitive components of reading, responding, and understanding. One of the traditional approaches involves using a taxonomy of hierarchically ordered questions. Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) posit a two level hierarchy of comprehension composed of seven question types. To test the hierarchical, taxonomical nature of the questions, they applied the seven question types to four short stories to determine if the

hypothesized comprehension skills would hold across and within the four stories. Students at the grade nine, eleven, and twelve level read each of the stories and then wrote answers to the questions. According to Hillocks and Ludlow, the "results suggest the need to work hierarchically in helping students understand a given work at higher levels" (p. 23) because the students incapable of answering the lower level questions were also unable to answer the higher level questions. At first glance, this suggests a rather traditional approach to comprehension, but Hillocks and Ludlow believe that questions structured in this fashion by the teacher will help students achieve better comprehension and enjoyment of literature.

Similar to Hillocks and Ludlow's study, Lucking's (1976) study employed hierarchically ordered questions to study written responses. The study consisted of three phases of short story study. In phase one, students read a story and wrote an essay; during phase two, students read a story, discussed it, and wrote an essay; and during phase three, students read a story, discussed it using hierarchical questioning, and wrote an essay. Lucking found that the essays from the third phase displayed increased interpretational comments, fewer miscellaneous comments, and a broader sense of finding meaning with purpose. Because the study consisted of three phases, with the hierarchical questioning procedure being the last phase, the content change in the essays may have been the result of prolonged short story exposure and instruction.

Beach and Wendler (1987) used questions to elicit responses to a story in order to learn more about the development of inferring in students. Students read the story twice and then answered questions about the characters' acts, perceptions, and goals. For each of the question types, Beach and Wendler found that the eighth graders, eleventh graders, college freshmen, and college juniors responded differently. In particular, the college students' responses reflected a larger sense of socio-psychological contexts and thematic meanings. Using a somewhat similar focus, Fusco (1983) studied cognitive levels of development in children's responses to literature. During group booktalk discussions, Fusco asked students questions taxonomically based on a Piagetian framework. Her findings that students respond to questions matched to their cognitive level relates to Beach and Wendler's study. However, both studies leave unanswered questions about aesthetic response and student-generated questions.

Some studies have considered the use of open-ended questions for encouraging aesthetic response. In Ericson's (1984) study, three girls responded orally to open-ended questions during and following reading. The thoughts and feelings articulated in these sessions were compared with the group discussion responses. Similar to other studies, Ericson found that the girls had a preferred way of responding for certain types of texts. Also similar to other studies, "all participants were able to benefit from group discussions, although

to different degrees" (p. 388A). Galda (1982) used open-ended questions when interviewing subjects individually prior to a group discussion of a novel. The questions and the discussions provided information about the role that stance plays in determining a primary mode of response for a young reader. Open-ended questions were used in conjunction with recall and channelling questions by Golden (1978) to obtain oral responses to realistic and fantasy short stories. The differences in age levels and texts affected the responses. But perhaps the differences in the responses due to age was more a factor of instruction and grade level, than simply age.

As a slightly different alternative to the traditional method of teacher questioning, Tompkins (1987) had college students select five questions from completed response preference measures which they felt would be the most helpful guides for writing an essay about the metaphors in each poem read. Although Tompkins did not find a persistent pattern of response across the poems, she did find that most of the questions were chosen from the perception category and that there was a high correlation between the scores on the essays and the selection of metaphorical questions for specific poems.

Purves (1973), in the study of *Literature Education in Ten Countries,* used response preference measures to determine national, cultural, social, and educational differences in literature responses. The response preference measure for each story contained twenty questions, and from these twenty questions, the students selected the five questions they deemed most important. One of the reasons for having students choose questions to indicate their preferred response was "students learn .... to ask certain questions when they read a literary selection, and the questions they learn depend in part upon the critical beliefs of teachers and scholars" (p. 16). Generally the study found little consistency in the responses chosen on the three given opportunities. Nevertheless, students showed a distinct non-preference for the questions which asked if the story's characters were like people they knew or what did the story say about people they knew. And, they often chose "Is there anything in the story that has hidden meaning?" (p. 26-7). The effect of literature instruction was determined by the different pattern of questions chosen by the fourteen-year-olds and those chosen by the eighteen-year-olds. The fourteen-year-old students were more inclined towards questions about moral, hidden meanings, plot, content, emotional involvement, and affective evaluation. Whereas, the eighteen-year-olds focused more on formal perceptual responses, affective evaluation, general interpretation, morals, themes, and hidden meanings.

Although Purves's study contains a wide array of information, there are four most intriguing findings. First, the finding that the home is the most formative environment for reading ability and attitudes toward reading confirms a long held belief of teachers. Second, the choice of the question about hidden meaning displays the students' sense of not being able

to understand or make sense of literature on their own. Third, the older students' move towards formal analysis shows the influence of the teacher's formal critical training and the cumulative effect of years spent studying literature at high school. Fourth, the finding that "those schools whose students indicate their interest in the substance of the work and how it affects them are those whose students comprehend it better" (p. 243) seriously questions the formalist tradition of extracting meaning from the text only. In conclusion, the questions selected by the students clearly display the effects of literature instruction and the importance of students being able to find the answers to their own questions about literature.

McGreal (1976) and Webb (1985) undertook descriptive research of literature study in classrooms to determine the effects of instruction on response. In particular, McGreal (1976) looked at teacher questioning behaviour for short stories. Some of the study's findings indicate that teachers ask more content questions than form questions, age level affects the type of questions asked, and students felt that the questions asked about interpretation of style and affective evaluation were important. Webb (1985) found that over the ten week term of the study, the behaviours meant to foster the transactive response to literature declined as examination time approached. Thus, it appears that the "response to literature is restricted greatly by the question-answer instruction and by the constraints of the persuasive essay" (p. 281).

Student-generated questions have rarely been the focus of formal study. André and Anderson (1978-79) conducted two studies to see if students could generate questions about main points in a text, whether this facilitates learning, and whether training in question generation is necessary. They determined that students who generated questions displayed better comprehension and spent more time studying the text, than those who did not. In the second study, the students who were trained in question generation produced a greater percentage of good comprehension questions than did the untrained group. They also found that the number of good comprehension question generated was a significant predictor of achievement. André and Anderson's study is informative and thought provoking; unfortunately, it uses non-fiction material and not literature. This would be an interesting study to replicate using fiction to learn more about student-generated questions and aesthetic response.

Graup (1985) focused on student-generated questions and collaborative discussion to learn more about the link between cognitive comprehension and response to literature. Consisting of three phases, in each phase the grade six students read a different literary text, generated questions, and wrote essays. Of the four groups generating questions, only the instructional groups received assistance in constructing questions. As well, the groups varied according to whether or not they used the questions for discussions or for writing individual

responses. Chiefly, Graup found that group discussion using questions aided comprehension better than did individual writing in response to questions. Students in discussion groups who generated more inferential questions and students who received instruction in question generation but were not in discussion groups produced a greater number of interpretive responses in essays. As in Hillocks and Ludlow's (1984) study, the students were able to respond to questions which corresponded with their ability levels.

> It was concluded that comprehension could be facilitated through collaborative learning and the strategy of reader generated questions. Actively engaging students in the comprehension process led to improved comprehension and broader more interpretive essays (Graup, 1985, p. 482A-483A).

If Graup had used a questioning taxonomy that included an affective component, the study may have yielded more information about the strategy of students generating questions as a means of developing aesthetic response. The fact that the instruction groups received assistance when generating questions would also seem to be a confounding factor in the results. Nevertheless, Graup's research conveys the value of student-generated questions as a response technique.

As demonstrated by the preceding studies, questioning does not have to be teacher-centred, nor does it have to address only cognitive realms of comprehension. With regards to student-generated questions, my personal observation of students in grade nine, who after a brief discussion generated their own questions about a short story, indicated that asking and answering questions about a literary text may deepen commitment, create active enthusiasm, and encourage exploration of feelings and insights. Thus, questioning strategies which honour and foster the reader's personal involvement with literature are reasonable means of developing aesthetic response.

Conclusion

We ask questions to understand and learn. Out of our questions, speculations, and hypotheses, we create narratives to explain our existence, our culture, our environment, and our humanity. Out of the experience of narrative and storytelling has come the literature which is read and studied in schools today. The evolution of literature is a poignant reminder of why literature instruction needs to provide "a living through, not simply knowledge about" (Rosenblatt, 1976, p. 38).

> Aesthetic response to literature is a process alive with sensuality, emotion, and intellect. Because the literary experience tends to involve both the intellect and the emotions in a manner that parallels life itself, the insights attained through literature may be assimilated into the matrix of attitudes and ideas which constitute character and govern

> behavior. Hence the opportunity for the student to develop the habit of reflective thinking within the context of an emotionally colored situation (Rosenblatt, 1976, p. 274).

Rosenblatt's statement is crucial with regards to instructional practice. The world of literature reflects our personal, cultural, social, environmental, and historical experience; it offers the "virtual experience" of life. Thus, we must afford our students opportunities to carry out personal explorations of literature so that they may not only read with joyous appreciation and understanding, but may also live through the wide array of experiences that literature offers. If we fail to produce students capable of enjoying literature, a vital dimension of human experience will be diminished.

Therefore, when we think of fostering aesthetic response to literature through collaborative student-led discussion groups, research has revealed much that is worthy of consideration. For instance, we know that the home plays an important part in the development of active, capable readers, and that instruction at school has a cumulative effect on students' responses to literature. As far as aesthetic response to literature is concerned, we have learned of the need to honour students' initial responses and to promote reflective thinking through writing and talking. Reading ability and aesthetic response may further be strengthened by the overt practice of students learning to ask their own questions about literature, instead of relying on the teacher's questions. The knowledge we possess about response to literature is helpful and informative; yet it also reveals that we still need to learn more about developing response, response styles, modes of response, effects of group behaviour, effects of teacher instruction, reading stances, and questioning strategies. Because if "response is best defined as the ongoing interaction between the individual and the work, an interaction that may continue long after the individual has finished reading" (Purves, 1973, p.36), we can never stop asking questions in order to learn more about the nature of response.

Chapter III: Methodology

A. Description of Research Methodology

In order to learn more about student-led small group response to and discussion of literature, I decided to use a case study approach. The case study approach falls within the realm of ethnographic, qualitative research that seeks to describe what happens in a particular situation and circumstance. The ethnographic methodology also provided me with the ability to look holistically at how students work to make meaning when discussing short stories. From the small student-led discussion groups, I was able to observe and describe the many approaches and strategies that students used, such as analysing, referring to personal experience, inferring, and questioning.

The case study involved four groups of students, sixteen students in total, responding to short stories during four discussion sessions. Because of possible concerns about the reliability and validity of case study data, I made certain that I gathered data according to the methods of triangulation. Thus in the study, triangulation is ensured by gathering data in three ways: audio-taping the four discussion sessions of each group, writing field notes and a researcher's journal, and conducting focussed interviews with students after completing the four sessions.

B. Research Design

The groups in the case study were audio-taped using a slightly modified version of Dias's (1987) small group procedures. Dias used the small groups as a means of encouraging response to poetry before conducting responding-aloud-protocols (RAPs) with individuals. During Dias's introductory small group procedure, poems were read aloud twice and students, in turn, gave initial responses round the group without commenting or interrupting any of the speakers. Once each student had spoken, discussion became open with the express purpose of making meaning for the poem. At the end of discussion time, each group reported back to the rest of the class. The groups were not, however, expected to reach consensus as to their sense of the poem. That night, for homework, students were asked to read the poem again and then write a response journal entry about their thoughts and feelings on the poem.

The reason for using this procedure is that it works well in the classroom setting for encouraging small group discussion and understanding of poetry. As Dias states, "It is within the security of a small group that pupils will be more willing to risk offering their personal interpretations" (1990, p. 297). I was interested, therefore, in determining if the procedure

would be a successful response strategy for short stories. As well, the procedure allows students to talk together about literature without the influential presence of a teacher. As a result, small student-led group discussions may encourage greater exploration of feelings, questions, associations, thoughts, analogies, interpretations, and strategies for responding to and making sense of literature. With the preceding items in mind, the overall question of how do small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the context of discussing short stories takes on even greater significance.

Pilot

To determine the feasibility of the study, a pilot study was undertaken with three different heterogeneous grade twelve English classes in a middle class, suburban secondary school. These classes were unknown to the researcher.

On each occasion, students, in groups of three to four, discussed the short story assigned by the teacher. The groups were chosen by the teacher to make certain that they were heterogeneous. The stories discussed were taken from a Ministry authorized textbook, *Story and Structure* (1966).

Not every small group in each class was audio-taped. Because only three cassette players and two electrical outlets were available, the tape recorders were placed randomly around the room. At each succeeding session, different groups' discussions were recorded to obtain a wider sense of students' responses.

In the first small group session, students discussed "I'm a Fool." Before the discussions began, students had read the story and written a free response journal entry. To ensure that the student groups used the same procedure, the researcher gave each student a handout titled "Discussing Short Stories as a Group" (see Appendix). Students read the handout and then asked the researcher questions based on the information in the handout. Essentially, the handout outlined that each student states an initial response without questions or comments from the other members of the group. Following that, students may begin speaking randomly in order to discuss the story further. Students were also informed that they could at any time re-read portions of the story to clarify meaning and refresh their memories. As well, the researcher made it clear that it was not necessary for the groups to reach consensus; the purpose was for students to make sense of the short story together. The discussions lasted for fifteen to twenty minutes. Afterwards, each group reported back to the rest of the class to initiate whole class discussion of the story.

The following two sessions were similar to the first except that the groups discussed "The Lost Boy" (Part 1) and "A Special Occasion." Because of other pressing work

commitments, there was a gap of approximately one month between each audio-taped session, which in turn seemed to lead to developmental differences in the students' ability to respond to the short stories. For instance, in the first session, students were less familiar with the response process and more accustomed to looking to the teacher to provide information and ideas about the story being discussed. By the third audio-taped session, students had been using the response process regularly for approximately three months. This experience with the response process encouraged the student-led small groups to have comfortable discussions among themselves and be less inclined to look for teacher direction.

The pilot provided the following information for the proposed study.

1. Dias's small group procedure for responding to poetry seems to be applicable to using with short stories.
2. Discussion sessions of twenty to twenty-five minutes each are sufficient for obtaining response information.
3. Students are capable of stating responses and developing an initial understanding of the story in the allotted time.
4. Audio-taping of the response procedure does not appear to inhibit responses in an appreciable way.
5. The procedure provides information about peer group dynamics while discussing short stories.

Sample Population

Sixteen grade twelve students from North Surrey Secondary, which is located in a middle class, suburban community, participated in the study. All students came from one English class which was heterogeneous in nature.

Before the research began, I consulted with the students' English teacher to determine if we could select appropriate participants (i.e. did she have students who would be reasonably willing to read and discuss short stories in small student-led groups?). The teacher selected one of her three grade twelve English classes to participate in the study. The teacher and I then chose sixteen students from within the selected class to be the study's subjects.

Although the class consisted of twenty students, I did not include them all in the sample as the case study methodology is more conducive to smaller numbers. As well, the four students not selected as subjects had irregular attendance patterns and the study needed students who attended class regularly.

The final criterion for selection was the students' academic achievement in English according to the teacher's professional judgment. I wanted three groups whose academic

achievement was heterogeneous and one group whose academic achievement was average. Even though the study's design consisted of three heterogeneous groups and one homogeneous group, I was not interested in conducting a statistical study of differences between academically average and academically heterogeneous groups. I was, however, interested in observing whether the academically average, or homogeneous, group approached the stories differently. But most of all, I wanted to see if there were similarities and differences as to how four groups of grade twelve students would make sense of short stories, whether they were heterogeneous or homogeneous.

Background

It seems appropriate at this point to provide some background information on the students' experiences with small group discussions and short stories during the time leading up to the study. For instance, it is important to remember that the research was conducted in May, virtually the end of the students' year in English 12.

At the beginning of the school year with the aid of the pilot study's procedures, the teacher initiated the use of small student-led groups to discuss the short stories being studied in *Story and Structure*. She worked extensively at developing the students' confidence in themselves as readers and interpreters of short stories; she also worked at developing the students' ability to work well in a collaborative group setting. To help students work collaboratively, she had them do small group exercises on body language, supporting and encouraging each other, and assuming roles. When the students were in their groups discussing short stories, she tried to avoid participating in the groups as much as possible. For instance, rather than answer a question about a short story, she might rephrase it and redirect it back to the group. During the reporting back, she invited the students to ask questions of each other, provided clarification and information, and encouraged the students to elaborate on their thinking. For each reporting back session, the groups selected a different reporter so that all students were familiar with the different roles in a group and participated in the whole class discussions. As well, she worked diligently to have the students discuss their interpretations of the stories among themselves instead of reporting back to her as the teacher. To achieve this goal, she avoided talking as much as possible so that the students were in a sense forced to talk to one another rather than to her.

In her capacity as facilitator, the teacher had the students review the elements of the short story within their student-led groups. They read the appropriate chapters in *Story and Structure* on the elements of the short story and wrote SQ3R notes on the material. The teacher modelled the SQ3R procedure for the first chapter on escape and interpretation. For the

remaining chapters the students worked on their own. After they had completed their notes, the students reviewed the information in their groups. During this time, the students were responsible for ascertaining whether each member of the group had completed the note-taking process and that each member of the group understood the material. At the end of each chapter on the short story elements, the class wrote a quiz. If everyone in a group achieved at least 80 percent, that group received bonus marks.

Throughout the school year, even after the unit on short stories was finished, the students worked together in small groups to discuss literature and complete other learning activities. The groups changed every six to eight weeks or unit by unit depending on what was being done in the class. The selection of who would be in each group alternated between teacher-choice and student-choice. Thus, by the end of the school year, or by the time the research began in May, the students knew each other well and were comfortable working together in small groups.

Procedure

The sixteen subjects, plus the remaining students in the class, were involved in an introductory session and four data collection sessions that each time involved reading silently while listening to a short story being read aloud and audio-taping small group discussion sessions. Although only sixteen students were actually the subjects of the study, the whole class participated in the research process because the teacher felt that the process would be beneficial for them all. The methodology of the sessions was as follows.

For the introductory session, I explained the purpose of the study to the students and reviewed the response process that they would use. Regarding the purpose of the study, I informed the students that the research was being undertaken for my Master's thesis at U.B.C. and that I wanted to investigate how students respond to literature when given the opportunity to discuss short stories in small student-led groups. I also talked about wanting to help teachers learn more about using small group discussions for literature instruction in order to encourage students to be confident about their ability to read, understand, interpret, and enjoy literature. Finally I told them that I had chosen to study grade 12 students because they were at the end of their high school careers and would have much to say about short stories.

The response process was explained in the introductory session in exactly the same fashion as during the pilot study. Students read the handout titled "Discussing Short Stories as a Group" and then asked the researcher questions based on the handout's information. The handout outlined that each student states an initial response without questioning or comment from the other members of the group. Following that, students may begin speaking randomly

in order to discuss the story further. Students were also informed that they could at any time re-read portions of the story to clarify meaning and refresh their memories. As well, the researcher made it clear that it was not necessary for the groups to reach consensus; the purpose was for students to work together to make sense of the short story. Because the students were familiar with working together in small groups to discuss literature, most of the students asked questions of clarification, rather than questions indicating initial bewilderment.

The format of each of the four reading and response sessions was the same. The sixteen students listened and read silently as I read the session's story aloud and then worked in groups of four to discuss the short story.

For the first session, I read aloud "He Swung and He Missed" by Nelson Algren. This short story, like the other three to follow, was unfamiliar to the students. After the reading, students worked in student-led groups of four to discuss for twenty to twenty-five minutes the short story. Each group's discussion session was audiotaped by placing a taperecorder in the middle of the group. The students were responsible for turning on and off the tape recorders when I indicated the beginning and end of discussion time. If there was time remaining in the class, each group's chosen reporter presented the group's discussion to the rest of the class for the purpose of having a whole class discussion. Any reporting back and whole class discussions that occurred were not part of the research data.

To begin talking about each short story, students were to share around the group their initial responses to the story. These responses could be questions, likes, dislikes, interpretations, analogies, etc. The students were not to comment about each other's responses until each member of the group had an opportunity to speak.

Following the initial responses, students could comment freely about the story and each other's statements. As a means of relating their ideas to the text, they were encouraged to reread aloud portions of the story at any time and could decide to discuss the story page by page. Toward the end of the session, it was suggested that groups skim the story and review their discussion to get an overall sense of what they talked about. The review process also enabled the reporter to present a complete sense of the group's discussion should there be time left in the class for a reporting back session.

Sessions two, three, and four followed the same procedure as session one. The only difference was that instead of discussing another short story from *75 Short Masterpieces* (1983), the students discussed short stories selected from previous English 12 provincial examinations. The stories selected were "Penny in the Dust" by Ernest Buckler, "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" by Morley Callaghan, and "The Friday Everything Changed" by Anne Hart. Each of the stories used in the sessions was chosen because of its length -- it could be read aloud in five to ten minutes. The four stories were also used because each was stylistically

quite different and seemed to be both interesting and challenging for students in grade twelve. For instance, "He Swung and He Missed" is a descriptive story about life's challenges and boxing; "Penny in the Dust" is a retrospective look at a childhood event; "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" is a descriptive vignette of a couple's relationship; and "The Friday Everything Changed" is an account of an event involving boys and girls at school. Each of the four sessions followed each other according to the scheduled timetable.

During the audio-taped discussion sessions, I recorded field observations to capture a sense of the classroom setting, the students' attitudes and behaviour, involvement and participation, body language, and group dynamics. The field notes were also to provide information about the general ambience of the classroom. To record the notes, I conducted timed observations for three to five minutes for each group and sometimes for the class as a whole. The notes consisted of key comments, physical descriptions, and general overview statements.

After the four sessions were completed, some of the sixteen students participated in an audio-taped retrospective interview that took place during one noon hour. Because of the students' time commitments (e.g. completing a poetry unit, study sessions, homework, examinations, team sports, jobs), it was not possible to interview all of the sixteen students, nor was it possible to interview them during class time or after school. One complete group of students (the academically average group) and some selected students from the other three groups composed the two interview groups. Each of the two groups was interviewed for fifteen minutes. Students selected to participate in the retrospective interview demonstrated a willingness to offer ideas and opinions. They were also students who were able to attend the interview session which took place outside of class time.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained why they had been asked to participate in the interview process and that I was not looking for right or wrong answers to my questions. The interviews consisted of the students in each interview group addressing the following items after I presented each item for consideration.

1. General comments about working in small groups to discuss short stories, e.g. likes/dislikes, concerns, questions, etc.
2. Thoughts about discussing short stories in small student-led groups in comparison to working individually answering assigned questions.
3. Thoughts about the teacher's role when discussing short stories in class, e.g. comments about traditional teacher-led discussions in comparison to small group discussions.
4. Thoughts about whether or not the students felt that learning was taking place during the small group discussions, e.g. did they pick up ideas and strategies from each other about how to make sense of stories?

5. Closing comments, e.g. any questions, comments/ideas about the process, etc.

Basically, the interviews gave the students an opportunity to share their thoughts about the student-led, small group response procedure as a means of developing response to and understanding of literature.

