THE EFFECTS OF POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON THE
READING ACHIEVEMENT OF A YEAR TWO CLASS – AN ACTION RESEARCH
PROJECT

Submitted by

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Declaration of Originality

I, Charlene Philippa Bain declare that this thesis is my own work and to the best of my knowledge does not contain material previously published or written by any other person. This thesis has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any other tertiary education institution. Ideas, quotations and other material that has been derived from the published and unpublished work of others have been acknowledged in the text and in the reference list.

Signed: Charlene Philippa Bain

Dated: 4 November 2013
Acknowledgements Page

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ABSTRACT

Literacy is an inherent skill needed by all in society in order to be able to effectively interact within the 21st Century (Greenlee & Bruner, 2001). It has become apparent through the annual National Literacy and Numeracy tests across Australia that literacy progression, particularly in reading has dropped significantly (National Assessment Program, 2013). This study used an Action Research Approach to investigate the potential links between teacher-student relationships and academic progress in reading with a Year Two class in a Low-Socio Economic Status (SES) Western Sydney School. The teacher of the class was the researcher. The study was conducted over a six week period with three cycles consisting of two weeks each. Students were given a preliminary examination before the study started to assess their reading levels and an assessment at the end of each cycle. Students also completed questionnaires to assess their view of the relationships between themselves and their teacher, how much they enjoyed reading groups and their motivation for reading during each cycle. Results were then analyzed at the end of each cycle and necessary adjustments to teaching practices were undertaken by the researcher to increase the relationships between teacher and student.

The results of the study showed that through an increase in positive teacher-student relationships, student’s motivation and enjoyment for reading greatly improved as well as their reading levels. During this study, students reading levels increased on average by 7 levels over the course of the six weeks.
4.2 The First Cycle .......................................................................................................................... 40
4.2.1 Planning ................................................................................................................................ 40
4.2.2 Action .................................................................................................................................... 42
4.2.3 Observation ........................................................................................................................... 42
4.2.4 Reflection and Analysis ........................................................................................................ 45
4.3 Second Cycle ............................................................................................................................. 46
4.3.1 Planning ................................................................................................................................ 46
4.3.2 Action .................................................................................................................................... 47
4.3.3 Observation ........................................................................................................................... 48
4.3.4 Reflection and Analysis ........................................................................................................ 48
4.4 Third and Final Cycle ............................................................................................................... 53
4.4.1 Planning ................................................................................................................................ 53
4.4.2 Action .................................................................................................................................... 54
4.4.3 Observation ........................................................................................................................... 55
4.4.4 Analysis and Reflection ........................................................................................................ 55
4.4.5 Summary of Results .............................................................................................................. 59
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................... 61
5.1 Cycle One ................................................................................................................................ 61
5.2 Cycle Two ................................................................................................................................ 63
5.3 The Final Cycle ........................................................................................................................... 67
CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................................................... 70
REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 73
APPENDICES ...................................................................................................................................... 76
Figures

Figure 3.1 – Process of Action Research.................................................................28
Figure 4.1 – Preliminary Reading Assessment.........................................................34
Figure 4.2 – Preliminary Analysis of Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship..........................................................36
Figure 4.3 – Cycle One Reading Assessment............................................................42
Figure 4.4 – Cycle One Analysis of Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships..........................................................43
Figure 4.5 – Cycle Two Reading Assessment............................................................48
Figure 4.6 – Cycle Two Analysis of Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships..........................................................50
Figure 4.7 – Cycle Three Reading Assessment and Overall Comparison...............55
Figure 4.8 – Final Analysis of Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships..........................................................58
CHAPTER ONE- INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Literacy is integral to success in our modern society (Greenlee & Bruner, 2001). It pervades almost every area of social interaction including education, work, leisure, communications, and business. Competence in literacy is essential for individuals to actively and positively participate within our society. It enables individuals to engage in the work force, democratic processes and make a constructive contribution to society. Literacy is also a fundamental agent for social justice, allowing individuals to gain access to social resources and participate in social institutions. Additionally, literacy provides the means for individuals to contribute to a widening knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world.

Studies have shown that people who read frequently possess stronger literacy skills overall which includes larger vocabularies, enhanced writing abilities, improved spelling, and better awareness of grammar and punctuation rules (Naglieri, 2001). Moreover, those who read regularly for pleasure are healthier, more active citizens. National data from the United States of America shows that habitual readers are more likely to exercise, volunteer, and participate in community activities (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Most importantly, once a child or teen becomes a proficient reader, he or she will always be able to learn through the world of books, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet (Medwell, Wray, Poulson, & Fox, 1998). As such it is essential for educators to encourage students to become lifelong readers, as what individuals read shapes their thinking and cognitive advancements.

Current educational trends, demonstrate that students are not progressing in literacy at a rate substantial to allow students to understand current concepts and read and write at a high enough level within our 21st Century Society (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007).
Research states that within the last decade, student progression through literacy, particularly reading, is becoming slower and more normalised than that of their predecessors (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013). This is an alarming fact in light of the extensive research that has been used for the development of literacy and reading programs designed to substantially increase reading levels within a shorter time frame, particularly for academically low-achieving students and at risk students (Levine, 2006). As such it is essential as teachers, that potential causes of such slow progression are identified, to help teachers improve their classroom practice and increase student literacy attainment.

The annual National Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests administered across Australia show that literacy progression, particularly in reading, has dropped significantly. The NAPLAN tests are a country wide test administered in years three, five and seven to track students’ progress across the nation to target areas in need of improvement and to develop strategies to meet these targets. NAPLAN commenced in 2008 and since then has provided education staff and parents with an analysis of student progress. Since 2008, students’ results in reading, writing and grammar have dropped an average of 3% by Year 5, particularly in Low-SES schools which shows a regression in student literacy attainment (National Assessment Program, 2013).

There is increased evidence, which points towards student lack of progress emotionally, socially and academically being attributed to the relationships students develop with their teachers. These relationships influence students’ self-esteem and self-belief about their abilities and worth (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Goran & Gage, 2011; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez & Bradley, 2006). The work of Cartledge (2009) states that there is increasing evidence that students with negative teacher attachment and low emotional positivity regress academically, socially and emotionally as they continue through the education system.
The Christian teacher should not see him or herself as a mere purveyor of curriculum content. The teacher, their character, words and relationships are all part of the curriculum which is shown repeatedly throughout the Gospel of John in the character of Jesus who always showed everyone he met love, understanding and compassion. An example is in John 5:1-14, Jesus spoke to a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. This man had given up all hope of ever being healed and had been left at the side of a pool for years. Jesus noticed and showed compassion and love to this man, whom, the rest had chosen to ignore and forget. Additionally in John 4:1-26, Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman, which in itself is an amazing act of compassion and love as Jewish and Samaritan people did not associate with each other. However Jesus looked past her race, in addition to her chosen lifestyle which left her an outcast from the other women in the town and showed her mercy, compassion and love.

Jesus embodied and emphasised all he taught through his character, words and relationships which demonstrates the importance of relationships in developing the individual, particularly in the realm of teaching. A teacher’s work is often strenuous and demanding, at times it can also be very disheartening, however if a teacher is teaching relationally God will sustain them (Ridderbos, 1997). Additionally, following the example of Jesus particularly in the area of relationships, should provide more positive results within the classroom in terms of achievement in all areas and particularly in literacy. The work of Goldsworthy (2010) states that it is evident through the Bible that we were created to be in relationships with others and that such relationships help heal and edify individuals, thus assisting individuals to develop trust and reach their full potential.
1.2 The problem and research questions

According to Goran and Gage (2011), student reading attainment is decreasing. It is important to identify potential causes for such low progression and discover ways in which educators can increase students’ reading attainment. Such will increase their literacy development across all spectrums, as reading is fundamental to writing, talking, and listening (Cornelius-White, 2007). Various research articles state that, a large percentile of low reading attainment is potentially caused by poor student-teacher relationships (Greenlee & Bruner, 2001). As a teacher of an academically low ability Year 2 class in a low-SES, Western Sydney School I am concerned that the teacher-student relationships currently developed within the classroom setting may contribute to the reading achievement of these students. As such this research study poses the question “How effective are the relationships between students and their teacher in impacting students’ reading achievement in a low achieving Year Two setting?"

1.3 Purpose of the study

In the light of the literature related to the importance of student-teacher relationships (Algozzine & Yessledyek, 2006; Cornelius-White, 2007; Dobransky & Bainbridge, 2004; Greenlee & Bruner, 2001; Hart & Hodson, 2004; Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdalh, & Holliday, 2010) it is important to identify the potential effect of relationships on students’ reading levels, particularly how such relationships are developed, maintained and monitored within the classroom environment. Through identifying possible links, there is a potential for an increase in students’ overall literacy development which will assist students in their progression in other academic areas. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the
effectiveness of the student-teacher relationship on reading achievement in a significantly low achieving year two classroom setting.

1.4 Benefit of the study

Through the engagement in this study of the researcher as teacher with her Year 2 class, it is anticipated that other educators with similar classes will gain an understanding of teacher-student relationships and beliefs about reading from the student’s perspective, thereby being able to reflect upon their own teaching to incorporate some changes into their pedagogy. It is anticipated that by carrying out this study, reading attainment will increase, through the continual reflection and improvement of the teacher’s relationships and reading strategies with the students. This study then may encourage fellow educators to apply the knowledge gained within their own classrooms, ultimately increasing student reading attainment at a larger scale.

Further it is expected that a better understanding regarding the effectiveness of relationships in influencing student achievement will provide educators, in particular the teacher/researcher to develop more successful strategies to enable effective relationships with students. The results may be used to assist educators to develop strategies specifically designed to encourage more effective relationships that impact on the behaviour and academic achievement of students. It is anticipated that this study will lead to further research in the area of relationships and positive ways to engage poorly behaved and low-achieving students to provide them with a positive belief about themselves.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This chapter provides an introduction and background to the research topic of the effect of student – teacher relationships on the reading levels of year two students. Chapter two consists of a literature review investigating current understandings and beliefs
surrounding literacy development in school-aged students and the effects of teacher-student
relationships on student achievement and development. Chapter three outlines the research
methodology undertaken throughout this study and the process that was taken to ensure the
research was ethical, unbiased and methodical. It details information about the participants,
research processes and the strategies taken during the cycles.

Chapter Four discusses the results and analyses the results in respect to the three
cycles undertaken throughout the research and the data gathered throughout this process. It
discusses the results and analysis of the results in terms of cross analysing relationship
development between the teacher and students and their results in reading, motivation and
enjoyment of reading and the self-reflection and modifications carried out by the researcher.

Chapter Five discusses the results in relation to the literature review and analyses
potential links between teacher-student relationships and reading level progression. Chapter
Six is the conclusion and highlights the results found and future research suggestions and the
limitations of this study.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores areas pertinent to trends in reading achievement. It considers what makes an effective teacher of literacy, teacher expectations of students and the effects of these on reading achievement. This literature review also considers the effects of teacher-student relationships on academic achievement as well as student engagement and how this impacts achievement. This literature review examines self-efficacy and self-esteem and how these impact student achievement, as well as how teachers impact the development of these in students, in addition to student behaviour and teacher behaviour impact learning.

2.2 Current Trends in Reading Achievement

There is an increasing amount of evidence that suggests achievement levels in reading have decreased during the last decade, which is particularly evident in students’ abilities to read fluently and confidently whilst comprehending what is being read. Research shows students are progressing at a much slower rate, in addition to being at least several reading levels below those of students in the same grade several years ago (National Assessment Program, 2013).

