Structured Read-Aloud in Middle School:

the Initial Impact on Reading Assessment Scores

by

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ABSTRACT

Read-aloud is a technique predominantly utilized at the elementary level. This study was designed to research the effectiveness of this technique at the middle school level, specifically, sixth grade students who were not receiving special education or additional reading intervention services. Until recently, research on read-aloud in the middle school has been limited. For the current investigation, students in two middle schools within the same school system in Virginia were tested using the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) during the fall of 2009 and again in the spring of 2010. Data from the pretest and posttest in the areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary were collected and analyzed using SPSS Version 18. Pretest and posttest raw scores, along with gender, were analyzed for reliability, and, correlational and multivariate analyses were conducted to examine for potential relationships and group differences. Qualitative data were gathered from anecdotal logs from the teachers from the treatment group and the researcher from fidelity checks throughout the research period. Information from teachers included: attendance, student reactions, lessons, and personal reflections. Researcher information included observations of teachers from control and treatment groups, and included information such as: types of questions asked, activities utilized, and demeanor/behavior of the students. This data was analyzed for trends to complement the quantitative data from the assessments. Significant findings and their implications are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As many may know, this has been an incredibly long journey. Someone once told me, "Jen, it's not about finishing the race, it's about the journey." After many stumbling blocks, topic changes, and moves to different states, the journey has reached its conclusion. Along with thanking my committee members, especially Dr. Karen Larwin (who was the driving force behind this finished product), participants in the study, and Ethel, there are three other people who were the reason I've gotten to where I am today.

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There were many times that I wanted to quit completely. However, one event changed this for me: the birth of my daughter, Samantha. When she is old enough to understand, I want her to know that her mommy persevered and completed the most difficult project as yet in her life. I want to be a role model for her to understand she can do anything; it just takes hard work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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If you walk down the hallway of any elementary school in the United States, chances are that you will find numerous occurrences of teachers reading aloud to students. That same walk down the hallways of a middle school and the findings will most definitely differ. Middle and high school students also enjoy being read to, but seldom is read-aloud used as a strategy by secondary teachers (Richardson, 2000; Tingley, 1986). *Read it Aloud!* Author, Judy Richardson (2000,) made a powerful statement by saying, "Read-alouds make good sense and are just plain fun." In so doing, her reference was to all grade levels, not simply elementary (Richardson, 2000). So the question is - why aren't read-alouds being utilized after elementary school if they are a proven technique to improve reading skills, and, students enjoy them? Because experts assert that it is not until approximately eighth grade that reading and listening skills begin to converge (Biemiller, 2003; Trelease, 2006), the use of read-alouds should be continued throughout middle school at least. When the students still need a teaching technique that they enjoy and that will improve their reading skills and build their reading comprehension strategies, read-aloud should be considered.

Research on the success of read-aloud in elementary is prevalent; however, even though middle school students report that they enjoy and value teacher read-alouds, little data is present to identify the extent to which they are or should be utilized in the middle

school (Albright, 2002; Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ivey & Broaaddus, 2001). Along with being a common technique in elementary grades, read-aloud has also been used as an accommodation in testing situations. Students with disabilities often have read-aloud accommodations for testing situations (Bolt & Ysseldyke, 2006; McKevitt & Elliott, 2003). These accommodations are seen in all grade levels, not just elementary. However, could read-aloud in the middle school and high school setting be seen only as an accommodation?

With elementary teachers having the bulk of the responsibility of teaching students to read, the fact that read-aloud is a technique that has been studied and determined to be successful has shown promise for correlating read-aloud in supporting reading success. Over twenty years ago, the National Commission on Reading commented on the practice of read-aloud across grade levels as "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23). Middle and high school English/Language Arts teachers are often not prepared to "teach" students to read. Again, it is the assumption that students should already know how to read by this point? Could this also contribute to the fact that read-aloud is not a technique that is predominant after the elementary level?

Even though much success of read-aloud is documented in younger children, middle school students need assistance as well. Support for continued reading success is necessary after students leave elementary school; however, students go from a Reading class to Language Arts and are expected to make this transition seamlessly. Unfortunately, many students are not ready to be completely independent in regard to

reading. For instance, Ivey & Broaddus's (2001) survey of 1,700 sixth graders found that one of the two most preferred reading activities in school were teacher read-alouds (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Trelease (2006) devotes much of his book to the importance of read-alouds and states that one of the most common mistakes is stopping read-alouds too soon. When is too soon? Why stop at all? Read-aloud is not only for young children. He asserts that, "Every time we read aloud to a child or class, we're giving a commercial for the pleasures of reading" (p.37). Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a practice that is incorporated into many secondary schools; this is time is set aside for students to silently read, without interruption. Teachers are to be modeling positive practices during this time as well. If they model silent reading, why not model reading aloud as well? As read-aloud is common- place in elementary schools, if teachers continue the practice into middle school, will the comprehension of students continue to improve?

Read-aloud is a daily practice in elementary classrooms and many are supporting the same should be true in the higher grades as well. Walther and Fuhler (2008) go as far as to say "it is critical that we continue to set aside time to read aloud to our students. This essential practice belongs in every single school, every single day, at both primary and intermediate levels" to support reading success (p.8). The statement, "Reading should be fun" speaks volumes; however, why is the practice of read-aloud not continued into middle school on a consistent basis (Tingley, 1986; Richardson, 2000)? In the first chapter of Trelease's (2006) book, he relates two of the most important findings from *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23):

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

o   It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades.

The proposed study will compare the results of two schools, more specifically sixth grade classes, and the utilization and nonutilization of structured read-aloud and the results of both practices. While one does not utilize this technique at all, as many middle schools do not, the other middle school will fully implement this technique as a part of the regular curriculum. At the end of the academic year, the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) will document how the two schools performed in terms of vocabulary and reading comprehension growth, skills documented as impacted by read-aloud (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ivey, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Trelease, 2006). The reading assessment will provide baseline and final data for students in both schools. The results from the Oral Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension subtests for each student will be compared for analysis of growth in the areas of vocabulary and reading comprehension.

From reading the research literature, questions raised in regard to read-aloud have led to this research. First, when does it stop being effective, to, does it stop being effective? Second, will this technique show improvement in test scores when used consistently? Third, is this an appropriate technique for older students? Finally, what are the perceptions and misconceptions of read-aloud? These are questions that will attempt to be answered throughout the review of the literature and the study, itself.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the initial impact of implementing the structured read-aloud technique in a middle school setting, specifically at the sixth grade level. As this strategy is most often left to those who teach elementary grades, the bridge

from fifth grade to sixth grade is the focus. The control group will not utilize this strategy at all and the experimental group will implement this strategy on a regular basis through the second two nine-weeks of the school year. This study will identify comprehension as the skill that has the most potential to show growth from utilizing a strategy such as read-aloud. Comprehension skills have been shown to improve in the elementary grades from this technique (Richardson, 2000; Trelease, 2006). Vocabulary growth will also be analyzed. From the data collected, skills will be analyzed based on the initial impact on the scores of a standardized reading assessment. Anecdotal observations by teachers will also be analyzed for trends and attitudes of students during read-aloud time.

In light of the aforementioned research, discussing the alternative methods for increasing comprehension and vocabulary that are currently utilized is pertinent. There are six alternative methods that are utilized often in the middle school level. First, is Readers' Theater. Readers' Theater involves repeated readings of a script; these repeated readings serve as multiple encounters with vocabulary, which supports vocabulary growth. Comprehension is also a skill that improves with fluency improvement. When students increase their fluency, comprehension normally follows (Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008).

Next, lecture and note-taking are the two methods that tend to be common practice in secondary schools. Although these solid skills for future educational settings, such as college are vital, middle school students are not necessarily competent in taking efficient notes while actively listening to the lecture. Third, Literature Circles are student centered and student-directed activities in which all levels of text are included and all

contents can be incorporated. With this technique, all levels of learners can be addressed (Daniels, 2002).

Fourth, reciprocal teaching is a technique that incorporates a gradual release of responsibility to the students; students take on roles in a collaborative setting in which the teacher starts as a model and ends as an observer (Stricklin, 2011). The fifth technique, Expeditionary Learning, is a newer technique where students engage in interdisciplinary projects that are hands-on and interactive (Dobbertin, 2012). Finally, Brain-Based Learning focuses on the techniques and strategies that bring about engagement based on science (Jensen, 2008). All of these techniques are currently utilized in the middle level setting. Teachers must find the techniques and strategies that best fit their teaching style, their students, and how their students learn best.

Research Setting

The research setting was chosen through a connection with the school division. The researcher spent two years in a supervisory role with the division in the Reading Department. The schools were chosen due to their similarities in enrollment, demographic make-up, and recent accreditation status. The research plan was developed through the assistance of current administrators, sixth grade language arts teachers, and reading coaches from both schools. At the time of the research period, the researcher was no longer employed with the school division and had no supervisory role with any participant within the research study.

The pretest and posttest assessment was chosen through collaboration with the school division. The school division had been utilizing the Let's Go Learn: DORA (Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment) for the past three school years. The

determination was made that the assessment would continue to be administered within the research period. Results from this assessment aligned with information needed for data collection.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

The significance of this study is simple: read-aloud is in the best interest of the elementary students, grades one through five, therefore, establishing the significant contribution to the vocabulary and comprehension skills of the middle school students as well. Research literature has shown that the read-aloud technique is one that is used on a regular basis in elementary schools with positive results. If this study can show that the practice can benefit the middle school student as well, then this will be another technique that teachers can utilize to benefit students in becoming proficient readers. Although this is just one study in one school system, it may show that there is a basis for further research on the benefits of read-aloud in the middle school setting and beyond. As the review of the literature will show, there are many educators and researchers who support this strategy, but there are not as many structured research studies done at the middle school level to support it used at that level as there are for the elementary level (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Richardson, 2000).

Read aloud is more than just sitting in a circle and having the teacher read a book to the students. Rycik and Irvin (2005) state that the "read aloud experience creates a sort of 'level playing field' in which all students can participate regardless of their ability to decode the words of the text" (p.106). Students often spend so much time focusing on pronunciation or decoding that they lose sight of comprehension; thus read-aloud can assist in the improvement of reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ivey, 2003; Richardson,

2000). Read-aloud also provides teachers the opportunity to model effective reading strategies, such as rereading, and using context (Rycik & Irvin, 2005). Modeling in an instructional context for the previously mentioned reading comprehension strategies, students can become aware of the natural strategies of prediction, self-questioning, and inference (Ariail & Albright, 2006; Rycik & Irvin, 2005; Trelease, 2006).

When teachers utilize read-aloud, the text becomes more accessible, more interesting, and more comprehensible (Ariail & Albright, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Ivey, 2003; Rycik & Irvin, 2005). Ariail and Albright's (2006) study on the practices of read-alouds in middle school related one such story:

> As a struggling reader who won't admit how little he understands, reading aloud helps Max hear and understand the pronunciation of single words, as well as whole sentences that lead to layers of meaning (p.69).

In other words, read-aloud provides scaffolding. When the students walk away from this study, it is the researcher's hypothesis that they will not only have increased vocabulary and comprehension skills, but will also have the skills to dissect the text and analyze the text to ensure their own comprehension when reading silently.

Research on the read-aloud technique, although not a common practice in middle schools, has shown the following technique benefits for students: scaffolding, accessibility to text, increased interest in reading, and modeling for reading strategies. Elementary teachers have already "bought in" to this proven technique. If this study can show that it works in middle school as well, then this would be another technique to add to the repertoire for our students to become better readers. Trelease (2006) reiterates from *Becoming a Nation of Readers,* getting better at reading is a two-part formula:

o The more you read, the better you get at it; the better you get at it, the more you like it; and the more you like it, the more you do it;

o The more you read, the more you know; and the more you know, the smarter you grow (Anderson et al., 1985, p.23).

Read-aloud not only supports comprehension and engagement, but also supports vocabulary development. The more exposure to new vocabulary, the more likely students will add it to their working vocabulary. This is not only in a reading classroom setting; utilizing read-aloud in other content areas can assist in vocabulary and comprehension as well (Braun, 2010). If all teachers, not just Language Arts teachers, are exposed to the benefits of read-aloud in the middle school, the chances of this technique becoming more mainstream increases. If read aloud can help middle school students continue to become better readers, why stop at the end of elementary school?

<div align="center">Limitations and Delimitations</div>

Limitations of this study may include the following:

1. Student enrollment in both schools will not be finalized until the beginning of the school year, so definite numbers will not be available until then.

2. Students who initially are in either the control or experimental groups may either leave the school or be transferred out before the final assessment is given.

3. Students may not try their best on the reading assessment.

4. As the researcher no longer works for the school system, the teachers' response to the professional development may not be taken as seriously.

5.	Teachers were directed in making non-judgmental anecdotal observations; however, biases are likely to appear.

6.	The teachers' morale and willingness may change due to pending lay-offs and school closures in the division.

Delimitations of this study may include the following:

1.	Two middle schools in the peninsula region of southeastern Virginia will be utilized for the study.

2.	Only students in the 6th grade will be used for the study.

3.	Students who attend either remedial reading or READ 180 (additional reading support classes discussed further in Chapter III) will not be included in the study so as not to skew the results.

4.	Data will be collected during the first nine-weeks and at the end of the third nine-weeks of the 2009-2010 school year.

Additional research challenges are provided in Appendix H.

Definition of Terms

Anecdotal Chart:	Teachers were asked to keep anecdotal, non-judgmental, observational notes on the behaviors, attitudes, and participation of a randomly selected group of students during the experimental period (www.uft.org).

Comprehension:	Comprehension skills as defined by the DORA include: identifying details in a passage, identifying cause-and-effect relationships and the sequence of events, drawing conclusions, and making

comparisons and generalizations. The DORA also only utilizes

non-fiction passages. "Non-fiction passages offer a range of topics

common to many classrooms, reducing bias due to race, gender,

and culture" (www.letsgolearn.com).

Log: Chart developed by the researcher to be used after each read-aloud

session that documents dates, materials, duration, and strategies

covered during read-aloud time. Teachers may also include student

reactions to read-aloud on this chart.

Middle School/

Middle Level: According to the Association for Middle Level Education, this

includes "kids in grades 5-9, regardless of the grade configurations

of the schools that house them" (amle.org). For purposes of this

study, middle level begins at sixth grade in the schools involved in

the research.

Read-aloud: The act of reading out loud to the students on a consistent basis;

texts may be above independent level but at their listening level

(Albright & Ariail, 2005; Rycik & Irvin, 2005).

Structured read-aloud: As defined by this study, structured read-aloud encompasses an

actual read-aloud technique with the addition of questions, such as

higher order thinking questions from Bloom's Taxonomy from the

teacher to guide reinforcement of comprehension skills.

Reading Coach: The role of the Reading Coach is covered in Chapter III: Methodology section. For this study, the Reading Coach will be administering the DORA to all students and will be assisting the researcher in monitoring delivery of the read-aloud by the teachers within the study.

SOL: Standards of Learning as defined through the Virginia Department of Education (www.doe.virginia.gov).

Vocabulary: The DORA assesses Oral Vocabulary because this "is often a predictor of future reading ability", due to the fact that "students cannot read words that do not exist in their oral vocabularies, so an assessment of oral vocabulary would help identify a gap that would prohibit students from reading achievement" (www.letsgolearn.com).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

"Although reading aloud with children is widely agreed to be beneficial, it is often assumed both by teachers and young people themselves that it is something you grow out of as you become an increasingly proficient reader" (Hodges, 2011, p. 19). Mention the term "read-aloud", during which the teacher reads the text to the students to an educator, and many times the association made will be the word "elementary." While used predominantly in the elementary grades, it is also becoming a technique that secondary teachers are beginning to employ as well. As more research literature becomes available, this technique may become part of the repertoire of many teachers outside of elementary school, namely, middle school.

This chapter will review the importance of teacher led read-aloud, the success of this technique in a variety of settings, and how research has found it to be most effectively implemented. In addition, other teaching techniques that are implemented in the middle grades will be discussed. Finally, feedback on the read-aloud technique, from students and teachers, will be discussed.

Why Read-Aloud?

Why read-aloud? Why not read-aloud? In the primary grades, reading aloud to children is often seen as an integral part of developing future readers (Lesesne, 1998). According to Beck and McKeown (2002), "reading a story to children is not a difficult task to a literate adult, taking advantage of the read-aloud experience to develop children's literacy is complex and demanding" (p. 19). Literacy instruction often begins

at home, with the parents or caregivers providing the child's first experience with books (Trelease, 2006). Teachers then become an integral part of supporting reading growth and enjoyment.

When researching student perceptions on reading, one may discover that some of the statistics may be alarming. For example, the National Reading Report Card (2005) found that although nearly 100% of students are enthusiastic about reading when they start school; however, that enthusiasm soon diminishes. Further, when it comes to reading for pleasure, only 54% of fourth graders, 30% of eighth graders and 19% of twelfth graders read anything for pleasure daily (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005). If we look at the decline in reading for pleasure, what might account for this? One reason may be because the text becomes increasingly too difficult or uninteresting. Or, it could be that the classroom and even the home are not developing and fostering life-long readers.

Teacher read-aloud is not a new concept, however. In 1985, the report *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, stated that reading aloud to young children was the "single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading" (Anderson et al., 1985, p.23). The commission also stressed that reading to children should continue throughout their schooling, no matter the age. Further, as the amount of time adults read aloud to children declines, the amount of time students spend on recreational reading similarly declines (Lesesne, 2006; Trelease, 2006). Elley (1992) conducted a study for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and found that the United States placed second in the ability of nine-year-old readers, but dropped to eighth when fourteen-year-olds were evaluated (Trelease, 2006). This is but one study that shows that while we have success in reading

in the primary grades, in a global comparison, the reading skills begin to decline as children grow older. The drop in reading success could be credited to a variety of reasons from the type of material used, the difficulty of the text, or the curriculum as a whole. Another possibility is that this decline could be partially attributed to the changes in instructional strategies as students continue through the grades.

In an Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey of 1,700 sixth graders, students named teacher read-alouds as the most preferred reading activity, with free reading time coming in second (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey identified the overwhelming popularity of read aloud for the students; moreover, the similarities between the students of different ages and grade levels became clearer as well. Ivey noted that the sixth graders reacted to a read-aloud in the same way as many of her first graders: their eyes became wide with anticipation and they edged their seats closer to the reader (Ivey, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Additionally, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) encouraged future research into whether the teacher led read-aloud could be a component in increasing interest in reading, whether in the reading classroom or content areas.

The Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey brought read-alouds in middle school into the research spectrum. As the topic becomes more and more prevalent, more research is taking place in regard to read-aloud both in relation to teachers and students. Albright and Ariail (2005) found that teachers in the middle grades are beginning to utilize read-aloud for reasons such as modeling fluent reading, making texts more accessible, and ensuring all students were receiving the information from the texts. The use of read-alouds also gives students exposure to literature that students may not have received with a

traditional textbook. Reading aloud can contribute to increased student engagement, understanding, and motivation (Albright, 2002).

