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Samantha Alme

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WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF READING ALOUD TO MIDDLE SCHOOL  
AGED STUDENTS IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM AS  
MEASURED BY THE STAR READING ASSESSMENT?

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, Craig and Twyla Race, who fostered my love for reading and literacy. You have always instilled in me the value of an education. To my husband, Andrew, who has supported me throughout this journey. Thank you for supporting me every step of the way.

“We have an obligation to read aloud to our children. To read them things they enjoy. To read to them stories we are already tired of. To do the voices, to make it interesting, and not to stop reading to them just because they learn to read to themselves. Use reading-aloud time as bonding time, as time when no phones are being checked, when the distractions of the world are put aside.”

-Neil Gaiman

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## ABSTRACT

Alme, S. What is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR Reading assessment? (2019)

The research question addressed in this study is: what is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR Reading assessment? Topics explored in the review of the literature include components of literacy-specifically children's literacy, language arts curriculum, as well as the importance and effectiveness of classroom read alouds. A cohort of nearly 30 students in fifth and sixth grades were observed on how well they comprehended children's novels while reading independently and while reading with teacher guidance and interaction.

While one class completed a read aloud novel study with the instructor, the other read the same novel silently on their own. Ideally, they read two chapters a day regardless if they are reading with instructor or on their own. Both groups completed the same comprehension packet as they read the novel. Again, if they read the novel with the teacher, they completed the comprehension packet with instructor as well. If they read the novel on their own, the students also completed the comprehension packet on their own. After the completion of that novel, the class that read aloud with the instructor then silently read the next novel study on their own. The class that read the previous novel study silently on their own, then read aloud the next novel study with instructor. This way, each class read the same book at the same time, but one class read it silently and the other read it aloud. Both classes used the same assessments, whether they read aloud or silently read. Students then took an accelerated reader quiz after reading each novel which measured their comprehension and understanding of the novel. Students then took a STAR Reading Assessment to measure their overall comprehension growth.

Keywords: read alouds, comprehension, children's literature



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

As I look around my classroom, there's a handful of students who absolutely detest reading. There is also a group of students who enjoy reading. Yet, there's a small group of students who read with such passion that it is almost impossible to get their nose out of a book. Almost every day, all of my students—even those who hate reading, eagerly ask, "Are we going to read aloud today?" I always enjoy their enthusiasm to listen to me read. This is what ignited my thinking about the importance of reading aloud to older kids. To pursue this topic, I question: "What is the significance and benefit of reading aloud to middle school students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR reading assessment?"

### The Early Years

I have grown up surrounded by fabulous memories of learning. As a child, my parents would read to me every night. They would tell me stories of how, as an infant, they'd find me smiling and giggling, and trying to turn the pages of a book. I would find a book on the floor and crawl to one of my parents with it as in saying, "Read, please." Mom claims she went through countless copies of *Corduroy* (written by Don Freeman) and *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* (written by Eileen Christelow) because we wore them out by reading them so much.

Through the years, my parents still continued the nightly ritual of letting each of my sisters and I pick out a book for them to read to us before bed. I remember sitting on

my bed after getting out of the bath, wet hair soaking my nightgown, waiting ever so patiently for my mom to begin reading. Some nights, I was a beautiful princess in a magical far away land. Other nights, I whimsically played with the Dr. Seuss characters. Occasionally, I even swung from the vines with Tarzan and Jane. I quickly understood that reading is magical. It is a delightful, powerful magic that allows a person to go anywhere, do anything, and be anyone simply with a turn of a page. Mason Cooley stated, “Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are.”

Despite my parents not making a lot of money, they firmly believed that knowledge was power and the key to that power was reading. I was always surrounded by piles and piles of books. On Saturdays, my mom would take me to rummage sales or Goodwill to see if we could find new, enchanted reading adventures. The joy of finding a new book was more important to me than anything else money could buy. While other children wanted and asked for toys for Christmas, I wanted and asked for books instead. I found reading and books to be my sanctuary.

### **Elementary**

My passion for reading began at home. It was not a surprise, then, that my favorite time during the school year quickly became story time that was held right after recess. I remember how, in second grade, Mrs. Briski would have us all gather around her on the reading carpet. Every day, I would eagerly wait to join Jack and Annie when “the treehouse was spinning. Faster and faster. Then everything was still. Absolutely still.” Every one of Mary Pope Osborne’s books in the Magic Tree House Series contains

those words. I have read those words and the Magic Tree House books so often and enjoyed them so much that, even to this day, those words are still committed to my memory. Every afternoon, we would go on magical exploration through history with our friends, Jack and Annie. I learned about dinosaurs, rain forests, Vikings, the Amazon, and so much more.

In Mrs. Briski's class, I also learned an important lesson. I learned that books can spark real, raw emotions and create amazing ideas. She taught us that it was perfectly normal to "feel" while reading. I remember being so excited and full of curiosity while waiting to go on adventures with Stuart Little but, I also remember crying during the reading of *Charlotte's Web*. I learned that great writing gives the reader friends, emotions, and something to connect to at a deeper level.

### **Secondary School**

Once I hit high school, I became enthralled with sports and extracurricular activities. I was playing three sports, and I was also active in many school groups. I tended to put reading on the back burner and quite frankly, I only read when I had to rather than for enjoyment with my class. With my busy schedule I didn't feel I had the time or energy to invest in reading a book, because I had other, more important things to do.

It wasn't until my junior year when my English teacher, Mrs. Finn, started doing novel studies that I began to fall in love with reading all over again. She would read aloud to us wonderful, amazing, captivating pieces of literature. She read classics such as

*Of Mice and Men, The Outsiders, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, To Kill a Mockingbird,* and so many more. Mrs. Finn rekindled the fire that had long since dwindled by pouring gasoline on my passion for reading.

I vividly remember when we began reading *The Outsiders* in class. The author, S.E. Hinton, did a phenomenal job capturing the reader's attention and pulling them into the story. The rowdy boys, who sat in the back of the class and usually slept or talked throughout the class period, were even sitting at the edge of their seats in anticipation of what would happen in the next chapter. It is honestly the first time I ever remembered that group of boys being interested in a book that had nothing to do with sports. With the magic of reading aloud, the whole class (even those reluctant to read on their own) was excited and hanging onto every word that was read. Even then, as a student, I wondered if this was simply how well the book was written or was there something more that made reading aloud so enjoyable and intriguing? It could be said that my curiosity about the significance of reading aloud started with the adventures that my own teachers, Mrs. Briski and Mrs. Finn, would take the class on daily while reading aloud to all of us.

