

How Does The Use of Read Alouds By Two Fourth-Grade Teachers Effect Their
Students' Independent Reading Choices?

By Margaret M. Freeman

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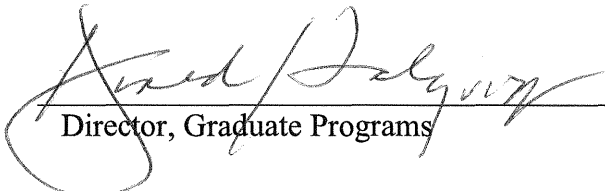
Margaret M. Freeman

APPROVED BY:



Advisor

7-18-11
Date



Director, Graduate Programs

07.19.11
Date

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

If a student has never read a book by a particular author, or read about a new topic, or even a different genre, how will that student know if he or she would like to read more books by that author or about the new topic or genre? All students bring different levels of background knowledge in these three areas to their literacy learning. A student will never expand his or her knowledge or interests if he or she is never exposed to new things. Consider the following incident that happened to a family friend.

A family friend was reading *Beowulf* aloud to her 15-year-old daughter at the kitchen table one night. This friend's nine-year-old son was sitting at the table with them. As the mother read the book to her daughter, her son's interest in the book was apparent as he started to ask questions about the plot of the book. He sat, enthralled, as the mother read aloud. The next night, the mother's son was at the kitchen table, again, as she continued to read to her daughter, his interest in the book as great as the night before. The result of his listening to the mother read aloud to his sister was a trip to the local public library and a stack of books on Viking warriors, dragons, and stories set in medieval times for him to read, look at, and listen to the mother read aloud to him.

This friend's son had never been exposed to a book like *Beowulf* before, and even though it was not a book he would have been able to read independently, it piqued enough interest in the topic that he wanted to read more books and learn more

about Vikings on his own. The read aloud meant for the boy's sister allowed this friend's son exposure to a topic that was interesting to him and with assistance from his mother, the son was able to find books on the topic of interest that were appropriate for his reading level.

Significance of the Problem

Literacy is a priority in every classroom and every school district across the nation. A major component in literacy is a student's independent reading habits. . Reading aloud to children and students has been recognized by experts as an activity that is an important element of literacy development that should be experienced by students of all ages. It is recognized that the more an activity is performed and practiced, the more proficient a person will become at that activity. This would be assumed to hold true for reading also.

According to Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) the read aloud is an instructional practice where teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children. The reader incorporates variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery (Morrison & Wlodarczyk). In 1985, the Commission on Reading issued a report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, which found that "the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (p. 23). The report also stated that "it is a practice that should continue throughout the grades" (p. 51). These findings support the importance of reading aloud to students frequently and at all grade levels.

In contrast to these significant findings by Morrison & Wlodarczyk (2009), additional past research indicates that as students got older, they were not read to as frequently (Van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer, 2003). Other research also found that the practice of reading aloud to students is often neglected or eliminated entirely once students reach the intermediate grades (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2002).

Many times students struggle with book selection because they do not have enough knowledge about authors, topics, or genres to choose a book they would find interesting on their own and may not, therefore, engage in independent reading on their own (Ivey, 2003). Read alouds can provide an opportunity to introduce students to new authors, topics, and genres (Ivey) that the student may not have discovered and chosen on their own. Exposing students to read alouds that incorporate exemplary teacher practices and include a variety of authors, topics, and genres may contribute to a student's desire to do more independent reading, therefore, enhancing their literacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of read alouds in the classroom could introduce students to books in ways that would generate interest in an author, topic, or genre which would then enable the students to more easily find choices for independent reading books and increase their independent reading. During the course of this study, the research question, "How does the use of read alouds by two fourth-grade teachers effect their students' independent reading choices?" was addressed. By understanding how read alouds can effect a student's

independent reading choices, it will enable me, and other teachers, to develop read alouds that are engaging for the students and which will generate student interest in not only the read aloud, but in choosing books for independent reading that they might not have previously chosen.

Study Approach

For this study, I observed two fourth-grade teachers and their students during their read aloud sessions. The teachers both worked in the same school district. Data, such as how long the teachers had been teaching, their personal beliefs and feelings regarding read alouds, frequency and length of time of read alouds, their opinions on what makes an interesting and worthwhile read aloud, and how they determine what books to use for the read alouds was collected from each individual teacher by means of individual interviews with each teacher and recording responses on a pre-written collection sheet (Appendix A).

