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Abstract

This research study aimed to determine if interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds when numerous factors are taken into consideration. It will be determined why interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension. Data was collected through numerous observations, interviews, assessments, and two read-aloud sessions with four second grade males. Based on the results from this study, it is proclaimed that interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds. The use of interactive read-alouds in a classroom setting will lead to higher levels of participation and engagement among students and eventually lead to student independence.

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Using Read-Alouds to
Reinforce Comprehension in Second Grade Students

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Abstract

This research study aimed to determine if interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds when numerous factors are taken into consideration. It will be determined why interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension. Data was collected through numerous observations, interviews, assessments, and two read-aloud sessions with four second grade males. Based on the results from this study, it is proclaimed that interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds. The use of interactive read-alouds in a classroom setting will lead to higher levels of participation and engagement among students and eventually lead to student independence.

Using Read-Alouds to Reinforce Comprehension in Second Grade Students

Comprehension is one of the most important aspects of literacy learning across all grade levels and subject areas. There are countless ways to gain comprehension inside as well as outside of the classroom and school environment. For students to be successful in understanding the texts they are reading, they need to not only be challenged while they are learning how to read but they also need to understand the thinking process used to make meaning. As stated by Beers (2003), “comprehension is both a product and a process, something that requires purposeful, strategic effort on the reader’s part” (p. 45). There are also a number of factors that affect a student’s comprehension. These factors need to be taken into consideration when planning and implementing effective instruction. Comprehension, because it is such an essential skill in the process of literacy learning, needs to be a product of explicit and direct teaching (Beers, 2003). Along with being frequently exposed to numerous comprehension strategies, students need to be taught how to use these different strategies during a read-aloud and be able to use them in regard to any text and in any subject area. Incorporating read-alouds into classrooms and daily reading routines is just one of these techniques to help students increase and stabilize their comprehension strategies and skills.

Read-alouds can be a successful part of a classrooms literacy block if used in the correct way. Kucer (2009) states, “teachers, regardless of the age of their students, should read to them. Students need to hear the sounds of language and the expression of ideas in forms they may not yet be able to read on their own” (p. 324). Students will learn comprehension strategies through classroom read-alouds, which they will then be able to apply to other reading activities and when reading independently. Through interactive read-alouds, students will also become active participants in their learning process and demonstrate how to use the comprehension strategies

they have learned. This topic is important because in an educational setting, all students will benefit from their knowledge of best comprehension strategies in addition to knowing when and how to practice them. Once familiar with this technique, students will also become more active participants in the classroom environment (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Teachers will be able to use this knowledge as well to narrow their lessons to focus on specific comprehension strategies. Without this research, students would not be actively participating in classroom read-alouds, which will reinforce their comprehension skills, and teachers would not be meeting the unique needs of each one of their students.

The purpose of this study was to determine if interactive read-alouds had a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds, when considering the several factors that affect students' comprehension. Research has shown that constructing meaning from a text during read-alouds is a social act and therefore I used several sources of data throughout my research. Through observations, interviews, two read-aloud sessions along with comprehension assessments of the participants, it was concluded that when taking into consideration the different factors that affect comprehension, interactive read-alouds are proven to have a greater impact on comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds. Based on these findings, there are multiple implications for teachers when planning and implementing an effective read aloud.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy is an ever changing term, which is a very intricate system that is comprised of how a person learns and acquires language skills and furthermore how that language is then used in the most successful manner. Cohen and Cowen (2010) define literacy as a “complex, multifaceted process that requires a wide variety of instructional approaches” (p. 6). They

express that literacy goes well beyond just basic knowledge of reading and writing, but knowing how to use this knowledge in all contexts. Students will use this knowledge and apply these literacy strategies in problem solving and critical thinking skills. They argue that a student's ability to take basic skills and apply them to higher order thinking is essential to being successful. Acquiring higher order thinking skills will enable students to "solve problems, to synthesize information into new creations, and to effectively make decisions that are based on solid understanding of surrounding conditions" (Cohen & Cowen, 2010, p. 11). On the road to becoming literate, students take many different avenues and use numerous experiences from their social environment to shape their understandings.

A student gains literacy skills through explicit learning accompanied with their own acquisition of knowledge (Gee, 2001). Additionally, Larson and Marsh (2005) state, "literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people" (p. 10). Literacy is a social act and the relationships between people are strongly linked to a person's literacy learning and acquisition. This specific literacy acquisition occurs differently for different students. More specifically, each student has the same opportunity to learn a specific skill, however, no two students learn in the same manner. Each student is unique to their method of literacy acquisition due to their previous social, cultural and educational exposures. These differences play an integral role in their acquisition of literacy. Their acquisition is affected by various perspectives that include their background knowledge and experiences, their discourse and how literacy skills are presented in their classroom environment. Teachers should differentiate literacy instruction and integrate social interactions within their classrooms as a means for promoting well-rounded learning experiences for all students.

Literacy learning and acquisition is also strongly linked to a person's oral and written language skills (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Oral and written language skills are essential to being a successful reader and gaining higher literacy skills. Oral language refers to a person's vocabulary skills, phonemic awareness skills, comprehension skills among many others. Written language refers to a person's ability to understand print, recognize letters and sounds and overall alphabet knowledge. A student's understanding of oral and written language skills go hand in hand. In most literacy experiences, such as participation in read-alouds, oral and written language are both present and students will need adequate knowledge on how to work with both simultaneously in order to be successful. In knowing that students learn best through meaningful and purposeful situations and experiences, teachers should keep this in mind when planning and executing their literacy instruction. Oral and written language skills are used in everyday activities in school and out of school as well as embedded within formal and informal instruction. Since there are many factors that effect a student's literacy acquisition, a more diverse approach to learning linked with meaningful experiences, student outcome can become universal.

After literacy skills have been either learned or acquired, students need to choose how and when to use these skills. Each social situation or text a person reads could potentially utilize literacy differently or elicit different thoughts. Once a student has encountered this, they can then decide how they want to go forward. When making meaning from a text, students utilize their prior knowledge, their different social identities and past experiences. Literacy skills are changed in different situations to make meaning from each encounter (Larson & Marsh, 2005; Goodman, 2001). Once students become more knowledgeable in these text encounters, they will be able to participate in higher level thinking, ranging from text connections to self-reflections.

It is concluded that most of what people know, including their literacy skills come from a combination of being both learned and acquired (Gee, 2001).

Acquiring and learning strong literacy skills is very much a social act. It is considered a social act mainly because teachers and students are active learners using language and literacy as tools for inquiry, communication and thinking. The socio-cultural theory supports this claim. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). This theory implies that with assistance, students will be able to accomplish difficult tasks that they are unlikely to accomplish when working independently. A difficult task such as comprehending a text would likely benefit from collaboration and interaction among peers. Comprehension strategies should be modeled and students will work together to learn the benefits of such strategies on their learning. Additionally, through active collaboration, students will learn how to verbalize their thinking and their thought process, which will be an influential skill.

The socio-cultural theory shifts learning from an individual process to placing a greater emphasis on group learning through collaboration. Gee (2002) explains that important literacy skills are learned through social, cultural and economic implications. Therefore, students are acquiring literacy through social interactions before, during and after school. Although there are times during a students' school day when individualized instruction is necessary, social interaction is beneficial in the learning process as a whole. Incorporating these social interactions into classroom instruction is essential to student learning and encouraging a strong

classroom community. It is also a chance for students to take responsibility for their learning, for their thought process and for making each reading experience a positive and meaningful one.

Read-alouds are a great example of a social activity that enables students to interact with their peers as well as their teacher while navigating through a text. Vygotsky (1978) supports this by stating, “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development and what they can do alone” (p. 85). When students work collaboratively together they are able to build upon common knowledge and discover new understandings together. Vygotsky (1978) explains, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). Integrating read-alouds into a daily classroom routine will encourage collaboration and reinforce comprehension.

Research Question

This study will support the socio-cultural theory because it will investigate the different ways students comprehend a text when they engage in an interactive read-aloud. Furthermore, this study will explore if using interactive read-alouds in the classroom, and making comprehension more of a social experience, will reinforce students’ comprehension of a text. Given that many different factors affect a student’s comprehension of a text, including students’ attitudes toward reading, this action research project asks, do interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on comprehension than a non-interactive read-aloud?

Literature Review

There are a number of reoccurring themes that emerge when researching the effectiveness of read-alouds, the influence they have on student comprehension and how they reinforce literacy instruction. The following literature review explores different perspectives on read-

alouds as well as what factors influence their use and effectiveness towards comprehension. Before focusing on read-alouds themselves, I will first explore the numerous factors that influence comprehension. Next, I will explain the role that metacognition plays when students' are reading independently or participating in read-alouds. Then, I will explore the term interaction, as it is used in countless research articles as having a positive influence on literacy instruction and learning, especially in the area of read-alouds. Finally, I will investigate the benefits of using interactive read-louds in the classroom as a regular part of literacy instruction and what ways it reinforces students' comprehension and use of comprehension strategies. The research indicates that interactive read-alouds are a positive addition in improving literacy learning and reinforcing student comprehension.

Factors that Influence Comprehension

Comprehension is a complex term that greatly affects literacy learning. Sargent, Smith, Hill, Morrison and Burgess (2008) define comprehension as “the understanding of text and often demands explanations, interpretations, applications, perspectives, empathizing, and self-monitoring” (p. 362). Essentially, it is the opportunity for a student to make meaning from a text. If students are not making meaning from what they are reading, it is unlikely that they will be proficient in higher-order thinking or be able to analyze a text on a greater level. There are a number of comprehension strategies that teachers and students can pull from when attempting to make meaning from a text. Comprehension strategies are utilized before, during, and after reading. These strategies can be included in a countless number of activities, which teachers integrate into their daily literacy instruction (Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Santoro et al, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001; Stahl, 2004). Also, the specific comprehension strategy used in each instance depends on the purpose for reading

(Braten & Stromso, 2003; Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Janssen, Braaksma & Rijlaarsdam, 2006; Scharlach, 2008). There is a huge push for more effective comprehension instruction in today's classrooms, but before this can be successfully implemented, it is important that we understand the factors that affect students' comprehension and how these factors tie together. These various factors have been called a framework for comprehension (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001).

Vocabulary is one factor that affects comprehension, no matter the age or grade level of the student. According to Joshi (2005), a person's vocabulary and vocabulary knowledge are strongly linked to the number of words they are exposed to on a daily basis. This knowledge starts at a very young age and is constantly added to. Joshi (2005) states, "generally, children acquire about ten new words per day from the time they are two years old and will acquire approximately 14,000 words by the time they are six" (p. 212). A student's vocabulary and vocabulary knowledge or lack thereof is imperative in making meaning from a text (Joshi, 2005; Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008). This theory is supported by a study conducted by Ricketts, Nation and Bishop (2007) which found that if students are unable to understand a specific word while they are reading, they will have difficulty in using context clues or inferring the words meaning based on the rest of the sentence. Additionally, their research found that if students are unable to read a word or understand its meaning, they will have a difficult time making meaning from the text as a whole, thus greatly affecting their comprehension.

Another factor that affects comprehension is a student's background knowledge. All students begin reading a text with a different set of knowledge or skills (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lowrance, 2004; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001; Stahl, 2004). Furthermore, Smolkin and Donovan (2001) emphasized that while reading, students are expected to use their prior background knowledge and make connections to their own lives. Students should not only be

making connections to themselves, but connections to other texts as well (Braten and Stromso, 2003). The main goal of students activating their prior knowledge is to make their comprehension more meaningful (Berne, 2004; Cakir, 2008; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001; Stahl, 2004). Bitter, O'Day, Gubbins and Socias (2009) emphasize the importance of activating prior knowledge by stating, "meaning exists not in the text itself, but rather must be created by the reader interacting with the text" (p. 19). To achieve this goal, they should be encouraged to use not only their own knowledge but the new knowledge extracted from the text to construct meaning.