After each session, I wrote in my researcher's journal. The purpose of the journal was to write an overview of what occurred during each session and to capture any thoughts and feelings that I may have had during the session. As well, writing in the journal enabled me to reflect on how the research was progressing. Essentially, my journal was intended to provide me with time to contemplate through writing and be another source of data about the sessions themselves.

Analysis of the Data

Data from the study were analysed inductively. Although specific systems for classifying levels and patterns of response exist that could be applied, classifications were determined from what was present in the students' oral response discussions in conjunction with existing analytical rubrics. The primary data for the study were derived from the small group discussion sessions, while the retrospective interviews, field notes, and researcher's journal were secondary sources of information.

1. Small Group Response Analysis

The audio-tapes were transcribed so that content could be analysed. The response categories were determined from what was apparent in the transcriptions. However, other researchers' analytical rubrics were referred to as well. Based on the superficial content analysis that was done for the pilot study tapes, certain researchers' classifications seemed more useful than others. For instance, Dias's (1987) four patterns of response - paraphrasers, allegorizers, thematisers, and problem-solvers - seemed possible to use together with Purves and Rippere's (1968) four elements of response - engagement-involvement, perception, interpretation, and evaluation. Thomson's (1987) six level developmental model of response: (1) unreflective interest in action, (2) empathizing, (3) analogizing, (4) reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour, (5) reviewing the whole work as a construct, and (6) consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes (p. 360), also appeared useful. But as stated previously, the method of analysis evolved from the content of the discussion sessions.

A further reason the content analysis needed to evolve was my inability to predict how students in small student-led groups would discuss short stories. It was crucial that the data analysis remain open to unexpected features that might be present. Furthermore, the imposition of another researcher's analysis scheme could result in data pertinent to the study being overlooked.

Basically, I undertook the following procedures to analyse the content of the discussion sessions' transcripts. I read each line of the 300+ page transcripts carefully. Initially, I wrote analysis comments for each speaking turn in sessions one to four of Group One, the academically average group. I read the complete set of transcripts for Group One simply as a starting place. But also in order to familiarize myself with Group One -- the homogeneous group -- and to get a sense of how the discussion sessions might progress from beginning to end for any group. Next, I completed the same process for Groups Two, Three, and Four, except that the analysis was not done speaking turn by speaking turn. Instead, I grouped the transcript's lines according to topic or what was being talked about.

The second stage of the analysis involved reading through my initial analysis comments to determine whether there were any general categories of response and group dynamics. Following the categorizing procedure, I reread all my analysis notes and transcripts again and wrote summary descriptions of each group's four discussion sessions. Finally, I analysed the summary descriptions in terms of the study's questions and the categories of response and group dynamics.

Because the study's subjects were grade twelve students, I analysed the content of the data in terms of how the responses in student-led group discussions began. In relation to starting levels of response, I also analysed how response in a small group discussion evolves and whether the choice of short story makes a difference? A range of reading strategies and experiences were expected because of the students' ages and grade level. Thus, I analysed the content of the groups' discussions to determine whether or not they used strategies for making meaning, whether or not they referred to personal experience to make sense of the stories, and whether or not they used their knowledge of literary elements when discussing short stories. Group behavioural dynamics was also a focus for the analysis. Do groups vary in the ways they approach and respond to short stories? How does the make up of the groups affect the response to literature? The areas of analysis stated above, were not only analysed to provide me with information related to the study's questions and future areas of study, but they were also analysed with the goal of being able to provide teachers with information regarding student-led small group discussions of short stories.

2. Interview Analysis

The two retrospective group interviews with different students in the class were analysed to determine their responses to the small group response procedure. The analysis revealed what they think they learned about literature, their thoughts about working with their peers in small student-led groups, and their thoughts in general about responding to literature in small groups. Furthermore, the interview data provided background information needed to complete the information contained in the transcriptions.

3. Field Notes Analysis

The field notes were analysed to complete the picture of the setting in which the study occurred. The subjects' attitudes, levels of participation, and group behaviour were more apparent as a result of the field notes than if only the audio-tapes' transcriptions had been used. Essentially, analysis of the field notes was undertaken to provide supplemental information for the study.

C. Limitations of the Study

The results of this study will have limited generalizability because of the sample size, the number of sessions, and the skewed population. Because only sixteen grade twelve students, who were not selected randomly, participated in the case study, large scale generalizations about levels of response, development of response, and influence of peer group discussion is not possible. Other limitations imposed upon the study may be the method of data collection (audio-taping) and the influence of being part of a research project. It will, however, be possible to draw conclusions about this group of students, or others who fit the same description.

Chapter IV: Findings

A. Introduction - Four Stories of Four Groups

In this chapter, I will tell the four stories of the four groups involved in the study of how small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the classroom context of discussing short stories. As outlined in the previous chapter, four groups consisting of four students each participated in four discussion sessions. The discussion sessions,which were audiotaped, took place after I read the stories aloud.

Initially I used the study's five sub-questions as a heuristic for analysing the data.

1. How does response to literature evolve in small student-led group discussions? For instance, is there an initial focus and where does it go from there?
2. Are there clearly identifiable patterns in students' responses during their small group discussions? For instance, what tends to be discussed; what strategies do the students use?
3. Which aspects of story do students in groups tend to focus upon?
4. What influence does the choice of short story have upon the group discussions?
5. Do groups appear to vary in the ways they approach and respond to a short story?

The questions were also to serve as the overall structure for reporting my observations of what happened during the research process. However, content analysis of the resulting data revealed that although each group was similar in many respects, each group was also richly individualistic. The more I looked at and thought about the data, the more it seemed that the student-led discussion groups deserved consideration as unique entities. In other words, it was important to tell each group's story individually instead of collapsing them under the umbrella of the study's five sub-questions.

Before I tell each group's story, I want to give the reader a sense of some of the broad categories of responses and group behavioural dynamics that were present during the groups' discussions. By no means do these categories and behaviours represent everything that occurred; they do, however, serve as a meaningful schema for the groups' stories.

In terms of response categories, these four evolved.

1. **literary elements**
   - discussion involving character, plot, theme, point of view, setting, mood and tone, symbolism, story titles.
2. **personal response**
   - discussion involving personal experience and knowledge, analogy, engagement and involvement, role play, feeling/expressing empathy, wondering, predicting, speculation about alternatives beyond the text, being aware of one's own reading process.
3. **interpretation**
   - discussion involving analysis/interpretation, inferring, synthesis, questions, reflecting on significance of events/behaviour, expressing confusion, hypothesis, speculation, paraphrasing, referring to the text - reading specific segments or drawing on one's memory of the story.
4. **evaluation**
   - discussion involving reviewing the whole work as a construct, critiquing quality, expressing like/dislike and explaining why, being aware of author's construction of text.

Group dynamics or individual behaviours seem to fall into four categories.

1. **expressing agreement and support**
2. **elaborating and clarifying**
3. **contradicting and expressing a different opinion**
4. **directing the discussion either by one individual or collaboratively as a group.**

B. Group One's Story

Overview

Group One consists of three boys (S., J., and A.) and one girl (R.). They are a group of students whom the teacher considered academically average. Originally I wanted to see if an academically homogeneous group would respond and make sense of the short stories differently than academically heterogeneous groups. Whether or not Group One actually discussed the four short stories in a manner that was different from the other groups will be seen as their respective stories are told.

R. is Group One's self-elected chairperson or leader. There is never any discussion about who should chair the group. R. naturally assumes the role of chairperson. She, more often than the others, directs the focus of the discussion, checks to see how much time is left, keeps the others on task, and encourages others to offer ideas. "You have to find something. Let S. do his" (Story 2, l. 124). This is not to say that other members of the group do not display some of the aforementioned behaviours. She does, however, display real leadership behaviours and works hard to keep the group on task. "A.! Other than that -- um -- so, now what do we think of the plot and the characters and the theme?" (Story 1, ll. 33-4).

R.'s chairperson role may have something to do with stereotypical female behaviour and innate leadership abilities, but it may also be the simple result of the three boys' personalities and attitudes toward discussing literature. For instance, A. displays less interest in the four stories than the others in the group, and he is often more negative about the stories than the others. "Well the story's okay um... It's not exciting" (Story 2, ll. 383-5). S. and J. are somewhat positively inclined toward the stories. For instance, S. comments quite differently from A. about the second story. "I think it's quite the awesome story" (Story 2, l. 375). J., on the hand, requires encouragement from the other members in the group to offer interpretations and related personal experiences.

A. What were you going to say. Go on, seriously.
J. No, no.
A. Seriously.
J. No.
A. Just say it. Just say it.

(Story 1, ll. 143-47)

He seems to be a shy student who might not have spoken at all in traditional teacher-led discussions of literature.

Although every story exerts its unique influence upon the group's discussion process, the group's discussion session did tend to follow a certain pattern. Usually, the discussion sessions opened with the group making statements that were rather general. These statements tended to fall into four categories. First, they might evaluate the story as a whole, or parts of it. "I thought the story - I didn't think it was that great ..." (Story 3, l. 31). Secondly, they expressed whether or not they felt personally engaged with the story. "I enjoyed the story because it was really based on a lot about the sex roles in which we are forced to play ..." (Story 4, ll. 6-8). Thirdly, they often stated what they thought the story's theme or purpose was such as in the above example.

What tended to happen next during their discussions was rather interesting. The discussions seemed to follow an organizational format similar to a traditional five paragraph

essay. The body of each discussion session focussed on specific details, such as character and plot. The conclusion of each session, to continue the analogy, returned to the general focus of the introductions, i.e. theme, evaluation, and/or engagement. For instance, R. evaluates the ending in her concluding statement for story one's session. "Okay, my conclusion is I like the ending in a way it's kinda cute but um he lost what he had because he was going to cheat" (Story 1, ll. 236-7). The preceding statements are generalizations based on my analysis of the discussion sessions for each story, and, like any generalization, there are exceptions and variations on the theme.

From my field observations and discussion transcripts, Group One appeared to be argumentative, unsupportive, and less probing.

A. It's got nothing to do with sports or something.
S. Ahh.
R. No sports eh?
S. Super jock doesn't like -
A. What's that?
R. No sports eh?
A. I don't know it's all right. I didn't say I hated it or nothing like that.
R. No, you said you didn't like it.

(Story 2, ll. 407-15)

In fact, the teacher and I wondered at the end of the first discussion session whether or not we should intervene during their future discussions if the group dynamic continued in the same fashion. I decided not to intervene which was fortunate because appearances are deceptive. Upon reviewing the group's transcripts, it became apparent that while the group members contradicted each other during their discussions, they were actually engaged in lively and supportive discussions.

R. We have to say okay um that what the penny symbolizes. Then we have to say um how the father interprets it and how the son interprets it and why they're going to bury him with the penny.
J. Yeah.
S. Didn't the kid take the penny out too though?
R. No, left it there.
A. He put it back -
R. It's shiny.
R. So if he polished that penny that means everytime he took that penny out of his pocket he thought of him and his son having a good time together.
J. Yeah.

(Story 2, 314-21, 325-7)

The example cited above also indicates that even though each student speaks briefly and the level of interpretation is somewhat unsophisticated, Group One's peer response discussion sessions displayed insight.

At this point, I shall examine the discussions of each of the four stories because as stated previously, while it is possible to generalize about the four discussions, each story's discussion is unique. As well, each story's discussion provides new windows of understanding as to how student-led discussion groups work to understand and make sense of short stories.

Session One

The first story read and discussed was "He Swung and He Missed" by Nelson Algren. "He Swung and He Missed" is about a young man named Rocco whose boxing career is in its final stages. Although the story opens with reminiscences about Rocco as a student at school, most of the story is a description of Rocco's last fight. In conjunction with being unsuccessful as a boxer, Rocco's fight is clouded with confusion as to whether or not he will actually take the dive as previously arranged.

His wife, not knowing about Rocco's secret agreement, bets their last dollars on Rocco to win. She loses their money, and Rocco appears to have ended his career on a losing note. The story, set in New York City during the early twentieth century, focusses on people and events that are not typically within the students' realm of experience. This does not mean that Group One is unwilling to discuss the story and express some engagement with it. But in fact, only A., who does not like reading very much, finds the story particularly engaging.

> R. I know personally I don't like violence and I don't like boxing and that kind of thing so ...
> A. I would have tooken him on for a couple rounds.
>
> (ll. 31-2)

J. initiates the group's discussion. He focusses on Rocco's character overall and the the story's theme. "I think Rocco really did good in his life 'cause he tried hard and he -- he never got really KO'd and he -- he tried his hardest to make out the best for him and his wife" (ll. 1-2). A. also focusses on Rocco and indicates an emotional connection with the story. As well, he talks somewhat thematically about the story.

> A. It sort of seems sad 'cause ah on the first page it's sorta like there's so much hope and - fighting and get rich or whatever. At the end of his career he's got nothin really to show for it - sorta thing.
>
> (ll. 3-5)

The third person to give an initial response is R. She evaluates, positively, the story's ending and tone, and expresses engagement with Rocco's character.

> R. I like the ending. I thought it was kinda neat but um sort of in a bad way and that he wasn't mad cause he could have been like totally really upset uh that she blew all the money but he was still pretty cool about it so I like the ending. (ll. 6-8)

S. speaks last; he contradicts R. He evaluates the story's ending and Rocco's character negatively.

> S. "I don't like the ending because he - he never got any money he lost money. He tried to help his wife an he didn't. She ended up screwing him" (ll. 9-10).

Group One's initial responses analyse the story and its central character overall and evaluate the story as a construct that conforms or does not conform to their personal perspectives on life. As well, the opening statements reveal a sense of comfort and willingness to venture personal opinions.

The introductory section of the discussion concludes with the group using a variety of strategies for making sense of the characters and the story as a whole. The strategies used range from attempting to feel empathy to expressing engagement.

> R. The characters convey their difference like 'cause I guess like the way we're all in school like there's not many of us who've been here for the 5th time kind of thing. So it's kind of neat that the characters aren't very ordinary that they're different sort of but the name Rocco, the name's gotta go. But um the story was good but ...
> A. Sort of a pretty cool guy actually. (ll. 23-8)

R.'s attempt to empathize with the characters is an example of how the members of Group One tend to make sense of short stories. They seek to find the characters and events that conform with their outlook and experience.

The focus of the discussion changes from the more general nature of an introduction to consideration of specific literary elements. The group considers character, plot, and theme. Primarily, however, they talk about the central character, Rocco. Comments about Rocco include such things as he "tried hard", "never gave up", and it "says he got beat up" (ll. 35, 36, 40). As they analyse, they readily clarify and elaborate upon each other's comments.

> A. Yeah he got beat up there at the end.
> R. No, he died; he died.
> J. No, he didn't.

S. No, he never died 'cause ...
J. ... woke up in the dressing room right.

(ll. 41-5)

As the dialogue about character, plot, and theme continues, Group One employs the meaning-making strategies of inferring, analysing, and speculating.

J. Trusting that Rocco would make good and he doesn't.
R. He does make good.
S. Oh yeah, he did, yeah.
J. No, he doesn't ...
R. Making good doesn't necessarily mean winning.

(ll. 55-9)

The above segment reveals the group analysing Rocco by referring to a statement from the story about trusting that Rocco would make good. They also infer from the statement and synthesize from the story in general as to what making good means. R.'s comment about what making good means is an insightful thematic statement that develops naturally from the discourse about Rocco's character. Similarly, as they continue to discuss Rocco's character and whether or not he achieved success, thematic understanding evolves when they realize that even if all you have is the love of your wife, you have something significant.

J. I know exactly, what does he have to show for it.
R. A wife.
A. The love of his wife.
J. But that's it.

(ll. 66-9)

The third meaning-making strategy, speculation, is used by the group to move beyond the given text. Their engagement and involvement with Rocco leads them to speculate about what Rocco will do beyond the conclusion written by the author.

S. He's never going to fight again.
J. He can't. He shouldn't be doing any fighting anyways.
A. He will 'cause he needs more money right?
J. He's too beat in though he shouldn't fight anymore anyways.

(ll. 137-40)

The concluding moments of Group One's first session represent a return to making generalizations such as might be used in an essay's conclusion. Through discourse about character and plot, they demonstrate understanding of the story's themes: doing good, gaining respect, sense of pride, and possessing love.

J. Well, my conclusion is he did good in his life but I think in some ways...
A. But he gained the respect eh J.?
J. He gained respect and that he did love his wife. He had the love and but he did not have the money.
S. And he lost his pride. And he'll never fight again.
A. He has the pride. (ll. 291-295)

The comments also become more evaluative in nature. R. says, "Okay, my conclusion is I like the ending in a way it's kinda cute but um he lost what he had because he was going to cheat" (ll. 286-7).

Even though this was Group One's first discussion session, it revealed a great deal about their behavioural dynamic, their meaning-making strategies, and the shape and flow of their discussion. They were energetic and, generally, comfortable with one another. Individually, they did not probe too deeply into the story. They did, however, build upon each other's statements and disagree with each other quite readily. Chiefly, they made sense of and developed empathy for the central character and through him tried to interpret the plot and theme. Other literary elements rarely came into the discussion. Overall, they wanted to be able to relate to the story, and the behaviour of the central character was their central means of attempting to achieve that.

Session Two

The second story read and discussed was "Penny in the Dust" by Ernest Buckler. The story is told from Pete's perspective as an adult on the eve of his Father's funeral. He and his sister reminisce about the past. In particular, they talk about the time when Pete's Father gave him a shiny penny which he loses as a result of pretending it is buried treasure that will make it possible for him to buy things for his family. He then disappears and everyone thinks he is lost. The family finds Pete in his bedroom and his Father, an uncommunicative man, thinks that Pete is afraid to tell him what he did with his penny. The next day Pete and his Father come to understand one another better as a result of them finding the lost penny together. At the conclusion of the story, Pete finds the penny, still shiny, in his deceased Father's suit coat pocket.

R., once again acting as the chairperson, begins the discussion by indicating that she likes the story. "Okay. It is a good story. I liked it" (l. 5). S., the second person to speak, evaluates the story positively. "It's better than the last one" (l. 6). R. agrees with and supports S.'s comment. A., who speaks next, disagrees with R.'s and S.'s evaluations of the story. "No. I didn't like it" (ll. 8, 10). The final initial response comes from J. "I thought it was

better. It was alright. I don't know..." (ll. 9, 11). He agrees with R. and S. and evaluates the story positively, comparing it to "He Swung and He Missed". None of the opening statements is longer than one brief statement, nor do the students provide reasons for their positions. As in session one, the opening statements are global and, in particular, evaluative. It is intriguing to note that they compare this story to the previous story; they openly state their level of engagement with the text; and they do not hesitate to state an opinion that differs from their peers.

Session two moves from the introductory phase to the middle phase or body of the discussion when R. expresses confusion about the gender of the central character. S. confesses to experiencing a similar confusion. They draw upon their memory to refer back to the story to clarify the confusion.

R. Okay. Um. Okay we have our little characters. Actually at the beginning I didn't know that like it was a guy.
S. Neither did I.
R. Yeah, 'cause...
S. I thought it was a girl.
R. My sister and I. I guess like just the way we think but it wasn't until you know when she said Pete.

(ll. 22-29)

Similar to the discussion of "He Swung and He Missed", Group One focusses primarily on character and secondarily on plot as they work to make sense of "A Penny in the Dust".

S. Okay but he didn't spend that penny because it was so shiny right? He'd never seen one.
R. Like ...
S. So why was he playing with it in the dust getting it dirty?
R. No ... 'cause like he was thinking like well the penny his father gave it to him right. I think that was more the reason than the fact that it was so shiny and to say shiny was a good excuse for him because he just didn't want to admit to the fact that it was because it was his father's that he wanted it.
S. Could be.
A. I agree.

(ll. 78-86)

They also draw on many of the same meaning-making strategies used in the first session. In the example quoted above, S. and R. ask questions, infer from the story's details, and speculate about character motivation and behaviour.

A most interesting meaning-making strategy that the group uses is telling personal stories. At the instigation of R., they recount childhood stories about when they did something stupid.

R. Well, I remember um like when I like I was babysitting and my brother was younger and um we had this old clock right. Like it was really old like the things like falling apart and we were running around the house we're not supposed to run around the house when Mom and Dad aren't there right especially ... so we're running around the house and I hit the clock and it fell and it smashed it. I took a piece of gum and I tried to put it all back together again. And I put it on the shelf and you know Mom and Dad got home and I go Mom I'll set the table Mom and I'll clean everything right and she freaking out - she picks up the clock and like I'm totally freaking out thinking I'm grounded when she starts laughing. She goes did you try putting this back together. I had like pushed gum sticking out of all the ends.
A. We weren't supposed to play soccer in the back yard 'cause like it wasn't like a house here. It was in Greece. And we had these two, these two parrots.
S. You guys had parrots?
A. What's that?
S. Like cement you mean or like live parrots?
A. No live. In a cage. And I kicked the soccer ball and it went csheeeee, hit the parrot cage, the parrot cage fell and opened up and the parrots took off.

(ll. 99-107, 112-8)

By telling their personal stories, they seem to develop empathy and understanding for Pete's character and situation. During the personal story telling sequence, R. works hard to encourage J. to tell a related story from his childhood. Finally, J. tells his story "No there's another time when I was throwing my garbage away at Guildford and I threw my five dollars away so I got the maintenance person to look into the garbage for me" (ll. 144-145). The other fascinating component of the group's personal stories recounting childhood behaviour is how similar they are in theme and content to Buckler's story.

S. When I was a kid I left my red truck on the roadside.
A. And a car hit it.
R. And it rained.
S. No. Somebody came, like a paperboy or something and -
A. Stole it.
S. Stole it. And I thought I'd lost it - I started freaking out. My parents weren't even mad I was just freaking out.

(ll. 125-131)

As they examine Pete's actions and his relationship with his father more closely, they also draw on personal experience with their parents.

S. Your parents, like you were lost and you were a little kid your parents you'd hear your parents calling you right. If you were in your bed hiding you'd get in more trouble for not answering. You know if you're far away an then, that's stupid.
R. I think it would be sad that like you're a kid with that you'd be so scared of being slapped like for, you know being slapped around.
J. Especially after losing a penny.

(ll. 209-14)

J. Why would his father hit him for losing something?
S. No but -
J. That small.
S. He wouldn't hit him. Just the kid thought he would.
R. No, the kid didn't think he would hit him though.
J. Why did he hide then?
R. Because he's emotional about the fact that he had all his treasure planned and it wasn't the penny that he had lost.

(ll. 219-23, 225-7)

Essentially, the preceding statements show the group trying to decide why Pete hid after losing only a penny. What is interesting about the statements are the strategies the group uses to interpret Pete's actions. They not only refer to personal experience, but they also suggest possibilities, offer alternative interpretations, contradict each other, analyse character and plot, and infer from the text.

The exchange focussing on Pete's actions after losing the penny causes them to consider a third literary element: symbolism. "Yeah, his penny was like symbolic of his dream of him and his father going to town and having all these treasures and everyone looking at them" (ll. 258-9). As a means of discussing the penny's symbolism, the group looks again at specific actions of Pete's and his relationship with his Father.

