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Interactive Read Alouds: Mastering One Skill at a Time

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Abstract

Teaching children to read and to comprehend is a daunting task. Reading aloud to children teaches text structure, vocabulary, and confidence. A traditional read aloud asks many questions and requires that students respond to questions asked. An interactive read aloud gets students involved in the story by asking them to talk with a partner about different questions or calling out thoughts as the story is read. This type of read aloud focuses on one skill at a time. By presenting one skill at a time, students gain confidence in applying the skill to different texts. As students begin to understand each skill, a new one is added. Skills are built upon one at a time for mastery.

Exploring interactive real alouds in the classroom showed that students understood skills better and in less time when worked on one at a time. Building up skill knowledge allowed students to practice finding and applying each skill in different texts. By the end of the study, students were able to identify many different skills at once in one reading passage. Students gained confidence and were not afraid to call out thoughts during a real aloud.
Acknowledgements

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Researchers Stance

As I think about the past, I am quickly whisked away to my childhood. When asked by my family what I wanted to be, the answer was simple – a teacher. Why? Simple, too. My Mom was a middle school math teacher. She would take me with her to set up her 8th grade math classroom each year. I still have many happy memories of these days. I even spent snow days or days off sitting in the back of her classroom playing on the new Apple II GS. I loved the musty smell of the stairways and setting up the school store. New bulletin boards were designed each year and of course there was the chalkboard. I had a WHOLE chalkboard to myself with no one to stop me from drawing everywhere! Those days were truly the beginning of my career. For me, it was on-the-job training. So much was learned in those tender years. I still take some of it for granted.

When I entered college, I was a ready-made teacher who had lost her focus. I graduated with a Business Management degree. One year after graduation, September 11th occurred and the business world was thrown upside down. My lucrative job with an insurance company was downsized, and new jobs were hard to come by in my industry. The following summer, while helping my mom set up her classroom, I was offered an aide position in the middle school. I immediately accepted, not only because I needed a job,
but also to see if I still liked being in a classroom. When I walked into the classroom, I instantly felt at home. Nine years later, I am writing about my journey.

Education was valued at home and in my Mom’s classroom. School came first; everything else was second. As an aide in an urban classroom, it was quite shocking to see first hand how education had changed since my childhood days of sitting in the same classroom. Teaching had not changed, but the value placed on education had. As a child, my Mom and I read every night. We played games to encourage memory and to challenge my mental skills. In my new aide’s position in this struggling school district, the first thing that struck me was the student’s lack of wanting to learn. It was readily apparent that most students were several grade levels behind in reading and math. At their homes, there was often no support for education or their parents could no longer help since they did not understand the material themselves. School was a place to meet friends and plan your social life, not a place to learn.

I saw frustration set in quickly for students. Even if they could read (sound out) the words, there was little knowledge or comprehension of the text. Reading became tedious because the students lacked the skills to read
fluently, comprehend, and draw conclusions. Therefore, the students chose to not read.

Once I completed my teaching certificate, I found a permanent position in a district where education was valued by the teachers, the students, and their parents. Students were eager to learn. Parents read to their children and it was evident in the students’ love for reading. Despite these differences, what did not change was the ability to comprehend what was read. These students may be able to “read” better, but like their struggling counterparts, comprehension was lacking. I asked myself how could I get students to comprehend text? Was there a way? I looked for an enjoyable way for my students to become good readers. I found my answer while I sat through an in-service in the fall of 2010. The audience was being introduced to a new concept called interactive read alouds. I could not figure out what was new about it since I read picture books or chapter books aloud to my students regularly. Upon further investigation, I quickly realized that interactive read alouds were not what I had been doing in my classroom. I was reading out loud, but I as not reading for learning. I was not allowing students to interact with the story. I really began to reexamine my approach to how I taught reading. My goal was to not just get the students through the year, but to give them the skills necessary for reading across the curriculum.
I set out to learn more about interactive read alouds and how to use them successfully in the classroom.

My core values as a teacher and in life are simple: I want my students to become life long learners using a variety of source materials in a safe and secure environment. Books open new worlds and allow our imaginations to take over. We could explore places that we cannot physically go: the world of the dinosaurs, the inside of the Earth, or a flight to Mars. Books provide an escape from reality and allow us to imagine a new or past world. Along our travels, we learn the skills necessary to decode text and read between the lines. We are able to escape our surroundings while reading, so reading provides a safe place to learn and explore. It also leaves us wanting to learn more. Knowing how to read through text for relevant facts can allow the students to feel safe when learning.

Standardized testing has increased the pressure for students to perform well. This has caused some teachers to take the fun out of learning and resort to drill and practice. Teaching a child how to pass a test, and teaching a child to really learn are two completely different things. I intend to keep the fun in learning, allowing students to become more responsible for their own learning, and hopefully to give them a love of reading that will last their lifetime.
Reflecting on my core beliefs has confirmed that the research question I posed is the right question for me to explore. What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences when implementing interactive read alouds in a 3rd grade classroom?
Literature Review

Introduction

“Extensive pleasant experiences with read alouds and shared reading enables children to see themselves as readers and to become readers more quickly and easily than any other single experience teachers can provide” (Moustafa, as cited in Miller, 2010).

Reading aloud to children at home and in the classroom has proven benefits. Reading to children at an early age teaches them many simple lessons about words and pictures, as well as entertains and enlightens their young minds (Myers, 2005). Teachers are then responsible for sharing their knowledge and love of reading. Allowing students to interact with a story, become part of it, and have a conversation with the text, develops a deeper knowledge of how stories work (Terblanche, 2002). Students are then less afraid to try more challenging skills that are necessary for learning to read.

Benefits of Read Alouds

A read aloud is a book read out loud to a child or group of children. In primary classrooms, teacher’s use read alouds “to introduce students to the pleasure of reading and books” (Barratine, 1996, p. 36). Kowalewski (2001), Miller (2010), and Terblanche (2002) agree that reading to children enables them to learn letter sound recognition, sentence structure, and proper
grammar, as well as to expand their vocabulary. Kindle (2009) says that students’ word learning occurs “incidentally as the teacher stops and elaborates on particular words to provide an explanation” (p. 202). Reading out loud also improves comprehension, language, and listening skills (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008). Miller (2010) adds that reading aloud builds background knowledge, demonstrates fluency, and creates excitement about reading.

Reading aloud to children happens often in reading class. There are many benefits to using picture books or non-fiction books in writing, math, science, or social studies as well. Shatzer (2008) studied using picture books to teach math. She used picture books to teach concepts that allowed students to visualize the math concept based on the illustrations in the story. “Children’s literature can be the vehicle for providing a meaningful content for learning math as it helps learners value mathematics, encourages learners to be mathematical problem solvers, encourages varied solutions, and provides a meaningful method for students to communicate mathematically” (Shatzer, 2008, p. 649).

Bradley and Donovan (2010) used non-fiction read alouds to increase students’ knowledge of different genres in science. Their goal was to improve their students’ non-fiction writing. Books were used to show the
differences between the structure of a fiction book and a nonfiction book. Samples of each were read to stress the difference in the way the stories were written.

Research studies (e.g., McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Miller, 2010) have shown the benefits of reading aloud. However, some argue that interrupting the reading takes away from the enjoyment of reading. Too much stopping or sharing disrupts a student’s comprehension of the story being shared (Harker, as cited in Barratine, 1996). Miller (2010) reminds us that there are times to just sit and read for enjoyment, but in order to teach, prudent interruptions must occur.

**Planning an Interactive Read Aloud**

Just reading a story aloud is not enough to improve students’ comprehension and reading skills (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). How a book is selected, prepared, and read to students is very important. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) and Miller (2010) examined how teachers prepare read alouds, and found that although the order may vary, all teachers follow similar steps when planning a read aloud. The steps for preparing a successful read aloud are: (a) book selection; (b) planning and practicing the selected text; (c) during reading strategies; and (d) extension activities for after the read aloud.
**Book selection.** Fisher et al. (2004) and McGee and Schickedanz (2007) recommend selecting books that use complex plots. This sets the read aloud book apart from the everyday independent reading book. Santoro, Chard, Howard, and Baker (2008) recommend avoiding simple books. Instead, the teacher should select books that have rich vocabulary and a complex plot.