Interestingly, Smolkin and Donovan (2001) have found that student's background knowledge can surface false information, making it "detrimental to the children's learning from text" (p. 109). Their research indicated that background knowledge might be wrong for a number of different reasons. One reason being that the student is basing their knowledge off of something they once saw on TV, which in actuality is not reality. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) also concluded that this incorrect knowledge might be due to their inability to distinguish between a make-believe story and an informational text. Stahl (2004) reinforced that students may be exposed to texts and genres that they are unfamiliar with, due to their limited background knowledge. It is essential that students use specific comprehension strategies to assist in their meaning making process when navigating through unfamiliar texts and genres.

Stahl (2004) includes a number of comprehension strategies with specific activities for children to engage in which can be used when reading multiple genres. Some of these strategies include the following: picture walks, literature webbing, and the five-finger retell strategy, among others. She explains that picture walks will not only activate prior knowledge but will help students develop a clear prediction about the story. She further explains that literature

webbing is a successful strategy because it will allow students to make predictions and additionally enable them to confirm or revise their predictions during and after reading. Finally, she explains that the five-finger retell strategy is useful because it provides students with a clear, concise picture of important story elements (Stahl, 2004). In addition to the strategies explained by Stahl's (2004) research, there is a plethora of comprehension strategies that have been researched and deemed successful in comprehension activities. It is important to note that these researchers have also found that comprehension strategies can be used in independent reading as well as during read-alouds to aid students in making meaning from difficult texts (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Santoro et al, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001; Stahl, 2004).

A third factor that affects comprehension is student engagement in the reading task. A number of researchers have explored this concept due to the fact that reading and reading engagement is largely a social act (Duncan, 2009; Joshi, 2005; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004). Braten and Stromso (2003) state that students read for different purposes, depending on the text they are reading. They also state that oftentimes readers will set a personal goal to achieve while reading. These reading goals will also differ depending on the text and the reading task. Duncan (2009) supports this concept in his research as well. He found that there are external as well as internal factors that are included in a person's reading engagement and are both influences on that level of engagement.

Duncan (2009) defines external factors as motivating factors. These factors include "keeping up with current affairs, getting a good job and helping your children, as well as situational factors such as 'having nothing to do' or having too little or too much 'time'" (p. 320). These are factors that will motivate a person to read. Additionally, he states that "internal factors relating to reading explore ideas such as enjoyment, experiencing emotion, escaping

emotion, ‘feeling inside’ a text, forgetting everything and experiencing something new” (p.320). Similarly, in a study by Schoot, Horsley and Lieshout (2010) they discovered that when students are actively engaged and can imagine themselves within a story and essentially become one of the characters, it was much easier to read and ultimately to comprehend.

In a study by Braten and Stromso (2003), students were asked to participate in two different reading activities, one included reading a self-selected text, one that the student would be reading in school to keep up with other classwork and the other was strictly read to answer comprehension questions that followed. Braten and Stromso (2003) ultimately concluded that students set different goals based on the reading task and therefore use different comprehension strategies and processing strategies to make meaning from the various texts. No matter the type of text, if a student is not engaged in the text or the reading task, the comprehension piece will be lacking.

Metacognition

Research indicates that metacognition is an important variable that affects the success of independent reading as well as participation in read-alouds. Metacognition is also an important piece in a student’s comprehension process. Metacognition refers to a student’s ability to think about their own thinking process and to understand what they are thinking and how it obtains to their comprehension (Braten & Stromso, 2003; Ozler, 2008; Santoro et al, 2008; Scharlach, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001). Researchers believe that students’ ability to internalize their thinking process and how they come to conclusions is just as important as being able to successfully comprehend a text.

The use and implementation of metacognitive strategies is a huge benefit to students in all aspects of literacy learning. Nash-Ditzel (2010) supports this claim by stating that students

will benefit if they are able to not only understand their thinking, but also able to monitor their own progress. Nash-Ditzel (2010) found that if students are able to monitor their progress, they will in turn be able to revise or refine their strategies to have the most successful outcome. Janssen et al., (2006) enforce the importance of metacognition this by saying that students will also develop feelings and emotions towards specific characters and will be able to verbalize these feelings as well. In their study they found that when students were encouraged to talk as much as possible and were told that there were no wrong answers when it pertained to their own thinking process, the students were much more successful (Janssen et al., 2006). Hilden and Pressley (2007) call this process self-regulating and will believe it will ultimately make students in charge of their own learning. Finally, Berne (2004) reinforces and builds on this by stating that when students are consciously aware of their thinking process, they will also become aware of what is effective in their learning and what is not. Ultimately, students will become proficient in utilizing only strategies that benefit their learning.

Students should be encouraged to use their metacognitive strategies in a whole-group discussion as well. Nash-Ditzel (2010), Scharlach (2008) and Hilden and Pressley (2007) call this opportunity a think-aloud. During a think-aloud, there are a number of metacognitive strategies that are elicited by students (Cazir, 2008; Nash-Ditzel, 2010). Nash-Ditzel (2010) explores these strategies through a closer lens. Nash-Ditzel (2010) conducted a study where think-alouds were used to examine which types of metacognitive strategies students used when processing a text. It is important to note that the students participating in this study were first taught a number of strategies to use during a think-aloud and the value of each was outlined. Nash-Ditzel's (2010) study concluded that the most frequently used strategies by the students were making inferences, activating background knowledge and finally, connecting schema.

Similarly, the studies conducted by Scharlach (2008) and Hilden and Pressley (2007), both concluded that think-alouds were most effective when teachers modeled and explicitly taught a strategy while reading, and verbalized the entire process as they navigated through it. The teachers who used this process in their classrooms expected and encouraged students to not only use think-alouds during a read-aloud but also during classroom discussions of texts.

Although the research by Janssen et al. (2006) did not discover this to be true, it is essential to point out that they mentioned the possibility of a downfall to always using think-alouds as a means of assessing a student's metacognitive process. They stated that some students might be too shy or timid to verbalize their thinking during a discussion. They hypothesized a number of reasons for this including, fear of being wrong, having a different opinion or response than someone else, and lack of effective communicative skills (Janssen et al., 2006). Similarly, the results of Hilden and Pressley's (2007) study yielded teacher concerns as well. Some of these concerns include classroom management and how it fits into the think-aloud process, appropriate assessment for think-alouds, teacher attitudes and qualifications in using this method in their classrooms and finally, time management.

It is concluded that using metacognition will do much more than just allow students to verbalize their thinking process. Guterman's (2002) research established that "metacognitive awareness guidance created commitment, involvement, connection, obligation and responsibility" (p. 296). Finally, Berne (2004) found that metacognition will allow students to know what areas they excel in, but additionally, will be able to pinpoint where their areas of need lie. Thus, students will be able to work alongside their teachers in making sure these needs are being met.

Interaction between Teacher and Student

Interaction is a key component in a classrooms literacy instruction. More specifically, interaction is needed to incorporate read-alouds effectively into the classroom routine. Research has shown that read-alouds are more successful when there is an interaction between the student and the teacher while attempting to make meaning from a text (Bitter et al., 2009; Hoffman, 2011; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Santoro et al, 2008; Scharlach, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2003).

In many instances, researchers have found that the interaction between the teacher and student begins with the teachers use of scaffolding effective strategies and over time gradually releasing the responsibility onto the student (Bitter et al., 2009; Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Scharlach, 2008; Stahl, 2004). Teachers will ultimately educate their students on how to utilize what they have learned independently. Pentimonti and Justice (2010) reinforce this approach by stating that students will not only use effective strategies but they will become proficient in knowing in what instances and in what texts it is appropriate to use them as well. The goal of this approach is to enable students to use the strategies they have learned along with metacognition to provide them with more meaningful learning.

The scaffolding approach may take many forms. A study conducted by Pentimonti and Justice (2010), required teachers to use various scaffolding strategies as a part of their classroom read-aloud. For the purpose of this study, the strategies were broken up into two categories, high level of support and low level of support strategies. High level of support strategies were to be used when their main purpose was to help students with a task they knew would be difficult for them to master. Low level of support strategies were to be used when the task at hand was easy for the student to master. The results from this study found that teachers were using more low

support strategies in their classroom read-alouds, which would not benefit the diverse needs of all of their students. These results show differentiation as a major component in the interaction process that takes place between the teacher and student during a read-aloud. In a similar study performed by Bitter et al. (2009), teachers were also required to use high levels of support and low levels of support in their scaffolding approach. The researchers measured students reading achievement and linked it to the level of support they received from their teacher. It was concluded that the teacher's use of high level support, including questioning and discussion yielded gains in reading achievement from their students (Bitters et al., 2009).

As a means for supporting student connections, teachers implement different methods of participation to motivate their learners. A study by Sipe (2002) explored the role that students' participation had on their ability to comprehend a text during a read-aloud. Sipe (2002) called this "expressive, performative engagement" (p. 476). Sipe (2002) explains these types of expressive engagement as dramatizing, talking back, critiquing and controlling, inserting, and taking over. In order to understand the effectiveness of expressive engagement, it is essential to recognize what each of them entails and what effect it has on the student.

Dramatizing refers to students being encouraged to act out or perform a certain part of a story, which can be done in verbal or nonverbal ways. This type of engagement allows students to physically make meaning of what is happening in the story. Talking back is when students are encouraged to talk back to the story, or in some instances, to a specific character within that story. This type of engagement enables students to share their thoughts and feelings aloud, thus using their metacognitive and cognitive skills. Critiquing and controlling refers to the students' ability to offer alternatives to the story. For example, students can make the story more personal, connect it to their own lives and experiences or take ownership of the story or characters. The

story comes alive for them because they have become one of the characters. Finally, taking over refers to students having full creativity in their own learning process. Students are not required to fully understand a story, but rather invited to express their feelings and thoughts in a creative manner. Sipe's (2002) study proved that teachers' use of these strategies in a read-aloud setting was beneficial to students' overall comprehension, encouraged students to become actively involved and made it a pleasurable learning experience. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) support this claim by adding another type of engagement to the discussion. This type of engagement is called questioning the author. In this instance, students are invited and encouraged to question the author's feelings, decisions and thoughts while writing. Along with Sipe's (2002) research, this too has proven effective in students' comprehension and engagement in read-alouds.

Some researchers have found that silent or independent reading is not as effective for some reading tasks due to the lack of interaction between the teacher and student. Hale, Hawkins, Sheeley, Reynolds, Jenkins, Schmitt and Martin's (2010) research found that it is difficult for teachers to monitor if students are actually reading when they take part in silent reading activities. If students are not reading thoroughly with metacognition, their comprehension of the story will be compromised. Hale et al. (2010) further discovered that this was most common in students with lower reading skills and students who were not interested in the text. Hale, Skinner, Williams, Hawkins, Neddenriep and Dizer (2007) support this claim by stating that it is more difficult to monitor students reading abilities and efficacy in reading a text in its entirety when participating in silent reading. Furthermore, teachers will have difficulties in monitoring progress and addressing concerns that may arise (Hale et al., 2007). This lack of a connection between the teacher and student is due to the nature of this type of reading.

It is concluded that interaction between the teacher and student during a read-aloud resulted in comprehension gains as well as advances in student participation. Although the teacher is ultimately educating the student on how to be successful independently, the read-aloud should remain an interactive component in literacy instruction.