### **Life, Unexpected**

Like the unexpected twists and turns, ups and downs of any great story plot, our lives can also turn unexpectedly. During my junior year of high school, my best friend was killed in a car crash. I remember the phone ringing; I remember sinking to the floor. I remember my parents waiting, concerned, and not yet knowing the details of my emotions. I would be lying if I said I handled the news gracefully. I struggled to

understand. I never received any answers explaining my burning question of “why?” One day during school, we started reading a new story aloud. As someone who always loved reading, I despised this specific book. I absolutely wanted nothing to do with it. The book was about how a teenage girl moves on after her best friend tragically dies. The irony did not sit well with me. As much as I dreaded that book, I slowly began to see myself in it. Eventually, it was that novel helped me overcome my grief that I was feeling and learned how to cope with my new reality.

Unfortunately, my own students had something similar happen to them last spring. With many of my students struggling the same way I did, I began searching for the perfect book to read aloud. At first, my students had the same reaction as I did in high school; they wanted nothing to do with the story. However, midway through the novel, my classroom was crying. We used our read aloud as a springboard for discussions and to help each other cope and deal with the pain. As hard as it was, my students and I learned that not all books are happy and cheerful. Sometimes we cry and sometimes we hurt. However, no matter the emotions we may feel, there is always a lesson to be learned.

### **My Passion as a Teacher**

I don't know when the specific moment when it was decided that I to be a teacher, but my family may have played a role in my decision. On my father's side, there are eight teachers. My aunt and uncle are both college professors of education, my aunt Jen is a special education teacher, three of my cousins are English teachers, and my mother is

licensed in elementary education and middle school science and recently finished her Master's in special education. For this reason, it is no surprise that I chose to become an elementary teacher. I would be lying if I said that being a teacher wasn't in my blood.

However, I would like to think that a big part of why I became a teacher was so that I could ignite each and every one of my students' fiery passion for reading the way that my parents and past teachers did for me. I want them to be passionate, to feel the emotions of the author, and to make internal connections to the novels they read. There is so much to be learned and felt by reading books.

When I reflect on my love for reading, I fondly remember Mrs. Briski and Mrs. Finn reading aloud to the class. Both of those marvelous teachers kindled the fiery passionate love for reading within all of their students. Whether it was the *Magic Tree House*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or *Of Mice and Men*, they were able to bring the printed text to life, making it real for the reader.

Now that I'm the teacher, I want to share my love of reading with my students. While on our adventurous expeditions we undertake during our read alouds, I want my students to be engaged and, hopefully, even my reluctant readers will find some enjoyment in the books I read aloud to them.

I vividly remember one of my sixth grade boys, Travis (pseudonym), who considered reading to be a torturous activity. He openly admitted, on numerous occasions, that he hated reading. I made it my mission to find one book that he did not absolutely despise. To fulfill part of the mythology reading standard, I began reading the

*Percy Jackson* series aloud. Right off the bat, I had my entire class hanging onto every word I read, everyone that was, except Travis. He sat at his desk with his head down and acted as if he wasn't paying any attention. When I stopped reading for the day, his head popped up and he said, "That's it? Seriously, you are stopping there?" I was dumbfounded; the student who absolutely hated all books actually asked me to keep reading! Who was I to say no? I continued reading aloud to the class. Travis, along with his classmates, cheered with excitement. The next day, Travis had his own copy of the book and was reading ahead of me. He finished the book in two days and finished the entire series in about a month. I considered that a success--he found a genre of books that he truly enjoyed. My once reluctant reader was finally passionate about reading! Even though he limited his interests to anything written by Rick Riordan, I finally was able to find a book for him that he did not find tortuous.

I feel I was successful in sharing my passion for reading with my class--even my most reluctant readers were reading. More importantly, however, they were even enjoying it! With each new read aloud I would start, I would always try to strategically target my audience, especially those reluctant readers. Personally, Rick Riordan had been a huge hit with my students as well as anything written by Christopher Paul Curtis. Granted, without fail, I always seem to have at least one or two of my reluctant readers who fall in love with reading by reading from those two authors aloud of conducting read alouds to my class. Besides creating passionate readers, what were the other benefits? Also, what is the significance of reading aloud with middle school aged children in the language arts classroom?

## **Summary**

As a teacher and avid reader myself, I know how reading can take readers on wild adventures and how it can create a sea of emotions and feelings. My experiences have taught me that everyone can create connections to books they read. What is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged children? What are the benefits? In the following chapter, I will introduce and focus on the research that has been done in this area along with the importance and effects of reading aloud to middle school students. Chapter three will explore the methodology used during research. Chapter four will share the results of my research. Lastly, chapter five will conclude my research, summarize my findings, examine the research, and discuss the ongoing potential of this project.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The old man that comes into the coffee shop every morning for a cup of coffee and the paper, the woman reading a novel waiting at the bus stop, and the college students reading a textbook on the courtyard lawn all have something very important in common. Every day, people all around us are constantly reading to themselves for enjoyment, information, research, or relaxation. The United States is considered a literate country with about eighty-six percent of its population being able to read. Unfortunately, that also means that there are fourteen percent (or thirty-two million people) in the country that are not able to read. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). With so many people being illiterate, what is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR reading assessment?

As educators, we want to do everything within our power to provide our students with every opportunity to become literate, passionate readers. The importance of reading aloud has been discussed for decades (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000). However, the question remains: “What is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR reading assessment?” Many researchers have confirmed that read alouds are a valuable, effective strategy to introduce students to the delightful adventures of reading and also the knack of listening. (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004)

## **Children's Literacy**

Literacy is the huge driving force behind student success. As defined by Merriam-Webster, literacy is “the ability to read and write; knowledge that related to a specified subject.” The National Council for Education Statistics goes on to define literacy as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (p.2). Literacy is not something that is only applicable in the school setting. Children and adults all around the world would jump at an opportunity to learn how to read and be able to communicate using written language. Literacy is more than simply learning basic sight words, it is the ability to read and comprehend a piece of text while being an actively engaged member of society.

Children first begin to acquire literacy skills at very young ages. Some children are very fortunate to have parents that begin reading to them as infants or while they are still in the womb. By reading aloud to their children, adults are modeling the literacy skills that ultimately build the foundation that children continuously build upon in the future.

Young children eagerly begin talking, sharing their ideas, thoughts, and feelings with the people around them. They are excited to be able to communicate and be clearly understood. They become curious about absolutely everything going on around them. Gradually, children become members of a literate society that has a written language and spoken language. With increased interaction with others, children use their listening

skills, build their vocabularies, and spark their curiosity about the world around them (Crockton, 2010).

With that curiosity, children begin to explore. Toddlers begin exploring the fascinating world of language. They start writing their names, make notes, and write letters. When they first begin, it is often next to impossible to read their writing, but if asked, children will use every opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas. As adults, it is important that we allow children numerous opportunities to learn and explore both written and oral languages. Goodman (1984) states that, “it is important to remember that a child’s development of literacy grows out of their experiences, and their views and attitudes towards literacy that they will encounter as they interact with social groups.”.