Several studies have stated potential causes for a low improvement in reading stating reduced parental school involvement, lower-income thresholds, decrease in student engagement with printed texts due to technology and an increase in behavioural issues in the classroom (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick, & Elder, 2004). Congruently, the work of Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdalh, and Holliday (2010) states that an increase in curriculum content, expectations on teachers and lack of home support have ultimately increased teachers’ stress levels, reducing the time spent on catering for individual students and developing
relationships with students. Such has resulted in a significant decrease in student reading achievement and interest in literature.

Furthermore, the research of Cornelius-White (2007) demonstrates that the lack of teacher-student relationships impact on student attainment levels due to low levels of trust, empathy, respect and value by the student within the classroom setting. A lack of knowledge of student interests and needs of the teacher’s part also results in an inability to effectively cater for students’ individual needs and talents within the reading curriculum (Dobransky & Bainbridge, 2004).

2.3 Effective Teachers of Literacy

Research states that effective teachers of literacy engage in three main cohesive behaviours, which include systematically employing a range of differentiated teaching methods, focusing on the individual needs of the student and employing a holistic view to teaching literacy (Naglieri, 2001). Such teaching methods include using materials and classroom tasks that are matched to the specific needs of each child they are teaching and possessing a well-developed and cohesive understanding of all literacy areas (McCabe & Howard, 2001). Furthermore, when teaching literacy, effective teachers engage in the deliberate teaching of the codes of literacy including sound-symbol correspondence, word features and their structures, spelling patterns, vocabulary and word study, punctuation, grammatical constructions and text structures whilst maintaining a sound belief system in regards to the nature and learning of literacy (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdalh, & Holliday, 2010).

Additionally the research of McCabe and Howard (2001) state that effective teachers of literacy create literate environments within their classroom which enhance students’ understanding of the functions of literacy and encourage students to engage in more literate
based activities. Such is achieved through providing a range of models of effective literacy practices, using praise and constructive criticism in response to students’ literacy work with a view of consolidating success, correcting errors and promoting growth, as well as continually monitoring students’ progress (McCabe & Howard, 2001). Through possessing sound subject knowledge, effective teachers of literacy are able to teach the necessary skills directly and explicitly thereby encouraging more quality teaching sessions and less unnecessary time wastage (Medwell, Wray, Poulson, & Fox, 1998).

By motivating students to read and develop a reading habit, teachers can positively affect students’ lives and empower them as lifelong learners (Cartledge, 2009). Even if teachers are concerned only with enhancing reading skills, current research suggests that reading ability and desire to read are equally important factors in students’ reading achievement (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011).

### 2.4 Teacher Expectations and Reading Achievement

Various research articles spanning across several decades have demonstrated the effect of teacher expectations on a student’s reading achievement. Teacher perceptions on students’ achievement, whether accurate or not, affect students’ academic levels and test scores as evident in the research by Wigfield and Eccles (2000). There is considerable research stating that teachers treat and teach students differently based on what they believe a student can achieve. If an educator believes a student can achieve highly, that student is thus treated more fondly than a student who is expected to achieve at a lower rate. (Dobransky & Bainbridge, 2004). It has been noted by Hart and Hodson, (2004) that teachers show more positive opportunities and responses, interact more warmly, show more acceptance and provide less criticism to those students they deem high achievers. Whereas, those who are deemed low achievers receive little praise and constant negative criticism, which can be seen
as an underlying factor determining these students low literacy progress (Cornelius-White, 2007).

2.5 Student – Teacher Relationships and Academic Achievement

In recent years it has become apparent that students who show a consistent lack of improvement regarding academic progress in reading often state they have negative feelings towards their teachers and school (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Several studies (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Britain, 2005; Wright, 2006;) have found the percentage of students who relate negatively towards their teachers were reading at an age below their grade level. Over the past seven years this percentage of students relating negatively towards their teachers has increased from 54% to 75% (DfES, 2005; Wright, 2006).

Furthermore, the quality of students’ relationships with their teachers is indicative of current and future adjustment to school (Levine, 2006). Students who experience supportive, positive, relationships with their teachers have a higher regard for school, are more engaged, and show a higher result in reading and other academic areas (Cornelius-White, 2007). Studies have shown that teacher-student relationships effects are potentially strongest in the early years, ultimately determining their view of school for subsequent years (Goran & Gage, 2011). Research identifies various categories where differences in student-teacher relationships based on race, SES status, temperament and behavioural issues. Furthermore, the majority of students who fall into such categories typically perform lower than their peers in reading and academic progress (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

A study carried out by Dodge, Keenan, & Lattanzi (2002) demonstrated that students showed no significant growth in reading or written language over the years if they had poor teacher relationships. Students with poor teacher relationships also showed greater deficits in
reading than their peers who had more positive relationships. Recent profiles of students with behavioural and emotional issues suggest a great deal of variability in their academic and behavioural functioning which correlated to the view educators possessed of that student (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011). Students who were viewed as low achievers by their teachers, had greater behavioural difficulties, more social anxiety and smaller academic gains then those students viewed as higher achievers.

Findings revealed the achievement rates of some groups of children with either severe academic deficits or academic achievement well within the average range, and different types of social and behavioural problems ranging from clinically significant to relatively significant, appeared to correlate significantly with the view their teacher possessed in regards to their achievement, behaviour and general well-being (Osher, Quinn, & Hanley, 2002). Hart and Hodson (2004) state the view an educator possesses of a child, greatly impacts on the willingness of an educator to develop positive relationships with the child, their willingness to show the child compassion and help improve the child’s achievement level. As such these students had poorer relationships with their teachers, and made significantly less progress in reading attainment (Cornelius-White, 2007).

2.6 Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

The expectancy-value theory as stated in the research of Cornelius-White (2007), highlights the notion that motivation influences choice, persistence and performance in relation to student progress within the classroom setting. Several theorists argue that students’ individual choice, persistence, and performance can be explained and attributed to their beliefs about how they will perform in regards to the task assigned to them (Cornelius-White, 2007). Such beliefs and expectancies are presumed to be attributed to task-specific beliefs
such as the perceived difficulty of the task, the student’s individual goals, self-schema and affective memories regarding previous school experiences (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006).

The research of Cartledge (2009) found that ability beliefs are defined by the individual student’s perception of his or her current ability, skills and competence in regards to a set task. As such, these beliefs about one’s ability play a prominent role in how a student attempts a task and can be said to be dramatically influenced by a teacher’s beliefs, attitude and behaviour towards the student (McCabe & Howard, 2001). Attributing one’s success to their ability has a dramatic effect on positive motivational consequences. As such Hart and Hodson (2004) state that it is essential for teachers to develop relationships which are positive, mutually respectful, trusting and caring in order to boost a student’s self-esteem and increase their overall engagement in reading activities.

Intrinsic value is the enjoyment the student gains from engaging within a set task. Thus, Greenlee and Bruner (2001) state that in terms of reading achievement, teachers need to ensure the level of activities and proposed work is a reflection of what students find enjoyable within the reading process. Additionally, through making real-world connections and allowing students to see how such tasks fit into the grand scheme of future goals and ambitions, a student’s view of the utility value of a task will ultimately increase, further promoting student engagement, thus, enhancing a student’s progress within reading (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick & Elder, 2004).

Through increasing student engagement within reading there is a greater possibility of producing higher achievement rates which will ultimately increase the student’s task-specific beliefs and self-efficacy (Winch et, al., 2010). Students are less likely to attempt reading tasks and other activities involving reading if they perceive their failure before starting. However McCabe and Howard (2001) detail that in order to increase a student's engagement within a
task, teachers need to initially develop positive relationships with students to understand what interests them, how they learn, what they value in life and to evaluate any negative preconceived beliefs that student may possess in regards to their abilities and potential progress.

2.7 Self-Efficacy and Struggling Readers

Self-efficacy is the belief one has about their ability to succeed in a particular area. In the case of struggling readers, the research of Levy and Chard (2001) suggests that students who believe they cannot learn to read based on previous attempts and effort have a very low self-efficacy. Such students often resist reading, and apathetically engage in classroom tasks which involve any form of reading. In contrast to this are students who possess a high self-efficacy in regards to their abilities, particularly in reading. These students show a higher readiness to participate in tasks, work harder, persist for longer durations and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when faced with tasks that contain difficult activities (Naglieri, 2001). As such, it is critical for teachers to assist students in developing positive self-efficacy in regards to their capabilities (Wright, 2006).

Through the development of positive relationships students are provided with frequent, immediate feedback and assistance, as well as credible, task-relevant feedback, students’ performance begins to improve, along with their beliefs about their potential achievements (Wright, 2006). However teachers can only provide such feedback when they have a substantial knowledge in regards to the student, their interests and what they value. This is due to the teacher's ability to create materials at the student’s proper instructional level, using tasks similar to those which the student has previously achieved success, and meeting with students in a non-invasive way to listen carefully to their needs (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick & Elder, 2004).
Westwood (2011) details that to improve student self-efficacy in reading attainment teachers need to make students aware of their previous and current success, assist students in focusing on their success, consistently make encouraging comments, provide students with opportunities to read to other students, directly reduce anticipated anxiety by scheduling relaxation exercises and capitalise on student interest each day during reading exercises. Westwood (2011) believes that by doing so, teachers can change student views of themselves and once this is achieved, dramatically increase their reading levels and progress.

2.8 Teacher – Student Relationships and Academic Instruction

Students who present with significant social and behavioural challenges that frequently disrupt the classroom environment and impede learning have been found to have very negative and confrontational relationships with their teachers (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Goran and Gage (2011) state that due to these disruptions, educators and researchers have typically focused more attention on interventions and techniques designed to diminish these behavioural and social challenges in an effort to create an atmosphere that is more conducive to academic learning. Due to this thinking and the belief that assumes that academic instruction cannot take place unless a student’s behaviour is first under control, behavioural intervention is viewed as imperative in addressing both the behavioural and the academic deficits in students who continually display negative behaviour within the classroom environment (Zigmond, 2007). Levy and Chard (2001) highlighted this issue stating that too much attention has been devoted to managing disruptive behaviours and dealing with emotional issues so that the questions of what students should be taught and how they should be taught are often not afforded careful or even sufficient consideration.

The findings of Sherwood (2008) identify that many teachers of students with emotional, behavioural and academic needs dictate their actions based on the combative
events in the classroom, rather than the goal at hand. More recent evidence has revealed teachers in mainstream classes, particularly in Australia devote only 30% of the day to actual academic instruction (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013). Siperstein, Wiley, and Forness (2011) state that behavioural intervention and social skills instruction have been found to effectively address a variety of behavioural and communication issues within the classroom environment thus allowing teachers to devote more time to academic instruction.

As Christian educators, it is important to view the child from a biblical perspective. Students are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) however, due to the Fall (Genesis 3) the core of students’ behavioural problems is sin and separation from God and an understanding of this should enable greater compassion, understanding and love for each student (Goldsworthy, 2010). In addition, Christian educators should be helping students to see their need for Christ, and forgiveness from Jesus Christ, the Saviour in order to assist students in building a relationship with God.