When selecting a book, it is important to know the interests of your audience. “We want to explain and provide information about the world. We want them to be curious and inquisitive and see language as entertaining and stimulating” (Smith, 2000, p. 30). Using books that relate to students’ lives can help them connect the stories to their real life events or situations. Younger students tend to enjoy animal characters, while older students like a rich plot and lively story (Terblanche, 2002).

Before a book is chosen, it must be previewed. Miller (2010) says that not all books make good read aloud books. Some are meant for entertainment purposes only. She suggests books that move quickly and have a strong story line.

**Planning and practice.** After an appropriate book is selected, the text must be practiced. Fisher et al. (2004) recommend that teachers find stopping points and prepare questions ahead of time. They continued on to
say that many teachers put sticky notes on the pages with prepared thoughts or questions. Miller (2010) cautions that even though preparedness and practicing are important, teachers need to make sure that they do not sound scripted or rehearsed.

Practicing also helps provide a fluent reading experience for students. It also allows teachers to practice voice changes and hand movements (Fisher et al., 2004). Stopping points should be found where students can act out words with sounds or movements (McTigue, 2010). By planning ahead, teachers can be prepared for confusion when the text and pictures do not match, since younger children tend to rely on pictures (Beck & McKoewn, 2001).

**During reading strategies.** Actively engaging students in the story makes the read aloud more meaningful (Hoyt, 1992; McTigue, 2010). A good discussion about the reading is necessary to make the read aloud purposeful. Before beginning the read aloud, teachers set the purpose for reading by explaining and modeling the skill, like characterization or sequence of events, that students will be working on during the read aloud. This lets students know that there is a reason why the book is being read, and to listen for appropriate clues to purpose.
While reading, there are several different strategies that will help students recall important details or learn new words. Drama, voice changes, hand gestures, or reinforcing sounds are a few reading strategies that help with comprehension skills and promotes higher order thinking (Hoyt, 1992). When students become involved by acting out words, sounds, or scenes, comprehension improves (Myers, 2005). Younger students tend to use the pictures in the story to make meaning or retell a story. Motivating students to remember actions or sounds will help ensure an authentic reading experience (Beck & McKoewn, 2001).

Modeling while reading is important, too. Students need to know what happens in a good reader’s head. By thinking aloud, which is telling students what is happening in your head, the teacher shows students how good readers comprehend (Smith, 2000). Making connection to other stories or real life experiences also improves comprehension (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009).

**Extension activities.** Extension activities, after the read aloud, can help students connect new knowledge with their prior knowledge. They also build upon the comprehension or story skill addressed in the read aloud (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Extension activities can include, but are not limited to, reader’s theater, visual representations, oral interjections
(expressing thoughts or feeling about the story), and writing assignments (Hoyt, 1992).

Depending on the age of the students, extension activities may need to be modeled. The key to comprehension instruction is a gradual release of student dependence (Marcell, DeCleene, & Juettner, 2010). Teachers must model desired behaviors, and gradually release students into using these on their own. This gradual release will happen differently for each student in the class. Some will quickly pick up on what is happening and others will need additional exposure. This gradual release, along with extension activities, is key to the student’s success (Pilonieta & Medina, 2009).

Myers (2005) found that three months after the conclusion of a study, students were still able to use what was taught because of the constant practice. Lo (1997) agrees that text talk and modeling are a must to ensure understanding. Teaching many different ways to decipher text allows students to choose what works best for them (Pilonieta & Medina, 2009).

**Interactive Read Alouds**

The term, interactive read aloud, was coined in the early 1990s. It refers to a particular style of read aloud. As the name states, the read aloud is interactive; students are actively involved in the story (Miller, 2010). A strong interactive read aloud must include students in the action of the story
Research has shown that students who were prompted with questions and allowed to speak during the read aloud were better able to retell events or apply strategies (Lo, 1997). These interactions help students keep track of events and become aware of characters or storylines they might not have noticed (Barrentine, 1996). Connections are made during reading rather than after reading.

In a study done by Marcell, DeCleene, and Juettner (2010), the researchers found that students could “talk the strategy talk but don’t walk the application walk” (p. 687). As teachers, we want our students to be able to “do more than recite a list of strategies, we want them to actually use the strategies, unprompted” (Marcell et al., p. 688).

In order to help students learn and apply the strategies taught in class, teachers must think creatively. Read alouds allow teachers to read books that are above a students reading level (McTigue, 2010). Since interactive read alouds rely on active participation, students share the responsibility for learning (Myers, 2005).

While reading, teachers must guide comprehension using what Beck and McKeown (2001) refer to as text talk. Text talk is “an approach to read alouds that is designed to enhance young children’s ability to construct meaning from decontextualized language” (p. 13). Text talk can lead to a
deeper understanding and often requires a longer, more in-depth answer. Students will eventually begin acting as though the characters are real. They might also suggest alternate endings to the stories or insert other scenarios (Sipe, 2002).

Allowing children to interact with a story is the purpose of an interactive read aloud. However, while reading, teachers ask questions that call on students to use a variety of skills, like characterization, setting, and plot, at one time. Hoyt (2009) suggests teaching one skill at a time. By aligning skills with appropriate literature, students learn to fully understand the skill. While reading, students need only focus on one skill rather than several at once. Skills are slowly built up and students begin to identify skills independently.

**Conclusion**

A successful interactive read aloud requires planning and preparation. Before reading a story, teachers must select a text that targets the skill being addressed. Stopping points and questions must be formed before beginning the lesson. During the interactive read aloud, students must be allowed time to talk with one another about the story. Then, thoughts need to be shared as a whole group. The questions asked during the interactive read aloud
should focus on one skill, like summary or main idea, instead of many skills at once.

Interactive read alouds allow students to learn how to identify skills one at a time within fiction and nonfiction text. Allowing students to become active listeners, students are able to develop a connection to the text, and the interactive read aloud becomes more enjoyable.
Data Gathering and Methodology

Introduction

I have tried many different ways of enhancing the basal reader I use in my classroom. Using a read aloud to reinforce strategies works well. However, the traditional read aloud asks too many different skill questions. Interactive read alouds allow me to focus on one skill at a time. Students participate in the lesson by talking with each other and as a group. This allows students to practice applying reading strategies to stories in our basal reader and other pieces of literature.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a rural school in northeastern Pennsylvania. The school is a Kindergarten thru 6th grade building. About 800 students attend the school. The school is 96% white, 4% other. About 16% of students receive free or reduced lunch. Most students live in single-family homes, while some live in trailer parks. Overall, students are middle class. Most students come from homes that have a respect for education. Homework is completed in a timely manner. There are few behavior incidents.

The studied class is a gifted group of 3rd graders. Nineteen out of 21 students participated. Six out of the 21 students are identified as gifted.
Overall, the 3rd grade as a whole is a smaller group, having only 80 students. Most grades in the building have 95 – 100 students.

Students in this class were shy. Most liked to work independently and read to themselves. Their reading abilities were above average, but their comprehension skills were on grade level. There were few behaviors problems within the classroom. Students were eager to learn and always willing to give it their best.

**Procedures**

The first week of my study was dedicated to explaining to students the purpose of my project. Students shared their thoughts about reading in a Reading Meeting. In this meeting, the students and I discussed why reading was important and if they like to read.

A follow-up lesson discussed the difference between a traditional and interactive read aloud. Students learned how an interactive read aloud worked, and we practiced by reading *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. The target skill in this lesson was character traits. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* was the book used for the next lesson to reinforce character traits.

In the third week of the students, character traits were still our main focus. Students were grouped and given either *Owen, Weekend with Wendell,* or *Chrysanthemum*. Each group was asked to read the story and tell how the
main characters were feeling and acting. Later in the week, to complete previous lessons of realism and fantasy, we read *Stellaluna* and practiced identifying real and fantasy events.

The third week ended with an extension activity comparing and contrasting characters from our basal reader. Students worked with a partner to identify important traits of each character.

The focus in week four was sequence of events. I introduced two wordless picture books, *My Friend Rabbit* and *Tuesday*. After reading, students completed two activities to go with each story. With *My Friend Rabbit*, students were asked to write the story. The students created a comic strip after reading *Tuesday* as a group.

Week five and six continued our learning of sequence of events. I read *Make Way for Ducklings* and asked students to re-sequence the story when we finished. *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* provided another opportunity for us to practice identifying sequence of events. Students identified the sequence of events in our weekly story, *Penguin Chick*, to complete these lessons.

