April 23, 2012

Dear Catherine Gay,

Below is my reconciliation letter detailing how the reviewers’ comments and concerns were addressed. Their comments are below, our response is in blue.

Reviewer Comments #1

•       The research presented in this study is timely and significant in the

fields of early reading and early childhood pedagogy. As noted by the

author, few studies focus the transactional stance of reading on primary

grade students ‘.  This study adds to a small selection of research that

examines young children and their aesthetic experiences, comprehension and

early reading.  The study is innovative and unusual on the current landscape

of reading education which has over the past decade focused on the science

and mechanics of early reading without focusing on the value of children’s

literature and aesthetic experiences in early literacy. This is an exciting

and hopeful horizon for early literacy that has too much persisted

instruction in phonics, getting the word right and rote learning during the

primary grades.

•       Some additional limitations were suggested by this reviewer.

o       Many teachers do not have the freedom to chose books outside of a given

curriculum or series selected by their district.  This limits the ability of

these teachers to use books related to student experiences for read alouds.

 This is not a limitation with the study, but perhaps a limitation in applying the study’s findings. This was addressed and included in the limitation section as a difficulty in generalization of the findings. This was added to the manuscript:

In terms of generalization, many teachers work in schools where the curriculum must be strictly adhered to and are therefore limited in the choice of books they can use for reading instruction or read alouds. These teachers must find other ways to bridge the content for their students.

o       In addition, teacher evaluations often emphasize that lesson plans should

relate to prior learning but not necessarily prior experience.  This is

another barrier to teachers choosing literature relevant to their

students’ personal histories.

 Though I agree that many teacher evaluations emphasize a lesson’s connection to prior learning, this is usually referred to as activating prior knowledge or background knowledge. This term is broad enough to include prior learning and students’ personal knowledge on this topic. I actually see this as an opportunity to incorporate literature that relates to students’ lives, and therefore do not see it as a limitation. No changes were made to the manuscript.

Reviewer Comments #2

•       Well written paper with only some minor revisions necessary.

o       Specifically, the last full paragraph on page five (“Rosenblatt’s

(1978) Transactional Reading Theory has….”) does not flow well.  The

three sentences seem disconnected.

 This paragraph was revised to show the connection between the sentences, the text now reads:

Rosenblatt’s (1978) Transactional Reading Theory has been used to explore how children respond to literature. Though few studies have focused on primary grade students (Sipe, 2000), Martinez-Roldán and López-Robertson (2000) did conduct one focusing on first graders. They analyzed the discussions bilingual first graders engaged in during literature circles. They found that students made aesthetic connections while exploring social issues relevant to their community.

o       The following sentence (“A few studies have explored the role assuming a

specific stance while reading has on the subsequent discussion.”) is

confusing and may need to be reworded.

 This sentence was revised, it now says:

A few other studies have been conducted with intermediate and middle school students. These studies analyzed the effects on students’ writing after having a discussion that focused on aesthetic or efferent components of reading.

Reviewer Comments #3

•       The purpose of the study is important to the field because it is

ultimately about fairness. Public schools in this country consist of a

variety of students from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds

and they are all expected to do well in reading comprehension.  There is

evidence that shows students do better at reading comprehension when exposed

to literature that mirrors their experiences. However, the literature that

mirrors the urban experiences of these students is more often than not

considered inappropriate in the classroom, which puts those students at an

unfair disadvantage. When one adds to this the fact students are largely

judged by standardized reading comprehension tests and that the formative

years are perhaps the most important in this process, the unfairness is

compounded.  Nevertheless, even in the absence of these concerns, this study

is important because it provides all teachers but especially elementary

school ones with a greater understanding of how to help students

comprehended literature better.

•       The methodology would benefit from more detail regarding the students

and how the books chosen for read alouds were related to them.  You mention

that school principals and teachers indicated social issues pertinent to the

students but how was this done?

 The following was added to the manuscript:

These sensitive social issues were identified by the school principal and teachers as pertinent to the student population. Prior to the study, both teachers and the principal were informally asked about the nature of the home environment, cultural reality, and social issues of the participants. Informal questioning was employed to garnish the perspective of the teachers and principal as it related to sensitive social issues in children’s books, as well as to inform book selection. Informal questioning enabled the gathering of anecdotal information without breaching FERPA.

•       It is unclear why mixed methods and grounded theory were used for data

analysis.  Some explanation of the rationale for these methods would improve

understanding of the methodology, results, and conclusions.

 The rationale for using mixed methods was added to the manuscript. The text now reads:

Mixed methods were used to analyze the data in order to fully capture the effects of the study. A qualitative approach was used to code and anlayze students’ responses to the comprehension assessment and connection to prompts as well as the stance they took while reading, whereas a quatitative approach was necessary to examine the correlation between the stance taken and the students’ comprehension score.

A few additional phrases were interspered throughout that paragraph to add further clarity.

•       This reviewer also would have liked to see more explanation of the

figures and how they relate to the conclusions.

The text now reads:

Figure 1 shows an efferent connection relating the text to their topic of study. After reading about Martin being shot in *Martin’s Big Words,* the child explains that it reminded him of Martin Luther King Jr. The class read and discussed this book, along with other books on the topic, around Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Figure 2 and 3 show aesthetic connections where children are able to use their personal experiences to make deeper connections to the text.. In Figure 2, the child makes a personal connection to the book. After reading about the boy’s father trying to find a job (the are currently homeless) the child is reminded of when they had to live with their grandmother. Figure 3 also shows the child personally relating to the text when after seeing how Jackie Robinson being ostracized by his teammates, he relates to not having any friends and remembers an experience in the playground.

•       The conclusions could be made stronger by drawing more connections

between the results of the study and the literature reviewed.

Two sentences were interwoven throughout the conclusion to strengthen the link between the lit review and the conclusion. The sentences are:

In fact, much like Keene and Zimmerman (1997) suggested, because the children had schema for these topics via their personal experience, these texts were appropriate for them.

Indeed, we report that similarly to Many’s (1991) study of fourth, sixth, and eighth grade students, primary grade students who assumed an aesthetic stance also scored higher on the comprehension measures.

The rich sociocultural knowledge that students bring to school color their perspective on learning and more specifically on literature (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

•       Lastly, “comprehension” is misspelled at the top of page 12.

 Typo was corrected

I think that the above changes and revisions make this a stronger manuscript. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Paola Pilonieta

pilonieta@uncc.edu