As many teachers know, struggling students rarely admit to how little they understand in a passage when reading content that is too difficult for them. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that reading aloud built "scaffolds to understanding because the teacher helped to make the text more comprehensible or more interesting to them" (p. 367). Ivey (2003) goes on to say, "The bottom line is that when teachers read to students they enhance students' understanding and their inclination to read independently" (p. 812). Thus it is clear that when teachers employ a technique that can reach the struggling reader, the average reader, the gifted student, and even the alliterate student, this technique might be effectively utilized in all grade levels.

Proponents of read-aloud have shared that this practice can promote a love of literature, more interest in reading and increased comprehension (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Lesesne, 2002; Trelease, 2006). In Albright and Ariail's 2005 study of middle school teachers who did not practice read-aloud, it was commonly reasoned that they did not feel it was an appropriate technique for their content or that they did not even consider the read-aloud technique. Of the teachers who did employ this technique, many stated reasons that were solidly based in facilitating students' learning, such as supporting comprehension and reinforcing content (Albright & Ariail, 2005). The researchers found that when read-aloud was introduced as a plausible technique through a course, in-service, or workshop, the number of teachers who incorporated read-aloud went from 57.4% to 81.4% (Albright & Ariail, 2005).

As further research shows, read-alouds have proven successful in elementary school and, of the limited number of studies conducted, have also indicated positive results in middle schools. Again, there are many benefits to this technique, including motivation and engagement of students, as well as improving vocabulary and comprehension. Moreover, if read-aloud is a technique that has the potential to reach all students and improve their learning, then it may be a conceivable technique to bridge elementary and middle school.

As an Accommodation and/or Intervention

Historically, an accommodation on standardized tests has been read-aloud. While this accommodation has been employed in subjects like math and science, the reading comprehension subtests may include this modification, but with restrictions. As of 2006, the read-aloud accommodation is currently allowed with no restriction in three states: Massachusetts, Missouri, and Vermont (Lazarus, Thurlow, Eisenbraun, Lail, Matchett, & Quenemoen, 2006). However, one common characteristic of the state policies on accommodations is the restriction of read-aloud in certain testing areas. For example, it can be used in a math test, but not a reading comprehension test due to this accommodation possibly giving an advantage to those being read to (Bolt & Ysseldyke, 2006). Further, 41 states had no restrictions on reading aloud the directions only (those who had some restrictions allowed the directions to be read aloud, but there were additional implications in scoring or restrictions on certain tests such as tests that measured reading ability) (Lazarus et al., 2006).

Numerous research studies have been conducted on the end result of a read-aloud accommodation on standardized tests with both students who required accommodation

and those who did not. According to Crawford and Tindal (2004), the read-aloud accommodation tends to change the skill being assessed when utilized in a reading comprehension test. Instead of evaluating reading comprehension, the focus becomes listening comprehension; however, text comprehension can still be appropriately assessed in this setting. Along the lines of listening comprehension, it is important to note that this skill causes more of a variance in reading comprehension than decoding, as students age (Crawford & Tindal, 2004). Often, listening comprehension and reading comprehension do not converge until middle school. When administering Informal Reading Inventories, such as a QRI (Qualitative Reading Inventory) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006), both oral reading and listening capacity are assessed to determine the level of proficiency.

Koretz (1997) found that students with disabilities in math and science neared the mean of students without disability by receiving the read-aloud accommodation. On the Science, Usage and Expression, Math and Reading Comprehension subtests of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Meloy, Frisbie, and Deville (2000) provided the read-aloud accommodation to all students, regardless of disability. Their findings supported the claim that all students can benefit from the read-aloud accommodation. However, these results were only valid on the Science, Usage and Expression, and Math subtests since changing the focus of reading comprehension to listening comprehension, and receptive vocabulary invalidated this data.

When analysis of student reaction to the read-aloud accommodation was complete, McKevitt and Elliott (2003) found that eighth graders felt they did better with the read-aloud modification. In the Meloy et al. (2000) study, there were mixed results. The majority of students, with and without disability, stated they liked it because it forced

them to pay closer attention to the material in comparison to what they would do independently. Other students stated that they did not like the fact that they could not read ahead or look back with this modification. A few voiced that either the reader was too fast or too slow for their liking (Meloy et al., 2000). Nevertheless, students in both groups fared significantly higher with the accommodation.

Another important factor to consider when analyzing read-aloud as an accommodation is the level of the passage. On standardized tests, students are expected to read at least grade-level appropriate passages. However, not all students are on grade level, especially in middle school. In a reading comprehension study by Royer, Kulhavy, Lee, and Peterson (1986), fourth and sixth graders exceeded comprehension when the passages were below grade level; however, when the passages were above grade level, listening comprehension exceeded comprehension from silent reading. Crawford and Tindal (2004) stated "when developing readers face textual material that is too hard for them in vocabulary…they become fully absorbed in decoding the words and are not able to concentrate on the meaning of the text" (pp. 91-92). On the other hand, the student would no longer need to focus on decoding and instead focus on comprehension of the passage, if read-aloud is offered.

As students move to the secondary grades, opportunities for intervention are not as prevalent. Due to the declining achievement in literacy, "countless secondary schools across the United States that previously had no structured literacy programs have been adopting the RTI model" (Brozo, 2009, p. 277). RTI, or Response to Intervention, commonly incorporates intervention in three phases: support to all students in the classroom, small group instruction for targeted students, and one-on-one instruction for

those in need of the most intensive assistance (Brozo, 2009). Although the success of RTI

is documented at the elementary level, there is less supporting research at the secondary

level. Brozo (2009) has been a critic of the move of RTI to secondary schools due to the

challenge of changing how literacy is taught in content area classes (Lenski, 2011).

For RTI to be successful at the middle and high school level, all teachers must be

involved.

RTI at the secondary level is only as good as its preventive supports. If content

teachers fail to offer responsive literacy instruction to benefit every student and

differentiated assistance for those in need of extra help, then the preventive

potential of RTI is lost (Brozo, 2009, p. 280).

Teachers in all content areas must be prepared to provide supportive reading techniques

and strategies; this includes read-aloud. With the scaffolding and questioning part of the

practice, which provides the first phase of RTI, the whole class instruction could prevent

more students from needing the latter phases of intervention.

Key findings from a meta-analysis of interventions at the adolescent level reveal

that it is not too late to provide reading instruction. Reading is a foundation of instruction

in elementary school, but those who struggle past elementary school may not be receiving

the assistance needed to succeed in the secondary school (Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn,

Edmonds, Wexler, Reutebach, & Torgesen, 2007). Further, Scammacca et al. (2007)

concluded that word meanings and concepts were areas in which significant gains could

occur with more focus on direct instruction in vocabulary. Read-aloud is a technique that

could support this focus as an intervention. Both Language Arts and content teachers

alike must work toward improving the vocabulary of their students, especially

contextually. The more language and vocabulary they are exposed to, the better. "To be a successful reader for academic purposes in middle and high school, adolescents need much more than skill in decoding words…they must also be knowledgeable of and have control over a range of sophisticated literacy strategies" (Brozo, 2009, p. 279).

Beginning at Home and Elementary Success

In many homes, reading to children is a common practice; in fact, some parents begin to read to their children in-utero. Not all research suggests that reading to young children will predict reading success. For instance, Elley's (1992) survey of 32 countries found that out of the top 10 countries, four of those countries who score the highest in reading do not even begin formal reading instruction until age seven; more alarming is that Finland's laws forbid the teaching of reading before age seven. Of course, this does not mean that we should not read to our students before they enter school.

Teachers are not necessarily the first exposure to reading for young children. The foundation is set when parents are actively involved in presenting reading material and reading to their young children. To promote reading success, parents can read to their children, and read with their children ensuring that the books are high quality and encourage conversation (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). In the Reading Together Program (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012), families with children from six to thirty-six months were introduced to tools and techniques to support early reading development. In this program, "the children were exposed to early literacy skills instruction through daily experiences that embedded their prior knowledge of the text and through exposure to de-contextualized language. These skills, developed through the guidance and encouragement of their parents and caregivers, helped to build better understandings of

and meaningful interactions with the text" (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012, p. 117). When children are given a solid foundation in early reading, the scaffolding that will occur becomes more accessible.

Nonetheless, there are students who enter school already reading; these students are classified as *early fluent readers* (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Forester, 1978). These students have engaged in the process of reading before the formal instruction given in the early grades. Four factors were present in the homes of nearly all children studied: (1) they were read to on a regular basis; (2) there was a wide variety of printed material available; (3) pen/pencil and paper were readily available; (4) the people in their homes stimulated and supported interest in reading (Durkin, 1966; Trelease, 2006).

It is important to note that the research that has been done on read-aloud has primarily been centered on younger children. "[R]eading aloud is a common and useful literacy activity in elementary classrooms" (Wolsey, Lapp, & Dow, 2010, p. 112). In a study by Wolsey et.al (2010) findings documented that 52% of primary teachers and 67% of upper elementary teachers favored teacher read-alouds with students following along as a preferred activity, compared to audio recordings and students reading aloud. Research surrounding read-aloud has shown that this practice provides numerous benefits to young children in language development and reading success (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Ariail & Albright, 2006; Durkin, 1966).

For instance, Adams (1990) did a research study entitled "Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print" that searched for answers for best practices in supporting strong readers. Her study was done in the midst of the phonics vs. whole language debate. Through research, Adams brought about a new approach: the balanced

approach. "The controversy centers on teaching 'phonics' — the relationship between letters and sounds — versus a 'whole language' approach, which stresses reading and appreciating engaging texts" ("Putting", 1990, p. 26). The balanced approach consists of a mix of phonics and whole language instruction. The balanced approach includes explicit phonics instruction along with instruction using authentic literature. As Adams (1990) studied best practices for predicting future readers, she compiled a list of recommendations that encompassed her findings about beginning reading. Read-aloud topped the list as the basis for providing the foundation for reading. Even though many skills are encompassed within the scaffolding of reading, read-aloud sets the groundwork for success.

"The U.S. Department of Education's 1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that children who were read to at least three times a week had a significantly greater phonemic awareness when they entered kindergarten than did children who were read to less often, and that they were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25 percent in reading" (Denton & West, 2002 as cited in Trelease, 2006). Research literature has shown that repeated picture book readings increase the acquisition of vocabulary (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Trelease, 2006). Early exposure to read-aloud not only increases future reading ability, but it also connects children to text.

Beck & McKeown (2001) have found success incorporating additional strategies to the read-aloud in the development of Text Talk. Text Talk is an extension of the common teacher read-aloud. Effective read-alouds in early childhood settings have proven supportive in the language development and overall reading success (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Shudd & Duke, 2008). Text Talk encompasses questions that support

the development of language and also singles out specific vocabulary from the text to teach and support active practice to build students' vocabulary. The questions foster the higher level thinking to elicit answers that require description and explanation, not rote recall. The teacher works to scaffold students' thinking to glean further development of initial ideas (Beck & McKeown, 2001). To reiterate the finding by the National Commission on Reading, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 23). Read-aloud, although more common in elementary grades, has proven benefits in improving reading ability and comprehension; for this reason, middle school teachers would benefit from the adoption of this technique.

Children who have had experience being read to before they enter school, have an advantage over those who have not. Being able to listen quietly, follow along with the story, and even raise their hands if they have questions or comments are skills that repeated exposure to reading aloud in young children can support (Press, Henenbers, & Getman, 2011). Parents who continually interact with their children in the form of reading aloud provide a solid beginning to reading before even entering elementary school. With large gaps of up to 4,000 words separating students by second grade, presenting children with additional assistance from home is a benefit (Greenawalt, 2010).

With that large gap making such a large difference in the success of young readers, Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) introduced the "tier" system of categorizing vocabulary words. Tier 1 words are basic words that show up frequently in their reading and discussion (clock, baby, happy). While learning these words are essential, they do not take up as much instruction time as the others. Tier 2 includes the "high frequency words

of mature language users" that make the most impact on a child's vocabulary and comprehension ability (Beck et al., 2002, p. 8). They are often words that can be used across content areas, in which contexts change (coincidence, hasty, absurd). These words should have the most time devoted to so students truly grasp the meanings. Finally, Tier 3 words are more specialized and tend to be contained in one specific area (nucleus, osmosis, archaeologist). Context is important with teaching this tier and takes place when the word occurs. In elementary school, students who have a broader range of Tier 1 and Tier 2 words have a stronger grasp on language and comprehension.

Vocabulary and Comprehension Development through Modeling and Text Connection

Hart and Risley (1995) did a study that looked at 42 "normal families" that represented three socioeconomic groups: welfare, working class, and professional. They found that all 42 families, rich or poor, still demonstrated good parenting. By the age of four, children in a professional household will have heard forty-five million words, working class children twenty-six million words, and poverty children only thirteen million (Gunning, 2008; Hart & Risley, 1995; Trelease, 2006). To further analyze that information, within the continuum between poverty and professional, the researchers found that parents gave affirmations on average of 80,000 times in poverty level homes compared to 800,000 times in professional level homes by the age of four. Another comparison between poverty and professional was the volume of words heard in an average hour of family life: 500 words per hour in poverty level homes compared to 3,000 words per hour in professional level homes (Gunning, 2008; Hart & Risley, 1995). Exposure to language can be attributed to households that involved children in conversation and reading at an early age.

Various techniques have proven beneficial when used in conjunction with read-aloud for the improvement of vocabulary and comprehension. For instance, in 2004, The National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Associated promoted reading aloud in their parent guides; The Reach Out and Read program began utilizing pediatricians as an avenue to promote reading aloud to children (Lane & Wright, 2007). One popular way to incorporate read-aloud into curriculum, currently popular in elementary grades, is with the use of Text Talk (Beck & McKeown, 2001), an approach that utilizes read-aloud techniques to improve comprehension and language development (Beck & McKeown, 2001). The premise of Text Talk is to encourage children to talk about the story and become familiar with the vocabulary through the use of open-ended questions posed by the teacher. When utilizing Text Talk, teachers scaffold on children's background knowledge to establish meaning of the text; pictures are shown after the discussion of the meaning and teachers feel the students have grasped the meaning through language, context clues, and prior knowledge (Beck & McKeown, 2001). To improve the acquisition of the decontextualized language, questioning is an important aspect of Text Talk. If the initial open-ended question does not elicit the response sought, the teachers are then asked to probe deeper with strategies such as repeating and rephrasing what the students say, and asking questions that would enable the students to reread and focus on specific text in order to meaningfully answer the question (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

To further vocabulary development with Text Talk, it is imperative to have the students investigate and use new vocabulary words. Beck and McKeown (2001) state "if children do not think about and use a word after initial instruction, it is unlikely to

become part of their vocabulary repertoire" (p. 18). They designed charts for teachers to use that would tally how often the new vocabulary words were used within context in the classroom. Moreover, it was essential that the students could utilize the new vocabulary in correct context outside of the text. Teachers commented on how students used the words and commented on the use of words in new text that they had previously encountered in other stories (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

In addition to emphasizing vocabulary growth in students, Text Talk includes specific strategies to improve comprehension in the read-aloud. Teachers follow the approach of read-aloud, but also intersperse open-ended and guiding discussion questions throughout the reading (Beck & McKeown, 2001). The researcher (Kohart) utilized this structure when designing the current research study. Beck and McKeown (2001), from their research on Text Talk, found concepts that guide read-aloud to becoming effective in the scaffolding of comprehension and vocabulary; they include:

- Awareness of the distinction between constructing meaning of ideas in a text and simply retrieving information from the text;

- Understanding the difficulty of the task young children face in gaining meaning from decontextualized language;

- Designing questions that encourage children to talk about and connect ideas and developing follow-up questions that scaffold, building meaning from those ideas;

- Helping students to meaningfully incorporate their background knowledge and reduce the kind of surface association of knowledge that brings forth a hodgepodge of personal anecdotes;

- Awareness of how pictures can draw attention away from processing the linguistic content in a text, and thus attention to the timing and use of pictures;

- Taking advantage of the sophisticated words found in trade books by using them as a source of explicit vocabulary activities (p. 19).

Taking advantage of the benefits of read-aloud includes using the read-aloud to scaffold vocabulary and comprehension while involved with text. Teachers can take the opportunity to utilize class discussion to compare and contrast language and vocabulary from other texts, other time periods and other content areas (Harvey, 1998). Teachers need to model how to decipher vocabulary meaning through the use of context clues while reading. As students do not always have a computer or dictionary handy, having the tools to decode and analyze words through awareness and application of context clue skills modeled by the teacher during the read-aloud will assist in not only vocabulary development, but comprehension as well. When teachers correctly utilize read-aloud for the benefit of comprehension improvement and vocabulary acquisition, they are modeling, to students, how to use thinking, reading, and language strategies to process and understand the text they are reading (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). The use of open-ended and guiding discussion questions invites participation from every student and the opinions and ideas from all (Atwell, 2000). Bloom's Taxonomy historically guides

development of questions through the levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (later renamed: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create) (Eber & Parker, 2007). When questions are developed utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy, teachers then scaffold students' thought processes and comprehension through higher-level thinking. When students receive guidance while navigating through the levels, comprehension is supported.

"Reading aloud provides a natural context for modeling and applying elements of strategic reading such as self-questioning, prediction, and rereading" (Atwell, 2000, p.145). When the teacher is reading, the students have eliminated the stress of performance and pronunciation and can concentrate on comprehension. The teacher then models appropriate questioning techniques to promote the skills of proficient reading comprehension, namely, prediction, inference, and utilizing context clues. Examples of questions utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy include:

-What happened after…? (Knowledge)

-Describe what happened at…? (Knowledge)

-What do you think might happen next…? (Comprehension)

-Can you provide an example of what you mean…? (Comprehension)

-What factors would you change if…? (Application)

-What questions would you ask of…? (Application)

-What was the underlying theme of…? (Analysis)

-What were some of the motives behind…? (Analysis)

-What would happen if…? (Synthesis)

-Can you develop a proposal which would…? (Synthesis)

-How would you have handled…? (Evaluation)

-What do you think about…? (Evaluation)   (www.meade.k12.sd.us).

When teachers ask questions within a read-aloud and pose open-ended questions such as "How did you arrive at that?" teachers can then begin to model appropriate strategies for comprehension, such as rereading, predicting, or activating prior knowledge. When "during a shared reading of a content area passage [this] models for students how a proficient reader grapples with the problems of unfamiliar vocabulary, new concepts, text features, and text structures that can seem quite foreign – even after years of success with narrative reading" (Lapp et al., 2008, p.377). Modeling by the teacher is an essential component of the read-aloud. Teachers guide the students on how to eventually utilize metacognitive strategies and regulate their learning and comprehension.