**Components of Literacy.** While both oral and written languages are vital components of literacy, the two are very different from each other. According to Kucer (2005), oral language is something that is acquired and can be found in any situational context. Meaning, oral language is a skill that is easily picked up. Toddlers unintentionally pick up on oral language skills when simply watching PBS television programs or shows such as *Dora, the Explorer*. Acquiring written language skills, however, is a bit more difficult and tricky. Learning a written language is a skill that occurs over time and with much practice. An added benefit to written language is that it acts as a permanent recording. Even though oral and written languages have differences, they both rely on each other. Together, oral and written languages go hand-in-hand because they are both expressions of language and how we communicate.

When learning language skills, there are four developmental patterns and principles that Kucer (2005) investigates. The first is “The Learner is a Scientist and Construction Worker” developmental pattern. Within this developmental pattern, the child discovers abstract regularities of language based on past communicative experiences.

The second developmental pattern is the Recursive Process. During this process, learning improves over time. Allowing children multiple opportunities helps build their understanding of both oral and written languages. It’s like the old adage says, practice makes perfect. With every opportunity, the children are building upon their literacy foundation, brick by brick.

The adult as a Demonstrator, Mediator, and Guide is the third developmental pattern. Language learning processing begins. Adults demonstrate and model the different aspects and attributes of written and oral language. The adults mediate and support children’s endeavors with the use of language. Working together, the adult and child create language concepts that contribute and build upon their literacy skills). Both parents and teachers have an essential role and responsibility in modeling language use for the child.

The final principle is Negotiating Meaning (Kucer, 2005). In this principle, students use an assortment or variety of cues to decipher or figure out the meaning of language. Children begin to learn rules and concepts that help them to figure out meanings of words. This includes using context clues to figure out word meanings in

written language. All of these principles play a vital role in where the language learning process begins.

Knowing that children begin learning and understanding language at a young age, it is absolutely crucial to read aloud to them while they are young. The beginning years of a child's life are so important because they are when a child starts learning and developing language skills and participating in the literate world.

Creating literate children starts at home, so children become more acquainted with spoken language. By reading aloud, parents are modeling and teaching their children important reading strategies and vocabulary while also building their schema and background knowledge (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004).

### Read Alouds

In the pivotal, foundational research *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), it was claimed that “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p.23). Reading aloud is when the teacher (or someone else) reads to the students orally, even if the students see the text or not. Students are simply listening to the text, and they are not focusing on decoding the words or trying to understand what they are reading (Press, Henenberg, & Getman, 2009). However, mention the term “read aloud” to an educator and it may be frequently associated as only an “elementary activity” (Marchessault & Larwin, 2013, p. 3). While read alouds are very common

among the elementary grades, they are also a wonderful tool for secondary teachers to utilize as well.

Even though students may not have a copy of the text in front of them during read alouds, it is not a passive activity. Albright and Ariail (2005) found that teachers utilize read alouds for modeling fluent reading, providing a plethora of accessible texts, and making sure all of the students understand the main points or themes from the texts. Using read alouds also provides students with opportunities to explore different genres and texts they may not have encountered on their own.

**History of Read Alouds.** Reading aloud to children is nothing new. In fact, it has been recommended for decades (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000). Most children are exposed to books and reading as young children. Read alouds help develop emergent literacy skills, phonological and print awareness, beginning phonics skills (Allor & McCathren, 2003) and decontextualizes speech (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

There has been some controversy on whether reading aloud to young infants has been beneficial or not, but Holland (2007) states her study found that reading to infants was extremely beneficial to the language development of the child. Reading aloud to children creates a passion for reading. Every story read aloud models for children how to read fluently themselves. When children are read to, they become engaged with the text. They ask questions, answer questions, make predictions, become familiar with vocabulary, hear fluent reading, and learn comprehension strategies (Atwell, 2000; Spranger, Sandral, & Ferrari, 2011).

Reading aloud is not a new concept. It has been part of instruction since the colonial era. Reading aloud was often considered the goal of classroom instruction (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). For years, researchers (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2001; Chomsky, 1972; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Durkin, 1966) have acknowledged the many advantages of reading aloud to children and the great, positive effects of language growth and development that is gained by doing so (Albright & Ariail, 2005).

Early in the nineteenth century, schools started oral recitation to emphasize elocution. Oral recitations soon become the desired method and goal of reading instructions (Burrell & Riley, 2007). Teachers strived to have students reading with great enthusiasm and pronunciation. A typically recitation lesson consisted of the teacher reading orally. Then the students would orally practice on their own and, eventually read to a classmate or the teacher. While reading to the teacher, students were graded on their reading fluency and the ability to recall information. This practice of oral recitation continued and eventually became a staple in the reading education curriculum (Burrell & Riley, 2007).

In the twentieth century, reading instruction began to change. Emphasis was switched to comprehension and silent reading as these concepts were viewed as the best tools for higher success. Students began spending more time reading by themselves and answered deeper, more philosophical questions about the topics they were reading instead of focusing on recalling basic facts like in the previous century. In the latter half of the twentieth century, round robin style of reading became very common. With round robin

reading, one student would begin reading out loud as other students listened and followed along. After a given amount of time or length, the next student would read, then the next. This process continued until the story or passage was completely finished. The students were urged to read with great expression and fluency.

However, in the twenty-first century the round robin style of reading became discouraged. This was because students were easily and often embarrassed if they stumbled upon or missed a word. This style of reading was very stressful for struggling readers in particular. Students would become so fixated on reading their section correctly, they would count ahead to find which section they were reading and read it silently over and over so when it was finally their turn, they would know that words and not struggle. By doing this, they were missing everything else that had been read and were unable to successfully comprehend the story or passage. As instructors moved away from round robin reading, teachers began modeling comprehension strategies during read alouds instead currently this style or method is still the most prevalent strategy used today.

**Importance of Read Alouds.** Researchers believe that read alouds are a great and effective way to introduce the joy of reading and the art of listening to others (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). Parents are often encouraged to read to their young children so they can become familiar with written and oral languages. By using books they have listened to and read with adults, children are constantly building their vocabulary skills. Meyer, Stahl, Wardrop, & Linn (1999) affirm that reading aloud to children helps build



their vocabulary, has made them eager to read, and it has contributed to their sight word development skills (p. 56).

Children who are read to at an early age tend to benefit from the positive effects of reading aloud during the elementary years. Children whose parents read to them also typically become better readers, perform better in school, and are more successful on standardized tests, vocabulary, fluency, and overall intellectual growth (Bausch, 2009).

Read alouds are so beneficial to students because they offer them the opportunities to explore extraordinary literature as well as exposes them to a vast variety of genres. As the students are exposed to the brilliant variety of great literature, they are developing great listening skills that can last a lifetime. Not only should teachers read aloud to students, but it is also crucial that teachers model the essential reading skills such as predicting, inferring, and visualization to aid in students expanding comprehension skills. When students use these skills, they are able to make deeper, more valuable connections to the text.