Week seven concentrated on working on character traits and sequence of events, while introducing a summary. *The Rabbit Thief*, a short reading passage, provided a time to read, identify character traits, and learn
about summaries. A two-day lesson with *Tortoise and the Hare* asked students to identify character traits and sequence of events in one story.

In week eight, students learned how to write a summary. Students read *The Ant and the Grasshopper* and *Prudy’s Problem*. With each story, students completed a summary sheet. Character traits were again reviewed in *The Ant and the Grasshopper*.

In weeks nine and ten, our focus again switched. Our new skill was main idea. A short introduction activity taught students how to find the main idea. We read and discussed *Snowflake Bentley*.

In the final week of the study, I interviewed students. I introduced a blog where students could share their opinions and thoughts of books and other topics. This is where the study concluded.

**Data Gathering Methods**

At the beginning of the study, I gave students a Reading Interest Survey. A double entry journal recoded student conversations. Examples of student work accumulated as the study progressed. At the end of the study, I interviewed students to gain insights into their struggles, likes, and dislikes of interactive read alouds. I typed my reflections after each lesson was completed, and analyzed the data after the study ended.
Reading interest survey. During the first lesson, students completed a reading interest survey (see Appendix D). Students had to think about their likes and dislikes of reading. Students completed open-ended response questions. Here students could write more specific answers to each question. Lessons took into account students' interests.

Field log. I recorded student conversations in a double entry notebook. The left section allowed for teacher/ student conversation and student/ student conversation. The right section of the notebook contained reflections or thoughts from the lesson. These notes were typed each day. I then assigned a code to each entry.

Student artifacts. In order to gather evidence of growth, I collected student work to show understandings and misconceptions. Once compiled, I organized these by skills and lessons. Each artifact can be correlated with a journal entry and reflection.

Methodological memo. About half way through the study, I reflected on the progress of the study. At this time, I stopped and looked at where students were struggling. This memo allowed a plan of action to be created for the second part of the study. This path acted as a guide to complete my study.
**Student interviews.** Before ending my study, I interviewed students to gain insights into students’ needs, likes, and dislikes with these lessons. Each student talked with me one-on-one. I started a blog to allow students to freely comment on book interests and skills that they still found difficult.

**Trustworthiness**

Before I begin this study into Interactive Read Alouds in a 3rd grade classroom, I must mention my established beliefs about reading. I love reading. I believe that reading is essential to becoming a successful adult. Without a good foundation in reading, everyday tasks become difficult. As a researcher, these biases can affect my attitudes during my study.

As I collected data and wrote up my findings, I approached this as if looking through a camera. I looked through the lens of the camera and captured exactly what I saw and heard. I wrote what students discussed to the best of my knowledge. Data, student conversation, and student work were examined from every possible angle. Even if I did not like what the data were saying about my teaching or research, I presented the data in a truthful and unbiased manner. While questioning or interviewing students, questions were as general as possible. I did not attempt to push my view of reading on my students. It was my goal to present a real life snapshot of their point of view.
I followed steps recommended by Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2005). A proposal was sent to the Human Subject Internal Review Board (HSIRB) committee for approval (see Appendix A). After approval from the HSIRB committee was received, my principal signed a consent form. A letter was also sent home to parents to request permission to participate in this research (see Appendix B). On the first day of the study, my class and I discussed the study. I also explained that even if I could not use their information, they would still participate in all activities. All information would be kept confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participating student. Students were treated fairly throughout the study.

Johnson (1997) says that “extended field work, data triangulation, low inference descriptors, and participant feedback” are important when writing an accurate research report. A reading interest survey provided a good snapshot of the student’s current view of reading and reading aloud. Interviews allowed students to express feelings openly and allowed students to have a private conversation to tell of struggles and triumphs. A double entry journal captured specific moments in the class. Participants were quoted accurately, and the artifacts collected were analyzed to show growth in student comprehension or lack there of. By using a variety of data sources, the data collected was compared and contrasted to ensure a true picture was
captured and reported. In the end, a trustworthy and reliable report was presented.
My Story

Let’s Start at the Beginning

It was a hot day in late August when the empty halls were filled with noise. The pitter-patter of feet and the giggles of young children meant the start of another school year. What kind of school year would this be? I greeted each student as they nervously entered the classroom. I always say that there is an easy way to tell how a class will behave for the year by how they enter the classroom. If the room is filled with whispers, it usually means a quiet year. If it is noisy, however, it most likely means a year of chattiness. Well, it was quiet. Actually, really quiet. I had to check to make sure the students were still in the classroom. They were of course, but anxiously looking at me for guidance. I gave a few simple instructions and greeted the rest of the students. Welcome to the 2011 – 2012 school year! Time to get started.

Reading Meeting

The students were settling in nicely, learning the schedule and routines of the classroom. The getting to know you phase quickly turned into the getting down to business phase. One Friday afternoon, in late September, the class and I sat in a large oval on the floor to talk about reading.
Teacher: Why is reading important?

Casey: To tell time?

Madison: You use your brain.

Steph: Learn how to read.

I was shocked! Speechless actually. I realized that no one ever asked why reading was important before? Or maybe as adults we just assume kids know why reading is important. My brain scrambled for ideas, but then Alex came to the rescue.

Alex: To read a recipe.

Michele: Oh yes, and street signs.

Tom: Read forms, like from the doctor.

Casey: And to follow directions when you play a game.

A breakthrough! A purpose for reading was discovered. Now, the tough question was to follow. This question could have a dreadful answer.

Teacher: Is reading fun?

Whole class: Yes and no.

Ben: I love to read. But I like to read in my head better.

Casey: I like to read in my head and be able to choose my book.

Gerry: I do not like to read on command. I want to read when I feel like it.
I quickly and excitedly discovered that I had a class of readers. I suspected this before this meeting due to past conversations held with students, but it was nice to have proof. This next question would help determine the success of my study.

*Teacher:* Do you like to listen to stories?

*Mary:* If I'm in a good mood.

*Ben:* If the story is good, I will listen. If it is boring, I will not listen.

The whole class agreed that it depended on the story. The pressure was building. I had to capture them with each story. Good book selection was a must to make this study a success. I used the answers from the open-ended survey questions to find out what types of books students like to read.

*Figure 1. Favorite Books*
After talking about reading, I gave a Reading Interest Survey to see how students felt about different areas of reading (see Appendix D).

Table 1

*Reading Interest Survey Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Love it!</th>
<th>Like it.</th>
<th>It's okay.</th>
<th>Don’t like it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to read on my own.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read with a friend.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to listen to stories.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read true stories.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read make believe stories.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to talk about what I read.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read magazines.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results clearly show a love of reading. I knew this before giving this survey, but now I had the proof. The biggest problem was that I have a class of independent workers. Many like to read to themselves and like to complete work by themselves, also. They do not like to read with a friend.
To solve this problem, I could allow students to work independently or with a partner. I have seen this independence in the classroom already. Conversations might have to be encouraged.

**An Introduction to Interactive Read Aloud**

Knowing what challenges awaited me, I took a deep breath and began the first lesson.

*Teacher:* *What should you do during a read aloud?*

Their views of a traditional read aloud were correct. I then explained how a traditional read aloud and an interactive read aloud differ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Read Aloud</th>
<th>Interactive Read Aloud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acknowledge the teacher</td>
<td>listen to the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to the teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t talk to your neighbor</td>
<td>talk with a partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no clowning around</td>
<td>talk to the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit and listen</td>
<td>one skill at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher asks lots of questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* *Traditional Read Aloud vs. Interactive Read Aloud*

Students were excited to start with our first lesson. I chose a familiar book, *Officer Buckle and Gloria.*
Teacher: Look at this picture of Office Buckle. What can you tell me about him?

Steph: He looks nervous, or maybe mad.

Debbie: He has his hand on his head, so tired maybe or worried about something.

Teacher: I think Officer Buckle is glad to get a friend.

How does Officer Buckle feel when the students are cheering during his speech? Talk with a partner.

Kathy to Debbie: He feels happy because the kids like him.

Joannie to Alex: He is surprised and happy, usually they (the students) fall asleep.

