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Improving students' comprehension through the use of read-alouds

Brittany R. Brickson

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Improving Students' Comprehension Through the Use of Read-Alouds

By
Brittany R. Brickson

A Graduate Field Experience
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts Language and Literacy At Cardinal Stritch University Milwaukee, Wisconsin 2012
This Graduate Field Experience
for Brittany R. Brickson
has been approved for
Cardinal Stritch University by

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(Advisor)

October 21, 2012
(Date)
Abstract:

This is a study conducted in a Kindergarten classroom to see if reading aloud does increase student comprehension. The study was administered for eight weeks to a group of seventeen students during the 2011-2012 academic school year in Cambridge, Wisconsin. The researcher found a correlation between reading aloud and increased comprehension scores. The data collected concluded that as the number of read-alouds increased, so did students' overall comprehension.
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CHAPTER ONE

As I began my teaching career in the kindergarten classroom six years ago, I was astounded by the various academic levels of the children. This was especially relevant in the area of reading. I had students that were already reading short texts, and students who couldn’t even recognize their own names. I asked myself many questions, but the one that kept resonating in my head was “How am I ever going to teach the children how to read?” Immediately, literacy became an area of focus and I was determined to find a way to best meet the needs of my students. This is when I decided the next step in my career was to get a master’s degree in the area of reading. Part of being a reflective professional is learning new things and making modifications to teaching approaches.

Statement of the Problem

As a kindergarten teacher, I am responsible for teaching all subject areas with the exception of art, music, and physical education. At the heart of my teaching is literacy because most of the other subject areas are taught through the means of reading. Most kindergarten students come to school unable to read, and it is my job to make them readers by the time they leave my classroom. The best way to approach this deficit is through the use of read-alouds. The read-aloud process allows me to expose the children to rich literature while teaching them about the important aspects of literacy at the same time. Standard ELA-Literacy.RL.K.10 which states that students should “actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding” (Wisconsin Common Core Standards).

Over the last twenty years, numerous studies have been done to investigate the effectiveness of reading aloud. Many of them were done in order to answer similar questions to my own, and this is where my research question for this study was developed: Does using read-
alouds enhance student comprehension? Although the research on read-alouds varies in the way it is analyzed, the overall consensus is that reading aloud does enhance student comprehension.

Beverly, Giles, and Buck (2009); Holland (2007); Ouellette, Dagostino, and Carifio (1999); Adomat (2010); Crawford and Tindal (2004); Fletcher et al. (2009); and Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, and Saleh (2004) all conducted studies that analyzed read-alouds as a specific tool to aid comprehension. Not all of the researchers examined the read-aloud in the same way, but all found similar results. Specifically, the articles by Crawford and Tindal (2004), Fletcher et al. (2009), and Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, and Saleh (2004) examined the use of read-alouds as a way to increase comprehension on standardized tests.

It was also discovered through the works of Bamyak (2011); Brabham, Murray, and Bowden (2006); and Hall and Williams (2010) that motivation and book choice play a large part on the influence of reading aloud and comprehension. It was concluded from these studies that optimal learning can take place when students are interested in their learning.

Researchers such as Fien et al. (2011) and Greenawalt (2010) explored vocabulary development and how it can be enhanced through the use of read-alouds. Both researchers found that repeated oral readings of a text enhanced students' vocabulary skills and overall comprehension. From this research, I was able to focus my interests and develop an area of focus for this action research.

For this particular study, I decided to focus on the use of read-alouds as a way to increase comprehension skills through sequencing and retelling. I chose this aspect of comprehension because of the age level of my students, and it being an area of challenge in my classroom. The population consisted of the 17 children that were enrolled in my kindergarten classroom for the 2011-2012 school year. Of the 17 children, ten were females and seven were males. Cambridge
Elementary School is in the city of Cambridge which is located in Southeast Wisconsin. This particular school is home to 419 students in grades pre-K through fifth grade. Of the 419 students, 0.7% are American Indian, 1.2% are Asian, 3.3% are African-American, 2.9% are Hispanic, and 91.6% are Caucasian. The sample used for this particular study involved 2% Hispanic and 98% Caucasian. All of the students were between the ages of five and six.

I designed the study to last over eight weeks, with the first and last week of the study designated for testing. The tool used for testing was the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) developed by Fountas & Pinnell (2008). The actual intervention phase of the study lasted for six weeks. Throughout the six weeks, students met with me twice a week for 20 minute small group sessions. During these sessions, data was gathered using various methods such as graphic organizers, anecdotal notes, and a rubric developed by the researcher. Examples of these tools can be found in the Appendix.

**Summary**

Not only was it the grade level that I teach that helped guide my action research, but also my interest in read-alouds from past courses. The next chapter will discuss past research that was used to frame this action research. It will include summaries of the studies and the conclusions derived from the data. The information gathered for the next section acted as the guide and was the reason I chose to concentrate on the use of read-alouds and improving student comprehension.
Key Terms:

**Benchmark Assessment System (BAS):** a reading assessment developed by Fountas & Pinnell (2008) to determine student reading levels and skills.

**Crossed Design:** a type of experiment where every participant engages in every condition of the study.

**Expository:** where the purpose is to inform or explain a subject to the reader.

**Intervention:** a period of time where intense, additional instruction takes place in order to improve a week academic area.

**Mean:** the average of a sum of numbers.

**Metacognition:** the process of thinking about ones thinking and using that to make adjustments in the learning process.

**Narrative:** also known as a story; a written account of connected events.

**Performative Responses:** a way to enhance learning by allowing children to enter the world of text and interpret it and make meaning from it in their own way.

**Range:** the difference between the highest and lowest numbers in a set of data.

**Read-Aloud:** the act of orally reading a story above the audience’s independent reading level.

**Standardized Test:** a test given to all students, regardless of ability level, to gather data in various academic areas.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

Research has proven that read-alouds are an effective comprehension building strategy (Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008). Read-alouds allow students to build background knowledge and learn and refine reading strategies and skills. Read-alouds have shown to be extremely important for elementary age students because many are just beginning their reading journey and absorb as much new information as possible. Educators need to use this to their advantage and incorporate read-alouds into everyday lessons and activities.

This literature review contains twelve articles covering issues related to students and the use of read-alouds. These articles have been divided into three different sub-categories: comprehension, motivation, and vocabulary. The first section contains articles that are related to improving overall comprehension with the use of read-alouds. The second section will encompass articles that will support the importance of motivation and read-aloud book choice. The last section contains articles that are related to read-alouds and increasing student vocabulary skills.

Improving Overall Comprehension with the Use of Read-Alouds

The articles in this section focus on the use of read-alouds as a tool to enhance student comprehension. The first article explores the use of various reading strategies including read-alouds to increase first grade phonics skills. The second article examines the importance of reading aloud to children from the time they are infants. The third article touches on using read-alouds as a way to enhance students’ ability to use and understand story structure. The fourth article explores the use of performative responses with picturebook read-alouds. The last three
A continuous problem that faces educators is how to improve student comprehension, especially for struggling readers. Due to this problem, comprehension has always been an area of interest for researchers. Numerous studies from researchers such as David E. Rumelhart (2004), Louise M. Rosenblatt (2004), and Walter Kintsch (2004) have been done to provide the best way to aid student comprehension. It seems as if there is not just one way to do this. This study tries to find the best combination of strategies to enhance comprehension. Beverly, Giles, and Buck (2009) suggested that using decodable texts, basals, easy readers, authentic children’s literature, and non-fiction text are some of the best ways.

The purpose of this study was to determine the achievement of students in reading comprehension using phonics instruction with decodable texts versus read-alouds. Phonics instruction in general encompasses the teaching of different parts of words and sentences so students are able to understand the pieces first and then are able to put it all together. Phonics instruction with decodable texts encompasses using basic level texts that incorporate high frequency words and repetition of words to promote comprehension. On the other hand, phonics instruction with read-alouds includes a teacher reading a text aloud while demonstrating characteristics of a good reader and also teaching important concepts. There are many teachable moments that arise during a read-aloud, and a teacher should use this to his/her benefit.