A biblical perspective of the child demonstrates the need to recognise the individuality of each child and show respect for this (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) as each child brings something unique and irreplaceable to the classroom through focusing on how “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) each student is. Teachers also need to teach students to focus on the importance of the classroom as a group. Thus, instilling a respect for each person into the students, which ultimately, according to Goldsworthy (2010), ensures a wholesome, caring, academically sound classroom is developed. This biblical view of the child enables the teacher to appreciate the value and uniqueness of the child in relation to their individual learning needs and thus, inform the development of curriculum and the behaviour and communication strategies of teachers (Berkhof & Van Til, 1990).
2.9 Student Behaviour and Teacher Behaviour

The research of Sherwood (2008) emphasises the importance of considering the characteristics of the classrooms in which the students are educated to understand the reasons for unimpressive academic outcomes for students with behavioural, academic and emotional needs. Classrooms for students with behavioural, emotional and learning needs have been described as lacking some of the basic components that are necessary for student learning (Goran & Gage, 2011). Various studies have reported a lack of systematic academic programming in many classrooms resulting in poor educational experiences, heightened behavioural problems due to boredom and a lack of understanding, thereby increasing the stress rates of teachers; in particular, the findings from these studies have revealed a lack of positive comments or praise, low rates of instructional demands and high rates of reprimands (Westwood, 2011).

The most consistent interactions between teachers and student with behavioural and learning needs tend to occur around instances of inappropriate classroom behaviour by the child (Wagner, et al., 2006). Thus these studies reveal that teaching practices for these students are far from optimal and provide little opportunity for students to make academic progress (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011).

One explanation for this poor academic climate in classrooms may be the link between aggressive and disruptive children influencing the behaviour of teachers. Students thus unconsciously direct teachers towards a less demanding curriculum (Goran & Gage 2011). If students consistently respond to instruction with noncompliant aggressive behaviour that is ultimately aversive to a teacher, over time, this teacher will most likely provide instruction less often as stated in the research by Siperstein, Wiley, and Forness (2011).
Additionally, many studies have found that a vast majority of inappropriate behaviours exhibited by students are preceded by some type of instruction by the teacher (Wagner, et al., 2006).

Zigmond (2007) details that this sequence of teacher instruction followed by negative student behaviour can potentially encourage teacher avoidance behaviour, thereby, decreasing the amount of time devoted to academic instruction in the classroom to the bare minimal to try and avoid confrontations. Several studies have reported that in classrooms where students show high rates of aggressive behaviour less instruction from their teachers is provided, as opposed to students who exhibit less aggressive behaviour and receive higher levels of instruction (Goran & Gage, 2011).

The Christian teacher should not see him or herself as a mere purveyor of curriculum content. The teacher, their character, words and relationships are all part of the curriculum which is shown repeatedly throughout the Gospel of John in the character of Jesus who always showed everyone he met love, understanding and compassion (John 5:1-14; John 4:1-26). Jesus embodied and emphasised all he taught through his character, words and relationships which demonstrates the importance of relationships in developing the individual, particularly in the realm of teaching. Christian educators can achieve such through a relationship with the Holy Spirit that allows them to deep knowledge of the relational content in John (Erickson, 1998). Jesus states in John 4:34 that his sustenance is completing the work the Lord assigned to him. A teacher’s work is often strenuous and demanding, at times it can also be very disheartening, however if teachers are teaching in the way God called them to, he will sustain them always (Ridderbos, 1997). Additionally, following the example of Jesus in terms of relating to others, how to pray, rest and work, should provide more positive results within the classroom in terms of achievement in all areas.
2.10 Learner-Centred Teacher Relationships

Positive teacher relationships are associated with optimal, holistic learning. The classical approach of developing relationships focused around the learner, not the teacher, emphasise showing students empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, non-directivity, and the encouragement of critical thinking (Cornelius-White, 2007). The research of Levine (2006) demonstrate certain attitudinal qualities existing between the learner and teacher, are responsible for yielding significant results in school progress. Such relationships require a genuine trust between the student and the teacher followed by a genuine acceptance for each other’s unique qualities and attributes.

Algozzine and Ysseldyke (2006) state one of the key components of a learner-centred relationships is empathy which is developed through understanding various behaviours, beliefs and attitudes through focusing on the needs of the student from their perspective. Such empathy allows educators to develop a deeper perspective of certain behaviours, responses and potential learning difficulties which ultimately allows the educator to develop flexible teaching methods and transparent compromises with the students and all stakeholders (Zigmond, 2007). This is due to students desiring authentic relationships where they are trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity (Wright, 2006).

Additionally, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) state in order to develop successful learner-centred relationships, teachers need to develop the attitude of facilitator rather than educator. This attitude allows more productive activities to be developed with the students as the underpinning framework for all learning activities that occur (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Additionally, as a facilitator, teachers provide students with opportunities to solve relevant real world problems, provide useful and meaningful resources, use contracts for planning and
evaluating lessons, form positive and beneficial learning groups, programme instruction techniques that are adapted to individual needs and use the community and peer support to assist student learning (Siperstein, Wiley & Forness, 2011).

Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick and Elder (2004) describe positive learner-centred relationships as possessing a high degree of influence on achievement within the educational setting. They state that through honouring student voices, adapting to individual and cultural differences, encouraging learning and having learner centred beliefs students are provided with a sense of support and ownership in regards to the learning they engage in. Additionally it has been noted by Dodge, Keenan, and Lattanzi (2002) that secure and reciprocal attachments are important for students to engage in their relationships with teacher, peers and subject matter and develop healthy self-concepts and senses of well-being. Developing such relationships is dependent on individuals listening, showing they care, understanding, respecting others and being honest, open and sensitive to students’ needs and feelings (Westwood, 2011).

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the literature which demonstrates the importance of the relationships between teachers and students in affecting the academic achievement of students. In addition, it has detailed the importance of quality relationships between teachers and students in terms of achievement academically, emotionally and socially. It has shown that it is essential for educators to ensure students feel valued and to maintain high opinions of all students as this leads to students’ academic success.
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological approach used in this study. It gives details of the sample chosen, the instruments to be used in the collection of the data, ethical considerations and the procedures used during the research.

3.2 Rationale for the Action Research Methodological Approach

Action research was chosen as the methodology for this study due to its ability to be used in almost any setting where a problem has been discovered (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Action research is defined as “a form of disciplined, rigorous enquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand enquiry by the researcher in order to improve their understanding of their own teaching practices within the contextual parameters to maximise social justice” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 344), which in this study is related to the academic achievement of students. Action research is primarily designed to bridge the gap between research and practice, thus overcoming the perceived failure of research to impact on, or improve, teaching practice. Action research thereby contributes not only to the researcher’s own practice, but to others, thus making educational practice more reflective (Mentler, 2006).

The rationale behind the research methodology was related to the intention of the researcher to bring about change within their own educational practice. Action research is more focused and conclusive when the research is being carried out to bring about change within one’s own educational practice, in addition to providing the researcher with a clearer picture of the overall results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, action research combines diagnosis, action and reflection focusing on the identified practical issues allowing for a more holistic solution for professional understanding and growth, thereby
allowing for practical improvement, innovation, change and development of social practice and the practitioners’ better understanding of their practices (Mentler, 2006).

There are four stages in action research designed to enable one to come to grounded conclusions designed to improve their own practices. These stages include planning, developing, acting and reflecting. During the planning stage it is vital that one identifies and limits the topic at hand to one that is manageable and beneficial to the target audience, or, the researcher’s own educational practice which is established through reviewing the current literature (Mentler, 2006). Once this has been established and the researcher enters the developing stage, it is time to develop a plausible and coherent research plan that addresses the discovered needs highlighted within the current literature (Mentler, 2006). Throughout the acting stage, the researcher is collecting and analysing the data, so that the results can then be shared and communicated. Finally the researcher reflects on the results and what has been learnt throughout the process in regards to the proposed research topic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

*Figure 3.1 – Process of Action Research* ((Mentler, 2006, p. 37)
3.3 The Setting and the Sample

The setting is a government school with 269 students from Kindergarten to Year 6. This school is situated in a low socio-economic area comprising mostly of housing commission establishments, in South Western Sydney. There is a high Indigenous population within this area, however the majority of the students come from a white Anglo-Saxon background. Behaviour management is a high issue in this school, with disrespect and violence towards others being the highest reoccurring behaviours.

The sample includes ten students consisting of six females and four males in a class of low-achieving Year two students. Seven students are from a white Anglo-Saxon background, one is from an Indigenous Australian background, and two are from a Chinese background.

3.4 The Instruments

The research instruments included three questionnaires, Reading Group Evaluation Questionnaire (Appendix A), Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Appendix B), Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire (Appendix C) and one academic achievement measurement which was PM Benchmarking Kit (Cengage Learning, 2008), allowing students reading progress to be tracked. As this study was exploratory the Reading Group Evaluation Questionnaire and Students’ Motivation for Reading used open-ended questions which were answered at the beginning of the first cycle. The answers to these questionnaires provided the data for the Teacher- Student Relationship Questionnaire which included a series of seven questions using a five point Likert scale. Open-ended questionnaires were used initially as they are more likely to invoke a response from students within this age group, particularly as students remained anonymous removing any feelings the students may have felt in regards to offending their teacher resulting in themselves being placed in trouble (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick & Elder, 2004).
The questions contain few verbal items due to the academic and age level of the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Appendix B), utilised concepts from the Expectancy-Value theory by Wigfield and Eccles (2000). It was an open ended questionnaire comprising of 15 questions aimed at targeting students’ beliefs about themselves and enjoyment in relation to reading as well as ascertaining their perceived characteristics of their teachers behaviour in helping them with reading. This questionnaire was given to students at the beginning and the end of the study. The Teacher-Student Relationships (Appendix C) questionnaire derived from the work of Cornelius-White (2007) was a multiple choice relationships questionnaire of seven questions on a five point likert scale. It included interview questions aimed at identifying students’ perceptions of teacher-student relationships in relation to reading. This questionnaire was administered at the beginning of each cycle and at the end of the final cycle.

The Reading Group Evaluation questionnaire (Appendix A) investigates the student’s own evaluations of the reading groups and it was administered after various reading group sessions and was derived from Van Brummelen’s work, “Walking with God in the Classroom” which details a Christian approach to teaching (2009). The academic achievement measurements included the PM Benchmarking System developed by Cengage Learning (2008) which is a 30 level assessment system allowing student progress to be tracked consistently and equally to help eradicate any potential ethical concerns.

Students were provided with an initial reading based assessment to ascertain where the students were currently performing in terms of academic achievement. The same test was then administered at the end of the study to ascertain the amount of improvement or lack thereof. This was then compared with students’ results in previous years to ascertain if
students were achieving at their normal rate of academic gain, or, if having positive relationships with their teacher had provided them with substantial academic gains.

Through using these data collection instruments, before, during and after the intended research period, a range of data was available to be analysed to determine if there were links between relationships and achievement (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). To ensure the gathered data was reliable, methodological triangulation and data triangulation was undertaken. Triangulation is considered to be a method of research which allows for more reliable and accurate results pertaining to the research question (Mentler, 2006). Specifically methodological triangulation refers to the use of more than one method for gathering data and data triangulation entails gathering data through several sampling strategies, so that slices of data are gathered at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of students, (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Triangulation is the process of using more than one form of gathering data pertaining to the same research question. In this case three different types of questionnaires were used, as well as data from the PM Benchmarking reading tests to identify how the children are performing before, during and after the study to investigate if relationships influenced achievement (Mentler, 2006). The instruments provided the data that were to be analysed in the light of the proposition that relationships affect reading achievement thereby reducing the bias and uncertainty of the results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

A proposal was sent to the Ethics Committee of Morling College and was approved for research. Within this proposal several ethical considerations were detailed including confidentiality and obtaining consent from the participants. It was discussed that all data collected would be filed in a secure, locked location to maintain strict confidentiality and
security for those concerned. Students involved in the study had a right not to participate, however after discussing what was being undertaken with the students, as well as informing them that their answers would be treated privately without bias or fear of offending their teacher, all students were happy to participate.