Utilizing Successful Read-Alouds in the Classroom

Read-alouds have been proven very effective in classrooms for a number of reasons. However, it is essential to understand that their effectiveness is dependent on the way they are used in instruction. It is important that teachers have a plan and are knowledgeable themselves of the value of read-alouds as a tool in aiding classroom literacy instruction. There are a number of different approaches and strategies for read-alouds that teachers are using to incorporate them into their daily classroom routine.

It has been found that read-alouds can be successful for using many different types of texts. Researchers have found that more schools are using expository texts in their instruction for a number of reasons (Santoro et al. 2008, Smolkin & Donovan, 2001; Smolkin & Donovan, 2003). Santoro et al. (2008) found that using read-alouds is a great opportunity to expose students to expository or informational texts. Students need to learn the value of these books and the plethora of information that can be extracted from them. Santoro et al. (2008) further offer that using a KWL chart during these types of read-alouds is an effective tool. These charts provide teachers with what the students already know about a given topic and what they want to learn. It also gives students a chance to monitor their own learning and assist them in making meaning from a difficult type of text. Furthermore, this strategy elicits active engagement because students are constantly seeking new information to add to what they have learned and to confirm or revise any predictions they had made. Smolkin and Donovan (2003) support the

importance of using informational texts stating that, “early access to the ideas, vocabulary, syntax, and text structures of informational texts helps prepare children for the time in school when the emphasis in reading instruction shifts from learning to read to reading to learn” (p. 27). Smolkin and Donovan (2003) emphasize that the use of informational texts introduces students to complex subjects, such as political, global and societal issues.

A study by Smolkin and Donovan (2001) focused on different groups of students being exposed to either an informational read-aloud or a story book read-aloud. The students were then asked comprehension questions and asked to verbalize what they were thinking about while they were listening. This study concluded that informational and story book read-alouds elicit different thoughts and responses from students. Additionally, Smolkin and Donovan (2003) note that more comprehension strategies were used with the informational text than with the story book. Informational texts are not only helpful in exposing students to new topics and subjects embedded throughout, but they also encourage students to use higher-level thinking and utilize comprehension strategies.

The method teachers’ use for utilizing read-alouds in their classroom instruction is also an important component in making them successful. A study conducted by Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) found that the effectiveness of classroom read-alouds depended on how well the teachers read-aloud and what they executed during these read-alouds. Their study researched three different read-aloud styles as well as how these different styles influenced comprehension acquisition among first and third grade students. The three read-aloud styles used in this study were just reading, performance reading and interactional reading. Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) hypothesized that the outcomes of using these different read-aloud styles would differ because each one would provoke different thoughts and feelings from students. Additionally,

they would extract different levels of student engagement. It is important to identify exactly what the teachers did during these read-alouds to fully understand the impact they had on the students. The just reading style refers to only reading through the story, teachers were not permitted to ask or answer any questions nor could they engage in discussions. The performance reading style refers to reading through the story; however teachers were permitted to answer questions but only before and after the reading took place. The interactional style required an interaction between the teacher and students all throughout the reading of the story. Brabham and Lynch- Brown (2002) found that comprehension of the story was higher from the interactional style reading group, followed by the performance reading group and finally, the least comprehension came from the just reading group. They concluded that although the interactional style has more disruptions than the other two reading styles, due to engagement through questioning and discussion, is more beneficial to students' participation and overall comprehension.

Many researchers have found that permitting interruptions is essential to a successful read-aloud. They stress that these interruptions should not be seen as disruptions (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Hoffman, 2011; Santoro et al., 2008, Sipe, 2002; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001). The research of Hoffman (2011) focused on incorporating critical literacy skills and analyzing texts during classroom read-alouds, thus also reinforcing that interaction is an integral component of read-alouds. Hoffman (2011) called these higher level literacy practices. This research found that students at a very young age are capable of higher-level thinking with a text with guidance from the teacher. The teacher's job is to allow multiple interpretations, discuss misunderstandings and answer any questions that arise. At the start of this particular study, the teacher required students to raise their hands if they had something to ask or comment on during

a read-aloud and she did not allow students to speak out. This study evolved from the teacher requiring students to raise their hands to allowing them to speak out when they wanted, as long as they did so in a quiet voice. Hoffman (2011) concluded that this small transition greatly improved participation as well as comprehension from students. Sipe (2002) supports this claim with his previously mentioned study explaining expressive engagement. This engagement is not seen as a disruption to instruction, but rather an invitation for participation in learning.

Stahl (2004) supports the notion that interruptions during read-alouds should be embraced through teachers' use of questioning. Stahl's (2004) study found that teacher questioning is essential to positive interaction during a text. This study focused on four different types of questions teachers could rely on during a read-aloud. These included right there questions, which could be found right away from the text, putting it together or think and search questions which require students to search throughout the text for the answer, author and you questions which require students to make inferences based on what is read and finally, on my own questions which encourage students to draw on their background knowledge and prior experience to answer. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) support question use by stating that student questioning during read-alouds is very important, however teachers should enforce that all questions might not be answered in the text and students will have to discover these answers elsewhere. Furthermore, Hoffman (2011) believes that student answers do not necessarily have to match teacher answers to specific questions and that multiple interpretations should be embraced.

There are numerous benefits that come from using read-alouds in the classroom to enhance literacy instruction. Duncan (2009) as well as Santoro et al. (2008) explains that read-alouds are helpful with students who are struggling with decoding skills and students who are not

fluent readers. Additionally, this research found that listening to a text instead of attempting to read it word by word helps with overall comprehension (Hoffman, 2011; Santoro et al., 2008; Scharlach, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2003). Furthermore, researchers found that read-alouds supports vocabulary knowledge because of the interaction between teacher and student. Through this interaction, there is an opportunity to make meaning from difficult words together, thus making the text as a whole easier to understand (Joshi, 2005; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Santoro et al., 2008). Pentimonti and Justice (2010) reinforce this by stating “children’s participation in read-alouds that feature strategies such as active engagement through questioning and repeated readings can have positive effects on young children’s vocabulary growth” (p. 248). The research of Smolkin and Donovan, (2003) concluded that becoming comfortable to speak out in class and be an active member of the classroom discussion as being another identifiable benefit of interactive read-alouds.

Read-alouds have the opportunity to be an essential part of the literacy instruction in any classroom and across any subject area if used correctly (Santoro et al., 2008). Read-alouds have been proven to positively affect students’ comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, by removing the stress of having to decode a difficult text on their own, students develop and engage their metacognitive processes as well during this process, thus helping them grow as a learner. It is imperative that teachers make students feel comfortable during interactions and embrace their differences when utilizing read-alouds. Finally, teachers need to understand that incorporating purposeful discussions, questioning, and inviting active participation is essential for read-alouds to be a success.

Method

Context

Research for this study occurred in the Deane Central School District (pseudonym), which is located in a large suburb in Western New York. This district is bordered by Lake Ontario to the north, Wayne County to the east, Irondequoit Bay to the west and finally, the town of Penfield to the south. The Deane Central School District is made up of seven elementary schools, two middle schools and two high schools. This district as a whole serves approximately 9,000 students kindergarten through grade twelve (New York Department of Education, 2010). There are many opportunities for community involvement within this school district which include full access to the public library, aquatic center, and a variety of public parks.

This study took place in one of the seven elementary schools within the Deane Central School District. Vera Elementary School (pseudonym) is a kindergarten through fifth grade building which accommodates approximately 475 students. The average class size at each grade level is 22 students. Of this student population, 8% are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices. The racial/ethnic origin of the school is predominately made up of 94% Caucasian students. It is also comprised of 1% African American, 2% Hispanic or Latino and 3% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. Vera Elementary has an annual attendance rate of 94% and 0% student suspension rate (New York State Department of Education, 2010).

Within the Vera Elementary School, the research for this study occurred in one of the literacy specialist's classrooms. This classroom consists of Mr. Bradley (pseudonym), who is one of two literacy specialists at this school. On average, there are between two and four students receiving services in his classroom at any given time. Mr. Bradley provides

instructional intervention to students in kindergarten through grade five. Students in grades one through five are primarily referred to his classroom through the Grand Rounds process. This process is tri-annual, which occurs in September, January and June. The Grand Rounds process includes a school-wide meeting following the administration of Benchmark testing to all students. These assessments include AIMSweb TEL (Tests of Early Literacy), Reading Curriculum Based Measure (RCBM) and the NWEA Descartes results. From this assessment data and through additional observations of the student, a decision is made as to whether intervention is needed. Kindergarten students are screened using the AIMSweb TEL and the Kincaid Scale to identify low performing students, which indicates who needs further literacy support (Alessandra, 2012). The racial/ethnic origin of all the students that receive literacy support is Caucasian, which includes four students at the kindergarten level, seven at the first grade level, five at the second grade level, three at the third grade level, three at the fourth grade level and eight at the fifth grade level. At first, second and fifth grade levels Mr. Bradley's schedule supports two twenty minute sessions with two different groups of students, which allows for small group size. At the kindergarten, third and fourth grade levels, each session is forty minutes with the given groups.

Participants

This study was conducted in Mr. Bradley's classroom. He is one of the two literacy specialists at Vera Elementary School. Throughout my study, I interviewed as well as observed him to obtain information about his teaching practices and the participants in the study. Mr. Bradley holds a dual certification in Literacy K-12 and Regular Education K-6. He has been one of the school's literacy specialists since September 2010. Prior to that, he provided direct instruction and instructional support to students in an Option-3 6:1:1 day treatment program for nine years. As a literacy specialist, his job responsibilities include providing direct ELA

instruction and designing interventions for students using the response to intervention (RTI) model (Alessandra, 2012).

There were four target student participants in this study. The students in this study are all currently in second grade at Vera Elementary School. All of the second grade students are in different homeroom classrooms and receive literacy support from Mr. Bradley. These four participants meet five days a week for twenty minute sessions for instruction.

The first participant is Luke (pseudonym) who is an eight year old Caucasian male. He is currently enrolled in a general education classroom. Besides reading intervention, Luke does not receive any additional support during the school day. Luke is an outgoing individual and is enthusiastic when engaging in reading activities within Mr. Bradley's classroom. He is willing to share ideas and is able to verbalize his response and thought process. Luke enjoys reading because he likes to learn new information (Scharlach, 2006).

The second participant is Bob (pseudonym) who is a seven year old Caucasian male. He is currently enrolled in a general education classroom. Besides reading intervention, Bob does not receive any additional support during the school day. Bob is an energetic and outgoing student. He is willing to learn and is an active participant in all literacy activities and assignments he is given. He is a productive worker and finishes assignments promptly. Bob encourages his peers and provides them assistance when needed. He enjoys reading because he feels that reading makes a person smart (Scharlach, 2006).

The third participant is Striker (pseudonym) who is a seven year old Caucasian male. He is currently enrolled in a general education classroom. Besides reading intervention, Striker does not receive any additional support during the school day. Striker is a very quiet and fairly shy individual. He is hesitant about sharing ideas and verbalizing his thoughts throughout his

reading sessions. He does not typically engage in discussion with the teacher or his peers, unless he is prompted to do so. He enjoys reading because he wants to learn new topics (Scharlach, 2006).

The fourth participant is Johnny (pseudonym), who is an eight year old Caucasian male. He is currently enrolled in a general education classroom. In addition to reading intervention, Johnny receives speech therapy two days a week for twenty minute sessions. Johnny is an outgoing individual who loves to learn. He is being dismissed from his reading services within the next couple of weeks. He enjoys reading because it enables him to learn new and interesting topics (Scharlach, 2006).