It is clear that students, especially those exposed to books at a young age, will most likely become avid readers (Hodges, 2011, p. 19). During read alouds, children are able to wholly engage themselves into learning comprehension skills that directly impact their success in reading. By being engaged, students are learning how to be fluent, literate students. In intermediate grades, reading aloud can connect students to the themes or content being taught. Read alouds motivate students while making the text

easier to comprehend. This is especially true for children with reading difficulties (Press, Henenberg, & Getman, 2009).

### **Language Arts Curriculum**

Throughout a child's education, teachers continue reading aloud in order to help build the students' language skills. In preschool, children are read to every day. As teachers read a plethora of books, students continuously get excited to listen to another story. Soon, this eagerness quickly becomes learning. Children begin to become familiar with phrasing, inflections, and expressions (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). Teachers continually read aloud. In turn, this helps to build on their students' schema and literacy understanding.

In primary grades, a large portion of a student's day is spent listening to stories being read aloud long with reading independently. Students are listening to stories from a wide variety of genres and books at or above their reading level (Seefeldt, 2003). Children in the primary grades listening comprehension is much higher than their reading comprehension up until around the students reaches eighth grade. This is where the two begin to equal out.

Typically, every year as the child grows older, teachers read aloud less and less (Crockton, 2010). Unfortunately, what teachers may not realize is that they are doing a disservice to their students as well as their students' education. With less time spent reading aloud, students are getting less and less exposure to a wide variety of literature and vocabulary. As the students grow, teachers often believe that because they are able

to read more independently, they don't need to be read to anymore (Hodges, 2011, p. 19). This, however, could not be further from the truth.

As the child advances in school, more and more pressure is placed on teachers to meet adequate yearly progress. The creation of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 required all students (including students with disabilities) to perform at a proficient level on state assessments. Minnesota utilizes the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments or MCA as the measure of academic performance. The importance of this test is to ensure that students are reading and comprehending at the level of proficiency compared to their peers. Review of the data from the MCAs provides teachers with a guide to understand what areas students are performing well on as well as areas that may be of concern on their academic development. These comprehensive tests are important safety measures to make sure we are raising a literate society.

**Read Alouds in the Classroom.** In the primary grades, teachers model reading strategies and demonstrate how written languages are different from spoken language. Using read alouds, students begin to learn new words and ideas while being exposed to a wide variety of genres. Teachers are able to check for understanding and have valuable, meaningful discussion about the text. Collin (2005) believed that having set reading aloud times during the school day does lead to significant effects and benefits on expressive language, comprehension, and great listening habits.

The read aloud model demonstrates expressive, enthusiastic reading, pleasurable reading, and encourages listeners to become passionate, avid readers. Teachers model

aspects of fluent reading, which makes literary works more welcoming for students and guarantees that students are subjected to an extensive selection of important, relevant information and texts. Modeling also provides struggling readers with plenty of opportunities to focus on meaning instead of pronunciation of unfamiliar words (Albright & Ariail, 2005). When students become engaged in read alouds, they begin to better understand themselves and their emotions while having deeper, more meaningful connections with the text. According to Serfani & Giorgis (2003), reading instruction should help develop the students' enthusiasm for reading, reinforce their experiences with literary works from all genres, and inspire them to be passionate, active readers in society.

In the intermediate grades, reading aloud tends to fall to the wayside as teachers tend to become more "traditional" in their teaching style. In the more traditional teaching style, teachers focus solely on the curriculum and read only when required or necessary. Besides the difference in teaching strategies, teachers often place intermediate students in a developmental transition category where they are moving from oral to silent reading. (Prior & Welling, 2001) When asked about this practice, many teachers agree that reading aloud is very important, but they don't feel as though they have enough time to read aloud with students during the school day (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000).

With so much pressure being placed on raising standardized test scores, teachers create rigorous lessons and activities that simulate standardized test experiences. Pressure continues from state and federal legislatures to raise test scores. Unfortunately,

because of this, “public school classrooms may become places where children learn to read well enough to score higher on standardized tests, but may not be places where you learn to love to read, discover great authors and piece of literature, or learn how to read in order to succeed in the ‘real’ world” (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

“Although reading aloud with children is widely agreed to be beneficial, it is often assumed both by teachers and young people themselves that it is something you grow out of as you become an increasingly proficient reader” (Hodges, 2011, p. 19). Even in the intermediate grades, reading aloud should still be practiced with students. Reading aloud engages students, creates a passion for reading, and models critical reading strategies and skills. By reading aloud, teachers can motivate students and build upon their schema knowledge on a specific subject matter. Reading aloud can bind children to themes or subjects being reviewed as well (Press, Henenberg, & Getman, 2009, p. 38).

Also, when students enter the intermediate grades, teachers who read aloud do tend to stay away from picture books and focus more on chapter books (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000, p. 12). Teachers fear that reading picture books to older students may discourage students from reading because they view picture books as “childish.” As educators, we want to challenge our students. However, a large portion of nonfiction texts are indeed picture books. Unfortunately, nonfiction books have a bad report for being sterile, dry, and boring. Thankfully, publishers have realized the dry reputation nonfiction books have been receiving and are working diligently to publish imaginative, detailed, interesting books with splendid, colorful presentation of

information (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000). Reading picture books can actually be ideal for content-area teachers because of the short format, in-depth exploration of a given topic, and the books can be visually appealing (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998).

Trelease (2013) claims that everyone, including teenagers, enjoys a good picture book.

Read alouds can also be used as a strategy to develop interest and motivation.

Reading aloud to students allows the students to focus on making connections to the text and allows them opportunities for their own personal growth socially as well as morally (Albright, 2002). In France, one high school teacher achieved great success by reading aloud to a class of underachieving students. The students became interested in having books read to them. Since it was something they could not do on their own. During and after reading, they would have discussions about how the books connected to their own lives (Lesesne, 2006). As educators, we want our students to make valuable connections to the texts.

Press, Henenberg, & Getman (2009) shared a wonderful example of how a group of middle school students connected with the literary classic *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton (1967). Students in middle school are searching for their own identities and are often feeling pressured to join groups or teams. One teacher asked the class for their definition of a gang and then read aloud the thoughts of one of the main characters, Ponyboy. “You take up for your buddies, no matter what they do. When you’re in a gang, you stick up for the members. If you don’t stick up for them, stick together, make like brothers, it isn’t a gang any more. It’s a pack. A snarling, distrustful, bickering

pack.” The teacher then asked the class if that is true or if they have ever had any of those thoughts. Instantaneously, the discussion gets passionate as the students relate their feelings about gangs and belonging to something bigger than themselves (Press, Henenberg, & Getman, 2009, p. 39).

