CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Being in the field of English teaching for years, the researcher has been interested in easing students’ learning difficulties and creating an interactive classroom. New thoughts instilling into current reading research provided the researcher fresh ideas about how to guide a reading lesson. This preliminary study is conducted to explore whether a new teaching strategy focusing on questioning and discussions facilitates students’ reading comprehension and whether it activates their thinking ability. How students feel about the teaching strategy is also probed into for future adjustments.

Background and Motivation

Based on the researcher’s observation, many junior high students have expressed reading in English an arduous and exhausting task. Some of them are compelled to sit in language classrooms, waiting for break time; some read English because it is a required school subject; still others read with interest, but find reading in English demanding as well. Encountering reading, students, whether extrinsically or intrinsically motivated, had to recognize words, learn grammar and get explicit or implicit information (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). The whole process has exhausted them. These frustrated readers wore themselves out in word-decoding skills and literal comprehension and oftentimes they lacked reading power to “synthesize, analyze, or integrate new ideas with what they know…” (Griggs, Daane, & Campbell, 2003; Salinger & Fleischman, 2005, p. 90). Readers with deficient background knowledge (Nassaji, 2002), unaware of how mental model works (Kintsch, 1998) and failing to digest author’s words to become their own words (Rosenblatt, 1993) form a
majority in the campus. Even though they read, they do not seem to interact with what they read. What is worse, many students have been devoured by the notion: “Why do I need to read more?” This phenomenon brought the researcher’s interest to explore whether students could regain pleasure and confidence in reading through strategic reading, for it is the teachers’ responsibility to illuminate the reading class with teaching strategies (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000; Kucan & Beck, 1997) and make English reading more enjoyable.

In some reading classes, teachers explained everything important painstakingly, and still, students had hard time getting the main idea (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton & Kucan, 1997). The gap between teaching and learning prompts researchers to rethink of a better teaching approach (Almasi, 2003; Baker et al., 2000; Block & Pressley, 2002; Pressley, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003) to narrow the gap. If discouraged readers keep listening to lectures all day long without engaging with the text, successful reading or reading for meaning (Swaffer, Arens & Byrnes, 1991) is just like the summit Sisyphus, a king in Greek mythology who was punished to push a stone uphill repeatedly (Agnes, 2000), could never reach. Thus, sound instructional procedure that guides students to become able readers (Pressley, 2000; Tierney, Readence & Dishner, 1990), to interact with authors (Beck et al., 1997; Lewin, 2004; Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1993) and to take pleasure in English reading (Rosenblatt, 1993) arouses my concern.

Among the instructional procedures, one of them is questioning (Cairney, 1990; Dillon, 1988; Flippo, 1997; Gauthier, 2003; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Penticoff, 2002). Teachers use different types of questions to inspire students to learn effectively. Through questioning, teachers are able to check students’ understanding of basic knowledge in the text and even trigger their critical thinking (Gorder, 2003; Penticoff, 2002). The question-answer instruction (Raphael & Pearson, 1982;

However, in traditional classrooms, teachers dominated the majority of classroom discourse. Most of the questions were for retrieving facts (Durkin, 1978-1979; Graesser, Pearson, & Hu, 2002; Hyman, 1982), so students were provided with few chances to interact with the author, not to mention “to think critically about the underlying messages” (McDaniel, 2004, p.8). They responded only when asked and required. Since the scope of answers was limited to factual phase, strictly text-bound responses might curb students from yielding the ability to construct their own meaning. As students are the main roles in the course of reading (Pearson & Fielding, 1996), they should actively take part in classroom activities, rather than being passive readers waiting for questions to answer.

Therefore, a classroom with well-planned questioning format and students’ active participation is expected. These teachers gradually release more responsibility to students (Pearson, 1985) by applying more high-level questions, such as questions for synthesis, evaluation or inference, and they even elicit a greater amount of student talk by encouraging students to challenge the author in classrooms (McKeown & Beck, 2004). Questioning the Author (QtA) (Beck & McKeown, 1997, 2001, 2002; Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan 1997; Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; McKeown, Beck, & Worthy, 1993; McKeown & Beck, 2004; McKeown, Beck, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1999; Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999) is a teaching strategy that focuses on questioning in class. It is advocated in classrooms by teacher-researchers in the States who found frustrated when they had taught so much but students did not learn anything. They studied the phenomena and concluded that students failed because they lacked interaction with the text (Beck et al., 1997). QtA was proposed to respond the problem and is based
on the ideas that text is written down by a human being who might make mistakes or whose writing might be incomprehensible. Texts might not make the content clear enough for readers to grasp the meaning. Confusing ideas cause reading problems. Readers while reading should learn to communicate with the text by questioning the author.