Onofrey and Theurer (2007) detail similar findings when discussing the connection between read-aloud techniques and comprehension. After choosing a thought-provoking book, it is important to predetermine stopping points that relate to key story elements such as: plot, characterization, conflict, point of view, theme, and setting. During read-aloud, discussion, both paired and whole class, takes place with the teacher scaffolding responses by eliciting prior knowledge, connections, and inter-textual connections (Onofrey & Theurer, 2007).

In a study conducted by Fisher, Frey, and Lapp (2008), teachers were asked to read aloud from the text while discussing their own processes for comprehension. This read-aloud and think-aloud combination gave the students a model of what happens while a good reader is processing the information from the text. A more in depth look at think

aloud will follow later in this section. The teachers would model fluent reading during the read-aloud sections and would then walk through their own comprehension processes to understand the text. This proved to be a strong modeling process in which a multitude of strategies could be addressed. For example: making connections to characters from other books and texts, utilizing prior knowledge to help understand vocabulary or characters, identifying text aspects like theme and story elements, or comparison of style of the author to other authors/texts (Sprainger, Sandral, & Ferrari, 2011). When the idea of simply addressing one strategy at a time was brought up, teachers explained that their own thought processes do not work that way, so why would they assume students did? Teachers have discovered that they need to reinforce automatic usage of strategies; for example: "We need to show students how to incorporate these things automatically and not artificially stop and summarize or question or whatever. I use my guided instructional time to focus on specific strategies with specific students who need attention in a specific area" (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 551).

Teachers also commented on vocabulary development through modeling. Again, they would read the text aloud and model their thought processes to determine meaning of vocabulary words (Fisher et al., 2008). Some strategies addressed through the modeling included: context clues, word parts, and resources (dictionary, thesaurus, etc.). While working through the passages, teachers would also address text structure and text features and how this affected students' thought processes as well. Students need to have a purpose for reading and to know how to determine meaning and comprehension with unfamiliar text. Modeling, when used in conjunction with read-aloud, provides this. Students take one of two stances when they approach a text; efferent, when the focus is

on gathering information, or aesthetic, when the experience of reading the text is focal (Graves & Liang, 2008). Teachers must support students knowing which stance is appropriate, or if a combination is required. Modeling through read-aloud allows the teacher to preface comments relating directly to purpose in this manner.

Keeping students engaged in the text can assist in the discussion as well; it keeps students focused (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). "Engaging with text requires active thinking and reflecting, which enhances comprehension; therefore, activating and making use of cognitive resources can enable understanding of texts" (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009, p. 112). With engagement, come connections. As previously mentioned, when students make connections with the topic or text, they have a better chance of fully understanding the content and retaining the information (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Connection techniques for children can be taught on a continuum; first, begin with text-to-self connections followed by text-to-text, and text-to-world connections (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Text-to-text connections begin with discussion of how the current text has similarities between another text, movie, song, etc. Text-to-self connections are made when students relate the text with their own life experiences or ideas. Text-to-world connections relate to the bigger picture — how the text relates to the past, present or future.

Overall, it is the teacher's responsibility to model effective fluency and comprehension throughout the use of read-aloud. Atwell (2000) describes her philosophy on the effective read-aloud:

When reading aloud, I go for it, changing my inflection for the different characters and moods of a text. I change my face, too – smile, frown, show anger

or surprise or the effects of suspense or enlightenment – and I modulate the volume, louder or softer, to match the mood. I read slower than I speak, and I pause before and after parts I want to stress, to let things sink in. I ask questions…I show the illustrations (p. 145).

The teacher is such an integral part of the learning process when using read-aloud. The types of questions they ask shape students' comprehension. Proper implementation of read-alouds requires careful reading and careful planning; this is not something that should be used "on the fly." Such careful preparation for read-alouds preclude the use of impromptu questions to ensure that the students are truly thinking about the text; teachers must carefully plan their comprehension questions (Atwell, 2000; Rycik & Irvin, 2005).

Interactive read-alouds is a technique wherein the teacher and students discuss the process by which they understand the material, as well as responding to the literature (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). Barrentine (1996) defined interactive read-alouds as a conversation in which the teacher poses questions "that enhance meaning construction and also show how one makes sense of the text" (p. 36). This technique also gives the students opportunity to interact with the text. These interactions include text-to-text comparisons, text-to-self similarities, and text-to-world conclusions. This relates to utilizing think-aloud.

Modeling thought processes during the read-aloud is as important as well. Think aloud provides the means to demonstrate the questioning and the manner in which good readers achieve comprehension. "Reading requires the orchestration of many skills such as the ability to activate prior knowledge, make connections, question and monitor one's own reading throughout the reading process" (Sprainger et al., 2011, p. 33). When

teachers model how they extract important information from text to further dissect and reflect to achieve a deeper meaning, students then have a basis to do the same when they read (Caldwell & Leslie, 2010). In a study by Caldwell and Leslie (2010), data found that when "students thought aloud they made more inferences in recall than when they did not think aloud, and the associative inferences made used text information" (p. 334). Inference is a skill that is important for middle school students to become proficient with due to the increased level of sophistication in the materials they will read, so this reinforces how read-aloud and think aloud can work together to achieve this goal.

Interactive read-alouds are often more effective when the teachers are observed utilizing gestures and different voices to encourage engagement with the text (Greenawalt, 2010; Lane & Wright, 2007). To support vocabulary acquisition through this technique, it is imperative that students not only "know" the definition of the words, but understand the meaning of the words as well. Providing definitions in terms that are easily accessible to the students will reinforce this. Those meanings could be used in a contextual discussion relating to familiar stories or the lives of the children (Greenawalt, 2010; Lane & Wright, 2007). The more students are introduced to new vocabulary and given repeated exposure, the more likely they will add those vocabulary words to their repertoire (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Greenawalt, 2010).

Repeated exposure to read-alouds with modeling of appropriate language and fluency encourages the love of reading. The teacher becomes the vessel from which positive feelings toward reading are shared. This is also an opportunity to address how spoken language differs from written language (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). This

technique also exposes students to a variety of books they may not have normally read, which becomes the catalyst for developing lifetime learners and lovers of reading.

Another skill that is often a result is critical thinking (Greenawalt, 2010). When teachers serve as a model for how to ask questions, how to delve deeper into the text, and how to connect the text to other knowledge, students are given a classic example of the processes needed to fully engage with the text.

To support this engagement with text, teachers must understand all that happens during reading. Students activate prior knowledge, make connections, predict, ask and answer questions, all to comprehend the text (Morrison & Wlodarcyk, 2009). With read-aloud, the teacher supports the processes occurring and scaffolds the development of appropriate techniques and strategies necessary for comprehension. Giving students the opportunity to fully engage with the text through read-aloud assists in the understanding of language and understanding text in all stages of reading (Morrison & Wlodarcyk, 2009). The modeling of connections, text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world, opens the door to students understanding that their knowledge and experiences are essential to comprehension. The more they are exposed to, even through experiences of others, the more prior knowledge to tap into to make those connections.

Engagement and Motivation

"The activities in which students engage, the interactions they have with peers and adults, and the physical characteristics of their learning environments all contribute to their motivation to learn and their desire to engage" (Daniels & Steres, 2011, p.2). In Ariail and Albright's "A Survey of Teachers' Read-Aloud Practices in Middle Schools" (2006), it was stated that although the use of read-aloud was not as well-researched as

one may expect, the few studies that have been done show the benefits of read-aloud. They list the following among the benefits: "increases in students' accessibility to texts, motivation, engagement in learning, positive attitudes toward reading, background knowledge in content areas, and fluency" (Ariail & Albright, 2006, p. 69). These studies have shown that motivation and engagement are two benefits in which read-aloud can provide effective results.

Clearly supporting the read-aloud technique in middle school, Ivey (2003) states, "The bottom line is that when teachers read to students, they enhance students' understanding and their inclination to read independently" (p. 812). In elementary school, the motivation for students to read is there; students are there to learn to read. However, when they enter middle school, sometimes their reading ability does not match what they are expected to read. The disparity between reading ability and text often becomes clearer in these grades. Teacher Linda Rief understands how important read-aloud is in bridging students' reading difficulties with the text: "[it is] because of the struggling readers, who don't really read on their own when given the choice, that I must find the time to read the stories aloud" (Ariail & Albright, 2006, p. 69). In fact, Ivey and Broaddus' (2001) survey of 1,700 middle school students found that students preferred teacher read-aloud as a method of delivery and that read-aloud brought about positive student attitudes toward reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ariail & Albright, 2006; Ivey, 2003).

Read-aloud also assists the alliterate students, those who can read, but choose not to do so (Ariail & Albright, 2006). Beers (1996) has classified these alliterate students as dormant (although they like to read, they don't make time for it), uncommitted (they say

they may do it in the future, but don't like it), and unmotivated (they don't like it and don't expect to change their minds) (as cited in Ariail & Albright, 2006). For these students, engagement and motivation are the keys to getting them to read. Thus, in addition to motivating students, it is important to note that read-alouds can also engage the readers in material they may not have chosen on their own (Ariail & Albright, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lesesne, 2002).

While middle school students are in the midst of the "reading to learn" stage (Fang, 2008; Rycik & Irvin, 2005), in contrast to the "learning to read" stage of elementary school students, they are also encountering text that may be unfamiliar and challenging. Thus, engagement with the text is critical. When students are engaged in the text, they have the confidence to make sense of the text and make it interesting, even if it is difficult (Rycik & Irvin, 2005). Specifically, when students encounter challenges within text, they have to draw upon the strategies they have been given (Fang, 2008). Read-aloud can be used as a channel to expose students to the new strategies to improve comprehension; the more motivated they are to learn, the more apt they will be to learning these more advanced strategies.

One problem with motivating and engaging the middle school student is the difficulty of satisfying them. With all that is happening with family, friends, their bodies, and now more demanding schoolwork, it is increasingly challenging to find activities and materials that will appeal to all students. To improve engagement and motivation, teachers must give students the opportunity to succeed. Roe (2001) identified components of a reading program that support middle school students' engagement. They include: control of literacy activities, opportunities and choice of materials to read, models of

engagement involving the teacher modeling as the reader and showing what good readers do, appropriate materials to ensure a variety of resources to better match the student with the text, and having authentic literacy tasks when students can actually connect school activities with real life activities (Roe, 2001). Read-aloud can mesh perfectly within the previously mentioned components when an enthusiastic teacher has an array of genres available for the students, such as fantasy, mystery, reality and graphic novels.

One aspect that might prove problematic would be the teachers and their knowledge about adolescent reading and literature. In one study in California, a new administrator proposed supporting a school-wide culture of readers (Daniels & Steres, 2011). However, the teachers stated they "wanted to promote reading and to read with their students, but they did not feel comfortable recommending books; nor did they have a clear understanding of how to teach students to choose and interact with books" (p.10). If the teachers are not supported with professional development and the tools to ensure success in reading are not provided, motivating adolescents to read could become an insurmountable task for many teachers. In this study, teachers received a grant to build their classroom libraries, containing outdated collections in the library and lacking access to outside sources. Teachers created 500-1,000 book libraries for each classroom (Daniels & Steres, 2011). The expectations of the students to read and the teachers to support strong reading habits were clearly maintained and assisted in changing the culture of the school to one of promoting the importance reading. Professional development time was focused on broadening the teachers' knowledge of young adult literature, how to impart the love of reading, choosing appropriate literature, and becoming models of lifelong readers (Daniels & Steres, 2011). In the end, the "students in this study felt more engaged

with books and reading because their teachers constantly talked about books and modeled active reading. Students believed that reading mattered" (Daniels & Steres, 2011, p. 10).

Even with appropriate materials and precise modeling, some middle school students may also need additional assistance in fully engaging in text concerning gender and cultural differences. All students need to feel they belong; middle school is a time students struggle to find where they belong and the teachers must address students' affective as well as cognitive needs (Richardson, 2000; Rycik & Irvin, 2005). In middle school, the differences in gender become more diverse with the age of the students and development of hormones. During this time, students often need support with how they are feeling, the changes that are happening, and the dynamic of gender differences. Cultural diversity must also be addressed, especially in middle school, as students are at a phase in their identities when attitudes toward culture are shaping. Having appropriate texts for this age group is imperative. Identifying novels that encourage discussion of gender and cultural differences increase engagement by tackling issues of importance to the middle school student. When students are involved with these types of texts, exploring and discussing these issues work hand-in-hand with the text. Further, students must have texts involving characters with which they can identify (Lesesne, 2002; Rycik & Irvin, 2005; Trelease, 2006). One author who has books that identify with struggles and issues of this age group is Jerry Spinelli. Using his books such as *Maniac Magee* (1999) to discuss culture, and *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock* (2007) to discuss gender differences, are two that not only entertain but invite discussion about important topics.

Research done by Brozo and Hargis (2003) at Foothills High School in Tennessee (a pseudonym) found that:

[N]early 35% of all students at the school were reading one or more grade levels

below their placement, so the school implemented four initiatives aimed at

increasing the quantity and quality of wide reading for all students: sustained

silent reading, reading young adult novels in content classrooms, offering alter-

native texts to struggling readers and advanced readers in content classrooms, and

buddy reading with elementary-grade students (Fisher & Ivey, 2006, p.181).

When faced with these results, Brozo & Hargis (2003) helped the school develop three

initiatives to support improvement in literacy: "sustained silent reading, reading young

adult novels in the content classroom, and making alternatives to the textbook available

for both struggling readers and superior readers" (p. 62). When the opportunities for

reading are provided, motivation appears. Students must be motivated and engaged, so

the teachers must find the activities and techniques that will produce the best benefits for

their classes.

Middle School Success

Follos (2007) shares, "Elementary school children love story time. Removing

read-aloud structure from the secondary curriculum places an inordinate amount of stress

on students who struggle with independent reading skills" (p. 20). Rycik and Irvin (2005)

convey support of the read-aloud in middle school, but note that they understand why

some may be apprehensive to try this strategy. "Some middle grades teachers might be

concerned that read-alouds will make their students passive or dependent, but reading

aloud to students actually whets their appetite for reading on their own" (p. 105).

Teachers must employ questioning techniques within the read-aloud to ensure that

students are paying attention and comprehension questions are correctly answered.

Twenty years ago, when I first started teaching middle school students, I read aloud as a way to entertain students and keep them quiet! I also read aloud to them to show them that I liked to read and that I knew good books for them to read. Now I read aloud to middle school students because have discovered what primary grades teachers seem to have always known: being read to is an important part of reading development (Lesesne, 1998, as cited in Rycik & Irvin, 2005, p. 105).

Read-aloud should not be seen as a passive activity for students; students should be active participants in the text and the learning to read process.

Middle school is the time when reading skills start to catch up with listening skills (Rycik & Irvin, 2005; Seefeldt, 2003). As reading and listening skills do not normally converge until around eighth grade, it stands to reason that reading to children is an activity that does not have an expiration date (Biemiller, 2003). Students who are read to are exposed to new and interesting experiences with literature that they may not have otherwise had access to if forced to read everything independently (Seefeldt, 2003). This is also a time for middle school students to just enjoy the literature (Tingley, 1986). Read-aloud for this age group should show that reading is not just about answering the questions at the end of the passage or chapter; it should be about showing how literature can be enjoyable (Seefeldt, 2003). For many students, reading in the middle school is centered on a textbook passage and follow-up questions. Read-aloud can expand students' exposure to reading materials, even materials above their instructional level, by utilizing their listening skills. When the students' only task is to listen to the material being read, not to worry about pronunciation, taking turns reading, etc., comprehension

becomes the end result. Teachers can take advantage of the fact that many students have a higher listening capacity level than reading level by utilizing read-aloud.

Middle school students are no longer "learning-to-read", but they are "reading-to-learn" (Fang, 2008). Studies within the last decade have indicated that critical reading skills are lacking in adolescents (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ariail & Albright, 2006). Further, adolescents also do little pleasure/leisure reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Bauman & Dufy, 1997). Bauman and Duffy (1997) state that "when adolescents increase their pleasure reading, their literacy profile and performance also increase in academic work" (as cited in Richardson, 2000, p. 3). Thus, incorporating read-alouds provides students with opportunities for exposure to new authors, new genres, and new subjects. When interest is piqued in the classroom, teachers should support follow-up experiences with similar literature.

Lesesne (2003) supports read-aloud for middle school and goes one step further in her suggestion for making read-aloud even better by suggesting specific areas to address to ensure the success of the read-aloud session. Teachers should never begin a passage or topic without first reading it themselves because adolescent literature, while a terrific teaching tool, may have some material that needs extra attention or additional support if it is a difficult subject (Follos, 2007; Lesesne, 2003). Practicing and becoming familiar with the piece is essential; this will help the piece become part of one's memory and will help avoid the awkward stumbling that may happen when reading unfamiliar sections.

One area Lesesne (2003) notes as tricky, whether a teacher has prepared or not, is the pronunciation of names. Even if all of the rules of pronunciation with phonics and syllabication are followed, names are often the exception. She recalls the discussion

about names from the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1999) series and how she mispronounced them until she heard them on tape.

Finally, it is imperative to personalize the connection with the text during read-aloud. When the reader uses facial expressions, gestures, pauses and emphasis, the reading comes to life and invites in the listeners (Lesesne, 2003).

Anyone who has taught in a middle school knows how challenging it is. In *Teens Take Time to Listen When You Make Time to Read Aloud* (2007), Follos describes just a few of those challenges of teaching middle school which include, reducing new teachers to tears, forcing some teachers straight out of the profession, enduring obnoxious noises and smells and the unending fidgeting to name just a few (p. 500). After attending the 2006 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference where the importance of reading was again stressed, Follos developed a Reader's Workshop in which read-aloud was used as a basis for a book club. This should not be confused with Reader's Workshop coined by Nancie Atwell (2007), in which a lesson is taught introducing the book and includes discussion of purpose for reading, story elements, and how to choose an appropriate book. Atwell's (2007) approach is one that focuses solely on reading and not necessarily all of the "activities" that normally accompany literature study in the classroom; her approach will be discussed later in the chapter. Follos' (2007) book club mirrors the read-aloud technique used in classrooms. Follos read aloud from a text chosen to motivate and engage her students and modeled questioning strategies at appropriate times within the reading. In her experience with the Reader's Workshop, she has found that students who once avoided reading and the library are now the first ones to show up; students who had a difficult time staying in their seats are calm and attentive;

and most importantly, the discussions are now about the literature and how their own experiences relate to what they are reading and not about unending unrelated topics or classroom management (Follos, 2007). Thus, her approach has the potential to assist in the reduction of challenges related to learning literacy skills in the middle school.