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am working on obtaining my Master's Degree in Literacy (Birth-12th grade) and I hold a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (1st -6th grade) from SUNY Geneseo. I currently have a certification in Early Childhood and Childhood Education. Through my substitute teaching work during this past school year, I have had the opportunity to work with Mr. Bradley's students on numerous occasions, allowing the students to build a rapport with me. During this study, I took on both the privileged, active observer role and the passive observer role (Mills, 2011). According to Mills (2011), the privileged, active observer has the opportunity to observe "during a time when they are not directly responsible for the teaching of a lesson" (p. 75). Furthermore, taking on the privileged, active observer role provided an opportunity to "withdraw, stand back, and watch what is happening during a particular teaching episode, moving in and out of the role of teacher, aide and observer" (Mills, 2011, p. 75). To begin this study I provided students with a brief review of specific comprehension strategies that will supplement the read-aloud. Additionally,

in taking on the passive observer role I was given the opportunity to shift my focus from the daily responsibilities of the teacher to data collection (Mills, 2011). The passive observer role allowed me to strictly observe the students reactions to learning, specifically the read-aloud.

Method

To successfully complete this study, it required me to collect a variety of data. I observed Mr. Bradley's classroom a total of three times and participated in my study two times. The observations were approximately 30 minutes in length, enough to observe each second grade session. During these observations, I noted the students' responses to instruction, attitude toward reading, use of comprehension strategies and engagement and participation in read-alouds. On the first visit to the classroom, I provided the participating students with a ten question questionnaire about reading. The questions were open-ended, which provided students an opportunity for authentic answers without boundaries. Next, I observed the students' response to instruction, specifically comprehension instruction during one of Mr. Bradley's lessons. These observations provided me with a clear understanding of the comprehension strategies that students are exposed to and their ability to use them when reading a text. As a means to learn how read-alouds are incorporated in this classroom, I also observed the students response to a read-aloud initiated by Mr. Bradley. Furthermore, it was important for me to obtain information from Mr. Bradley regarding his thoughts on the effectiveness of read-alouds. Through acquiring this information, I learned how he integrates read-alouds with comprehension strategies throughout his instruction.

After this initial information was obtained, I began my instruction, where I engaged the second grade participants in a read-aloud. There were two sessions of read-alouds used in this study, which both were used to assess comprehension. During the first session, the second grade

participants engaged in an interactive read-aloud of a non-fiction text. I chose making connections and predictions as the two comprehension strategies as the focus of this study. Before reading, the students and I engaged in a brief review and overview of these two comprehension strategies so that they would be clear in their mind throughout the read-aloud. This interactive reading included probing, questioning and discussion throughout the course of the read-aloud, thus requiring active participation. The participants were probed on how to use these two strategies during the read-aloud. Additionally, prior to reading the text to the participants, I completed a picture walk with them where they made predictions about the text itself. Next, while I was reading the text to the participants, I stopped frequently to ask questions, had students make additional predictions and encouraged students to make connections to the text. After the reading of the text, asked students to reflect on the context of the text, what they had learned and also encouraged them to confirm or revise their initial predictions. We then actively drew conclusions together from the text and engaged in a five finger retell in order to informally assess their comprehension.

The second read-aloud session contained a basic read-aloud of a non-fiction text, which did not incorporate interaction between teacher and students. I did not complete a picture walk with the students this time before reading the text nor did I engage the participants in any kind of discussion prior, during or after the reading of the text. Additionally, the participants were required to listen to the read-aloud without asking any questions or making any predictions as well.

After completion of each session of read-alouds with the second grade participants, I assessed their comprehension in order to conclude which read-aloud style was most beneficial to

the students' comprehension. These two assessments consisted of five questions that included right-there, think and search, author and me and on my own questions.

Quality and Credibility of Research

In doing this research it was important to ensure the quality and credibility of the study. Mills (2011) defines credibility as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). I took several measures in order to ensure credibility throughout my study. I used peer debriefing throughout my study by continuously engaging in collaboration with my critical colleagues (Mills, 2011). Collaboration with my colleagues allowed me to reflect on the work that I have produced as well as make needed revisions. My critical colleagues also provided me with additional information and insights into my study. I also practiced triangulation to ensure credibility throughout my study. I used numerous sources of data and compared them in order to make conclusions (Mills, 2011). Finally, I collected data items that are defined by Mills (2011) as “slice of life data items” (p. 105). These items include documents, post assessments, interviews and video recordings.

Transferability was also ensured throughout this study. Transferability refers to the researcher’s understanding that the data and information used within this study is context based. The researcher will also need to understand that generalizations cannot be made to other contexts and groups of people outside of this study (Mills, 2011). I ensured transferability by providing detailed descriptions of each aspect of the study that the data is used.

I guaranteed dependability throughout this study as well. Dependability refers to the study’s level of stability (Mills, 2011). I ensured this by establishing an “audit trail” (p. 105). Establishing an audit trail refers to using an external person(s), such as my critical colleagues to

observe my data collection process and interpretations of the results. Utilizing my critical colleagues throughout my study enabled me to make additions and revisions to my work as well. Dependability is also evident through the use of triangulation by overlapping methods of data collection. This method is effective because it highlights the idea that “the weakness of one is compensated by the strength of another” (Mills, 2011, p. 104).

Finally, confirmability was also evident throughout my study. The confirmability of this study refers to the objectivity or neutrality of the data that is collected and used (Mills, 2011). This was ensured through my use of triangulation and reflexivity. I practiced reflexivity by actively taking accurate notes and observations during each stage of my study. I then reflected on these notes and observations and determined which can be incorporated into my study without including assumptions or biases. This action provided my study and research with objectivity.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants

Before conducting this study, it was essential to receive permission from all of the participants. In order to ensure the rights of these participants, I provided Mr. Bradley with an informed consent form and the three participants with parental permission forms. The parental permission forms explained the purpose of the study and required their signature in order for their child to participate. The parents were also reassured that their child’s name would be anonymous and any data collected would not be attributed back to their child. In addition to the parental permission, I received verbal assent from the four student participants involved in the study by asking them if they were willing to participate in this study. The school in which the study took place, along with all of the participants’ names were replaced with pseudonyms and confidentiality was guaranteed.

Data Collection

There were multiple forms of data collected throughout this study. I engaged in active observation in Mr. Bradley's classroom. Through this method of data collection, I was able to see how the students interacted in the classroom and observed their response to instruction. In addition to observations, I also took detailed field notes and descriptions of everything that I am observed. These field notes enabled me to reflect and provide adequate instruction to the participants. These notes also helped me in comprising the post-assessment that was administered after the read-alouds. I also conducted an interview with Mr. Bradley, which consisted of 14 open-ended questions. These questions encompassed background knowledge, job responsibilities, instructional methods and strategies and attitudes towards certain instruction practices. I feel that the information obtained from this interview provided me with the insight needed to carry out a successful study. I also provided students with a ten question survey, which was retrieved from Scharlach's (2008) study, regarding their reading habits and general attitudes toward reading. Video recordings were another data source I used throughout this study. As I engaged in two different read-aloud sessions with the second grade participants, I used video recordings of the sessions to reflect on the instructional approach. Additionally, the video recordings of the read-alouds enabled me to reflect on student performance and reaction to instruction. Finally, I provided students in both read-aloud sessions with a post-assessment comprised of five questions, which was used to assess their comprehension of the read-aloud text. This assessment determined which style of read-aloud was most effective to the students overall comprehension of the text.

Data Analysis

After all of my data had been collected, it was necessary for me to organize and score all the data. First, I studied the teacher interview (see Appendix A) and student questionnaires (see Appendix B) to gain insight into the students' and teacher attitudes towards reading, read-alouds and comprehension. Next, I typed up all of my field notes that had been taken during my observations in order to make sure they were clear and coherent. Then, I watched the video tapes from the two read-aloud sessions I provided and took field notes based on what I observed on the tapes. Next, I scored the two comprehension assessments, one from the interactive read-aloud and one from the non-interactive read-aloud (see Appendices C & D). The comprehension assessments were comprised of four questions, one of each right there, author and me, think and search, and on my own questions. The answers to these two assessments were scored based on appropriate answers to the text that was read. Finally, I studied the post interview I conducted with each of the participants following the read-aloud sessions (see Appendix E).

After scoring and organizing all of the data, it was necessary to then code the data in order to find patterns and meaning throughout the data collected (Mills, 2011). Reading through my field notes, student questionnaires, teacher interview and student answers to the comprehension assessments, I was successful in discovering emergent themes among the data. The recurring themes from my data were student attitudes toward reading, comprehension, and interaction. I coded my data a total of three times. The first time I just read the data to refresh my memory on all that was completed throughout the study. The second time I read through my data, I began to consider possible themes that I could see emerging and thinking about how all of my data tied together. Finally, the third time I read through all of my data, I wrote down key words and thoughts I had while I was reading on sticky notes. Following this final read-through

I put similar data together and placed the sticky notes into different categories. I ultimately narrowed the data down to three distinct themes. My data will be presented through these three themes: the effect of students' reading attitudes on their comprehension, utilizing before, during, and after reading strategies to help comprehension, and the impact of interaction during read-alouds on comprehension.

Findings and Discussion

Comprehension is an important component of literacy because it is the ability for students to understand and make meaning from what they are reading. Comprehension is an essential component in every grade level and across all subject areas. It is vital that students have a strong sense of their own comprehension skills but also of comprehension strategies that can be utilized throughout numerous reading experiences. Interactive read-alouds are just one way that teachers can reinforce comprehension with their students during their classroom instruction. This research study explored how comprehension is reinforced through interactive read-alouds as opposed to using traditional or non-interactive read-alouds. Within the data that was collected throughout my study, there were distinct themes that emerged. These themes make it evident that there are many different factors that affect a students' comprehension of a text and that these factors should be taken into account when planning effective instruction. The themes that were found among my data are the effect of students' reading attitudes on their comprehension, utilizing before, during, and after reading strategies to help comprehension,⁶ and the impact of interaction during read-alouds on comprehension. My data is presented in quantitative results as well as qualitative results.