Job well done! Students easily responded to the questions and really used the text and pictures to describe what was happening. Conversations were on topic and in-depth.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters**

I called teams up to the carpet and they eagerly awaited the introduction to the new story.
Teacher: As we read Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters, an African Tale, let’s made a list of character traits for each sister. Please use big words, not the little words like nice. Think of FLATS, how the character feels, looks, acts, and thinks. Also, tell me why you think the word describes the character.

The foundation for this lesson was established in early September. Although this activity did involve an interactive read aloud, it was not the first time students were learning or hearing about character traits. We had done a few small activities before reading this story.

Teacher: What can we say is true about Nyasha?

Alex: She loves nature because she is outside.

Tom: Nyasha likes animals because of her snake friend.

Teacher: How about Manyara? How would you describe her?

Erica: I would not be friends with her! She is a bully.

(Other comments included: mean; cruel; bossy; brags; nasty; vicious; attitude; temper; brat; pushy; ignores needy; selfish)

Teacher: Let’s keep reading.

Casey: Manyara is really mean to the boy and woman. She could have helped him. Nayasha is really nice though, she helped.
Bravo! Some words used were basic character traits words, but many were advanced words as well. I could feel the dislike of Manyara in the classroom. Students really attacked her for being mean. All thought that Manyara deserved to be unhappy in the end for being mean to her sister.

At some point during the reading, I again noticed that students were using the pictures to help describe characters. I would eventually need to make sure students will be able to find character traits without relying on the pictures.

**Extension Activity: The Mouse Books**

Finding books that have strong characters was a challenge for me. I eventually chose several Kevin Henkes books, *Chrysanthemum*, *Weekend for Wendell*, and *Owen*. The goal was for students to interact with a story and locate character traits. Instead of the teacher guiding with questions, the students would have to talk with the story to find how the characters were feeling and acting. Students worked in groups with 3 or 4 peers.

It was fascinating to watch how each group worked. Some read the entire book and then went in search of character traits. Other groups stopped as soon as they heard something interesting. Which way is correct? It was up to the group.
Michele: We should write that down.

Amy: Yeah, we should. She’s feeling sad because they are being mean.

Steph: I’ll write being mean and sad. Let’s keep reading.

Figure 3. Student work: Sample Chrysanthemum

Another group, working on Weekend with Wendell, commented,

Alex: Owen is a rule breaker. He likes to do bad things.

Gerry: He likes to fool around and cause trouble with his cousin.

One problem that arose was that there was little conversation between the partners in some groups. This was seen in the survey when
students responded that they do not like to talk about what they read and that they like to read alone.

Overall, this was a good activity that helped students identify character traits in a story. However, without my guidance, students did revert to using simple character trait words.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Stellaluna**

From earlier lessons, I wanted to do a quick check on realism and fantasy.

*Teacher:* *We are going to read Stellaluna. It is a story that is a mix of real and make-believe. As we read, let’s keep a list of what is real and a list of things that are not real. (begin reading) Any thoughts so far? Talk with a partner.*

*George:* *Bats can hang upside down.*

*Erica:* *They can act like birds but they are not birds.*

*Alex:* *Bats can’t talk.*

*Kathy:* *Bats can’t sleep in a nest.*

I can tell at this point that the students are very comfortable with realism and fantasy.
Gerry: Bats can eat fruit and some eat bugs.

Steph: A bat can fall into a bird’s nest.

Joannie: A bat does eat fruit.

George: Bats do hang upside down.

Alex: Bats do have thumbs.

I know they understand realism and fantasy.

Extension Activity: Character Study

We had been talking about character traits for weeks, along with realism and fantasy. I knew they understand realism and fantasy. I was concerned with character traits. Will the students be able to identify character traits and find examples in the text on their own?

Since we reached the end of our first unit, I thought it would be a good place to stop and look back at the characters we met. Students were asked to examine Amanda, Saruni, and Alexander from the Unit stories. A Character Trait worksheet was completed with a partner.
Joannie: Amanda, she is a real character. I can make a pie, just like her. She is round because she changed, sad in the beginning, then happy in the end.

Casey: Hum, she is smart, friendly, creative, and persistent because she kept trying and trying; determined to make a pie; generous because shared her money with the family.

Joannie: I think we are done with Amanda, let’s move onto Saruni. He is a lot like Amanda.

Casey: Saruni is real again because he wants a bike. Plus, he is friendly.

This group seemed to be making connections with each character. While most groups worked, others fooled around more than they worked. When I moved closer, work got done, like magic! But when I moved away, nothing.

Rick: What are you doing today?

Gerry: Don’t know, Legos I think.

Rick: (slowing writing Alexander)

Teacher: Read question 1 please. (RF reads question 1). What do you think?

Rick: You can love money.
Teacher: Okay, what else.

Gerry: You can have a problem spending money.

Teacher: Okay, combine those thoughts. Now read question 2. (Rick reads question.) Does what you said for question 1 fit Alexander? Think about it, I will be back.

A few minutes later I returned to find them with nothing written. I again guided the boys through the rest of the worksheet.

The lesson continued the next day when, as a group, we compared and contrasted the characters from our basal reader. We discussed why traits fit a character and if the character seemed like a real person. Figure 4 shows our findings.
Lesson concluded and a job well done. Students seemed to be able to identify character traits. Their vocabulary usage has also expanded to include new words. Now, it is time to let go and see what happens!

**Interactive Read Aloud: Tuesday and My Friend Rabbit**

To begin teaching sequence of events, I used two wordless picture books. These were my first lessons using a story to teach a skill, sequence of events, instead of a minilesson. Wordless picture books were chosen to allow students to see that every story has a sequence. I did not want students to focus on the words, just the pictures.
Joe: Mouse got a plane as a present. Rabbit is saying surprise, his hands are out!

Michele: Mouse looks so happy. Rabbit must be a good friend.

Kathy: Rabbit just got Mouse’s plane stuck in a tree!

Erica: Mouse is so sad. Rabbit should have been careful.

Mary: Yeah, now what will they do?

Teacher: Let’s turn the page and see what happens. (Laughter breaks out. Rabbit has piled animals on top of each other to get the plane.)

Jon: How is that going to help?

Alex: Now they can get the plane!

Michele: Oh no! Crash!

Gerry: Now, he’s done it!

Rick: They are all mad.

Mary: Rabbit is embarrassed because he caused an accident.

Joannie: They are mad at him. Look at their faces.

This story was so much fun. The goal was sequence of events, but many character trait words were used as well. The class eagerly responded to the story and often laughed at the pictures.
After discussing the story, I asked students to write new words to the story. All were able to retell the story and even added conversation. I was happy that students retold the story in the correct order. Many also used feeling words in the writing.

A few days later, *Tuesday*, another wordless picture book, was used to focus on sequence. This story invoked a lot of fun conversation and a lot of talking to the story.

*Joe:* Look, he’s flying.

*Mary:* On a lily pad!

*Teacher:* Where to?

*Casey:* Town

*Ben:* Weee...this is fun!

*Ann:* I’m riding a dog!

*Michele:* This is awesome.

*Teacher:* *(The book shows pig shadows on the barn.)* Now you make a comic strip of what happens next.

Pencil scratches were heard all around. The room was filled with quiet chatter as students added words to their comic strip.
Ann and Casey: Look at our sequence. The pigs are floating in the house, now they are floating out the window.

Tom: Mrs. Fulfaro, look at the pond. It is down there. They (the pigs) are flying over the pond. The frogs are mad. They (the frogs) think they should be flying.

Ben: Mrs. Fulfaro, look the man from the frogs. He is thinking not again. The police won't believe me now.

This sequence lesson brought out students' creativity. Comics were told in order and most were complete. When asked later on, this was a favorite lesson. I can tell that students understand that a story has an order.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Make Way for Ducklings**

I looked and looked for a good book to use for this lesson. I examined a book, Interactive Read Alouds, by Linda Hoyt, for ideas. She suggested using *Make Way for Ducklings*. I explained that we would be focusing on sequence of events and we began reading and discussing. Students were not really engaged in the story, and therefore did not interact with the story. It reminded me of something a student said during our reading meeting in September.

Ben: If the story is good, I will listen. If it is boring, I will not listen.
After reading, the follow up activity was to re-sequence the story using story strips. Each group separated out the strips and read each one. Some groups got right to work. Others stared at each other. They were not sure where to begin.

*Ann and Steph:* (Read all the slips but needed prompting.)

*Teacher:* Which one do you think goes first?