This study consisted of 32 children from two first grade classrooms in a southern public school. Fourteen of the children were girls and eighteen were boys. Fifteen of the participants were African-American, and seventeen were Caucasian. A total of fourteen of the participants were considered by the researchers to be at-risk in the area of reading. This was determined by a
parent survey, and participants were considered at-risk if they fell into any of the following categories: the students' family had a history of speech and language difficulties, the student repeated a grade level, or there was a history of significant birth history.

The research method for this study was quantitative. The independent variables were the three different groups of students: one group using decodable texts, another using authentic literature read-alouds, and a control group. The dependent variables were the scores that were measured using DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2002). DIBELS is an assessment that consists of three subtests: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, and Oral Reading Fluency.

This study occurred over eight weeks with a total of sixteen sessions. The sessions were held twice a week for 30 minutes each. At the start of the intervention, all participants were given the Gray Oral Reading Test, 4th Ed. (GORT-4; Weiderholt & Bryant, 2001), and a benchmark reading assessment associated with Preventing Academic Failure (PAF; Bertin & Perlman, 1998). During the sessions, the group using decodable texts received ten minutes of systematic phonics instruction associated with PAF. The remaining 20 minutes was spent refining reading skills with decodable texts. In contrast, the read-aloud group spent the entire 30 minute session listening to a read-aloud from the teacher. Books with phonological emphasis such as rhyme or alliteration were not used to prevent additional phonological exposure. The control group received a combination of phonics instruction with both decodable texts and authentic literature. At the end of the sixteen sessions, participants were administered both the GORT-4 and the PAF benchmark assessment again to collect data.

As a result of their research, Beverly, Giles, and Buck concluded that significant reading gains were made by all of the first grade students following the sixteen-week intervention.
regardless of the type of text. Participants that used phonics plus decodable texts demonstrated that below-average readers had greater increases than average readers. However, average readers had greater improvements after the literature read-aloud. This study is proof that reading is a complex task, and that a balanced literacy approach is the best for all readers. It can, however, be concluded from this research that reading practice with decodable texts and explicit phonics instruction is essential for beginning readers.

It is evident that reading aloud in school settings has a positive effect on literacy development, but reading aloud should begin long before a child enters school. Holland (2007) conducted a case study analyzing the effects of reading aloud to infants. The study was done because of the controversy between health care professionals, educators, and researchers on the idea of why reading aloud is important. Reading to infants has always been a controversial topic, but this case study examines the positive effects it can have on literacy development. The research question for this study was: “Does reading aloud to an infant (in the home environment and child care) promote literacy development?” (p.384) Researchers such as Ninio (1983) and Snow & Goldfield (1983) stated that reading aloud provides positive literacy experiences for infants and prepares them for future reading success.

This case study examined the effects of reading aloud to a sixth month old child from before birth to present. The infant is a girl and is also an only child. She was born into a middle income family that lives in a low income area in the southern United States. Read-aloud opportunities were presented to her in both her home environment and child care setting. Many different individuals conducted the actual read-alouds. Some of these individuals included her parents, grandmother, and child care teacher.
To measure the effects of this case study, daily observations in the home environment were made of the infant for the first four months of her life. Then, observations were made in her home environment and child care setting during her fifth and six months. These observations were done to determine if reading aloud to infants does have a positive impact on literacy development. The observations were analyzed based upon reactions and physical engagements by the infant during the read-aloud. Examples of the reactions and/or physical engagements include: touching the book, babbling, or eye movement.

During this particular case study, the infant showed significant signs of comfort and happiness while being read to during her first month. During her second, third, and fourth months she attempted to read or talk along with the adult conducting the read-aloud. During her fifth and sixth months, she became engaged in the read-aloud by grabbing onto the book and attempting to turn the pages. It can be concluded from these observations that the infant was highly engaged in the read-aloud, and that reading aloud does indeed have a positive effect on literacy development. It is also important to note that reading aloud does not only promote literacy development in infants, but can also help older students with reading comprehension and story structure.

Ouellette, Dagostino, and Carifio (1999) conducted a study in low fifth grade students that examined the effects of using children’s literature through read-aloud and an inferencing strategy to enhance reading comprehension and story structure. Most narrative texts follow a similar story structure, and students are more apt to remember details from the story when they understand the structure. According to the researchers, as students have more exposure to narrative story structure, their ability to recall important facts from the text will increase. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of literature in developing students’ reading
ability and sense of story structure. The independent variable in this study was the group of students receiving the read-aloud intervention. The dependent variables were the data collected by the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Sixth Edition (MAT 6) and the scores from the students’ summaries. The MAT 6 assessment was used to measure reading achievement. The summarization task required students to listen to a read-aloud and then immediately complete a summary of the story. No limits were provided on the length of the summaries or the time it took to complete the summaries. Summaries were then typed to prevent any bias against students. Summaries were then scored on a scale of zero to thirty with zero being the lowest number of points possible, and thirty being the maximum.

This study occurred in two schools in a medium-sized city in the Northeast. There were 231 fifth grade students who participated that came from eleven different classrooms. These students were divided into two different groups based on the results of their scores from the MAT 6: high readers and low readers. To be designated a low reader; students had to score at or below the 31st percentile. To be designated as a high reader, students had to score at or above the 72nd percentile. From these results, 72 students fell in the category of low readers and 64 fell in the category of high readers. The group of 72 low reading students was randomly split into two groups, a control and intervention group.

This study was conducted over a twelve-week period. Prior to the intervention, all students completed a summarization task and a subtest of the MAT 6 assessment. For each week of the twelve week intervention, students met in small groups of six students with the researcher to talk about children’s literature. The control group continued as normal with large group instruction and did not participate in read-aloud sessions. During the intervention sessions, the researcher would begin by stating the title of the book. From here, the researchers would engage
the students by asking the students questions related to the characters and the problems in the story. At the conclusion of the read-aloud, students were asked to discuss the previously asked questions and were also allowed to handle the book to investigate further. After the treatment period, students from both groups completed a different subtest of the MAT 6 and another summarization task. This was done so the researchers could compare results from before and after the intervention.

At the conclusion of the study, results from the MAT 6 and summarization tasks were compared between the control and experimental group. According to the MAT 6 assessment, the control group had a mean pre test score of 23.36 and the experimental group had a mean pre test score of 23.14. The mean post test score for the control group was 29.15 and the experimental group has a mean post test score of 31.50. These scores indicate that the experimental group made more gains after receiving the small group read-aloud intervention. According to the summary scores, the control group had a mean pre test score of 17.61 and the experimental group had a mean pre test score of 17.01. The mean post test score for the control group was 22.97 and the experimental group has a mean post test score of 24.32. The scores indicated that the students in the experimental group scored better on the summarization task following the intervention. All of the results from this study concluded that students receiving the intervention outperformed the students in the control group. Therefore, the use of children’s literature for a read-aloud does play an important role in developing fifth grade students’ reading ability and sense of story structure.

Not only does reading aloud enhance a student’s ability to understand story structure, but it also allows them a creative outlet to make meaning from text. Adomat (2010) conducted a study that explored how young readers build literacy awareness through performative responses
and picturebook read-alouds. Adomat (2010) suggested that performative responses ...”allow children to contribute actively to the construction of meaning” (p.207). They are a way to enhance learning because they allow children to enter the world of text and interpret it and make meaning from it in their own way. According to Sipe (2008), characteristics such as taking on the role of the characters, using different voices, and creating dramatizations are examples of performative responses. This study was completed to examine the use of picturebook read-alouds as a means to promote literary understanding. In particular, the study focused on one young child and the characteristics of her performative responses in relation to the read-aloud.

