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An Investigation of the Effects of Reading Aloud to Intermediate Students

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State University of New York

College at Brockport

An Investigation of the Effects of Reading Aloud
to Intermediate Students

By

Tracey L. Coccitto

A Thesis submitted to the
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Abstract

This study explored the effects of reading aloud to intermediate school students. The researcher read aloud to her students from September through February. The study used twenty-six fifth grade students in a suburban school district in Monroe County, New York. A survey was used to measure the students perceived effects and/or benefits of listening to a read aloud story daily. It was divided into two sections: One section was short answer and Section Two was extended response. The researcher also made use of informal interviews, observation, as well as anecdotal notes to determine if reading aloud indeed had a positive correlation with leisurely reading. It was established that reading aloud does get children excited about reading. It was also determined that many students became interested in specific authors and/or series because of read alouds.

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The objective of this study was to explore the effects of reading aloud to intermediate level students.

Need for the Study

Significant research has been completed regarding the positive effects of reading aloud to primary age students, toddlers, or even to babies still in their mothers' wombs! Children who have been exposed to literature at an early age often develop a desire to learn to read, acquire a knowledge of narrative text, and learn much information about the world long before they get formal literacy instruction (Chomsky, 1972; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Cohen, 1968; Goodman; 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1986; Trelease; 1989). Children are introduced to concepts through words, pictures, and colors. Saban (1993) states that reading aloud to children has long been used to improve language skills of students, especially in primary education. He adds that listening to stories at very early ages is a way of learning to read. Many investigations are carried out at the primary level because that is considered by many to be the peak years for reading aloud since many of the students are unable to read independently at this stage.

“Unfortunately, many teachers believe that once students begin reading independently, the process of reading aloud to them should end.” (Giorgis, 1999, p. 52). Therefore, there appears to be a lack of studies at the intermediate, middle, and high school levels concerning the issue of read alouds. A recent study of secondary students by Duchein & Mealey (cited by Giorgis, 1999, p. 53) found that more than two thirds of those interviewed were read to prior to beginning school and more than half were read to by primary teachers, but most had little or no experiences with read alouds after third grade. Teachers who did read aloud during grades four to six made significant, positive, and long-lasting impressions on their students. It continues to be even more important as the students' grow older because they tend to have other distractions and are apt to lose interest in reading. The fact is children young and old enjoy listening to interesting stories being read in a fluent manner.

Definitions

Intermediate grades-the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade level

Journal-teacher's notebook used for recording the information in the study

Limitations of the Study

- This study involved only a small group of students from one geographical area of Western New York. Even though the students came from different social, racial and economic backgrounds, they attended one particular school district.

- The students' literacy backgrounds, home environments, or reading skills were not evaluated. These topics have been addressed or will be the focus of future studies.

The researcher used the results of this study to enhance her current reading program. She shared the information with her colleagues in hopes that they would find the conclusions valuable and could implement some of the strategies in their own classrooms in order to create lifelong readers. She also communicated these findings to this year's parents in order to provide them with strategies to encourage their children to read.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Why Read Aloud?

Reading aloud to children has been known for decades to have a positive effect on reading interest and achievement. In 1983, a national commission was formed to examine the United States' problems in reading, find its causes, and recommend a solution. It was named the Commission on Reading. It was organized by the National Academy of Education and the National Institute on Education, and funded under the U.S Department of Education. It consisted of nationally recognized experts in how children develop, how they learn language, and how they learn to read. Since nearly everything relates to reading in school, the consensus was that reading was either the heart of the problem or the solution. It took the Commission over two years to evaluate the more than 10,000 research reports which have been done in the last quarter century on reading in order to determine what works and what doesn't. The Commission's report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, included two simple declarations in its primary findings:

- The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.

- It (reading aloud) is a practice that should continue throughout the grades. (Becoming a Nation of Readers, The Report of the Commission on Reading, cited in Trelease, p.2-3)

All in all, the experts determined that reading aloud was more important than many of the other methods teachers were currently using in the classroom. The researchers established that one of the cheapest, simplest, and oldest techniques of teaching was a better training tool than anything else that could be found in the home or the classroom.

When the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement compared 210,000 students from thirty-two countries, it found the highest scores (regardless of income level) among children who were read to daily and who read the most pages for pleasure daily (Trelease, 1989). In spite of this, the majority of teachers found in today's classrooms do not value read alouds or Silent Sustained Reading. Therefore, they do not allocate time for it in their schedules.

Reading aloud helps students' general understanding of stories while they are acquiring new vocabulary. It provides general information whether it is about places they've never traveled, cultures they've never learned about, or specific information on a particular topic. Essentially, it gives them familiarity with things they have never experienced first hand.

It models good grammar and English, and exposes children (and adults) to the English language in a manner different from the television sitcoms or other programs they choose to watch. Most parents and teachers realize that they read to their children to reassure, to entertain, to inform, to explain, to arouse curiosity, or to inspire. In addition, Trelease (1989) emphasized that while reading aloud you also condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure, create background knowledge, and provide a reading role model.

Reading storybooks aloud keeps children's attention to the context and lends itself to vocabulary learning. Elley (cited in Saban, 1993) tested children's understanding of difficult words in the stories read aloud to them with and without explanation of such words. Results showed that students learn new vocabulary from illustrated storybooks and therefore gain can be doubled by teachers' explanations of unknown words.