3.6 Procedures

The Action Research was implemented in three cycles, over a two week period for each cycle. The study commenced day one of Term Three (15th July 2013) and continued for a six week period until 30th August 2013 during which at each two week period, each questionnaire was administered and adjustments to teaching were made based on results. During each cycle the students completed the relevant questionnaires. Additionally, the educator engaged in constant self-reflection and evaluation, the fourth stage in Action Research. She reflected on the teaching strategies and relationship building strategies to identify what strategies were more successful in encouraging student participation, positive behaviour and positive student self-belief systems.

The results from each cycle were then collated and analysed to investigate links between relationships and achievement. In addition, an analysis was made regarding how the improvements that the researcher had made to developing positive relationships in each cycle had impacted on the effectiveness of the relationships between teacher and students in relation to student reading achievement and progress.
CHAPTER FOUR - RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter will present the results and analysis for the results from the Classroom Action Research conducted with Year 2 students during reading group lessons. The data derived from observations, questionnaires and interviews will be used to answer the research question:

- How effective are the relationships between students and their teachers in impacting on students’ reading achievement in a low achieving Year 2 setting?

There were three cycles in this Action Research Project. Each cycle went for two weeks and overall the research covered a period of six weeks. In this research, reading groups occur four times a week for 45 minutes (3 x 15 minutes). There were 10 students in Year two split into three reading groups based on their current reading level. Group A with 4 students’ were the highest achievers, Group B with 3 students’ were the next in achievement and Group C with 3 students’ were the lowest achievers. The researcher developed a unit plan for each cycle with eight lessons for each group, per cycle. A copy of the unit plan for each group is located in Appendix D.

Reconnaissance

After observing and assessing the Year 2 class, the researcher discovered that most students were behind the required standard in reading for their year level which was determined by their spelling scores based on the South Australian Spelling Test, PM Benchmark results developed by Fountas and Pinnell (2013) and a comparison of results with the other two Year 2 classes at the school. Although some students showed high rates of participation in the reading group lessons, their PM Benchmarking results showed little
progress from what they had obtained at the beginning of the year and most students in this Year 2 class were an average of seven levels lower than the norm for third term, Year two based on the standard levels as developed by the PM Benchmarking Reading levels chart developed by Fountas and Pinell (2013).

4.1.1 Preliminary analysis of students’ current reading achievement

An initial reading assessment taken at the beginning of Term 3 2013 showed that on average students were achieving at a rate of seven levels lower than the expected achievement level for a student in their third term of Year two (see Table 4.1) Table 4.1 below provides in graphical form the comparison of each student’s reading level at the beginning of the research compared with the average reading level for the age group. As is shown the lowest achieving student was Student 3 achieving a level of 12, which showed a 12 level drop from the expected average of 24. The highest achieving student was Student 6 achieving a level 23, only one below the expected average.
4.1.2 Preliminary analysis and overview of students’ motivation for reading

An initial assessment was made using the Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire/Interview (Appendix B) to discover what students preferred in reading and to ascertain just how to develop the reading group curriculum. It was recognised that students all had similar beliefs about reading and what made it meaningful and interesting for them. When students were asked to state if they liked reading and why, all ten students stated that they liked it. Reasons pertaining to why students liked reading included that reading contained spelling; it was fun; so you can learn about things; sounding out words, and looking at the pictures. All students stated that they enjoyed having the teacher read to them for differing reasons such as it is quiet, fun and some students mentioned specific stories they enjoyed such as the “Three Little Pigs”.

In relation to what stories students liked all students mentioned fun, adventure type stories that taught them interesting facts. All students stated that they enjoyed stories with pictures in them; however, student 6 stated that stories did not always have to have pictures in them, but sometimes they helped to understand the concepts within the book or story. Reading groups was stated as being enjoyed by all students, with four students making specific mention of the work sheets as fun. When asked what they disliked about reading groups, three students stated that they did not dislike anything, six students disliked reading hard books and one student disliked the work sheets.

All students stated that they considered themselves to be good readers, with Student 5 stating it was because they knew they would be a good reader when they grew up. When
asked what made reading interesting answers varied from sounding out, looking at the pictures, doing lots of work, learning new interesting words, and learning how to pronounce new words. In relation to the teacher, all students stated that their teacher did not exhibit disappointment or anger when they incorrectly read a word, stating that their teacher helped them to sound out the words or told them.

Students showed very similar beliefs about what makes a good teacher including showing kindness, being nice, helpful and happy. In relation to improving their reading, all students believed that their teacher could help them improve through various methods including increasing reading time, helping them learn how to sound out the words, making work more meaningful for them and through the students engaging in work. Lastly, when students were asked how they felt when their teacher corrected their reading, students stated that they felt sad when they got words wrong, happy because they teacher was helping to improve their reading and sad because they had not tried hard enough.

4.1.3 Preliminary analysis of student’s perception of teacher-student relationship

Using the Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships Questionnaire/Interview (Appendix C) students demonstrated very similar perceptions regarding the relationship they had with their teacher during reading groups. Figure 4.2 shows a graphical overview of students’ answers to each question. Findings revealed definitive areas of improvement required by the teacher. Such areas of improvement included patience, and student perception of the teacher’s desire for students to improve.
In relation to kindness, students view being helpful as the top priority when it comes to reading groups with all ten students stating this. One student stated their teacher was not kind during reading groups due to being reminded to stay on task and the teacher getting frustrated when other students were noisy. Five students stated their teacher was patient due to the teacher waiting whilst they were trying to sound out a word, helping them sound out the word and teaching them to be patient. One student selected “some” as the answer to how patient their teacher was based on making the student wait during reading groups. The two students who selected “a little bit” stated it was because the teacher tells them the words too quickly and gets frustrated at the other reading groups. Six students stated that they would like to see more games in reading groups.
All students stated their teacher helps them in reading groups, detailing this was because the teacher helps them read, helps them with their mistakes and helps them when there is a hard word. When it came to whether the students believed their teacher could help them read better half the students answered “lots”, whilst the other half answered “some”. The five students who selected “lots” stated it was due to their teacher being very nice to people, helping them when they are stuck on hard words, and that their teacher had a desire for them to learn and succeed. The five students who selected “some” detailed that they either did not know, or thought the teacher gave them work that was too hard, thus showing that the students were uncertain of their teachers commitment to increasing their overall learning, demonstrating a lack of trust and security.

All students believed their teacher liked them which resulted from evidence pertaining to being helpful, being nice, and because the students themselves were good. Eight students believed that their teacher cared about their increase in reading as they knew that their teacher liked them, thought they were smart, and liked to help them. The two students who did not select “lots” stated that their teacher was kind to tell them to read better and because their teacher helped them “a little bit”.

4.1.4 Reflection and Analysis

Upon initial assessment it was evident that the students were not performing at the year level. Initial feedback from the students as outlined above showed all the students in the study enjoyed reading. This demonstrated the current practices implemented by the teacher during reading groups were not meeting the students’ needs.
All students participated thoroughly in reading and believed they were good readers. This finding helped eliminate any potential causes for low reading scores being a result of negative self-image or beliefs. Additionally, students’ responses regarding how they felt about reading groups all showed positive regard and various attitudes associated with lack of interest and a high amount of distraction which resulted in numerous causes for concern.

Students listed the positive attributes of a good teacher as being one who is caring, understanding, nice, in addition to being helpful and possessing a general joyful disposition. It also became evident that the students placed a high degree of value on work being meaningful and relevant to their needs, as well as, being provided with time to sound out and predict the phonological progression of words in their own time, only receiving help from the teacher when asked.

After determining the strengths and weakness of the teacher-student relationship based on the preliminary assessment, the researcher determined the following improvements needed to be made for Cycle One:

1. To increase students’ security and trust in their teacher’s willingness to help them succeed, thereby potentially increasing a positive relationship, the teacher would work at developing a higher level of patience and kindness during reading groups, as well as increase the level of positive encouragement used through her verbal interaction with the students.

2. As the students showed low-levels of response to help that was offered before being asked, the researcher decided to implement a strategy called “stretchy snake” to provide students with ownership over their learning, as well as to provide the educator with a means to demonstrated positive regard and warmth for student attempts.
3. As students view joy, enthusiasm, kindness, patience and helpfulness as they key attributes of a good teacher, the researcher aimed to employ these character attributes at a much higher level to increase positive responses and develop mutual trust and understanding.

4. As all students stated they would enjoy more games during reading groups and that the noise level of other students caused too much tension and stress, the teacher decided to use group games as an incentive for quiet work and completion of work to increase the overall peace experienced during reading groups.

4.2 The First Cycle

The first Cycle was over two weeks and involved eight reading lessons of 15 minutes each.

4.2.1 Planning

This stage involved developing the reading group unit for the two weeks of the first cycle with a focus on incorporating students’ identified interests including spelling, information books, pictures and developing new activities for sounding out and sound chunking. Planning also involved the teacher being aware that she needed to show an increase in patience, kindness and ensure students were provided with adequate praise and motivation to establish trust and acceptance by both parties in accordance with the work of Cornelius-White (2007).

The objective of the unit was to increase each student’s competency in solving unfamiliar words without detracting from the meaning of the literature. As such, students were required to develop strategies for sound chunking, fluency and comprehension (See
Appendix D). As students identified an enjoyment in hands-on work that allowed them to come to the conclusions themselves, students were provided with a new strategy for sounding out called ‘stretchy snake’. Students were provided with a laminated picture of a snake which they wrote the segmented sound chunks of each word they were unfamiliar with.

Students were separated into three reading groups based on their initial reading levels and were reading texts at level 22, 17 and 14. Group A with 4 students at reading levels between 22 and 24 which included students 4, 5, 6, and 8 and were reading texts at level 22, Group B with 2 students including students 1 and 2, with reading levels between 16 and 18 were reading texts at level 17 and Group C with 4 students with reading levels between 11 and 14 were reading texts at level 14 and included students 3, 7, 9 and 10. Each group of students was required to read to the teacher for 15 minutes each and then complete group work activities relating to predicting what may happen in the text. Group work consisted of writing exercises, art activities and verbal responses.

To increase patience and kindness in the forms of compassion, understanding, empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, non-directivity and encouragement, the teacher adopted the verses from Colossians 3:12-13 “Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others”. She also prayed for God’s help in doing this.
4.2.2 Action

This stage involved implementing the lesson plans and putting into practice Colossians 3:12-13. Each reading group read with the teacher, eight times over the two week cycle, for a period of 15 minutes each time. Each reading group’s lesson started with a quick discussion of the text which was changed weekly, followed by each student reading a page of the text sequentially, until the 15 minutes were up. During the reading lesson, students were encouraged to use the Stretchy Snake for difficult words, with teacher assistance initially, to instruct students in how to correctly break up a work into sound chunks. Students then proceeded to complete their group work whilst the next group read with the teacher. Twice a week, after a reading lesson, students completed the Reading Group Evaluation Questionnaire (Appendix A). Feedback was then incorporated into the next lesson.

4.2.3 Observation

There were three main instruments used for observation in the first cycle: the PM Benchmark Reading Test, Teacher-Student Relationships Questionnaire and Student’s Evaluations of Reading Groups. The PM Benchmarking Reading Test was completed by the students at the end of the first cycle. The Teacher-Student Relationships Questionnaire was completed by the students at the end of the first cycle. Students also completed the Reading Group Evaluations twice a week. An analysis of the results follows.