This study was conducted in a rural elementary school on the east coast of the United States and lasted for six months. The participants for the study were a total of eight children, five of which were boys and three of which were girls. All of the children in this study were in second grade and received Title I services from their school. The group was made up of a diverse population with five of the children also received support for speech and language, and six of them qualified for free or reduced lunch. These children were selected because they were already part of a larger study that examined instructional practices for children who qualified for extra support in the area of literacy. One particular student was chosen as the focus of this study because she accounted for more than 54% of the performative responses that occurred. The teacher who was chosen to be part of this study was very qualified because she had more than 20 years of experience in the teaching field.

Throughout the six month study, 15 different small-group read-aloud sessions were conducted. Each of these sessions was videotaped and audiotaped, and then later transcribed. Observations of the tapes were made, and notes were taken from the transcriptions. From here, the researcher used the five categories of literary understanding (Sipe, 2008) to analyze the
results. The five categories include: analytical responses, intertextual responses, personal responses, transparent responses, and performative responses. Analytical responses are when children discuss narrative elements such as plot, setting, characters, etc. Intertextual responses are when children make connections to other texts and/or books. Personal responses are when children make connections to their own lives and/or experiences. Transparent responses are when children find themselves deep in the story world. Performative responses are when children manipulate the story using their own creative abilities. The data was further analyzed, and it was evident that one student in particular demonstrated the most performative responses and therefore became the focal point of the study. Mime and gestures, sound effects and vocal intonations, characterizations, and spontaneous dramatizations are all example of performative responses.

The results of this study indicated that the group of second grade children utilized the following kinds of responses: 33% analytical, 6% intertextual, 26% personal, 2% transparent, and 33% performative. Although all children showed a blend of the different categories, it is evident from the data that the most popular type of response was performative. This is because this particular type of response allows children to use their imaginations and make their own meaning from the text. Many times these responses are discouraged because they can be seen as distracting or disruptive, and students can appear to be off-task. However, this study demonstrates the importance of performative responses and their ability to enhance literary understandings.

It is not performative responses alone that increase reading comprehension. The ability to have standardized tests read aloud has also shown an impact on improving student comprehension. In this study presented by Crawford and Tindal (2004) the effects of a test
modification were examined especially in the area of reading aloud a reading comprehension test. This study had four research questions in two different categories: the effects of the modifications, and teacher decision making relating to how their students would perform with the modifications. In addition, the researchers grouped the students into three educational classifications: special education, Title One, and general education. The two questions the researchers posed that fell under the effects of modification were: (1) Does a read-aloud modification produce better test scores than reading passages silently? (2) Does a read-aloud modification help boost the confidence of students with disabilities? The questions that fell under the teaching decision making were: (1) Is there a different between teacher opinions on students performance and the actual student benefits? (2) Is there a difference between teacher scoring and student performance on the standard administration test?

The research model for this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the read-aloud video administration versus the standard administration of the reading comprehension test. The dependent variables were the comparison of student tests on each of the test administrations (video versus standard) and the teacher predictions on how students would perform.

The site of this study was in two different states, North Carolina and Oregon. A total of 357 fourth and fifth grade students participated. Analysis was only conducted on the 338 students who completed both test formats (standard and video administration). Of these 338 students, 22% received special education services and 26% received Title One services. Teachers were not randomly selected who participated in this study. Instead, they were part of a larger study about oral presentation on a statewide math tests, and volunteered to be in this
smaller, but related study. All teachers received the materials for this study at a training workshop beforehand.

For this study, the researchers used a crossed design which means that every participant engaged in every condition of the study. The two conditions for this study were form and administration format. Student completed these two conditions in random order. In addition, there were two test forms (A and B) for each method of administration. The standard administration of the test encompassed five passages that each had five to eight questions following them. Students were required to read the passages and questions silently to themselves. For the video administration of the test, students were able to watch a T.V. where the passages and questions were read aloud.

The results of this study were examined in two categories: the effects of the read-aloud modification and the ability of the teachers' decision making related to test modifications. The effects of the read-aloud modifications were analyzed in five different ways. Initially, the average grade level differences across all students' raw scores on both test administrations were analyzed and no significant difference was found between fourth and fifth grade students. Therefore, the sample population was combined from that point on. Then, the effects of which type of format the students were offered first was determined not to be a factor. Next, the variance of test form, either A or B, also proved not to be a factor. Next, as hypothesized, analysis proved that the mean scores for all students improved when the test was given with the video administration broken down by educational classifications. The student group that benefited the most was the special education population with a 3.53 mean test score improvement. The general education population demonstrated a 1.12 mean test score improvement. The Title One population had a relatively small mean test improvement of 0.73.
Lastly, the researchers used a formula developed by Fuch and Fuch (2001) for analyzing the effects of accommodation for individual students. The individual students who made the greatest gains, defined as five points or greater, on the video administration versus the standard administration were the special education students (33%), followed by the Title One students (12%), while general education students showed the least improvement from the accommodation (4%).

The ability of the teachers' decision making related to test modifications was analyzed in two different ways. One method of analyzing teachers' decision making was the teacher ratings of students' proficiency. Teachers predicted student outcomes based on prior knowledge using a scale of one to five. Teachers' predications were accurate for those students they ranked proficient (100%), predications were nearly perfect for students in the highest reading levels (96%), but teachers' predictions were not accurate for those students predicted as poor readers (38%). The second method for analyzing teacher decision making was teacher judgment related to the importance of the read-aloud modification compared to their actual improvement. Teachers identified 135 students who they believed would benefit by five points or more, but only 59 students actual met the five point improvement. However, all of the special education students that teachers identified as benefitting the most did in fact meet the five point threshold. It is evident from this study that students who are provided with an opportunity for a standardized test to be read aloud do perform better than if they are reading it on their own. This is not the only research that supports this fact.

In a study conducted by Fletcher et al. (2009), the researchers examined the effects of accommodations on standardized testing with middle school students. In recent years, the topic of standardized tests and fairness between all students has been controversial. It became even
more controversial with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. All students are required to take standardized tests, but how can they pass these tests if they are unable to understand them? This study was done in order to prove that students with disabilities that receive accommodations do not have an unfair advantage to students that do not have disabilities. The researchers hypothesized that the accommodations would show benefits for poor readers regardless of designation.

This study took place in southeast Texas in four suburban school districts. The study took place over one school year, and all participants were in the seventh grade. All students came from similar demographics and similar school districts. There were a total of 695 students, 271 of which were identified as having special services in reading and 424 of which were considered average readers.

The research method for this study was quantitative. The independent variables were the three groups of students: one receiving standard administration of the test, another receiving the one day read-aloud administration, and the last receiving the two day read-aloud administration. The dependent variable was the scored from the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, Experimental Version; 2007).

This study took place over one school year. Students were administered the test in random, small groups ranging in size from 4-20. These groups consisted of special education students along with average achieving students. For the standard administration group, examiners followed the guidelines as written and provided no read-aloud accommodations. For the read-aloud accommodation groups, test administrators read the passages and the answer choices aloud, but students were required to fill in the answer form on their own. After the first three stories, the students assigned to the two day read-aloud group were dismissed. The one day
read-aloud group took a small break with a snack, and then finished the test later that day. The two day read-aloud group came back together the following day to complete the test. Also important to note, was that test administrators were not allowed to deviate from the test manual in order to ensure validity.

At the conclusion of this study, raw score and standard score results from the TAKS (2007) were analyzed and compared. The data showed that performance on the two day read-aloud accommodation was higher than performance on the standard administration. As a result of their research, Fletcher et al. (2007) concluded that all students, both special education and average achieving, benefitted from the read-aloud accommodation. The accommodation allowed for all students to spend more time comprehending and less time decoding. This in turn led to better standardized test scores for all.