The quantitative results obtained from this research study are shown in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2. Figure 1.1 outlines the two comprehension assessments as comprehension

assessment one and two. Comprehension assessment one was used following the interactive read-aloud and comprehension assessment two was used following the non-interactive read-aloud. Each assessment consisted of four questions that were based on the information in the books used for the read-alouds. Each assessment used one right-there question, one think and search question, one author and me question as well as one on my own question. A right-there question is a type of question where the answer is located in the text and is typically easy to find. The words in the question are also typically the same words found within the text. A think and search question is one where the answer is also found within the text however, the reader is required to put together more than one piece of information or search different places throughout the book to complete the answer. An author and me question is a question where the answer is not found within the text. The reader is required to think about the connection between what they already know along with what they learned from the text to answer the question. Finally, an on my own question is also a question where the answer is not found within the text. The reader is required to use their prior knowledge and own experiences to successfully answer the question. On some occasions, this question can be answered vaguely without reading the text. The importance of differentiating questions is supported by Stahl's (2004) research which states, "question answering can lead to an improvement in finding information in text and deeper processing of text" (p. 600). The questions for this assessment were meant to start out simple and gradually become more difficult in order to gauge student comprehension of the two read-alouds. The participants' results on the comprehension assessments are shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. Student Results on Comprehension Assessments

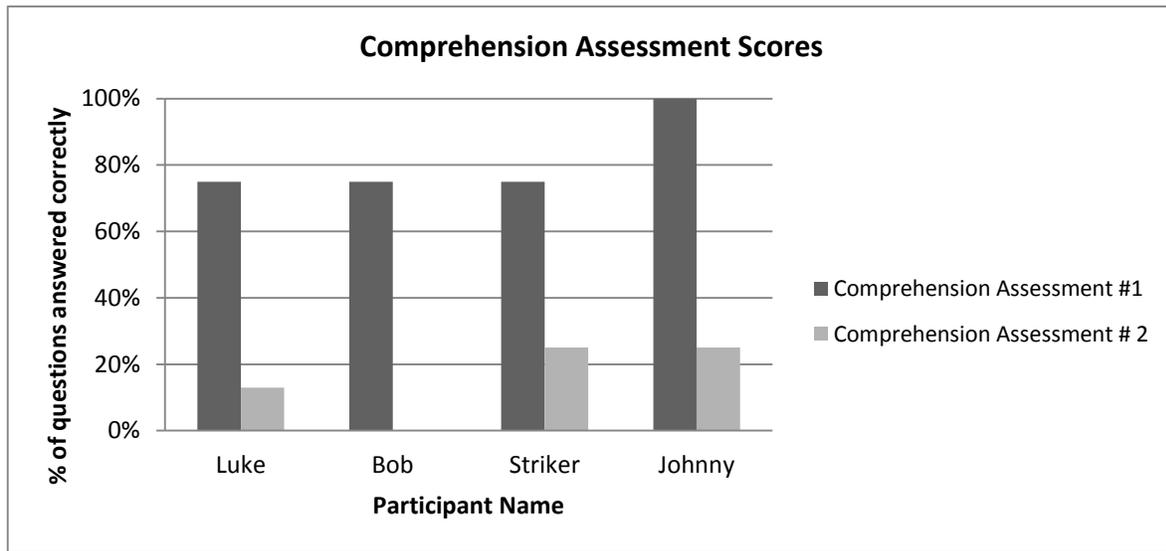
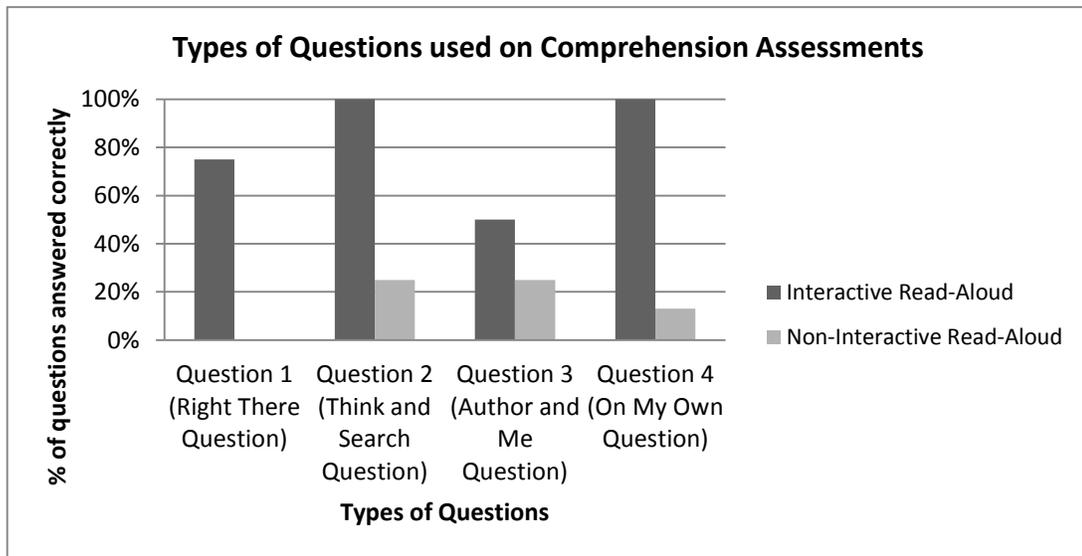


Figure 1.1 outlines how many questions each student answered correctly out of the total number of questions as a percentage. Luke answered three out of the four questions correctly or 75% on the interactive assessment and point five out of four questions correctly or 13% on the non-interactive assessment. Bob answered three out of the four questions correctly or 75% on the interactive assessment and zero out of four questions correctly or 0% on the non-interactive assessment. Striker answered three out of the four questions correctly or 75% on the interactive assessment and answered one out of four correctly or 25% on the non-interactive assessment. Finally, Johnny answered four out of four questions correctly or 100% on the interactive assessment and one out of four correctly or 25% on the non-interactive assessment. Figure 1.1 confirms that all of the students scored higher on the comprehension assessment following the interactive read-aloud as compared to the assessment following the non-interactive read-aloud. The consistency in these results is due to the fact that the participants were allowed to interact during one read-aloud and not during the other. They were able to activate prior knowledge, make predictions, have misunderstandings and conceptions cleared up and make connections.

Figure 1.2 outlines the exact types of questions that were included on the participants' comprehension assessments, as well as which questions the participants answered correctly as a percentage.

Figure 1.2. Student Results on Comprehension Assessments based on Types of Questions



The types of questions were the same for both comprehension assessments. The types of questions used on the assessments included one right-there question, one think and search question, one author and me question and one on my own question. These questions were used to assess the read-aloud because they start with lower level thinking questions and gradually move to higher level thinking questions. Stahl believes in the importance of these questions, she states, “asking a variety of questions, lower level and higher level, is important in prompting thinking at all levels of reading development” (p. 600). Participants should have been able to answer the right-there and think and search questions just based on what they heard from the read-aloud if they were actively listening. The author and me question and on my own question would be a little more challenging for some students because both of these questions required them to activate and use their prior knowledge in order to answer successfully. The results from

this figure show that Luke, Bob and Johnny or 75% of the participants answered the right-there question correctly on the interactive assessment and incorrectly on the non-interactive assessment, while Bob's results showed the opposite because he answered the right-there question incorrectly on the interactive assessment and correctly on the non-interactive assessment. Bob's opposite results could be due to the fact that he was more interested in the non-interactive read-aloud than the other three participants were. His interest in the book could also be the cause for his correct answer on the right-there question because he might have been more engaged in that read-aloud over the interactive read-aloud. All four participants or 100% answered the think and search question correctly on the interactive assessment, but had contrasting results on the non-interactive assessment. Luke and Bob both answered incorrectly, while Striker and Johnny both received partial credit for their answers. Striker and Johnny received partial credit for their answers because part of the answer was correct and part of it was incorrect. These partial answers are due to the fact that the think and search question required the participants to search in different parts of the text and put together more than one piece of information to come up with the correct answer. Striker and Johnny were successful in finding one part of the answer, while not successful in finding the other. They were all successful in answering it correctly on the interactive read-aloud because we stopped throughout to discuss the topics and make the connections needed to answer the question. Luke and Striker answered the author and me question incorrectly on the interactive assessment, while Bob and Johnny answered these questions correctly. The reason that half of the participants answered the author and me question correctly while the other half answered incorrectly might be due to the fact that some of them had more prior knowledge on the topic than the other participants. It was necessary to add their prior knowledge to the information from the text to correctly answer this

type of question. Similarly, Luke and Johnny received partial credit for their answers on the non-interactive assessment, while Bob and Striker answered them incorrectly. Luke and Johnny might have been successful in receiving partial credit on the non-interactive read-aloud because it was not necessary to have read the book to answer the question vaguely. They did not receive full credit because they did not answer it with enough detail, but they did answer the question. Finally, all four participants answered the on my own questions correctly on the interactive assessment. Additionally, Luke, Bob and Johnny answered this question incorrectly on the non-interactive assessment, while Striker received partial credit. The results of the on my own question may be due to the fact that the participants were actively participating in the interactive read-aloud and able to connect the book to their own lives as well as activating their prior knowledge. These skills being utilized throughout the read-aloud may have helped them in answering the on my own question successfully.

Based on these results, there were findings that were consistent for all the participants. All four participants correctly answered the think and search questions as well as the on my own questions on the interactive read-aloud assessment. These findings are due to the fact that the participants were interacting with me throughout the read-aloud and were able to recall important information that was discussed when completing the comprehension assessment. Furthermore, all four participants answered the right-there question incorrectly on the non-interactive assessment. The answers on the assessment may be due to the fact that there was no interaction between the participants and myself during this particular read-aloud which might have made it harder for them to recall a specific detail that was located right in the text (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). It might have been difficult to recall details because there was no time allotted for recalling events or discussion of important details. It might also have been hard to

recall because they were not allowed to see the text for themselves to locate answers, they were read the text one time and not shown it again. Finally, this table concludes that only Johnny answered all of the questions correctly on the interactive assessment, while none of the students answered all of the questions correctly on the non-interactive assessment. Johnny's ability to answer all of the questions correctly on the interactive assessment might be due to the fact that he had prior knowledge about the topic or also because he was actively listening and participating throughout the entire read-aloud, which enabled him to make the most out of our discussion (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). Based on these results, it is concluded that all four of the participants did answer more questions correctly on the interactive assessment as opposed to the non-interactive assessment. The fact that they answered more questions correctly on the interactive read-aloud assessment is because the interactive read-aloud supported participant interaction and active participation. The background knowledge of each participant was stimulated in some way throughout the read-aloud and they were able to ask questions and have their questions answered during the reading of the text. All of these factors together led to higher comprehension scores on the interactive read-aloud.

Along with the quantitative results obtained from this study, there were qualitative results as well. These results were obtained through a teacher interview, student surveys, numerous classroom observations, student reactions from read-aloud sessions and students' comprehension assessments. These qualitative results are categorized into three themes. These themes include: the effect of students' reading attitudes on their comprehension, utilizing before, during, and after reading strategies to help comprehension and the impact of interaction during read-alouds on comprehension.

The Effect of Students’ Reading Attitudes on Comprehension

The first theme that emerged from the data obtained from this research study was student attitudes toward reading. When reading with students and when planning effective instruction, it is important to understand students’ attitudes toward reading and what has affected these various attitudes. Every student has a different way of learning and more specifically a different outlook on their own learning. These attitudes may help or hinder a student’s ability to participate successfully in literacy activities and instruction and ultimately affect their comprehension. A student’s attitude toward reading may include their enjoyment of reading, their confidence in reading, their reading ability, and comprehension of what they read. Table 1 outlines these various attitudes in depth, which were essential in the success of this research study. Through my classroom observations and read-aloud sessions, student attitudes were evident as well.