Reading aloud also has a major impact on reading comprehension. Cohen (cited in Ouellette, Dagostino, and Carifio, 1989) concluded that reading to children is vital to their success in learning to read. To test his theory, he had several regular second grade classroom teachers read a story to their class each day. One hundred fifty-five second graders from the top, middle, and low achievement levels were focused on in the study.

All classes in both the experimental and the control groups used a basal series for reading instruction and followed the required curriculum for New York City schools. They administered Form B of the Metropolitan Reading Achievement Test as a pretest in October, and Form C as a posttest in June of the same school year. Analysis of the data revealed a significant increase in word knowledge and reading comprehension for the experimental group. That group also displayed an increase in the quality of vocabulary over the control group on a Free Association Vocabulary test.

With so many clear benefits, the obvious question arises, "Why aren't more parents and teachers spending additional time reading to their children?" The fact is, today's home environment is loaded with many distractions. Most modern homes are equipped with multiple television sets, VCR's, video games, and home computers. It is easy for parents to let their children be entertained by one of these means after a long day's work. Therefore, reading doesn't have a chance. For teachers, they have other added pressures such as an increase in required curriculum and state test measures for which they are expected to prepare their students. We teach them how to read using drill and skill practice or by reading a story and answering the questions. We are producing people who know how to read, but don't want to read.

The standards initiatives, the debate about creating a national curriculum, and the bashing of the whole language approach are among the high visibility trends that are causing teachers and administrators to focus on the kinds of learning outcomes that are more palatable to the media, boards of education, and the parents. Such a limited perspective usually translates into basic skills dominated instruction and a de-emphasis on more meaningful, interesting activities. Thus reading for pleasure to develop the lifetime reading habit is not given equal status with basic skills instruction.

(Sanacore, 2000, p.157)

As humans we tend to be pleasure-centered creatures. We like to do things that we find success in. If a child experiences failure upon failure while reading, it is only natural for them to have negative feelings towards it or avoid it altogether. Coiro (1998) states parents and educators need to get kids excited about reading. First of all, it is essential that children be read to when they are still young enough to want to imitate adults around them. The readings should be interesting and exciting. Finally, it is necessary for children to be read to for the appropriate length of time for their age level, being careful not to overwhelm or bore them. With today's competition for reading, parents and teachers must advocate for children, and somehow make an impression on them about its importance, producing citizens who are lifelong readers.

Reading aloud is a commercial for reading...Think of it this way: McDonald's doesn't stop advertising just because the vast majority of Americans know about its restaurants. Each year it spends more money to remind people how good its products taste. Don't cut your reading advertising budget, as children grow older.

(Trelease, 1989, p. 95)

Are Students Ever Too Old?

Reading aloud exposes children to literature in a way that silent or independent reading never can. Freeman (cited in Education World, 2000) states:

Reading aloud in school is not a frill. So go out of your way to make each book a special experience to your students. Allow them to live literature, to become so involved in a story that they become a part of it. It could change their lives.

Many teachers have expressed that they too still enjoy being read to. One teacher said that she and her husband read to one another and they both love it. It is unfortunate that numerous educators feel pressured by time and heightened standards and do not consider reading aloud to their students a top priority. Teachers only do it when they have time to fill, which is hardly ever. However, with the pressures of added curriculum, teachers find themselves asking, "Is it worth it?" Sharp (2000) believes that it is. First of all, it improves the climate of the classroom. Mary Bowman-Kruhm teaches reading classes for special education teachers at the Johns Hopkins School of Professional Studies in Business and Education.

I read to my graduate students at the beginning of class...because It gives them time to get settled and to clear their minds' of the day's activities. As a beginning teacher, I quickly became aware that reading aloud to my class had its benefits...My students became very quiet, they heard some good literature, and they got through an entire book. One student said it was the first book he had read in its entirety since first grade!

(Sharpe, 2000, p.4)

Children learn that reading is enjoyable, pictures provide clues to the story, and books and print go from left to right. They also understand that print represents word and meaning, and that stories have a beginning and an end. By listening, watching, and asking questions, they add to their vocabulary and increase their comprehension. Certainly most teachers could integrate these skills with their required curriculum.

You became a reader because you saw and heard someone you admired doing the experience, someone led you to the world of books even before you could read, let you taste the magic of stories, took you to the library, and allowed you to stay up later at night to read in bed.

(Trelease, 1989, p.10)

We have read the research that indicates how important it is to read to your preschooler. However, the stress put on reading aloud seems to decrease as the reader becomes more independent. Teachers often ask, "Aren't my students too old for read aloud?" It is frequently believed that once a child can read by himself, he should not be read to any longer. It is also difficult for teachers to justify reading aloud to their class when the pressures of testing have increased.

The current mania for testing doesn't help. In Bibbs County, Georgia, a third grade teacher was recently cited by her supervisor in her yearly evaluation for wasting valuable instructional time by reading to her students. In all likelihood that teacher is now teaching the test instead of teaching her students to love reading by reading to them.