As read-aloud becomes a more visible technique, intermediate and middle school teachers are beginning to see the same reactions from their students that elementary school teachers have always seen: complete engagement with the text as they listen to the teacher read (Meehan, 2006). All educators have been taught how important engagement and motivation are in students' retention of information and, ultimately, their learning ability. While motivation and engagement can be increasingly more difficult as students advance from one grade to the next, the right materials, coupled with teachers who believe in utilizing the read-aloud strategy, can procure amazing results.

Meehan (2006) found that excitement could be generated through the sharing of non-fiction read-alouds. She followed one content-area teacher who utilized non-fiction read-aloud to garner excitement and motivation in her social studies classroom. This teacher spent 15-20 minutes per day reading from a book about survivors of the *USS Indianapolis*. In doing this, she developed lessons that would encourage curiosity in the subject, related to their Language Arts classroom, and promoted classroom discussion. The excitement in this class spread to other grades in the school and continued after the unit was over. A survey given after the unit confirmed the motivation the students retained to keep reading non-fiction, because of the material contained topics "relating to real-life situations" (Meehan, 2006, pp. 13-15).

In middle school, students are expected to take what they learned in elementary school and build upon that base as they encounter new types of text (Atwell, 2000; Lesesne, 1998). Further, students who are successful readers in the elementary grades should strive to continue to be successful readers in the middle school. If teachers take away one of the reading techniques that was so successful in elementary school, successful reading becomes even more of a burden to students as they come upon the types of reading they are expected to do in the middle grades. "Young adolescents need the opportunity to *learn* literacy through experiences that provide both challenge and security" (Rycik & Irvin, 2005, p. 7). Read-aloud provides both of those experiences.

Adolescent Needs

According to Wolfe and Goldman (2005),

readers process text by elaborating on what is in the text, making connections within and across texts and to prior knowledge. Although many kinds of elaborations and connections fill in 'gaps' in the text and contribute to more coherent mental representations, some types are less likely to do so (p. 469).

Because the levels of texts for adolescents are often above their reading ability, many find it difficult to examine the text or make judgments as to the validity of the text. When students are not able to process and reason on the level of the text, deep understanding is not likely to occur (Wolfe & Goldman, 2005). When the frustration of not being able to connect with the text happens, the negativity associated with reading could increase.

Middle school expectations, in regard to reading and vocabulary, are somewhat intimidating for many students. "Students who fear independent reading and sleep-inducing vocabulary lists don't need more obstacles" (Follos, 2007, p. 501). When such

obstacles cause students to disconnect from the lesson, they are more likely to have difficulty retaining the information and they will find increased difficulty activating prior knowledge, and making the text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-media, and text-to-world connections. When teachers provide thought provoking information and materials, the connections can then occur. Making connections, along with accessing and building upon prior knowledge, is essential for meaningful comprehension to occur.

When discussing read-aloud for students in the secondary setting, one obstacle that may come to mind is the "cool factor." According to Tingley (1986), students of this age group may think it is silly to be read to or that the teacher thinks they cannot do it on their own. On the other hand, teachers may look at read-aloud as time consuming and risky because of the expectation of the students to pay attention and sit still, or just "too elementary." When Tingley (1986) began starting her middle school class with a read-aloud, she found two somewhat unexpected results. First, the students no longer needed to be asked to get to their seats; they were in their seats and ready to listen. Second, they became gatekeepers of a sort to the read-aloud time; if a student was not paying attention or was interrupting, that student was met with a class full of annoyed students (Tingley, 1986). Peer pressure, in this sense, worked to the benefit of the teacher.

Although the teacher may be a deciding factor in the level of enjoyment of the read aloud with using voices, excitement, and intonation, sometimes it is simply about the choice of the text to be read. Follos (2007) relates an important factor of read aloud : "In real estate the motto is: location, location. In read-aloud, it is: selection, selection" (p. 20). Follos (2007) agrees with Tingley's finding that middle school students show up for class on time when they are engrossed with a read-aloud; however, she adds, humorously,

that, "They'll not only show up for class on time, they'll show up even when they don't have class. They only thing you'll have to fear is an annoyed teacher down the hall waiting for late students" (Follos, 2007, p. 20).

Choice of text is often left up to the teacher, or dictated through curriculum. Nancie Atwell (2007) believes that putting that choice into the hands of the students will encourage them to become lifelong readers. Her Readers' Workshop is all about reading; there are no tests, no reading activities, no vocabulary exercises or strategies taught within workshop time. Instead, "there are booktalks, read alouds, conversations, time, silence, comfort, simple systems of record-keeping and a classroom library that gets bigger and better every year" (Atwell, 2007, p. 46). Even though read-aloud is a component within the workshop, the end result is to get the students to pick a good book, read books with fluency, and keep on reading. This Readers' Workshop is all about the "Pleasure Principle" as the title of the article aptly states (Atwell, 2007).

The school librarian is an appropriate source of information on what the students are reading and their attitudes while engaging with books. Keith McPherson (2005) relates his own feelings of bearing witness to read-aloud:

> One of the joys of being a teacher-librarian is witnessing our students' utter engagement with stories read aloud. Sometimes the engagement is so complete that they need to be physically jogged in order to return them to reality. Most of us know students who have come late to class or have missed a bus stop, due to a particularly good read. Similarly, most of us know the powerful effect that oral reading of a good book has on a particularly energetic class (p. 68).

The librarian can also assist in finding authors who especially appeal to the middle school students. Influential books for this age group would be the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling (Trelease, 2006). This series has encouraged even non-readers to want to read. Other authors who have recently broken into this age-group are Stephenie Meyer and her *Twilight* (2006) series, and Suzanne Collins with the *Hunger Games* (2010) trilogy. When students find an author that they like, the sequels are a must-have. Accordingly, even if some are not pop-culture authors, there are other authors who have numerous books that attract this age group. Some of those authors include Jerry Spinelli (*Space Station Seventh Grade,* 2000)*, Loser* (2003)*, Crash* (1997)*, Maniac Magee* (1999), Jack Gantos (*Jack Adrift: Fourth Grade Without a Clue, Jack on the Tracks: Four Seasons of Fifth Grade* (2005), and Gary Paulson (*How Angel Peterson Got His Name* (2004) to name just a few (Follos, 2007). Follos (2007) reinforces that one reason why these authors are so popular with this age group is because of their use of humor. She also notes that when books contain humor, they may work better for older students.

With heightened suspense and excitement, mysteries are often crowd-pleasers for middle level students (Lesesne, 2003). Gender is not a factor in the mystery genre; it has been discovered that this genre is read equally by girls as well as boys (Lesesne, 2003). Further, mysteries often have chapters that can easily be completed in a class period and leave the students wanting more (Follos, 2007). Overall, even reluctant readers may find success and increased engagement if mysteries are a part of the read-aloud routine.

Although the old adage is "don't judge a book by its cover," learners do exactly that. Thus, it is important to think about the cover and whether or not it will be inviting and not considered "uncool." For example, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*, by

Christopher Paul Curtis (2000), is a popular middle school novel that takes place during

the Civil Rights Era. Students can easily identify various parts of the story on the book

cover such as: the "brown bomber" and the map from Flint, Michigan, to Birmingham,

Alabama; characters are also easily identified by traits such as Momma's gap between

her teeth. Having a cover that so exactly corresponds with the story is important. The

cover design can either incite interest or discourage further investigation of an unfamiliar

book; sometimes teachers have to show the benefit of looking beyond the cover and not

discounting a book simply by the cover.

Finally, it is important to choose selections that are accessible to the students.

"Accessible" refers to the students' comprehension and maturity levels. With read-aloud,

the teacher may choose to read selections that are above the students' reading level but at

their listening level (Allen, 2000; Rycik & Irvin, 2005; Trelease, 2006). As previously

stated, middle school students' listening level is often above their reading level. Thus,

teachers can choose books that may be at the students' independent level or higher if they

utilize read-aloud. If teachers expect students to continue independent reading after the

novel, it is imperative to choose what the National Council of Teachers of English

(NCTE) calls high interest-easy reading books (Lesesne, 2003). These books are

beneficial to struggling readers because the interest level is high, while written on a lower

reading level. Patricia Phelan (1996) has compiled a list of high interest easy reading

selections for middle and senior high school students. Scholastic, Inc. also has a list of

these books that are of interest to older students, but contain lower reading ranges. Some

include: *Heartbeat* by Sharon Creech (realistic fiction) (2005), *The Westing Game* by

Ellen Raskin (mystery and suspense) (2004), *No More Dead Dogs* by Gordon Korman

(humor) (2002), and *The Clique: a Graphic Novel* by Lisi Harrison (graphic novel) (2010).

Middle School Students and Teachers are Saying…

Much has been said about the strategy and educational value of read-aloud, but what about the students' reactions? If teachers can garner interest and motivation with a strategy that students enjoy, then would it not make sense to utilize this strategy more? According to Walther and Fuhler (2008), "All in all, read-aloud time is relaxing, enjoyable, educational, and thought provoking – a time when an author's words can fill the classroom and the minds of the listeners. Who knows the long-term impact of those words?" (p. 8).

Moreover, it is interesting to note what students are saying about their experience with read-alouds in middle school. Ivey (2003) compiled student responses from a study she and Broaddus completed on teacher read-alouds. Some of the responses received from students in the intermediate grades contained thoughts that may make the difference between wanting to try this strategy and maintaining middle level status quo. Student reactions on how the teacher makes the text more understandable include:

- I like listening, but it's hard to concentrate when I'm reading. If it's a really good book and someone's reading it out loud, I like to listen;

- She makes it so interesting;

- If it was me reading I wouldn't finish it because I thought the beginning was kind of not interesting. But since she's been reading it every day it's getting more interesting, so [I] like that;

- When other people are reading to me, they can explain it better or something. And they got a better accent in saying it and stuff (Ivey, 2003, p. 812).

Teachers not only assist in comprehension, they can also make reading more attainable and encourage students to read on their own. Many middle school teachers would agree that getting students to pick up a book voluntarily is no easy task. When the teacher can bridge a connection between student and text, positive outcomes occur. For example:

- Sometimes my teacher reads from big books with small writing and makes it interesting. She makes us want to read it;

- I want to read in this class when the teacher reads a little part of the book. If it is interesting, I want to find out about the rest of the book (Ivey, 2003, p. 812).

Data garnered from studying read-aloud in the middle grades are not as prevalent in comparison to research in the elementary grades. However, the responses from students within research conducted should encourage teachers to employ this technique used by primary school teachers. As students often see their last year of primary school as their last year of read-aloud (Tingley, 1986), too often teachers assume all students have instantly become independent readers. Follos (2007) expresses that students who lack independent reading skills become stressed when the read-aloud is taken from them because the read-aloud may have been the one activity in which they understood the content.

Teachers who have embraced this strategy are also supporting the growing research about its effectiveness. Richardson (2000) shares experiences from middle school and high school teachers from their childhoods and classroom:

- I did not experience the joy of being read aloud to until the 11th grade. My English teacher brought stories to life. When he read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to us, he gave each character a personality beyond words. His style of reading and the fact that he read aloud brought excitement into my life that I had not felt since the first grade;

- Read-alouds provided me with an opportunity to model the many different purposes for reading. I could demonstrate the variety of resources that readers use daily, the pleasure readers draw from the activity, and the volume of information that is available in books;

- It is not just what you read but the teaching strategy that is modeled that makes an impact (p. 3).

Reader's Workshop, initiated through Alison Follos (2007) in a school system in New York, also proved to have many positive benefits for students and teachers alike. Follos' term, Reader's Workshop, is another way of stating read-aloud. The following are examples of students' reactions:

- Reader's Workshop introduces me to stories that I wouldn't necessarily pick out on my own;

- I have a hard time paying attention. Reader's Workshop helps with my listening skills by helping me to concentrate and follow the story (p.499).

Along with previous comments, Follos was greeted with other positive accolades from students such as "just a few more minutes," "May I borrow your book?" and "Don't we have Reader's Workshop today?" (p. 500). Again, receiving such positive comments from middle school students is always welcomed and encouraging.

Read-aloud is not restricted to the Language Arts classroom. In a junior high school in New York, the teachers applied for and received grants to fund a read-aloud library of picture books for all content areas (Zehr, 2010). In the history classroom, teachers found that the language is often a barrier to comprehension, so read-aloud can bridge that gap for the students. This gap can be present for English Language Learners and special education students as well. Reading aloud and discussing the text can be the most successful ways to make the text accessible (Zehr, 2010). Using interdisciplinary curriculum options may also help to alleviate stress due to too difficult content area texts. To integrate student choice within a common theme can provide the differentiation needed to meet the needs of all students (Ivey, 1999). In this case, read-aloud could be integrated in small group settings, not just whole group settings.

If read-aloud is to become commonplace in the middle school, all teachers should understand the importance. "By expanding their read-alouds to include expository, descriptive, and poetic text, teachers increase students' opportunities to read in these areas and build their knowledge base" (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010, p. 181). A group effort is required to support the continued literacy improvement of secondary students. The science teacher can scaffold difficult sections through read-aloud supported with charts, graphs, pictures, maps, etc. (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010). A myriad of trade books is available to read aloud in a history classroom. Finally, math teachers can utilize books

in the "Math Out Loud" series by Pat Mower (2003); this series gives teachers and students the tools to read about the math problems and talk their way through them.

Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011) recount their classroom experiences with read-aloud as a support in the acquisition of informational texts. They report that when the read-aloud began, most students sat quietly listening, but this changed over time. Students began making connections to the text, text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world. The independent connections by the students may not have taken place without the scaffolding of synthesizing information (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011). "Content area literacy instruction can be beneficial for all students, including those who struggle; done well, it provides them with needed guidance in using a broad range of texts and literacy practices" (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p. 5).

Mindy Singer-Cook, one of only two Reading Specialists in a secondary school in Hampton City Schools in Virginia, related how imperative read-aloud is in her classroom. "I do read-aloud every day in my classes; the students love the time to become completely engrossed in a story. Often, other teachers or administrators will walk into my room and the students are so involved that they never notice." She also knows how tricky it can be to pull off read-alouds with middle schoolers. "I don't have a problem being goofy or making a fool of myself; when the students see this, they, too, become a part of story with sound effects and voice ideas." A daily experience was that the first question her students asked was, "Are we reading today?" Singer-Cook continues, "I've introduced my students to authors like Jerry Spinelli and Louis Sachar (*Holes, Wayside Stories*) and the librarian tells me that they cannot keep them on the shelves. That is why I've created my own library from which students can check-out books." Singer-Cook's

"library" contains books that are well-worn from many readings. When asked about those books, her reply was, "That makes it all worth it. I like to keep books by authors we read in here so that they can find other works in that genre that they will read independently" (personal interview, December 10, 2009).

Middle school teachers' confidence in read-aloud is essential. Albright and Ariail (2005) administered a survey of read-aloud practices in a study of middle school teachers. Research is limited in the middle school read-aloud and the responses that they received were from one school district, but the findings were promising. In a survey of 141 middle school teachers from a school district in Texas, 85.8% of teachers reported reading aloud with their students; this included all special education and reading teachers (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Modeling, accessibility of text, and increasing understanding were the top three most frequent answers given by the teachers for their basis of read-aloud. "I read aloud to my students so students can concentrate on comprehension rather than focus on pronunciation" (Albright & Ariail, 2005, p. 585). The top reasons for not reading aloud included: books not being appropriate for the content and not thinking about read-aloud as a strategy. However, as these researchers present across the country, they have found that teachers are eager to share their read-aloud practices and experiences; Ariail and Albright (2006) are now looking for more supporting rationale for a strategy they feel is essential. The hope and expectation of the researchers is to provide evidence for advocating the read-aloud technique.

Additional Teaching Techniques Utilized at the Middle School Level

"The typically overstuffed curriculum, brief class periods, and clanging-bell schedule make teachers feel like there just isn't time to cram in anything extra or try

something new" (Daniels, 2002, p. 159). A variety of techniques to make the text

engaging and accessible for students are utilized in the secondary setting. Some are as

common as note-taking, some involve interacting with the teacher and fellow students,

and others provide an entire interactive learning experience with a hands-on approach.

For the best interest of the students, it is important to research the techniques that would

work best for the teacher, the type of classroom, and of course, the students.

Lecture/Note Taking

As read-aloud is not normally among the techniques utilized consistently in

middle school, it is important to discuss other teaching techniques. Lecture and note-

taking are still among the most utilized teaching methods in secondary schools. While

knowing how to take notes and actively listen to lecture are essential skills, especially for

college-bound students, many middle school students have not mastered this skill. While

taking notes is a cognitive process that assists in learning, the traditional paper and pencil

is quickly being sidelined in favor of technology like laptops or iPads (Boyle, 2011).

With the improvements in technology, it would not be surprising if digital learning via

iPads becomes the new "textbook" with links to videos and other visual media (Hill,

2011). If students are not competent note-takers, especially in middle school, they often

miss essential information that may not be reviewed again after the lecture has taken

place. Speed of the lecture, amount of prior knowledge to tap into, and overall difficulty

of the topic are all variables in the success of note-taking. "In the name of taking notes,

students typically copy verbatim from the text, which is a hand-and-eye event,

completely bypassing the mind" (Saunders-Smith, 2009, p. 35). In essence, when

students are "taking notes" they are not necessarily reading the text to add to memory, but

just writing down the information. Whether they take notes from a lecture or copy notes from a text, this does not add to comprehension or vocabulary acquisition. To improve this method, students must be given a format that would support paraphrasing, taking out essential information and utilizing symbols—all of these aspects force the students to slow down, think about the text and find the main idea (Saunders-Smith, 2009). This crosses both aspects, taking notes from lecture, and taking notes from text. Students must hone their listening skills, along with note-taking skills, along with tapping into comprehension and vocabulary strategies.

Reciprocal Teaching

If students are not proficient note-takers, they could benefit from reciprocal teaching. Brown and Palincsar (1985) were early proponents of reciprocal teaching, an activity involving the students taking an active role in leading group discussions. The teacher is involved with scaffolding, modeling, and direct instruction; however, the student then takes the lead with generating questions, engaging in dialogue with a small group of classmates, while interacting with the text to explore answers (Meyer, 2010). Reciprocal teaching has been found to support higher level thinking and comprehension skills such as predicting, clarifying, summarizing and, questioning. To ensure these activities are successful, students must have extensive scaffolding and modeling from the teacher showing the expected types of questions. Reciprocal teaching, like read-aloud, involves both the teacher and student engaging in dialogue and questioning about the text. This technique, when used correctly, eventually becomes more student-centered than read-aloud, since the teacher does not direct the dialogue.

In reciprocal teaching, students have four strategies to remember: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. Teachers may assign students to a role to ensure that each strategy is being addressed. For predicting, a purpose for reading is set and students make an educated guess as to what the text is about or what will be learned. For clarifying, it is imperative that unknown words or sections are not skipped. Here, connections to the text are made and reinforced through looking for context clues, etc. For questioning, students must understand the text in order to ask questions of their peers. For summarizing, main idea and supporting details are the focus (Stricklin, 2011). With reciprocal teaching, the teacher is the model for each strategy and then releases the responsibility to the students (Williams, 2010).