Table 1

Student Attitudes toward Reading from Student Questionnaire

Student Attitudes toward Reading	Percentage of Participants		
Enjoys Reading	100% Yes		0% No
Confidence in Reading	100% Yes		0% No
Characteristics of a Good Reader	50% Practice	25% Focus	25% Fluency
Strong Comprehension Skills	50% Yes	25% No	25% Sometimes
Before Reading Strategies	100% Look at and read the title/cover page		
During Reading Strategies	50% Concentrate and visualize	25% Focus	25% Follow along
After Reading Strategies	50% Pick out a new book	25% Give the book to someone	25% Do something else

Table 1 outlines the questions and responses that were obtained from the student questionnaire which was presented to the four participants at the beginning of this study. The questions that were asked on this survey ranged from basic attitudes toward reading all the way up to before, during, and after reading strategies of the participants. These questions were essential to this research study because it allowed me to understand student's attitudes toward their own reading and what skills they already utilize when they are engaged in reading activities. Based on this student questionnaire, all of the participants in this study enjoy reading as well as exhibit confidence in their own reading skills. When the participants were asked characteristics of a good reader, 50% of the participants answered practice, 25% answered focus and 25% answered fluency. Interestingly, when the participants were asked if they have strong comprehension skills 50% answered yes, 25% answered no and 25% answered sometimes. These answers could vary due to the participants experience with reading and the texts they chose to read. If the texts they are choosing to read are too difficult, it might affect their comprehension. It might also be due to the comprehension strategies they have been exposed to by their homeroom teachers because all four of the participants have a different second grade teacher. The student questionnaire also asked participants to reflect on their before, during and after reading strategies. All of the participants or 100% of the participants stated that their main pre-reading strategy was to look at and read the title and cover of the book. This pre-reading strategy was utilized during the interactive read-aloud, which may be why the participants did better on that comprehension assessment. However, this pre-reading strategy was not utilized during the non-interactive read-aloud which might account for the low comprehension scores on their assessments. Fifty percent of the participants stated that the strategy they use during reading is to concentrate and visualize, 25% answered focus, while 25% answered follow along. Given

that this study focused on read-alouds, participants had the opportunity to utilize all three of these during reading strategies that they mentioned on their questionnaires. Finally, when participants were asked about their after reading strategies, 50% stated they pick out a new book, 25% stated they give the book to someone and 25% stated they do something else. The answers on this part of the survey clearly indicate that all four participants have not only been introduced to reading strategies, but they have been exposed to specific before, during and after reading strategies. This survey also indicates that the participants are able to verbalize which strategies they use and are able to do so independently. The importance of reading strategies is supported by Nash-Ditzel's (2010) research which states, "students must believe in the value of reading strategies if they are ever to utilize them on a consistent basis" (p. 55). Similarly, in the interview with Mr. Bradley, he states that understanding his students' attitudes toward reading is important in planning effective instruction. He feels that by doing so it will hopefully "turn on" their thinking and their imaginations, to get them generating questions, making connections and comparisons and hearing them ask for more, or look for other texts on these topics now that they're interested in them" (February 20, 2012).

The first read-aloud session was the interactive session. Throughout this read-aloud, all four participants were engaged and making eye contact with me while I was reading. Their eyes were focused on the book and on the pictures. This observation shows that all four of the participants were actively engaged and interested in what was being read to them. The fact that all four participants exhibited behaviors that they were enjoying the read-aloud might be due to the fact that they were an active part of the discussion regarding the book. It could also be because they were introduced to the book through a picture walk and by being encouraged to make predictions and connections to the text as well. Taking the time to introduce a book well to

students is beneficial to their engagement, which is clearly shown through my observation field notes. There were parts in the story that made the participants laugh as well (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). The fact that the participants were laughing at some parts of the book made it evident that they thought the book was funny. During the read aloud Luke stated, “this book is really funny” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). When I asked him why he thought that, he stated, “because of the pictures” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Luke stated that he thought the book was funny because of the pictures, which does not necessarily mean the participants understood the humor that the author intended from the book, but rather that they understood that the pictures were humorous. The fact that the participants found some of the book humorous was due in large part to the fact that I explained some of the humor to them. Without this interaction, they would not have understood some of the humorous content that the book provided. All of these observations made it evident that the participants’ attitudes toward this book were positive ones.

The second read-aloud session was the non-interactive one and because of the lack of interaction different attitudes towards the book were evoked from the participants. Based on my observations of this session, none of the participants were engaged in the book throughout the whole read-aloud. They appeared to be attentive at the beginning of the reading but decreased throughout the session. Participants began looking around the room, looking in the hallway, whispering to one another and Bob even put his head down on the table (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). There was one point in the read-aloud when Mr. Bradley came in to the room to get something and although he was very quiet and respectful, all four of the participants looked at him until he left the room (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). This lack of engagement is due to the fact that there was no interaction between the participants and myself. I did not

allow for them to ask any questions, therefore their questions went unanswered for the entire read-aloud session. If the students had misunderstandings about the content of the text, they were not able to have them cleared up which might be another reason for their disengagement. In addition to leaving student misunderstandings untouched, I did not provide students with any interpretation of the humor found in this story. This text was written by the same author and exhibited humor just like the other text did, however, students missed a lot of the humor because of the lack of interaction and explanation on my part. The participants may also have been distracted by Mr. Bradley when he came into the classroom. These distractions may not have occurred throughout the interactive read-aloud because during that session the participants would have been actively participating and might not have noticed Mr. Bradley's appearance in the classroom. Additionally, the participants might not have been engaged because they were not required to use any reading strategies, which altered their normal reading routine. The reason Bob put his head down could be due to the fact that he wasn't personally engaged or connected to the story and he was noticing that his peers were not as well. He might not have had any connection to the story or prior knowledge to support the text, therefore, leading him to become lethargic. These observations made it evident that the participants' attitudes toward this book and read-aloud session were not positive.

Another area that affects a students' attitude towards reading is text selection. When planning an effective read-aloud, it is important to choose a text that will be engaging as well as one that will be educational. The two read-aloud sessions for this study were completed using two non-fiction texts. The research of Santoro et al. (2008) supports the use of non-fiction texts in classroom read-alouds because they "provide an ideal opportunity to teach expository, or information, text structure" (p. 397). In my interview with Mr. Bradley, he also expressed the

benefits of a non-fiction read-aloud by stating, “it’s exposing them to rich descriptive language, content vocabulary and higher level concepts than they can access at their reading level”

(Personal interview, February 20, 2012). The two non-fiction texts were by the same author and at the same reading level. The book used in the interactive read aloud was called *So you Want to be President* and the book used in the non-interactive read-aloud was called *So you Want to be an Inventor?* I chose two similar books by the same author so that there would be no discrepancy between the two read-aloud sessions based on the text content or text level. The participants showed interest in both books; however they exhibited more prior knowledge about presidents than they did about inventors. When participants were asked to think about what they already knew about presidents or make any connections to this topic Bob answered, “I have seen presidents on TV” and “there were a lot of them” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This answer shows that Bob has basic knowledge about presidents but cannot distinguish important details about them. The basic knowledge that he does have will help him contribute to discussion and make further connections to the book. Striker answered, “presidents are old” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Striker’s answer indicates that he thinks presidents are old, which is not always the case. Johnny answered this same question in a little more depth by saying, “I just learned that President Lincoln got shot in the head and he must not have felt it because he didn’t even die until the next day” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Johnny’s answer shows that he knew that President Lincoln was one of our president’s and that he did get shot, however the second part of his answer shows that there is a gap between his background knowledge and the inference he made to support it. Luke did not supply an answer to this question when it was presented to the group, which might mean that he did not have any prior knowledge about presidents or couldn’t make any connections to them. His inability to

answer might also be due to the fact that he just chose not to participate this early in the discussion. The answers to this question gave me some idea of the background knowledge the participants had and would be using throughout the read-aloud; however there was not enough time in the read-aloud session to clear up the misunderstandings they clearly exhibited. These misunderstandings might be the reason they answered some questions incorrectly on their comprehension assessment.

Prior to the interactive read-aloud session, participants contributed in a discussion with me to make connections, activate prior knowledge and make predictions, this method was not the case for the non-interactive read aloud. Participants were not encouraged to engage in any discussion before the second read-aloud. Therefore, the participants were not given a chance to utilize any reading strategies that they typically use during a read-aloud to develop their comprehension of the text. The directions that were given to the students prior to this read aloud were “today we are going to do another read-aloud, we are not going to discuss it while we are reading, so all you have to do is sit there and listen to the story” (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). There may have been connections that the participants could have made with the story, misunderstandings that needed to be cleared up, or predictions to the topic of inventors that might have helped their comprehension, however the participants were not able to use them during this read-aloud session. Smolkin and Donovan (2003) state “text complications occur for many reasons in informational texts, including the author’s assumptions of background knowledge, too much or too little explanation of a new concept, and lack of cohesion among ideas present” (p. 30). These areas not being discussed and participants’ questions not being answered during the read-aloud are most likely the cause of their lack of comprehension in the non-interactive read-aloud session.

Setting a purpose for reading is another factor that affects a students' attitude towards reading. Prior to the interactive read-aloud session, participants were told they would be engaging in an interactive read-aloud and following the read-aloud they would be completing a short comprehension assessment. Participants went into this session knowing what my expectations were and what they should be doing in order to actively participate. Additionally, because we stopped and discussed different aspects of the book and utilized numerous reading strategies during the read-aloud, the participants were more prepared for the comprehension assessment. One example of a discussion that took place during the interactive read-aloud session was when I stopped and asked, "why do you think George Bush stopped eating broccoli when he became the president?" (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Bob answered, "because he didn't like it" (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This answer was correct, yet obvious because the book said that he didn't like broccoli when he was a little boy and never wanted to eat it. Striker also answered "and you can do whatever you want when you're the president" (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Striker took Bob's answer and added on to it by making an inference that Presidents can do whatever they want just because George Bush stopped eating broccoli when he became president. Striker's answer shows that he was able to make an inference based on the context of the text, but it also shows his misconceptions and overgeneralizations about all Presidents based on just one instance.

Based on the reading attitude survey given to the participants at the beginning of the study, all of the participants liked reading and felt that they were good readers. Even though all four participants have a positive attitude towards reading in general, based on my observation field notes of the two read-aloud sessions, participants did not have a positive attitude toward the non-interactive read-aloud. These attitudes might be due to the lack of interaction because

participants are either used to engaging in interactive read-aloud sessions with Mr. Bradley or with their second grade teachers. They could also be because they are used to reading independently, allowing them to be as engaged as they chose to be. The fact that they are used to engaging in interactive read-alouds in the resource room is confirmed in the interview with Mr. Bradley. Mr. Bradley explains that on a regular basis his students “use language from the read-aloud, apply strategies by externalizing their thinking, seek out connected texts and resources, and engage in social learning through the shared experience of listening to and talking about the text” (Personal interview, February 20, 2012). Additionally, all four participants stated that their main pre-reading strategy was to study the cover and title page of the book and because the non-interactive read-aloud did not allow time for them to engage in this strategy, it disrupted their typical reading routine and left them unfocused and off topic.

Utilizing Before, During, and After Reading Strategies to Help Comprehension

The second theme that emerged from my data collection was the use of reading strategies and how they affected student comprehension. Reading strategies are important because they are ways that students can interpret and organize their ideas and details from a text as they are reading. Using reading strategies is also a way for students to think about the text before reading as well as reflecting upon it afterwards. Reading strategies were utilized throughout the interactive read-aloud session before, during, and after reading. The purpose of the student questionnaire was to gauge what reading strategies the participants had previously been exposed to and which ones they chose to use on a regular basis. It was also for me to plan the necessary instruction of before, during, and after reading strategies to enhance the interactive read-aloud session.

Prior to beginning my instruction and read-aloud sessions, I obtained information from Mr. Bradley through an interview in order to gain insight on his attitudes and experiences with comprehension and reading strategies that helped promote comprehension, specifically during read-alouds. I asked Mr. Bradley how he typically teaches comprehension and what reading strategies he uses with his students during his read-aloud sessions. Mr. Bradley stated, “all teaching uses some form of Vygotsky’s gradual release model. This becomes I do, we do, you try, you do” (Personal interview, February 20, 2012). Mr. Bradley’s teaching style and attitude towards teaching comprehension is similar to many research studies on this topic. The research of Bitter et al. (2009), Pentimonti and Justice (2010), Scharlach (2006) and Stahl (2004) all conclude that the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction is a beneficial teaching strategy. Along with using Vygotsky’s gradual release model, Mr. Bradley also stated that he uses read-alouds all the time in his classroom and tries to utilize them at least once a week with each group of students he works with. He explained that read-alouds “expose students to rich descriptive language, content vocabulary and higher level concepts than they can access at their reading level” (Personal interview, February 20, 2012). These comments from Mr. Bradley are consistent with my findings from this study because there were times in the text when I had to explain content to the participants in order for them to understand because they were higher level concepts than they would normally be exposed to if they were reading independently at their own reading levels.