Quantitative data was gathered by students completing a student survey (Appendix B) that provided data that determined how they chose their independent reading books, what they liked best and least about when their teachers read to them, what makes the read alouds interesting, and how the read alouds help the students to find books for independent reading. The survey also provided qualitative data which indicated their personal feelings regarding read alouds.

Observations of the teachers during read alouds evaluated physical environment of the read aloud area, the use of book introductions, author discussions, enthusiasm and animation by the teacher during the read aloud, and

quality/opportunity of discussions after the read aloud. Students were also simultaneously observed and evaluated for actions that displayed interest or non-interest through body language, questions asked, and any remarks or comments that were made.

Finally, each classroom was provided with additional book collections related to the books that were currently being used during read alouds or ones that were recently finished. Common factors of the additional books were author, topic, and genre. The books were made available for student use during the first week of classroom observations. These additional book collections were monitored to determine the frequency and length of time of student use for independent reading. Book questionnaires (Appendix C) were available for student completion when the book from the collections were returned that determined the length of time the student had the book, why the student chose the book, if the book was completed and if not why, the student's enjoyment level, and if the student would recommend the book to a friend.

Rationale

Increasing a student's desire to engage in more frequent independent reading can only benefit the student and help create a lifetime reader. Many times students struggle with book selection because they don't have enough knowledge about authors, topics, or genres to choose a book they would find interesting on their own and may not, therefore, engage in independent reading on their own (Ivey, 2003). This study provided data to determine if including classroom read alouds in students'

schedules provided the students with valuable information which could then assist the students in finding authors, topics, and genres that would allow them to make their own choices for independent reading easier. The study provided data about the practices of teachers during read alouds and how these practices contributed to student engagement during the read aloud.

I believe that read alouds are an easy and fun way to introduce students to many different kinds of books and styles of writing. My own personal experiences with read alouds, both with my own children and students, have shown me that read alouds can stimulate my children's and students' interests and encourage them to want to read more books by themselves. By demonstrating to a student, through read alouds, that reading books is entertaining and worthwhile, more students will hopefully choose to read on their own, both at school and at home. Instilling the desire to read in a child can have a positive, lifelong effect and assist that child in becoming a lifetime reader.

Summary

Generating interest, enthusiasm, and desire to read is an essential aspect of independent reading. Classroom read alouds provide a significant opportunity for teachers to expose students to a variety of authors, topics, and genres thus providing their students the opportunity to increase and expand their interests and desire to read a larger volume and variety of books independently. Careful book selection, the read aloud environment, and teacher practices during, before and after read alouds must be taken into account as they can all be factors in making the read aloud more appealing

to the student and should be carefully considered when incorporating read alouds in the classroom.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

For many students and teachers, classroom read alouds are an enjoyable experience. Read alouds may appear at first inspection to be designed for enjoyment only and carried out with little thought or planning. In some cases, this may be true and may result in an unsuccessful experience. In other cases, the experience is an involved, well thought out activity that is engaging and that has many positive benefits. Reading aloud to children and students has been recognized by experts as an activity that is an important element of literacy development that should be experienced by students of all ages. This section will review research that has focused on the read aloud practice, and how this practice can influence a student's literacy development, including independent reading habits. I will examine research in areas such as the benefits and insights into reading alouds to students and elements in planning a successful read aloud. The elements of successful read alouds that I will examine closely will be book choice, genres and topics, book introductions, student engagement, frequency and length, and atmosphere.

Benefits and Insights into Read Alouds

Reading is a basic building block for success in school and life (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). All students must be able to read fluently and with comprehension. To help achieve fluency students are engaged in many different types of reading, including small group, large group, and independent reading. The more a student reads, the better he or she masters the skill, and the better he or she reads, the more he or she will like reading; and the more he or she likes reading, the

more he or she will read; a student must enjoy reading in order for him or her to choose to read independently (Trelease, 2001).