*Ann:* I don’t know.

*Steph:* I think Mr. and Mrs. Mallard need to find a place to live.

*Ann:* Or is it fly over the city.

*Steph:* No, that happens later, first they need to find a home.

*Ann:* Okay.

Conversations were limited again. Students worked quietly by showing each other what goes next, or placing it in the correct place without asking their partner. I will have to try again with a different book.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs**

*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* was the book I chose for this lesson to focus on sequence of events again. This story was an instant success. I had several copies and the students sat with their noses in the book. We spent time on each page just looking at the pictures.
Teacher: What can we say about the beginning of the story? Talk with a partner.

Joe: Grandpa is telling a story.

Rick: It’s bedtime, and grandpa is telling a bedtime story.

Teacher: (a few minutes later) So what is happening so far?

Debbie: Food falls from the sky and people eat what falls.

Students had great insights into the problems in the story. As we read, we stopped and retold what was happening in the story. Many were able to restate earlier answers and give the next part.

Teacher: Let’s recap...

First, grandpa tells a story.

There is a town where food falls from the sky.

Then...

George: The sky drops too much.

Joannie: People have to leave.

Alex: They find a new place to live.

Ben: The next morning, it snows and it looks like potatoes and butter.
When we finished reading, we retold the story. I then asked students to retell the story to a partner. As I listened, I heard the story retold in the correct order. The room was filled with laughter; another great book choice.

Reflecting on this lesson, I did not assess in any way if the students can put a story in order. I simply asked them to retell. I began to realize that I was having trouble thinking of good activities.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Penguin Chick**

We worked on sequence of events using an interactive read aloud from the basal reader story, *Penguin Chick*. We read and discussed the story as a class. When we finished, we completed a worksheet together. Students needed to look through the story and find important events and list them in order of the worksheet (see Figure 5).
Figure 5: Penguin Chick Sequence of Events

Sequence of events seems to be getting easier, but what will happen without my guidance?

Reflection

About halfway through the study, I paused to reflect on lessons and student understanding. Students were showing growth identifying character traits and realism and fantasy. With the newest skill, sequence of events,
students were struggling. They were able to pick out important information with me during an interactive read aloud lesson, but were not able to successfully complete the activities that followed. Using a book to teach a lesson was not working well. Students were not understanding, and starting to show frustrations at times.

While reflecting, I thought about what Dewey (1938) said. He said the teachers tend to follow the paths created by colleagues. His words reminded me that it is okay to try new ideas in my classroom. It keeps me fresh and innovative.

I realized that when teaching a new skill, I always start with a mini lesson discussing the skill and applying the skill in small passages or activities. An interactive read aloud introduced the skill using a book. I skipped cognitive levels by jumping to the application level when reading. This asked students to find the skill, like sequence of events, without an understanding of what to look for in a story. I decided to go back to introducing a skill with an activity and mini lesson, followed by a book to reinforce the skill keeping in mind Bloom’s Taxonomy.

**Interactive Read Aloud: The Rabbit Thief**

I decided that even though sequence of events was not mastered, I did have to introduce summarizing. I would keep coming back to sequence of
events to review and practice. *The Rabbit Thief* was not a picture book, but a short reading passage. Each student had a copy of this interactive read aloud. The goal was to introduce a summary. After we finished reading, highlighting, and talking to the text, I did a magic trick (see Figure 5).

*Teacher:*  
*Time to introduce a new skill.* Well, it is not new, you are asked to do it quite often. It is a retell, or summary, of the story. It is a brief statement about the story. I like to aim for 40 - 50 words. What was the story all about? And you know what? Highlighting and talking to the text can really help. Look at this! (I shut off the overhead and the only thing left on the white board was our talking to the text words and yellow highlights all over the place.)

*George:*  
Yellow marks and our words. Cool.

*Teacher:*  
Now, fill them in for me. *(Students called out the highlighted words.)* Excellent, our highlighting can help us go back and see what the story was all about! You just told me the summary of this passage. Amazing!
Figure 6. Talking to the Text Summary

Shock and surprise was on each students face. I do not think they realized that a summary would appear so quickly and easily when we highlight correctly. Plus, we used about 40 words. Good first step.
Interactive Read Aloud: Tortoise and the Hare

This week I chose a familiar story for the students, *Tortoise and the Hare*.

**Teacher:** We learned several different skills this year. We learned about character traits, realism and fantasy, sequence of events, and summaries. We are going to read a familiar story. We will read it twice. Today, our first read, we will be looking for character traits. Tomorrow, we will focus on sequence and summary.

As research suggests, modeling and explaining the purpose is necessary at the beginning of a lesson. I do this with the start of each lesson.

**Teacher:** How would you feel with Hare as a friend?

**Steph:** He is mean and not a good friend.

**Rick:** I would walk away.

**Casey:** I would go home and ignore him.

**Erica:** I would feel depressed always listening to someone brag about themselves. It would make me feel low.

**Teacher:** Call out traits as you hear them.

**Call outs:** Being mean, bragging, and thinking only of himself
The students are definitely more comfortable with calling out and interacting with the read aloud format. I think for me, remembering to have students talk to each other is a challenge. We get so involved in the lesson that I forget to have students chat with each other, instead of with the whole class. By the end, we had a nice list of traits.

*Casey:*  *Tortoise’s list is longer than Hare’s list! I would have thought that Hare’s would have been longer.*

Casey provided good insight into Hare. Most would think that the main characters list should be longer than the supporting character. But, the opposite proved to be true (see Figure 6).
The next day, we switched our focus to sequence of events and summary. Students were eager to reread the story. I was worried about reading the same story twice. Obviously, they liked it!
At the end of the story, students sequenced the story as follows.

**Joe:**  First, Hare is bragging.

**Mary:**  Then, Tortoise agrees to race Hare.

**Gerry:**  Next, Hare takes off. But then, he slows down and falls asleep.

**Alex:**  While Tortoise keeps going.

**Joannie:**  Finally, Tortoise wins and Hare learns a lesson.

I was very happy with the double lesson. However, students seemed to focus on word count. I am a little worried about the introduction of a 40-word summary. It is holding a few students back because they are obsessing about 40-words.

**Extension Activity: Tortoise and the Hare**

In this activity, I was able to see which students were beginning to move from guided practice to independent work. This activity was also the first time where students did not have pictures to rely on. They had to use the text to find character traits without the help of facial expressions or actions. After identifying character traits, students had to write a list of events in order, a small summary.

As I started to listen in on conversations, I noticed that they used the story to find traits. Exciting news!
Tom: Grasshopper realizes what he did wrong. He will never do it again.

Ann: Learned that he needs to work hard.

Joannie: Grasshopper wants Ant to play, but Ant has to work.

Debbie: Grasshopper does not care for himself. There is work to be done. Let’s highlight that. Storing food for winter.

Students started out strong, but after three traits were beginning to get stuck. I think five character traits was a too much to ask them to find. I did at this point tell students to aim for three character traits for Ant and Grasshopper. That did relieve some of the pressure and students moved onto writing the summary.

Again, as I watched students, some easily started, but again ran into a problem. Students were obsessed with the 40-words. Even though I told the students to just write, many were stumped because of this 40-word idea. In the end, students did write good summaries, but it was a stressful situation. I will have to find a way to undo my mistake.
Good-bye 40-word Summary

*Teacher:* I want you to zip open your brain. Now root around in there and find the folder labeled 40-word summary. Pull it out. Throw it out the window. Now, zip your brain closed. Hopefully that gets rid of the 40-word summary idea.

Of course, this activity was a hit and it took about one minute. It also worked. I could see relief set in for many of them. The next part of the lesson proved that this little activity worked!

*Teacher:* We are going to work on a pizza pie summary of Prudy's Problem. We need to start with the problem of the story. Any ideas?

*Jon:* Prudy collects too much stuff.

*Ben:* Prudy does not want to throw anything away.

*Alex:* Prudy picks up everything she sees.

*Madison:* Prudy likes to collect things.

*Teacher:* Now, let's move to the end. How did her problem get resolved?

*Jon:* She built a museum to show off her collections.
Students and I continued to have a conversation about the events in the story. When we finished, I asked students to reread what they wrote. All agreed that this was a complete summary.

I was really impressed with the work that students did in this lesson. From previous experiences, I was worried that summaries were really going to stump students. They are proving me wrong for now.