It has been proven that special education students benefit from read-aloud modifications on standardized tests, but regular education students do as well. Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, and Saleh (2004) conducted a study that was designed to achieve two goals. The first goal was to extend work from previous researchers such as Fuchs et al. (2000). The researchers wanted to examine the impact of a read-aloud accommodation on a reading performance test with an older group of students with and without learning disabilities (LD). The second goal was to analyze the students' insight of the read-aloud accommodation on the reading performance test.

The research method for this study is quantitative. The independent variables were the three types of test administration which included standard administration, the one-day accommodation, and the two-day accommodation. The dependent variables were the scores from the reading performance test and the student responses to interview questions.
This study took place in a large urban school district located in the southeastern United States. Participants for this study were recruited from six different schools within the district. Of the six schools, three were middle schools and three were high schools. A total of 456 students participated, and all of the participants were in Grades 6 through 10. Of the 456 participants, 283 were considered Learning Disabled (LD) and 173 were not. Of the 283 participants with LD, 182 were male and 101 were female. For the students who did not have a disability, 94 were male and 79 were female.

For all students, the standard administration of the reading comprehension test was administered first, and then the read-aloud accommodation was given second. All tests were administered by one of the authors or a trained research assistant. During the standard administration, students were provided with a sample test question to ensure that they understood the test format. The test administrator then signaled to the students when they were to begin and end each reading passage and answer the corresponding questions. To ensure consistent implementation of the test, all test administrators followed a strict script and used a stopwatch. After the students were given the standard administration version of the test, researchers waited two to three weeks before giving the read-aloud accommodation. For this version, the test was individually administered versus in a group setting. Students were directed to read the passage aloud at their desired pace, and then read the answer choices aloud and mark their answer. The test administrators told the students when to begin, but then positioned themselves away from the students so there was no additional pressure. The only time the test administrator intervened was when a student appeared to not be reading the passages and answers aloud. As both test conditions concluded, students participated in an exit interview. The interview was very brief and only consisted of two questions. Students were asked how difficult or easy they perceived
the test to be and whether they felt they had performed better in the standard administration, the read-aloud accommodation, or the same in the two conditions.

The results from this study indicated the answer to the first goal of the researchers that scores from the two tests were not significantly different. For the read-aloud accommodation, 17% of students with LD boosted their performance whereas for 20% the read-aloud accommodation impaired performance. For the students without LD, 10% showed a benefit from the read-aloud accommodation, whereas 11% showed impaired performance. Overall, it can be concluded that the read-aloud accommodations did not dramatically enhance performance on the test. The second goal was to analyze students’ perceptions of the read-aloud accommodation. Of the students with LD, 41% of them perceived that they had performed better during the read-aloud accommodation, 36% thought they did better during the standard administration, and 32% believed they performed similarly in the two conditions. Of the students without LD, 49% perceived that they did better during the read-aloud accommodation, 19% thought they did better during the standard administration, and 32% believed they performed similarly in the two conditions. Overall, of those who benefited from the read-aloud accommodation, 56.4% believed it helped their performance, 12.8% believed there to be no difference, and 30.8% believed the read-aloud accommodation negatively affected their performance.

There are many components that influence reading comprehension, and read-alouds play a very important role because they allow students various opportunities to experiment with text. However, it is not read-alouds alone that promote optimal comprehension. Student motivation is extremely important when trying to take new meaning away from a text. Mathewson (2004) supported this by stating that having a positive attitude toward reading gives an intention to read
and then leads to reading itself. A quality educator should use this to his/her advantage, and select read-alouds that are of student interest. This will motivate students to read and then in turn comprehend what they read.

Importance of Motivation and Read-Aloud Book Choice

Read-alouds are a great way to promote literacy development, but when books pertain to student interests the benefits increase greatly. Students are more in tune with their learning when they are interested and motivated. The same literary aspects can be taught through books that interest them as ones that don’t. It is also important for the teacher to choose books that interest him/her because Jim Trelease, author of the Read-Aloud Handbook, stated that you shouldn’t “…read stories that you don’t enjoy yourself. Your dislike will show in the reading, and that defeats your purpose” (1982, p.68). The first article in this section examines the physical and verbal actions between children and parents during a read-aloud. The next two articles demonstrate the importance of book selection when reading aloud.

Reading aloud in general is extremely important to a young child’s literacy development. However, a child benefits the most when the reading aloud begins at home. There are many benefits that come from a parent reading aloud to a child including: improved vocabulary skills, engagement in meaningful conversations, and motivation for children to read on their own (Bennett et al., 2002). Barnyak (2011) conducted a study that focused the physical and verbal interactions of rural families regarding reading books aloud. The research method for this study was qualitative and included semi-structured interviews and direct observations. The research questions for this study are as follows: (1) What are the rural parents’ attitudes and beliefs about reading books together aloud with their children? (2) What are the young children’s attitudes and beliefs about sharing books together at home with their parents or guardians? (3) While reading
together aloud, what observable (physical and verbal) interactions occur between the adult/child dyad? (4) Are the observed interactions of parents and their children aligned with their self-reported attitudes and beliefs about reading books together aloud?

This study took place in a rural community in Western Pennsylvania. Participants were chosen based on their age range (2-7 years old) and their involvement in a local educational center. Six rural families that consisted of seven adults and eight children were the core of this study. These families were chosen because of their involvement with the educational center. There were various sites for this study including: participant homes, public libraries, and the educational center itself.

Prior to the start of the study, all participants were fully informed about the study’s purpose and procedures. Interviews and observations were the main modes of data collection for this study. Interviews were used to obtain participants beliefs and attitudes about reading books together. Observations were done to examine relationships between parents and children while reading together and were guided by the research questions. The observations were videotaped to allow families a certain degree of privacy, and then were used to analyze the physical and verbal actions between the family members during the read-aloud.

At the conclusion of the study, videotapes were transcribed and the Adult/Child Interaction Reading Inventory (ACIRI) (DeBruin-Parecki, 2004) was used to analyze the findings. For the parent interview portion of this study, three main themes emerged based on the ACIRI. These themes included: Reading Within Families’ Everyday Lives, Reading Supported Through Parents’ Positive Outlooks, and Reading Supported Through Fostering Storybook Extensions. All of these themes encompass the importance of reading aloud with children at home. As for the children interview portion, analyses from the interviews demonstrated that
children have positive feelings about reading aloud, and were very enthusiastic about the time spent with their parents. For the observation portion of this study, three categories emerged from the ACIRI. These categories include: Increasing Attention to the Text; Encouraging Interactive Reading and Assisting Comprehension; and Applying Literacy Strategies. Examples from these categories are physical proximity, tone of voice, pointing to text and illustrations, visual cues, and repetitive language. Overall, the findings from this study show that parents and children’s beliefs and attitudes about reading aloud aligned with their actions during an actual read-aloud interaction.

Reading aloud has many positive benefits, but choosing popular books can be an added advantage. Brabham, Murray, and Bowden (2006) conducted a study that compared literacy learning amongst kindergarteners using ten popular alphabet books that were read aloud. Reading aloud has been proven to be an effective way to promote literacy learning in the classroom. According to Beck & McKeown, reading aloud “is probably the most highly recommended activity for encouraging language and literacy” (2001, p.10). This statement supports the idea that reading aloud can have a strong, positive impact on learning.

The research method for this study was quantitative. The independent variables were the implementation of the two interactive reading styles: the meaning emphasis style and the phoneme emphasis style. The dependent variable was the results from the instrument that was modeled after the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 1997).