Like read-aloud, reciprocal teaching is appropriate for fiction and non-fiction and can be used with any age group (Stricklin, 2011). Reciprocal teaching can also be utilized with literature circles, which will be discussed later. All levels of readers are engaged in an activity like reciprocal teaching. They are in a collaborative group where everyone has a role and is expected to take ownership over the assignment and comprehension of the text. This gives students the chance to take on each role, to learn to take turns, and actively listen to their peers. This is a technique that supports students becoming independent readers (Stricklin, 2011).

Brain-based Learning

As with reciprocal teaching, brain-based learning is a technique that supports active student participation and higher order thinking skills. Brain-based learning theory, much documented by Eric Jensen and his 21 books on the subject, provides more insightful in how our students learn best. This theory explores the "link between brain

science and teaching and learning" (Jensen, 2000, p. 76). Instead of forcing them to memorize, students need to engage in their learning and with the text. When students are engaged and actively involved in the learning process, the lines of communication for deeper discussion and personal connection are opened (Werle, 2004). Storytelling is one means of activating this engagement. "Storytelling sessions are often interactive, offering the opportunity for an exchange of ideas as well as movement and role-playing" (Werle, 2004, p. 83). The sharing of personal experiences can assist with activating prior knowledge and personal connection with the students. Brain-based learning techniques utilize basic psychology and common sense that requires the teacher to have a deep knowledge of how students learn and then providing activities that improve the learning environment (Jensen, 2000). Again, as with read-aloud, when the students are engaged and involved, learning occurs.

"Brain-based education is best understood in three words: engagement, strategies, and principles" (Jensen, 2008, p. 410). Choosing techniques and activities that engage the students is essential; the strategies that teachers choose should be sound and brain-based theory states those strategies should be based on real science (Jensen, 2008). However, it is important to be cautious when implementing a brain-based classroom. McCall (2012) cautions that much of the research today has been around for years and is not based in neuroscience, but cognitive and psychological research. Further, sometimes the data is misinterpreted and the research may not have been conducted with children (McCall, 2012). Overall, brain-based learning can have a positive impact on the teaching strategies, but it is imperative that teachers stay abreast of new developments and research.

Readers' Theater

Teachers often try to incorporate activities that engage the student with the text, instead of simply reading silently. Readers' Theater is a common teaching method that takes place in the middle school as well as elementary school. "Readers Theatre is a rehearsed group presentation of a script that is read aloud rather than memorized" (Flynn, 2004, p. 360). Students practice a script and practice until they are comfortable reading it. The teacher's role is a coach to support their fluency and interpretation of the language within the script. Since students do not need to practice "performing" in relation to acting out the script, they can concentrate on the language and how to most effectively read the passage out loud (Keehn, et al., 2008). Although repeated reading is never a waste of time, Readers' Theater can be time consuming. Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho (2008) researched the Readers' Theater process in eighth graders and found that after interviewing students who participated in Readers' Theater, the students commented that the process was engaging and performing was a positive aspect; however, practicing over and over was one aspect that students disliked.

Readers' Theater can be of benefit to middle grades students in that this technique continues to support the pace of reading and creating characterization through voices, to name a few. Also, as students move through the grades, they encounter more difficult text, so working collaboratively can place more proficient readers in the part of assistant (Hodges, 2011). Readers' Theater can also cross content areas; expository text can be difficult, so scripts can be created that "include explanations and elaborations of difficult concepts using vocabulary words and student-friendly language to aid in student understanding" (Clementi, 2010, p. 88). The integral parts of Readers' Theater, rehearsal,

review, and reactivation, can aid in retaining content area information (Clementi, 2010; Flynn, 2004).

One great benefit of Readers' Theater is flexibility. Teachers can utilize scripts that are already complete or teachers and/or students can create their own scripts (Clementi, 2010; Flynn, 2004; Hodges, 2011). Adding the aspect of performance may appeal to shy students who may normally be apprehensive about reading in front of peers. With creating their own scripts, students take ownership in the process. The opportunity to read, repeat and understand in any classroom can prove beneficial for students' comprehension (Clementi, 2010).

Literature Circles

Along the lines of Readers' Theatre and read-aloud, another activity that has shown successful in the middle school is Literature Circles.

> Literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-assigned portion to the text (either in or outside of class), members make notes to help them contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share (Daniels, 2002, p. 2).

Day and Kroon (2010) assert that literature circles are successful for adolescents because they enjoy collaborating in small groups in which they can voice their interpretations along with personal experiences. Prior to full implementation of literature circles, the teacher must lay the groundwork for demonstrating strategies to call upon, honoring opinions of all, and how to actively participate. This is much like the scaffolding a teacher must provide with read-aloud. Literature circles become more student-centered

than read-aloud with the addition of choice. Choice is an integral part of literature circles; students take on the role of choosing the text, choosing discussion topics based on their notes and, in essence, choosing their groups. While read-aloud is normally a large group activity, literature circles allow students to choose what they read and discuss in a small group setting (Brown, 2002; Daniels, 2002; Day & Kroon, 2010).

As literature circles progress, the teacher takes on a participant role, in contrast to that of a leader (Brown, 2002). While both literature circles and read-aloud involve discussion and questioning, literature circles should not be controlled by the teacher. Both literature circles and read-aloud can be used to introduce texts that may not otherwise be accessible for all students. Read-aloud, as previously stated, can incorporate higher level texts due to the fact that the teacher is guiding the activity and can provide appropriate scaffolding when needed. With literature circles, more advanced students are given the opportunity to explore texts in a small group that may otherwise have been inaccessible for the rest of the class (Cameron, Murray, Hull & Cameron, 2012).

Read-aloud and literature circles have another similarity, the ability to cross content areas. Even though content classes historically utilize expository text, teachers are being encouraged to include narrative text as well (Hawkey, 2007) — read-aloud and literature circles can be implemented at this time. With the move toward more cross-curricular activities and having content teachers support reading strategies within their classrooms, both are strong techniques to support this (Wood, Pilonieta, & Blanton, 2009). As both of these techniques support understanding the text and becoming active in the discussion, they can easily be utilized in a content classroom as well. Scaffolding and discussion are essential parts of both techniques and can carry over in other contents. For

example, Wood et al. (2009) discussed how a social studies class implemented literature circles to reinforce context clues and cause/effect. As content classes also attempt to bring in more types of reading material, like magazines, newspapers, Internet articles, all may be utilized for literature circles (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles and read-aloud can be utilized through narrative texts in the content classroom, as these become more popular modes of conveying information outside of the Language Arts classroom (Wood et al., 2009).

A final strength of literature circles that read-aloud may not directly offer is the ability to support multi-modal learning. Day and Kroon (2010) discussed the idea of online literature circles to support an extension of the classroom activity. Here, students were given the opportunity to discuss and write journals online to share with their small groups. This supported the use of technology and allowed for an openness that may not have happened in the physical classroom. Students were quoted as saying: "I was much more comfortable sharing my ideas because I wasn't afraid of people laughing at me" and "You can ask questions that you would never ask out loud" (Day & Kroon, 2010, p. 22). Additionally, the teachers included multimodal projects such as theme collages and digital quilt squares; these projects took the place of traditional paper projects and demonstrated understanding of the text. Power Point was used to create digital projects wherein students developed theme collages using graphics, colors, and even sound; the digital quilt squares were developed around "piecing" together important terms, features and graphics from the book. Multimodal activities do not have to be technology based, however. Media, art, and music are three other means by which multimodal literacies can

be addressed (Thompson, 2008). While one could argue that multimodal literacies could be addressed with read-aloud, they are more easily accessed with literature circles.

Book Clubs

Literature-based reading instruction was transformed in the 1990s. This was in response to the social and cultural aspects of reading brought into focus by social constructivist theory. This view encouraged students to interact with the text using both oral and written language; teachers were also urged to have students interact with other students and even adults as they constructed meaning from the reading (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). The book club concept was developed with four components: reading, writing, whole-class discussion and instruction. Integrating strategies for supporting vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and authentic discussions were significant as developing the program around state mandated standards was important (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). There were some extremely positive outcomes from the research of Raphael and McMahon (1994); they found that after the research period students held authentic discussions, encouraged participation by all students in the class, were able to have real conversations with each other's feelings and opinions in mind, and had test scores as high as those in a regular classroom setting. Overall, this alternative to the traditional language arts approach has benefits for engaging students with a variety of texts and opportunities for higher-level thinking and discussion.

Expeditionary Learning

Within the scope of teaching techniques utilized at the middle level is Expeditionary Learning (Dobbertin, 2012). This is an alternative to differentiated instruction since students have targeted goals with interdisciplinary projects as the focus.

Within this process, "supporting targets" are identified to support the long-term, final

product (Dobbertin, 2012, p. 68). Within these expeditions, students engage in hands-on

learning, interactive conversations, and track their progress in personalized charts. This

method still meets the needs of below grade level readers by having appropriate texts that

still produce the same essential target as all students (Dobbertin, 2012). While this

technique could be successful in some situations, it could be seen as another time

consuming activity that is not conducive to district pacing guides or when a

predetermined amount a material must be covered in short amount of time. With added

pressure of covering topics that may be on state assessments and not enough time to

adequately explore each, especially if remediation is needed, in-depth projects are often

passed over for direct instruction (David, 2008). Table 1 presents a visual representation

of how each strategy discussed has similar benefits.

TABLE 1

Comparison of the Benefits and Features of Discussed Strategies

	Crosses Content Areas	Encourages Collaboration	Incorporates Multi-Level Text	Encourages Student Engagement
Read-Aloud	X		X	X
Lecture/Note Taking	X			
Reciprocal Teaching	X	X	X	X
Brain-Based Learning	X	X		X
Readers' Theater		X	X	X
Literature Circles	X	X	X	X
Book Clubs	X	X	X	X
Expeditionary Learning	X		X	X

Table 1 demonstrates that middle school level teachers have a multitude of teaching techniques to choose from that encompass essential benefits and features. Crossing content areas, encouraging collaboration (with peers), multi-level text and encouraging engagement (with the texts) are all fundamental. Read-aloud can fit into the repertoire of techniques that positively support vocabulary and comprehension improvement.

Table 2 takes the information previously discussed and summarizes each of the seven teaching techniques often utilized by middle level teachers.

TABLE 2

Summary of Common Teaching Techniques in the Middle Level Grades

Technique	Summary
Lecture/Note Taking	• Students are often passive participants and lack interaction with the text; • This is a teacher-directed technique that must have a strict format to ensure student comprehension.
Reciprocal Teaching	• This technique has a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student; • Students are actively engaged with the text and take on collaborative roles to complete the activity.
Brain-Based Learning	• This theory centers around engagement, strategies, and principles (Jensen, 2008); • This promotes students' engagement; • Research on the topic is ever-changing, so teachers must stay current.

Readers' Theater	• This technique is student-centered and has students actively engaged with both narrative and expository text; • Repetition aids in retention; however, some students may prove resistant to too much practice.
Literature Circles	• This technique is student-centered and student-directed; the teacher is an observer; • Choice, variety of materials and reading levels, as well as the ability to cross content areas are all benefits.
Book Clubs	• This is a literature-based way of incorporating multiple levels of books into any type of unit; • Students are guided by the teacher, through modeling, on how to have authentic discussions about books, while higher-order thinking is being supported; • There is whole group and small group instruction; there are both teacher-centered and student-centered activities.
Expeditionary Learning	• Texts of different levels are utilized to meet the needs of all students; • Interdisciplinary projects are the focus; • They can be time consuming, so may not be incorporated often.

Table 2 provides an overview of seven teaching techniques that are utilized in middle school classrooms. There are strengths and weaknesses to each, as with all techniques, read-aloud included.

Is Read-Aloud the Best Solution?

Middle school teachers can choose from teacher-centered techniques, like lecture, to student-centered techniques, like Literature Circles, to a multitude of techniques that fall somewhere in between. Those that best fit the needs of the student and the teacher

need to be implemented. Read-aloud has both strengths and weaknesses. With a

technique that has proven successful in elementary and intervention settings,

investigation of the strengths of this technique could deepen the pool of appropriate

strategies for use in the middle school classroom. In essence, teachers should not limit

their teaching techniques, but instead, have a variety that can be utilized as the situation

arises. Table 3 contains strengths and weaknesses in the debate for utilizing read-aloud.

TABLE 3

Strengths and Weakness of Read-Aloud

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Allows for exposure to text of a higher level and more variety of topics/authors • Modeling of reading strategies by the teacher • Lower stress for students due to not having to concentrate on pronunciation and reading in front of peers • Allows for positive modeling of reading techniques by the teacher • Guided scaffolding by the teacher for vocabulary and comprehension • Ability to support higher level thinking by the students through questioning by the teacher • Engagement through discussion	• Teacher directed • Lack of responsibility by students • Can be time consuming

Table 3 demonstrates positive attributes for inclusion of read-aloud that could outweigh the possible weaknesses.

When using read-alouds, the teacher becomes the model for positive reading behaviors and the bridge for scaffolding the connection between text and read life (Burgess & Tracey, 2006). The teacher can also support student responses and guide higher-level thinking. Another strength of read-aloud is the exposure to language and literature. Developing life-long learners and lovers of reading requires strong role models. The students may become frustrated when reading alone, but can open themselves up to enjoying the text when they are relieved of the stresses. Engagement can be difficult with middle school students; however, when read-aloud is utilized, they can engage with the text, the teacher and the discussion in a proactive manner (Burgess & Tracey, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

The potential weakness of read-aloud can be seen as being too teacher-directed or lacking the release of responsibility to the students to take ownership of the learning. Although students must be actively engaged in read-aloud, some may view it as a passive activity, with students simply listening. When done correctly, the teacher and the students are both actively involved — the teacher actively reading and guiding questions and the students actively listening, processing the information and taking part in discussion. While one cannot say that read-aloud is the best technique for daily instruction, simply dismissing read-aloud as an elementary technique is being short-sighted.

Conclusion

Read-aloud is a technique that has been shown to be successful in elementary school. So much so that it has become a best-practice tool throughout the primary grades

(Wolsey et al., 2010). Steadily, research is beginning to support the continued implementation into middle school. Middle school students have differing needs and attitudes than their younger counterparts, but a successful technique crosses all age lines. No one will disagree with wanting all students to be successful, so teachers in primary and secondary schools must implement a technique that supports vocabulary and comprehension acquisition.

One last thought about reading aloud: it can't be hurried. As the world spins faster and communication shrinks to the size of Twitter, we need to make room for the sound of a voice reading a story: details creating another place; the well-paced unfolding of plot; the blossoming of character; the luxury of language. Thus is culture passed on, through stories shared, language spoken and heard (McDonnell, 2010, p. 73).

Looking back on what has become extinct in the last thirty years: the record player, the tape deck, the Apple IIe computer, rotary phones and cellular phones that weighed five pounds, it is increasingly essential that the spoken word never meets that fate. Teachers and their students need to keep reading, keep sharing stories, in order to keep the language alive.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The type of research utilized for this study was mixed-method. First, the quantitative focus was the Nonrandomized Control Group, Pretest-Posttest Design. This quasi-experimental design was appropriate to this study's problem regarding use of the read-aloud technique in middle school because the students' schedules cannot be altered and the researcher must utilize the groups as they have been assigned within the schools (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006). Both control and experimental groups were administered a pretest and posttest, the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA). To note, this test has historically been given twice a year, every year. The test, administered to students via computer, provides scores in a variety of areas such as word recognition, oral vocabulary and comprehension, to name a few.

Secondly, the qualitative phase of the study is in the form of Basic Interpretive Design (Ary et al., 2006). The teachers in the experimental group randomly chose five students each to observe throughout the experimental period. They were asked to complete a weekly chart on each student, who would only be known by a letter, on the following aspects: attendance, participation, comprehension skills, and attitudes during read-aloud and overall progress (See Appendix B). This chart was completed in anecdotal observation form; it was done in non-judgmental observational terms. These data serve as a complement to the quantitative data from the assessments.

The control group consisted of the students who did not receive read-aloud instruction while the treatment group consisted of those who did receive instruction

through structured read-aloud. The treatment for purposes of this study was the utilization of structured read-aloud three to four times per week for fifteen-minute segments for the second and third nine-week periods of the 2009-2010 school year.

Both groups were administered the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) during the first nine-week period and again after the third nine-week period. Data was charted from this assessment. The treatment group teachers received professional development at the beginning of the two experimental nine-week periods to guide them in the process of read-aloud and provided assistance, materials, and answered questions, and received an introductory session to familiarize them with the study itself. Those teachers were also asked to complete a log of their read-aloud activities (Appendix A).

<div align="center">Population and Sample</div>

The groups studied were students in "Middle School X," grade six, the control group; and "Middle School Y," grade six, the experimental group. The populations of the schools range between 300-500 students per year and are both within the same school division that has an overall demographic breakdown of 63:31 African American to White, with 40% being economically disadvantaged (www.localschooldirectory.com). Middle Schools X and Y, combined, range from 75 to 80% African American and have a range of 58 to 68% economically disadvantaged, depending on the enrollment of the given school year (www.localschooldirectory.com). Table 4 provides further information.

Table 4: 2010 Statistical Breakdown by Building

	Control	Experimental
Total Students	629	764
6th Grade Students	206	273
Free and Reduced Lunch	64.2%	70.5%
African American	76.5%	80.2%
White	18.9%	13.2%
Hispanic	2.5%	3.3%
Other Races	1.5%	2.4%

www.localschooldirectory.com

The two schools that participated in the study were in the bottom 5% of Virginia middle schools according to performance on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests from 2009 in the subjects of Reading, Mathematics, Science and Writing (www.localschooldirectory.com). For this study, roughly 150 to 175 students were tested between both schools with 80 to 100 students from Middle School Y receiving treatment; numbers could differ from pretest to posttest due to enrollment changes and the READ 180 remediation program enrollment changes. The baseline data for this investigation produced 71 students tested in the control group and 90 students tested in the experimental group. Both schools suffered from reduced enrollment the school year of the study. Another important aspect to note is that all students within the study, if they were students in this school system for the previous two school years, in both control and experimental groups, were exposed to read-aloud for the two years prior to their sixth grade year.

Students in the sixth grade at Middle Schools X and Y were administered the DORA at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year. Raw scores from that diagnostic test served as initial baseline data for the year. Scores of the students who received additional outside reading instruction, especially in the form of READ 180, which is a reading remediation program, were not included in the data in order to not skew data since those students receive additional small-group reading instruction, including read-aloud in the case of READ 180. As this program provides additional reading support with the use of read-aloud, the researcher chose to only use the scores from students not enrolled in this program.