First Cycle analysis of students’ current reading achievement

After the first cycle of focussed positive relationship building and different strategies for helping students with their reading, students showed an average increase of one reading
level over a two week period, with the highest gains being made by Students 9 and 10 who increased their reading levels from 14 to 16. Figure 4.4 details a graphical depiction of students’ reading levels at the preliminary stage; at the end of cycle one; and the average reading levels for students in Third Term, Year Two. At this point, students were achieving, on average, six levels lower than the average reading levels.

![Cycle One Reading Assessment](image)

*Figure 4.3 – Cycle One Reading Assessment*

**First Cycle analysis of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship**

Based on the data from the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire overall the relationships with the students had improved slightly. With an increase of one student selecting the “lots” box for kindness and only one student stating that their teacher was not very patient. This student explained that this was due to the teacher getting frustrated if the student was not reading along with the other students.
Students completed four evaluations based on the reading groups for the two week cycle. Students listed several reasons for what they enjoyed about reading groups which included: being fun and interesting when they were able to participate in lots of reading, enjoying the books and it being nice and quiet. It was also mentioned repeatedly by students that they enjoyed the calmer atmosphere, as well as using ‘stretchy snake’ to sound out the words and to increase their ability to read the text, stating it as being fun and easy. However some students listed difficulty sounding out words and high noise levels from other groups as reasons for what they disliked about reading groups. All students noted that they enjoyed the games and would like to see an increase in games and worksheets in the reading groups.

Figure 4.4 – Cycle One Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships

First Cycle Analysis of Students Evaluation of Reading Groups
4.2.4 Reflection and Analysis

After assessing students’ reading levels, an increase of an average one level was achieved by all students. This shows that the strategies in meeting the students’ needs during reading groups were starting to have an effect.

One of the notable strengths of this cycle was an increase in the overall positivity of the students’ relationship with their teacher with only three students selecting ‘some’ as the descriptor to describe patience. There was an increase of one student selecting ‘lots’ to describe their teacher’s level of patience as well all students’ selecting that they strongly believed their teacher could help them succeed at reading. It is possible that the teacher’s focus on trust and empathy towards the students had an impact on the students’ comfort and peace during reading groups, increasing their willingness to make mistakes and attempt all activities.

Furthermore, six students still identified noise levels and a lack of games as something they would like to see changed for future lessons. The noise levels could be a cause of anxiety experienced by students, which might affect the students’ reading levels and progression in reading.

As such, based on the strengths and weakness of cycle one, it became apparent that the teacher should make several changes during Cycle Two which included:

1. Increasing student interest in reading groups through employing more games and reducing the levels of frustration shown to help reduce noise levels. Increase student attainment and learning through simple games.
2. Continue to implement stretchy snake strategy until the students were competent at stretching out the sounds in words.
3. Continue to increase the positive relationships experienced by the students and teacher, the teacher decided to demonstrate more patience, understanding, and empathy and provide encouragement through the use of verbal reinforcement.

4. Incorporate student-initiated reading strategies through providing students with small white boards, magnetic letters and markers to enable them to attempt to break up words on their own. Such strategies were detailed in the work of Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdalh, and Holliday (2010) on increasing reading attainment and interest in struggling readers.

4.3 Second Cycle

4.3.1 Planning

Planning for the second cycle, focussed on incorporating students’ interests including games, sounding out, blending and the stretchy snake exercises. As well as using the strategies gained from the preliminary assessment conducted before Cycle One which included using information books, pictures and hands-on activities that allow the students to take initiative for their own learning. An increase in patience, kindness, empathy, praise, encouragement and student directed teaching were also planned particularly focussing on avoiding the identified dislikes mentioned previously by students.

The objective of this two week unit (See Appendix D2) was to increase each student’s competency in sustaining fluency in reading for extended periods of time through quick mental sounding out strategies and the use of familiar words. As such, students were required to increase their ability in sound chunking and sounding out mentally, as well as their comprehension and fluency. Students would be provided with the stretchy snake as they
mentioned their enjoyment of this strategy. Students would also be provided with magnetic letters, small white boards and markers to write, create and break up unfamiliar words.

Students were separated into three reading groups based on their new identified reading levels. Group A with Four students reading at level 23. Group B with Two students was reading at level 18 and Group C with Four students reading at level 15. Each group of students was required to read actively with the teacher for 15 minutes each lesson and then complete various independent group activities relating to making connections with information and their text.

Additionally, the teacher focussed on Proverbs 22:6 which states that we need to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”. As such the researcher reflected on what morals the students would need in later life such as kindness, humility, patience, gentleness, self-control and joy and decided to keep this in constant mind whilst implementing the reading lessons to demonstrate and train the students in correct behaviour. Thus, in reference to this Scripture, the teacher planned to engage with the students in positive relationships.

4.3.2 Action

This stage involved implementing the new unit plan (see Appendix D2) and the teacher continued to practice Colossians 3:12-13, in addition to Proverbs 22:6. Each reading group read with the teacher, for 8 x 15 minute sessions over the two week cycle. Each reading session started out with a quick discussion of the text which was changed weekly, as well as a quick sound recognition and sound chunking game. This introduction was then followed by each student reading a page of the text sequentially, until the 15 minutes were
up. During the reading session, students were encouraged to use the stretchy snake for difficult words, as well as the white board and magnetic letters, with teacher assistance being offered upon a student’s request. This then allowed them to take further ownership of their reading. Students then proceeded to complete their group work whilst the next group read. Twice a week, after the reading lesson, students completed a reading group reflection questionnaire (see Appendix A). Feedback was then incorporated into the next lesson.

4.3.3 Observation

The three instruments used for observation in the second cycle were the same as used in the first cycle to maintain consistency and an adequate assessment of progress: the PM Benchmark Reading Test, Teacher-Student Relationships Questionnaire and Student’s Evaluations of Reading Groups. The PM Benchmarking Reading Test was administered by the teacher to the students at the end of the second cycle; similarly the questionnaire was completed by the students at the end of the second cycle. Students also completed the Reading Group Evaluations twice a week. An analysis of the results follows.

4.3.4 Reflection and Analysis

Analysis of student’s current reading achievement

Students reading levels were increased on average by 1.7 levels, showing a .7 increase in improvement from the previous cycle’s assessment as is demonstrated in Figure 4.5. Students 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 all showed an increase of two reading levels during this two week period. The other five students increased their reading levels by one. At this stage, students
were on average 4.5 levels lower than their expected achievement levels but were showing an overall improvement of 1.9 levels from the previous assessment.

Figure 4.5 – Cycle Two Reading Assessment

Second Cycle analysis of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship

Based on the data gained from the questionnaire regarding their perception of teacher student relationships at the end of Cycle Two, it became apparent, that overall the relationships with the students had improved significantly in this two week period. Nine students (which was four more than at the end of Cycle One) selected ‘lots’ for the overall patience displayed by their teacher and only one student selected ‘some’ to describe patience. The overall reasons given by the students for patience included being very gentle, happy and helpful with one student stating that their teacher seemed to really care if they tried on their own.

All but one student selected ‘lots’ to describe kindness stating similar reasons to the above, with the one student stating they selected “some” because they were late for reading
and packing up which their teacher did not like. The student who selected “some” for patience stated this was due to the teacher running out of time for reading groups as can be seen in figure 4.6. In relation to all other areas, the general consensus from the students was a significant improvement, with very few students selecting ‘some’ to describe their teacher. All students believed that their teacher cares that they increase in their reading ability, with only one student selecting ‘a fair bit’. Students demonstrated this belief due to the increase in patience, understanding and that their teacher was very helpful during sounding out practice.

Figure 4.6 – Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships.
Second Cycle Analysis of Students’ Evaluation of Reading Groups

Students completed four evaluations on the reading groups over the two week cycle. Students listed several reasons for what they enjoyed about reading groups which included: being fun and interesting when they were able to participate in lots of reading, enjoying the books and it was nice and quiet. It was also mentioned repeatedly by four students that they enjoyed the calmer atmosphere, as well as using ‘stretchy snake’ to sound out the words and to increase their ability to read the text, stating it as fun and easy. However three students listed difficulty sounding out words and high noise levels from other groups as reasons for what they disliked about reading groups. All students commented that they enjoyed the games but would like to see an increase in games and worksheets in reading groups in future lessons.

As outlined above during this cycle students made a significant average of 1.7 reading levels increase. Such could be attributed to the significant increase in student-teacher relationships with all students selecting ‘lot’s’ to describe the helpfulness of their teacher during reading groups and only two students selecting ‘some’ to describe their belief in their teacher’s ability to help them increase their skills in reading. This increase shows that the increase in patience, understanding and putting students’ needs first was making a significant change in the relationships and trust between students and teacher.

Additionally, a strength of this cycle was the increase in student enjoyment, interest and participation which was demonstrated by the overall decrease in noise levels and the positive reading group reflections completed by the students. Students still mentioned an enjoyment for “stretchy snake”, particularly now that they were able to complete this on their own with the aid of other sounding out stimuli.
An area to focus on in future was identified by the evaluations of this cycle with the difficulty some students stated they had sounding out certain words and the nervousness a student displayed at being late for reading and packing up. If a student is greeted negatively this can impact the overall feelings they have towards reading for the remainder of the lesson (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick, & Elder, 2004). Furthermore, a student mentioned that inadequate monitoring of time decreased their teacher’s patience levels and that it impacted on their enjoyment during reading groups.

Based on the analysis of Cycle Two, the researcher decided to make the following modifications for the Final Cycle:

1. Ensure that all students feel supported, not just during reading groups, but at the beginning and pack up as well to ensure that students have positive feelings before they engage in reading, during and after reading to help promote respect and understanding. By doing so, it is also believed that the students will develop a more interested perspective and be more willing to participate actively in reading groups as the fear and negative feelings dissipate.

2. Continue to provide students with interesting, open-ended art based group activities and games based on their reading for the cycle to increase participation during group work and minimise potential noise levels.

3. Increase time monitoring adequacy to ensure that the reading groups do not run out of enough time for each student to read, ensuring that there are smooth transitions between groups and when preparing for the next lesson after reading. Such should minimise potential stress and negative relationship occurrences.
4.4 Third and Final Cycle

This Cycle immediately followed Cycle Two and was again of two weeks duration with eight reading lessons being monitored during this time.

4.4.1 Planning

The planning for the Final Cycle of research involved developing the unit plan (Appendix D3) for the reading group lessons with a focus on incorporating students’ interests including games, sounding out, blending and the stretchy snake exercises. The planning also involved making use of the feedback from the other two cycles which included using information books, pictures and hands on activities that allowed the students to take initiative for their own learning. A focus on the teacher’s patience, kindness, empathy, praise, encouragement and student directed teaching were also involved and avoidance of the identified dislikes mentioned previously by students.

The objective of this unit was to increase each student’s competency in sustaining fluency in reading for extended periods of time through quick mental sounding out strategies and the use of familiar words. As such, students were required to increase their ability in sound chunking and sounding out mentally, as well as their comprehension and fluency. Students were still provided with the “stretchy snake” as they mentioned their enjoyment of this strategy. Students were also provided with magnetic letters, small white boards and markers to write, create and break up unfamiliar words.

Students were separated into three new reading groups based on their new identified reading levels. Group A with four students were reading at level 23. Group B with two
students were reading at level 18 and Group C with four students were reading at level 16. Each group of students was required to read actively with the teacher for 15 minutes each lesson and then complete various independent group activities relating to making connections with information and their text.

Additionally, the teacher chose to continue her focus on Colossians 3: 12-13 and Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”. As in previous cycles the teacher reflected on what morals the students would need in later life such as kindness, humility, patience, gentleness, self-control and joy and decided to keep this in constant mind whilst implementing the reading lessons to demonstrate and train the students in correct behaviour. In doing this the teacher would continue to develop positive relationships with the students.