**Minilesson: Main Idea**

I was back in my comfort zone. My students were learning again.

*Teacher:* How many of you have taken a picture before? (Hands raise)

*When you take a picture, you capture what you see. You take a picture of what you think is important. Like at the beach, you take a picture of the ocean. But what else is there in your picture?*

*Tom:* sand

*Alex:* birds

*Casey:* people

*Teacher:* But what makes the beach the beach? The ocean. That is the most important feature. All the other things are supporting details. Today, we are going to work on finding main idea in some small paragraphs.
A discussion followed this about the main idea of a small paragraph I
drew on the board. Then, five groups were formed. Each group had a
different passage to read and find the main idea and five supporting details.

One group worked on a paragraph about music.

**Joannie:** Let's put music as the main idea.

**Amy:** No

**Kathy:** Yea, music

**Amy:** No, different kinds of music

**Teacher:** Where did you see that?

**Amy:** (points to opening sentence of the passage)

**Kathy:** Ok, detail, rock and roll, classical

**Amy:** um, rap music

**Kathy:** Instrumental

Another group, worked on a paragraph about school.

**Tom:** Who thinks the main idea is kids go to school (hands raise)

**Rick:** Get an education

**Debbie:** Learn something new

**Madison:** Make connections. Yeah, making friends!

I was proud of students at the end. Main idea is a hard skill to
understand. For the first time working with main idea, students did a
wonderful job. I noticed that students used the beginning of the paragraph to find the main idea. They also looked for words that were repeated over and over.

**Interactive Read Aloud: Snowflake Bentley**

Snowflake Bentley was the story I chose to practice finding main idea. We need more practice with nonfiction stories. This book tells the story of the snowflake man, and the book has side bars that provide more information. As we read, I modeled how to find the main idea of sections.

*Teacher:* What is the story about so far? What was the main idea of this section? Well, I know the story is talking about a boy who loves snow. He likes to study snowflakes. So, the main idea so far is that there is a boy who loves to study snowflakes.

Students were able to help identify the main idea of different sections. Although I know there is a lot of work to be done with identifying main idea, we have started to practice the skill.

**Extension Activity: Why Possum’s Tail is Bare**

To close my study, I wanted students to review and apply all the skills we learned in the past few months. I used a legend called *Why Possum’s Tail is Bare* for my interactive read aloud. Each student had a copy to highlight
and talk to the text. They had to identify three traits of Possum and Rabbit. After that, the students were asked to complete a Story Elements Summary sheet the story. Lastly, I asked students to think about the main idea, or lesson, in this legend. Students worked on this activity a step at a time. Groups worked hard and asked questions when they got stuck. This time around, students easily identified character traits, and wrote a summary not focusing on the word count. Many groups got stuck with the main idea, or lesson, in the story. It did not surprise me since the skill was new.

**Interviews**

At the end of my study, I wanted to take some time with students and reflect on their learning. Where were they struggling? What could I do to help?

Interviewing students was funny. The students were afraid to talk with me one on one. Usually if the teacher calls you up to chat, it is not for a good reason. But after some small talk, the students opened up.
What skill have you found the hardest so far, summary, character traits, sequence of events, or main idea?

**Sequence is the hardest:** I went back and looked but it takes awhile to find out which happened first. George

Character traits if they did not stand out in this story. Main idea was easy since I read this before. I already knew the lesson in the story. Michele

Summary because it takes time. Casey

Summaries are hard because you have to go back and make sure that you did not miss anything. Kathy

Summary because you have to go back into the story and see what happened. You have to read what you highlighted. Debbie

Summary because my arm gets tired! Ben

Character traits when the story does not tell you the word. Then you have to think of them on your own. Alex

Figure 8. Interviews
I was glad to hear students being honest with me. Their answers did not surprise me. I knew that summaries were hard since we were still trying to forget the 40-word summary. I also knew that the character traits lesson without pictures was a challenge. Practice makes perfect. As one student told me,

Joannie:  It is hard because it is a new skill and honestly there’s nothing that you can really do except give me sometime to get used to it.

Blogging was another approach I took to find out which books were keepers and which were not. The students really loved going online, writing, and seeing everybody’s response.
Which books have you liked listening to so far?

**Favorites**
- Officer Buckle and Gloria
- Tuesday
- Officer Buckle and Gloria
- Tuesday

**Least Favorite**
- Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters
- Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters
- Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters
- Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters

*Figure 9. Favorite Books and Least Favorite Books*
The End

As my study drew to an end in mid-December, the students were moving from dependence to independence. I was very proud of the progress made since the beginning of the year. Looking back to September, students did not like to discuss story events with each other. Now, during interactive read alouds, students were talking with one another about the story, and also talking to the story itself. Many felt comfortable enough to interject while reading and tell the class their thoughts. This confidence allowed them to learn five different skills in a few short months.

Students are able to identify character traits, along with realism and fantasy events in a story, with little help. Student mastery of sequence of events, summaries, and main idea are in varying stages. As we continue into the new year, I know that with more interactive read aloud practice, students progress will continue.
Data Analysis

MacLean and Mohr (1999) state that a teacher researcher cannot “collect data for very long without stopping to reflect, analyze, and reset their sights” (p. 57). I decided to think of data analysis as viewing pictures through a camera. Snapshots were taken of important events during our journey. These moments were captured in a field log of student conversation and student work. As we continued on our learning journey, I reflected on each snapshot. After the journey ended, I began by looking at each picture individually. The snapshots and reflection were catalogued (coded), and organized into similar categories (bins). After every memory was in place, I then began comparing pictures to see common trends of growth or setbacks. This comparison allowed me to begin to see my study in a new light. By comparing all the snapshots at once, I was able to get a true picture of the students’ progress during the course of the study.

Analysis Done During Data Collection

Field log analysis. To keep track of conversations in the classroom, I kept a notebook. This notebook traveled with me around the room during lessons. Important comments were written in this notebook to remind me of the lesson. Later in the day, I sat and typed the notes I had taken earlier in the day. I then reflected on each lesson. These reflections often voiced
concerns about student learning, vented my frustrations about lesson setbacks or failures, or told of the triumphs, carefully preserving the picture captured in the classroom. This log also contained student work and survey information.

**Coding analysis.** I read through each piece of data and looked for common themes. Codes were assigned to pieces within the field log. Pieces of related information were assigned the same codes. Codes changed again and again as the study progressed. Coding allowed me to keep track of all of the information collected, and to search for trends in the data.

**Student work analysis.** As we completed activities, I kept or photocopied student work. This work became part of my field log. Over time, I could see areas where students excelled and areas that students needed to improve. This work showed students moving from dependence to independence. It also showed growth in student understanding of the skills taught.

**Survey analysis.** Students responded to a reading interest survey at the beginning of the study. These results helped me choose books to use in the classroom. It also provided a great picture of what to expect from each student during the study. The open-ended response questions allowed me to collect detailed information.
Mid-study methodological memo. About half way through the study, I needed to stop and reflect on the moments that were already captured. This reflection ensured focus on the designed path and created the path that I would follow to reach the end. This memo provided insights into the past and looked towards the future.

Analysis of Educational Philosophers

While researching, I read many different educational philosophers including Dewey, Freire, Kozol, and Vygotsky. After reading each philosopher, I completed a paper that compared book quotes to my study. Many important moments were captured in those reflections. These reflections helped me view scenes from the study in a different way. I was able to see the positives and negatives of lessons.

Analysis Done After Data Collection

Field log analysis. I looked and relooked at the field log while writing up my study. All of the small moments came together to form a complete picture. I examined each moment and saw the growth or set-backs from lesson to lesson. My reflections helped me see why adjustments were made in follow up lessons and well as my growth as a teacher.

Student work analysis. The work collected during this study was a vital piece to the completed picture. I looked at each piece of similar student
work and compared each piece to see the changes. While looking at the student work, I also looked at the field log. Growth could be seen in many pieces. However, misunderstandings and struggles were seen as well.

**Interview analysis.** To end the study, students answered questions about the books used in the study. Knowing what read aloud books students enjoyed helped me understand their participation and understanding of a skill. After commenting on book selections, students responded to questions about the skills. Answers again were compared to the field log and student work.