From the experimental group, a random sample was chosen as a subgroup for specific qualitative inquiry. The entire experimental group, sub-group included, will have their scores analyzed; however, the subgroup will then be further analyzed for qualitative teacher feedback. Following the steps for simple random sampling, both teachers chose five students apiece, for a total of ten. Each student was assigned a letter to represent them for all future records. The baseline raw scores of those students were separated and documented, as were the final raw scores. These scores were analyzed along with the anecdotal observations at the end of the research process. Data were collected from the Anecdotal Observation Chart on the following areas: attendance, participation, comprehension skills, attitudes during read-aloud, and overall progress (See Appendix B).

Students at both Middle Schools X and Y were administered the DORA in the same time period, followed the same school-division pacing guide, and took the Virginia Standards of Learning exam in May. All elementary schools in the division were fully

accredited by the state of Virginia at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Students from those elementary schools then moved on to Middle Schools X and Y, among other middle schools in the division. Middle Schools X and Y received their first full accreditations in the same year, 2008.

Experimental Treatment

Control Group

The control group, the students in grade 6 at Middle School X, did not receive any structured read-aloud treatment for the 2009-2010 school year. Middle School X does not participate in any type of structured, teacher-led read-aloud process. This was determined during prior observations done by the researcher within the school system of teachers and administrators at Middle School X for the two years prior to the research study. The researcher and Middle School X's Reading Coach monitored delivery of instruction on an as-needed basis. Both were prepared to carefully steer the pedagogy from the use of read-aloud if the need occurred, which it did not. One of the duties of the Reading Coach existed in the form of observing and assisting teachers with reading. The Reading Coach was on site daily to observe the delivery of instruction of the teachers in the control group. Further, the researcher also monitored delivery with fidelity checks through 10 on-site visits during the experimental period.

Middle School X Teachers

The teachers at Middle School X were tenured teachers within the school system and licensed within the state of Virginia. Both teachers held a Bachelor's degree and certification in secondary English. They had both taught more than three years but less than ten, teaching sixth grade Language Arts within the school system. Both also have

had experience with inclusion classes and have had similar results on the state standardized test (Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment: SOL). This is important because they have had similar experiences with the comparable populations of students (i.e. not all honors or advanced classes).

Experimental Group

The former principal, teachers of sixth grade language arts, and the Reading Coach at Middle School Y volunteered to implement the structured read-aloud strategy with their classes for the 2009-2010 school year. Model lessons and co-teaching opportunities were also offered for both teachers by the researcher, who is a licensed Reading Specialist. The researcher and Reading Coach monitored delivery of instruction on an as-needed basis. The researcher monitored instruction of teachers of the experimental group, as a fidelity check, through10 on-site fidelity check observations within the experimental time period. Monitoring consisted of the researcher observing the read-aloud time of the teachers. In addition, the two teachers were asked to keep logs of their read-aloud activities; the log template was created and provided by the researcher; a copy is provided in Appendix A.

Middle School Y Teachers

The teachers at Middle School Y were tenured teachers within the school system and licensed within the state of Virginia. Both teachers held Bachelor's degrees and certification in Middle School English. Similar to the Middle School X teachers, they had both taught more than three years but less than ten, teaching sixth grade Language Arts. They also have had experience with inclusion classes and have had similar results on the state standardized test (Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment: SOL). This is

important because they have had similar experiences with the comparable populations of

students (i.e. not all honors or advanced classes).

Role of the Reading Coach

Both Middle School X and Y employ a Reading Coach. Both coaches have earned

Master's degrees, but are not licensed Reading Specialists. As Reading Coaches, they are

responsible for implementing the READ 180 program in both schools. Middle School X

provides this program for sixth and seventh grade; Middle School Y provides it for sixth

through eighth. Further, the Reading Coaches provide literacy/reading support in the way

of model lessons and professional development for all content teachers. For the purposes

of the study, coaches from both schools volunteered to monitor and support the sixth

grade teachers with the read-aloud practice in the absence of the researcher. The Reading

Coach at Middle School Y was also included in all professional development given by

the researcher.

Both Reading Coaches possessed similar duties in regard to observing and

assisting teachers in the area of reading. The Reading Coaches, as well as the researcher,

had received training in READ 180, which includes a read-aloud section. The Reading

Coaches in both schools also taught sections of READ 180; the students within those

classes were excluded from the study due to the additional utilization of read-aloud

practices. Both coaches again volunteered their assistance in monitoring lessons. The

Reading Coach at Middle School Y volunteered for teachers to watch her model read-

aloud in READ 180 if they desired additional modeling.

Professional Development

The researcher provided professional development opportunities, first as an introduction to the study, in August, and at two other times coinciding with the beginning of the nine-week periods: October and February. Professional development for the teachers included current readings and/or research in the use of read-aloud, lesson ideas and materials to utilize within their classrooms for the next nine-weeks, and a time to ask questions. Professional development was supported by the following two texts that were purchased for the two teachers by the researcher: *Read it Aloud! Using Literature in the Secondary Content Classroom* (Richardson, 2000) and *The Read-Aloud Handbook Sixth Edition* (Trelease, 2006).

The first professional development opportunity consisted of the introductory session, in August, to discuss the study and the actual read-aloud process. Both teachers were familiar with read-aloud and were knowledgeable on the research behind the utilization. In this session, discussions were held about the duration (at least 15 minutes), the materials (short stories, poetry, and novels), and standards to be reinforced. A short, sample session was demonstrated by the researcher, in which a section from a novel was read-aloud, appropriate supporting and guiding questions were asked, and possible questions were discussed. In this demonstration, the researcher asked the teachers to pay close attention to the intonation and expression in the reading.

Dialogue regarding what actual read-aloud time would consist of was also a part of the conversation. Within this discussion, the following were activities that would be included: background discussion of the upcoming text, teacher-led discussion throughout the lesson on topics such as language, vocabulary, figures of speech, characterization and

foreshadowing (to name a few), teacher read-aloud of the text which required expression, fluency and intonation, and finally a review of the material covered. This list was in contrast to a non-read-aloud session, which would include: worksheets, silent reading by the student and no personalized dialogue about the text or important text features.

The following professional development opportunities included sections of the supplemental texts being discussed, progress on the classroom read-aloud, and questions and comments related to the students' participation, comprehension, and engagement. During these times, sharing of experiences thus far and discussion of how to implement the read-aloud in upcoming units were also included. Further demonstration of the read-aloud process was offered, but both teachers expressed comfort in the delivery and required questioning techniques.

Each of the schools, which dictate all state standards that must be addressed and texts that should be utilized, distributed a pacing guide to all teachers. A division-wide pacing guide includes the state-standards that must be addressed each nine-weeks with a guide as to how to address them within the time frame of the grading period. For the second nine-weeks, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (1997) was the main text. Teachers also addressed poetry and figurative language during this time period. For the third nine-weeks, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2000) was the main text.

During professional development, the researcher provided materials to support the division pacing guide and text selection to go along with read-aloud skills that were under the umbrella of comprehension, namely identifying details in a passage, identifying cause-and-effect relationships and the sequence of events, drawing conclusions, and

making comparisons and generalizations. The Reading Coach, teachers and researcher

spent time collaborating on the progress of the read-aloud process. Also during this time,

the researcher provided input and suggestions regarding the observations thus far in

relation to the read-aloud. The teachers provided their input and suggestions as well; an

overview of the upcoming nine-week period was discussed.

Additional Supporting Information

The premise behind the inclusion of read-aloud was to guide and model students'

reading and thinking during reading, teach skills through the use of literature and short

passage, and to ensure that literature was read and comprehension was checked during

class time. The use of literature and short passages aligned well with the baseline and

final assessment, DORA. The DORA assesses comprehension with the usage of short

passages; therefore, the skills taught during read-aloud included strategies the students

could call-upon during various comprehension assessments. Teachers not only reinforced

formerly mentioned comprehension skills during read-aloud time, but skills such as

rereading text and annotating were also emphasized.

Time spent on read-aloud was to average at least three days per week for 15 to 20

minute time periods. Although treatment differed in delivery by teacher, the strategy

remained the same, read-aloud. This should not be confused with student reading; read-

aloud is a teacher directed activity. Structured read-aloud is not just reading out loud by

the teacher; it is a way for the teacher to model reading with intonation and enthusiasm,

checking to ensure students' comprehension and asking guided questions to support

comprehension acquisition. Ultimately, this strategy is for the students' benefit, to

improve their comprehension. In the read-aloud, teachers stop, ask guiding and higher-

order thinking questions of the students to gauge and assist comprehension. During these "stops," teachers give students an example of how to use the text to search for comprehension answers. This also gives the teacher a chance to address unfamiliar vocabulary and show how a good reader finds the meaning during reading. As the students become familiar with the patterns, it usually becomes a strategy they can employ during silent reading, content reading and testing situations.

Read-aloud is a technique that focuses on strengthening comprehension skills and those skills were reinforced during the implementation. Students, although not reading silently, were given strategies to utilize while listening. Even though reading skills are the main focus of read-aloud, vocabulary is also an area that becomes a focus. The more words that students are exposed to will aid in improving vocabulary. The read-aloud technique also lends itself to contextual discussions within read-aloud time, thus it is the researcher's hypothesis that the introduction of read-alouds will result in a significant difference in the raw scores of the students in the read-aloud group on reading comprehension and oral vocabulary relative to students' raw scores in the non-read-aloud group.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The DORA test was administered to the control and experimental groups in September and October 2009 and April 2010. The baseline data was collected during the first nine-week period; the final data was collected at the end of the third nine-week period. The final nine-weeks within this school system primarily focus on preparation for the Virginia Standards of Learning test that was given in May 2010. The bulk of reading instruction was conducted after the pretest and before the fourth nine-weeks, thus, this

was considered the experimental period. Data from the control group was obtained from the report received based on the DORA. For purposes of this study, information from only the students within the sixth grade control and experimental groups was collected for data analysis. This excluded other students, such as students in seventh and eighth grades, English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and students in full-day special education classes.

The DORA (Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment) summary report was, therefore, utilized to collect data twice during the experimental period. Historically, the Reading Coaches in both schools have administered this assessment; this did not change for the study. After the Reading Coaches received the DORA reports, the information was provided, in the form of de-identified data, to the researcher to begin the baseline data charting.

With regard to test validity of the DORA, studies done in two schools showed a 3 year gain and 1.8 year gain, respectively, in the experimental groups; the control groups in both schools only averaged .5 year growth. The design of this assessment was based on the CAL Reads intervention model and was created with the intention of mirroring assessments historically delivered in a one-on-one setting. The US Department of Education partially funded the pilot of this program in 2002. Compared to the CAL Reads intervention and its Reading Specialists, the DORA presented as an online assessment with highly correlated results (www.letsgolearn.com).

In the spring of 2010, an Internal Consistency Reliability Report was released by Let's Go Learn for the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA). The findings were released to the public. The Rasch model was utilized for a 17,856 student sample.

The sample was obtained from students in four different states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, and Virginia). All sub-tests were limited to one version, except for Comprehension, which had three versions. With the exception of Phonemic Awareness, all sub-tests received a reliability score of .74 or higher. One possible reason for Phonemic Awareness low reliability score (.45) could be due to the use of this being a screening assessment, targeted for grades K-2. Overall, the DORA demonstrates strong reliability (www.letsgolearn.com).

This assessment is currently utilized in all fifty states in over 500 school systems (www.letsgolearn.com). As the focus of this study is comprehension and vocabulary growth utilizing read-aloud, it would be essential that this assessment have a record of recording comprehension and vocabulary growth. Let's Go Learn has documented the following school systems' case studies' success with using DORA as a comprehension and vocabulary assessment tool:

- Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC) in Washington, D.C.;

- Alliance School System, Ohio;

- Learning Curve Education Center, New Jersey;

- St. John's School District, St. Augustine, Florida.

Final collection of data took place after the conclusion of the third nine-week teaching period when the DORA test was again administered to those students in the control and experimental groups. DORA summary reports then provided the information necessary for final data collection and led to data analysis. For the quantitative section of

the study, groups were compared using the baseline and final data collected for the investigation, in an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

Read-aloud logs and anecdotal observation charts were sent to the researcher at the end of each nine weeks. Each teacher from the experimental group completed the logs and charts; the information was then sent electronically to the researcher at the end of each instructional period.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The DORA summary report provides information for each student on the following subtest areas: High Frequency Words, Word Recognition, Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Oral Vocabulary, Spelling, and Reading Comprehension. Since High Frequency Words, Spelling, Phonics, and Phonemic Awareness are not skills addressed beyond elementary school except in remedial areas, these subtests were not utilized. Word Recognition was considered as a possible focus area for middle school, but for this study, Oral Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension most closely aligned to the purposes of this research. As per the Let's Go Learn website, the Reading Comprehension subtest "evaluates the learner's ability to answer questions about a silently read story" (www.letsgolearn.com).

The Oral Vocabulary subtest of the DORA examines the student's receptive vocabulary skills through leveled lists of vocabulary words. Students are presented with a series of pictures, then hear a spoken word, and must click on the picture that matches the word they heard. "This skill is indispensible to the learner's ability to comprehend and read contextually, as successful contextual reading requires adequate vocabulary"

(www.letsgolearn.com). The results are then presented with a score in a range of K-High 12th. Example questions include:

> *-What does the word "improvised" mean in this passage?*

> *-What was the "Bushido"?*

> *-In this passage, what does the word "retaliation" mean?*

The Reading Comprehension subtest is a silent reading evaluation of a student's ability to answer factual and inferential questions. There are twelve graded passages in this portion of the assessment. The results of this subtest are also given in a range of grades K-12. Example questions include:

> *-Why was jazz considered America's greatest musical contribution?*

> *-Why might some Samurai have broken the new Japanese laws?*

> *-Why might the fate of the slaves who survived the rebellion be considered worse than that of Nat Turner's own fate?*

Data from the control group was compared to that of the experimental group in the subtests of Reading Comprehension and Oral Vocabulary. The DORA report offers a range of K-12 for both Reading Comprehension and Oral Vocabulary. It was anticipated that read-aloud would be a technique that should improve reading comprehension and vocabulary. Therefore, the researcher's hypothesis was that the utilization of read-aloud would produce a significant difference in the reading comprehension and oral vocabulary scores in the read-aloud group compared to the students in the non-read-aloud group.

Data from the anecdotal observation charts from the random sampling of the experimental group were also analyzed. In particular, observation charts were analyzed for trends in the randomly chosen students' behavior, attendance, participation, and

overall progress during read-aloud time. The baseline and final scores for each student

within the randomly selected set were also part of the analysis to observe possible

correlation with quantitative scores and qualitative trends. The hypothesis was that

positive trends would appear in the suggested areas during read-aloud times.

Analysis also took into consideration that read-aloud may not have been the only

factor that influenced the reading assessment scores. Research analysis, however,

discusses how the implementation of a technique such as read-aloud has shown to have

an impact in lower grades and may prove to be one factor in improving comprehension

and vocabulary in middle school students. Data were analyzed to find trends that may

support or refute this hypothesis.

The following was a timeline of the major events of within the research period:

August 2009:   Introduction and description of the study, discussion of

                        expectations from the teachers and Reading Coaches

September and

October 2009:   Initial testing of students at both schools

October 2009:   First professional development (during teachers' planning time)

February 2010:   Second professional development (during teachers' planning time)

April 2010:   Post-test given for students at both schools

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The analysis of data was twofold: quantitative results and qualitative observations. Data from the pretest and posttest, Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment, for both the control and treatment groups were compiled as de-identified data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet then imported and analyzed using SPSS Version 18. The quantitative portion includes data analysis derived from the comparison between the pretest and posttest. The qualitative portion examines trends from teacher logs and researcher observations.

For the control group, $n = 71$, students were included in the testing; the treatment group included $n = 90$ students. These students were in the regular classroom setting, and received no Special Education services in reading or reading remediation through READ 180. The Reading Coaches assembled the pretest data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet; the posttest scores were added alongside the pretest scores and names of students de-identified to numeric codes. Gender identification was also included to provide additional information for data analysis. The teachers from the treatment group randomly chose five students to follow closely in regard to attitudes and participation during read-aloud time. These students were given an additional alphanumeric code for analysis.

Descriptive Data

Demographics

For purposes of this study, the only demographical data analyzed was gender. Within the constructs of instruction, gender was the one area in which analysis was

performed to note any trends. Table 5 provides a summary of gender throughout the study.

Table 5. *Gender*

Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	93	57.8
Female	68	42.2

As indicated above, the breakdown between males and females in the study is relatively close. Of the randomly selected students from the treatment group chosen for additional data regarding qualitative information during read-aloud time, nine out of ten students were male. A full breakdown by gender across groups is found in Table 6.

Table 6. *Gender Breakdown Across Groups*

	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Control	41	29	70
Treatment	52	38	90
Total	93	67	160

Reliability

There was a necessity to determine whether or not the data from the pretest to the posttest were considered reliable. The questions for both subtests were analyzed through Cronbach's Alpha. The data from both analyses are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. *Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha*

Cases	N	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Vocabulary	162	.976	2
Comprehension	161	.971	2

Cronbach's Alpha indicated acceptable reliability of each subtest with extremely close

results of *a* = .976 and *a* = .971. This demonstrates a high reliability of the data.

Further analysis was conducted in an effort to demonstrate the basic descriptive

data related to the four measurements taken for this investigation. These data are found in

Table 8.

Table 8. *Descriptive Statistics of Outcome Measures*

	n	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Vocab Pre	162	6.337	2.484	.120	-.993
Vocab Post	161	7.814	2.411	.062	-1.132
Comp Pre	162	6.040	2.549	.380	-.356
Comp Post	162	7.425	2.466	.088	-.488

As indicated in Table 8, the means for the pretest measures are consistently lower than

the means for the posttest measures, and all standard deviations are comparable.

Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values are all within acceptable ranges, based on

the guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

Correlations

Based on zero-order correlation, significant correlations were found between all

sub-constructs with the exception of gender. All variables being considered are presented

in Table 9.

Table 9. *Correlations*

Pearson Correlation	Gender	Vocab Pre	Vocab Post	Comp Pre	Comp Post
Gender	1	.023	.045	.083	.062
VocabPre		1	.941*	.770*	.794*
VocabPost			1	.748*	.782*
CompPre				1	.942*

Based on the above data, there are strong positive significant correlations between the pre and posttests for vocabulary and comprehension. Additionally, none of the test values were found to be correlated with the gender variable. However, these values include all of the data from both the treatment and control group.

<div align="center">Assumptions</div>

<div align="center">*Independence*</div>

In examining assumptions for this research study, independence is the first to be established. First, the participants from the control group and the experimental groups were at no time in the same classroom and were separated for the duration of the study. The researcher is aware that the groups were housed in two separate buildings in separate classrooms during the study.