(Trelease, 1989, p. 11)

The truth is reading aloud benefits people of all ages. You may hear of a nurse reading aloud to an elderly patient who is no longer able to see the words on the page. A college professor was mentioned earlier who read to her students to calm and focus them. Reading aloud to people at any age helps them develop and improve literacy skills. We listen at a higher level than we read; therefore, it stimulates growth and understanding of vocabulary patterns. Amy Brecount White (Education World, 2000) learned that students, even outstanding high schoolers, need examples set for them. Students need to be shown that while word on a page readers must assume the role of director...how moving or funny or disturbing the final product is-is really up to them. She continues,

Teachers should read something aloud from the newspaper at least once a week. They should offer children books on tape and listen to them together while in the car. If a child complains about a new book, the parent should sit down and read the first part together. Not only will they be showing their child how to read, they'll be showing them that they think homework is important.

The fact is many high school students have not been read to or have done very little reading on their own. When they reach the high school level, we expect them to jump into novels such as The Red Badge of Courage or The Scarlet Letter with great enthusiasm.

The truth is they are not interested and/or see no purpose in the readings. If a love of reading is instilled in them before they reach this stage that is half the battle.

Richardson (cited in Giorgis, 1999) maintains that reading aloud to middle and high school students demonstrates a teacher's enthusiasm for reading, an attitude that can be contagious. Hearing a good story read aloud often piques the interest of the most reluctant reader, who will then become an active listener and, possibly a more willing reader. (p. 53)

Picture Books

Yet another way to inspire older students to read is to reintroduce them to picture books. Currently, all kinds of picture books are being published. You can find topics, which range from historical events to global issues and current problems and events. Contrary to popular belief, picture books do not have any lesser quality of writing or vocabulary. Many picture books touch upon very serious issues, hold significant themes, or teach valuable lessons. The advantages of using picture books are: they are short, have pictures to aid in comprehension, and there is enough action to hold the listeners' attention. They can be used to lead into a new skill being taught or be incorporated into the curriculum. However, few secondary students remember having seen a picture book since entering middle school, much less having one read aloud to them.

A recent study of secondary teachers by Duchein and Mealey, (cited in Giorgis, 1999) concluded that more than two-thirds of those interviewed were read to prior to beginning school and more than half were read to by primary teachers, but for most the practice had stopped by the third grade. Teachers who did read aloud during grades four to six and into middle and high school made considerable, positive, and lifelong impressions on their students.

“Children with limited English skills find picture and wordless books immediately accessible and thus gain reading confidence”(Trelease, 1989). Wordless books tell a story without using words. The pictures, which are interpreted orally by the reader, tell the entire story. The students quickly learn that the pictures are to be followed in a certain order for the story to make sense. Just as a toddler is able to “read” a book with a great deal of repetition, an ESL student can do the same. If they keep practicing, their invented reading becomes more accurate and eventually they will be reading naturally.

Trelease also recommends that teachers, who work with children of literate or semi-literate parents, should make these picture and wordless books available to them in a classroom library. By doing so, these parents might feel more comfortable sharing books with their children. They’re able to work through the books using the pictures and interpreting the pages just like their children have learned to do.

The ESL Student

Students who are learning English as their second language have a challenging task ahead of them. The language is full of exceptions and irregular patterns, which many other languages do not possess. When teachers incorporate read alouds in their daily routines, they give ESL students a great opportunity to hear authentic literature in a natural setting. It expands upon their vocabulary while hearing it in context. Many words have more than one meaning; therefore, memorizing a single definition from the dictionary would most likely not be helpful. However, when they hear the word in context, they will be able to attach meaning to it and internalize it. It helps them see that a word in one setting may mean something different in another. When ESL students are read to they learn the patterns of English and gain the sociocultural background necessary to understand what they are reading.

Amy Staley, (1997) a teacher of college ESL students, believes learning should be student-centered and carried out for the sake of the students. It should encourage their growth as learners and give them the freedom of making their own choices when possible. Incorporating read alouds into her classroom allows her to do so. She tells about a time when her class was studying France's nuclear testing. When she tried to hold a class discussion about it, most of the students agreed it was unfortunate.

Few of them went beyond a statement or two and didn't express much interest in the topic. She decided to bring in a picture book and hoped to spark some interest. The book was called Hiroshima No Pika by Toshiki Muraki. It is a story about a little girl named Mii and her family's experience when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. As she read the story aloud, the author's powerful watercolor pictures captivated the students. They listened attentively to every word. By the end of this powerful story, most of the students were full of emotion and one girl had tears in her eyes. The teacher took advantage of this teachable moment and gave them a writing assignment. She observed that most students wrote more than the required amount. They also wrote with passion and interest about the topic.

Boyle and Peregoy suggest that storybook reading provides a scaffold by modeling language and story patterns. This event can be shared with the child by a parent, sibling, teacher, or friend.

Once integrated, those patterns provide the basis for comprehending other stories and for telling and writing them as well. Of utmost importance, learning is embedded within natural social interactions aimed at sharing communication and negotiating meaning. Through such collaboration, the story reader facilitates the child's movement to the next level of development by engaging the child in a literacy event that exceeds the child's current capability if unassisted.

(Boyle & Peregoy, 1990, p.194)

Therefore, when you are working with ESL students, there are several ways books can assist in their progress in learning the English language.