R. Do you think, do you think what he really lost was a penny or do you think what he really lost was the fact that him and his father did something that didn't relate to like work or something. The fact that him and his father would go to town and be together and laugh. See he, him and his father never seemed to laugh so he didn't lose a penny what he lost was this dream 'cause this penny was like his dream.
S. His dream.
R. So I think what it was is that he didn't lose a penny he just lost the friendship of his father and that's what he was scared of losing.
S. He'd lost his dream of friendship with his father.
R. Like he treasures the penny. It's like a treasure. It's not a penny anymore it's, it's a dream and that's why he treasures it so much and he keeps it with him wherever he goes because it was in his favourite suit in the breast pocket. No one puts change there.

(ll. 253-7, 264-6, 288-290).

While the above examples explicitly illustrate the group working to analyse the penny's symbolism by using the strategies of questioning, inferring, speculating, elaborating, and referring to the text, they also reveal the group's implicit understanding of the story's themes: the power of love, father and son relationships, dreams and reality, and communication. Similar to the discussion in session one, Group One rarely engages in an outright deliberation of theme. They seem to understand theme through looking at other aspects of the story.

Another literary element they discuss is mood. R. talks about the mood the story evoked for her and links it to a television commercial. "Now you get kind of a neat feeling after reading it you know. I did. I thought - sort of like the Canadian Tire commercial" (ll. 41-2). J. agrees with her analysis of the story's mood, but he does not see the story as being similar to the commercial chiefly because the commercial has a different outcome. "Heartwarming. That's a very heartwarming story. Not like the Canadian Tire commercial" (l. 43). However, A. and S. follow R.'s train of thought because the story elicits a similar mood and similar childhood memories for them. Although they do not talk about mood for very long, it is significant because it is another illustration of their level of engagement and involvement with the story and their desire to relate the story to their own experiences.

For the concluding portion of session two, the group returns to generally evaluative statements about the story. A. seems to have held on to his negative evaluation of the story. The other group members question him to explain "why don't you like it?" (l. 381). S., contrary to A., wishes the story were turned into a novel. At this, A. hesitatingly endorses the story as okay. "Well the story's okay um" (l. 384). They continue to push A. to explain his position. "Yeah. Why don't you like it? Seriously I want to know why you don't like it" (l. 385). Although the others disagree with and challenge A. to elaborate upon or change his opinion of the story, they ultimately accept his right to express a different opinion about the story. This a good example of how the group might outwardly appear argumentative.

Generally, Group One has the ability to disagree coupled with a willingness to engage in lively and supportive discourse. Their group dynamic is more volatile than we will see in the other three groups. But whether their behavioural dynamic is a result of their academic background or individual personalities, in their discussion of "Penny in the Dust" they draw heavily on personal experience and anecdotes to demonstrate a strong sense of engagement and empathy for the characters.

Session Three

The third story, "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" by Morley Callaghan, is quite different from "Penny in the Dust" in that it does not contain any childhood experiences to which the students may relate. It is the story of a young married couple, expecting their first child, who begin to squabble as they are walking in a park. The tiff occurs because Mrs. Fairbanks does not think her husband understands her feelings of apprehension about the baby and their circumstances in life. The disgruntled feelings increase after Mrs. Fairbanks tries to give a seemingly down and out man money. He rejects her offer. She is disconcerted, while her husband is nonplussed. She calls her husband insensitive and declares that she does not want the baby.

Mr. Fairbanks thinks she is being foolish. His methods of consolation only irritate her more. As they walk home, they pass the man who rejected the money once again. He smiles at Mrs. Fairbanks and she smiles in return. After that, Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks walk home happily.

Interestingly, the discussion process begins with the group following one of the response process suggestions. They read the first and last paragraphs of the story aloud. Although they have read segments of the story in previous discussions, they did not follow the suggested response process so precisely before.

After reading aloud from the story, the group members give their initial responses. Similar to the other two discussions, the opening comments are more general and evaluate the story overall.

J. I thought the story - I didn't think it was that great, but because, I don't know, it just didn't seem to be too interesting to me, but, well, it's -
A. I thought the lady was like unreasonable like the husband said some of the things she said were like dumb, and I liked the story though. It was pretty good.
R. I thought the story was an interesting story, but I don't like the way the husband just wouldn't consider the woman's idea whether or not she wanted to have the child.
S. I think I agree with the man, just what A. said that she was being a bitch.
(ll. 31-45)

In the preceding comments, the students not only evaluate the story, but they also express their degree of engagement with the story, their opinion of the couple's behaviour, and their personal views on gender issues elicited by the story. As in discussion sessions one and two, the opening remarks once again have the broad scope of a typical introduction to an essay.

The body of the discussion session focusses primarily on the wife's behaviour and secondarily on the husband's behaviour. They also talk about the man on the bench. Focussing on character to understand a short story is not a new pattern for Group One. However, what is important about their focus on the literary element of character is that it excludes obvious discussion of other literary elements. Throughout the session, they work explicitly to make sense of the characters' motivations and behaviour. They do not express confusion about the plot, wonder about the setting, or try to determine the theme. Any concerns about plot, theme, or setting occur implicitly within the talk about character. For instance, in the middle of the session, A. and R. evaluate the story's ending while discussing the wife's behaviour.

A. I liked sorta here at the end where she sorta grabs his hands and then makes everything okay.
R. Okay.
A. That's sorta neat. It's the best part of the story.

R. Yeah.

(ll. 115-19)

Because character is the only literary element discussed overtly, it is informative to look at how the group goes about making sense of the story's characters. Their repertoire of meaning-making strategies is fairly extensive and reflects the style of interpretation used by the group in sessions one and two. The most widely used strategies are analysing, questioning, evaluating, inferring, speculating, referring to personal experience or knowledge, feeling empathy, expressing engagement, and role playing.

Of course, the strategies are not used in isolation. For example, during one segment of the session as they work to make sense of the wife's and husband's behaviour, they analyse, question, infer, evaluate, empathize, and refer to personal experience.

J. She doesn't have to whine about it.
R. All she wanted to do was give him a quarter, right, and he just sorta gave her a look and she felt really bad and embarrassed.
S. She should feel stupid. Wouldn't you feel stupid?
A. You say I feel dumb and you just don't keep going on and on and on about it.
R. Well, what are they supposed to talk about?
A. They're husband and wife. I'm sure they could find something.
S. The story could have been ended on the second page. They dragged it.
R. I think the husband is very unreasonable in that like she didn't want to have her child. She is like saying, you know, I don't feel this and this.

(ll. 61-74)

The interest in Mrs. Fairbanks leads the group to speculate about what her first name might be, possible names for the baby, and possible names for the other characters.

R. They didn't mention her first name. I think it would be Lynn, if she had a first name.
J. Lynn Fairbanks.
R. Yeah.
A. Sure.
J. Okay, what are we going to name the kid?
S. And what about his name?
R. Bill.
S. George.

(ll. 190-98)

This type of speculation indicates engagement with the characters and the story.

The group's discussion becomes a little off topic after speculating about characters' names and R., acting as chairperson, brings them back on topic by commenting that she liked how the man on the bench smiled at Mrs. Fairbanks.

R. It was kinda neat the way the bum turned around and he smiled at her -
J. Yeah.
A. He knew she felt bad.
R. I guess in a way the reason he smiled was because first of all when they walked by, right, they were a totally happy little couple, and he was like rrrrr and then when they were like fighting.
A. No, she was like RRRRRRRR.
S. Yeah, he was too though.
A. No, he wasn't.
R. And when they were fighting the bum decides it's kinda funny because not everyone's life is so perfect, so he decides he's going to grin at it.
A. He smiled because he knew he ruined their day.
A. But he realized -
S. Who did?
A. - that she made an honest mistake. That's why she smiled at him.
S. That's the answer. It's the whole meaning of the story. You just figured it out.
(ll. 206-22, 228-33, 241-2)

By inferring from the few details provided in the story about the bum, they not only interpret the man's behaviour, but they also interpret the story as a whole. This is another example of how they focus on character in their discussion, but through talking about character they often discern other things about the story such as theme.

During the general discourse about the Fairbanks, an unusual form of understanding the couple's behaviour is used briefly by R. and S. when they suggest alternative dialogue for the characters.

S. So he agrees with her. What's he supposed to do? If he disagrees, then she starts talking again.
R. No, he's not just disagreeing, he could just say, 'It's okay, honey, it's an honest mistake'. Would it be so hard for him to be a little sympathetic?
A. No.
S. Then she would have said, 'It's not okay'.
(ll. 451-457)

In a sense, they are role playing and speculating at the same time. The use of alternative dialogue is unusual for Group One, but it does highlight the degree of empathy and engagement that the group has with the story's characters.

As session three draws to a close, the group continues to analyse and speculate about the characters. They focus chiefly on Mrs. Fairbanks, but at the same time consider Mr. Fairbanks and the man on the bench as well. They also consider bigger issues raised by the story such as gender issues, moral dilemmas, and consideration of who has control over getting and remaining pregnant.

R. But A. are you saying it's her fault - that it's her fault that she's pregnant?
A. Well, I never said - J. said it was her fault.

R. So if it's her fault -
J. I never said it was her fault.
R. Okay, but -
A. It's obviously both of them's fault.
S. You don't think it was a planned kid?
R. No.
J. Yeah, it was.
A. Yeah.
S. I think it was. I think she changed her mind after.
A. Yeah.
R. No.
S. She's having second thoughts now.
J. Well, I think that sums it up then.
R. Go ahead. What are you going to say? And if you say it's the woman's fault about this argument, I'm going to bop you.
S. Yeah, but that's not the whole point of the story is whose fault the argument was.
R. No, it's just that's the point they made -
J. What is the point of this story?
R. Okay, the point of this story is that they were married and they got through a little argument which is cool that they got through it, I think it's cool that they got through it, and that incident about the bum just helped to show how close they really are and how they got through it.

(ll. 649-675)

The session concludes with them making general statements similar to the discussions of sessions one and two.

As stated previously, throughout the session Group One focussed on the characters, and the relationship of the husband and wife in particular. Group One's energy and comfort with one another fostered a discussion session that had a lively, argumentative tone. Their ability to be supportive and contrary helped them consider various interpretations of characters' behaviours. Even though they never developed a consciously elaborated theme statement, never fully understood the role of the man on the bench, and paid scant attention to the author and his construction of the story, Group One was very engaged with making sense of how men and women, i.e. Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks, behave during arguments and pregnancy. Their overwhelming interest in the characters' motivations, behaviour, and relationships seems to demonstrate their interest in identifying with characters in stories and having them relate to their personal experience.

Session Four

The last story read and discussed, "The Friday Everything Changed" by Anne Hart, is similar to "Penny in the Dust" in that many of the characters are children and the plot revolves

around an event from childhood. There is much in the story that students can relate to experientially.

Essentially, the story is about how the girls in a one-room school, with a young first year teacher, got to carry the water bucket. Before this change of events, only the boys carried the water bucket. The change, of course, does not come about without a struggle. The boys fight the girls blatantly and deviously for a week, but eventually the boys are unsuccessful because Miss Ralston stepped up to bat one lunch hour and hit a magnificent home run. That afternoon she announced that Alma Niles and Joyce Shipley would carry the water bucket next week.

The group begins its discussion with each member of the group giving an initial response to the story. Each one of them evaluates the story positively.

> S. It's a good story. I liked it.
> J. I thought it was a good story also, because, I don't know, it was a conflict between boys and girls in elementary school. It seemed like pretty good.
> R. I enjoyed the story because it was really based on a lot about the sex roles in which we are forced to play with or I guess what I'm saying is, you know, girls are allowed to be tomboys, when guys aren't allowed to be sissy's, but in this case the girls got to do what was considered to be only a guy's thing.
>
> (ll. 2-12)

J. and R. give reasons as to why they like the story. Their opening comments also delve into the story's theme and male/female conflict. One of the group, A., draws on personal experience. He relates the story to the television show, *Little House on the Prairie.*

> A. I thought it was good. It reminded me of those *Little House on the Prairie* stories. I thought it was funny that the guys beat up the girls though. Well, it wasn't funny, it was sorta mean, but I don't know, it was sorta odd that they'd beat up the girls when they couldn't get their way.
>
> (ll. 15-19)

As in the three previous sessions, the discussion opens with general statements. Their personal readings of the story are synthesized into brief opening statements. Also like the previous sessions, the group focusses on evaluating the story, expressing engagement with the story, referring to personal experience, and analysing theme and character. The final segment of the introductory comments or initial responses has the group reading the opening and closing paragraphs of the story as suggested by the response process guidelines. Group One's chairperson, R., directs them to read the paragraphs and they comply with her.

Literary elements provide the framework for the body of Group One's discussion of "The Friday Everything Changed". As they talk about the story through the elements of character, plot, setting, theme, and symbolism, they use a variety of meaning-making strategies.

The first literary element Group One discusses is setting. They refer to personal experience to determine where and when the story took place. In this case personal experience refers to their viewing of *Little House on the Prairie.*

S. - it's not just elementary.
J. Younger kids.
A. It's like *Little House on the Prairie.*
S. *Little House on the Prairie.* All in one class.
J. All grades in one class.

(ll. 78-82)

Later in the session, they return to trying to determine what the setting is. Inferring and questioning are two strategies they use. For instance, J. infers that the story takes place in a city, but asks why they have to walk distances. "It was in the city though. How do they - why do they have to walk a quarter of a mile?" (ll. 211-2). J.'s comment and question about the story's setting inspires much discussion among the group about the location and time period. They settle on a country setting after R. says, "No, it was a school in the country because they all had to get their water from the pump by the river" (ll. 220-1). Determining the time period of the story is another matter. For 88 speaking turns, they speculate, infer, and draw on personal knowledge and experience to reach a sense of when the story occurred.

J. Maybe the twenties then?
A. I think the twenties.
R. No, but see, like -
S. Yeah, but *Little House on the Prairie* wasn't mentioned then.

(ll. 242-5)

S. Paragraph 16?
A. And the television came through in the 40s.
R. Yeah, so it's before the television.
A. About seven years before the television.
J. Yeah, you know. Okay.

(ll. 280-4)

Even though the exploration of setting eventually drifts off topic, it is interesting to observe the meaning-making strategies the group uses, particularly the use of personal experience.

The primary focus of the session is character. Even their analysis and questions about plot, the second most talked about literary element, occur within the character discussions. For instance, as part of talking about the boys and girls playing baseball, S. states, "It's a conflict between the boys and the girls" (l. 340). The first 36 speaking turns on the topic of character involve only the boys. They analyse and make inferences about characters' behaviour and draw on personal experience to talk about male/female roles.

A. Yeah, the boys are always trying to outdo the girls.

S. Yeah, that's how it is in elementary too.
A. Not any more though.
J. Not much, anyway.
A. No, I mean in elementary schools. I don't think that now.
J. Well, no.
S. Why is it?
A. Women's Lib.
J. Yeah, that's what it is.

(ll. 83-91)

The discussion of character focusses on reflecting on the significance of the boys', girls', and teacher's behaviour and analysing the characters' motivations for acting in the ways they do. For example, R.'s reflective evaluation of the teacher's gesture at the end of the story reveals the overall significance of the characters' behaviour.

R. Okay. I think the last line is kinda cool. It's like she swept her hand over the top of her desk, a tiny desk - I guess what had been really building up was like the girls wanted to carry the water for a long time, and it's been building up just like dust builds up, and finally, after hitting that ball, and after announcing that the girls were going to carry the water, she removed that dust. She sent it flying, so she's the one that actually got the dreams of the girls being equal to guys.

(ll. 123-30)

A.'s subsequent question leads the group to analyse the characters' motivations. "Do you think they always wanted to carry the water though" (l. 131)? Different opinions are given by A. and R., but, interestingly, R. builds on A.'s interpretation to develop her own analysis.

A. I don't think half of them even thought about it until that one -
R. No, they didn't think about it because it wouldn't be prudent. Like, it wasn't acceptable for them to think about it.

(ll. 134-5).

Chiefly, however, they discuss the significance of the characters' behaviour. And because the characters are not developed individually as much as they are developed as a group of girls and a group of boys, they draw on their knowledge of male/female behaviour and traditional versus nontraditional gender roles to make sense of the characters' actions and attitudes.

S. The boys have their jobs, the girls have their jobs, right?
A. No.
R. No, no, no. Because then you're saying the bigger they are -
S. The smarter they are.
R. No, I don't think size has anything to do with their intellect. But, it has a lot to do with sex type roles. I was just reading an article on Thursday that had something to do with - it's about how when kids are younger and their parents think it is okay for little girls to be tomboys and stuff. But little Johnny or whatever, he's not allowed to play with dolls and stuff. I just think like it's similar to that right here because in those days little girls weren't allowed to

carry the water, but it was okay for, you know, the guys to, and I just don't think it's fair at all.

(ll. 367-81).

The outcome of the preceding comments is an evaluation of the story by R. and to some degree an analysis of the story's theme as well.

R. Yeah. But I just think that was great for women's movement and I'm really impressed with the story. It's cute too.

(ll. 399-400).

In the concluding portion of session four, Group One agrees with each other's evaluations of the story.

R. It's cute too.
A. I thought it was cool.
S. Yeah.
J. I thought it was good.

(ll. 400-4)

They also spend time deciding who will be the group's reporter, synthesizing the story's details to complete their sense of its overall meaning, and referring to personal experience to make sense of the characters' behaviour.

A. Who's the reporter here, R. or S.? One of you two.
S. R. can do it.
A. Okay, what are we going to say?
J. Fighting for the equality.
A. It's sort of exaggerated though too.
R. What?
A. The story, just to make it long.
R. But what's exaggerated though?
A. Because the guys wouldn't have really beat the girls.
R. Have you seen little kids in a playground?
A. They wouldn't have beat them though.
R. Yes, they would. Little kids.

(ll. 430-32, 440-49)

And although they all enjoyed the story, by no means is there consensus within the group about its meaning and significance. Yet, they do listen to R.'s analysis of the story's conclusion.

S. Why? You're always the one that is contradicting yourself.
A. I just think it had to like -
R. Okay, let's decide what we should say.
A. I think it depended on her - if the water would have been -

R. Okay. When we're reporting back, I think we should mention that - okay, we should mention the last line how she does the dust thing.
J. Okay, what did you say about that?
R. She swept her hand over the top of her desk, the tiny desk -- and so she's like removing the dust, and like, so I guess all that was building up, dust built up, just like the girls desire to carry the water.
A. Okay, but what does the dust represent?
R. The little girls desire to carry the water, and it built up, and you don't always notice it, just like you don't always notice dust until it finally thickens up. Just like no one noticed that they really wanted to carry the water.
S. Why don't you say that?

(ll. 539-555)

Because "The Friday Everything Changed" is about a male/female conflict at school, Group One was able to understand the story by relating to the characters which is an important strategy for them. In general, their repertoire of meaning-making strategies and literary elements was broader for this story than it was, for example, in their discussion of "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks", which may be because "The Friday Everything Changed" was easier for them to interpret. They had more prior experience and knowledge to draw upon.

C. Group Two's Story

Overview

Group Two has three girls (V., P. and C.) and one boy (E.) in it. This group is heterogeneous, academically and personally. While Group Two possesses similarities to Group One, it does function differently. For instance, there does not seem to be one person who chairs the discussion sessions. As well, Group Two, in contrast to Group One, does not read passages from the text as a possible way to revisit the story before beginning their discussion sessions.

In general, Group Two functioned with less internal controversy and contradiction than Group One. They also tended to talk more extensively for each speaking turn.

P. I don't understand what he means, what she believes why he did it, I guess. Well, I guess that he didn't get knocked out, but he didn't accomplish anything, so I don't really understand the point of the story besides the fact that he was a fighter and he didn't give up, but he didn't get anything out of it. I mean, he graduated but he still hasn't done anything with his life really and they're both poor. They've got nothing left. And I agree with V. about, and understand how his wife, why would she put money on there? It didn't seem that she's that type tp put the money down. She seems the type to be responsible with money and it's sort of ironic that she never, he said he never gambled all his life as well.

(Story 1, Session 1, ll. 14-26)

Perhaps as a result of each person talking at greater length, the discussions seemed to probe more deeply into the stories. For example, the concluding speaking turns from Session 1 reveal the group's interpretation of "He Swung and He Missed".

E. - but still they had each other and they will always be happy whether he quits boxing or not.
C. I think so because they didn't have the money before he had the hundred dollars, and now he doesn't have it again, so.
V. So it's sorta like it doesn't matter if he wins or loses ...
E. You give your best.
V. Yeah, you've given it your best, and you're satisfied with what you've done.
(Story 1, Session 1, ll. 421-29)

Group Two, in comparison to Group One, tended to talk about the stories through the framework of the literary elements and use more strategies for comprehending the stories.

From my field observations, Group Two functioned well together. As they talked about the stories, they leaned toward each other and listened carefully to what each person was saying. There was also much smiling and laughing.

But as I said for Group One, the discussion sessions for each story reveal better than anything the similarities and differences of each group.

Session One

Group Two's discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" begins, in one respect, quite differently from Group One's discussion. The obvious difference is in the length of each student's initial response to the story. Group Two's responses include not only personal statements of engagement and evaluation, but also expressions of confusion, character analysis, and considerations of theme.

V. I was kinda confused about if he took the dive or not and I guess, well, E. explained to me that he did and he won by points, ah, the other guy won by points. But, ah, the thing I don't understand is why would his wife put all that money on him? I though she would have rather bought something for herself, or ...
E. I kinda like the story because, um, I don't know, I admire people who keep on trying once they've, like they've been put down a lot and they've never been given much to, to start with. After like his graduation and, ah, and ah, just this fighting period it shows that he's, that he's a true fighter and just keeps on going, like he rolls with the punches and doesn't give up.
P. I don't understand what he means, what she believes why he did it, I guess. Well, I guess that he didn't get knocked out, but he didn't accomplish anything, so I don't really understand the point of the story besides the fact that he was a fighter and he didn't give up, but he still get anything out of it. I mean, he graduated but he still hasn't done anything with his life really and they're both

poor. They've got nothing left. and I agree with V. about, and understand how his wife, why should she put money on there? It didn't seem that she's that type to put the money down. She seems the type to be responsible with money and it's sort of ironic that she never, he said he never gambled all his life as well.

C. I really don't know what to say. I don't really understand the whole story. I don't know. He - V. said that, um, he had lost by points but I think he got knocked out and all this but I don't know. We've already talked about that.

(ll. 2-31)

Even though they are confused and ask questions about the story, the group seems to start its discussion at a different level of understanding than Group One. Group Two seems more aware of not only what they understand, but also what they do not understand. Their first reading has not left them with a clear understanding of the story's purpose.

Groups One and Two consider some of the same literary elements while talking about "He Swung and He Missed": character, plot, and theme. However, Group Two more consciously approaches the story through the framework of the literary elements and they use approximately twice as many meaning-making strategies.

Throughout the session, Group Two discusses all the characters in the story: Rocco, his wife, Lili, Uncle Mike, and Miss Donahue. But, Rocco is their central focus. In the following segment, Group Two uses the strategies of analysing, inferring, and referring to the text to understand Rocco's behaviour and motivations. It also illustrates how they function together as a group. They readily elaborate upon and agree with each other's ideas. However, their willingness to be supportive does not stop them from offering different interpretations such as V.'s statement in the following segment.

E. Rocco is kinda like a guy of tradition because at the very end he says like "that was young Rocco from graduation day. He always did it the hard way, but he did it."

C. He always did what he had to do.

E. Yeah. He didn't take any shortcuts or try to do anything any easier than it's supposed to be done. He was always did it like that.