<div align="center">*Normality*</div>

Next is the assumption of normality. The Kolmogorov-Smimov Test was performed on the distribution for the mean and standard deviation for both the pre and posttests. The assumption of normality is also supported by the low skewness and kurtosis values provided above in Table 8. Therefore, all distributions were found to be normal and the decision was to retain the null hypothesis. The data retained from the Kolmogorov-Smimov is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. *Kolmogorov-Smimov Hypothesis Findings*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
VocabPre	6.337	2.484	.087
VocabPost	7.814	2.411	.129
CompPre	6.037	2.549	.407
CompPost	7.425	2.466	.705

<div align="center">Significance level is .05</div>

Based on the data in Table 10, the assumption of normality was found to be tenable.

Homogeneity of Variance

Data was examined for homogeneity of variance. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, examining two scatterplots of homoscedasticity, and Box's Text of Equality of Covariance Matrices were conducted. Levene's results are found in the following table.

Table 11. *Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Vocab_Change	1.273	3	157	.285
Comp_Change	.820	3	157	.485

As can be seen in Table 11, no violation of homogeneity of variances was found, so the assumption is tenable.

Additionally, homoscedasticity was examined in an effort to analyze the data for possible explainable error variance. This assumption test is accomplished by examining a scatterplot of the pre and posttest data of both measurements for any pattern of data present in the error values. Figure 1 presents the data for the Comprehension test.
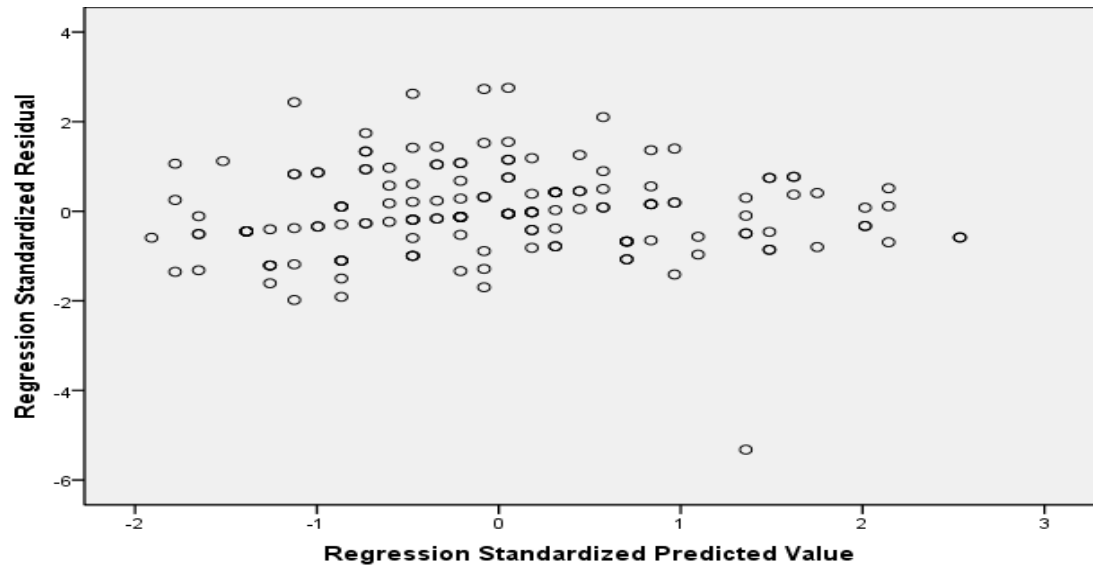
Figure 1: Scatterplot Dependent Variable: Comprehension Post Test

As can be seen by Figure 1, the data are scattered evenly around the zero line, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity is tenable.
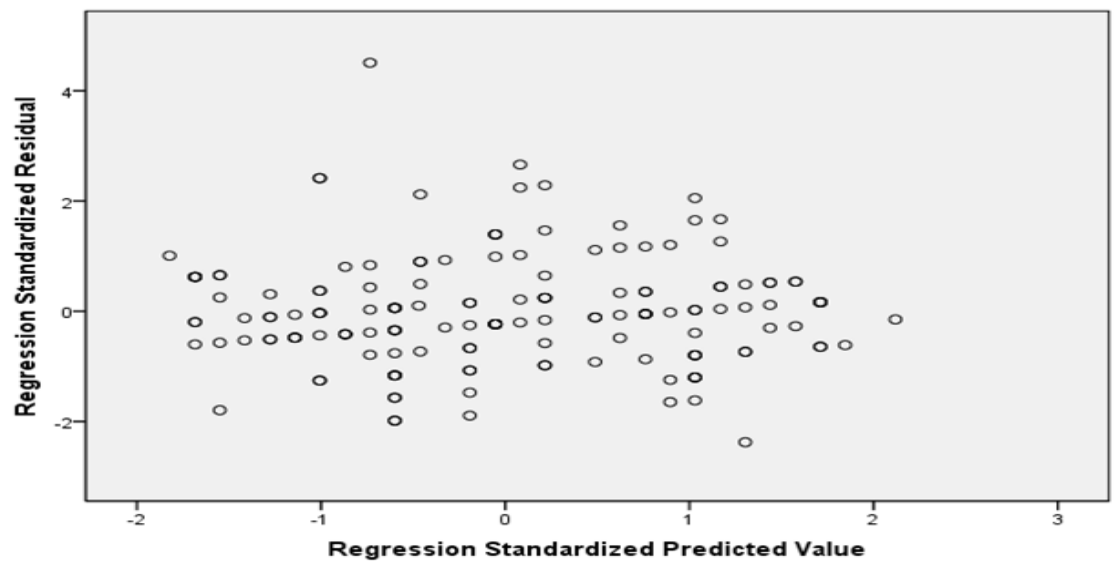
Figure 2 presents the data for the Vocabulary test.

Figure 2: Scatterplot Dependent Variable: Vocabulary Post Test

As can be seen by Figure 2, the data are also scattered evenly around the zero line, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity is tenable. Box's M Test was conducted to assess equality of covariance matrices. According to the data (*F*=2.453, *p*=.009), this assumption is violated. As indicated, due to the significance level not meeting .05, the assumption is not tenable. However, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), violation of this assumption is not problematic when there is an error variance greater than *n*=20.

Preliminary Analysis

T-Test

An exploratory analysis was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest for vocabulary and the pretest and posttest for comprehension. An analysis of the results can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12. *Paired Samples T-test*

			Paired Differences		
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper	T
VocabPre-VocabPost	-1.51143	.83498	-1.64139	-1.38147	-22.968
CompPre-CompPost	-1.38852	.85662	-1.52143	-1.25561	-20.631

Note: The significance level is p <.001

Initially, the aggregate data was examined with a paired samples T-test. As indicated in Table 12, all students made significant gains from pre-test to posttest on both measures.

Repeated Measured Factorial ANOVA

Based on the results of the zero-order correlations and the assumptions' tests which were found to be tenable, it was determined that a Repeated Measures Factorial ANOVA was the most appropriate analysis for addressing research questions.

Multivariate analysis indicates overall significant differences were found across the two groups, $F=$ 10.054, $p <$ .001 (Hotelling's Trace). This signifies that the interventions did have a significant impact overall on both the vocabulary and comprehension assessment scores for the students in the treatment group relative to the control group. The full analysis is available in Appendix A. Gender was assessed in the multivariate analysis and was found not to be significant.

Test of Between-Subjects Effects

A test of between-subjects effects was conducted in order to assess the impact of the intervention for each assessment independently. Vocabulary and comprehension analysis indicates no significant interaction for vocabulary; however, there is significant interaction with comprehension ($F = 7.496, p = .007$). Conversely, when examining the main effect of gender, no differences were found for either assessment. Most significantly, data indicates significant impact from intervention across groups for vocabulary ($F = 18.696, p <$.001).

The following two figures represent the data across the groups for estimated means for gains in vocabulary and comprehension. To fully understand the figures, both groups (control and experimental) are represented at the bottom: .00 (control group), 1.00 (experimental group). Solid lines indicate boys and dotted lines indicate girls. The points indicate their gains after the posttest.

Figure 3: Estimated Means of Comprehension Change

Figure 3 illustrates the gains made across groups for the comprehension portion of the assessment. For the control group, the estimated means for comprehension change for the boys was approximately $D = 1.15$, and girls $D = 1.45$. For the treatment group, the boys' estimated mean change was $D = 1.68$, and girls' $D = 1.28$. The most significant data from this figure wre garnered from the treatment group, more specifically, the boys. Their gains indicate highly significant gains with the use of the intervention on the comprehension assessment.

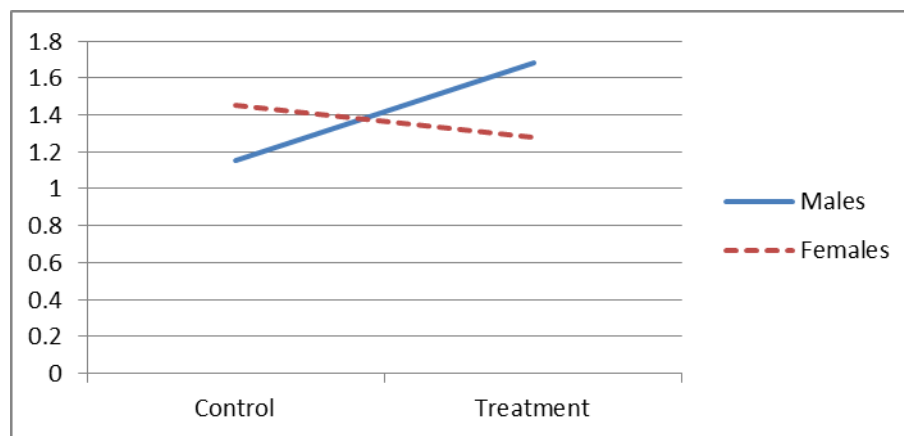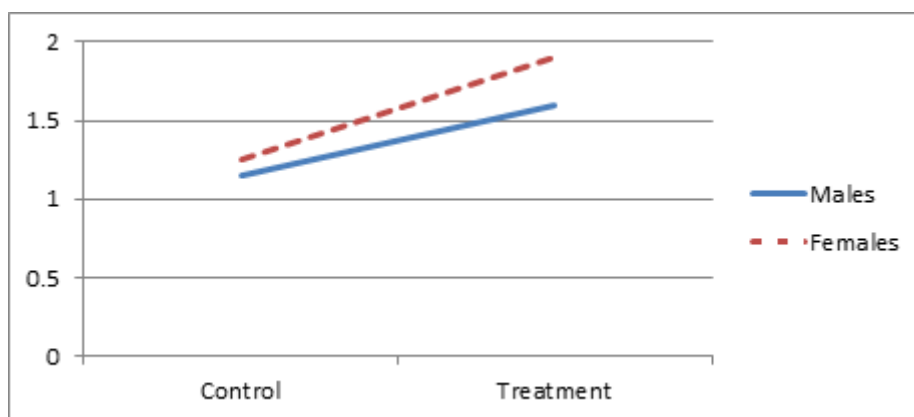*Figure 4:* Estimated Means of Vocabulary Change

Figure 4 illustrates the gains made across groups for the vocabulary portion of the assessment. For the control group, the estimated means for vocabulary change for the

boys was approximately $D = 1.15$, and girls $D = 1.25$. For the treatment group, the boys' estimated mean change was $D = 1.60$, and girls' $D = 1.90$. The most significant data from this figure were garnered from the treatment group. Their gains are highly significant with the use of the intervention on the vocabulary assessment.

After reviewing Figures 3 and 4, it was positive to see that there were, indeed, gains across all groups. However, the gains of the boys in the treatment group for comprehension were most noteworthy. The gains of the treatment group in vocabulary were also significant. The figures reveal more than the actual correlational data. As gender was not initially a focal point, the breakout of gender provided important information that has larger implications for this research.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative Analysis: Teacher Logs

The teacher logs were developed to detail the observations by the teachers of their classes as a whole and also of the randomly selected students. A copy of the log presented to the experimental teachers can be found in Appendix B. The expectation was that these logs would be specific and address students individually. After the first half of the research period, logs were gathered and it was noted that they were not as detailed or as reflective as had been requested. Unfortunately, even after further probing for more detail, the final sets of logs were not as detailed as the researcher had hoped, either. Overall, the logs gave brief responses to all questions. However, there were some trends from which to take note.

The researcher compiled notes from the logs to search for either positive or negative trends from the teacher comments. During this time, it was noted that the

responses detailed from the teachers were similar based on the information or type of lesson. After further examination, it was the researcher's conclusion that collaboration between the teachers was apparent. Each teacher used the same data for the "Information on Read-aloud" section of the logs. This was appropriate since the teachers plan together and follow a set curriculum. For the "Student Reactions" section, the vast majority of responses were positive. Situations such as weather, upcoming days off, and use of a CD due to illness were all mentioned as factors that influenced the changes in attitudes of the students during read-aloud time. To read responses that detailed how active and excited the students were during the read-aloud time was encouraging to the researcher.

The teachers were also positive in their personal reflections on read-aloud. They were honest in that some activities, such as poetry or assessment reviews (reviewing for the state exams), were not as easy to utilize read-aloud and that these activities also garnered less favorable responses from the students. The analysis of the responses of the teachers during the novel units was also positive. After the first novel was complete, both teachers stated that the students were asking for the next book. In between novels were units on poetry, short story, and assessment reviews. When the second novel began, the positive responses from the teachers and students were extremely encouraging for read-aloud practices.

When analyzing the logs on the randomly selected students, again, the teacher notes were not as detailed as hoped. A copy of the anecdotal observation chart presented to the experimental teachers for their notes can be found in Appendix C. Annotations were compiled on the notes from the teacher logs and trends were explored. Overall, for the ten randomly selected students, attendance was high for the majority. Participation

was good, except for two students, one from each teacher. The remaining categories showed development throughout the research period and both teachers maintained a positive tone.

Qualitative Analysis: Researcher Observations

The researcher visited each teacher, both control and experimental, ten times during the research period. Copies of the logs used for both the experimental and control group visits, respectively, can be found in Appendices D and E. Each fidelity check visit took place during read-aloud time for the experimental group and during literature instruction for the control group. Visits were, on average, every other week and lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. During the visits, the researcher took notes of the types of questions asked by the teachers, answers from the students, activities within the observation period, and time spent on read-aloud.

Control Group

The fidelity check visits to the control group corresponded to the experimental group visits so that material taught would be the same. For all visits to the control group, read-aloud was not utilized. Student participation was sporadic at best. One teacher relied heavily on independent work and the other used small group instruction. Questioning techniques for both teachers were at the lower level of Bloom's Taxonomy, when utilized at all. "Does anyone have questions?" was used often. However, it is important to mention that the researcher noticed more participation during the few times that a CD version of the novel was used. When asked about the use of the CD, the researcher was informed it was to "give the kids a break."

Experimental Group:

The first observation made was the activity level of the students during visits. The logs from the teachers were not as detailed and a true picture of the read-aloud time was not deciphered through the logs. The fidelity check observations reinforced that both teachers were providing strong, structured read-aloud.

Unfortunately, one teacher from the experimental group did not have a positive attitude toward the teacher logs. Concerns arose that read-aloud was not taking place, but the observations supported that read-aloud was, indeed, present. The researcher was told by the teacher that she did not have time to complete the logs thoroughly. As it was more important for the read-aloud to take place, the researcher did not force the issue. The data received from the logs reflected all weeks, albeit in a cursory manner.

Questioning and class participation were the two most marked differences between the control and experimental groups. Experimental teachers did, on average, more questioning during read-aloud time and moved throughout Bloom's Taxonomy. During the fidelity check observations, the researcher monitored the active participation by the students. Students in the experimental group actively took notes, asked and answered questions, and were on-task. The quality of responses developed throughout the research period to show deeper thinking and comprehension of the topic.

Other Possible Factors

The results from the experimental group's posttest scores were encouraging to the researcher. It could not be ignored that there were other factors that could be identified as influencing these results. The first factor would be teacher delivery. Earlier, it was noted that all four teachers in this study have similar results on the Virginia Standards of

Learning assessment, but teacher delivery still varied between the four. The teachers in the experimental group were given some direction as to which activities best supported read-aloud and those activities were the primary mode of delivery for read-aloud time. From the researcher's observations, students in the experimental group were actively engaged and on-task during each visit. On the other hand, this consistency was not present during visits to the control group. Both schools followed school system curriculum, but, again, delivery methods differed.

Another possible factor to consider while analyzing data would be the students' attitudes during the tests. It is possible to assume that not all students took the reading assessment seriously or tried their best. However, it would be impossible to determine which students tried their best and which did not. Also, it would be impossible to determine if the students possibly took the posttest more seriously and therefore showed higher gains. Although this is not quantifiable, the likelihood that all students in both groups did their best on both tests is questionable.

The final factor to take into consideration would be testing conditions. At the beginning of the school year, students are not yet in "testing mode" like they are toward the end of the school year. Teachers administer assessments throughout the year and as the year progresses, students are more familiar with testing situations. Also during the posttest window, students were beginning the intense concentration on skills for the end-of-year assessment. To assume that many students will perform better on a posttest is appropriate, but there are other factors to consider.

Final Overall Qualitative Analysis

Looking at all of the data, the logs and the charts present encouraging data. The hypothesis was that students exposed to read-aloud on a regular basis would perform better on the DORA than those students who did not receive instruction through read-aloud. The comments from the teachers, the researcher's observations, and the visual representations of the final data supported the hypothesis that read-aloud could be a contributing factor in the vocabulary and comprehension growth of the experimental group. Even without the supporting data, the excitement and participation witnessed in the experimental group during the observations was so promising that it reinforced the hypothesis that read-aloud provides a positive and encouraging environment for learning at the middle school level. The data provided additional data with regard to gender improvement in that boys surpassed the growth of girls in both areas in the experimental group.

Summary

Data collected through the use of the pretest and posttest was determined to be reliable and consistent. The data collected was found to be tenable through a battery of assessments to test reliability, normality, and correlation between variables. Qualitative information was gathered through fidelity checks by the researcher and anecdotal logs completed by the experimental teachers.

Multivariate analysis revealed that significant interaction with comprehension was present from the impact of intervention. There was significant impact on vocabulary across the group from intervention. According to the mean effect of gender, no differences were found; however, while graphing the data from the estimated marginal

means of change, significant differences were found in relation to the gains of the boys in

the experimental group in comparison to those in the control group.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Structured Read-Aloud in Middle School:

The Initial Impact on Reading Assessment Scores

Much can be said about this research period from beginning to end. While the original research design may not have been executed seamlessly and without any difficulty, the end result and final data provided information that supported the hypothesis and supports further research in various areas in education.