This study took place in three elementary schools from the same public school system in the southeastern United States. From these three elementary schools, subjects for this study were from twelve different kindergarten classes. There were a total of 152 participants for this study, 70 of which were males and 82 of which were females. Ages for the participants ranged from
five years, one month to six years, eight months. To recruit teachers for this study, researchers contacted principals at the designated elementary schools and asked them if any kindergarten teachers would be willing to participate. Of the teachers who participated, one-third had master’s degrees, and the rest had bachelor’s degrees.

This study was completed over a four-week time period. Prior to the intervention, a few weeks were given to conduct interviews and observations, and to introduce the twelve teachers to the ten different alphabet books and the two interactive reading styles that were to be used during the intervention. From here, six teachers and classes were assigned to the meaning emphasis group and six to the phoneme emphasis group. Within the meaning emphasis group, four teachers were assigned to the listening center condition with a book and audiotape and two were assigned to the computer center condition with a CD-ROM. All six of these teachers were given instructions to emphasize word meanings as they read aloud. Within the phoneme emphasis group, two teachers were assigned to the listening center condition with a book and audiotape and four were assigned to the computer center condition with a CD-ROM. These six teachers were instructed to emphasize phonemes that correspond to letters and provide example words within the read-aloud book. All twelve teachers were instructed to use the same opening statement while introducing the read-aloud regardless of which group they were part of.

At the end of the four-week intervention, the researchers analyzed data using an instrument that was modeled after the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 1997). Researchers compiled a list of words that occurred in the ten read-aloud books at least five times. From here a list of eighteen words was created that were used during both the pre-test and post-test. The researchers then selected images from software or online to represent each of the eighteen words. When the assessment was administered, students were shown three pictures.
One picture represented a word from the list of eighteen, and the other two were considered distracter pictures. Children were asked to point at the correct picture, and then their responses were then recorded on score sheets.

Results from this study indicated that students who were exposed to the listening center with audiotapes scored higher than students who were exposed to the CD-ROM storybook versions. This was especially apparent in the phoneme emphasis group with students scoring higher after being exposed to the listening center with audiotapes. Overall, results for this study indicated significant improvements in kindergarteners' ability to identify letters and phonemes after the four-week session when the teachers read the alphabet books aloud. Not only do popular books work well as read-alouds, but award winning books work just as well.

Hall and Williams (2010) conducted a study that examined how teachers of first grade children from low socioeconomic backgrounds used Caldecott picture books as a means of reading aloud. Caldecott picture books were chosen because of their quality and rich content. Researchers such as Van Kleeck & Stahl (2003) supported this by stating that many aspects of literacy can be better developed through the use of a quality read-aloud. Print concepts, vocabulary, comprehension, language, and overall attitudes about reading can all be enhanced through the use of a read-aloud.

The research method for this study was quantitative. The four questions for this study included: (1) What were the descriptors of the teacher talk during the expository and narrative read-alouds? (2) Were there differences in the number of descriptors between the expository and narrative read-alouds? (3) What interaction style did the focus teacher display in the two read-aloud events? (4) What were the students' responses to the read-alouds? The independent variable
was the implementation of the read-aloud event using the Caldecott books. The dependent variables were the list of eight descriptors, and the interview questions posed by the researchers.

This study took place in an urban elementary school in northeast Florida. There were 582 students total who participated in this study. Of the 582 students, 61% were African-American, 1% was Asian, 21% were Caucasian, and 4% were of mixed ethnicities. In total, 91% of the participants were eligible for free or reduced hot lunch. As for the five teachers, all were female and held either a bachelor’s or master’s degree. Their teaching experience ranged from 3-29 years.

There were two books that were chosen for this study. The first, *Snowflake Bentley* (Martin, 1998), was chosen because of its blend of narrative and expository text. The second book, *The Spider and the Fly* (DiTerlizzi, 2002), was chosen because of its rich vocabulary and humorous nature. However, both books were chosen because they received Caldecott honors.

This study was completed in two phases. The first phase consisted of observations of the first grade teachers conducting the read-alouds and then developing categories and descriptors of their talk. The read-aloud events were audiotaped and then transcribed for each teacher. Students were then interviewed to determine their feelings and observations on the read-aloud event. The interview were conducted immediately following the read-aloud events and consisted of the following questions: (1) Did you like the book the teacher read aloud to you? (2) Tell me about this book. Is this book fiction or nonfiction? How do you know? (3) Do you like hearing picture books? (4) Which book did you like best, and why? The second phase of this study examined the read-aloud events on one particular teacher and her students’ responses. This teacher was chosen because her principal deemed her highly qualified and she had the most children present for the read-aloud event in her classroom.
In order to answer the first research question, a list of eight descriptors was developed after the transcripts were analyzed. The categories include management, predictions, book focus, analysis, clarification, vocabulary, personal, and recall. These descriptors were developed based on the types of interactions the teacher made with the class during the read-aloud. To answer the second research question, the utterances during the read-aloud were counted and analyzed. It was evident from the data that there was a difference in the number of descriptors she used for each type of text, particularly in the categories of predictions, analysis, and recall. The third question proved to be the most difficult to answer because the teachers interactive style did not fit into the read-aloud categories discussed in the article. For the last question, results indicated that students enjoyed the read-aloud experiences with the Caldecott books although many believed that the chosen books were too sophisticated for an audience of socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The results also indicated that allowing students to respond to the story increases both their engagement and comprehension. Neither of the books was familiar to the students, but they were able to make connections and demonstrate comprehension of both through retelling.

Read-alouds that support student interests are a very important way to increase comprehension and reading skills. It is using these types of read-alouds in conjunction with informational text that will promote optimal learning. Read-alouds not only assist with comprehension, but they also lend themselves to opportunities for educators to teach about and enhance student vocabulary. Fien et al. (2011) suggested that it is extremely important to identify elementary age children with low vocabulary skills and intervene in ways that will enhance those skills. The read-aloud is a perfect example of this.

Read-Alouds as a way to Increase Student Vocabulary Skills
The articles in this section focus on the use of read-alouds as a tool to enhance vocabulary skills. The first article explores a small group intervention with first grade students and the effectiveness of increasing vocabulary skills. The second article examines repeated interactive read-alouds using non-fiction texts.

Read-alouds have proven to be very effective in numerous classrooms, no matter what age level. Read-alouds allow a teacher to teach vocabulary, review text structure, build background knowledge, and model comprehension strategies (van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer, 2003). Most students learn better by having something first modeled for them, and then being allowed to try it on their own. It is through the read-aloud that the important characteristics, skills, and strategies are demonstrated. Fien et al. (2011) conducted a study that explored whether small-group activities in conjunction with whole-group read-aloud instruction would enhance vocabulary and comprehension skills in first-grade classrooms. The purpose of this study was to determine if the small-group instruction would enhance vocabulary and comprehension skills. The primary research question posed was whether supplementing whole-class Read Aloud Curriculum (Coyne, Zipoli et al., 2009; McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009) with small-group vocabulary instruction will affect student retelling and vocabulary? The Read Aloud Curriculum is a nineteen week program that incorporates an authentic read-aloud experience along with explicit vocabulary instruction and direct comprehension.

The research model for this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the small-group who received the intervention. The dependent variables were the TOLD-P-3 Assessment (Bankson, 1990), narrative and expository retells from the Strong Narrative Assessment Procedure (Strong, 1998), and a depth of vocabulary knowledge measure that was developed by the researchers. Each of the variables was equally important, and each measured
something different. The TOLD-P-3 Assessment measures language proficiency and assesses skills related to syntax, semantics, and phonology. The Strong Narrative Assessment Procedures involve students retelling narrative and expository components from various read-alouds. The depth of knowledge measure assessed students’ knowledge of sixteen taught and untaught vocabulary words.