To begin with, the teacher should have numerous wordless and predictable books available to them. It is important that they are on their current reading level so that they may find success and form a positive attitude toward reading. The teacher can simultaneously read picture and chapter books that are above their current capabilities in order to expose them to more good literature that they are not able to tackle independently at this time. The teacher should be modifying and adjusting her program as the students grow, in order to maximize their exposure to literature.

It is evident reading aloud has distinct advantages for the listener. For the teacher or parent who is reading, the message is conveyed that this is a worthwhile activity. It improves reading skills in several areas that in turn make the listener a better reader. It not only applies to the very young, but also to older students and adults, as well as those who are learning English for the first time. It is a worthwhile activity that is frequently overlooked in today's society.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of reading aloud to intermediate school students.

Research Question

How does reading aloud affect intermediate level students?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this investigation were twenty-six fifth grade students from a suburban school district in Monroe County, New York. They were either ten or eleven years old. They attended an intermediate school, which housed grades three, four, and five with a total enrollment of approximately eight hundred students. Of those twenty-six being studied, half the class was girls and half was boys. The majority of the students had attended this district since kindergarten. There were five minority students in the class, two of whom spoke English as their second language. Two students were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and were being treated with medication. Two others were going through the testing process for possible A.D.D. Their socioeconomic background varied. Many of the students lived with one parent or were in a stepparent situation. One child was being raised solely by her grandparents.

Materials

A survey was developed by the researcher to measure the attitudes and behaviors of the students during read aloud time. It was also used to determine if read aloud time had an effect on their interest in leisure reading (see Appendix). The survey was divided into two sections. The first section contained questions with short answers such as: Yes, No, and Sometimes. In the second portion, the students had to rate the novels using Good, Okay, or Didn't Like and then give an explanation to justify their answers. The other materials used were the books for read aloud and a journal for record keeping. The books selected to be read aloud depended on student interest as well as recommendations from The New Read Aloud Handbook. (See Table 1)

Table 1.
Read Aloud Books Used in the Study.

| <u>Title</u> | <u>Author</u> | <u>Publisher</u> |
|--|----------------------|---|
| <i>The Best School Year Ever</i> | Barbara Robinson | Harper Collins Publishers, 1994 |
| <i>Bridge to Terabithia</i> | Katherine Paterson | Avon books, 1977 |
| <i>Holes</i> | Louis Sachar | Scholastic Inc., 1998 |
| <i>The Best Christmas Pageant Ever</i> | Barbara Robinson | Harper Collins Publishers, 1972 |
| <i>Soup</i> | Robert Newton Peck | Bantom Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc., 1974 |
| <i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i> | C.S. Lewis | Harper Collins, 1950 |
| <i>James and the Giant Peach</i> | Roald Dahl | Knopf, 1961 |

Procedures

The teacher started reading aloud to her students during one of the first few days of school. She consistently read to her students immediately after their special area class while they were eating their snacks. It was an appropriate time period since it helped calm the students and transition them into the next task at hand. It also kept the children occupied while they were having their treats.

The classroom teacher continued to read to her students on a daily basis for approximately fifteen minutes or one chapter in most of the books. The teacher also experimented with her positioning and the students' locations during read aloud time. She had the students remain at their desks or sit directly in front of her on the carpet. At other times she would walk around the room. She made certain the students' desks were cleared off so the children would concentrate on the readings.

In January, the students were asked to fill out a survey about read aloud time in their classroom. It was done anonymously. The teacher needed clarification of some students' answers. As a result, she informally interviewed eight of the students. They explained their responses, and she obtained more information for her study. Meanwhile, she continued reading aloud to her students for fifteen minutes per day at least four days a week.

The teacher recorded any comments about read aloud from the students and feedback from parents in her journal through February of that school year.

Analysis of Data

After the students completed the surveys and interviews, the teacher examined how read aloud affects her overall educational program. Questions that were explored in the data included: Does reading aloud get children excited about reading? Do they go to the library and take the same book out for themselves to read again? Do they seek out other books that were written by the same author? Are there any students who were not reading on their own, but began to due to a story they heard in class? Are they actually learning new words to add to their existing vocabulary? In addition, she looked for other findings that emerged from the data that may not have been anticipated.

Chapter IV

Results of the Study

Purpose

The objective of this study was to explore the effects of reading aloud to intermediate level students.

Findings and Interpretation

A survey was given to twenty-six fifth grade students in a suburban school in western New York. It was developed by the researcher to measure the attitudes and behaviors of the students during read aloud time. It was also used to determine if read aloud time had an effect on their interest in leisure reading (see Appendix). Of the 26 surveys returned, 23 were usable. The survey was divided into two sections. The first section contained questions with short answers such as: Yes, No, and Sometimes. In the second section of the survey, the students were required to rate read alouds that they had heard thus far in the school year and also list reasons to support their opinions.

Table Two shows the breakdown of the results of the first section of the survey. A total of 87% of the students surveyed responded that they enjoyed read aloud time. None of the students said that they didn't like read aloud time. Thirteen percent of the subjects surveyed said that they sometimes liked read aloud.

Table 2.