**Bins and themes.** When analyzing all of the snapshots, I used each individual piece to create an entire picture. Then, the pictures captured at each moment were categorized, or coded. These codes were then catalogued, or binned, together. Upon examination, trends began to appear and theme statements were developed from these bins.
Figure 10: Bins

Skills and Strategies
- character traits
- main idea
- realism/fantasy
- sequence
- summary
- vocabulary

Conversations
- interview questions
- student/student conversation
- student/teacher conversation

Challenges
- extension activity challenges
- skills and strategies challenges
- interactive read aloud challenges
- skipped cognitive levels

Interactive Read Aloud
- prior knowledge
- planning
- modeling
- extensions

What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences when implementing interactive read alouds in a 3rd grade classroom?

Ability Levels
- dependence
- growth
- guided practice
- independence
Theme Statements

1. **Skills and strategies:** Building students’ knowledge of literacy skills one at a time increases their confidence in locating specific skills in texts.

2. **Conversations:** Students develop a deeper understanding when allowed to interact with text and peers during a read aloud.

3. **Challenges:** Planning a variety of challenging student activities allows for a more realistic picture of student understanding and misunderstanding.

4. **Interactive read aloud:** Properly implementing an interactive read aloud requires careful planning, keeping in mind the audience, and the literacy skill being practiced.

5. **Ability levels:** The move from dependence to independence is slow and varies from student to student.
Findings

*Building students’ knowledge of literacy skills increases their confidence in locating specific skills in texts.*

The goal of using interactive read alouds in the classroom was for students to learn how to talk with a story to find answers to questions. By introducing skills one at a time, students developed a deeper understanding of each skill. Freire (1970) notes that students often learn skills in isolation. Students need to be able to connect knowledge to real life situations. Actively engaging students in the story makes the read aloud more meaningful (Hoyt, 1992; McTigue, 2010).

Learning how to look though a story to find answers to questions is a daunting task. Identifying character traits was the first skill focused on in our basal. Students began by identifying how characters felt and acted during the course of the story. In our beginning interactive read aloud discussion, students used basic descriptive words like nice, kind, mean, and funny to describe Officer Buckle. In *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*, students used vocabulary words like vicious, nasty, and cruel. As we continued with other lessons and activities, student became more confident identifying traits.
While reading *My Friend Rabbit*, with sequence of events as the main focus, students commented on the characters’ feelings. This occurred again while reading *Tuesday*. While sequencing the story, students called out how people were feeling. These two events showed that students were beginning to show confidence in combining skills.

Because I taught how to identify character traits before I began my study, students’ confidence with character traits steadily grew with this skill. However, students struggled with skills that were introduced along with a book, instead of with a mini lesson. The students did not have the necessary background to apply the skill.

To see if students were able to identify multiple skills at one time, we completed several activities at the end of the study. These activities asked students to use all the skills we had discussed at one time. Each student used the story to look through and find examples. This became an easy task by the end of the study.

*Students develop a deeper understanding when allowed to interact with text and peers during a read aloud.*

An interactive read aloud differs from a traditional read aloud because it requires students to interact with the text by talking with others during the reading. Lo (1997) said that students who were allowed to interact with the
story were able to recall events or apply strategies better than those students that remained quiet. These interactions helped students keep track of events. It also ensured that connections are made during reading rather than after reading (Barrentine, 1996).

Getting students comfortable with talking to each other and to the story was a challenge. During our first lesson, I modeled talking to a partner. Students were able to see what was expected during the lesson. Students were both eager and hesitant when first asked to talk. Some groups did not say much, while others discussed the text with enthusiasm.

In-depth conversations were crucial for gaining confidence and understanding. Each lesson began with a book introduction and discussion of the skill being addressed. The students were reminded that I would be asking them to talk with a partner, and partners were picked at this time. This small reminder seemed to help students focus on the story and skill.

In the beginning of the study, I had trouble remembering to have students talk with a partner. Interacting with a story as a group was not new for me, but having students interact with partners was new. After reading the beginning of a story, I would pose a question, and students would talk with their partner. As the book reading continued, I would pose additional questions to the group, but forget to have partners talk.
As the study continued, students’ confidence and comfort steadily increased. After the first few lessons, I would start with a question and suddenly the students would begin injecting comments. The comments began to flow freely. I no longer needed to ask as many questions because of their interjected comments.

With this new comfort level, I could easily tell when a book was not interesting. *Make Way for Duckings* was a book where many questions were asked to get students to respond. It was evident from the beginning that students were not in love with the story.

Now that the study has concluded, this new habit of talking to the story has continued. Even when just reading books aloud for fun, students want to talk with the story and comment on events or characters.

*Planning a variety of challenging student activities allows for a more realistic picture of student understanding and misunderstanding.*

Teaching skills in isolation never shows if students have a true understanding of the skill. During interactive read aloud lessons, students were guided by my questions and responded accordingly. I could see that some students, those that participated, understood the skill being addressed in the lesson. However, those that did not actively participate might understand the skill, but I had no way of knowing.
Planning an activity to follow each lesson was crucial to see if students were able to identify skills without my complete guidance. Each activity targeted the skill being taught and asked students to explore using the skill in a different way. For example, when we began our character traits lessons, the activities planned had distinguishable character traits. The descriptive words were mentioned in the text. This let me know that students were able to pick out the traits. Later lessons were more challenging. Students had to read the text and think of a character trait word to describe the character. Here is where students really began to struggle. Thinking of a description word was much harder than finding a word in text.

As we moved on to sequence of events, students again began lessons able to retell a story with my guidance. However, when asked to sequence *Make Way for Ducklings* after reading, students were not able to reassemble the story. Alternative activities were created to ensure understanding of sequence of events.

Eventually, skills were blended together. Students had to read a short passage with a partner or on their own, and then identify traits of the main characters, sequence events, and write a summary. These combination activities really allowed me to see which students were mastering these
skills. Overall, a more challenging activity allowed me to see which students understood how to identify skills within a story.

**Properly implementing an interactive read aloud requires careful planning, keeping in mind the audience, and the literacy skill being practiced.**

When preparing for a read aloud, how a book is selected, prepared, and read to students is very important. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) and Miller (2010) note that preparing for a read aloud requires good book selection and a comprehensive teacher read through of the read aloud book. McGee and Schickedanz (2007) recommend books that have complex plots and rich vocabulary. This sets the read aloud book apart from the everyday independent reading book. Kozol (2005) states that teaching is an act. Teachers must use voices, movement, and other inventive ways to teach materials. Student respond better to creative ways of teaching.

Book selection was crucial when planning lessons. Smith (2000) recommends keeping in mind the interest of the students. I used information from the Reading Interest Survey to gather that students enjoyed listening to fantasy stories and realistic fiction stories. Reading stories that students could see themselves as a character helped to make the story relatable.
After identifying the skill to be taught, an appropriate book was needed to teach the lesson. The challenge was to find a story that students would enjoy, but also a story that had many examples of the skill being taught. Many books were read before a read aloud book was decided upon. Some books had been used in past years successfully, while some were being used for the first time.

The first skill that was introduced to students was character traits. The books selected for character trait lessons had characters that expressed strong emotions or characters that changed significantly throughout the story. The story line in the selected book was complex, and did challenge the students to think about why the characters were responding the way they were.

When finding books for sequence of events, a book with a more complex plot was selected, *Make Way for Ducklings*. This book was not a class favorite, and the first book that students struggled to enjoy. For this skill, going against the researcher’s advice would have been wise. A book with a simpler or repeating plot would have worked better than one with a complex plot.

As skills were combined, book selection became even more important. *Tortoise and the Hare, How Possum’s Tale Got Bare*, and *The Grasshopper and*
the Ant were stories used that had complex plots and characters. Students enjoyed these stories since they were easy to read, and animals were also the main characters in each story.

Close to the end of the study, when asked, students’ favorite stories were fantasy stories, like *My Friend Rabbit* and *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. The realistic fiction selections, like *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* and *Make Way for Ducklings*, which were selected because of their strong plots and real life situations, were not among the favorites.

In my reflections, I noted that students interacted with *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughter* and showed enthusiasm while listening and talking about the story. When the students voted this as a least favorite book, it was surprising. However, when *Make Way for Ducklings* appeared at the bottom of the favorites list, it was not a surprise.