**Components of an Effective Read Aloud.** According to Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004), there are seven components that are vital for an effective read aloud. While there are many ways and ideas that schools around the world can incorporate read alouds, they found these seven components to be the most effective for reading:

1. Books should be chosen based on student’s interests. Teachers should try to pick a text for the students that interest them. If a student loves World War II it would be a great idea to select a book related to that era. For example, Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars* is a great introduction into World War II.
2. The teacher should always preview the book before reading it to the class. Previewing the text allows the teacher to make sure the book is appropriate and interesting. Previewing the text also allows the teacher opportunities to know where to pause and build suspense, as well as where good stopping points are for discussions.
3. The purpose of the read aloud should be expressed clearly. With this, teachers are given the opportunity to express why they chose the particular book. Using this component, teachers are also able to check for understanding by having the students retell the story, make predictions, and have meaningful discussions. All

of these strategies, along with comprehension strategies, are easy to introduce to the students.

4. Teachers model fluent oral reading. While similar to previewing the text, this component stresses fluency. Teachers are encouraged to practice elocution and proper pronunciation. Fluent reading is commonly described as reading that is swift, precise, and animated (Schwanenflugel, et al., 2009).
5. Teachers use animation and expression. While reading aloud to students, teachers should use both animation and expression. It captivates the students' attention and pulls them into the story. Teachers are urged to change their voices to denote different characters' emotions and moods. Forms of expressions are great tools to use to accomplish this component.
6. Occasionally, stopping to thoughtfully ask the students questions. When students are actively engaged in a text, teachers ask the students to make connections to the text. These connections can be to the story or to real world applications. When students make connections, they are able to automatically think of a time in which he or she has faced that particular problem or situation.
7. Teachers make connections to independent reading and writing. During this component, teachers connect their read aloud to the independent reading or writing that occurred during the lesson. Some teachers find "Response Journals" extremely helpful for students to respond to their readings.



All of these seven components are so vital to an effective read aloud. If teachers focus on these seven components, it will ensure that students are involved in reading and are receiving the best of the read alouds.

**Personal Connection.** As the reading teacher for grades fourth through sixth, I am passionate about discovering why read alouds are so important and what benefits they have in the middle school classroom. I want to share my love for reading with my students. I want our novel studies to take my students on wild adventures that deepen their understanding of literature, but also themselves. Most importantly, I want to help my students develop a life-long love for reading and to allow them a magical escape to a world different than our own.

### **Summary**

Using the powerful tool of reading aloud to help deepen comprehension skills, I read numerous novels aloud with my students during the year. By creating a curriculum that weighs the benefits of reading aloud, I will be able to test if reading aloud truly helps reading comprehension and literacy skills as a whole.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

#### Introduction

Chapter two explored literature that supports read alouds. Sifting through the plethora of information, information was sorted into piles of similar themes. From these piles, the author coded what she felt was necessary for the project and answered the question “What is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR reading assessment?”

The importance of reading aloud has been discussed for decades (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000). Researchers have confirmed that read alouds are a valuable, effective strategy to introduce students to the delightful adventures of reading and the knack of listening (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). When children are read to, they become engaged with the text. They ask questions, answer questions, make predictions, become familiar with vocabulary, hear fluent reading, and learn comprehension strategies (Atwell, 2000) (Spranger, Sandral, & Ferrari, 2011).

This chapter will provide information about the search paradigm for this project, the school setting which the curriculum was created for, and the data collection methods. Information on the literature texts that were used and the lesson plans will also be incorporated.

## **Setting**

This curriculum project was designed for the school the author taught in, Jefferson Public Schools (pseudonym). The small, rural school was located near the Minnesota and Canadian border. The preschool, elementary, and high school were housed in one building, which also happened to be the only school in the district. In the 2018-2019 school year, there was a total of 197 students enrolled preschool through twelfth grade. There was one section of each grade. The largest class had eighteen students and the smallest class had five students.

The school did not have a very diverse population of students. In the 2018-2019 school year ninety-four percent of the students were Caucasian, three percent of the students were Hispanic, three percent of the students were African American. Of the districts population, 39 percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch.

Of the entire school population, 17 percent of the students received special education services. As of the 2018-2019 school year, Jefferson school had two full-time special education teachers, nine full-time special education paraprofessionals, and two part-time special education paraprofessionals. Some students were pulled out for direct instruction, however, most students received paraprofessional support within their primary classrooms.

Since Jefferson was a small, rural school in Northern Minnesota, it only had seventeen teachers (all of which were Caucasian.) There were nine elementary teachers, eight high school teachers, and two special education teachers that serviced both the

elementary and high school populations. The entire faculty was fully licensed, with thirteen teachers having multiple degrees or licensures, two with a Master's degree.

2018-2019 was my seventh year teaching grades fourth through sixth at that school. Each grade had only one section. The fourth grade class had fifteen students, fifth grade had sixteen students, and the sixth grade had seventeen students. Fourth through sixth grade classes were departmentalized. I taught reading, spelling, and writing. One of my coworkers taught math and science, the other taught English and social studies. All of the students also went to specialists for music, band, and physical education.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were fifth and sixth graders. In the fifth grade class there were sixteen students, six males and ten females. One male and one female fifth grade students that received special education support services. In the sixth grade there were six males and eleven females. I had two male and one female students that also received special education support services in the sixth grade. One male received direct instruction in the resource room.

All of the participants received a letter stating what the researcher would be observing, as well as a written consent form. In the letter sent to parents, a brief introduction of the study was shared and assurance given that the rights of the parents, teachers, and students were confidential and protected. Along with this letter, reading

surveys were attached for both the parents and the students to complete. If at any time names were used, the researcher used pseudonyms.

### **Researcher Stance**

Working through developing this process, the author continuously referred back to the literature review in Chapter Two to help guide the project since reading aloud is such a vital component of literacy. Not only is literacy a driving force behind student success, it also builds upon reading literacy skills. Read alouds are shown to help improve listening skills, broaden vocabularies, build background knowledge, as well as model fluency and comprehension strategies (Atwell, 2000) (Spranger, Sandral, & Ferrari, 2011).

### **Project Design**

During this part of the study, the author served as a participant observer according to Mills (2011). While having this role, the researcher was fully engaged in what is going on during the read alouds (Mills, 2011).

Since the Jefferson School was departmentalized in fifth and sixth grade, the researcher had ninety minutes with each grade. Every class had twenty minutes daily devoted to reading aloud, which is nearly a third of the instructional time. Of those ninety minutes, thirty minutes were considered Title I time during which there was multiple students leaving the room for reading support services.