Results by Categories Students' Perceived Enjoyment and/or Benefit from Read Alouds

| <u>Categories:</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> |
|--|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Enjoyment | 87% | 0% | 13% |
| 2. Cognitive Stimulation | 39% | 39% | 22% |
| 3. Influence of read aloud book | 52% | 48% | |
| 4. Interest in author of read aloud | 74% | 26% | |

After questioning the students, the researcher determined that whether or not the students liked read aloud time depended on the particular book the teacher was reading. It is understood that the teacher could not please all of her students all of the time. Therefore, she tried to choose read aloud books that covered different genres as well as different topics that both boys and girls would be interested in. An extraordinary 87% of her students said they were fond of read aloud time. That statistic in itself suggests that taking time to read aloud is worth it. They considered it a valuable activity. They each had a more positive attitude towards reading overall than in the beginning of the school year. They viewed it as something they did for pleasure. They were not required to take a test on it or complete activity sheets related to it.

When the students were asked if they thought they learned new information from listening to read alouds, 39% of the students responded positively, 39% negatively, and 22% thought that they did occasionally. There seemed to be some confusion when this question was posed to the students. They may have been learning new vocabulary words or information, but were not able to self reflect and pinpoint that specific information at the fifth grade level. It may have been more helpful for the researcher to point out times when they came across a word in context that they had studied earlier and have the students make note of it immediately. It certainly occurred, but many of them had trouble remembering specific examples.

Next, the students were questioned about whether they had taken the same book out of the library that someone had read to them previously. Fifty-two percent of the students surveyed responded that they indeed had read the same novel as they heard from a teacher or parent. The researcher found that those who did reread the book were her lowest readers. By hearing it from her first, it gave them the confidence they needed to try it on their own. Forty-eight percent of the students said did not want to revisit any book they had heard. The reasons behind the 48% were: the students didn't like the genre, topic, or ending of the novel. They were more interested in trying to read something else.

As the year progressed, it was unavoidable to read novels that were new to the entire class. More often than not there were one or more students present that had heard the story previously. The teacher responded to the students' objections by pointing out that they often watch their favorite movies repeatedly. She also challenged them to pick out details that they had not remembered from the first read. She invited them to figure out the author's viewpoint, figurative language, or other elements like the main idea.

Finally, students were asked whether or not they had found an interest in a particular author after they had heard one of the author's books. An overwhelming 74% of the students said that they had searched for another book by the same author that someone had read to them. After interviewing the students, the researcher concluded that most of them actually read more than one book by that same author. Often when they became comfortable with the author's style or a series, they were more likely to read independently. Only 26% of the students said they had not looked for a book by an author who had become familiar to them through read alouds.

In the second portion of the survey, the students had to rate the novels using Good, Okay, or Didn't Like. In addition to choosing one of those three responses, they had to explain why they had decided upon that specific description for each read aloud listed. Their reflections can be found in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3.
A Sample of Students' Reflections of Read Alouds that were Rated "Excellent".

I liked the main characters.
It was full of adventure.
It was funny or used humor.
It was easy to follow.
It was exciting.
The author used many details.
The book was interesting.
It was fun to listen to.
It had a good ending.

Table 4.
A Sample of Students' Reflections of Read Alouds that were Rated "Good".

It had some good parts, but others were hard to understand.
It was real to life, it could really happen.
In the beginning the characters didn't like each other, but then they became friends.
The main character was my age.
I couldn't wait to see what was going to happen next.
There were some funny parts. It was amusing.
It was a bit too short.
I liked the topic. (It was about school.)
The villain became a good guy.
The kids in the story used their imaginations.

Table 5.**A Sample of Students' Reflections of Read Alouds that were Rated "Didn't Like".**

It was boring.

I read the book before. My teacher read that book to me last year.

I didn't like the characters or the decisions they made.

I didn't like the disgusting parts.

The ending was too sad.

I couldn't remember what the book was about.

There was no action in the book.

I wasn't interested in the topic.

It is evident that this particular group of fifth graders had certain criteria for read alouds. They liked books that were reality based. They enjoyed novels when they were able to develop a close relationship with the main character(s), whom they preferred were their age. They also seemed to be attracted to adventurous novels filled with action and suspense. They responded well to novels that used humor throughout the plotline. They liked it when problems were solved, and there was a happy ending. Several were upset by a sad conclusion, but the teacher explained to them that there was a lesson to be learned. Some complained that a book was too boring or they didn't like a particular topic. Others objected to titles because they had read them previously. As this study showed, teachers can't please all of their students constantly, but there are many titles to choose from. The decision should be based on what novels would be best for their particular class each year.

The researcher also took into account her positioning in the classroom during read aloud time. She had someone observe the class during read aloud time on three different occasions. The examinations were completed over a two-month period at the same time of day. Read aloud was routinely done after the student's special area class either at 10:35 or 11:20 in the morning. The person who observed had been in the classroom on several other occasions, therefore the students felt comfortable and didn't even realize their behaviors were being recorded. It should also be noted that the students were required to clear off their desks before each read aloud session. They were allowed to eat their snacks during this time period.

During the first observation, the teacher was reading *The Bridge to Terabithia*. She stayed in one area off to the side of the room while each of the students faced her. The students in the first two groups, located closest to the teacher, were focused on her throughout the reading. As the students' distance between the teacher and the students increased, their attentiveness decreased. They tended to fidget with things in their desks, talk with neighbors, or even create drawings on paper.