The four participants approached this study with some background knowledge of comprehension and reading strategies to help with comprehension. Furthermore, they were able to verbalize the strategies they use while they are reading and which ones proved most successful for them. In addition to the strategies that the participants indicated they use before, during and

after reading, I reviewed two strategies with them as well. The two comprehension strategies I reviewed with the participants were making connections, and making predictions. These strategies were strictly used in the interactive read-aloud session only. Prior to reading the book to the participants, I opened up a discussion on each of these strategies in order to gauge their background knowledge and possibly build upon it. I had anticipated that the participants would need some instruction and modeling of these before reading strategies to help their comprehension and to enable them to become active participants. Therefore, I was prepared to model and review these strategies with the participants. However, when reviewing each strategy, the participants showed a clear understanding of each of the strategies and how to use each them during an interactive read-aloud. Additionally, they were actively participating without much prompting, which indicated to me that they are accustomed to this kind of interaction. Through my observation field notes, it was evident that the participants were well prepared to use the strategies plus additional strategies to assist in their comprehension of the read-aloud and help in completing the comprehension assessment. This method of teaching is supported by Sharlach's (2006) research study which explains, "effective comprehension instruction includes teaching a small repertoire of strategies, modeling and explaining and facilitating scaffolded practice" (p. 21). Similarly, this method of teaching is also supported by Mr. Bradley who stated in his interview, "comprehension instruction involves modeling to, interacting with, guiding and observing students as they learn specific strategies" (Personal interview, February 20, 2012). This teaching practice proved to be beneficial to student learning because all of the students had a strong understanding of these reading strategies and how to use them. Through my discussion with the participants, it was evident that Mr. Bradley had taught them what these strategies were, as well as how to use them when reading any text. In addition to their knowledge of reading

strategies, the participants also knew how to be active participants in a discussion (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012).

There were many instances throughout our discussion during the interactive read-aloud session where I saw these strategies being utilized by the participants. Johnny identified that a prediction is “when you think about what something is going to be about” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This answer showed that Johnny knows what a prediction is and was successful in verbalizing his thought. Striker added to his answer by stating, “sometimes they can be wrong or right. We have done them in our classroom before” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This comment showed that Striker not only knew what a prediction means but also that a prediction can be correct or incorrect. This concept is important for students to understand because it will encourage them to make predictions and not be apprehensive about them being incorrect. It was important that he shared this during our discussion because it gave the rest of the participants the chance to make predictions and know they could change or revise them at any time during the read-aloud. Striker and Johnny were the only two that chose to participate when discussing predictions. A couple pages into the read-aloud Luke used his knowledge of making connections by stating, “I know this is about presidents, I saw a movie about this” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Striker added to what Luke said, “oh yeah, I remember that movie” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This comment showed that Luke had a correct understanding of what a connection is and he was also successful in making one. Although this connection was not very detailed, he would be able to use the knowledge of the movie about presidents during the read-aloud itself. Striker adding to his comment made it clear that he had seen the same movie and that perhaps they would both have some of the same background knowledge on the topic due to the movie they had previously seen. Throughout the

before reading discussion, Bob was the only participant who chose not to participate. This lack of participation might be due to the fact that he is more comfortable in using during or after reading strategies than before reading strategies. It could also be because he was unable to make a prediction or a connection to this particular topic area. Making connections to the text is important in promoting engagement as well as comprehension. The research of Santoro et al. (2008) supports the importance of making connections by explaining, “making text-to-text and text-to-life connections before, during and after reading integrated with lessons can later become connections between books both within and across units” (p. 404). This research indicates that if students are successful in making connections to texts in general, they will eventually be successful in utilizing this strategy across other texts and even across subjects and content areas as well.

In addition to making predictions before reading, the participants made numerous predictions during the reading as well. At one point Bob made a prediction based on the pictures that were on the page I was about to read, “I think the president that’s dancing is going to fall and break the other one’s instrument” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). This comment Bob provided showed that he was following along with the text as I was reading as well as able to make a realistic prediction about the picture that was seen on the page. Discussion, the method I used throughout my interactive read-aloud session is just one of the strategies Mr. Bradley uses when teaching comprehension to his students during read-alouds. He stated, “we use models (ex. graphic organizers), I externalize my thinking, writing, drawing, using reference resources, mixed media, role-playing, author studies, KWL, reciprocal teaching and other modes to allow students multiple modes of expressing what they know” (Personal interview, February 20, 2012). The fact that the participants were actively participating and using comprehension

strategies throughout the interactive read-aloud showed me that they were not only comprehending the book that was being read to them but also engaged in the topic they were learning about.

In order to formally assess the participants' comprehension of the two read-aloud sessions, the participants' were presented with two comprehension assessments immediately following each read-aloud. The assessments consisted of four questions based on the information in the books. According to my observation field notes, participants finished the assessment of the interactive read-aloud much faster than that of assessment following the non-interactive read-aloud. The participants started right away and appeared sure of their answers. They worked independently and finished their assessments without any support from myself or their peers (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). The fact that the participants showed confidence in their answers is because they were engaged and participating the entire time during the interactive read-aloud session. The participants were asked questions throughout the read-aloud, made predictions, and connections based on the content in the text. Additionally, through interaction, it was possible for them to have ideas and concepts explained to them in order for them to fully appreciate what the author and illustrator were trying to portray throughout the text. Without these interactions, the students would not have been as confident when completing the comprehension assessments. Contrastingly, following the non-interactive read-aloud, participants read through the questions and then looked to me immediately for guidance. When I didn't respond, they looked to one another for answers, which was not successful. Finally, Bob asked, "what if we don't remember the answers?" (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). This comment from Bob showed that he didn't know any of the answers and was curious about what he should write down in the answer spaces when he could not come up with any answers.

The participants were then instructed to answer to the best of their knowledge. Participants filled out the answers to the comprehension assessment with answers such as “I don’t remember” and “I don’t know” (Comprehension assessment, March 9, 2012). The fact that the participants were putting these answers on their comprehension assessment showed that they did not comprehend the non-interactive read-aloud book. They did not comprehend this text because there was no interaction or discussion throughout the read-aloud. They were not asked to utilize any before, during, or after reading strategies to help them promote comprehension. They were also prohibited from asking questions or making comments. The fact that they couldn’t ask any questions left them with misunderstandings and their inability to make the most from the text by fully understanding what the author was saying. The participants are used to interactive read-alouds and for the teacher to fill in the gaps for them in order to ensure comprehension of a text. Without this interaction, all of the participants were somewhat lost, which lead to poor comprehension of the non-interactive read-aloud text and that is consistent with their answers on the assessment.

Based on the results of these comprehension assessments, participants answered more questions correctly on the interactive read-aloud assessment than they did on the non-interactive read-aloud. The participants were able to recall important information from the interactive read-aloud because of the interactions throughout and then apply this information to correctly answer the comprehension questions. In addition to answering more questions correctly, all four participants exhibited more confidence when completing the interactive read-aloud assessment than they did on the non-interactive read-aloud assessment. This confidence on the interactive read-aloud assessment is due to the fact that students utilized reading strategies through discussion during the read-aloud, which ultimately reinforced their comprehension of the text.

Therefore, having a strong comprehension of the interactive read-aloud text led students to exhibit confidence when answering the assessment questions. The importance of incorporating comprehension strategies into read-alouds is supported by research as well. Santoro et al. (2008) states, “incorporating comprehension instruction and read-alouds appears to be a promising way to boost student comprehension” (p. 407). The findings from my study directly correlate with the research of Santoro et al. (2008), which concludes that interaction throughout read alouds results in higher levels of engagement and reinforces student comprehension.

Impact of Interaction during Read-Alouds

The third and final theme that emerged from my data was the impact of interaction during read-alouds. Interaction between teachers and students and even between peers is important in all aspects of literacy learning. Interaction encourages sharing of ideas, thoughts, and collaboration which all have a positive impact on learning and on comprehension. When students are encouraged to interact with one another or with their teacher it also encourages participation and a sense of community throughout the classroom. Students will feel more comfortable sharing ideas and participating in discussions when the precedent of interaction is both presented and embraced early on. This interaction between student and teacher will enhance comprehension because they are working together to make meaning from a specific text.

Prior to starting the interactive read-aloud, the participants were told, “if you have any questions or comments while we are reading go ahead and ask me. We are all going to be sharing ideas during this read-aloud” (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). I gave these directions in order for the participants to understand that they should feel comfortable sharing ideas and thoughts throughout the read-aloud with me and with their peers. The importance of

interaction during read-alouds is supported by Stahl's (2004) research which states, "the immediate interaction around the text promotes consistent engagement, clarifies confusions, and provides a vehicle for creating an accurate representation of text as well as assimilation with prior knowledge" (p. 602). Clarifying confusions to provide students with an accurate portrayal of what the author was intending is a vital way to reinforce comprehension. According to my field notes, all four participants were comfortable sharing ideas throughout this session. This comfort is evident because each participant engages in discussion at least once throughout the interactive read-aloud session. When studying a picture on one of the pages, Striker pointed to the picture and stated, "there are only five pictures of presidents named James" (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). He was referencing a contradiction between the words that the author had written on the page as compared to the picture the illustrator had drawn on the page. This comment shows that Striker understood the information that was presented to him in addition to showing his ability to think critically about the text. He also felt comfortable to share out and was able to successfully verbalize his thoughts. When participants feel comfortable to share out their ideas and execute this correctly, it will enhance their comprehension because they will be more likely to remember important details when answering comprehension questions. Finally, this showed Striker's ability to socially construct knowledge as a part of an interactive discussion between myself and his peers.

There were also occurrences throughout this read-aloud when I had to clear up misunderstandings or explain a concept to the participants. Ultimately, in doing this, it helped the participants with their comprehension of the book, thus making the interactive read-aloud more successful in reinforcing comprehension. One instance of a student misunderstanding was when there was a picture in the book of a family tree which had presidents hanging from it.

Luke asked me, “why are the presidents hanging off of that tree?” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). I explained to the participants that a family tree shows all of the different people in your family and that usually it only has the names of the people on it. I went further in saying, “the author and illustrator were adding humor to a family tree by illustrating the presidents hanging from the tree and hanging them off of one another” (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). Once I explained the humor in the picture to the participants, they showed their understanding by laughing and acknowledging the concept as funny (Observation field notes, March 6, 2012). The idea of clearing up confusions during read-alouds is supported by Brabham and Lynch-Brown’s (2002) research which states the importance of “the roles of adults in helping children construct meaning from written texts and the importance of social interaction as scaffolding in language and literacy development” (p. 471). Without this critical component of the read-aloud, the participants would have been left with a misunderstanding and therefore, limiting their comprehension of the text. However, in contrast, Brabham and Lynch-Brown’s (2002) research also explains that there might be times when interactive read-alouds are distracting to students and should not be used. Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) state, “an uninterrupted performance style or even just reading may produce a more desired result” (p. 472). This research believes that so many interruptions in the reading of one text would actually hinder a students’ comprehension of the text as a whole. This may be the reason for Bob preferring the non-interactive read-aloud over the interactive read-aloud, however, his comprehension assessment scores do not correlate with this research.