V. The way I sort of thought of it was that he sort of did take the shortcut. He didn't go to school and he --

C. He did, he graduated.

(ll. 119-28)

They also engage in speculation beyond the confines of the story as they discuss Rocco's future after boxing.

C. I think, personally I think he would sort of end up in a gym or something, being a coach.

P. Like another Uncle Mike in a way.

E. If he went into a gym, it would be kinda cool because he's been through boxing

quite a bit ...

V. I can't see him in boxing anymore because of like the way he sort of let them all go, like he doesn't want to have to do anything with it anymore.

(ll. 351-2, 355, 361-2, 373-5)

Group Two rarely analyses Lili, Rocco's wife, as a character in her own right. They look at her in terms of her relationship with Rocco and wonder what she saw in Rocco. "She doesn't see Rocco as, like, he might be an ugly guy, say, but he's a fighter, right, but she's more into his personality, like, what he's really like under the skin ... " (ll. 277-9). As they discuss Lili, C. reveals her ability to make inferences from the text and her ability to be aware of the images that she sees in her mind as she reads. "I could picture her being very small and frail, like a very tiny little girl" (ll. 291-2). In addition, Group Two speculates as to why Lili bet all the money on Rocco instead of buying shoes and other necessary things.

E. She might have done it, like, when somebody has a hockey game, and a bunch of friends come and watch, it makes them less self-confident on the ice.

E. She might have just done it to ...

C. For a little bit of support.

(ll. 300-1, 304-5)

As they discuss the story's characters, they not only analyse the characters as human beings who have aspirations and relationships, but also consider the characters as types constructed by the author.

P. The dynamic central character. She changed him.

C. Yeah.

V. Well, yeah, he changed after.

C. Lili seemed kinda flat. She sorta just seemed like the kind of girl that would just stand by and you know.

V. Uncle Mike is like his manager.

C. His manager.

V. Right.

C. He kinda changed, like, he was kinda weird but he knew what Rocco wanted in life.

(ll. 161-63, 166-7, 171-75)

The preceding segment is an example of how Group Two is able to use knowledge of the literary elements as part of their discussion of the characters.

While Group Two usually considers plot while discussing character, there are times when they talk directly about a certain event in the story. For instance, C. is bewildered by the outcome of the boxing match. She reads aloud the end of the fight.

C. It says, right near the end there it says, "Rocco spun half way around and stood looking sheepishly out at the the rows. Kid Class saw only his man's back." Therefore obviously, he was knocked out. He was out on his feet. "He walked slowly along the ropes, tapping them idly with his glove and smiling

vacantly down at the newspapermen, who smiled back. Solly looked at Ryan. Ryan nodded toward Rocco. Kid Class came up fast behind his man and threw a left under the armpit, flush onto the front of his chin. Rocco went forward on the ropes and hung there, his chin catching the second strand and hung on and on, like a man decapitated."

(ll. 44-55).

Her confusion about the boxing match is taken up by the rest of the group and there is much back and forth inferring from the story's details about whether or not Rocco was knocked out.

C. If he went down, so ...
E. And no bell went ring. How far ...
C. It doesn't say. Then after it says he was decapitated. It says he came to in the locker room under the stands.
P. So we're missing that little scene there, I guess.
C. We don't know exactly.

(ll. 65-70)

Interestingly, as they talk about the fight and Rocco's character, they also consider the author and his role as the constructor of the story when P. mentions that they are missing a scene. It seems that to some degree they are aware that authors make decisions to include certain events and to exclude other events.

The other literary element that Group Two discusses is theme. They do not ask each other directly about the theme. Consideration of the story's theme arises as a result of talking about other components of the story. For instance, P. evaluates the story positively. "I liked the story" (l. 73). E. also evaluates the story and its characters. And from his consideration of the characters' behaviour, he analyzes the story's theme.

E. I don't know, it's just kinda cool how they don't have much but they've got each other.

(ll. 88-9)

After E.'s statement, C. and P. praise him for being so profound which is an example of the group's supportive and agreeable dynamic.

C. Oow, that's profound.
P. Yeah, I like that. I like that thought.

(ll. 90-1)

Later in the session, E. offers another interpretation of story's theme after the group has been analysing Rocco's character at great length.

E. "I guess it kinda has to do with how money affects our lives... we start to cherish the things that wouldn't normally mean much to people"

(ll. 150-4).

Once again the other group members support his thematic analysis.

One literary element that Group Two discusses that Group One does not is symbolism. Symbolic interpretations are suggested by E. and C. as a means of building a clearer picture of Rocco's character.

E. His wife can be like a symbol of hope because that's his main inspiration. The reason why he wants to win, to try to get some money so he can please his wife.
C. Yeah. The boxing can symbolize his struggle with life.
(ll. 191-4)

These statements may represent students taking the search for symbolic meaning too far. Nevertheless, C. and E.'s statements are examples of how Group Two uses their knowledge of literary elements to help them understand Rocco's character

At the conclusion of the session, the group considers ideas and analyses of a more general nature which reflects the prevailing shape of the groups' discussion sessions: begin generally, become specific, and end generally. They use the meaning-making strategies of analysis and synthesis to make global pronouncements about the characters' attitudes and to suggest possible themes for the story.

C. They lost it. They lost everything, but that's what Lili wanted, and I think that's why he wasn't that upset because it was for Lili that he got the money.
V. So it's sorta like it doesn't matter if he wins or loses ...
E. You give it your best.
V. Yeah, you've given it your best, and you're satisfied with what you've done.
C. Yeah. This is all.
(ll. 417-9, 425-30)

Generally, Group Two built and elaborated upon each other's ideas; they supported and agreed with each other; and they demonstrated problem solving behaviour in their approach to making meaning. In contrast to Group One, they rarely referred to personal experience as a strategy for understanding the story. This may be because of how they worked as a group to interpret the story or it may be because the group consisted of three girls and only one boy. The three girls may have found it difficult to relate personally to a story about a boxer's last fight. One of the most interesting things about Group Two's discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" was the number of meaning-making strategies they used in contrast to group one. Group One had a repertoire of about seven meaning-making strategies; whereas, Group Two had a repertoire of about eleven meaning-making strategies. The shape of their first discussion session was also less obviously general to specific to general, or essay shape, than Group One's. The interesting question is whether these differences will become more or less apparent in the subsequent sessions.

Session Two

Group Two begins discussing Ernest Buckler's, "Penny in the Dust" by asking questions and expressing confusion.

C. So, okay, well the obvious question is did he find the penny, like after, like when he was older, or like right after he was a kid?
P. I think he found it when he was a kid. I'm not sure.
V. I don't know. It's just -- this guy is seven right?

(ll. 3-8)

The opening questions lead to more questions about Pete, the penny, and the setting.

V. Yeah, and that's really confusing in a sense because if he's talking like the last part, he's talking about finding the penny again yesterday, meaning yesterday after the day he was like lost, or was it yesterday meaning another time yesterday, or like a different year yesterday?
E. Does this just mean like he found the penny again yesterday, is this just simply like a couple of days later when they had the special occasions thing, or I don't know?

(ll. 12-16, 22-4)

Group Two's initial responses for "A Penny in the Dust" do not follow the typical pattern of making general statements of evaluation, engagement, and theme. Instead, they focus on what is causing them to feel confused about the story. As well, they do not follow the suggested process of each person giving an initial response about the story without receiving any comments or questions or answers from other members in the group. Between each student's initial response other members of the group reply to or elaborate upon what was said. Nevertheless, the students' questions, answers, and comments create a tone of interested inquiry.

In a sense the introductory section to the session is not only different in content, but also in length because the aforementioned questions and expressions of confusion are more like the first half of the session's introductory segment. The second half of the introductory segment begins with E. saying "I don't understand this story very well" (l. 28). After E. expresses his confusion about the story, the girls offer analyses of the penny's symbolism that are also analyses of the story's theme.

P. Well, I have that same question, if he's still young or not. I guess the only other thing I got out of it was the penny just symbolized all the father's dreams or whatever, so he kept those dreams polished.
C. I kinda thought the penny represented the bond between the two. The first time they actually really related and vocalized their -- like in some kind of a way to each other, rather than just know that they love each other, but couldn't say it. That's what I thought it symbolized.

V. Yeah, and the penny helped us to see through that, like an object. I mean, it's not like true feelings, but it helped us to see that there is love between them, and it's not like a cold -- he's not a cold man, he just has a hard time showing it.
(ll. 30-3, 35-40, 44-7)

The preceding speculative interpretations illustrate how the group functions generally. They build and elaborate on each other's ideas and they support and agree with one another.

Usually Group Two, like Group One, discuss plot within the context of character; nevertheless, at times it is addressed directly. For instance, E. evaluates the story's ending positively. "I liked it near the end of the story like where the kid found the penny and then he just leaves it in his pocket because he knows that everytime that his father sees it, he'll reflect back upon the memories of what it really means" (ll. 71-4). The others in the group support and build on E.'s evaluation. In fact, V. analyses what type of ending the story has. "Yeah, it's a sentimental ending" (l. 79). Other than the above comments, the group rarely questions, analyses, or speculates overtly about the plot of "A Penny in the Dust".

Setting is another literary element that is seldom a topic of discussion. However, when the group does talk about setting, it is usually considered in its own right.

V. Okay. What else can we discuss?
E. This must be like a pretty old story, right?
V. Yeah.
E. Like a penny meant a lot?
C. Yeah.
(ll.126-30)

As they work together to determine the story's setting they use a variety of strategies. They ask questions; they infer from the story's details; they draw upon personal knowledge of history; and they speculate.

C. It's probably 1930s because there were cars, there was machinery, so it was 1930 something.
P. And like having a car must have been something like --
C. It would probably be just before the depression, so it would be 1920s.
P. So I guess having a car was like a big deal.
(ll. 136-41)

The segment above also illustrates just how much the students use personal knowledge to determine a story's setting. Group Two discusses possible time periods for the story long enough to decide that "it would probably be just before the depression, so it would be 1920s" (ll. 139-40).

Similar to Group One, Group Two talks most of all about character, in particular, Pete, the central character, and his relationship with his father. For example, V. expresses confusion about the central character's gender. "I thought Pete was a girl" (l. 81). The discussion about

Pete's gender and character continues for the next 32 speaking turns, and it becomes clear that everyone in the group thinks that Pete is simply a nickname for a female character. They seem to be taken by surprise when "the mother came in and said Peter ..." (l. 89). In order to determine why they were confused about Pete's gender, they refer to clues in the text such as where it says "My sister and I" (l. 92). However, the most important reason for the confusion rests with Pete's behaviour.

V. It's just that he showed his emotion ...
V. It showed emotions, so I know it's not fair to say that the guy, with Eric here, but you kinda think it's just like the girl who always shows.
C. A lot of the stories (inaudible) guys tend to be the masculine and don't say anything, and the female is the ...
P. ... I just got the impression that it was a girl for like the first two pages of it ...
(ll. 95, 98-101, 109)

The preceding comments reveal interesting inferences from the text's details, interesting perceptions about male and female characters' behaviours, and interesting references to other stories read. As well, the supportive and exploratory atmosphere of the group allows them to consider a wide range of topics without concern for being wrong.

As they discuss Pete as an individual character, they also discuss Pete's relationship with his father. The group considers Pete's and his father's dreams, behaviour, and motivation by inferring, analysing, and speculating. For instance, the following exchange is concerned with analysing Pete and his father's characters. In addition, P.'s comment about "he always wanted the best" is speculation about the character and the final comment from C. about the father is based on both inferring and speculating.

V. Because he was always fantasizing -- not fantasize, but like always kind of dreamt of having a better life.
C. Always had it in his head that something better could come.
P. You know, when he says of buying him a (inaudible). This has always been a dream, and he always wanted the best for not only himself, but his family.
C. But that's what I think his father wanted too, because his father was upset about this because if the son loved him or because like the son realized about what he wanted, right? Maybe the father kinda wanted it to.
(ll. 217-8, 221, 224-6, 229-32).

In addition, they reflect on the significance of the penny as it connects to Pete's behaviour and Pete's relationship with his father.

P. I think it's more the ...
C. The bond.
P. ... the bond, the love between the son and the father.
(ll. 234-6).

Although they seldom refer outright to their own relationships and experiences as children in order to interpret the story, their predominant interest in the characters of the story reveals their fascination for looking at what is revealed about human behaviour in short stories.

Group Two's second session comes to an abrupt end because they seem to run out of time. Thus, unlike Group One, they do not conclude by making general statements that evaluate, express engagement, or interpret theme. In a sense, the group's session moved in a circular fashion. It began with confusion about Pete and consideration of the penny's symbolism as it linked to the story's theme. Next, they considered specific details in the story, especially areas of confusion and interest regarding Pete, the father, and the penny. And eventually they returned to discussing Pete's age and what ultimately happened to the penny.

Overall, there were two features of Group Two's second session that were interesting to look at in relation to group one's second session. First, they considered similar literary elements, but they had a larger repertoire of meaning-making strategies upon which to draw. Secondly, they referred to personal experience and knowledge very differently than Group One. When Group One discussed "A Penny in the Dust", they talked for quite awhile about silly things they had done as children; whereas, Group Two never told any stories from childhood as a means of understanding and empathizing with character. In this regard, Group Two seems to have less need than Group One to have stories confirm their experiences with the world.

Session Three

Similar to the discussion of "He Swung and He Missed", the discussion of "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" opens with each member of the group giving quite lengthy initial responses. They build and elaborate on what the previous speaker says. For instance, E., speaking first, evaluates the story and expresses a lack of understanding; while, V., who gives the last initial response, offers an analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks's character, as well as evaluating the story and comparing it to the last story they read.

E. I didn't really like this story that much. I didn't really understand this treaty, I guess, and I wasn't that really that happy doing it.

C. I sorta know how E. feels, but the only thing I got out of it was that this woman was scared because she was pregnant, and because she wasn't sure how her husband felt towards her and how she felt towards the baby. I don't know.

P. I sort of thought this lady was totally like a little girl, and because she (inaudible), I don't understand the way at the end of the story, but I thought it sorta had to do with something about the guy being happy when they were upset, and him being sad when they were happy. Like, when two people compare their lives to others just to see how happy they are, sort of, but it didn't really end the way I thought it would.

V. ... she is like a very childish person and she only thinks of herself, like, she's very self-centred like children are when they're at that age of whatever. She just seems to be like me, and me, and me, and never like - - she's not willing to grow up yet, but I guess at the end she kinda did, and I don't like the story either, as much as the one we did last day.

(ll. 3-5, 21-7)

The initial responses for session three conform to the typical discussion shape - begin generally, be specific in the middle, and end generally - more than the initial responses for session two did. The students evaluate the story, express engagement with it, and analyse character and theme to some degree. In addition, P. reveals the ability to use a strategy that generally is not seen in the initial responses. Her comment about the story ending differently from her expectations indicate that she is aware of her personal reading process to the extent that she knows she makes predictions about stories' outcomes.

The body of Group Two's discussion of "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" is considerably different from Group One's. The only literary element that Group One considered directly was character; whereas, Group Two considers six different literary elements. Nevertheless, the chief topic of interest is character, and some of the other literary elements are discussed within the context of character. Group Two also uses more meaning-making strategies in session three than group one used when discussing the same story. As we will see, Group Two employs an array of strategies ranging from analysing and questioning to speculating and being aware of how authors construct texts.

Almost immediately the discussion focusses on character. P. asks a question about the man on the bench. "Does anybody know what that guy meant?" (l. 28). C. and V. offer speculative, and somewhat symbolic, responses to her question. But, E. goes beyond the man on the bench and offers direct analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks. "I thought the lady was kinda childish because she's trying to avoid the fact that she's getting old, and it's gonna happen to anybody, no matter what happens in life ..." (ll. 34-6). V. builds on E.'s rather critical analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks. She is, however, as are the other girls in the group, feeling empathy for Mrs. Fairbanks's character because of her pregnancy.

C. Yeah, you can understand she's feeling a little apprehensive and scared, but still, I think she's kinda going - - she's over dramatizing it.
V. Yeah.

(ll. 56-9)

The analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks's character continues for the following sixteen speaking turns. They refer to the text, demonstrate awareness of their reading processes, and offer inferences as a means of building a window of understanding into her character. For instance, C. says, "And in the very first paragraph he calls her a very small girl with bobbed hair, and I just got a

picture of a very young person" (ll. 63-65). Group Two is quite interested in the motivation behind Mrs. Fairbanks's behaviour. For instance, V. asks, "Why does she resent him so much? Her husband?" (l. 274). The rest of the group readily considers her question, offering possible answers. E., for example, looks at it from the perspective of insecurity.

> E. It might be because of her insecurity, like, he's just the type of guy who is easy-going. Whatever happens, happens, right. But it says right here in line number ten, it says, "but I'm scared though". Like people are usually scared if they don't know, like, what's to come or like what's going on ...
>
> (ll. 280-4)

As the group pursues its consideration of Mrs. Fairbanks, the students refer to the old man on the bench again. He is analysed symbolically by C., and then she role plays, very briefly, Mrs. Fairbanks as a means of getting inside her character.

> And I think the old man is kinda like a sense of the reality, a symbol of reality. Like, she has to look - - she looked at him and then she thinks "oh my God, I don't want to be like that" (ll. 73-5).

The preceding statement by C. demonstrates how Group Two considers the relationships among characters and what the relationships mean in terms of developing an individual character in the story. Group Two also refers to their personal experience to make sense of Mrs. Fairbanks.

> V. She could have given him a nickel or a dollar and he would have felt the same I think ...
> C. Because people in the street, like, even in Vancouver, when they want money they just take anything they can get.
>
> (ll. 129-30, 141-2)

However, they do not draw upon their previous experience and knowledge nearly as often as Group One. This may be because they interact with the story through both their feelings and thoughts. Whereas, Group One tended to engage with the story more emotionally than intellectually.

At an impasse in their discussion C. asks, "So what else can we talk about? (l. 157). V. counters with, "What's the theme? (l. 158). Group Two is obviously comfortable asking questions, suggesting new ideas, and elaborating upon and supporting each other's ideas. As well, V.'s suggestion, i.e. question, to discuss the theme displays the group's experience with using literary elements as a means of talking about short stories.

> C. It's a cliche, so you can't really say it's a theme, but ...
> C. Like money can't buy everything for people ...
> V. She thinks money is going to get her everything.
>
> (ll. 170, 172, 176)

Even though the group obviously begins to discuss the story's theme, the topic shifts back to the characters rather quickly. For them, the means of understanding this story is through the characters, in particular the central character.

E., who has not spoken much during the discussion, suggests a new focus. "Do you think that the last name might mean anything though, like Fairbanks? (l. 201-2). The significance of the last name is considered peripherally, as part of the continuing analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks's and the others' characters. But what they do say about the title indicates some awareness of the author's process of constructing a story and the significance the title has for a story.

> V. It's sorta - - it gives the - - it's the title and it's their names that's gotta mean something...
> P. Okay. Fairbanks. That could mean like fair banks, banks meaning money. Fair - - they're ...
>
> (ll. 216-7, 243-4)

This, in turn, leads to an interesting comment from E. about authors and stories.

> I think it's kinda weird though because whenever somebody makes a story, I guess they always feel that they have to take somebody's last name and make a symbol or meaning out of it or something. ... We see how they just - - every story we read now there's always a last name that means something or some part of somebody's name means something. (ll. 322-5, 329-32)

Group Two is definitely aware of authors, and, to some degree, is aware of how they approach understanding stories. They are able to read like writers.

> V. Yeah, symbolism. It seems like everybody's name has some family symbol to it.
> P. Yeah.
> C. Then it's all like the writers, like the authors and stuff.
>
> (ll. 334-7)

Further on in the group's discourse, V. says, "Yeah, like some of the things I look at are the name and the title ... Like here, yeah, it's gotta be important because it's the name and the title, so there's something important there, I think" (ll. 364-7). Group Two's perception of the text is quite sophisticated or developmentally mature. In fact, being able to talk about the text as an author's creation and being able to understand one's own reading processes are at levels five and six respectively in Thomson's (1987) developmental model of responding to literature.

In the concluding segment of the group's session, they evaluate the story and assert that although they discussed the story, they still do not understand it fully. For example, C. says, "Yeah, and the thing I don't like is I don't understand it ..." (l. 409). Nor, do they find it easy

to relate to because they lack the personal experience of the characters. As C. states, "I just don't think about raising a family at this point. That's what I see, because kinda they don't think about the family aspect or the money ... " (ll. 435-7). Or as V. says at the close of the discussion, "... most think about the immediate future, not the long term future. So we can't relate to the story, basically" (ll. 455-7). The strategies used and statements made in the session's conclusion conform to the typical shape of the student-led discussions. They evaluate, express their level of engagement, and try to present an interpretation of the story overall.

Group Two did not discuss "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" in the same way as Group One. Group One, in contrast to Group Two, was never as evidently concerned with interpreting the story as a literary construct. They were far more interested in the behaviour and relationship of the husband and wife, and what that meant in terms of male/female behaviour. Group Two, on the other hand, did not discuss the story from the perspective of gender behaviour and attitudes. Their interest in the story as a literary entity led them to consider the story with less certainty and more confusion. Indeed, as a group, they tended to behave similarly to what Dias (1987) describes as problem solvers. Nevertheless, despite Group Two's ability to consider the story as a literary entity, they were unable to fully understand the story because they could not relate to the experiences of the characters. Thus, they could not be described as highly sophisticated readers.

Session Four

Group Two's discussion of "The Friday Everything Changed" opens with V. asking about the Red Cross in the story.

> V. Is it like the Red Cross that I'm thinking about or is this the school Red Cross? Stuff like that. That's one thing that I was worrying about -- that I'm wondering about. I like the story because obviously I'm a girl and I like the ending of it. But there was a lot of things that confused me in this story. (ll. 2-5)

The next student to speak, C., says she likes the story, but she asks "... why she waited until the end of the week to show up the boys. Like why didn't she start something earlier?" (ll. 8-9). P., also a girl, says she likes the "story too because I'm a girl too. And I don't know, I would like to know what the Red Cross is too" (ll. 11-12). E., the boy, is the last to give his initial response.

> E. I liked the story but I can't say because I'm a girl because I'm not. It was a pretty good story. It was well written and I think it's cool that the girls were allowed to participate in every activity that everybody else does. I think -- I thought it was cool because the girls like want to get involved with the activities

of the school, and do like things that the guys do ... I just thought it was a neat story.

(ll. 13-18)

The group's initial responses cover the range of typical strategies and topics for the opening segment of a discussion session. The express confusion and engagement with the text; they analyse theme and character; they ask questions about character and plot; and they evaluate the text as a literary construct. They do not, however, present only generalizations in their initial responses. V.'s opening question about the Red Cross leads the discussion into considering specific details much sooner than is characteristic for both Group One and Group Two.

During this session, the students not only evaluate the story at the beginning and the end, but they also evaluate "The Friday Everything Changed" in the body of the discussion. For instance, P. abruptly changes the topic of discussion by stating that "this is definitely one of the better stories, right?" (l. 148). The girls, not E., compare this story to other stories they have read.

C. I liked that dust one better, but, yeah, this one was better than that first one.
V. The "Penny in the Dust"?
C. Yeah.
V. I liked that one.
P. Yeah, that's my favourite, but this one was better than that last one we had, whatever it was.