*The move from dependence to independence is slow and varies from student to student.*

Every child learns differently. Some are able to hear or see information once and immediately apply the new knowledge. Others need to practice again and again. At the beginning of the school year, all students are treated equally, since I do not know their individual needs or strengths. I had not yet had time to discover their strength or weakness.
As I began this study, interactive read alouds were new to all students. Each one had to learn how to interact during each read aloud and learn how to locate skills within a story. The year began with character traits. Students learned to think of FLATS, how a character feels, looks, acts, and thinks. During after reading activities, some groups had in-depth conversations showing understanding of locating skills in a story. Other groups stumbled over the pages, not really knowing how to identify character traits. I quickly saw which students were able to navigate text and which struggled to find skills.

As lessons continued with character traits, along with realism and fantasy, a divide began to occur in the classroom. Students who moved to more guided work, only asking a question every now and again, used richer vocabulary. Those groups that needed my help still used simple vocabulary words. The Ant and the Grasshopper was the first time I noticed students did not need my help. They were able to work independently when locating character traits in the story.

Main idea, sequence of events, and summary lessons moved slower. Since there were many struggles when teaching these skills, students did not reach the independence level by the end of the study. The first main idea lesson, students relied heavily on me to guide them to answers. As time went
on, some students began to be able to teach or guide others to the main idea. Even today, students are at different levels when finding main idea. If given choices, students can usually pick out the correct answer. When coming up with the main idea, students still need my help.

Summary is a skill that moved very quickly once we forgot about the 40 word summary idea. Once students learned to just write what they knew, the move from dependence to independence was very quick. This skill became an independent rather easy task with shorter stories.

Overall, students are all beyond the dependence stage now. Some need guidance now and again, but most are able to successfully find these skills in grade appropriate texts.
The Next Step

One month had passed since I finished collecting data on my students. To be honest, I was relieved to be free of having to use picture books to teach new skills. In the fall, I found myself neglecting favorite projects or activities in order to use a picture book in each lesson.

As I look to the future, I have a lot of things to consider. There were many positive events that happened during my study. I had fun finding and reading new literature. I do not get a chance to read to the class as often as I would like to. Using interactive read alouds in the classroom allowed me to use picture books that complemented our basal reader. The students enjoyed listening to each story and loved having the ability to talk with each other. Students were used to just sitting and listening, and not being able to interact with the story and share their opinion. It was a challenge to get students to open up and talk in the beginning, but now they are interacting freely with each story. The students do look forward to commenting on each story.

On the negative side, some skills require a lot of practice, and a picture book is not always the best option to introduce the skill. I found that starting with an activity and following up with a story was more successful than using
the picture book first. This allowed me to introduce a skill with a fun hands-on activity, and then follow up with a lesson using a story.

The biggest question I have to answer is, would I use this approach again? It is a yes and no answer. I did feel trapped having to use a picture book to teach each lesson. I know that students learned the skills better when they were introduced in a mini lesson, followed by practice with a read aloud book.

I will continue to have students interact with each story that we read. Learning to talk to a story is an important skill to learn. As we read, we need to talk to a story, because it is talking to us. I will also continue to focus on one or two skills at a time. Jumping from skill to skill, or asking a variety of questions during a story, distracts from the story. I do need to remember to ask students to talk with each other. It is just something new and I have to get used to it.

As I look to the future, Vygotsy's (1978) words will forever remind me that, “Learning is more than the acquisition of the ability to think; it is the acquisition of many specialized abilities to focus attention on a variety of things. Learning does not alter our overall abilities to focus attention but rather develops various abilities to focus attention on a variety of things” (p. 83).
References


Hoyt, L. (1992). Many ways of knowing: Using drama, oral interactions, and
the visual arts to enhance reading comprehension. *Reading Teacher*, 45(8), 580-584.


Terblanche, L. (2002). *Read-alouds: Do they enhance students' ability to read?* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED465192)

Resources


Appendix A: HSIRB Approval Form

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

November 17, 2011

Jennifer Fulfaro
437 Larch Lane
Nazareth, PA 18064

HSIRB proposal by Jennifer Fulfaro for Richard Grove

Dear Jennifer Fulfaro:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: “Interactive Read Alouds in a Third Grade Classroom.” Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1379) or through e-mail (brower@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee’s requests.

Signed

George P. Brower
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1379

Page 1 of 1
Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Authorization for a Minor to Serve as a Research Participant

Dear building principal,

I am in the final stages on completing my Masters of Education Degree at Moravian College. As a culminating activity, we are required to do an Action Research Project. This project is a year and a half long project divided into 4 main sections. I am currently in the 3rd stage of this process, which is the data gathering stage. Action research allows me to explore new strategies or techniques within my daily teaching routines. I have chosen to explore interactive read alouds within a 3rd grade classroom. This project will not interfere with my normal teaching activities. These lessons are designed to enhance comprehension skills and strategies.

I am writing to ask permission to study the effects of interactive read alouds in my classroom. The study will begin on Monday September 19, 2011 and end on December 9, 2011. Data will be gathered using surveys, classroom worksheets and class projects. All of these activities will be used to extent the skills taught during the lesson.

Use of data on your child is voluntary. All participating students will be assigned pseudonyms. Only I will have information related to the identity of your child. At no point during the study write up will I refer to your child by his or her proper name. He or she will be referred to by their assigned pseudonym. You may contact me with any questions by phone or email, and your child may end participation in my research study at any time without penalty. To end participation, please call or email me. I can be reached at 610.767.1191 or fulfaroj@nasdschools.org. If other concerns arise, the principal can be contacted at 610.767.1191. My instructor, Richard Grove can be reached at rgrove@moravian.edu.

All students will participate in the same classroom activities, but I will only analyze and report data from those students who are serving as research study participants. Please check the appropriate box and return to school by Wednesday, September 14, 2011.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Fulfaro
____ I give permission for my child's data to be used in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

____ I do not give permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

_________________________                       ________________
Student's Name                           Signature of principal
Appendix C: Parent Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Authorization for a Minor to Serve as a Research Participant

Dear 3rd grade parents or guardians,

I am in the final stages on completing my Masters of Education Degree at Moravian College. As a culminating activity, we are required to do an Action Research Project. This project is a year and a half long project divided into 4 main sections. I am currently in the 3rd stage of this process, which is the data gathering stage. Action research allows me to explore new strategies or techniques within my daily teaching routines. I have chosen to explore interactive read alouds within a 3rd grade classroom. This project will not interfere with my normal teaching activities. These lessons are designed to enhance comprehension skills and strategies.

I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from your child during this process. The study will begin on Monday September 19, 2011 and end on December 9, 2011. Data will be gathered using surveys, classroom worksheets and class projects. All of these activities will be used to extend the skills taught during the lesson.

Use of data on your child is voluntary. All participating students will be assigned pseudonyms. Only I will have information related to the identity of your child. At no point during the study write up will I refer to your child by his or her proper name. He or she will be referred to by their assigned pseudonym. You may contact me with any questions by phone or email, and your child may end participation in my research study at any time without penalty. To end participation, please call or email me. I can be reached at 610.767.1191 or fulfaroj@nasdschools.org. If other concerns arise, the principal can be contacted at 610.767.1191. My instructor, Richard Grove can be reached at rgrove@moravian.edu.

All students will participate in the same classroom activities, but I will only analyze and report data from those students who are serving as research study participants. Please check the appropriate box and return to school by Wednesday, September 14, 2011.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Fulfaro
Please detach and return by September 14, 2011.

___ I give permission for my child's data to be used in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

___ I do not give permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Student’s Name  Signature of parent or guardian
# Appendix D: Reading Interest Survey

## Reading Interest Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Love it!</th>
<th>Like it!</th>
<th>It’s okay.</th>
<th>Don’t like it!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to read on my own</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read magazines</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read with a friend.</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to listen to stories.</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read true stories.</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read make believe stories.</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to talk about what I read.</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
<td>![emoji]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer each question honestly.

My favorite book is _____________________________.

I like this book because __________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________.

I enjoy reading books about________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________.

When I read I am good at _________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________.

I like to read because
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
  ___________________________________________
Appendix E: Reading Interest Questions

Class Discussion of Reading Interest Questions

Why is reading important?

When do you read?

What do you read?

Where do you read?

Is reading fun? When can it be fun?

Do you like listening to stories?
# Appendix F: Summary Sheet

## Story Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This story is about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(name the characters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This story takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(where and when)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The action begins when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After that,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story ends when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>