The non-interactive read-aloud was approached in a different manner. As opposed to the interactive read-aloud, prior to beginning the non-interactive read-aloud, the participants were told, “we aren’t going to discuss anything or talk about the book while I am reading. You should

just sit and listen to the story” (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). I gave these instructions in order for the participants to understand that this read-aloud session would be a little different and my expectations of them differed from the interactive read-aloud. Since this was the non-interactive read-aloud, we did not engage in any pre-reading activities, nor did we discuss the title and cover page of the book. Not discussing the title and cover page of the book might have led to their lack of comprehension of the text because all four participants stated that as their primary before reading strategy. Additionally, we did not complete a picture walk or make predictions about the book in any way. At one point during the read aloud Luke asked, “what did he invent again?” (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). He was asking a question in order for me to clear up a misunderstanding he had about the content in the book. In order to preserve this as a non-interactive read-aloud, I had to reply, “we will talk later, we are just listening right now” (Observation field notes, March 9, 2012). Besides the participants’ attitudes and behaviors throughout the non-interactive read-aloud, which were mentioned previously, this was the only interaction that took place throughout this session.

After completing the two read-aloud sessions, I engaged in a post interview with each participant. Interestingly, three out of the four participants chose the interactive read-aloud book, leaving one participant who chose the non-interactive read-aloud (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). The answers to these questions indicate that the participants preferred one book over the other book, not necessarily preferring the interaction. The participants answered in this manner because that was the way I presented the question to the participants. I asked them which book they enjoyed more, not which interaction they enjoyed more. Luke responded, “I liked the president one because it was funny. It had funny jokes, like a guy so huge he needed a bathtub that fit four men” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). In response to which comprehension

questions were easier to answer, he responded, “I liked when we talked during the book because it helps you remember it” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). Similarly, Striker explained, “I liked the president book because the presidents serve our country and do stuff for us” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). He also stated, “I liked when we talk about it because I like to do work. The president questions were easier because the inventor ones were longer and I forgot stuff” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). When Johnny was asked the same questions his response was, “I liked the president book because it was funny” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). He then explained, “I liked when we discussed it because it’s funny and sometimes when I read I like to stop to give people the idea that it’s funny” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). The fact that three out of the four participants answered the president book because it was funny is mainly because of the interaction. This book was read during the interactive read-aloud session and because of that they were engaged in discussion throughout and were not left with any misunderstandings. In addition to clearing up misunderstandings, the participants were able to receive detailed descriptions and interpretations of some of the content and pictures that were in the text. The participants would not have understood some of the humor within the book without the interaction and without my explanations. The non-interactive book had humor as well, but participants lacked the knowledge of why it was humorous because of the lack of interaction. Therefore, the participants could not conclude the non-interactive book as funny. In contrast with the other three participants, when Bob was asked the same questions his response was, “I liked the inventor book because my brother and me will invent stuff like the helping hand” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). The difference in Bob’s answer could be due to the fact that he was able to make a connection to this text and not with the other text. Making this personal connection could have added to his interest in this text as opposed to the other text as

well. Interestingly however, Bob stated that the president questions were easier to answer because “I remembered them and I remembered them because they were funny” (Personal interview, March 9, 2012). It is interesting that Bob enjoyed the non-interactive read-aloud over the interactive read-aloud and it is important to note that this is inconsistent with his comprehension assessment scores from Figure 1.1. This figure indicated that he answered 75% of the questions correct on the interactive read-aloud assessment and 0% correct on the non-interactive read-aloud assessment. The fact that Bob did not answer one question correctly on the non-interactive read-aloud assessment demonstrates that he did not comprehend this text. However, his answer during the post-assessment interview shows that he enjoyed the non-interactive read-aloud text more than the interactive read-aloud text. The only reason that he preferred the non-interactive read-aloud over the interactive read-aloud is because he had a previous connection to this text and not of interaction, familiar reading strategies were utilized, or strong comprehension of the text.

This research study has concluded that the majority of the participants enjoyed the interactive read-aloud over the non-interactive read-aloud. They were all able to verbalize why they thought this and all four participants were at a consensus that the interactive read-aloud comprehension assessment was easier to complete. All four participants also scored higher on the comprehension assessment following the interactive read-aloud as opposed to the assessment following the non-interactive read-aloud. The difference in comprehension assessment scores is due to the amount of interaction and discussion that took place during the interactive read-aloud and the lack of interaction and discussion that took place during the non-interactive read-aloud. Additionally, encouraging the participants to utilize before, during, after reading strategies based on their student attitudes questionnaire during the interactive read-aloud also benefited their

comprehension of the text. In conclusion, when taking all of the factors that affect student comprehension into account, interactive read-alouds have a greater effect on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds.

Implications

Through numerous observations along with two read-aloud sessions, it has been found that interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds. The data obtained from this study shows that when used correctly and in an interactive manner, read-alouds prove to be an influential component in literacy instruction, specifically in the area of comprehension. Interactive read-alouds provide a great opportunity to introduce and model comprehension strategies as well as reinforce comprehension of the text as a whole. The results from this study lead to several implications for teachers.

One implication for teachers is that many factors influence student comprehension and that is an important detail that teachers must keep in mind when planning effective instruction. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to, students' attitudes toward reading, prior background knowledge on the topic, comprehension skills and strategies, and engagement. If teachers know their students well, and keep these factors in mind when planning instruction, they will be able to successfully differentiate that instruction in order to meet the needs of their students.

Another implication for teachers when planning interactive read-alouds is encouraging active participation and engagement among students. Since this research study has concluded that interactive read-alouds have a strong impact on student comprehension, it is essential for teachers to be utilizing these types of read-alouds in their daily instruction. In doing so, students will learn how to interact with the teacher as well as their peers and become an active participant

in the classroom. This participation supports a co-construction of meaning, reasoning, questioning and drawing conclusions from a text together (Smokin & Donovan, 2003). When being encouraged to participate, students will become more comfortable sharing ideas and engaging in classroom-wide discussions. This type of interaction will lead to student comprehension because they are participating and making meaningful connections throughout the read-aloud.

Another implication for teachers is planning in order to ensure the read-aloud is a success. Interactive read-alouds will only be successful if the teacher is using them in the correct manner. Teachers need to first pre-read the books they are planning on using for their interactive read-aloud in order to gain insight into the content of the book. They need to be aware of target vocabulary, anticipate questions that might arise, misunderstandings that might occur and what they would like their students to take away from the read-aloud. Teachers should also be aware of what comprehension strategies they would like to model and have students practice with each book. Each book might lend itself to an interactive-read aloud in a different fashion and teachers should be well versed in what they are using each book to teach. If planned appropriately, read-alouds can be a great way for students to learn a new concept or a way to utilize a new comprehension strategy.

The final implication for teachers is that effective read-alouds can lead to student independence during reading. Interactive read-alouds are a great opportunity for teachers to build students' comprehension strategies and skills. Students will see firsthand how to utilize comprehension strategies and how well they work when making meaning from a text. Teachers should start out by explicitly teaching and modeling these strategies and then gradually release the responsibility of using these strategies onto the students (Scharlach, 2008; Stahl, 2004).

Once this gradual release of responsibility has happened, students will be more successful in using these strategies independently by recalling the strategy and discussion they were a participant of. Students will draw on these experiences to help comprehend texts even when they are not engaged in a read-aloud or a class discussion, which will lead to the self-regulation of their own learning (Sharlach, 2008). In addition to student independence, teachers can also utilize interactive read-alouds across all content areas in order to build knowledge and improve student comprehension in all subjects.

Overall, there are numerous implications for teachers when they are planning an effective interactive read-aloud. These implications need to be taken into consideration in order for the interactive read-aloud to be beneficial to all students and in order to reinforce comprehension. This research study shows that each of these factors was impressed upon in some way, and thus confirming that interactive read-alouds have a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if interactive read-alouds had a greater impact on student comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds, when considering the several factors that affect students' comprehension. Research has shown that constructing meaning from a text during read-alouds connects to the socio-cultural theory and therefore I used several sources of data throughout my research. Through observations, interviews, two read-aloud sessions along with comprehension assessments of the participants, it was concluded that when taking into consideration the different factors that affect comprehension, interactive read-alouds are proven to have a greater impact on comprehension than non-interactive read-alouds. Based on these

findings, there are multiple implications for teachers when planning and implementing an effective read aloud.

This research study revealed several limitations that should be considered when understanding the results of this data. The first limitation was that all of the participants used in this study were male. Therefore, the results may have varied if some of the participants in this study were female. It can be concluded that the results that were obtained from the male participants in the study might not have been the same if females were used. Another limitation to this study was that the four participants were all considered struggling readers due to the fact that they had all been referred to the resource room for reading intervention with the reading specialist for this school year. This fact indicates that the participants do not have a wide range of mixed abilities. None of the participants are considered proficient in their reading skills, and all of them are performing at the same reading level. Results might have varied if the study was conducted in a regular education classroom or with higher performing students. The third and final limitation to this study is that two different books were used for the two read-aloud sessions. It was essential to use two different books because one needed to be interactive, while the other non-interactive. The students' interest in one book over the other could have yielded different results. Based on these limitations and my data analysis, there were remaining questions that were not answered based on this research study.

After analyzing the data from this study, I am now wondering if the results would differ if females were used in the study as opposed to males, or even if there was a mix of both males and female participants. It would be interesting to see how the interactions and discussion would differ between these two groups. I am also wondering if the results would have been different if the participants were from a general education classroom and were not struggling readers who

had been referred for reading intervention. Furthermore, as stated above, I am also left contemplating if different results would have emerged if I had chosen different books to use in the two read-aloud sessions than the ones I chose to use. Overall, there are several aspects of this research study that should be taken into consideration if this research was to be completed again.

Through this research, I have developed a strong understanding of the numerous factors that affect a students' comprehension. I have also learned how to effectively plan an interactive read-aloud that reinforces student comprehension and promotes interaction and discussion. I was not surprised by the results of my research because there was an abundant amount of previous research similar to mine that determined the same conclusions. Interactive read-alouds have proven to be an effective tool in reinforcing comprehension.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been at Dewitt Road School?
3. What is your certification area?
4. What are your job responsibilities?
5. What reading assessment(s) does your school use?
6. How are students referred to your resource room for help? What is the process behind that?
7. How often do you work with the classroom teachers of the students you provide resource to? (pushing in to classrooms, planning with teachers, PD's, etc.)
8. How do you typically teach comprehension?
9. What comprehension strategies do you introduce and use with your students? Why?
10. How have you seen classroom teachers teaching comprehension?
11. How do you assess comprehension?
12. Do you use read-alouds as part of your instruction? If so, how do you use them?
13. Do you find them to be affective? Why or why not?
14. Do you think read-alouds have a positive impact on student comprehension? Why?

Appendix B

START Comprehension—Student Questionnaire

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

2. On a scale of 5 to 1, rate how much you like reading. Circle the number.

5	4	3	2	1
Love it!	Like it a lot!	Like it	Like it a little	Don't like it

3. Do you think you're a good reader? Why or why not?

4. On a scale of 5 to 1, rate yourself as a reader. Circle the number.

5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Okay	Not very good

5. What makes someone a good reader?

6. Do you understand everything you read?

7. What do you do if you don't understand what you're reading?

8. What do you do before you read a new book or a new chapter in a book?

9. What do you do while you are reading?

10. What do you do after you finish reading?

Appendix C

Name:

Date:

So you want to be President?

Comprehension Assessment

1. What vegetable did George Bush hate to eat when he was a little boy?
2. Name two examples of pets that presidents had while they lived in the white house?
3. Do you think you could be president? Why or why not?
4. What do you think is the best part about being the president? What is the worst part?

Appendix D

Name:

Date:

So you want to be an Inventor?

Comprehension Assessment

1. What did Benjamin Franklin invent?
2. What are two things women invented?
3. What would you have to do if you wanted to be an inventor?
4. What do you think is the best part about being an inventor? What is the worst part?

Appendix E

Post Interview

1. Which read-aloud did you enjoy the most? Why?
2. Which set of comprehension questions were easier to answer? Why?