(ll. 150, 153, 156-59)

While they vary in their opinions about which story they like the best, they agree that they like this story because "at least you can sort of relate to this in a way" (ll. 160). Personal response is much stronger for this story than previous ones.

Character is the topic of greatest interest for Group Two as they discuss "The Friday Everything Changed". Nevertheless, while talking about the story's characters they also consider other literary elements. For instance, they infer that some of the characters' behaviour is because of the story's time period. P. says, "Well, it's probably because of the time period, too, right" (l. 62)? As they try to infer the setting from the details provided in the story, they refer to what they visualized as they read the story.

C. I kinda got the impression it was like Little House on the Prairie kinda thing.
V. That's what I thought. I could picture them in the little school room...

(ll. 65-8)

Similar to the previous sessions, Group Two is quite aware of their reading processes, in particular the images they create in their minds as they read. In order to establish the story's setting, they also venture opinions and refer to the text, but they never reach a conclusive answer.

E. Where do you think this thing took place?
C. Well, it's in Canada, I think because of the mentioning of the Toronto Maple Leafs.
V. Yeah, probably in like Ontario or something like that.
C. Yeah, somewhere down east.
V. A little farming community.

(ll. 115-19)

V. I think probably 1930s because it was later on --
C. Okay, so 1930s. It was 30s,40s.

(ll. 130-1)

Group Two seems quite comfortable with some degree of ambiguity as they work together to make sense of not only the setting, but also the story.

Group Two does not discuss the story's theme directly. Their understanding of the theme is revealed through referring to personal experience to discuss gender differences and females' experiences today.

C. We're girls still going -- we're going through this, well, not that we are, but --
V. We're still trying to prove ourselves
P. Yeah. We still are no matter what. At least now we're considered part of the team. It's like we're one of the last ones to get picked on the teams.
C. We still have to like work for a place.
V. We have to prove everything we do.
P. That's like 1930s and we're like in the 90s now.
V. Yeah.
P. And it's like still it's happening after like sixty years.

(ll. 161-65, 171-72, 175-77)

Even E., the group's only male, draws on personal experience to illustrate the point of how hard girls have to work to establish themselves and how they have fewer role models. "Plus you don't see professional ladies playing hockey or soccer or football or anything like this" (ll. 182-3). The group discusses gender attitudes and behaviours for over 73 speaking turns. By drawing on analogous experience, they make sense of their own experiences as well the characters' experiences in the story. For instance:

V. It's our society builds us; like it's the way we are raised.
P. I think that's been a lot of the influence like what we were brought up with our parents.
C. He has to make all the money and you just sit home and raise the kids.
V. I mean, after work, my dad like comes home, my mom would serve him ...
V. ... Like she could go out and get the job, but she doesn't want to. She wants to stay at home, and so, you know, it's like a trade off.
P. It's like the girls in the story are probably like that too.

(ll. 190, 210, 215, 244, 275-7, 278)

Gender based issues continually surface as the group analyses the characters' behaviour and motivations. In particular, they talk about how children are raised by their parents and how boys and girls behave differently at school.

E. Look at the world today. It's just - - it seems like a kid starts like just when they're young it's already like they're put into a stereotype role, like, when you get a band when you're born at the hospital. Girls get pink; guys get blue. Girls get dolls; guys get cars, you know, stuff like this.

V. It's slowly changing. The schools are getting better, but kids notice it. The goals are still - - the teachers look at the girls, like the girls are mainly teacher's pet. It's not too often you see a guy as the teacher's pet.

C. It's like Arnold. He was even embarrassed that, you know, he was like totally embarrassed that the guys ...

(ll. 391-4, 410-2, 441-2)

They also compare this story to movies they have seen such as *Mr. Mom.*

E. But once they get to try it, right, like I mean, I don't know, you see a lot of movies nowadays like where men and women switch roles, like the man will stay at home and do all the ironing and washing and stuff.

P. *Mr. Mom.*

(ll. 508-11)

Group Two has a strong level of engagement with this story in contrast to the previous story. During session three, they rarely referred to personal experience. Whereas, in session four referring to personal experience is the meaning-making strategy used most often by Group Two. Underlying their gender-based discussions, whether they refer specifically to the story or to their own experiences, there is a sense of Group Two moving toward a deeper understanding of the story.

Character is the topic of choice for Group Two as they discuss "The Friday Everything Changed". They talk about character because they are interested in understanding the behaviour and motivations of the teacher, the girls, and the boys. But most of all the characters are intriguing for them because everyone in the group has personal experience with teachers and being children at school. Group Two discusses the teacher's motivation for waiting a week before making her decision about whether or not the girls could carry the water. They make inferences from the story's details to develop their interpretation of the motivations behind Miss Ralston's behaviour. For instance, C. says, "I think she probably just waited just to see what would happen in the school to see what everybody's response [would be]" (ll. 23-4). While V. infers and analyses when she says, "I think like she wanted to have like the guys, the boys, to have their like moment in glory and then just totally deflate their egos right after, like I think it was strategy, like she worked it up and then it was just kinda like the final kind of low blow" (ll. 25-7).

They analyse Miss Ralston's personality traits and physical traits. P. says, "It was also like a character and she was always like relaxed and take things one at a time" (ll. 28-9). To determine her physical traits they refer to their mental images of her and to the text itself.

V. And I kinda pictured her like she'd be like one of those tall -- like broad shoulders, and well built but just ...
C. I thought at times it contradicted, like, sometimes they made her sound like really pretty, and then like big, like I couldn't picture her at all.
P. -- but then again she was strapping these people, right, so -- so she must have been relatively big if she was strapping these --

(ll. 88-91, 95-6)

They are also fascinated by the fact that she is their age and teaching. V. says, "she only got grade eleven and she was teaching" (ll. 37). In contrast to "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks", almost everything in this story is something to which they are able to relate personally.

As Group Two talks about Miss Ralston, it is evident that they possess some understanding of how characters change and develop in stories. E. uses the strategies of speculation and analysis to present his understanding of the teacher's character.

E. I think the teacher also changed on Friday also because it's just been something she's been letting the guys do all along, right, and then the first time there was any opposition was when Alma, I think it was, right, she put up her hand?
V. Yeah.
E. Yeah. And then when she was actually challenged. I think the reason may be why she said that she wanted to tell them on Friday was because she needed that time to say, like, change, right, to realize that, you know ...
V. Yeah.

(ll. 330-4, 340-42)

Furthermore, prior to E.'s comment about Miss Ralston, the group was analysing and inferring from the text the motivation behind the girls wanting to carry the water bucket and the motivation behind the boys not wanting the girls to carry the water bucket. They also draw upon personal experience to determine the validity of the boys' actions.

C. They're not your every day little boys, that's for sure.
P. Maybe they are.
C. Well, when we were that age we all used to play together.
V. They used to chase little girls when we were young.
P. Well, it's probably because of the time period, too, right?

(ll. 52-3, 56, 58, 63)

Analysing the characters' motivations and referring to personal experience helps the group understand the dynamic nature of the story's characters. It also helps them interpret the purpose of the story. They work together to understand why the girls want to carry the water bucket, why the teacher acts as she does before allowing the girls to carry the water bucket,

and why the boys react so negatively to the girls' desire to perform a task that had been exclusively theirs.

There are no concluding statements as they seem to run out of time before finishing their discussion. This is not the first time that one of Group Two's sessions ended without a sense of drawing to a close by making general statements about the story. Perhaps Group Two's discussions just do not always conform to the typical shape seen in each of Group One's discussion sessions. This may be because they become more engrossed in their discussions and lose track of the time. On the other hand because Group One watches the time more carefully than Group Two, they may not have as much to say or be as absorbed in discussing the stories.

In general, Group Two was often inconclusive in its interpretation of "The Friday Everything Changed". However, they were highly engaged personally with the story. They also demonstrated greater awareness of themselves as readers and referred more often to personal experience than Group One did during their discussion of the same story.

D. Group Three's Story

Overview

Group Three consists of three girls (L., A., and T.) and one boy (K.). Like Group Two, Group Three is heterogeneous, behaviourally and academically. Unlike Group Two, the three girls do not dominate the group. K. not only participates well in the group's discussions, but he also acts as the group's unofficial chairperson. As the unofficial chairperson, K. tends to initiate the discussions of the stories. Quite often he asks questions and expresses confusion.

> This story was quite puzzling to me at the beginning because I didn't know what she was, like, what they were going through at the beginning until it kinda came to the end where they mention that she was pregnant or something, and I'm still not too sure whether she was pregnant or whether, you know, they were -- I don't know, planning on, you know, having a kid or not, and I don't know. (Story 3, ll. 5-11)

The other members of the group then offer suggestions and possible analyses of their own in response to his or others' questions and confusion.

Based on my field observations and audio transcripts of the discussions, Group Three works well together, building on each other's ideas to make sense of the stories. More than either Group One or Group Two, Group Three talks about the stories through the literary elements and author's techniques, rather than their own personal experiences. For instance,

they will talk about a character's role in a story, or the author's use of description, or the significance of a title.

K. Title.
A. Title?
K. "A Penny in the Dust"
T. Well, that --
K. What was the dust for?
A. His father.

(Story 2, ll. 174-9)

As with Groups One and Two, Group Three has its own personality and behaviour as will become clear by the observations of each story's discussion.

Session One

The discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" begins with K. comparing the story to the Rocky movies. "This is kinda almost kinda like a Rocky movie..." (l. 3). He also expresses confusion about why the story opens by focussing on Rocco's graduation from school. Similar to K., L.'s initial response focusses on Rocco the central character. She does not "understand the part about why he wanted to give up the fight in the first place" (ll. 10-11). A.'s initial response is similar to K.'s and L.'s in that she, too, is interested in Rocco and the story's overall meaning. She wonders, like the others, what "the school year and his graduation have to do with his um boxing, his fighting now" (l. 22). The last member of the group to give her initial response, T., builds on the questions and confusion of the others to give a more personally definitive analysis of Rocco's character. She says, "I just think ... that at first he wanted to win it for himself, but in the end he realized that he had other things to worry about" (ll. 25-6).

Each member's initial response reveals that Group Three reveals a willingness to express confusion about the stories they read. I think that this, in part, is because they are comfortable with one another and there is a degree of engagement with the story. The engagement derives from Rocco's character as they all talk about Rocco's behaviour and motivation. In fact, after the initial responses they discuss the characters, in general, and Rocco, in particular.

As Group Three talks about Rocco's character and his relationship with his wife, teacher, and Uncle Mike, they use certain strategies repeatedly. For instance, they analyse Rocco's character throughout the discussion by talking specifically about him or about him in relation to the other characters.

K. That's kinda an indication that he'll be successful but it probably won't be to do with like scholarly stuff...

(ll. 76-7)

K. Yeah. It said he wanted to, um, at the very end; it says where's Donahue, and Donahue would have been impressed and the whole way through he was also trying to show to her.

?. Prove to his teacher that he could do something 'cause probably he thought when he went to school she thought I'm going to be a bum kinda thing you know. But she actually did have faith in him and now he can prove that. He can make something of his life.

(ll. 243-47)

{? = new speaker whose identity is unclear}

The preceding and following comments are also examples of Group's Three's ability to make inferences about the characters' behaviour and relationships and the story's events.

?. Wasn't she the one that brought him back into thinking that winning wasn't all that mattered? That when he thought about her and when he was boxing and stuff and then when she came in and said that to him it was kinda like ...

?. Yeah it seemed she was mad about it.

?. Yeah.

?. 'Cause it , she was mad and then Rocco didn't get mad and then it kinda just like they came to an understanding.

?. Like not talking, but they both kinda went separate ways, sat there, and then they came to their senses and finally realized but not by talking to each other.

?. It proves they're probably closer now.

(ll. 283-294)

The previously cited statements also reveal how Group Three speculates and reflects about the behaviour of characters and events in the story. Indeed, during the session, it is rare for them to use one meaning-making strategy in isolation from another.

Group Three uses the strategy of referring to personal experience less often than Group One. This is not to say that they do not refer to personal experience. For example, they refer directly to a commonly held experience to understand how it could be that the teacher knew Rocco for so many years.

K. Like the teacher watched him grow whatever since grade 6 or grade 5?

?. Yeah he had the same teacher too.

?. Maybe. You know how like you watch like "Little House on the Prairie" and they have one teacher all their life.

(ll. 155-6, 160-1)

Perhaps one reason why Group Three draws less obviously on personal experience is they focus on certain literary elements to make sense of "He Swung and He Missed". It seems that they are more developmentally mature readers than the students in Group One. The story may be considered as an entity unto itself rather than having to conform to the students' sense of the

world. For example, they try to determine the setting in order to figure out the value of the money earned and bet.

> ?. She didn't really complain at all but at the end she seemed to complain that he had lost like 'cause she had bet money on him.
> K. [Maybe we should] establish a setting ... Way, way back about 40, 50 years ago.
>
> (ll. 114-6)

They also ask each other about the moral of the story. For example, K. says, "So what do you think the moral behind this story is for us? Is there a moral or is it just keep trying. Don't lose your pride" (ll. 180-1). Nevertheless, despite being able to discuss the story as a literary construct, Group Three expresses personal engagement with and evaluation of the story as a means of concluding their discussion. K. summarizes the group's feelings toward the story when he says, "Yeah the moral of the story is quite weird. I don't know. Not like Rocky at all. I don't like it" (ll. 353-4).

In general, Group Three's discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" focusses on making sense of Rocco, the central character. They ask questions, speculate, analyse, infer, compare, and refer to personal experience to understand the significance of Rocco's behaviour and the story's events. It is also not surprising that they discuss Rocco most of all as he is the primary focus of "He Swung and He Missed". Even when the group is considering what the title means, they talk about Rocco.

> ?. I think the title kinda is uh trying to hold on kinda thing of to what he had so.
> ?. Yeah.
> ?. He tried to hold onto the fight. He wanted to go out with a bang, be really good and he tried but he couldn't do it kinda thing.
> ?. I don't think he really well; he wasn't planning to end it the way is happened. I think he wanted to end his career 'cause he knew it was over but he kinda wanted to do his best and go on.
>
> (ll. 321-2, 325-6, 332-5)

Even though Group Three asserted some personal engagement with the story, it was chiefly through the literary elements, in particular character, that they discussed "He Swung and He Missed".

Session Two

Group Three's initial responses to "Penny in the Dust" by Ernest Buckler are fairly lengthy. In response to "He Swung and He Missed", they asked questions and expressed confusion about the central character and the story's construction. In response to "Penny in the

Dust", they talk about liking the story, relating to it, enjoying its sentimental tone, the penny's symbolism, and Pete and his father's relationship.

For instance, K, who is the first to speak, says, "I liked the story. I really do. It's a -- it's got a sentimental part to it at the end, you know. It was so beautiful, and the penny plays a major role in this as a symbol, as he says, it's like digging out a treasure, you know, bury it, get it back" (ll. 3-6). T. builds on K's response. "Well, I agree with you with the sentimental thing. It is kinda like he was unbaring his dream, and his dad carried around the dream in his pocket, even thought he knew that he probably would never have it" (ll. 13-16). A. begins by saying "I thought the story was better than the boxer one because it was more interesting. The penny one was like something more you can relate to" (ll. 20-22).

A. moves the discussion beyond the level of initial responses by asking a question. "It makes me wonder why the dad didn't give the penny back to the kid after he found the penny. Why do you think that is?" (ll. 36-7, 39). Asking questions and expressing confusion seems to be a common strategy for Group Three. As well, their use of this discussion strategy indicates a level of comfort with one another, i.e. they are not unwilling to ask questions for fear of looking foolish in front of their peers.

Group Three's most commonly used strategy for discussing "Penny in the Dust" is that of analysis. This is similar to their approach to the previously discussed story. In particular, they analyse the penny's significance and the boy's and father's behaviour.

K. Like I think it has -- now it has more sentimental value to the dad, and it brought the son and the father closer together, and I think that's something.
T. Yeah, but even if it wasn't from his father, he still really liked it because it was really shiny.

(ll. 44-6, 55-6)

K. Yeah, it was in his old suit in the upper vest pocket where no one ever carries change, so the dad kept the penny closer to his heart kinda deal.

(ll. 113-4)

A. So like the penny was like his dream, like the treasure, the penny, like he did in the relationship he had with his father.

(ll. 205-6)

Group Three not only analyses and questions, they also infer, refer to personal experience, and speculate from details in the story. They infer from the details given them by the author that the father's behaviour is not unusual given the story's setting.

K. Did you find the role of the dad kinda unusual, like being the [macho] kind of guy, not too involved with his emotions with his kid kinda deal?
T. He's quiet.
K. I don't know. Given the times, I don't find it that hard to believe.
T. They didn't really talk to their kids unless they really had to do chores and stuff with them.

(ll. 71-6, 79-80)

The last comment by T. draws specifically on details given in the story about the father not being a talkative man, who when he talks with his son usually does it while doing chores. While Group Three makes inferences from the story's details quite often, they rarely refer to the text specifically, i.e. they seldom look up passages of the story to read. The lack of reference to the text beyond what they remember may account for the fact that their discussion of "A Penny in the Dust" remains on two topics: the penny's symbolism and Pete and his father's relationship.

In contrast to Groups One and Two, Group Three, as mentioned in session one, draws less on personal experience as a means of making meaning. Nevertheless, while they may use this strategy less often, they still use it as a strategy for gaining understanding and empathy. K. relates his relationship with his step-dad to Pete and his father's relationship.

> K. Well, there's me and my real dad, we're not really that close. I'm closer to my step-dad than to my real dad because I live with my step-dad. I don't know He's a cool guy.
> K. Yeah. And him, in my case, would be cars instead of having a penny because he's into cars and I'm into cars, and I don't know.
> K. Like, we talk about cars, but then we deal with other things too, and he understands me, I understand him, like, you know, that's the kind of things that bring us together, and in this story brings this father and son together.
> (ll. 340-4, 345-6, 354-7)

In this instance, K. refers to personal experience quite extensively. However, throughout the rest of the discussion, there are no other similar recountings of relevant analogous experience by either K., T., or A.

Group Three's use of speculation is linked to inferences they make from the story's details. For example, they discuss where and when the penny was found, and then speculate that Pete probably never knew that his father cared about him and the penny until he found it in the vest pocket.

> T. So I guess it's after he died when he finds it.
> A. Then he found it in his pocket.
> T. And he probably never knew that his dad really cared about the penny.
> (ll. 109-10, 117)

While Group Three uses meaning-making strategies to discuss the story, these strategies are not the primary focus. Their discussion of "Penny in the Dust", like their discussion of "He Swung and He Missed", develops under the umbrella of the elements of the short story. In particular, they discuss character, plot events, and symbolism. They also discuss setting, theme, mood and tone, and title of the story, but not to the same degree as the formerly mentioned elements. The reason that they discuss character primarily is, again, a

function of the literary material being discussed. Short stories tend to have a strong focus on character. Group Three is interested in Pete's character, his father's character, and the relationship of the two.

K. Yeah, and the kid speaks highly of the dad. He's got -- like he can fix things, and he's knowledgeable in his field, and he knows what he's doing.
T. He looks up to the dad a lot.
K Yeah. But the thing is I don't think none of them show it to each other because, I don't know, they're not close. They haven't really established any close relationship with each other.

(ll. 215-21)

When they talk about the plot it is usually within the context of what a character is like, what is happening, or what the penny symbolizes. For instance, K. says, "I didn't know what he was doing in the dust, like at the beginning, he would just say well he's burying it and now he's just finding it, burying it and finding it again" (ll. 233-5). Comments such as the latter, not only serve to explain what is happening in the story, but they also help the group reflect on the significance of the event.

Group Three is interested in the penny's symbolism throughout their discussion. It is referred to over and over again.

K. And the penny he's lost, it's like he got -- like, when they recovered the penny together, has also recovered kinda like feelings or --
T. Their relationship.
K. In their relationship, yeah. He became closer, and the dust symbolizes that the dark -- like, the distance that they were apart --
T. Yeah.
K. -- and now they are getting closer, so the dust finally settles.

(ll. 316-24)

The above segment reveals how the group is interested in analysing the penny as a symbol for understanding the story as a whole.

The concluding segment of their discussion did not involve making generalized statements about the story or discussion. Instead, the story evokes a lengthy personal response from K. Thus, at the end of the discussion the group is listening to K. talk about his relationship with his stepdad.

In general, Group Three's discussion of "Penny in the Dust" followed a similar pattern to their discussion of "He Swung and He Missed". What was different, however, was their interest in symbolic understanding, their level of engagement and involvement, and their positive evaluation of the story. As K. said, "I mean, we all liked the story. I say it is well written ..." (ll. 265-6).

Session Three

The initial responses for "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" are more akin to the ones given for the first story discussed. However, for "He Swung and He Missed" the group expressed some positive evaluation of and engagement with the story. Whereas for "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks", they talk about what was confusing for them with regards to the story as a whole, and, in particular, Mrs. Fairbanks's character.

As before, K. opens the round of initial responses. He is rather puzzled by the story and compares it negatively to the other stories they have read.

> K. This story was quite puzzling to me at the beginning because I didn't know what she was, like, what they were going through at the beginning until it kinda came to the end where they mention that she was pregnant or something ... I didn't get too much out of this story than like I did from the other ones.
> (ll. 5-9, 15)

Typically, the rest of the group elaborates on K's initial response.

> L. At the very beginning I kinda figured out that she was pregnant. I don't really remember when I figured it out ... But I didn't understand how after she saw the guy the second time, I didn't understand why she decided to change her mind and she was -- all of a sudden -- she felt good about herself again.
> (ll. 16-18, 19-21)

T.'s initial response is similar to L.'s, but she offers a tentative analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks's behaviour.

> T. Basically, yeah, I figured out the same as L. did that she was pregnant in the beginning, but I didn't understand -- like, I kinda understood why in the end she was happier because she felt like she made someone else happy, and then that made her feel better inside.
> (ll. 25-29)

A.'s initial response goes even further in its elaboration of the others' ideas. First, she suggests a general understanding of the story, but then she too returns to the group's particular area of confusion regarding the wife's behaviour towards the man on the bench.

> A. This story is just about two people, like the husband never understands and the wife is always fighting about how you don't understand ... I didn't really understand, like why she was sorta -- like about the man on the bench. Like I didn't understand like why he -- she felt more better when he smiled at her.
> (ll. 39-41, 50-2)

The body of the discussion evolves from the initial responses as in the previous two discussions. L. poses the question of "how did she make the man happy? Like T. said -- T.

said that she felt good because she made him happy, but how did she make him happy? I don't really understand that" (ll. 55-8). The supportive, comfortable atmosphere in the group makes it easy for them to ask each other questions and to build on each other's ideas. They are also comfortable with speculative answers and analyses. This, perhaps, is because they do not refer to the text as much as some of the other groups in their discussions. Although, for this discussion they refer to the text more than before, which may be because they find "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" a more complex, or perplexing, story. The crux of the group's enigma seems to rest with the question asked by L. "How did she make the man happy?" (l. 55). The group never really comes up with a definitive answer to the question. Yet it is illuminating that as an outgrowth from L's question, Mrs. Fairbanks's character and how and why does the story resolve itself as it does are the group's two main topics for discussion.