While one class completed a read aloud novel study with researcher, the other read the same novel silently on their own. Ideally, they read two chapters a day regardless if they were reading with researcher or on their own. Both groups completed the same comprehension packet as they read the novel. Again, if they read the novel with the teacher, they completed the comprehension packet with instructor as well. If they read the novel on their own, the students also completed the comprehension packet on their own. After the completion of that novel, the class that read aloud with instructor would then silently read the next novel study on their own. The class that read the previous novel study silently on their own, then read aloud the next novel study with the instructor. This way, each class read the same book at the same time, but one class read it silently and the other read it aloud. Both classes used the same assessments, regardless of whether they read aloud or silently. If a student was absent while reading the novel with the instructor, they caught up using an audiobook option. If the absent student was in the read on their own group, they caught up on reading on their own. Students took an accelerated reader quiz after reading each novel which measured their comprehension and understanding of the novel. Students then took a STAR Reading Assessment to measure their overall comprehension growth.

**Table 3.1 Novel Study Instructional Plan**

|                        | <u>5th Grade</u>      | <u>6th Grade</u>      |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Hundred Dresses</i> | Read Aloud w/ Teacher | Read Independently    |
| <i>Stone Fox</i>       | Read Independently    | Read Aloud w/ Teacher |

|                                 |                       |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> | Read Aloud w/ Teacher | Read Independently    |
| <i>Hatchet</i>                  | Read Independently    | Read Aloud w/ Teacher |
| <i>On My Honor</i>              | Read Aloud w/ Teacher | Read Independently    |
| <i>Number the Stars</i>         | Read Independently    | Read Aloud w/ Teacher |

When read alouds were completed with the students, all of the students found a comfy place to sit within the classroom reading lounge. The researcher began each new read aloud by introducing the book title, cover, and the author. Using that information, they'd ask students to make predictions about what they thought the book would be about and asked them to share their reasoning. This also allowed them to connect the text with any background knowledge that they may have on the subject. After students had the opportunity to share their ideas, the researcher would begin reading aloud to the class. While reading the story, the instructor would model fluency and stop frequently to model reading strategies such as making predictions, asking questions, using context clues, and being engaged with the text (Neugebauer & Rubin, 2009).

When the students finished reading for the day, the researcher would ask for someone to share the summary of what has happened in the reading so far. This allowed others to build upon what their peers have said. The students then went back to their seats and answer comprehension question(s.) At the beginning of the next day's read aloud, students discussed the novel thus far and summarized what they have felt, learned, valued, or what has touched them in some way.

Once a novel was finished, students were required to answer short response and comprehension questions. Students would also take a quick comprehension quiz on the novel using Renaissance Place's technology based program Accelerated Reader.

The students that received special education services had modified assignments and quizzes. One way the researcher modified the assignment was to read the comprehension questions aloud to them before the instructor read each chapter aloud. By doing that, it helped the students know what they should be listening for while the instructor read the story aloud.

### **Evaluating Curriculum**

During the read alouds, the researcher noted based on what she witnessed, how the students interacted with the text while it was being read. The researcher was able to assess the students' comprehension of the text that they were listening to while the novel was being read aloud through their written and oral responses on assignments, quizzes, and on the accelerated reader quiz through Renaissance Place.

### **Summary**

While utilizing passion for reading along with the desire to turn students into passionate readers, the researcher observed the benefits of reading aloud in the middle school language arts classroom. Creating literate students is more than being able to read; it is the ability to connect to the text, ask questions, and understand the story. As stated in the foundational read aloud 1985 report, "The single most important activity for



building the knowledge required for eventual cusses in reading is reading aloud to children” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

In Chapter Four, the author will reflect on her findings. The chapter will discuss literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and evaluative comprehension skills, as well as results. Student Accelerated Reading and STAR Reading Assessment results will also be shared.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study was designed to find benefits of read alouds in the middle school setting. Jacobs (2000) believes that reading aloud to children in the classroom has been a recommended practice for decades. However, it is not often recommended in the curriculum. Teachers often read to their students because it models fluency and also because it also teaches students the necessary comprehension skills that they need while reading. As a classroom reading teacher, the author of this study has observed how much the students enjoy being read to. While observing the students and their responses in a whole group setting, she began to focus on the common elements: engagement and reading comprehension.

#### **Engagement**

During the course of the research, observations and notes were made about how the children were engaged during the course of the novel studies--both read aloud and independently. Each day, they completed the novel studies at the same time. When the students were being read aloud to, the students would gather on the carpet in the reading lounge. Students were able to sit where they were comfortable. Some chose to sit on the carpet, some on the futon, chairs, yoga mats, or rocking chair. It was observed that the students often chose to sit in the same spot daily. Due to the small class sizes, everyone was able to sit in a circle and no one was able to avoid the teacher's line of vision. During discussion time and completion of the study guide, most of the children participated by asking questions or sharing their ideas. Collins (2005) believes that an

active involvement with literature enables pupils to share the experience of others. On average, according to the field notes, 85% of the class would share an idea, provide an answer, or ask a question. The students were quick to write down each other's ideas and answers as they completed the study guide together.

The students that were independently reading and completing the corresponding study guide were not nearly as engaged. They were able to sit where they were comfortable (carpet, futon, chairs, yoga mats, or rocking chair) but they often tried to find places that were out of the teacher's line of vision. Even though the teacher circulated the room, typically the boys would get chatty and the teacher would have to redirect them multiple times during the novel study block. According to research, males face great deficits in reading. Such deficits may be due to physiological-maturational and cultural-societal factors. (Below, Skinner, Ferrington, & Sorrell, 2010). This may or may not be a gender issue, but the author found it was interesting how it was typically the males who became more chatty and distracted than the females.

### **Types of Comprehension**

In order to monitor comprehension, the researcher would ask the students three types of comprehension questions--literal, inferential, and evaluative. Literal questions are questions that can easily be found in the text and can be stated directly. Students, both in the read aloud and independently reading, were always able to go back into the novel and find the text answering the question. Inferential questions were also able to be found in the text, but they are typically implied and not directly stated. Students would have to read between the lines to answer these questions. With this type of questions,

students are able to explain their rationale and reasoning using the part of the text that supports their idea. Evaluative questions are a little more tricky and require information from outside the novel's text. These questions involved drawing conclusions and interpreting the author's purpose.

### **Literal Comprehension**

Literal comprehension questions have answers that can be found directly in the story (Benchmark Education Company 2010). Again, regardless if the students were working with the group or independent, they were encouraged and allowed to look back to find the answers. However, the researcher rarely noticed the students going back to search for the answers or looking up the correct spelling. Regardless, all of the students seemed to do well on these questions. Most of the literal questions that were asked were pertaining to students having to identify the names of characters and locations that were mentioned. Students were confident in answering these literal questions because they were sure of the answer. When looking over all participants' literal questions, all 7 participants answered the questions that they were asked. What the data showed was that these students were able to listen and remember important information such as names, places, and dates.