4.4.2 Action

This stage involved implementing the new reading lesson plans and continuing to practice Colossians 3:12-13, as well as Proverbs 22:6, to help ensure all interactions are positive and meaningful. Each reading group read with the teacher, for eight, 15 minute lessons over the two week cycle. Each reading lesson started out with a quick discussion of the text which was changed weekly, as well as a quick sound recognition and sound chunking game. This introduction was then followed by each student reading a page of the text sequentially, until the 15 minutes were up. During the reading session, students were encouraged to use the “stretchy snake” for difficult words, as well as the small white board and magnetic letters, with teacher assistance being offered upon a student’s request to continue to allow them to take ownership of their reading. Students then proceeded to complete their group work whilst the next group read. Twice a week, after a reading lesson,
students completed the Reading Group Evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix A3). Feedback was then incorporated into the next lesson.

4.4.3 Observation

There were four main instruments used for observation in the final cycle: the PM Benchmark Reading Test, Teacher-Student Relationships Questionnaire, the Student Evaluation of Motivation for Reading and Teacher Input and Student’s Evaluations of Reading Groups. The PM Benchmarking Reading Test was administered by the teacher with the students at the end of the final cycle. Both questionnaires were completed by the students at the end of the final cycle. Students also completed the Reading Group Evaluations twice a week. An analysis of the results follows.

4.4.4 Analysis and Reflection

Final analysis of student’s current reading achievement

Final reading assessments showed that students increased their reading level by an average of 2.5 levels over this cycle. The highest reading level gains were achieved by students 2, 3, 7, 9 and 10 who increased by 3 levels. Students were averaging only 3.5 levels lower than the expected average with four students achieving above the required average for their stage. Student 4 was at level 25, Student 5 was at level 25 Student 6 was at level 26 and Student 8 was at level 26. Overall students increased their reading levels by 4.7 levels over a 6 week period with some students increasing by 6 levels as shown in figure 4.7
After the final assessment regarding students’ motivation for reading after the six weeks of research and self-reflection, it appeared that students’ still all had similar beliefs about reading and what made it meaningful and interesting for them. However the reasons for these beliefs were now different. When students were asked to state if they liked reading and why, all ten students stated that they really liked it, because they could learn interesting facts, because they were really good at it now, and because they were able to read harder books on their own. Few students mentioned spelling, pictures or sounding out. All students stated that they greatly enjoyed having the teacher read to them. The reasons pertaining to this enjoyment included being able to follow what the teacher was reading, to learn how to read better, the teacher made reading fun and exciting and they liked being able to read the books to her after to practice the new words.
Students still mentioned fun, adventure type stories as books that they enjoyed reading, however, many students included non-fiction literature, chapter books and history books that taught them interesting facts. All students stated that they enjoyed stories with pictures in them; however, seven students did not mind if chapter books had no pictures. Reading groups was stated as being enjoyed by all students, particularly now that they were reading harder books; it was quiet; and that their teacher was lots of fun and very relaxed and caring. Six students stated they really enjoyed the sounding out activities and that they were helping them read harder, more interesting books. When asked what they disliked about reading groups, six students stated they were too short and they wanted to read for longer periods of time, whilst four students put ‘nothing’ as their answer to this question.

In relation to their ability to read, all students stated that they considered themselves to be very good readers because their teacher “does not get mad at them” and they are reading much harder books. Students outlined that facts, interesting topics and more complex stories made reading enjoyable. All students stated that their teacher was patient, kind and did not get upset if they read a word wrong, but that she allowed them to try and sound the word out themselves, whilst patiently waiting, and would help them sound it out if they asked. Four students stated that they liked how their teacher would not tell them the word anymore, but let them work it out, even if it took them a great deal of time.

Students still stated that showing kindness, being nice, helpful and happy were traits that good teachers possessed, however, several students added patient, caring and gentle to their lists. One student mentioned a willingness to learn as a trait of a good teacher. All students stated that they believed their teacher could help improve their reading, mentioning that they have improved a lot over the term. Many students said their teacher helped them greatly with their reading and that made their teacher helpful and kind. Lastly, when students were asked how they felt when their teacher corrected their reading, seven students stated that
their teacher did not correct them but let them figure out the words themselves, only slightly giving them hints if they missed that they had read something wrong.

**Final analysis of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship**

Students’ perceptions regarding the relationship they had with their teacher during reading groups has increased significantly since the preliminary reflection. Figure 4.8 shows a graphical overview of students’ answers to each question. Findings show a big change from the start of the research cycles with only one student selecting a different answer for ‘lots’ on a question.

![Figure 4.8 – Final analysis of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship](image)

All students viewed their teacher as kind during reading groups, except for one student who selected ‘a fair bit’ stating that his teacher was very helpful and liked him, which
provided no discernible reason as to what made his teacher less kind compared to the other students’ answers. When it came to patience, helpfulness and being understanding, all ten students selected ‘lots’ for these questions which is an improvement of on average five students feeling supported, as shown in the preliminary assessment. Students stated their teacher was helpful, happy, caring, liked them a lot, was nice and loved teaching them to read.

Several students stated they knew their teacher cared about whether they learnt to read or not, due to their teacher always trying to make reading groups better and cater for their needs. Additionally, three students mentioned their teacher was very kind to them during reading groups and supported them when they made mistakes, which helped them feel ‘happy’ to try again.

### 4.4.5 Summary of Results

A notable strength of the last cycle was the increase in reading levels which appear to have been influenced by the growing relationships between the teacher and students with all but one section of the Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire receiving full scores. Students commented their teacher displayed empathy, kindness, gentleness, patience and a student-orientated approach to reading which Cornelius-White (2007) states is essential for the development of mutually trusting and supportive teacher-student relationships.

Students’ interests in reading had increased with answers being a lot more responsive towards the analytical enjoyment of reading for sustained periods of time, stating reasons for
enjoyment as, no longer mere pictures or sounding out, but for the enjoyment of extending knowledge, research, increasing vocabulary and engaging in a challenge.

This chapter has outlined the results and analysis of the three cycles of Action Research. The next chapter will discuss the results.
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

As has been demonstrated in the Results Chapter the reading development and attainment of the ten students involved in this study improved during the three cycles of Action Research. This chapter follows on from the Results and Analysis Chapter in answer to the research question “How effective are the relationships between students and their teachers in impacting on students’ reading achievement in a low achieving Year Two setting?” The discussion will focus on the reasons for the improvement referring to the relevant literature. The discussion will follow a similar pattern to the Results Chapter by discussing the results related to each cycle of research.

5.1 Cycle One

The results indicate all ten students progressed in their reading level by an average of 0.7 during the first two week cycle of the study. The Teacher-Student Relationship questionnaire from Cycle One showed that the relationships between the researcher and the students improved slightly with students verbalising that the researcher demonstrated an increase in patience, trust and kindness. Thus the improvement could be attributed to the increase in the quality of the relationships between the teacher and students which Naglieri (2001) states is indicative of future and current adjustment in school, such as the students’ ability to socialise, adapt to daily changes, obtain knowledge effectively and find an overall enjoyment in the school setting. It has been shown in the research of Dobransky and Bainbridge (2004) that students with more supportive relationships in the classroom setting
have a higher regard for school, are more engaged in the lessons and tasks at hand, and show a higher achievement result in all academic areas. Interestingly, it has been shown that students who show a consistent lack of improvement regarding reading, generally possess negative feelings towards their teachers (Cornelius-White, 2007). Three of the students in the study (who had the lowest achievement rates within reading), scoring an average of 13 levels below the expected average for a Year Two student in Term Three stated on the Reading Group Evaluation Form that they believed their teacher demonstrated low-levels of patience during reading groups, particularly when a word was read in an incorrect manner. These comments demonstrated a potential cause for the low achievement rates being due to situational stress and fear of failure as a result of the negative responses from the teacher. Students in their formative years of schooling have a large fear of disappointing their teacher and being seen as less than adequate by their peers Cartledge (2009). As such these students may have made better progress in reading, had their teacher been more patient and empathetic towards them.

Additional comments made by four students on the Motivation Questionnaire, identified a further weakness in the teacher’s attitude which related to what students perceived as low levels of kindness demonstrated during reading groups. Two students did not believe their teacher was willing to help them learn to read and see them succeed during reading activities. The work of Westwood, (2011) states students value positive teachers who view education as a high priority, one of the most meaningful and encouraging aspects of education. Without such encouragement, research has shown that a student’s success is lower than the average (Westwood, 2011). This low success shows a student’s lack of trust and sense of security in their teacher’s view of themselves as worthwhile students who can achieve. This response shows that the students did not have confidence that their teacher view them positively nor had strong positive feelings towards them.
According to four low-achieving students, as evidenced on the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire, their teacher demonstrated instances of frustration when students were not attending to the reading in a prompt manner which was noted as something they greatly disliked. Such dislike could result in feelings of anxiety as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, (2011) state that students who dislike an activity or an aspect of one, are more likely to try and engage in avoidance of such a task, however, if they are unable to avoid it, it can result in feelings of extreme anxiety and frustration or illness, whenever they are required to participate. Levine (2006) states that anxiety is one of the biggest causes for a lack of progress in learning whether adult or child. He further states that teacher frustration could be a potential cause for limiting the student’s ability to progress to their required achievement level for their stage of development. Thus the frustration demonstrated by the teacher towards these students could have prevented them from progressing further in their reading as well as minimising the level of trust within the teacher-student relationships.

5.2 Cycle Two

Students increased an average of 1.7 reading levels during this two week cycle with two students increasing by two levels. Such increase could be attributed to the significant growth in relationships shown by the student responses to the Relationship Questionnaire, as well as the Student Evaluation and Teacher Observations at the end of the Cycle, particularly in the areas of helpfulness and patience. Thus students felt supported and helped by their teacher, and the additional patience she showed helped develop a sense of trust in their teacher. Research has shown students are more likely to attempt unknown concepts and work, if they possess a confidence their teacher will edify and encourage them in spite of their failures, as opposed to being disappointed and humiliating them (Sherwood, 2008). As
such, through the teacher providing continual, positive help to the student, irrespective of how long that help may be required, as well as showing no signs of frustration or dislike towards the student, such confidence can be adequately developed (McCabe & Howard, 2001).

Furthermore, the responses from the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire showed students believed their teacher wanted them to succeed at a higher rate in their reading. The research of Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdalh, and Holliday, (2010) shows expectations have a dramatic effect on student achievement rates. Teacher expectations inform the way teachers relate towards their students. Teachers treat students in regard to how they believe that student can perform and teacher attitudes and behaviours can affect students’ view of their abilities. Teachers who show more warmth, regard, positive responses, and acceptance of students as individuals believe those students to be capable and a valued member of society. Winch et al. (2010) demonstrated teachers provide more praise to students they believe will succeed and demonstrate more patience towards these students. It appears they subconsciously see these students as more valuable than those students who struggle.

Over the last several years the percentage of students who have negative relationships with their teachers and perform at a low level in reading has increased from 54% to 75% according to the research of Wright (2006) and DfES (2005). Goran and Gage (2011) also state that over the last decade, a rapid decrease in the positive regard and understanding towards students that is demonstrated by teachers has occurred. This is due to the increasing demand teachers have to ensure their students perform to a certain standard, as well as the increase in teacher workloads. It can be said that the decrease in reading levels and relationship levels demonstrate a potential correlation between teacher-student relationships and achievement. This correlation is theoretically demonstrated in this study with an increase
in reading achievement during Cycle One and Two, being linked to a more positive relationship with the teacher.