In this discussion, as in the previous two discussions, Group Three uses a range of strategies for enhancing their understanding of the story. They analyse, reflect, speculate, question, infer, refer to personal experience, and evaluate. For instance, A., in response to T.'s question about making the man happy, speculates and infers from the story about Mrs. Fairbanks's and the old man's emotional states; she also analyses their attitudes towards life.

> A. Maybe also I think she maybe felt happier afterwards because she realized he was out of money, he was poor, but he was still happy ... And then after he smiled at her, it kinda showed that he really was happy, even though he was poor. He still had life in him and he was happy, and that made her realize that even though they're poor they still have love and they can have the kid.
> (ll. 65-67, 71-75)

However, literary elements and personal interest provide the framework for the group's discussion. For although A. uses many strategies for developing her understanding, she essentially is talking about Mrs. Fairbanks's character.

As Group Three talks about Mrs. Fairbanks's character, the couple's relationship, and the old man on the bench, they refer to personal experience and knowledge less often than Groups One and Two. They tend to focus on the story as a story and not as something that is similar to their own lives in some way. This may be because they do not like the story very much or that they are confused by it. They never talk about liking the story or identifying with it. The only time they obviously use personal knowledge to make sense of the story is when the girls in the group explain to K. how the author describes Mrs. Fairbanks's in certain ways that indicate that she is pregnant.

> L. Yeah, well, there's some here that -- these quotes here. "Your face is soft and plump and kinda glowing all over, and your neck and shoulders are rounder than ever." When you're pregnant you get chubbier, and you get a kinda glow.
> (ll. 78-81)

The group's use of a variety of strategies and seeming lack of concern about reaching a conclusive analysis of the story and its characters indicates, to some degree, problem solving behaviour. Well into the discussion they still are willing to express confusion and seek alternatives.

K. I don't know. This whole story is kinda mumble-jumble to me.
A. Yeah. I still don't understand why she was happy after she saw him. Like, I don't think my reason was right.

(ll. 119-122)

In fact, most of the discussion involves trying to figure out Mrs. Fairbanks's attitude toward being pregnant, her attitude toward her husband, and her attitude toward the man on the bench.

K. But towards the end she's saying "I don't want to have the kid, I don't want to have the kid."

(ll. 174-5)

T. She just didn't want to have the responsibility of giving up her job because she knew she didn't want to be poor, she wanted, like, a pretty good lifestyle, it seemed like.

(ll. 183-5)

T. Then she's like saying 'you're being so inconsiderate', but it was really her. It was like she was thinking 'me, me, me' all the time all the way through.

(ll. 201-3)

A. She didn't care about making him happy at all.

(l. 313)

L. I think he's just kinda fed up with the things that she's saying. She's kinda like greedy, like.

(ll. 351-2)

Interestingly, Group Three considers some of the descriptive detail provided by Callaghan for the setting as being significant for their comprehension of the story. Although they do not discuss the description at great length, this was not a topic of discussion for either Group One or Two.

K. The setting of the story explained like, you know, like, in detail. Like the sun being shining when they were walking away, and when they come back the sun was kinda dull.
T. Yeah.
K. That kinda introduced to me that, you know, things weren't as good as they could be, like, before they were. Like, when they were walking by the bum and everything -- or the guy on the bench, the sun was really nice and, I don't know, everything looked like it was a nice picture, but then they decided to turn around ... they walk back. The sun is all dull, and you know, it's not a pretty picture.

(ll. 325-335, 338-9)

The above segment emphasizes an important feature of Group Three's discussion behaviour: their ability to look at stories as literary constructs.

As a means of concluding their discussion, K. asks, "How do you like the story? Like elaborate on it" (l. 507). This brings the level of discussion back to overall generalizations. Chiefly, the group evaluates the quality of the story and their level of engagement with it. Group Three does not give "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" a high rating. They evaluate the story as mediocre.

T. It's okay.
A. I don't like the story.
T. It's not exciting. It's just kinda a slow paced, not much action.
L. It wasn't too much thinking.
A. It wasn't difficult though.

(ll. 510-514)

In general, because of their supportive group dynamic, the nature of this session was similar to Group Three's discussions of the previous two stories. They were friendly and helpful towards each other, but not particularly energetic or argumentative which made their discussion rather low key.

N.B. There is no Session Four for Group Three as it was lost during transcription.

E. Group Four's Story

Overview

Group Four consists of three girls (R., B., and M.) and one boy (C.). Unlike Group Three where K. (a boy) was dominant, C. is usually reserved during Group Four's sessions. In this group, the three girls tend to dominate. Group Four is an effective, insightful discussion group. My field notes made during the four sessions reveal that Group Four works well together; they agree, support, speculate, and clarify each other's ideas. They smile at each other, lean toward each other, and laugh with each other.

Like Group Two, some of the students in Group Four are somewhat aware of their own reading processes. For example, they are able to recall what they envision as they read. As well, they are, to some degree, aware of authors and how and why stories are constructed. Unlike Groups One and Three, who rarely commented about a particular detail included by an author, Group Four seems aware of how an author's construction of a text may affect or direct understanding.

Group Four, as a rule, follows the same discussion pattern used by the other three groups. They begin with comments about engagement, evaluation, theme, and confusion. Then they move on to consider character and narrative details. Towards the end, they review the story again in terms of evaluation, engagement, and theme. Nevertheless, Group Four is not identical to the other groups. As with the others, Group Four possesses a distinct discussion style and behavioural dynamic. For instance, they are the only group to use impromptu role play quite regularly as a strategy for making sense of stories. The following observational analyses of Group Four's sessions will reveal more obviously what happens as they work to make sense of short stories.

Session One

R. opens Group Four's discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" with a strong statement of engagement and evaluation. "I really enjoyed this story. I found it really slow at the beginning" (ll. 1-2). B., the second person in the group to give an initial response, reviews the story's purpose and construction. "I thought the story was, um, sort of a repetition of his childhood in that all through his childhood years he was a scrapper and that and he never had anything else to do, and then throughout his adult years he fought again" (ll. 4-6). M.'s initial response is negative as she says, "I'm not really much of a boxing fan" (l. 7). The final initial response comes from C., the only boy in the group. He evaluates the story's construction and expresses his engagement with it. "I think it went into maybe too much detail, but it was a good story overall" (l. 8).

Group Four's initial responses are very brief, which is similar to Group One and quite different from Groups Two and Three. This does not mean, however, that Group One and Group Four are alike in every respect. Group Four's discussion, while displaying personal engagement and involvement, goes beyond wanting the story to conform to their perspective of life.

> M. I thought the story was okay. I didn't like the gory details. I don't think that was necessary like.
> B. I know but it needed it.
>
> (ll. 274-5)

Because the opening responses are so brief, there is little room for development of individual interpretations of theme or character. But the general nature of their initial comments do leave room for many other topics to be considered in detail in the future.

One thing unusual about Group Four's initial responses is the fact that the students do not build on each other's ideas. Each member of the group gives an individual opinion without

seeming to use what the previous speaker has said. As the discussion continues, it becomes apparent that the group members possess strong opinions and insights about short stories. In a sense they may be making their individuality known to the other members of the group.

Group Four uses their knowledge of literary elements to make sense of "He Swung and He Missed". Immediately following the initial responses, they talk about Miss Donahue and Rocco.

R. Oh, that was a teacher.
B. The mother figure.
R. Yeah.
B. So she was a stereotype. Boring.
R. Well all the characters are basically simple.
B. Yeah. What about Rocco?
R. Um.
C. He's proud of himself.

(ll. 12, 16-8, 20-3)

They challenge and elaborate on each other's ideas about Rocco. Not content to accept R.'s classification of Rocco as being the same as the other characters, B. asks a question of clarification and C. suggests one character trait of Rocco's. As with the other groups, Group Four's discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" concentrates on character. Even though they consider other literary elements such as theme, setting, plot events, and symbolism, Rocco, either alone or in relation to the other characters, is the focus. For example, early in the discussion session, they talk about theme indirectly as a result of trying to decide whether or not Uncle Mike likes Rocco and what that has to do with Rocco deciding to go through with the dive. The following statements about learning it the hard way, not giving up, and love for each other not only demonstrate understanding of Rocco, but also demonstrate thematic understanding of "He Swung and He Missed".

B. He wanted him to take the easy way out but he didn't.
R. Oh. Um. Well it sorta has to do sorta with the end part where it says the fact that um "He always did everything even though he did it the hard way" like he sort of --
B. No matter what he did he learned it the hard way.
R. Yeah, at least he did it though he didn't give up even though he didn't exactly take the right way or route to go about the right way.
M. But like their love for each other I think sorta saw them through everything.

(ll. 46, 51-7)

At other times during the group's discussion, analysis of Rocco leads them to consider other literary elements such as the symbolic significance of Rocco's face being described "as impassive as a catcher's mitt" (l. 117).

M. But how would his face look like a catcher's mitt? It didn't make any sense to me. Catcher's mitt. Like it must symbolize something with the shoes.
R. Because it's, I don't know it's sort of it's sitting there; it's waiting to be hit. I don't know. Stand there and let me hit you in the face.
B. I don't think that's good. I don't know. That's weird.
M. [Maybe there is some connection] to a ballgame.
R. Mmm, hum, there must be some connection.
M. Well how [is] a catcher's mitt like [Rocco].
R. The fact that it goes through so much in a game.

(ll. 120-1, 124-9, 133-5)

Akin to the other groups, Group Four uses various meaning-making strategies for making sense of the literary elements of the story which they are discussing. Chiefly they analyse the story's characters and contents. But they also employ other strategies such as reflecting, questioning, empathizing, referring to personal experience, inferring, and synthesizing. While other groups also use the previously stated strategies, Group Four uses them to a greater degree or, perhaps I should say, in a more well rounded way. They do not seem to rely on one or two strategies exclusively.

As the discussion progresses, they analyse details and accumulate understanding about Rocco's behaviour and motivation.

M. Why did he box?
C. He's a good fighter.
M. Was he a --
C. Probably a --
M. Bully sort of or one of those --
C. Well he probably wasn't very smart either.
R. It doesn't say he was a bully. Maybe he just sort of maybe stuck up for other kids you know.
M. Did it ever say anything about his parents; you sort of gather he was without a mother?

(ll. 92-100)

The above discussion comments also reveal how they build on each other's ideas to develop understanding. As well, the comments indicate the group's willingness to ask questions which invites further discussion, investigation, and speculation.

A further example of Group Four's varied repertoire of strategies is their ability to synthesize and empathize. For instance, as they discuss Rocco's graduation day, M. synthesizes information provided by the author at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. "But right at the beginning and the middle and the end they both stated that graduation day that was the happiest day" (ll. 152-3). Empathy for Rocco is apparent when M.says, "I wouldn't get in there and get them to beat me up on purpose" (l. 166). Later in the discussion, M., once again, draws on her empathy for Rocco to understand him better.

He had that feeling like when he was walking into the ring he had that sorta that heavy feeling, that hate. And then it went away and then it came back. And it was if he was saying, 'Well I shouldn't actually be doing it but I have to do it.'

(ll. 248-250)

In the above segment, M. is also using a strategy that is basically unique to Group Four. She enhances her interpretation of Rocco's character by, in a sense, becoming him, or role playing him, when she says, "Well I shouldn't actually be doing it but I have to do it" (l. 250). This is not a line of dialogue from the story; this is the dialogue, or rationale, that she speculates may be behind Rocco's actions. M. uses this same strategy earlier in the group's discussion. There she adopts the roles of both Rocco and his wife.

M. And then she comes in 'Oh honey, I put 8-1 on you and you lost you idiot.'
M. An then he sorta says, 'well that's okay dear.' You know most men would be 'You stupid idiot what were you doing that for?'

(ll. 64, 67-8)

Interestingly, the rest of the group willingly work with her role play strategy as simply another means of making sense. This may be because they are comfortable with each other or it may be because it is simply another way to infer from text in order to develop a complete picture of a character. Certainly it does not seem possible to role play a character if empathy and understanding are lacking.

As the discussion of "He Swung and He Missed" draws to a close, they speculate about Rocco's future.

R. Maybe he'll hang around the boxing ring or something.
B. Be a coach or something.

(ll.267-8)

Then they begin to review and evaluate the story as a complete entity.

M. I kinda liked it. It's not my favourite story.
B. The beginning though I thought was kinda slow.
B. That's right yeah. And with the fight going on it's long too.
M. But the beginning could have [been shorter], but I guess that was sorta important, that graduation --

(ll. 280-1, 285-6)

R. also suggests that they "figure out the title", but the rest of the group does not follow her suggestion (l. 310). Essentially, Group Four's discussion ends with a general evaluation of the story and the couple's relationship which complements the beginning and middle sections of the discussion.

Group Four's first session revealed a group who was comfortable working together and who was able to draw upon literary elements and various meaning-making strategies in

order to make sense of "He Swung and He Missed".

Session Two

B.'s initial response to Ernest Buckler's, "Penny in the Dust" is quite general. "This story to me symbolized the pride about the man who could [not express] himself to his son, and I thought it was pretty interesting" (ll. 1-3). She offers an interpretation of theme and symbolism by synthesizing the story as a whole in her one statement about the father's pride. As well, she gives her personal evaluation of and sense of engagement with the story.

M., the second member of the group to give her initial opinion, begins with a positive evaluation of the story. From there, she analyses the father and son's relationship and how it relates to the story's theme. Different from B., she describes the mood engendered by the story for her. "I found it really touching how they got over that and were able to show their love for each other" (ll. 6-8).

C. also begins with a positive evaluation of the story. "I liked the story" (l. 9). His second comment is about the use of detail in the story which indicates some awareness of the story as an artistic creation of an author. "I think it went into lots of detail again" (l. 9). He concludes by speculating about the value of the penny and what that might mean with regards to the story's setting.

Similar to the others, R. opens by saying, "I really enjoyed this story" (l. 14). Her initial response is the longest which allows her to comment on a variety of things such as theme, characters, events, and symbolism.

> I like the part that ... penny could bring a father and son together. Their relationship was really -- I liked their relationship, even though they couldn't show their feelings for each other, but you could tell they deeply loved each other, ... and that was really nice at the end how this penny brought them to be able to express their feelings for each other. (ll. 14-21)

Contrary to the opening statements for the previous story, each student's response possesses some similarities. They evaluate the story positively; their positive evaluations also indicate a strong sense of engagement with the story. However, despite the aforementioned similarities, they also find something unique to present in their initial responses which is similar to the initial responses in the first session.

The initial responses for "A Penny in the Dust" follow the pattern of many of the groups' discussion sessions, broad overview comments such as the type of statements typically written at the beginning of five paragraph themes. The middle section of the discussion, like an essay, delves more closely into specific items in the story.

They pursue their discussion of "Penny in the Dust" through the framework of the elements of the short story. R. suggests the setting as a possible topic and the rest of the group immediately begins talking about it.

R. Okay, setting?
B. Setting?
R. Go ahead.
M. Something like a farm, right.
B. Yeah.
M. They were country people.

(ll. 24-29)

By inferring from the story's details, they decide that it must be set on a farm in the 1930s.

Immediately following that, they agree to discuss the story's theme. It is as if the problem of the setting is solved so it is now time to analyse another literary element.

M. Do you want to tackle the big one now, theme?
B. Sure, go ahead.

(ll. 47-8)

M. and R. offer two possibilities for the theme; both are more like broad topics than themes specifically related to the story.

M. Well, what do you think? Love?
R. Love, what about love?
M. It's like family.
R. Family relationships.

(ll. 50-3)

After talking briefly about these superficial, yet accurate analyses of theme, Group Four turns to analysing the father and son's relationship.

Throughout the discussion, character, in particular the father and son's relationship, is discussed most frequently. The following segment reveals their use of the strategies of inferring, analysing, and referring to text to develop their picture of the relationship.

M. But the little boy worshipped his father.
R. Yeah.
M. He was his hero, like 'dad could do everything. I had a broken wheelbarrow, he brought it back and the handle was perfect.'
B. He was always sorta rescuing him kinda thing, you know --
M. But when he said that he was going to find the penny and his dad -- and he never took his hand.
R. Mm-hmm. Like when his father said that he probably felt that he hurt his father, maybe, to think that he would --
C. Well, he felt like he's struck him.

(ll. 294-7, 300, 303-4, 313-5)

They use the story's details to obtain specific information, but they also fill in the gaps among the details by inferring such things as the boy's attitude toward his father. With the information gleaned from inferring and referring to the text, they analyse the characters' behaviour. They also infer from the story's details to offer a speculative analysis of Pete and his father's relationship.

B. It sounds like they had no communication between one another at all, and they didn't dream; they just dealt with reality, like what you have is what you have, and don't think of anything else. You just accept what you have for the best.

(ll. 196-203)

More than Groups Two and Three, Group Four draws on personal experience to make sense of Pete and his father's actions surrounding the penny. For example, M. says, "If I like you, I'll tell you so or give you a pat on the shoulder or something, and I don't find it hard to tell my father how I feel about him" (ll. 94-6). While referring to personal experience, Group Four often simultaneously uses other strategies. In the forthcoming excerpts from the discussion they not only analyse the father and son's relationship and draw on personal knowledge, but they also speculate beyond the text, make predictions, and infer from story details. For instance, the B. and R.'s comments about whether or not Pete and his father got along in the future are the result of inferring, speculating, and predicting.

C. Well, I was just wondering if, like, they got -- after this happened if they got along.
B. I don't think so.
R. I don't think anything changed. They just sorta had a little understanding between each other and that was it. That one special moment.
B. Some men. Maybe they just can't -- it's unmanly to do certain things and to feel certain things and yet they do --
R. Aren't they even close?
M. I've never seen my father angry.
R. The only thing --
M. He just won't express it.
B. Also my dad gets sad but he never, like, never like cries.

(ll. 416-421, 429-30, 436-40)

Another literary element Group Four considers is symbolism. They synthesize from the recurring importance of the penny for Pete and his father that it must be a symbol.

B. What did the penny symbolize?
M. Probably how small things can make a big difference.
R. Yeah, the smallest thing is treasure --

(ll. 155-7)

As they pursue their discussion of the penny's symbolism, they use a variety of strategies. Both M. and R. reflect, analyse, and infer in the following comments what the penny's symbolic significance might be.

R. Well it was such a small thing -- and you were able to express your love over something. It just brings them together, something so small and simple.
M. Like, how he kept on saying it was shiny though, and it was brand new. To me that sorta symbolizes a new start.

(ll. 165-7, 170-1)

Group Four does not arrive at a definitive analysis of the penny's symbolism, but that does not seem to concern them. They seem content simply talking about what the penny might represent in relation to Pete and his father's relationship.

Group Four also discuss the story's title. R. suggests the topic when she says, "Title? 'Penny in the Dust'" (l. 272). In response, B. suggests that it signifies "finding a buried treasure" and M. suggests that it signifies "lost treasure" (ll. 274, 276). B. and R. are simultaneously analysing the words in the title and synthesizing the story's events in order to interpret the title as they have. They do not discuss the title, itself, for very long, perhaps because of its inextricable connection to everything else in the story. But by choosing to talk about the title, Group Four also indicates an awareness that stories are conscious constructions by authors. In the concluding portion of the discussion, Group Four changes from considering details about the story to reviewing the story as a whole and their discussion of it.

R. So what do you think of it now? Do you think the same thing?
B. Yeah, I think it was a really good story, now that I've totally analyzed it, now it seems it's even better than I thought it would be.

(ll. 496-499)

R's questions invite a variety of comments from the rest of the group such as B's evaluation of its quality. Other comments express engagement and involvement with the story, connections to personal experience, comparisons to other stories, and speculation.

R. I really liked it. I think I liked it better than the other one.
B. Oh, I think this one is a bit better.
C. I just wish that --
B. Because this sorta touches home more because if you think of your father and things like that.
C. I just wish I knew what happened, like, if it changed about how they didn't -- it probably didn't, but --

(ll. 504-10)

Overall, Group Four recognizes that "A Penny in the Dust" is about a special moment in Pete's life that he and his sister reminisce about because of their father's death.

M. I think that was more his moment, you know. Your own special highlight in your life, especially since that's your's and you don't want anybody else to know about it.

(ll. 515-7)

And through R.'s final comment, they reaffirm their analysis of how important the love is that Pete and his father feel for one another.

R. But the thing that stuck out most in my mind was right at the end when his father never [was able] to say well, you know, it's in my suit pocket, would you cherish it and I love you and things like that. He just died and he found it.

(ll. 501-3)

In contrast to the other groups, Group Four focussed more on Pete and his father's relationship and less on the penny's symbolism. In general, their discussion of "A Penny in the Dust" was most like Group One's. However, there was a significant difference between the two groups in that Group Four was less concerned that the story align with their views of life and human behaviour. Their combined use of literary elements, meaning-making strategies, and sense of ease with not reaching definitive answers seemed to indicate that as a group they functioned comfortably as problem solvers.

Session Three

Group Four's initial responses for "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" chiefly express confusion, especially with regards to the theme.

B. I'm kinda confused about what this story is about. I don't quite understand the gist of it. It's -- I understand that there's a couple and they had a quarrel, but I don't see the whole thing behind it.

(ll. 1-4)

They are not as confused about the characters and even attempt to analyse them. C. says that "she just seemed paranoid about growing old. Like, overly paranoid, and the husband is just so passive that he's 'Oh, yeah, okay, whatever', and he just -- just a typical guy, I guess" (ll. 6-9). In contrast to their initial responses for "A Penny in the Dust", the opening comments for this session do not display strong positive engagement with the story. The following statement by R. typifies the group's initial responses.

R. I was very confused about this story too. She doesn't seem to be so worried about the baby, just the fact that it makes her look older because now she's going to have a baby to look after, and the old man on the bench seemed to bring this out more and more ... And that's about it. I don't know.

(ll. 10-14, 17)

Similar to the last session, after the initial comments they begin analysing the story using literary elements as the frame for their discourse. Their first consideration is character.

B. Mr. Fairbanks. What did you think of him? Stereotypical of a male?
(ll. 20-1)

B's questions encourage the group to use personal experience to make sense of character. The group does not, however, talk about Mr. Fairbanks beyond a brief answer to B.'s questions. They are more interested in Mrs. Fairbanks's behaviour and speculating about the couple's response towards having a baby.

C. But if you think about it, like, she was kinda babbling on about kinda stupid things like -- not to be mean to her, but --
B. I wouldn't say it was stupid of her --
C. -- they must have talked about having the baby before, and now that she's pregnant and she's --
B. Is she pregnant?
(ll. 24-6, 29-31)

B.'s question highlights the degree of confusion surrounding this story. She still does not understand that Mrs. Fairbanks is pregnant even though C. talked about her pregnancy in his initial response. Her question also indicates the level of comfort that the members of the group feel toward each other. She does not hesitate to ask her peers as she knows that her question will be treated seriously. In fact, the others respond by providing evidence from the story to demonstrate to her that Mrs. Fairbanks is indeed pregnant.

C. -- because she's getting plump and all that.
B. Ah. I thought she was --
R. That's why he's so concerned and tells her not to think of bad thoughts and everything because he's so worried about her health now. It's not healthy for the baby.
(ll. 34-38)

The next literary element proposed as a topic of discussion is the theme. B., who in her initial response to the story wonders what the point behind the whole thing is, returns to this question.