The site in this study was eighteen first-grade classrooms from nine Title I schools in the Pacific Northwest. There were a total of 106 first-grade students who participated that ranged in age from six to seven. All of the students received whole-group instruction from the Read Aloud Curriculum. Students were assigned randomly to each group resulting in 54 students receiving the small group intervention and 52 students in the control group. Demographics for the two groups varied, resulting in two diverse groups of students. The intervention group consisted of 55.6% female and 44.4% male students. Of these students, 74.1% were White, 18.5% Hispanic, 1.9% African American, and 1.9% Native American, and 3.7% declined to answer. Also, 18.5% were eligible for special education, and 7.4% were considered English Language Learners. The control group received no additional small group instruction. The use of a control group is important to a study to determine the optimal effect of an intervention. The control group in this study consisted of 40.4% female and 59.6% male students; 69.2% were White, 19.2% Asian, 3.8% African American, 3.8% Native American, and 1.9% declined to answer. Also, 23.1% were eligible for special education, and 5.8% were considered English Language Learners. It is evident from this data that each group had a wide variety of students, and this is essential for a successful study.

Students in the intervention group received additional small-group instruction twice a week for 20 minutes that was concurrent with the implementation of the whole group Read
Aloud Curriculum. The small-groups consisted of two to five students, and they received additional read-aloud activities and opportunities to enhance vocabulary skills. The intervention was delivered by a set of eleven interventionists, four of which were teachers and the other seven had experience working in classrooms as paraprofessionals. All interventionists received a full-day training prior to the intervention, and external support during the intervention. All lesson plans and materials were prepared in advance to enhance the quality of the intervention. The overall purpose of this intervention was to increase both comprehension and vocabulary skills related to expository passages.

As a result of the research, Fien et al. (2011) concluded that students who received the small-group instruction outperformed students in the control group on both vocabulary assessments and expository retellings. Findings from this study supported the idea that small-group instruction in addition to already existing whole-group read aloud instruction is beneficial especially for at-risk first grade students. The findings also answered the primary research question that supplementing whole-class Read Aloud Curriculum with small-group vocabulary instruction does affect student retelling and vocabulary. Not only is it the use of read-alouds through small group instruction that benefits comprehension, but repeated, interactive read-alouds help as well.

Greenawalt (2010) conducted a study that examined the effects of repeated interactive read-alouds using non-fiction texts. Fisher et al. (2004) stated that it is extremely important for students to be exposed to read-alouds because it promotes the building of background knowledge which enhances one’s overall reading skills. In this study Greenawalt (2010) proposed two research questions. The first research question explored whether or not repeated interactive read-alouds of non-fiction texts would promote vocabulary usage and comprehension. The second
question explored whether or not repeated interactive read-alouds would promote students to use new vocabulary and engage students in higher level thinking skills.

The research method for this study was quantitative. The independent variables in this study were the implementation of three interactive read-alouds using the text *Elephants Can Paint Too!* (Arnold, 2005) and also the eight vocabulary questions used throughout the study. The dependent variables were the yes/no study quiz created by the teacher, and the transcriptions of the audio taped sessions.

This study was conducted in two school districts in the Northeastern part of the United States. The first group of students that participated was a class of fifteen kindergarten students from a rural school district. This group consisted of seven boys and eight girls. None of the students received special education services. The second group of students that participated was a class of twenty-five first grade students from an urban school district. This group consisted of eleven boys and fourteen girls. Five of these students were considered English Language Learners, but if the total twenty-five none of them were considered to have exceptionalities. The students were placed into these designated groups so the results could be compared and analyzed.

This study was completed in a short amount of time and only lasted for two weeks. For the first group, which consisted of kindergarten students, the first read-aloud of the text *Elephants Can Paint Too!* (Arnold, 2005) took place on a Monday. Then on Friday, the researcher read the same text to her second group of participants, the class of first grade students. Each group was read aloud the same book two other times during the following weeks. To ensure that all interactive read-alouds were conducted in a similar manner, the researcher pre-read the book and created a list of questions to use with both groups. Each intervention started
with introducing the book and discussing the pictures. Following the group discussion, predictions were made as to what would happen in the story. During the actual read-aloud, the researcher modeled analytical thoughts and questions. It was at this time that vocabulary support was also provided. Eight pre-selected words were chosen from the text and supported throughout each session.

At the end of each interactive read-aloud, the researcher provided a mini assessment to all of the students. The note cards had the word “yes” on one side, and the word “no” on the other side. From here, the researcher would read a series of questions and the students would respond using the “yes/no” note card. She then tallied the results after each intervention, and compiled the results. The researcher was also able to collect data from the transcriptions of the audio taped sessions. The transcription was a compilation of student responses and open-ended questions. From the transcriptions, data was also collected on the amount of times that the researcher had to persuade the students to use the eight vocabulary words.

This study was analyzed in three areas: literal comprehension, critical thinking, and vocabulary usage. For the area of literal comprehension, both groups of students scored 100% on the questions following the three interventions. This implies that repeated interactive read-alouds may not have an effect on comprehension. As for critical thinking, both groups of students improved. At the start of the intervention, the kindergarten students were only able to give 84 responses to open-ended questions. At the end of the intervention, however, they gave 202 responses. The first grade students were able to give 121 responses to open-ended questions at the start of the intervention, but increased to 277 responses at the end of the intervention. This data shows that the repeated interactive read-aloud did improve students’ ability to answer open-ended questions. Finally, the data collected showed that both groups of students’ vocabulary
usage increased after repeated interactive read-alouds. The data demonstrated that the kindergarten students responded 23 times with vocabulary words after the first read-aloud, and 65 times after the third read-aloud. The results were similar with the first grade students as well. They responded 128 times with vocabulary after the first read-aloud, and 177 times after the third read-aloud. The results suggest that students were be able to understand and use the vocabulary after each interactive read-aloud.

Conclusions

It is evident from the reviewed studies that read-alouds support comprehension in many ways. Not only do they improve overall comprehension, but they also allow students to have an interest in their learning and increase literacy skills. Mem Fox (2001), author of Reading Magic, supported this idea by stating that “the fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn’t achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who’s reading aloud—it’s the relationship winding between all three, bringing them together in easy harmony” (p.10).

The studies also support that reading aloud can have benefits at any age and can increase literacy development in multiple ways. A quality educator should get to know each of his/her students and teach to their interests. These interests paired with literacy skills such as vocabulary and story structure can be intertwined into texts and lessons to promote optimal learning. Read-alouds also present many opportunities to introduce and refine reading skills and strategies. They do not have to be taught in any specific order, and many strategies can be worked on at the same time. Overall, read-alouds have proven to be an extremely useful tool to promote student comprehension.
CHAPTER THREE

Procedures for the Study

Introduction

Much research has been done over the years to support the importance of reading aloud to aide comprehension. This is especially pertinent with young children who are unable to read on their own. That reason alone is why the researcher chose this as a topic of study. This chapter describes in detail the sample population for the study, the procedures used, and the assessments used for data collection.

Description of Sample Population

This study was conducted in a kindergarten classroom in a public elementary school located in a small suburb in Southeastern Wisconsin. The elementary school houses grades pre-K through fifth grade and has a total population of 419 students. Of the total population, 0.7% were American Indian, 1.2% were Asian, 3.3% were African American, 2.9% were Hispanic, and 91.6% were Caucasian. The participants in the study included 17 children, ten of which were females and seven of which were males. The sample used for this particular study involved 2% Hispanic and 98% Caucasian. All of the students were between the ages of five and six. The mean age of the students was 5.35 and the range of ages five to six. Prior to the start of the study, all participants had parent/guardian permission to participate.

Description of Procedures Used

At the beginning of the study, the researcher discussed with students that the goal of this study was to improve comprehension through the use of read-alouds. The students were aware that the study was going to involve some pre and post testing along with six weeks of small group work.
This study was conducted over an eight-week period. The first and last week were dedicated to pre-testing and post-testing while the other six weeks were devoted to the read-aloud intervention. At the start of the study, all students were given the Fountas and Pinnell (2008) Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) to determine current instructional reading levels. After all students were assessed, they were then placed into small groups based upon the running record results from the BAS.