In the second session, the teacher was reading *Holes* aloud to her students. At this time, however, the teacher walked around the room as she read the story.

There were far fewer students who were off task during this read aloud period. One student had his own copy of the book and was following along as she read.

During the final read aloud period, the teacher had the students sit directly in front of her in a horseshoe shape on the carpet. She continued to read *Holes* as they listened. Once again most of the students were very attentive.

All in all, it seems best if the teacher is in close proximity to her students during read aloud time. They should also be free of any distractions that would keep them from listening and benefiting from the story. After the researcher recorded her findings, it seemed apparent that the students should be near their teacher during read alouds. However, the findings may have been more accurate if the researcher had completed all three observations while reading the same book. As a result, the students' interest level could be ruled out. They may have paid more attention during the readings of *Holes* simply because they preferred that novel to *The Bridge to Terabithia*.

The teacher continued reading aloud to her students throughout the school year and before she knew it, the students expected read aloud on a daily basis. In addition, they were disappointed if they had to miss it for some reason. One time a student asked if the teacher was going to read aloud and the teacher responded negatively.

Later that day, the teacher caught the student picking the book up off her desk and reading it herself. She explained, " I just cannot wait to see what is going to happen next."

With many of the more popular books, the students would beg almost daily for the teacher to read one more chapter. She always tried to end in a suspenseful place, which intrigued them even more.

The teacher was especially pleased when she observed one of her most reluctant readers get one of the titles she was reading for a gift. He brought the book in diligently and followed along with the readings.

During a parent teacher conference, a parent told the researcher she specifically remembers a book her child's third grade teacher read to him that made a difference in her son's reading career. She said he has been a reader ever since.

The teacher also observed the confidence her students had in her to recommend novels for them to read independently throughout the year. They would ask her if a particular title they checked out of the library was "a good book." They also might inquire about a particular author. The students knew reading was important to their teacher and considered her an expert.

Interestingly, both times the regular classroom teacher had a substitute teacher; she told the students there was not enough time in the schedule to read aloud. Unfortunately, that is the kind of attitude teachers should avoid when trying to encourage their children to read.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The objective of this study was to explore the effects of reading aloud to intermediate level students.

Conclusions

Reading aloud had a positive effect on the group of students who were studied. Most of the students reported that they liked read aloud time. Only a few said that they sometimes enjoyed it. Factors that contributed to this were the topic addressed in the book and whether or not they had read it before. It particularly benefited the low achieving readers and the ESL learners. It provided them with a model and illustrated strategies they could implement while reading independently. Since the teacher provided read aloud time every day, the students understood how valuable reading was. They knew it was a priority for her and before long it became one for them as well.

When the students went to the library each week, they took their teacher's book or author recommendations seriously. They were able to make better decisions when choosing their books. They had acquired a feel for several different authors' styles due to the read aloud stories they heard throughout the year.

There were a high number of students who searched for other books written by the same author as a read aloud novel they had heard.

After collecting the responses the students gave for liking or disliking a specific read aloud, the information fell into several categories. They enjoyed stories that were realistic fiction or adventures. Most of the students said that they liked the authors that used humor throughout their books. They took pleasure in stories they could relate to involving characters their age that had similar problems, and were real to life. The reasons the students gave for disliking read alouds were they didn't like the topic or felt the novel was boring. Unfortunately, there is little a teacher can do to cure this problem since today's classrooms are filled with a high number of students whose interests vary greatly. As mentioned earlier, each classroom teacher needs to determine which books she will read aloud by examining the overall attitudes and interests of the entire class each school year.

The researcher also concluded that her position in the classroom played an important role during read aloud time. The closer the students were to the teacher, the more they benefited from the story and the skills the teacher was modeling during each sitting. The teacher also noted the students paid more attention when they were asked to have their desks completely clear from any distractions.

Implications for the Classroom

There are several things every teacher can do to ensure productive read aloud time in their classroom. When choosing books, the reader should read the book to herself before reading it to the children. The primary reason is because it provides good practice. The children need to hear someone that is fluent and confident with the readings. Secondly, it is a good time for the teacher to preview the book, and decide if it is a good read aloud. Finally, the reader can prepare questions ahead of time that she might have for her students. She could also consider predictions she would like them to focus on. She will be able to anticipate questions or comments that they may have about the story.

One thing every teacher should avoid is reading books that they themselves do not enjoy. Feelings about the book will be reflected throughout the readings, and the students will be certain to sense them. If a teacher begins to read a book that he or she does not enjoy or does not find appropriate for their students, they should explain it was a poor choice and choose another. The students themselves should also be permitted to go through a similar process. If they find they do not like a particular book, they should be encouraged to exchange it, and start a new one. The last thing educators and parents want to do to their children is force them to read something that they are not interested in.

Once teachers decide to include read alouds in their daily routines; sometimes they have difficulty with book selection.

At this age children begin to develop an appreciation for mysteries, informational books, tall tales, adventures with real heroes, biographies, books with a strange sense of humor, and interactive choose-your-own adventure stories. They are often involved in active sports, bike riding, and developing best friends. By trying to select books from these categories, your children will be given access to a broad range of age appropriate topics and various literary styles.