### **Inferential Comprehension**

Inferential questions are also able to be found in the text, but they are typically implied and not directly stated (Benchmark Education Company 2010). As a whole, this type of questioning was harder for the students. However, the students who participated in the read aloud did better than those who were working independently. In one of the

novel studies, *Hatchet*, Brian was struggling with his parents' divorce because he knew a secret that his father did not. The novel alludes to an affair, but didn't come right out and say that. The study guide asked a question in reference to why Brian was struggling with divorce. When answering, seven of the sixteen students working independently responded because he knew a secret, but didn't elaborate to fully answer the question. Those in the read aloud took a few minutes of discussion and some prompting to figure the complete answer out.

During the novel studies, both read alouds and independently, students were asked to make predictions about what would happen next in the story. Most students were able to make relatively accurate predictions of what would happen next, but some would just extend what the author said at the end of the last chapter. Students in the read alouds were actively engaged in the predictions. Nine times out of 10, all of the students volunteered to share their predictions. The students working independently had vague, usually one sentence answers that either repeated what was mentioned in the previous chapter or seemed to be pulled out of thin air. Through listening to and reading their predictions, the researcher was able to see if they understood the previous chapter and what was a continuation of what was read previously.

### **Evaluative Comprehension**

In evaluative comprehension, students have to search for the answers outside of the text or have it already in their heads (Benchmark Education Company 2010). When students looked closely at these questions, they were able to make personal connections to the characters in the stories.

Students were able to make connections with things they read about or events that happened. Students who were in the read aloud group gave phenomenal answers to these questions. The researcher believes the reason why the students were able to give wonderful answers was because of their ability to connect the story to their personal lives. According to Fisher et al (2004) one of the components of an effective read aloud is for students to be able to make a connection between the text and either the world or themselves. One question that was asked while reading *Number the Stars* was in reference to being worried about lying to the Nazi soldiers. One student, Sophia, gave a detailed response as well as reasons why she felt that way. “I would have lied to the soldiers too. My family’s safety and people’s lives were at risk. Knowing what we do about World War II and the Nazis, I’d be terrified, but I’d have no choice but to be brave for my family, for my friends, and for my country” (October 28, 2019 Field Notes.)

Students who read independently were split. About half of the group answered with great detail and the other half barely responded and lacked any personal connection. The researcher feels these questions stem great discussion. If students were reading independently, they missed that vital component. When the independent group read their novels, they struggled more with the comprehension questions versus the read aloud group. The lack of discussion really played a large role in that gap between the groups.

### **Accelerated Reading Results**

Once the students completed a novel and the corresponding study guide that was completed with each chapter, they took an Accelerated Reading test which is designed to measure comprehension. All of the students read the same novel and completed the same

study guide. The only variable was the teacher. One group read the novel and completed the study guide independently. After each chapter, the instructor would correct the study guides and return to the students. On average, this group scored 82% on their Accelerated Reading quizzes. The other group read the novel as a read aloud with the teacher and completed the study guide in the teacher led discussion group. This group, on average, scored 92% on their Accelerated Reading quizzes. Looking at the quiz results, the students who read aloud with the teacher and had discussions while reading the text, scored an average of ten points higher than their counterparts. It is the researcher's belief that having the teacher model fluent reading and comprehension strategies as well as leading the discussions through the study guide greatly benefited those students. The teacher was able to see who was on task, redirect those that weren't, include ideas from the group, and guide the discussion if the students were off task.

**Table 4.4 Accelerated Reading Class Results**

|                                 | <u>5th Grade</u>                            | <u>6th Grade</u>                            |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Hundred Dresses</i>          | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 95% | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 86%    |
| <i>Stone Fox</i>                | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 84%    | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 93% |
| <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 91% | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 79%    |
| <i>Hatchet</i>                  | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 79%    | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 92% |
| <i>On My Honor</i>              | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 89% | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 81%    |

|                         |  |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Number the Stars</i> | Read Independently<br>Average Score: 84% | Read Aloud w/ Teacher<br>Average Score: 90% |
|-------------------------|--|---|

### **STAR Reading Assessment Results**

Once the students completed a novel, the corresponding study guide, and the coinciding Accelerated Reading test (which is designed to measure comprehension) they then completed a STAR Reading Assessment which is designed to measure the students' individual strengths and deficiencies in reading and offer specific insight into which areas need improvement. On average, the students who read the novel independently increased their reading scaled scores by eleven points. The grade equivalent scores were raised one-tenth of a point while the percentile rank didn't move.

The students who read the novel with the teacher averaged higher than their counterparts. These students typically, raised their scale scores twenty points. The grade equivalency averaged a two-tenth point gain, as the percentile rank gained a little over one point. The students who read aloud had steady growth at nearly twice the pace of their fellow students. The researched felt that the interaction with the teacher and having discussions about the text truly deepened their reading comprehension. As the teacher modeled reading fluency and making connections to the text, it seemed to have helped the students strengthen their overall reading scores.

**Table 4.5 STAR Reading Assessment Class Results**

|  |                           |                              |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|
|  | <b>Read Independently</b> | <b>Read Aloud w/ Teacher</b> |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|



|   |                             |                            |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Hundred Dresses</i> (5th Grade)          |                             | PR +22, GE +0.3, PR +1.3   |
| <i>Hundred Dresses</i> (6th Grade)          | PR +11, GE +0.1, PR 0       |                            |
| <i>Stone Fox</i> (5th Grade)                | PR +13, GE +0.3, PR +1      |                            |
| <i>Stone Fox</i> (6th Grade)                |                             | PR +19, GE +0.1, PR +1.1   |
| <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> (5th Grade) |                             | PR +18, GE +0.1, PR +1.1   |
| <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> (6th Grade) | PR +8, GE -0.3, PR -1       |                            |
| <i>Hatchet</i> (5th Grade)                  | PR +10, GR 0, PR -1         |                            |
| <i>Hatchet</i> (6th Grade)                  |                             | PR +22, GE +0.3, PR +1.3   |
| <i>On My Honor</i> (5th Grade)              |                             | PR +20, GE +0.2, PR +1.2   |
| <i>On My Honor</i> (6th Grade)              | PR +12, GE +0.2, PR 0       |                            |
| <i>Number the Stars</i> (5th Grade)         | PR +14, GE +0.3, PR +1      |                            |
| <i>Number the Stars</i> (6th Grade)         |                             | PR +21, GE +0.1, PR +1.2   |
| <b>Class Average</b>                        | PR +11, GE +0.1, PR 0       | PR +20, GE +0.2, PR +1.2   |
| <i>PR= Percentile Rank</i>                  | <i>GE= Grade Equivalent</i> | <i>PR= Percentile Rank</i> |

### Summary

Chapter Five, will share a reflection of the overall capstone project as well as future applications of the work. The final chapter will also highlight important ideas from Chapter Two that were involved in the creation of the project. Lastly, it will discuss potential further research and the benefits that it brings to the education community.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Overview**

This project was developed from a combination of personal and professional passions. Reading aloud has always been something I have been passionate about personally and I have brought that passion into my classroom. I was curious to learn more about the benefits of reading aloud to middle schoolers and how it impacts their learning. In the previous chapters, I discussed my rationale for my project as well as my process for creating my read aloud curriculum. In Chapter Five, I will reflect on my thoughts and learning while seeking to answer my guiding question: “What is the significance of reading aloud to middle school aged students in the language arts classroom as measured by the STAR Reading assessment?”