Once students were placed into groups, the six-week intervention phase began. The intervention phase consisted of small groups of students meeting with the teacher twice a week for 20 minute sessions. During the first 20 minute session of the week, students were introduced to a leveled book by the teacher reading it aloud to the small group. After the book was read aloud, the teacher elicited responses from the students about the main events of the story. Once the main events were determined and recorded, students were asked to put the events in sequential order. The small groups then worked together on the comprehension strategy of sequencing by using sentence strips to put the story in order. After this was completed, the teacher revisited the events on the sentence strips and corrected any mistakes that may have been made by referencing the book and using the strategy of looking back.

The second 20 minute session of the week consisted of a second read-aloud of the book and the use of graphic organizers to gather data. Students were instructed to draw pictures on the graphic organizers. This was done because of the age level of students and their inability to write accurately. While students were completing the graphic organizers, the teacher took notes of the children’s responses and recorded them on observation sheets that were kept with the graphic organizers. Responses were then scored as excellent, satisfactory, or poor based on relevance to the story. For a student to receive a score in the excellent category, he/she needed to
correctly recall an event from the beginning, middle, and end of the story. For a student to score in the satisfactory category, he/she needed to recall at least one or two correct events from any part of the story. For a student to score in the poor category, he/she could not correctly recall any events from the story or the events recalled did not fall in the correct order. Notes were also made on the score sheets for students who asked to look back in the text for assistance with recalling events.

**Description of Data Collection**

The first assessment used was the Benchmark Assessment System (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) (Appendix A). This assessment consists of leveled texts that correlate with a running record and set of comprehension questions to assess reading skills. While the students read the text aloud, the teacher records errors and notes on the running record page. Then he/she concludes the assessment by asking the comprehension questions that correlate with the text. After this is completed, the running record and comprehension questions are scored based on scales developed by the authors of the assessment kit.

The second assessment that was used was the observation sheets (Appendix B) developed by the researcher. These observation sheets included each student’s name with a section for notes about the beginning, middle, and end of the story. While the students were completing the designated graphic organizer (Appendix C) during the second intervention session of the week, the teacher recorded notes on the observation sheets. The observation sheets were then scored based on a rubric (Appendix D) that included three categories: excellent recall, satisfactory recall, or poor recall. All observation sheets were kept in a binder along with the student work in order to proceed with further instruction.
Summary

As stated before, much research has been done to support the importance of reading aloud to children. In an effort to further this research, the researcher of this study implemented intense interventions using read-alouds and sequencing main events in order to improve student comprehension. Throughout the interventions and data collection, the researcher gained knowledge about how to enhance the comprehension strategy of reading aloud and best meet the needs of the students.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The last chapter focused on implementing an intervention and the way in which data was collected to research if reading aloud does increase comprehension. This chapter will focus on the results of the data by discussing and representing pre and post test scores. It will also include examples of observation sheets and rubrics kept by the researcher and samples of student work during intervention sessions.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Prior to the start of the six-week intervention period, the Fountas & Pinnell (2008) Benchmark Assessment System was administered to each student by the researcher (Appendix A). The students were instructed to read a leveled book aloud to the researcher. While the students were reading, the researcher conducted a running record to note errors and self corrections made by the students. At the conclusion of the leveled book, the researcher administered the comprehension section of the assessment. This section incorporated five to six questions that related to the designated text. The researcher was directed to read the prompts that correlate with the questions and then record students responses. The type of questions varied; some questions could be found within the text, while others required the students to think beyond the text. Responses were scored on a scale of zero to three based on a comprehension scoring key developed by Fountas & Pinnell (2008). From here, the researcher calculated the scores using the scoring key and then turned the score into a percentage. For example, if a student received a score of 5/7, the researcher divided five by seven reaching a percentage of 71%.

Following the six-week intervention, the researcher administered the BAS a second time to all
students and calculated the scores. From here, the pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed and compared.

After the scores were calculated, majority of the students showed an increase in scores. However, some of the students scored the same on both the pre-test and post-test. The table below (Figure 1) shows the students pre-test and post-test scores in the percentage form. The students that demonstrated an increase in scores are indicated in bold.

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Benchmark Assessment System Comprehension Pre-Test Score</th>
<th>Benchmark Assessment System Comprehension Post-Test Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
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<td>71%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
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<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
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<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The bar graph below (Figure 2) shows a visual representation of the pre-test and post-test comprehension scores for each student.

Figure 2

The second bar graph (Figure 3) shows a visual representation of the students whose scores increased in order of the greatest to least gain.

Figure 3

Conclusions

As a result of the read-aloud intervention, it is evident that many students scored higher on the post-test comprehension section of the BAS. Of the nine students who showed an increase, the amount of increase varied. Some students increased their scores by a small percentage, whereas other increased their scores dramatically. Although there were eight
students whose score did not change, their scores did not decrease. Based on this data, one can conclude that the six-week read-aloud intervention conducted for this study was successful.

**Summary**

The results from the data indicate that the read-aloud intervention was successful. Of the seventeen participants, 53% demonstrated an increase in scores whereas 47% scored the same on both tests. The procedures used by the researcher allowed the students to explore the comprehension strategy of retelling. The use of graphic organizers was imperative to the students’ comprehension success. The graphic organizers allowed the students to get a hands-on understanding of the story and retell it in an easy-to-follow format. The results from the data also demonstrated the importance of including read-alouds into everyday instruction with young students. Read-alouds are essential to ensure student understanding because they provide opportunities to teach about numerous aspects of literacy. With this particular data, the researcher was able to draw conclusions about the intervention as well as prepare for future implementation of interventions in the classroom.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Connections to Existing Research

Read-alouds have been a topic of interest for a very long time. The topic has been researched in many ways, but how read-alouds increase student comprehension is the most popular. According to Irwin (2007) comprehension is: understanding sentences, connecting sentences, understanding the whole, elaborating, and metacognition; all of which occur at the same time. With young children, this cannot be done on their own because of their inability to read or their underdeveloped reading skills. This is where the read-aloud comes into play and becomes a key piece to the puzzle. Through the use of a read-aloud, a teacher is able to touch upon key concepts and ideas which strengthen students’ literacy skills. The read-aloud process lends itself for one to instruct about various reading strategies such as predicting, inferring, questioning, etc. Irwin (2007) supported this by stating that predictions help students direct their attention to pertinent information and be able to monitor comprehension. Research has also shown that text-based discussions as part of read-alouds increase comprehension (Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008). The discussions give teachers an opportunity to clear up misunderstandings and elaborate on important information from the text. All of the strategies can be taught and enhanced through the use of read-alouds, and will lead to better overall comprehension.

It is also important to note that incorporating read-alouds into one’s teaching can be done in various ways. Researchers such as Beverly, Giles, and Buck (2009) examined the difference of teaching phonics with decodable texts versus read-alouds whereas Holland (2007) explored the effects of reading aloud to infants. One study was quantitative and the other was qualitative,
but both studies concluded that incorporating read-alouds into a child’s developmental process is beneficial.

Not only is the actual process of reading aloud essential to a child’s literacy development, but it can also be a tool to assist children in a testing atmosphere. Researchers such as Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, and Salah (2004); Fletcher et al. (2009); and Crawford and Tindal (2004) examined the use of read-alouds on standardized tests. The material on the test was not altered in any fashion; the only difference that occurred was that the test questions were read aloud. Students were still required to answer the questions individually, but the read-aloud accommodation assisted ELL and/or special education students who may have been of a lower reading level.

**Explanation of Results**

The results of this study showed that there was an increase in comprehension scores on the BAS post-test following the six-week read-aloud intervention. The data suggests that the read-aloud intervention increased students’ comprehension skills, and therefore the majority of students scored higher on the post-test.