(Coiro, 1998, p. 4)

Teachers should keep this idea in mind when selecting their read aloud stories. They should also pay close attention to the themes of the stories. It is a good idea to expose students to several themes and genres since their chances of attracting each student to independent reading are increased. Thousands of titles are published each year, and it is advisable to keep up with the current ones. When teachers recognize new books, they are able to recommend additional ones to their students. They will also widen their assortment to choose from for read aloud time. Finally, many of the students may recognize these new books such as the "Harry Potter" series, and already have an interest in them.

Once teachers have established a daily schedule for read aloud, it is a good idea to adhere to it as best they can. It is understandable that instances will occur when it is not possible to fit it into the day. However, teachers should never leave their students hanging three or four days between chapters, and expect them to pick up where they left off.

Their interest and attention toward the novel will be lost. They should also set aside adequate time for read aloud. A common mistake teachers make is rushing through a chapter in order to finish it. The students need time to visualize what they are hearing and make connections within the text.

There are numerous strategies teachers can use to enhance their students listening abilities while reading aloud. First of all, teachers should not begin until all of their students are ready. The researcher noted that her students' were required to clear their desks of any distractions. It is also beneficial for the teacher to vary her positioning as well as the students' location regularly. Directly in front of the reader seems to be the most effective arrangement for the students. It also helps when the listening audience is involved. Teachers should invite their students to make predictions from the title, illustrations, and front and back covers. They can also retell what happened in yesterday's reading for those who were absent, or to serve as a reminder for the entire group. After the reading, they can confirm or refute the predictions made. Teachers who want to take read aloud time a step further can follow up with inferential and critical thinking questions which challenge the students to go beyond the literal meaning. Also remember some selections may be read aloud without discussion, merely to promote enthusiasm for reading for enjoyment and information.

Teachers need to remember to be focused on the reading while at the same time maintaining eye contact with their students if needed. Both young and old students are more likely to pay attention if the reader varies his or her tone of voice in order to convey a mood or a character in a particular piece.

Picture books

Using picture books at all ages in the classroom has been proven to be a beneficial activity which all seem to enjoy. Some people believe that picture books are exclusively for younger children. The truth is, even a middle or high school student loves to sit back, relax, and listen to a good story regardless of its length. Picture books use both text and illustrations to create a story. That is why it is crucial that the teacher hold the book in a way all of the students can see the illustrations. There are several picture books that have been published recently that deal with issues concerning today's middle and high school students. These titles can be successfully integrated into most any subject area. Picture books can be tied into important historical issues such as: the Holocaust, slavery, and Westward Expansion. In addition, many picture book biographies focus on scientists, explorers, and presidents from the past.

Using picture books in the classroom offer teachers several advantages.

They present the listener with a visual that students in the upper grades are rarely exposed to. They also allow the reader to read the entire story in one sitting. This is convenient when you only have one short class period each day. Picture books are a great motivator for students and teachers. They can be used to introduce a new skill, follow up on a previous one, or lead into a writing activity.

Students gain numerous perspectives through text and illustration that they would not if one or two pages were taken out of context. A case in point is *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith. This story is told from the wolf's point of view (allowing the teacher to elucidate the literary element point of view) and is effective with older students because they are familiar with the traditional story of *The Three Little Pigs* and they connect to the sophisticated humor in the story and illustrations. Reading the whole book conveys to the students that the teacher values literature in its entirety.

(Giorgis, 1999, p.52)

I use *Earrings* by Judith Viorst to introduce my fifth grade students to persuasive writing. The girl in the story tries to convince her parents to get her ears pierced. She gives all sorts of reasons why they should allow her to do so. Each of my students can usually find something that they've tried to talk their parents into, therefore, they can all relate to the story. It is an inviting way to get them motivated to write. I use versions of *If You Give A Mouse A Cookie* by Laura Numeroff to practice cause and effect. After we read the various adaptations of the book, the students make their own picture books while using cause and effect statements.

If it is possible, teachers should make the picture books available to the students after they have been read initially. This encourages them to go back and reread any parts that they enjoyed or did not understand.

The ESL Student

Reading aloud is just one of the ways an ESL student acquires the new language. It provides them with another opportunity to learn the language they are trying to understand. Teachers of ESL students should take them into consideration when choosing books to read aloud to the class. When teachers begin a novel or picture book, they need to provide background knowledge of the new reading material. A person new to this country cannot be expected to understand the cultural meaning Americans bring with them to the text. Teachers need to point out new vocabulary and figurative language to the ESL learner. They also need to provide them with strategies to figure out new words and concepts independently. They should discuss that many words in the English language have more than one meaning and this idea can easily be illustrated during read aloud time. Teachers should provide their ESL students with picture books that have significant meaning to them.

Table 6.
Recommended Picture Books for ESL Students

| <u>Title</u> | <u>Author</u> | <u>Publisher</u> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Hiroshima No Pika</i> | Toshiki Maruki | William Morrow & Co., 1982 |
| <i>Grandfather's Journey</i> | Allan Say | Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993 |
| <i>Baseball Saved Us</i> | Ken Mochizuki | Lee & Low Books, 1995 |
| <i>Teammates</i> | Peter Golenbock | Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990 |
| <i>Zen ABC</i> | A. & J. Zerner | Zerner & Farbour Editions, 1993 |

Note. From "Reading Aloud: Bringing Whole Language into the ESL Writing Classroom," by A. Staley, *The Language Teacher Online*, 1997.