#### **Reflection**

My project combined my enthusiasm for reading with my zeal for teaching. From a young child, reading aloud was always something I enjoyed doing. As a teacher, reading aloud with my students is one of my favorite parts of the day. I think being able to research something that I am so passionate about really fueled my motivation to keep learning more about the importance of reading aloud to children--middle school aged students in particular. For years, researchers (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2001; Chomsky, 1972; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Durkin, 1966) have acknowledged the many advantages of

reading aloud to children and the great, positive effects of language growth and development that is gained by doing so (Albright & Ariail, 2005) and I was fortunate to be able to see such growth in my own classroom.

When reflecting on the project, I am proud of how my students grew as readers. Their fluency improved, their ability to connect to the text made leaps and bounds and most importantly, their overall reading skills improved. All of these areas of the improvements demonstrated the importance of reading aloud. I thoroughly enjoy having conversations about novels with my students. Asking questions and hearing their thoughts and ideas guides my instruction. That being said, I had a really hard time not having discussions or asking questions when my students were reading independently.

### **Literature Review**

Reading instruction is always a hot topic in education, especially since Read Well by Third Grade was introduced by President Bush's administration. Creating a nation of literate individuals is so important to the success of this country as a whole. The National Council for Education Statistics defines literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (p.2). As educators, isn't this what we want for our students? Don't we want to develop young adults that are able to function in society, achieve goals, and reach their fullest potential? By providing students with the necessary skills, this can be achieved.

I believe that read alouds are so beneficial to students because they offer the reader opportunities to explore extraordinary literature as well as exposes them to a vast

variety of genres. As the students are exposed to the brilliant variety of great literature, they are developing great listening skills that can last a lifetime. Not only should teachers read aloud to students, but it is also crucial that teachers model the essential reading skills such as predicting, inferring, and visualization to aid in students expanding comprehension skills. When students use these skills, they are able to make deeper, more valuable connections to the text. Every story read aloud models for children how to read fluently themselves. When children are read to, they become engaged with the text. They ask questions, answer questions, make predictions, become familiar with vocabulary, hear fluent reading, and learn comprehension strategies (Atwell, 2000) (Spranger, Sandral, & Ferrari, 2011).

Read alouds demonstrate expressive, enthusiastic reading, pleasurable reading, and encourages listeners to become passionate, avid readers. Teachers model aspects of fluent reading, which makes literary works more welcoming for students. It also guarantees that students are subjected to an extensive selection of important, relevant information and texts. In addition, modeling provides struggling readers with plenty of opportunities to focus on meaning instead of pronunciation of unfamiliar words (Albright & Ariail, 2005). When students become engaged in read alouds, they begin to better understand themselves and their emotions while having deeper, more meaningful connections with the text. According to Serfani & Giorgis (2003), reading instruction should help develop the students' enthusiasm for reading, reinforce their experiences with literary works from all genres, and inspire them to be passionate, active readers in society.

**Implications**

This project was designed for fifth and sixth grade students in a reading classroom setting. As we know, students in a classroom are at a variety of reading levels--it's not a cookie cutter, one size fits all approach. The levels of books reflect the range of readers seen in a classroom. Each book also has teaching points that can be emphasized based on where any particular group of students may be. The lesson design is meant to be a guideline of how read alouds should look in a classroom setting. That being said, the classroom teacher must decide how to use the lesson plans for their own students and classroom, as well as be comfortable with the read aloud lesson format.

**Limitations**

This project was created for a small, rural school with only one section of each grade level. Therefore, the number of participants was limited. The students in the study were at a variety of levels including on level, above level, below level, as well as multiple students who receive special education support in reading. Because of their different levels, the books selected were not a perfect fit for each individual child's reading levels, but I tried to find books that did fit the majority of the students' reading levels. Students who were unable to read independently read with a para or teacher assistance.

Time was also another limitation. In my classroom, I only had thirty minutes allotted daily for both read alouds and independent reading. This study moved quickly--often reading two chapters per day. This may not be enough time depending on the

students. The thought is that this was a starting point and the classroom teacher can make plans and decisions for what works best for their students.

### **Suggestions for Ongoing Research**

Finding authentic, engaging read alouds needs to occur intentionally. There are different theories on how students should be grouped to focus on the students' academic ability while trying to challenge them at the same time. Because of my small class sizes, I wasn't able to group them, but I feel with larger class sizes this would be ideal. My research did not discuss the best practice for grouping students, but further research could be done in this area to provide a more effective instruction for read alouds.

Another area that needs more ongoing research is the connection between fluency and comprehension, as well as how fluency can be taught during read alouds. There is a surplus of research that has been done on the connection between fluency and comprehension skills. I do feel that there could be more done in the area of connecting fluency to read alouds. Fluency is such a vital component to making progress in comprehension, so it would be necessary to plan for when working with read alouds.

### **Communicating Results**

I plan on sharing my project with my colleagues. My fellow teachers are excited to have a template for teaching read alouds to their students. Over the past couple years we have had discussion about read alouds, the time they consume, and questioned if there

was a benefit or not. I am excited to share the progress my students had while they read aloud with the teacher versus when they read independently.

### **Conclusion**

While reflecting on this project, I feel like I have grown as a reading educator. The amount of research on the topic was overwhelming at times and sometimes daunting. With much thought and purposeful intention, I was able to combine the research I gathered, align it with my districts expectations, and meet the needs of my fifth and sixth grade students into a comprehensive read aloud plan. There is always more to learn, but I feel that I am ready to share my findings with my colleagues. By working together, we can continue to build our reading strategies to help make passionate, confident, lifelong readers and learners.

**APPENDIX A:****READ ALOUD CURRICULUM****Novels**

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- Estes, E. (1944). *The Hundred Dresses*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Compant.
- Gardiner, J. R. (1980). *Stone Fox*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the Stars*. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Paulsen, G. (1987). *Hatchet*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Rawls, W. (1961). *Where the Red Fern Grows*. New York: Bantan Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

**Study Guides**

- Danielson, K. (1991). *On My Honor (Novel-Tie)*. Learning Links Inc.
- Germain, A. S. (2011). *Stone Fox Study Guide*. Teacher Created.
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