Of the seventeen students who participated in the study, 53% increased their scores whereas 47% of the students scored the same on both tests. A majority of the students that improved their scores demonstrated gains throughout the intervention period. They developed a better understanding of the concept of retelling, and this was based on their increase of scores on the rubric developed by the researcher. It can be assumed that as students increased their comprehension skills, they also increased their overall literacy skills. Although some students’ scores did not increase, their scores did stay the same. Many of the students whose scores did not improve were tested using a text of the same level, but not the exact same passage, on both
pre-testing and post-testing of the BAS. This was because they had not improved their reading level over the course of the six-week intervention. It can be assumed that students who did not understand the comprehension questions and scored poorly on the comprehension section of the BAS during pre-testing scored similarly during post-testing. This data leads one to believe that a longer intervention period or a different approach to the study could’ve been more beneficial and increased a larger number of student scores.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This study was beneficial in many ways, but the most beneficial aspect was that all 17 students were part of my actual classroom. This was an advantage because all of the students were already comfortable with me as a teacher, and I knew each of them on an academic and personal basis. It was also an advantage because it made it easy to conduct the study and record data. Had the students been part of a different class or grade level, it would not have been as easy to meet on a regular basis.

A second advantage of this study was the time of day it was conducted. The kindergarten reading block was conducted in the morning following a recess. Therefore, the students had participated in a sensory break and were not worn down from a long day of instruction. With the students being a young population, they perform best in the early parts of the school day. If this study would have been conducted later in the day, students may have been tired and may not have performed to their full potential.

Although this study did have some advantages, it also had some limitations. The first major limitation was lack of adequate time. In order for this study to be most beneficial, it would have been necessary for the researcher to meet with the small groups on a daily basis. Unfortunately, with the existing curriculum and schedule this was not possible. It was evident
from the data that the intervention was successful, but it could have been even more successful if the students were able to meet on daily basis instead of only two days a week.

Another limitation of this study was the age level of the students. When picking a topic of study, it was difficult to find one that would pertain to the kindergarten level. This was because the students are not yet able to read on their own, and a lot of past research in literacy concentrates on independent reading. After much thought and deliberation about how to best approach this limitation, the idea of using read-alouds was developed.

Even though the topic of read-alouds seemed like the obvious topic choice, another limitation was what type of literature to use. In order for students to truly grasp the idea of sequencing and retelling, the literature used had to follow a sequential order. Also, the texts needed to be basic in order for students to successfully retell or sequence events from the text. Leveled readers from the school leveled library were used to best meet these needs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While the results of this study are encouraging, further research should be conducted. It would be recommended to anyone interested in this topic to familiarize themselves with the topic and explore the existing research. Although much research supports the use of read-alouds and the positive effect they have on student learning, there is some research that does not support read-alouds. It is beneficial to see both sides of a topic so the most logical conclusions can be made.

This particular study was done with a young group of participants. Would the results differ if the age level was different? It would be fascinating to conduct a similar study with an older group of participants. One could examine if reading aloud paired with independent reading would produce better comprehension. It only seems logical that these two features together
would be most influential for the students. Not only would it be interesting to change the age
level of the participants, but also the diversity of the group.

The population for this study was predominantly white, middle-class. There was little to
no diversity within this group. Would the results change if students were in a lower
socioeconomic class or of a different ethnic background? Would the strategies implemented in
this study have been as effective if the population was more diverse? This is exactly where
future research would be crucial to see if changing these factors would have an effect on the
results. Changing the participants of the study would be a good focus for future research, but
investigating the time frame for the study would be important as well.

A period of eight weeks was dedicated to this study, which included both pre-testing and
post-testing. To gather more accurate data, the time frame for the study could be lengthened.
For example, if the study were to be conducted over a whole school year, the results may have
varied. Based on the data collected for this study, a conclusion can be made that lengthening this
study would have a positive effect on student comprehension. Students would have had a longer
time to work on various skills and strategies, and strengthen overall comprehension.

Overall, a common conclusion can be drawn from this study and the studies summarized
by the researcher that reading aloud does increase student comprehension. While further
research would be needed to confirm these findings with a more diverse population or for a
different time frame, the results are promising. The intervention implemented both familiarized
student with the read-aloud process and improved overall comprehension skills.
### Appendix A

**Post - Test**

*My Little Dog* - Level B - Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>4-24-12</td>
<td>Cambridge Elem.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Recording Form**

**Part One: Oral Reading**

Place the book in front of the student. Read the title and introduction.

**Introduction:** This girl has a little dog. Read to find out all the things her little dog likes to do with her. Point under each word as you read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Accuracy Rate: 96.90%</th>
<th>Self-Corr. Ratio: 1:3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My little dog likes to sleep with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My little dog likes to eat with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My little dog likes to run with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>He likes to play with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information Used</th>
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---

*Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*
### My Little Dog • Level B • Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>SC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>He likes to ride with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>He likes to jump with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>My little dog likes to read with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>My little dog likes me!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Subtotal: 10
Total: 21
### Recording Forms

#### Accuracy Rate

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<th>6 or more</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Self-Correction Ratio

\[
\text{SC} = \frac{(E + SC)}{(E + SC)} = \frac{3}{2+1} = \frac{3}{1}
\]
# Part Two: Comprehension Conversation

Have a conversation with the student, noting the key understandings the student expresses. Use prompts as needed to stimulate discussion of understandings the student does not express. Score for evidence of all understandings expressed—with or without a prompt. Circle the number in the score column that reflects the level of understanding demonstrated.

**Teacher:** Talk about what happened in this story.

### Key Understandings

#### Within the Text
- The girl is telling about her little dog and the things he can do. The little dog likes to do lots of things with her. (Gives 2-3 examples such as sleep, eat, play, ride, jump, and read.)
- *Note any additional understandings:*

#### Beyond the Text
- The little dog likes to do lots of things and probably likes to do other things too (gives examples).
- The girl is really proud of (or loves) her dog.
- This dog is like my dog (or makes any personal connection).
- *Note any additional understandings:*

### Prompts

- What did the girl tell about in the book?
- Tell some of the things this little dog likes to do with the girl.
- What other things do you think the little dog likes to do with the girl?
- How do you think the girl feels about her little dog?
- Did this book remind you of anything?

### Score

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<thead>
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<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tell some of the things this little dog likes to do with the girl.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other things do you think the little dog likes to do with the girl?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the girl feels about her little dog?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did this book remind you of anything?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guide to Total Score**
- 0-3 Un satisfactory Comprehension
- 4 Limited Comprehension
- 5 Satisfactory Comprehension
- 6-7 Excellent Comprehension

**Writing About Reading Scoring Key**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Reflects no understanding of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflects very limited understanding of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reflects partial understanding of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reflects excellent understanding of the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Part Three: Writing About Reading** *(optional)*

Read the writing/drawing prompt on the next page to the student. Specify the amount of time for the student to complete the task. (See Assessment Guide for more information.)

---
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week #</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group:</td>
<td>Stars</td>
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<td>Group Members:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Names:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Read:</td>
<td>I'm the captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detective Dog &amp; the Search for Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Read:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Lv E
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stars</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Beginning:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle:</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>End:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Middle:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Middle:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End:</strong></td>
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<tr>
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</table>
Appendix D

Your Rubric: Reading - Analyzing Information: Retelling Main Events

RubiStar Rubric Made Using: RubiStar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org)

Reading - Analyzing Information: Retelling Main Events

Teacher Name: Ms. Brickson

Student Name: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies Important</td>
<td>The student accurately recalls an event from the beginning, middle, and end of the story.</td>
<td>The student recalls one or two main events from the correct parts of the story.</td>
<td>The student does not recall any main events from the story or the events recalled were not in the correct order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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References


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