B. What was the whole main thing in the story? Like, what was it -- what was the purpose of it? Marriage? Decisions? No, what's the old man on the bench have to do with it? There's gotta be something.
(ll. 99-102)

In a sense B. answers her own questions with more questions when she suggests marriage and decisions. Group Four follows her line of questioning about the old man and ignores the possible themes of marriage and decisions.

R. He sorta seems like a father figure, doesn't he?
B. He's a bum. He's got --
R. But he's not -- we don't know if he's a bum or what. Maybe he was just out of work or something.
B. Yeah, but he had red-rimmed eyes. Like, if he worked a lot or if he drank, you know, bums have red-rimmed eyes.
R. Yeah.
B. And he seemed to smooth it over. You know, like how fathers always do that, like, 'Oh, it's okay dear', you know, ' Nothing is gonna be wrong'. And it's like, 'Oh, shut up'. But he -- I'd say he was the key character in the thing.
R. Because, I mean, he's the one who brings out the fact that she's so scared of getting old now.

(ll. 103-115)

The preceding segment of discourse illustrates the group's interest in character and their use of strategies such as analysing, drawing on personal experience, and role playing for the purposes of illuminating a point or figuring out characters' behaviour. It also illustrates the importance and appeal of character as a topic of discussion for short stories. Discussing character, rather than theme, seems to be for Group Four, and the other groups, a more satisfying and sensible route to understanding story overall. Eventually the discussion about the role of the man on the bench reaches a conclusion that provides insight into not only the character, but also the story's theme.

C. Probably had that attitude like "I don't want your sympathy, leave me alone".
R. That could be too.
C. Just because you think you're better than me, cuz then -- cuz then, later when they were leaving and they had been in a quarrel he smiled and said, "You know, you're just like me, you got problems too", right.

(ll. 144-150)

Here again, various meaning-making strategies are at work. C., in particular, infers, analyses, and role plays in order to understand the man on the bench and his role or purpose in the relation to the story's overall meaning.

The next item for discussion is raised by R. when she asks, "What was the -- the quarrel was about the baby and not having enough money, wasn't it" (ll. 152-3)? This question integrates character and plot because the quarrel comprises a significant portion of the story. But the group focusses on character with plot acting as a subtle underpinning for the discussion. Mrs. Fairbanks is the character around which the discussion revolves.

C. It started off about she saying how they went to the park, and he's walking along and he's just worrying about himself, not her. What is he supposed to do? 'Oh, are you all right?', you know, every couple of ...
B. Yeah, but she --

R. I got -- yeah, I got the thing that she wanted to be babied, like looked after.
B. But she didn't want to be.

(ll. 154-61)

As they build their analysis of Mrs. Fairbanks's together, many of the familiar meaning-making strategies come into play such as inferring from details and role playing. The above comments by C., B., and R. also reveal information about their group's behavioural dynamic. They listen to each other; they elaborate and support one another; and they contradict each other.

Setting becomes an item for consideration when C. states that "You can't even tell when the story happened, like, the other stories we could" (ll. 215-6). In response, B. recognizes the universality of the story by saying, "Actually, this could happen any time" (l. 217). Group Four is quite ambivalent about analysing the time period of the story until B. begins to press her point about it occurring in the past by referring to textual details provided by the author about Mrs. Fairbanks.

B. I mean, I don't know, I was thinking back. I don't know why. It just --
B. -- that's what sorta stuck out in my head because of her -- she's like she's small, and she -- I don't know, the bobbed hair and tilted felt hat.
B. He portrayed her -- whoever portrayed her as a little girl with bobbed hair --

(ll. 227, 230-2, 236)

B. also infers a location. "I got, for the setting, I had a feeling it was New York in Central Park" (l. 377-8).

After a silly comment about pregnant women that causes the group to laugh, R. abruptly asks, "Okay, what is the theme" (l. 353). C.'s response to her question is similar to the response most English teachers hear when they ask the question: "I haven't got a clue" (l. 354). But immediately after C.'s reply, the group offers a variety of theme statements.

B. Just look at what you have before you look at what you don't have.
C. Yeah. Sometimes your problems aren't as bad as they seem.
B. Blow things kinda out of proportion or just look at others before you downgrade yourself. That's what I thought.
R. Because there's always somebody in a worse position than you are?

(ll. 355-62)

The preceding statements are rather cliched, but nevertheless they demonstrate the group's ability to analyse and then synthesize the story's events and the characters' behaviour to generate possible themes. Group Four also refers to personal experience to help them think about theme.

B. Just remember that when you fell down. Your parents said, "Look at somebody that's handicapped." It's just like, "Oh, no, here we go again."
R. You're not as bad off as you think you are.

(ll. 364-66)

The conclusion of their discussion session is more general in its focus. They review their sense of the story as a whole and evaluate it as a piece of literature.

C. Now that we've discussed the story as a whole, I still don't see it in any better light. I still am confused.
B. I still am -- I don't know. I didn't think -- it wasn't that good at first. I don't know. It was different.
R. Confusing.
B. Yeah. I didn't -- you have to totally analyse it to get anything out of it.
R. To me there wasn't any purpose. It just sort of -- the story from a soap opera scene.
C. Like what makes people write stories like this?
R. Maybe so that others can see their mistakes before actually making them, but like the only way you'd learn is to make your mistake and learn from it. You can't -- someone else can't tell you. I didn't like the story. I still don't like the story.
C. I really -- I don't like it either.

(ll. 522-38)

Once again, as a group, they tended to behave as problem solvers. Despite feeling somewhat confused about "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks", they persisted in discussing and trying to make sense of the story. More than in Group Four's previous discussions, this discussion used literary elements as the framework. It was also more essay-like in structure than any of the others. But perhaps the most intriguing thing about Group Four was their use of role play to understand characters.

Session Four

M. begins the round of initial responses for "The Friday Everything Changed". She immediately refers to her personal experience to compare the story to other stories she has read. She recognizes that its theme is similar, but evaluates the story positively because of its different point of view.

M. I've read stories similar to this before, like a woman's lib movement, but it's the first time that I've read something that has it from the point of view of kids, so that makes it sorta interesting, I guess.

(ll. 1-4)

C., the next one to speak, evaluates the story globally and like M. finds it similar to other stories he has read.

> C. The story is pretty -- seems pretty simple. What? I've read stories like this before too, and it just seems like, I don't know ...
>
> (ll. 5-6)

R.'s initial perspective is akin to M.'s; she essentially restates what M. said without adding anything new.

> R. I thought the story was pretty [simple], but it made a strong point about the women's lib, and I thought it was kinda different to see it through kids instead of always adults.
>
> (ll.8-10)

The final member of the group to give her initial response is B. She evaluates the story positively and also mentions women's lib.

> B. I thought the story was kinda neat in that they compared baseball as to a movement of why girls can't do the same thing as boys, and the baseball match just sorta had women's lib involved in that.
>
> (ll. 11-13)

For "The Friday Everything Changed" each member's initial response is very similar, in contrast to sessions one and two. They evaluate the story positively, refer to personal experience, and analyse the basic point. As well, they do not elaborate much upon their thinking, perhaps because they think it is a simple story.

After the initial responses, M. proposes discussing the story's setting. "Setting. Why don't we start with setting" (l. 14). The rest of the group follow her suggestion and offer various thoughts and details about the story. Like the other groups, they refer to their experience watching *Little House on the Prairie*.

> M. I thought it was like a country school, like *Little House on the Prairie* where they have all grades in one room.
> B. What time is *Little House on the Prairie* about?
> M. I don't know.
> R. What setting is that?
> M. 1900s, middle 1900s or so, I think. 1920s, 1930s.
>
> (ll. 17-18, 30-3)

They are also confused about the references to the Red Cross; their school experiences do not include the Junior Red Cross.

> M. What did they mean by Junior Red Cross? Why did they call it Junior Red Cross?
> B. Isn't Red Cross blood, right?

R. Yeah.
B. Well, what's the connection with the water?
(ll. 45, 46-50)

They never resolve the time period of the story, nor do they determine what the Junior Red Cross is. However, by referring to their personal experience, they do decide that the Junior Red Cross was "probably their version of silent reading" (ll. 62).

M. is obviously the group's unofficial chairperson. She suggests the discussion topics for the session. In the previous sessions, one member of the group was not clearly the chairperson. Nevertheless, the group does not always follow M.'s suggestions. In response to M.'s question about character, the group proceeds instead to evaluate the quality of the story. R. says, "Well, the story is basically stereotypical" (l. 81). Other members of the group do not agree with R.; they analyse the story differently. For instance, B. says, "I found it had a unique twist in it that involved kids" (l. 83). The preceding comment by B. also demonstrates her awareness of point of view and that authors make conscious decisions when constructing texts.

Another literary element the group considers is theme. M. asks, "What do you think the moral of the story was or the theme" (l. 106)? Immediately three, somewhat cliched, theme statements are offered.

R. Anything boys can do, girls can do better.
M. You can do anything you want to if you set your mind to it?
B. Don't be afraid to challenge things that are not the norm.
(ll. 107, 109-110)

But in conjunction with the theme analyses, they provide details from the text for support.

B. Yeah, she was strong enough to say, "Yes, why can't a girl do it?"
R. Well, even when her cousin came and said -- you know, she's always listened to him before, and he said, well, you should, you know.
R. And she stood her ground the whole time.
(ll. 115-8)

As they talk about events from the story which demonstrate the theme, Group Four also analyses the boys and girls' behaviour. Because characterization is dealt with differently in this story, the group discusses character less in this session. The teacher is one of the few characters discussed specifically. For example, they work to develop a picture of the teacher's character by questioning, inferring, analysing, and referring to personal experience.

M. What about this teacher?
C. When she was in school, she probably wanted to change things too.

R. But like when she did, everybody stuck up for her almost to say they idoled her, like she was sorta the -- what do you call people like that? Like a Christ figure, you know.
M. It was in that stupid story about Pigshead, *Lord of the Flies*, too. They had a Christ figure, right?

(ll. 407, 441, 445-49)

The rest of the characters tend to be talked about as groups of boys and girls.

M. They just don't know that it's guys against girls, but they -- just carrying the water bucket.
B. Until it came that the guys thought they were being threatened and the girls thought, 'well, phooey on you, you know, we're gonna get our way'.
M. But also it shows that it occurs even when you're little, not just like when you start to get out working kinda thing.
B. That it's happening all the time, no matter what age.

(ll. 165-170)

The group uses similar strategies for making sense of this story as for the previous stories. For example, in the preceding segment, they refer to personal experience, analyse theme and character, empathize and understand through role play, and infer from textual details.
What is different about the discussion of "The Friday Everything Changed" is the decreased focus on specific characters, the wider range of literary elements considered, and the increased use of evaluation and personal experience.

M., once again, takes charge of the discussion when she suggests talking about the title. "What about the title? We didn't do the title last time" (l. 232). Very quickly the group analyses the words of the title, "The Friday Everything Changed", and synthesizes the story's events to make sense of the title's significance.

R. It's self-explanatory. It happened on a Friday.
M. So, a new beginning.
R. Yeah, a new added change.
B. A change, yeah, or a step in a different direction.

(ll. 232, 234-6)

Because discussion of the title is resolved so quickly, M. offers another literary element for consideration. "Any symbols" (l. 238)? R. answers her question by saying, "Carrying the water is a symbol" (l. 239). This prompts M. to ask, "A symbol of what" (l. 240)? R. replies that it is a "symbol of what women fight for in women's lib, whatever that is" (ll. 242-3). M. synthesizes and elaborates upon R.'s suggestion by saying, "Independence" (l. 244). M. continues to display interest in finding symbolic meaning in the story.

M. What else? What about the baseball game? Isn't that sort of a symbol because, you know, it started with boys and girls, and then as soon as the girls spoke up, and then it was only boys, and then at the end she -- the teacher walked in

there and being a teacher I guess she had the authority or the right or whatever to go in there and say, 'well, to heck with you, it's going to be a girl game'.
(ll. 246-50)

M. uses an interesting array of strategies in developing and presenting her interpretation of the baseball game's symbolic significance. She presents her analysis initially as a question, but as she reviews and synthesizes the story's events in relation to the game she becomes increasingly confident. By the end of the above segment, she engages in an impromptu role play of the teacher in order to illustrate her analysis of the teacher's behaviour and motivation. B. offers an alternative analysis of the baseball game's symbolism. "But the game sorta symbolized equality in a way. You know, fairness, that everyone had a turn" (ll. 269-70). She also refers to personal experience to state that the ball game represents women's lib.

M. has one other item in the story that she wants the group to consider symbolically.

M. Well, about the last sentence when she swept her hand over the top of her desk, and tiny dust ...
R. Probably the norms, you know like how she changed. I think the dust symbolizes that.
B. A new beginning kinda thing.
M. Yeah.
B. And you notice how it danced in the sunlight? Now she could have just said she swept it off and it made her cough or sneeze, whatever --
R. Yeah.
B. -- but dancing in the sun was as if there was hope --
M. Hope.
R. It's lingering there, kinda.
(ll. 278-291)

The group's discussion of the symbolic significance of the dust motes being swept off the teacher's desk at the end of the story displays many things about how they make sense of the stories and how they work together as a group. They are willing to speculate and offer tentative ideas to one another which indicates a strong sense of comfort with each other. They offer each other support and encouragement by saying things like "yeah" or repeating an important word said by another person. They are also quite adept at analysing stories through the framework of the literary elements.

M. initiates the concluding portion of the discussion by asking a question. "Well, what do you guys think of the story now? Different, same" (l. 473). They proceed to evaluate the story as a whole, express engagement with the story, ask questions about the story, and draw on personal experience to support their concluding comments about the story.

R. It's actually a pretty good story now. The first time you read it, it's kinda like, yeah, okay, yeah, okay. I want the girls to play (inaudible) game. We've heard this before.

M. It was kinda -- I thought it was really unique that they used little kids in a baseball game so they could explain something so complex, instead of using kids our age or our parents' age because we wouldn't really understand.
B. Yeah.
R. What I'm wondering is like if you let a little kid be -- well, not -- someone who is young who has read enough who will actually sit down and read the whole story, would they get it?
B. Probably not because it's, you know -- it would have to be written by someone our age.
M. But you'd have to be old to understand it because all the little kid would see is a bunch of kids playing baseball.

(ll. 474-80, 482-88)

The last three comments from R., B., and M. are interesting not only from the perspective of how they make sense of this story, but also from the perspective of what they know about how less experienced readers would make sense of the story. The review process at the end of the discussion also enables them to reflect on what the discussion process does for them as readers. It helps them re-look and re-consider the text.

In general, Group Four's discussion of "The Friday Everything Changed" was similar yet different from previous discussions. The organizational shape of the discussion was essay-like. They used literary elements and a variety of meaning-making strategies, and they were comfortable and supportive of one another. What was different was the decreased focus on one central character which is likely because the story does not have one central character. As well, their use of the literary elements was more wide ranging than in previous discussions and they seemed to jump from topic to topic more. But the most significant difference was M.'s assumption of the role of chairperson. Without a doubt, she directed the discussion from beginning to end. It is also important to note that the group did not react negatively to her leadership; they worked together as comfortably in this session as they had in previous sessions.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to review briefly the main ideas of chapters one to three, weave together the threads of the four stories of the four groups in chapter four, and present conclusions and recommendations based on my research.

As we know, the theory, research, and practice of response to literature is attempting to find ways to produce independent and thoughtful readers. Traditionally, there has been too much teacher talk and influence, and insufficient meaningful opportunities for students to interact independently with literature. In order to provide these opportunities, we need to learn more about developing response to literature, response styles, meaning-making strategies, and effects of group behaviour. Thus, in my research I have investigated how students respond to literature when given the opportunity to discuss short stories in small student-led groups.

The foundation for my research rested upon my review of the literature related to reader response to literature. In particular, I reviewed three areas of response to literature research: written response to literature, oral response to literature, and response to literature through questioning. Research into written response to literature has found that when students write responses to a text the transaction between the reader and the text may be enhanced. Oral response to literature studies have revealed that small group discussions about literature broaden students' perspectives of texts and contribute to the reader's active re-creation of text. Studies of responding to literature through questioning have shown that questioning does not have to be teacher-centred, nor address only cognitive realms. Questioning strategies that honour and foster the reader's personal involvement with literature are reasonable means of developing reading strategies, comprehension, and aesthetic response.

As a result of my review of the literature and my research focus, I undertook to complete a qualitative, ethnographic case study of sixteen grade 12 students responding to four short stories in four student-led small group discussion sessions. I collected data on the four groups by audio-taping and transcribing the discussion sessions, writing field notes and a researcher's journal, and conducting retrospective interviews with selected students. Then I analysed the data inductively through content analysis in order to learn more about developing response, response strategies, and small group interaction.

B. Weaving Together the Four Groups' Stories

Despite the fact that Group One was purposefully created to be academically average and the other three groups were purposefully created to be academically heterogeneous, there were more similarities among the four groups than there were differences. As a consequence, I became less concerned during the analysis about distinguishing between the two types of groups and focussed instead on how each group worked to make sense of short stories in student-led discussions. In order to report most effectively on the groups' similarities, I will present them within the context of the study's five sub-questions.

Question One

The first question dealt with how response to literature evolves in small student-led group discussions. With this question I wanted to determine what the groups tended to talk about in their initial responses and what shape, if any, the discussion followed after that. With the initial responses each group, in some form or another, expressed engagement with the story, evaluated the story, and analysed theme. Sometimes they also analysed character and stated confusion about something in a story, usually plot, theme, or character. The initial responses were usually of a general nature rather than specific in focus. After the initial responses the discussions focussed on specific details in the story. For instance, they might discuss a character's personality or relationship with another character. During the middle segment of the discussion sessions, the groups tended to use various meaning-making strategies within a literary elements framework as a means of interpreting the story. The concluding segments of the discussion sessions were general in nature, similar to the opening segments. The students tended to comment once again on whether or not they liked the story (engagement), whether or not they thought it was a good story (evaluation), and what the story's theme was or what the story was about (analysis). Thus it seems that the groups' discussions tended to have the shape of a typical five paragraph essay. The discussions may have taken on this shape for a variety of reasons: first, the length of time given to the students to discuss the short stories; second, the simple need for a way to initiate the discussion; third, the suggested response process procedure; fourth, the possibility of having to report back to rest of the class, and fifth, the previous class experiences.

Question Two

The second question asked if there were clearly identifiable patterns in students' responses during their small group discussions. For this question, I was interested in determining if the students' responses could be categorized or would be entirely random. I also wanted to see what meaning-making strategies were most prevalent. From the content analysis I found four broad categories: literary elements, personal response, interpretation, and evaluation. Mostly these categories provided me with a useful way to describe how the students made sense of the stories. The categories were also interesting because of their similarity to other researchers' categorization schemes. In general, the categories that became evident revealed much about how students in a peer-led discussion group interpret and respond to literature, in particular short stories.

- The first category -- **literary elements** -- demonstrated the explicit knowledge learned during twelve years of literature instruction, especially in secondary English classes.
- The second category -- **personal response** -- revealed the students' need to be personally and emotionally engaged with the literature they read and study.
- The third category -- **interpretation** -- reflected the students' desire to understand the short stories, to make the stories mean something to them.
- The fourth category -- **evaluation** -- indicated the students' inclination to be perceptive critics and to state opinions.

For me the most fascinating component of the research involved the meaning-making strategies used by the students to make sense of the short stories. Within the context of the small group, the students used a wide range of strategies, the most common being **analysing**, **referring to personal experience**, **inferring**, **questioning**, **evaluating**, **expressing engagement**, and **speculating**. These strategies fall within three of the four broad categories of response, but in a sense the categories became unimportant when I looked at how the students used the strategies to make meaning. For example, the most commonly used strategies for "He Swung and He Missed", a descriptive and complex story about a boxer, were analysing and questioning. Other strategies such as referring to personal experience, inferring, evaluating, expressing engagement, and synthesizing were used less frequently. For "A Penny in the Dust", a symbolic and emotional story about a childhood experience, the most commonly used strategies were analysing, inferring, referring to personal experience, and questioning. Other strategies such as expressing engagement and evaluating were used but not as often. For the third story, "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks", a descriptive, low action, high dialogue story about a young married couple, the most commonly used strategies were

analysing, inferring, referring to personal knowledge, questioning, and speculating. Other strategies such as expressing engagement, evaluating, synthesizing, and role playing were used but not as often. The most commonly used strategies for "The Friday Everything Changed", a child's perspective of a significant event at school, were analysing, referring to personal experience, inferring, questioning, expressing engagement, and evaluating. Other strategies such as speculating and synthesizing were used but again not as often. No matter which component of a short story the students were discussing, they used one or more strategies to make sense of it. The students rarely used a meaning-making strategy in isolation; they seemed to layer the strategies almost like an onion has layers. For instance, a question might lead to both analysing and referring to personal experience.

Working in a group also influenced the students' use of strategies. They were willing to be tentative and exploratory; they rarely demonstrated a strong need to find a definitive answer or interpretation during the small group discussions. If they had been working individually, they might not have been so inclined towards behaving like Dias's (1987) problem solvers.

Overall, the most commonly used meaning-making strategy was analysis. This does not mean, however, that the groups worked to pick apart or extract meaning from the stories. Rather, their small group discussions provided them with the chance to analyse by re-creating the text, i.e. re-telling, re-visioning, re-thinking, and questioning, which is a fundamental reason for putting into practice response to literature theory (Barnes et al., 1971; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Fillion, 1981; Jackson, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1976; Stratta et al., 1973). Thus, while the groups' discussion sessions revealed certain categories of response and recurring use of many of the same meaning-making strategies, there was no obvious pattern to the responses. The lack of patterns in the groups' responses seemed to confirm the complex, contextual nature of response, rather than to simplify it.

Question Three

The third question asked which aspects of story do students in groups tend to focus upon. The literary elements response category was relevant to this question as it subsumed discussion involving character, plot, theme, point of view, setting, mood and tone, symbolism, and story titles. But once again the category was most useful as a means of describing what the students did. It did not provide hard and fast answers.

The aspect of story that students focussed upon most was character. Because character is such an important ingredient in any short story, it is understandable that they chose to discuss character more than any other short story element. The groups tended to make sense of

virtually every aspect of the short story by discussing character, which was something I had not expected to see to such a degree. For instance, while talking about a character they often discerned a story's theme or analysed another character or clarified an area of confusion regarding the plot. But in particular, they discussed the characters in order to determine their motivation and behaviour.

While the students were quite capable at discussing character, theme, setting, plot, and symbolism, they demonstrated limited awareness of tone and mood, point of view, and style. The reason for this may be threefold. They may have received less instruction on the latter elements; the students may not have perceived these elements in the stories being discussed; and the students may not be developmentally ready as readers to interpret tone and mood, point of view, and style.

The students were most comfortable using the literary elements as the frame for their discussions. For instance, one student might ask the others why they thought the character put the penny back in the pocket? Usually the whole group not only responded to the question, but also used the question as impetus for further discussion about the character's motivation, relationships, behaviour, and significance.

Question Four

The fourth question addressed the influence the choice of short story has upon the group discussions. The nature of the short story was an important influence upon the discussions. In particular, the story's content shaped what the students talked about. For instance, if the story was about a young boy losing a penny that his father had given him, the students talked about the penny, the young boy, and the boy's relationship with his father. They also made connections between their lives and the story by talking about similar situations they had experienced as young children. In the case of "He Swung and He Missed", the students talked about Rocco's career as a boxer. Because theme is integral to content, it was not surprising that the stories' themes seemed to subtly influence the groups' discussions. Although they rarely discussed theme outright, they did talk about theme as part of their character discussions. For example, in "Penny in the Dust" the theme of love and relationships was a significant part of the discussion of Pete's and his father's characters. Even for "The Friday Everything Changed" where the theme seemed quite obvious to the students, they used the groups of characters as the means by which they made sense of the story and its theme.