The Questioning the Author process requires teachers to segment the text, plan queries, and use discussion moves in classes. Teachers who practice Questioning the Author in reading classrooms help students “grapple with the ideas” (Beck et al., 1997, p. 6) in each segment and manipulate queries to invite students’ interpretation (Beck et al., 1997). Instead of presenting the ideas to students directly, teachers work out the meaning of the text collaboratively with students. Through classroom discussion, QtA unites thinking, interacting with the text, constructing meaning, and understanding. Moreover, when participating in the discussion, students take the initiative in presenting what is in mind. Then, students take more responsibility in the reading process while teachers play the role of facilitators that guide students toward the right path.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of Questioning the Author on reading comprehension of junior high school students in Taiwan. Reading comprehension contains different levels of understanding (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2002; Barrett, 1976; Bloom, 1956; Hill & Parry, 1994; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Smith, 1963; Wigg & Wilson, 1994). In this study, the QtA training was implemented to mainly assess its efficacy on memory of the text, inference generation and three types of comprehension (factual, interpretive and responsive). In addition, how students felt toward Questioning the Author lessons is also explored. The
research questions are:

(1) Do QtA lessons facilitate the recall of texts by junior high school students?

(2) Do QtA lessons produce a facilitating effect on three levels of comprehension for junior high school students?

(3) What is students’ perception toward QtA lessons?

**Definition of Terms**

**Questioning the Author (QtA):**

Questioning the Author (QtA) is “an approach for text-based instruction that is designed to facilitate building understanding of text ideas” (Beck et al., 1997, p. 5). This approach helps students construct understanding through the use of queries and discussion.

**Written recall:**

This is a widely-used assessment in L2, requiring students to write down whatever they know and remember after reading a text. When a written recall shows fidelity to the text read, the idea units in the written recall match the original text (Bernhardt, 1991; Carrell, 1992; Chang, 2002; Lee, 1986).

**Inferences:**

Inferences are idea units presented by readers, which find no identical matches in the text. There are text-based inferences, reader-based inferences and incorrect inferences (Chu, 2002). Text-based inferences relate a lot to the text. They are made to fill up the gap between the text ideas. Reader-based inferences are inferences for activation of personal knowledge. They show a causal relationship between the text and the reader’s knowledge. Incorrect inferences are wrong interpretation or production of misreading (Barry & Lazarte, 1998).
**Factual questions:**

Factual questions are questions assessing facts stated in the text. Readers can easily find the answer from the text. They are so-called text-explicit questions, such as questions about “who” “what,” and “where” (Alderson, 2000; Hill & Parry, 1994; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Soang, 2000).

**Interpretive questions:**

Interpretive questions are questions assessing to what degree readers interpret the text, such as drawing main idea, characterization and judgment of the ending. Readers may not find the answers explicitly in the text. They need to read “between the lines” (Alderson, 2000, p. 8; Gray, 1960) to grasp the message. They are so-called text-implicit questions (Alderson, 2000; Hill & Parry, 1994; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Soang, 2000).

**Responsive questions:**

Responsive questions are questions assessing reader’s ability to link text information and personal knowledge. Readers need to connect what they perceive in the text and their background knowledge to answer the question. They are called scriptally-implicit questions (Alderson, 2000; Hill & Parry, 1994; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Soang, 2000).

**Significance of the Study**

The study is significant in the following aspects. First, this study may help us understand whether Questioning the Author is a suitable alternative for reading instruction in language classrooms. As Questioning the Author is a strategy developed in the States, whether it is applicable in an EFL context is yet to be found. Second, this study may provide a chance to see whether students feel valued and comfortable in the environment the lesson creates. Whether students enjoy this way
of learning in a classroom where their responses are the major classroom discourse may interest many people in the field of English teaching.

Organization of this Study

In this study, a brief introduction about background and motivation, research questions, definition of terms and significance of this study is given. The second chapter presents theoretical background and practices done by earlier researchers. The chapter following that is a design of the present study. The fourth presents the results of the study. The last chapter provides discussion of the research questions, pedagogical implications, and implications for future study.