"Research indicates that motivation, interest and engagement are often enhanced when teachers read aloud to middle school students" (Albright & Ariail, 2005, p. 582). After analyzing the data from the present research and the observations gathered from the teachers in the experimental school, the findings support that statement. The results of this study offer significant findings to support encouraging teachers in the middle school to utilize read-aloud in their classrooms. Only within the last eight to ten years have read-aloud practices at the middle level become a focus in research. The study from Ariail and Albright (2006) brought about some of the first detailed data regarding middle school teachers and their read-aloud practices. The results from this study will add another layer of information by including the areas in which improvements were found to be noteworthy, for example, the comparative gains in comprehension. However, the most remarkable discoveries were with vocabulary and gender impact.

Summary

Summary of Researcher Observations

A total of 10 fidelity check observations was conducted throughout the research period for each of the four teachers involved in the study. The teacher and the teaching approach, and the students and their reactions to the teaching approach were observed. Going from a classroom of silent reading to a classroom of "buddy reading" was the norm at the control school. At times, the CD of the novel was used and the atmosphere was markedly different in both classrooms. However, expectations increased at the experimental school as fidelity checks revealed students who were more on task, behavior issues were not as prevalent, and the students appeared to enjoy the novel more. At the experimental school, educators watched with excitement as students jumped out of their desks in anticipation of the book to be read. When students asked the teacher to keep reading or asked her what the next book would be, it was apparent that reading was an activity that was being enjoyed within these two classrooms.

These two schools were at-risk schools and the students within the classes were not in advanced classes. It is commonly accepted that middle school students are, at times, difficult to engage and keep involved in lessons, especially with reading. The teachers at the experimental school were highly effective during the fidelity check observations when implementing read-aloud. To have so many students actively involved in discussion, participating in higher order dialogue, while supporting the strategies that were on the pacing guide for the teachers to include in their lessons, was a positive sight. This environment offered students connection with the text, the teacher, and each other.

The students were talking about characters, conflict, theme, and figurative language; they were indeed talking about books.

Summary of Quantitative Results

Attendance and migration were determining factors in the final sample numbers. Seventy-one control group students and 90 experimental group students took both the pre and posttest. While a large sample is always desired, this sample size provided sufficient population for the analyses being conducted, and positive trends were revealed.

The data across both groups showed that students had improved in vocabulary and comprehension; this was positive data that also supported the research hypothesis. The control group did have gains in comprehension and vocabulary. On average, the boys gained the equivalent of a grade level and the girls gained the equivalent of a grade level plus a few months. The experimental group boys averaged over 1.5 years of growth in comprehension and the girls averaged 1.25 years. Vocabulary for the experimental group demonstrated significant gains of over 1.5 years for the boys and nearly two years for the girls. As many of the students were not at grade level when the year began, these results speak to the potential benefit of the read-alouds in moving students closer to grade appropriate levels.

Within the treatment group, specifically the boys, notable gains were also discovered. As this was not a focus of the research hypothesis, this was an informative result of the potential impact of the read-aloud intervention. This is not to discount the gains made by the girls in the treatment group, but to look back at the charts depicting the gains the boys made from the pretest to posttest was rewarding. The results from the assessments also provided an additional link between the quantitative and qualitative data

where the boys were especially involved and engaged in the activities during read-aloud time. Accordingly, their results confirmed that they were preserving the information and strategies from the lessons.

More than 55 percent of dropouts are boys, who are more likely to have poor reading skills and are more likely to become underemployed or unemployed. Conversely, since reading ability is a major predictor of academic achievement, better readers are far less likely to drop out of school and consequently have more career and life options. Research indicates that adolescent boys are often unmotivated to read because they see reading in conflict with their sense of masculinity; so reading interventions intended to motivate need to address the unique adolescent male experience (Mitchell, Murphy & Peters, 2008, p. 70).

Other research on how to best motivate middle school boys to read address boys' book clubs (Mitchell et al., 2008). However, linking read-aloud to motivating middle school boys to read is a topic that does not appear to have been explored fully.

Conclusions

Overall Conclusions

Based on factors that changed the original research design, it was not clear how the results would favor. Moreover, it was not apparent how the climate change within the schools might affect the test results. After examining the data from the assessments, however, the analysis was supportive of the hypothesis that read-aloud would improve the reading assessment scores in sixth grade. As both schools were considered "at-risk", it was especially promising to see the gains made by the students in the experimental group.

As the information from the teacher logs was examined, the conclusion that there were activities that would be better suited to the read-aloud strategy became apparent. For purposes of the research, it was requested that read-aloud be used on a regular basis, no matter the topic. After reviewing the comments from the teachers and the observations from the fidelity checks, it became apparent that novels are the top choice, followed by short stories, to bring about the most positive results from read-aloud.

Another important factor to note was the participation and excitement about reading in comparing the two groups. Students actively involved in the novel and the questioning process were positive methods. The fact that the teachers in the experimental group were conveying the enjoyment of reading and the feeling of success with the students was paramount. According to Ivey (2003), "when teachers read a range of books aloud to the class they demonstrate their value for all levels of text" (p. 813). This was especially significant due to the variety of texts utilized throughout the experimental period; the teachers used read-aloud for novels and short stories easily, but it was when the topic was test taking or extracting excerpts from expository text that the teachers rose to the challenge of utilizing read-aloud to enrich the text and support the lesson with questioning, comprehension strategies, and vocabulary building. Moreover, "as students move into the upper elementary and middle grades, it is increasingly important to give them access to the rich vocabulary and concepts in texts they might not be able to handle independently" (Ivey, 2003, p. 813).

While investigating the notes from visits and logs from the teachers of the treatment group, trends became clearer. When considering the ramifications of the gender differences, where the boys had considerable gains in the treatment group in both

vocabulary and comprehension, the notes and logs supported the observation that the boys in the treatment group were actively engaged in the lessons. Notes and logs documented the boys' involvement in the class with comments, questions, answers, and overall participation.

The fidelity check observations were found to be telling in the area of strategies that bring about involvement and excitement. With each visit to the experimental group, the researcher was more hopeful that this research would show positive results. Students' excitement should therefore be reflected in improved test results. The read-aloud technique seems to motivate the students, actively involving them in the material and learning, thus helping the students improve upon the vital skills related to comprehension.

Finally, both quantitative and qualitative results provided confirmation that read-aloud is a technique that works with middle level students. The teachers within the experimental school were dynamic in presentation, asked higher-order thinking questions, and, the students performed to the standards that were put forth to them. High expectations were projected within the discussions and the students responded with enthusiasm and answers of much more than "yes/no" or phrases directly from the text. The data confirmed that implementing the intervention supported the students' improved performance on the posttest. With the added detail of how well the boys from the treatment group performed on the posttest, these results were even more significant and supportive of the original hypothesis.

Other Possible Factors

It is important to take into consideration that the intervention may not have been the only factor to impact the improvement in scores in the treatment group. The first

factor to consider would be teaching style. Conceivably, the teachers in the experimental school could have had stronger teaching styles that were better matched to the needs of their students than those in the control group. Next, testing conditions should also be taken into consideration. As times, dates, and room conditions could not be dictated for the pretest and posttest at either school, the testing conditions might have been more favorable in one setting than another. Finally, overall attitudes of the students cannot be dismissed. It is possible that one group was more amenable to testing than the other. These are factors that cannot be measured, but must be taken into consideration when analyzing results from a quasi-experimental study design.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

As gender was a surprise factor, a more in-depth study on the effectiveness of read-aloud with boys would be a topic of interest for those within the educational community. Especially in the middle grades, boys are, at times, the group that is more challenging to engage with the literature in the classroom.

> Researching the problems boys have with reading, I've come to the conclusion that much of the cause of boys' reluctance to read can be reduced to a single, crucial element – motivation. Reading research shows that young people need high-quality teachers, a wide variety of books and a range of reading activities. They need to hear books read aloud. They need to spend time talking about books (Scieszka, 2003, p. 18).

Research has been conducted on how to find books to encourage reading and involvement with boys in middle school; however, the added factor of read-aloud could help support additional research.

The research design included the reading of novels. Whole class reading of novels utilizing the technique of shared reading is one that "builds fluency, confidence, and the ability to read with inflection, expression plus strengthens vocabulary and an understanding of a wide variety of literary concepts" (Bailey, 2003, p. 31). While shared reading is normally used in elementary classrooms, exploring the idea of shared reading and read-aloud in the middle school, and perhaps beyond, could be a topic of interest for researchers. Shared reading has benefits for all students, above-level, on-level, or below-level, due to the types of discussions, strategies used for vocabulary development, and teacher modeling (Bailey, 2003). These are all attributes found within the read-aloud technique of the experimental group teachers. Shared reading begins with a read-aloud and the students then join in with a choral read (Bailey, 2003). Research on how these two techniques could work together in the middle school to help support vocabulary and comprehension development could bring about positive discoveries.

Another recommendation for future research would be to implement studies in school systems that have more flexibility in teacher choice of activities. Teachers may find it difficult to choose activities to support daily read-aloud simply due to time constraints in a school system where teachers are kept strictly to a pacing guide and held accountable for staying on a set schedule. However, "multiple instructional goals can be accomplished with one read-aloud, which can actually save instructional time" (Lane & Wright, 2007, p. 669). Appropriate teacher training would be a vital part of this research design and would most likely fall to the educational leaders to provide. Discussion and read-aloud could possibly take more time than sending a book home to be read independently. Time constraints must be considered so the students and teachers are

given the time to appreciate the value of read-aloud and utilize the strategies of questioning for comprehension and vocabulary development.

Another recommendation for future research would be to ensure the stability of the staff and administration involved with the research. Having a supportive administrative staff to encourage the teachers who are involved is essential. The environment will surely be more positive when the administrators are involved with the planning of the project and are accommodating of needs that may arise. The leadership involved is paramount to the success of this type of study.

The data also support studying the effectiveness of read-aloud including all grades in the middle school. For purposes of this study, it was important to determine the effectiveness in the year following elementary school, but if the technique demonstrates success in sixth grade, it would be beneficial to study grades seven and eight. If students are learning from this technique and they enjoy the time spent on read-aloud, research on the effectiveness in other middle school grades would be of interest.

Conclusion

Read-aloud is a topic that affects school leaders. As role models in the school system and initiators of finding best practices for teachers to implement in the classrooms, principals, curriculum developers, and others in leadership roles must stay abreast with the techniques that work best with today's students. Studying read-aloud effectiveness in middle school should be of interest to those in the educational community due to its success in the elementary level and the potential for success in the secondary level as well. This study indicated that not enough documented studies have been conducted, but it is positive that this is a topic that is considered appropriate for

future research. As more studies are done and more data are gathered, it is conceivable that read-aloud will gain ground as an accepted technique for use in the middle school. School leaders want the best for students, and to do that, those in leadership roles must provide teachers with opportunities to learn new techniques to engage students.

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APPENDIX A

Multivariate Tests[C]

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept:					
Pillai's Trace	.856	464.365[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Wilks' Lambda	.144	464.365[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Hotellings' Trace	5.953	464.365[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Roy's Largest Root	5.953	464.365[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Group: Pillai's Trace	.114	10.054[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Wilks' Lambda	.886	10.054[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Hotellings' Trace	.129	10.054[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Roy's Largest Root	.129	10.054[a]	2.000	156.000	.000
Gender: Pillai's Trace	.014	1.074[a]	2.000	156.000	.344
Wilks' Lambda	.986	1.074[a]	2.000	156.000	.344
Hotellings' Trace	.014	1.074[a]	2.000	156.000	.344
Roy's Largest Root	.014	1.074[a]	2.000	156.000	.344
Group*Gender: Pillai's Trace	.049	3.993[a]	2.000	156.000	.020
Wilks' Lambda	.951	3.993[a]	2.000	156.000	.020
Hotellings' Trace	.051	3.993[a]	2.000	156.000	.020
Roy's Largest Root	.051	3.993[a]	2.000	156.000	.020

Multivariate Tests[C]

Effect	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Intercept:			
Pillai's Trace	.856	928.730	1.000
Wilks' Lambda	.856	928.730	1.000
Hotellings' Trace	.856	928.730	1.000
Roy's Largest Root	.856	928.730	1.000
Group:			
Pillai's Trace	.114	20.108	.984
Wilks' Lambda	.114	20.108	.984
Hotellings' Trace	.114	20.108	.984
Roy's Largest Root	.114	20.108	.984
Gender:			
Pillai's Trace	.014	2.147	.236
Wilks' Lambda	.014	2.147	.236
Hotellings' Trace	.014	2.147	.236
Roy's Largest Root	.014	2.147	.236
Group*Gender:			
Pillai's Trace	.049	7.985	.708
Wilks' Lambda	.049	7.985	.708
Hotellings' Trace	.049	7.985	.708
Roy's Largest Root	.049	7.985	.708

(Continued)

a. Exact statistic
b. Computed using alpha = .05
c. Design: Intercept + Group + Gender + Group*Gender

APPENDIX B

Nine Weeks: 1   2   3   Middle School Y
Week of: _____   Teacher: A   B

Structured Read-Aloud Log
Directions: Please complete this log each week.

Day & Date	Information on Read-aloud	Student Reactions
Monday	Text Read: Duration: Strategies Taught/Reviewed:	
Tuesday	Text Read: Duration: Strategies Taught/Reviewed:	
Wednesday	Text Read: Duration: Strategies Taught/Reviewed:	
Thursday	Text Read: Duration: Strategies Taught/Reviewed:	
Friday	Text Read: Duration: Strategies Taught/Reviewed:	

Directions: Write a self-reflection for the week of Read-Aloud work. Be sure to address the questions in the first column in each week's response.

Self-Reflection: ~ How did I do? ~ What did I do well? ~ What aspects of Read-aloud do I want to improve? ~ Questions I have about application of Read-aloud:	

APPENDIX C

Nine Weeks: 1   2   3   Middle School Y
Week of: _____   Teacher: A   B

Anecdotal Observation Chart

Within the log, please include non-judgmental observations of identified students *during read-aloud times*. Complete a log for each student, each week.

Student: A   B   C   D   E   (Circle One)

Attendance	
Participation (note volunteering and contributions to discussion)	
Comprehension Skills (Are they using modeled skills? Are they demonstrating understanding of the content and strategies?)	
Attitudes During Read-aloud (note any positive or negative attitudes to the process; also note time-on-task and expressions)	
Overall Progress (regarding the read-aloud process and the content; note any changes, positive or negative)	

APPENDIX D

Researcher Observation Log (Experimental)

Place a check beside each of the pedagogical steps observed during observation time.
Note questions utilized by the teacher and student responses.
(Please note observations of targeted students if possible.)

Teacher: A   B   Date: _____   Read-aloud Content:_____

Pedagogical Steps	Leveled Questions (Bloom's Taxonomy) Asked and Answered	
___ Teacher: Oral Reading	Knowledge Questions # Asked:	Knowledge Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___ Student: Silent Reading	Comprehension Questions # Asked:	Comprehension Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___ Student: Oral Reading	Application Questions # Asked:	Application Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Students actively engaged	Analysis Questions # Asked:	Analysis Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Use of worksheets	Evaluation Questions # Asked:	Evaluation Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Students actively answering questions	Synthesis Questions # Asked:	Synthesis Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:

Observations of Teacher Questioning and Student Responses

Targeted Students' Responses

Student:_____	

APPENDIX E

Researcher Observation Log (Control)

Place a check beside each of the pedagogical steps observed during observation time.
Note questions utilized by the teacher and student responses.
(Please note observations of targeted students if possible.)

Teacher: A   B   Date: _____ Read-aloud Content:_____

Pedagogical Steps	Leveled Questions (Bloom's Taxonomy) Asked and Answered	
___ Teacher: Oral Reading	Knowledge Questions # Asked:	Knowledge Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___ Student: Silent Reading	Comprehension Questions # Asked:	Comprehension Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___ Student: Oral Reading	Application Questions # Asked:	Application Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Students actively engaged	Analysis Questions # Asked:	Analysis Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Use of worksheets	Evaluation Questions # Asked:	Evaluation Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:
___Students actively answering questions	Synthesis Questions # Asked:	Synthesis Questions # Student Answered: # Teacher Assisted:

Observations of Teacher Questioning and Student Responses

May 17, 2011

Dr. Karen Larwin, Principal Investigator
Ms. Jennifer Kohart Marchessault, Co-investigator
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology & Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol Number: 151-2011
        Title: Structured Read Aloud in Middle School: The Initial Impact on Reading
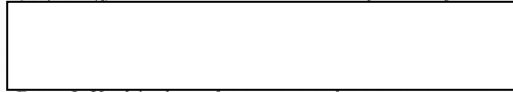   Assessment Scores

Dear Dr. Larwin and Ms. Marchessault:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that
it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 4 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review
Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard
to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be
promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.
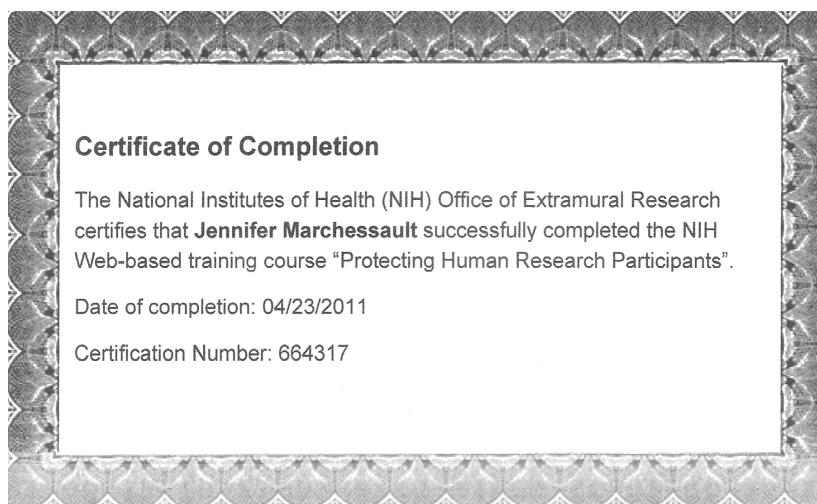
Sincerely,

Peter J. Kasvinsky
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research
Research Compliance Officer

PJK/cc

c: Mr. Joseph Edwards, Chair
        Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology & Leadership

www.ysu.edu YSU

APPENDIX G

NIH Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Jennifer Marchessault** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 04/23/2011

Certification Number: 664317

APPENDIX H

Research Challenges

The first obstacle that changed the original research design included a change in administration in the experimental school; this was noteworthy due to the fact that the original principal was an integral part in the planning and development of the research design. Soon after, the school system announced the impending closures of schools with the control school being on the definite list and the experimental school being on the possible list. Along with closing of schools, the budget deficit forced the implementation of the Reduction in Force (RIF). All teachers involved with the research knew that they were in danger of being transferred or losing their jobs. This affected the climate of both schools, especially the treatment school. Although the qualitative paperwork contributions were affected, the read-aloud components of the study were not and all teachers continued their participation in the research.

One thing teachers commented on was the limited time within the pacing guide. Read-aloud takes a lot of planning and also to keep up with the demands of the pacing guide; so the teachers expressed dissatisfaction with time constraints.