The style in which the story was written also influenced the discussions. They found it more difficult to become engaged with stories that contained much description or a low level of action and a high level of dialogue. For example, "Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks" elicited more

statements of confusion and disenchantment than any of the other stories. This was because the story contained little action and portrayed a situation that very few of the students would have experienced in their own lives. As a result, the three academically heterogeneous groups tended to discuss the story as an exercise in literary analysis. The academically average group discussed the story in terms of gender roles; they brought something they had experienced to the story in order to make sense of it. Nevertheless, in both cases it was the style and content of the story that influenced the groups' discussions.

Characterization in each of the short stories was the strongest influence upon the students' discussions. For instance, "He Swung and He Missed" was about Rocco, the young man whose career as a boxer was ending. When the students discussed "He Swung and He Missed", they talked about Rocco more than anything else. However, if a story's characters were not developed as individuals, the students' responses also reflected that difference in style. For instance, the boys and girls in "The Friday Everything Changed" were not portrayed so much as individuals as part of a group. There were the boys and there were the girls. This method of portraying character seemed to encourage the students to discuss the boys and girls in the story in terms of group behaviour instead of individual behaviour. In the other three stories, they talked a great deal about individual characters as individual human beings.

Question Five

The fifth question asked whether groups vary in the ways they approach and respond to a short story. One factor that accounted for much of the variety among the groups was personality. Or to be more precise, each student's personality and the combination of these personalities to form a group personality strongly shaped how each group functioned. The students were comfortable enough with one another to feel at ease discussing the short stories without seeming to require teacher intervention or cooperative learning structures. Each student's personality played a part in how each group functioned. For instance, some students were quietly supportive; some students shared leading the group; other students asked questions or elaborated on previous statements. The individual personalities influenced the ebb and flow of the the discussion sessions.

It is interesting to note that Groups Two, Three, and Four consisted of three girls and one boy and Group One consisted of one girl and three boys. This did not, however, result in three female dominated groups and one male dominated group. Each of the groups seemed to function in its own way at quite a developmentally mature level.

The students' sense of comfort with one another and experience working in small groups has a strong influence upon how the groups approached the response process. Perhaps

if the students had not been so familiar with working in student-led small groups, they might have had more need to make direct use of the cooperative structures suggested in the handout titled "Discussing Short Stories as a Group". As it was, other than Group One, the students paid little attention to the suggested procedures. They simply got down to the business of making sense of the stories together. In this study, the students' personalities and experience with small groups influenced how each group approached and responded to the short stories.

The following section in which I outline distinguishing features of each group, best addresses the question dealing with group variations and best illustrates the four categories of group behavioural dynamics that my analysis revealed. Essentially, each group, in its own way, demonstrated the following categories of behaviour:

- **agreeing and providing support for each other;**
- **elaborating or clarifying upon a statement;**
- **contradicting or offering a different opinion**; and
- **directing the discussion either by one individual or collaboratively as a group.**

Group One

Group One was obviously different because of its original composition. The group was formed on the basis of the four students being considered academically average by their teacher. The composition of the group did not hinder its ability to have lively discussions about the short stories. However, they did seem to be less developmentally mature readers and responders in that they wanted the stories to conform to their views of life; they wanted the stories to engage them emotionally, especially the characters; and they drew heavily upon personal experience as a means of interpreting the stories. While they used more than one strategy for making meaning, they had a slightly more limited repertoire of strategies than the other groups. Another characteristic of Group One was that its discussions were obviously led by one member of the group and perhaps as a result they were more conscious of time and being prepared to report back to the others at the end of the session. Generally each of their discussions followed the suggested directions for group response and evolved in the shape of a typical essay. Lastly, Group One was different because in the classroom they appeared to be a dysfunctional group who argued a great deal. However, after reading the transcripts of their discussions, it was obvious that being argumentative and lively was simply their discussion style. They were usually very much engaged with the task of making sense of the short stories.

Group Two

Group Two was distinctive because of its quite lengthy initial responses, especially when compared with those of Group One. Their opening statements often went beyond making statements of engagement, evaluation, and theme. It was common for their initial responses to deal with areas of confusion. As a group they functioned agreeably and supportively, while at the same time each member of the group possessed enough confidence and comfort to express individual opinions about the stories. Group Two did not have an obvious group leader; they simply worked well together. As a means of making sense of the short stories, they used more meaning-making strategies and literary elements than Group One. For example, during their discussion of "He Swung and He Missed", Group Two used eleven meaning-making strategies; Group One used seven. They also referred less often to personal experience than did the other groups, although the last short story did affect them very personally. A final distinguishing feature of Group Two was the shape of its discussions. The discussions did not always conform to typical essay structure. Sometimes their discussions seemed to end without reviewing or summing up because they were still busy discussing the details of the story.

Group Three

Group Three did not have as many noteworthy characteristics as the other groups. K., the only male in the group, usually, but not always, acted as the group's unofficial chairperson. Of the four groups, this was the only group to have a boy take on a leadership role. Group Three used the framework of the literary elements more overtly than Groups One and Two. But Group Three's most distinguishing feature was its group dynamic. It was far more low key and quiet than the other groups. Their discussions were supportive, friendly, and definitely not argumentative.

Group Four

Group Four was special in many ways. Consisting of three girls and one boy, the three girls were quite equally strong and usually shared the leadership of the discussion sessions; however, in session four, M., one of the girls, led the discussion by asking questions from start to finish. They were an enthusiastic and energetic group who in this respect closely resembled Group One. But unlike Group One, they usually were not concerned about the stories conforming to their personal views. More than the other groups they used a

broad repertoire of meaning-making strategies and a strong emphasis upon the literary elements in their discussions. In terms of strategies, they were unique in their level of awareness of their personal reading processes, awareness of the author's role in constructing a text, and their regular use of role play as a means of developing understanding of characters. There was definitely a mix between literary awareness and emotional involvement in their discussions.

In conclusion, while each of the four groups possessed distinguishing features, they were not strikingly different from one another. Indeed, the heterogeneous composition of Groups Two, Three, and Four seemed to make them unique from Group One in only one respect. Groups Two, Three, and Four were less concerned about having the stories and stories' characters conform to their personal perspectives. Thus, each group's response process was perhaps as much the random result of bringing together different personalities and abilities with different stories as anything else.

C. Research Conclusions

Many conclusions may be drawn from my study of how small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the context of discussing short stories.

Small Student-Led Groups

The first set of conclusions addresses the use of small student-led groups. First, the study revealed the importance of the small group discussion as a starting place for response to literature. Because the groups were small and consisted of the students' peers, they felt free to take risks, be tentative, ask questions, and explore possible avenues of interpretation all of which are vital for aesthetic response. It is not uncommon for students to be unwilling to ask questions in literature discussions because of not wishing to look unintelligent in front of the teacher and the whole class; however, in the small group setting the fear of speaking in front of large numbers of people was removed. The comfortable small group environment encouraged all students to participate in the discussions. During the retrospective interviews, the students were adamant about their degree of participation in student-led small group discussions versus teacher-led whole class discussions.

The interviews also revealed support for another conclusion about the value of discussing literature in small student-led groups. Students shared that they learned more by discussing in small groups than by discussing as a whole class. The group setting allowed them to ask more questions, offer more analyses, relate personal experiences, and hear how other students made sense of the short stories. Basically, each student had more time to talk

and make meaning, almost in the manner traditionally adopted by the teacher in whole class teacher-led discussions (Roberts & Langer, 1991).

The study also demonstrated the value of students working together to interpret literature in groups of mixed abilities and personalities. The academically heterogeneous groups were more capable of blending personal response with interpretation in order to perceive the stories as literary entities. The students' individual and group personalities provided another interesting insight. The students in my study confirmed that, with experience and practice at working together to discuss literature, the mix of personalities and abilities in a group was beneficial because of the emotional and intellectual vitality that it provided. The setting made it possible for each student to use his or her strategies for making meaning while at the same time they saw their peers using different strategies or similar strategies in different ways. For instance, while less sophisticated readers may have used mostly personal response strategies, they were able to listen to fellow students who used a wider range of meaning-making strategies. Thus, experience at working collaboratively in heterogeneous small groups seems vital for students' development as readers and responders. Interestingly enough, the students were quick to recognize the important role the teacher plays in providing them with knowledge that they themselves do not possess. However, they also strongly believed that the small group discussions enabled them to explore and expand upon their knowledge and to develop their own understanding of the short stories rather than that of the teacher.

In general, discussing short stories in small student-led groups fostered both individual and social construction of knowledge. The students worked together to make sense of the stories while at the same time developing their individual responses and interpretations. The group experience did not seem to hinder each student's perspective; in fact, it seemed to enhance their active re-creation of text far more than a teacher-led discussion might (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Fisher, 1985; Golden, 1986; Johnston, 1987; Otto, 1987; Roberts & Langer, 1991; Strickland et al., 1989; Wilson, 1975). It also seemed that the small group discussions supported the developmental view of response to literature and reading (Protherough, 1983; Thomson, 1987). Thomson's (1987) developmental model of response to literature is particularly interesting: (1) unreflective interest in action, (2) empathizing, (3) analogizing, (4) reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour, (5) reviewing the whole work as a construct, and (6) consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes (p. 360). If we think in terms of this model, the process of discussing the short stories in small groups seemed to enable more students to respond at a higher level of response than if perhaps they had been responding to the literature on an individual basis or in a different type of group setting. For instance, the heterogeneous groups moved among all six stages of response

identified by Thomson, while Group One, the academically average group, usually used stages one through five. Furthermore, from my perception of the students as individuals, I am willing to speculate that if they had been responding to the short stories separately some of them might not have demonstrated the ability to use stages four, five, or six. Thus, my study seems to corroborate the notion that response to literature is developmental and the value of using student-led small group discussions as a means of fostering response to literature.

Students Making Meaning

The second set of conclusions looks more closely at what the students actually did in order to make sense of the short stories. The four general categories of response that were most prevalent were literary elements, personal response, interpretation, and evaluation. For each of the four stories, the groups used meaning-making strategies as they talked about the literary elements. Within the response category for literary elements, the students talked chiefly about character. Second to character was plot, and then sometimes theme, symbolism, and setting. Within the other three response categories there are many different sub-categories of response, but certain **meaning-making strategies** were used by the students more often than others. For the sixteen students in my study, **analysis, inferring, referring to personal experience, asking questions, evaluating, expressing engagement, and speculating** were the favourites. Usually the students employed more than one strategy simultaneously or one strategy immediately after the other in order to discuss a topic. Each story's content and style also influenced what the students did to make sense of it. Thus, it seems that the grade twelve students were able to draw upon quite an extensive repertoire of meaning-making strategies. Certain meaning-making strategies, such as analysing, inferring, and referring to personal experience, were used extensively while others, such as synthesis, were seldom used. Therefore, the student-led small group discussion process for responding to literature was beneficial as a means of broadening the students' repertoire of strategies for interpreting stories but, as the students indicated in the retrospective interviews, teachers are still very important in order to teach them how to consciously use an increasing number of meaning-making strategies.

The study also revealed the need to balance the affective and cognitive realms when responding to literature. The students usually started and ended their discussion sessions with statements of engagement and evaluation. As well, throughout the discussions, they regularly referred to personal experience and prior knowledge as a way of confirming their own experience and developing understanding of the short story being discussed. Personal experience and prior knowledge often involved referring to other stories and novels they had

read or movies and television shows they had watched (Beach et al., 1990). They also drew on situations they had been involved in themselves. For instance, two stories elicited much discussion from their own lives of gender issues. The link between thought and feeling was also apparent in the predictable essay shape of the small group discussions. As stated previously, the discussion sessions began with general statements of engagement, evaluation, and analysis. The middle sections of the discussions dealt with details of the story, and the concluding sections often returned to being general statements of engagement, evaluation, and analysis. Although personal experience and analysis were used throughout the discussions, the students seemed to need to draw upon their feelings initially before they could venture further into interpretation (Britton, 1971; Wilson, 1966). Therefore, Rosenblatt's (1985) statement about interpretation being the effort to report on the nature of the thought and feeling called forth during the transaction with text appeared to be confirmed by the students' approach to discussing short stories.

Perhaps not surprising the grade twelve students used their knowledge of the literary elements as part of their approach and response to the short stories. Chiefly, the literary elements served as the frame for their discussions, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. For instance, a student might ask a question about a story's setting and the resulting discussion would involve many different meaning-making strategies. Certain literary elements were used more often than others which indicated a connection to the developmental nature of response to literature. Although the students were in their final year at high school, character, theme, plot, setting, and symbolism were the literary elements most often discussed. Thus, elements such as mood and tone, style, irony, and point of view were rarely considered which suggests that the students may not have had much experience with these literary elements and may not yet be completely sophisticated readers. The literary element discussed the most was character. The reason for the interest in character seemed to rest with the type of literature being discussed. The short story genre tends to focus on character. As well, character is generally more interesting to talk about because stories' characters are representations of our human experience, and less developmentally mature readers seem to want characters and stories that conform or connect to their personal experience. Nevertheless, whether the students were sophisticated or unsophisticated readers, they discussed the motivation and behaviour of the characters. This was the small student-led groups' main approach to making sense of the stories. Content and style also affected how the students responded to the short stories. If a story had an unusual plot or was written in a slow-paced descriptive style, the students' discussions revealed more confusion and less personal satisfaction with it. Ultimately, how the students used the literary elements to make sense of the short stories

indicates the importance of teachers being instructional coaches to assist students in developing their knowledge and experience with literature.

Value of Small Group Discussion

My final conclusion refers directly to the study's main question of how small student-led discussion groups work to make meaning within the context of discussing short stories. The small student-led discussion groups confirmed the value of giving students the opportunity to develop their own responses to literature. During the retrospective interviews, the students recognized that their own interpretations were often not as insightful or sophisticated as the teacher's, but they also recognized that it was imperative for them to work together to make their own meaning, especially initially, if they were ever to feel confident and capable at being able to understand and enjoy literature.

D. Recommendations

As with any study there are pedagogical recommendations and recommendations for further research in order to confirm and expand our understanding of the topic .

Future Research

In terms of future research, we need to investigate how response develops in small groups. Because my research was a case study, it is not generalizable to a large population. The response styles and strategies used by the students in the study provided interesting information, but also many questions. Why did they respond as they did? What can we do to expand and develop students' abilities to use meaning-making strategies? How can we assist them in becoming more sophisticated readers and responders? As well, we need to learn more about the levels of response in small groups as compared to the levels of response when students work individually. Although the small groups seemed to be quite capable at interpreting short stories, they generally could have asked more probing questions about the stories. For instance, they rarely considered the short stories as literary constructions by authors. We need to find ways of getting small groups of students to be less superficial in their responses. For example, how might student-generated questioning strategies assist the developmental nature of response to literature? Another area of future research might be how does the literary selection, i.e. content, style, and genre, influence the response to literature? Also, how much direction should teachers give groups when discussing literature? Finally, we

need to learn more about the influence of group dynamics and behaviour upon response to literature. Is it entirely beneficial or can it hinder individual thinking? What role does gender balance play in a group? The recommendations for future research are not necessarily new, but they have evolved from this study and are important to consider if we wish to enrich our understanding of response to literature.

Literature Instruction

My study also has some interesting implications for literature instruction. First, teachers need to consider how they teach students about the literary elements. Obviously, students want to learn more about the technical side of literature, but teachers need to think about how to connect the study of literary elements to the context of the literature being read by the students. Maybe we should not teach students about literary elements until they have been able to formulate their own responses to the literature. Or maybe teachers should combine mini lessons that occur at the beginning of each lesson with incidental instruction. As well, teachers need to consider whether certain literary elements such as plot, theme, setting, and character are overemphasized in their instructional practices (Purves, 1973). In conjunction with the literary elements, the students obviously used different strategies to make sense of the short stories during their small group discussions. It is, therefore, apparent that teachers need to learn more about different meaning-making strategies so they may provide students with the opportunity to expand their repertoires. And because genre, content, and style were so influential, it seems important that teachers consider these components carefully when choosing literature for class instruction so that students will learn to respond in a variety of ways to a variety of literature.

As a means of developing personal response to literature, teachers need to provide students with more opportunities to discuss in small student-led groups. Teachers should consider how much and what type of direction students may require when discussing literature in small groups. Teachers also need to be judicious about when and how they provide literary instruction and interpretation. Tape recording the students' discussion sessions provided me with much rich information about how the students were interacting with the literature and each other. The presence of the tape recorder kept the students incredibly focussed on the task of discussing the short story. To use tape recorders with every discussion would be excessive, but audio taping does seem to be a valuable means of doing observational assessment. As well, the students would benefit from listening to the audio-taped discussions. It might encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation. In conclusion, small group discussions are valuable because we learn not only through reading, writing, viewing and representing, but also through talking and listening.

E. Conclusion

In my study I hoped to learn more about how students respond to short stories in small student-led discussion groups. In conjunction with my central question, I wanted to learn more about response to short stories, oral discourse in small groups, and literature learning in general. The case-study methodology was particularly suited to my purpose as I was able to focus closely on four groups of students. Even though each group's story was distinctive, taken together the four stories of the four groups offer rich insights into response to literature. For example, I learned much about how students in small groups weave together various approaches and meaning-making strategies, such as analysing, inferring, referring to personal experience, questioning, and evaluating, to make sense of short stories. The use of the case study methodology to observe and describe small student-led discussion groups is especially important when we consider that the process of reading literature in school needs to aid students in making the "discovery of the relationship of one's own 'storying' and the story of the book" (Sawyer, 1987, p. 36). Small group discussions seemed to provide students with a setting conducive to discovering one's own storying as well as the text's story. In a sense, when students have the opportunity to discuss literature in small student-led groups, they both transform and are transformed by the literature (Beach & Hynds, 1991). They engage in aesthetic or dialogic response to their particular evoked "poem", rather than simply searching for information (Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978; Vipond et al., 1990).

The study also highlighted for me the complexity of the response process. On an individual basis, response is idiosyncratic, but when the individual is making sense of short stories as part of a group, the process becomes even more complex and random. It also becomes difficult to separate the parts being played by the reader, the text, and the context. Despite the complexity of the response process, the small group process made it possible to learn more about the use of meaning-making strategies. There are, despite each small group's distinctiveness, some modes of response that are used repeatedly. It is clear, therefore, that we need to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to move freely among modes of response and develop a sophisticated repertoire of response strategies (Beach & Hynds, 1991).

Discussing short stories in small student-led groups is a necessary starting place for response if we want students to learn to read with insight, confidence, and pleasure. Without the ability to read aesthetically, literature as an art form and territory for exploration will disappear. Thus the basic tenets of reader response theory, the transaction between reader and text, and the need to honour the reader's initial response were supported by my study of responding to literature through small student-led discussion groups.

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Appendix 1

DISCUSSING SHORT STORIES AS A GROUP

Roles & Expectations

1. Face-to-Face Interaction:
   - look at each other
   - quiet voices
   - speak clearly
   - stay with your own group

2. Individual Accountability: each person is responsible for giving an initial response to the story, asking questions and elaborating on what other people in the group have said, making notes on what is being developed in the the group's discussion, and encouraging and supporting everyone's efforts to develop an insightful and probing interpretation of the story.

3. Designate the following roles: encourager, reporter, reader(s), timekeeper.

Procedures

1. One person reads aloud the first page of the story.

2. A second person reads aloud the last page of the story.
   •(If the story is very short, the two people could share reading the whole story to the group.)

3. Each student states an initial response to the story - thoughts, feelings, questions, areas of confusion, similar personal experiences, etc.

4. Random speaking order discussion of story begins after each person has expressed an initial response.

5. At any time, the group may re-read portions of the story to clarify meaning and refresh the memory.

6. After approximately 20 minutes of discussion, the group should re-read significant sections of the story again.

7. The group formulates a discussion report to present to the whole class.

8. The groups report to the whole class and are responsible for asking questions and explanations of the other groups. Whole class discussion follows.

Lynn Archer
English Helping Teacher
Surrey (#36)

Appendix 2

Introductory Session

Materials

- name tags
- 5 tape recorders
- 3 extension cords
- 24 cassette tapes
- copies of short stories
- handout on response process
- clipboard
- field observation forms
- introductory notes

Researcher's Overview

•Purpose of Study: what, who, why

-research undertaken for Master's thesis at U.B.C.
-investigate how students respond to literature when given the opportunity to discuss short stories in small student-led groups
-help teachers learn more about using small group discussions for literature instruction
-encourage students to be confident about their ability to read, understand, interpret, and enjoy literature
-want to look at grade 12 students because you are at the end of your high school careers and will have a lot to say about short stories, i.e. insight, feelings, understanding

•Process to be Used

-four sessions of audio-taped small group discussions
-working in small groups of four
-groups chosen by teacher and researcher
-groups meant to encourage different people to work together so that we don't see typical response behaviour that may have been established throughout the year
-vital that everyone participate fully by exploring their own responses to the short stories and by building on what others in the group have to say about the story
-consider your thoughts, feelings, personal experiences similar to the story, make predictions, generate hypotheses, ask questions, analyze, etc.
-refer back to the text
-read first and last page or sections again or read portions of pages or read sentences or look back at the text to confirm or alter opinions or facts
-do not start until I indicate that all is ready
-the first part of the response process must be followed; each person states his or her name and then gives an initial response, reaction to the story; this is vital as it allows everyone equal opportunity to speak
-before each of you give your initial response, please state your name
-delve as deeply and thoroughly as possible into your individual and group's sense of the story
-try not to end discussion of a story until I indicate time is up
-teachers will not be involved in discussions so you are responsible for resolving dilemmas or issues or searching for answers
-at times their may not be an easy answer or even an answer
-**group does not have to reach consensus** on its understanding of the story

-before the end of the twenty-five minute discussion period, re-read some important sections of the story again and review what the group discussed so that a reporter may report to the rest of the class your discussion
-researcher will be conducting field observations, i.e. taking notes of the groups each day so that I get to know you better and gather another element of information about how students' discuss short stories in small groups
-will also be asking some of you (one complete group and some random students) to participate in a retrospective interview at the end of the taping sessions as a further, and necessary, source of information

•Involvement and behaviour

-at all times speak clearly and stay closely involved in your group
-the tape recorders are not very high tech and clear, clean recordings are crucial for the success of my research
-do not tap, knock, or play with the tape recorders in any way other than to turn them on and off when I say
-pay attention to the different perspectives within your group and try to build on each person's approach to the story
-also pay attention to the similarities among yourselves
-your participation is greatly appreciated

Appendix 3

Field Observations

FOCUS

- -one target group, but always observe all groups
- -setting
- -appearances, body language & positions throughout
- -eye contact
- -involvement/participation
- -attitude
- -behaviour
- -use of short story text

METHODOLOGY

- -describe setting/environment, placement of participants
- -describe each subject
- -describe behaviour
    - -random, sweeping observations of whole group/individuals

OBSERVATION FORM **DATE:**

Time Behaviour