Student answers from the questionnaires indicated an increase in enjoyment, participation and interest during the first two week cycle. This finding can be aligned with the work of Britain (2005) who found when students start experiencing supportive relationships, students appear to develop a higher regard for school, are more engaged and show higher results in reading. Furthermore, the work of McCabe and Howard (2001) found effective teachers of literacy create literate environments, which enhance students’ participation levels. This literate environment can only be achieved through effective and supportive relationships. Such relationships result in the teacher utilising knowledge of the individual student obtained through the relationships.

Students stated in the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire that they enjoyed engaging in their own attempts at deciphering words and found utilising the sounding out methods provided to be fun, easy and interesting. Such sounding out techniques included introducing the Stretchy Snake concept, which consisted of a laminated cut out of a snake with boxes within the body, allowing students to write the unknown words into familiar sound chunks and then read the individual sections easier.

Contained within the work of Hart and Hodson (2004) is the concept that developing relationships around the learner not the teacher allows for the holistic development of the student, emotionally, socially, mentally and physically. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) have shown teachers should develop an attitude of facilitator rather than teacher as such an attitude allows for the acceptance of change in the development of curriculum to occur. As students stated that they enjoyed using various tools to solve words on their own, such demonstrates a facilitator approach to the reading groups. A facilitator approach encapsulates the idea of
students taking responsibility for their own learning, with the educator, guiding the students towards a correct response on their own. This occurs through the educator providing the students with tools that allow them to learn independently. Initial Reading Group Evaluations showed three students did not enjoy reading groups. After reassessing later on, it was shown the same students enjoyed the reading groups with particular mention made of the student-orientated sounding out techniques.

Additionally, a facilitator develops curriculum around the learner’s needs and thus, provides them with opportunities to excel on their own, increasing the students’ self-esteem and belief in their abilities. This is due to the students’ becoming the focus for the learning outcomes and activities that are developed. Such programming allows the students to have tasks developed that they are able to complete, facilitating more on-task behaviour.

Six students commented on the Student-Teacher Relationship Questionnaire, that they enjoyed the decrease in noise level which related to an increase in engagement, enjoyment and attainment of information. The feedback from the students caused the teacher to become more of a facilitator, where she allowed for the development of tasks which were more focused on the students’ needs within the reading groups. As students became more focussed and their needs were taken into consideration it may have resulted in the decreased noise level. The results of an increase in student-teacher relationships may result in the development of a facilitator mentality include honouring student voices, adapting to individual differences and providing students with a sense of support and ownership (Cornelius-White, 2007). In addition the students appreciated the teacher’s empathy and regard towards them, by listening to them, showing respect and being sensitive towards the students’ needs. Thus the results of the Relationship and Motivation Questionnaires showed that the teacher’s attitude had improved in the students’ eyes during the Second Cycle,
5.3 The Final Cycle

During the Final Cycle, student answers on the Teacher – Student Relationship Questionnaires indicated an increase in relationships showing increased empathy, kindness, gentleness, patience and a student-orientated approach to reading. Students showed a significant increase in reading levels by an average of 2.5 with the top three students showing an increase of two levels. Thus, it appears the increase in the teacher-student relationship and reading levels may be linked and show a possible correlation between teacher-student relationships and student attainment in reading. When using such relationship strategies, differentiated instruction is engaged in by the educator unintentionally, as the educator possesses a solid understanding of the students and uses that understanding to address each student’s individualised needs.

In the case of the researcher, it became apparent when a solid understanding and knowledge of each student was developed, each student needed slightly different forms of encouragement and instruction when addressing their needs in reading. Some of the students involved in this study needed more modelling then other students, some needed to gain more self-confidence before they were able to effectively move forward and start to improve in reading, other students preferred more independent means and less teacher instruction. It is stated that effective teachers of literacy engage in differentiated instruction, which can only be achieved through developing a solid knowledge of each student as an individual being which occurs through gaining a solid knowledge of each student (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Furthermore students stated in the Teacher-Student- Relationship Questionnaire, that they found a greater enjoyment in reading for extended periods of time which was not evident in their answers for this Questionnaire during the previous cycles. Students also stated they
enjoyed reading for different reasons compared with what they had stated in previous cycles. These new reasons included extending knowledge, engaging in research and developing their vocabulary. Such reasoning shows an increase in the intrinsic value of enjoyment that the students received from reading. Sherwood (2008) states activities and work need to be a reflection of what students find enjoyable in order to develop a motivation for reading and in this cycle the teacher had continued to use a variety of activities including stretchy snake, word mapping, story creating, magnetic letters and word bingo which students found enjoyable.

The positive relationships with students had an impact on the individual student’s motivation as it has been shown that teachers who develop an understanding for what interests the students, how they learn, what they value, help to remove student negativity regarding the activity, and thus results in student progress. Thus teachers are able to cater for students allowing them to develop positive ideas towards the task at hand. Positive feedback from a teacher enhances student enjoyment which can only occur if a substantial knowledge in regards to the student is possessed, and such ultimately reduces anxiety and promotes student relaxation.

In conclusion, the relationships between the students and researcher were greatly strengthened throughout this study, and the students’ reading levels increased as a result of continual critical reflection and employing the Cornelius-White (2007) expectancy-value theory in the teaching and learning process. The relationship building strategies, many of which linked to Galatians 5:22-23 which states that “the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” included focusing on patience, understanding, empathy, student-orientated tasks, gentleness and understanding. These relationship building strategies appeared to increase the development of positive
student-teacher relationships and student progress. The correlation between relationships and reading development were demonstrated through the continual increase of both the relationship between teacher and student and student gains in reading levels. Finally, the improvement in teacher behaviour and treatment of students was seen to increase due to taking a student orientated focus, which could have also attributed to the increase in reading levels and relationship development.

The following chapter will provide the conclusion, limitations and recommendation from this study.
CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study examined the potential links between teacher-student relationships and progression in reading. It aimed to ascertain whether focusing on developing mutually trusting, supportive, encouraging relationships between teachers and their students, would impact on progress in reading. A study undertaken from the results from the National Assessment Program (2011) country wide testing system has shown a decline in literacy retention rates and academic progress in reading over the last decade.

The research involved Action Research with three two week cycles and involved analysing data from four separate instruments including three questionnaires completed by the students during each cycle and an assessment of student reading levels using the PM Benchmarking Kit. The data were analysed in relation to improvement in the teacher-student relationships and a gain in reading levels.

Over the course of this study, significant changes in both the relationships between students and teacher, and students’ reading levels were noted. The students’ responses on the questionnaires in the third Cycle showed an improvement in how they viewed the relationships between themselves and their teacher, and how much they enjoyed engaging in reading based activities. The work of Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick, and Elder (2004) states positive teacher-student relationships have an overarching effect on all aspects of the education attainment. In particular, three students who had stated on the initial Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire that they did not like reading groups, by the final Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire in Cycle 3, these same three students stated they enjoyed reading groups with particular mention to reading with the teacher. Such statements link the improvement in the relationships demonstrated to the results from the questionnaires.
The use of the Fountas and Pinnell (2013) Benchmarking Kit, demonstrated students increased their reading levels by an average of 6 levels over the course of the study. Three students moved above the expected level of 25 achieving level 26 and 27. In addition, the overall attitude of the teacher and the approach to teaching undertaken changed for the better as this study progressed as was evident by the reflections of the students towards the approaches to reading group plans and activities. More hands-on, student orientated approaches to literacy were implemented as the teacher became more aware of the students’ individual needs and interests and began to develop more positive, trusting, mutually beneficial relationships.

As the cycles progressed, the results from the Questionnaires, demonstrated a more positive approach to reading which appeared to impact the increase in reading levels. It would appear from the results of this study, that a positive change in the relationships between teachers and their students may assist with minimalizing the downward trend of reading achievement within schools. An additional interesting finding was the increase in positive behaviour during reading groups as fewer disturbances within groups through off-task behaviours were evident and more students remained on task and engaged in the lessons as the study progressed. The increase in positive behaviour appears to affirm the research by Cornelius-White (2007) who demonstrated as students become more confident in their worth in the classroom they are more engaged and interested in the tasks at hand.

This Action Research study has shown the impact of positive teacher-student relationships in increasing reading attainment within the classroom setting. Through the teacher employing strategies to increase patience, understanding, empathy and trust between the teacher and her students, as well as employing a facilitator mentality, the literacy results within the classroom increased at a substantial level. Thus the results of the study
demonstrate an answer to the research question that teacher student relationships are very effective in impacting students’ reading achievement in a Year Two setting.

**Limitations**

The above Action Research study has several limitations. First the use of self-report data through collective questionnaires is subjective (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Secondly, this study was completed by the researcher within her own classroom context which is not generalizable to other classroom contexts. Finally, the work of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) states the validly of Action Research can be questionable due to the potential bias of the researcher.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The data obtained throughout this study suggests some possible directions for future research. As there was evidence that mutually respectful relationships between the teacher and students increased reading rates within the classroom setting, it would be beneficial to investigate this on a larger scale. Literacy retention rates within Australian Education settings have dropped significantly over the last decade and there are many reasons as to why such a drop exists. (Goran & Gage, 2011). As such, it is important that educators identify potential causes of this decline to be able to increase literacy development within the classroom. As this study suggested a link between relationships and reading development, research on a larger scale in several different classroom and school contexts could provide more evidence for this.
REFERENCES


Reading Group Evaluation

Date: ___________
Name: ___________

What did you like most about reading groups today?

_______________________________________________________________

Why did you like this?

_______________________________________________________________

What didn’t you like about reading groups today?

_______________________________________________________________

Why didn’t you like this?

_______________________________________________________________

What can Mrs X do next time to make reading groups better?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________
What did you like most about reading groups today?

It is fun when we do more reading.

Why did you like this?

Because I do.

What didn’t you like about reading groups today?

When I do the Hot’s.

Why didn’t you like this?

I don’t like the Hot’s because it has lots of rules.
A2 – Cycle 2 – A sample of the Reading Group Evaluation Questionnaire completed by the same student as in Cycle 1

What did you like most about reading groups today?

Very good

Why did you like this?

Because it is so fun doing reading groups.

What didn’t you like about reading groups today?

Reading with the teacher.

Why didn’t you like this?