Implications for the Home

One of the most beneficial activities parents can do for their children is to spend some time reading to them daily. It can be done as early as birth, and it is one of the first intimate moments that parents share with their child. It is especially rewarding when the child sits on your lap and you have a book that is easily held. Parents should choose books that have large, bright, and colorful pictures. They should also contain exciting sounds or rhythmic patterns as are in *Mother Goose* rhymes. Other types of books that are good to read aloud at an early age are those that teach vocabulary.

There are word books that contain labeled objects on a page, which the baby learns by being exposed to them repeatedly. Parents should use sturdy board books or cloth books at this stage of their child's development so the books will remain in tact. They should also model how to properly treat books at this point. It is beneficial to establish a special time and place for reading everyday. The child will become accustomed to this and expect it. One of the best times is right before bed since it settles the child down and forms a habit they may keep for a lifetime. Grandparents and older siblings should also be encouraged to read to a younger child. It is wise for parents to oblige when their child wants to read the same book over and over again. Children like the predictability and will feel confident enough to "read" it by themselves once they have memorized parts of it. Parents should allow their children to participate in the read aloud process by lifting flaps, turning pages, pointing to pictures, or repeating words that they remember.

After children start their school career, parents can continue to do valuable activities with their children to encourage reading. As a child learns how to read, parents should keep on reading to them. The process might change. For example, the parent and the child can alternate reading pages, and discuss what is happening in the story together. It should be brought to the child's attention how illustrations are used in stories.

Parents should be choosing and exposing their children to variety of reading materials. While reading aloud, parents should try to sit where their child can also see the text and follow along if they choose to do so.

When children are in the primary grades it is important that parents expose them to books and opportunities that spark their interests. It is helpful for parents to read books to their child by the same author or poet. Parents can have children choose a magazine they would like to subscribe to. They would look forward to getting mail as well as reading it. Parents should begin showing their child other uses for reading such as street signs and recipes. After reading the recipe, the parent and child can actually make it. Children can also start reading and listening to short chapter books at this level.

Finally, there are activities parents can implement with their children even as they grow older. First of all, they need to be a good model by reading and visiting the library themselves. Older children can be enticed by reading the beginning of a book aloud and leaving off where the tension in the story builds. They will often want to finish the book by reading it themselves. Parents who want to continue read alouds need to choose a book with a reading level that is a few levels higher than their child's. Shared readings or taking turns with the dialogue is also an enjoyable activity.

In addition, children tend to like hearing something aloud from the newspaper. Parents should offer their children books on tape and listen to them together in the car. If an older child complains about a new book they are reading, the parent should sit down and read the first part together to show them that they value reading.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could explore more fully the students' perceptions of enjoying or benefiting from read aloud time in the classroom. It is true that all of the students responded positively in the survey when they were asked about read a loud time in their classroom. However, were they being honest or did they respond in a way they thought was expected? It seemed difficult for the students to elaborate on their ratings of the read aloud books. Another possible means of collecting the information could have been through documented student interviews. It also would have been interesting to compare the results of both a pre- and post-survey in regards to reading aloud.

When exploring student-reading habits, it would be beneficial to survey parents and ask them to monitor their child's leisure reading habits before and after they had been exposed to daily read alouds. Had they seen changes in their child's reading habits at home when their teacher was not present? Were they more self-motivated?

Had they become more familiar with different authors? Had their overall attitude toward reading become more positive?

Another more quantifiable means of measuring student growth during read aloud time would be to test their vocabulary and comprehension before and after they had been exposed to read alouds.

What role does Silent Sustained Reading play in the read aloud classroom? It seems that the two processes naturally flow together. Would implementing them, hand in hand, encourage students to become independent readers?

What factors determine whether a teacher reads aloud to their students? Are most teachers aware of its long lasting impressions on their students? Would they be more open to read aloud if they felt less pressure to prepare for standardized testing? Do administrators and school board members understand its importance? These are all questions for future research.

Reading Aloud Student Survey

This survey will be completed anonymously. Please fill out each section completely. Your responses to these questions will not affect your grades in any way.

Y=Yes N=No S=Sometimes

1. Do you enjoy it when your teacher reads aloud to you? Y N S

2. Do you learn new things like vocabulary words, information about places that you've never visited, or people that you've never met?
Y N S For example: _____

3. Have you taken the same book out of the library or brought one from home that your teacher has read to you? Y N S

4. Have you tried to find a book by the same author as the one that your teacher read aloud? Y N

5. Please rate the novels your teacher has read to you this year, and then explain why you liked or disliked them. Use the back if necessary.

Use one of the following terms to describe each of the books:

Excellent Good Didn't Like

- The Best School Year Ever- _____
Why? _____
- The Bridge to Terabithia- _____
Why? _____
- Holes _____
Why? _____
- The Best Christmas Pageant Ever _____
Why? _____
- Soup _____
Why? _____

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