Because it is not fun.
A3 – Cycle 3 - A sample of the Reading Group Evaluation Questionnaire completed by the same student as in Cycle 1

What did you like most about reading groups today?
I like to read and stretching snack stretch the word

Why did you like this?
because it is fun work and writing in our books

What didn’t you like about reading groups today?
I like to look at the photo and reading

Why didn’t you like this?
because we can play reading group games.
# Appendix B – Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire

B0 – Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire Sample (blank)

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**No 2: Questionnaire/Interview re students’ motivations for reading**

1. Do you like reading? Why?
2. Do you like your teacher reading stories to you?
3. What kind of stories do you like to read?
4. Do you like stories with lots of pictures?
5. What do you like most about reading groups?
6. What do you dislike most about reading groups?
7. Do you consider yourself to be a good reader? Why/why not?
8. What makes reading interesting for you?
9. Would you prefer to be in another reading group? Why?
10. How does your teacher try to help you with your reading?
11. Does your teacher get cross if you can’t do your reading?
12. What do you think makes a good teacher?
13. How can your teacher help you to improve your reading?
14. How do you feel when the teacher corrects your pronunciation, helps you read a word? Why?
15. What makes reading interesting for you?
16. Do you like to be in charge of the reading group? Why/why not?
17. Would you prefer to be in another reading group? Why?
18. How does your teacher try to help you with your reading?
19. Does your teacher get cross if you can’t do your reading?
20. What do you think makes a good teacher?
21. How can your teacher help you to improve your reading?
22. How do you feel when the teacher corrects your pronunciation, helps you read a word? Why?
B1 – Cycle 1 – Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire

1. Do you like reading? Why?
   Yes because we can sound it out and look at the pictures.

2. Do you like your teacher reading stories to you?
   Yes.

3. What kind of stories do you like to read?
   The sea in my bedroom.

4. Do you like stories with lots of pictures?
   Yes.

5. What do you like most about reading groups?
   We can do fun stuff.

6. What do you dislike most about reading groups?
   I don’t like the work sheet.

7. Do you consider yourself to be a good reader? Why/why not?
   Yes.

8. What makes reading interesting for you?
   Looking at the pictures and sounding out.

9. Do you like to be in charge of the reading group? Why/why not?
   Yes.

10. Would you prefer to be in another reading group? Why?
    Yes.

11. How does your teacher try to help you with your reading?
    He/She sound the words out.

12. Does your teacher get cross if you can’t do your reading?
    No.

13. What do you think makes a good teacher?
    Help, care.

14. How can your teacher help you to improve your reading?
    Keep improving.

15. How do you feel when the teacher corrects your pronunciation, helps you read a word? Why?
    Little bit sad.
B2 – Cycle 2 – Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire completed by same student as in Cycle 1

1. Do you like reading? Why?
   Yes, because it is fun.

2. Do you like your teacher reading stories to you?
   Yes, because I like the stories.
   [Signature]

3. What kind of stories do you like to read?
   The three little pigs.

4. Do you like stories with lots of pictures?
   Yes, I do.

5. What do you like most about reading groups?
   It is so so fun.

6. What do you like most about reading groups?
   [Signature]

7. Do you consider yourself to be a good reader? Why/why not?
   Yes, because I do.

8. What makes reading interesting for you?
   When I do so much work.

9. Do you like to be in charge of the reading group? Why/why not?
   Yes, I do.

10. Would you prefer to be in another reading group? Why?
    Yes.

11. How does your teacher try to help you with your reading?
    She tells me.
B3 – Cycle 3 – Students’ Motivation for Reading Questionnaire completed by same student in Cycle 1

1. Do you like reading? Why?
   Yes, because it got me a lot of fun.

2. Do you like your teacher reading stories to you?
   Yes, it is so quiet and so fun.

3. What kind of stories do you like?
   I can read.

4. Do you like stories with lots of pictures?
   Yes.

5. Do you like most ab?
   Yes.

6. What do you dislike most about reading groups?
   No, I like little bits of hard work but it is fun.

7. Do you consider yourself to be a good reader? Why?
   Yes, because I got a good kind of view.

8. What makes reading interesting for you?

9. Does your teacher get cross if you can't do your reading?
   No, get told off by the teacher.

10. What do you think makes a good teacher?
    Yes, very kind to people.

11. How can your teacher help you to improve your reading?
    Yes, say you improve your work.

12. How do you feel when the teacher corrects your pronunciation, helps you read a word? Why?
    No, I go to be sad.
Appendix C – Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship

C0 – Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship Sample (blank)

Instrument 3: Relationships Questionnaire/Interview

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<th>A fair bit</th>
<th>Some</th>
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<td>1. Is your teacher kind to you during reading groups?</td>
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<td>Give some examples</td>
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<td>2. Is your teacher patient with you when you make mistakes in reading groups?</td>
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<td>3. Does your teacher help you in reading?</td>
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<td>4. Do you believe your teacher can help you to read better?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Does your teacher like you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
C1 – Cycle 1 – A sample of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship completed by one student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is your teacher kind to you during reading groups?</td>
<td>Not very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give some examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is your teacher patient with you when you make mistakes in reading groups?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give some examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Does your teacher help you in reading?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give some examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you believe your teacher can help you to read better?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give some examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Does your teacher like</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give some examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rationale:**
- The teacher is kind to the student during reading groups.
- The teacher is patient when the student makes mistakes in reading groups.
- The teacher helps the student in reading.
- The student believes the teacher can help them read better.
- The teacher likes the student.

**Example Responses:**
- The teacher helps people when they need help.
- The teacher tells them to put their hands up.
- The teacher is kind to the student.
C2 – Cycle 2 – A sample of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship completed by the same student as in Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lets</th>
<th>A fair bit</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Not very much</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is your teacher kind to you during reading groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do you believe your teacher can help you to read better?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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6. Does your teacher understand what you need help with in reading?
   - Yes

7. Does your teacher care whether you read better or not?
   - Yes

---

Because she always helps...
C3 – Cycle 3 - A sample of Students’ Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship completed by the same student as in Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>A fair bit</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Not very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is your teacher kind to you during reading groups?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does your teacher help you in reading?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you believe your teacher can help you to read better?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Does your teacher understand what you need help with in reading?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you know?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because I am good

Because I need help

Because Shi likes me
## Reading Groups Program

### Year: 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week: 4 and 5</th>
<th>Term: 4</th>
<th>Topic: Predicting</th>
<th>Outcome:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RS1.5</strong> – Reads a wider variety of texts on less familiar topics with increasing independence and understanding, making connections between known knowledge and experience and information in texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RS1.6</strong> – Draws on an increasing range of skills and strategies when reading and comprehending texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RS1.7</strong> – Understands that texts are constructed by people and identifies ways in which texts differ according to their purpose, audience and subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RS1.8</strong> – Identifies the text structure and basic grammatical features of a limited range of text types.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Quality Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Learning</th>
<th>Intellectual Quality</th>
<th>Deep Knowledge</th>
<th>Deep Understanding</th>
<th>Problematic Knowledge</th>
<th>Higher Order Thinking</th>
<th>Metalanguage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Background Knowledge</td>
<td>Cultural Knowledge</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Learning Experiences

- Participates in shared reading
- Interprets story illustrations and simple diagrams
- Draws on own knowledge to interpret characters and events in literary texts related to personal experience
- Speculates on the behaviour of characters in stories and discusses own behaviour in similar situations
- Participates in class/group brainstorming activities to cluster and categories ideas and facts following the reading of texts.
- Makes connections between own knowledge and experience and information in texts
- Reads a variety of literary and factual texts.
- Reads independently for longer periods of time.
- Reads descriptions of familiar people, places and things.
- Begins to read texts about less familiar topics.
- Predicts what a text is about from its cover and title.
- Interprets pictorial procedures.
- Attempts to self-correct when meaning is disrupted while reading.
- Reads a variety of more complex literary and factual texts.
- Uses different parts of a text to access information.
- Predicts from the cover and title the target audience of the text.
- Talks about the topic of a text based on its illustrations and title.
- Predicts from the cover whether they will enjoy the text or find it useful.
- Begins to recognise how texts were created for different audiences.
- Retells or comments on incidents from a story book with attention to plot elements.
- Retells ideas from a factual text for beginner readers.
- Makes inferences and expresses opinions about a character's motives, actions, qualities, and characteristics in texts read or viewed, and speculates on their own behaviours.
- Talks about different types of simple stories.

**Planned Assessment:**
- Anecdotal
- Questioning and Activities
- Written Work
- Open Ended Questions

**Differentiation/Adjustments:**
See individual focus lessons for each group.

**Evaluation**
## Reading Groups Program

**Year:** 1 and 2  
**Term:** 4  
**Topic:** Monitoring  

| Week: 6 and 7 | Term: 4 | Topic: Monitoring | Outcome:  
|---------------|----------|-------------------|----------  
|               |          |                   | **RS1.5** – Reads a wider variety of texts on less familiar topics with increasing independence and understanding, making connections between known knowledge and experience and information in texts.  
|               |          |                   | **RS1.6** – Draws on an increasing range of skills and strategies when reading and comprehending texts.  
|               |          |                   | **RS1.7** – Understands that texts are constructed by people and identifies ways in which texts differ according to their purpose, audience and subject matter.  
|               |          |                   | **RS1.8** – Identifies the text structure and basic grammatical features of a limited range of text types.  

### Quality Teaching

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Quality Learning</td>
<td>Explicit Quality Criteria</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>High Expectations</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>Student Self-Regulation</td>
<td>Student Direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Learning Experiences

- Show monitoring poster  
- Students use highlighters and find the important words they know in yellow and the words they don’t in pink.  
- Discuss why they highlighted these words and how they help them to understand what is

### Indicators

- Participates in shared reading  
- Interprets story illustrations and simple diagrams  
- Draws on own knowledge to interpret characters and events in literary texts related to personal experience  
- Speculates on the behaviour of characters in stories and discusses own behaviour in similar situations  
- Participates in class/group brainstorming activities to cluster and categories ideas and facts following the reading of texts.  
- Makes connections between own knowledge and experience and information in texts  
- Reads a variety of literary and factual texts.  
- Reads independently for longer periods of time.
being read. Let them know why it is important to look for key words.

- Students create word webs by placing key words in bubbles and the branching off these words with words that help them to understand the text, words that come to mind, what they have learnt about these words, how to break them up, questions they might have etc.
- Students write down important words they don’t know or understand, then after discussion about these words, students draw pictures next to them to help them remember what these words mean when they come across them during further reading.

- Reads descriptions of familiar people, places and things.
- Begins to read texts about less familiar topics.
- Predicts what a text is about from its cover and title
- Interprets pictorial procedures
- Attempts to self-correct when meaning is disrupted while reading.
- Reads a variety of more complex literary and factual texts
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- Talks about different types of simple stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Assessment:</th>
<th>Differentiation/Adjustments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anecdotal</td>
<td>See individual focus lessons for each group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning and Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Ended Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation
# Reading Groups Program

**Year:** 1 and 2  

**Week:** 8 and 9  
**Term:** 4  
**Topic:** Questioning  

**Outcome:**  
- **RS1.5** – Reads a wider variety of texts on less familiar topics with increasing independence and understanding, making connections between known knowledge and experience and information in texts.  
- **RS1.6** – Draws on an increasing range of skills and strategies when reading and comprehending texts.  
- **RS1.7** – Understands that texts are constructed by people and identifies ways in which texts differ according to their purpose, audience and subject matter.  
- **RS1.8** – Identifies the text structure and basic grammatical features of a limited range of text types.

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<td>Explicit Quality Criteria</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Learning Experiences
- Using the key words from the cover and the blurb students think of three I wonder questions about the book.  
- Show students the Questioning poster.  
- Students underline the key words in the text after reading two pages. Students state what has surprised them about the text so far and what has puzzled them. Students then formulate questions based on these ideas.  
- Students think pair share and state what questions they have about the text. Model first.

## Indicators
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- Participates in class/group brainstorming activities to cluster and categories ideas and facts following the reading of texts.  
- Makes connections between own knowledge and experience and information in texts  
- Reads a variety of literary and factual texts.  
- Reads independently for longer periods of time.  
- Reads descriptions of familiar people, places and things.
• Using the stop marker, students read so far into the text and then have to ask a question about what they read as soon as they reach the stop sign.
• Students write two quality questions together that would stimulate discussion about the text including what has happened, why did it happen, what else may happen.
• Using blooms taxonomy dice, students think of a questions based on what they roll.

**Individual Group Focus**

- Begins to read texts about less familiar topics.
- Predicts what a text is about from its cover and title
- Interprets pictorial procedures
- Attempts to self-correct when meaning is disrupted while reading.
- Reads a variety of more complex literary and factual texts
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**Evaluation**