Past research has shown the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Cosgrove (1988) also showed both attitudinal and achievement effects of having a teacher read orally to fourth- and sixth-grade students. Researchers have found that reading aloud offers many academic benefits to students. Evidence has been presented that reading aloud to students can increase students' vocabulary (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002). Listening comprehension skills can also be increased by read alouds for students (Gambrell, Morrow & Pennington, 2002). Read alouds also provide an opportunity for the teacher to model reading strategies and ways spoken and written language are different (Hedrick & Pearish, 2003). All research reviewed indicates that read alouds are beneficial to students and their literacy development.

Research has been completed regarding read alouds, giving a great deal of insight regarding ways they can be successfully incorporated in classrooms with positive outcomes. As early as 1985, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, et al.) reported that priority should be given to independent reading and that by the time students are in third and fourth grades, they should be reading at least two hours independently. The report also stated that in order to accomplish this, books and guidance should be readily available to the students to assist them in choosing books.

Another study by Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard (2000) determined who reads to students in classrooms and how frequently they read. The study surveyed 1,874 elementary teachers nationwide. The findings showed that teachers read aloud more books in the primary grades as compared with the intermediate grades. Primary teachers frequently read pictures books while intermediate teachers read chapter books more often. Informational books were not frequently read aloud by any elementary teachers. Additionally, the age of teachers, not how many years they have been teaching, was an indication of how frequently they read to their students – older teachers reading less than younger teachers (Jacobs, et al.).

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) also conducted a survey to help determine what makes students want to read in middle school classrooms. They surveyed 1,765 sixth-grade students in 23 diverse schools in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States. The findings showed that 62% of students indicated a preference for teachers reading aloud as the reading activity they enjoyed most in class. Out of 331 students who responded that other people made them want to read, 201 students answered that their teacher and read alouds made them want to read (Ivey & Broaddus). Another finding was “as many as 4 or 5 students out of a class of 20 may be interested in nonfiction books, and a similar number may be interested in poetry or picture books” (Ivey & Broaddus, p. 368). Ivey and Broaddus reported that 42% of students responded that they were motivated to read by being able to find good materials to read and having choice in the selection of the materials. Ivey and Broaddus also

reported that one theme that emerged from the survey conducted was that students valued time for personal reading.

When we read aloud to students we are doing a variety of activities that help create lifetime readers. We read aloud to entertain them, reassure them, to bond with them, inform or explain something, to arouse curiosity, and inspire them (Trelease, 2001). These reasons for reading aloud also condition the student's brain to associate reading with pleasure and to provide a reading role model (Trelease). If a student's brain is conditioned to associate reading with pleasure, he or she will in turn have a desire to read more books independently because they will enjoy it (Trelease).

Elements in Planning Successful Read Alouds

Successful read alouds are not filler activities and do not happen by chance. Elements that help ensure that a read aloud will be an engaging, successful, and positive literacy experience are appropriate book choice, a variety of genres and topics, use of book introductions, student engagement, frequency and length of read alouds, and the atmosphere and setting of the read aloud.

Book choice.

The first step of all read alouds is choosing the book to be read. I believe that it is probably the most important of all steps and the step that needs the most careful consideration. Research has shown states that 5,000 children's books are published each year (Freeman, 1995). Considering these thousands of books to choose from, a teacher must be able determine which books would be appropriate and beneficial to use during read alouds. Many books that may be appropriate for reading silently may

not be appropriate for reading aloud (Trelease, 2001). Books in which the style of writing is convoluted or the sentence structure is too complex for the tongue can make a read aloud unsuccessful (Trelease).

Many different resources exist to aid in the selection of read aloud books. Resources such as a teacher's personal favorite books, recommendations from colleagues, professionals, or students, journals, internet sites, and guide books are just some of the many available.

Although all of these resources are helpful and informative, I believe that actually reading a book and knowing the contents is the most useful and trustworthy criteria when choosing a book for read alouds. By being familiar with the book we are able to determine whether or not it will be a good match for the audience to whom we are reading. The teacher must be aware of the characters, plot, and/or informational content of the book. Even books that are recommended by others or that are award winners may not be appropriate for the particular group of students that will be listening without knowing exactly what the plots entail. McDonnell (2010) describes two incidences where the subject matter of colleagues' read alouds was extremely upsetting and offensive to particular students in the classrooms. If the teachers had been familiar with the contents of the books being read aloud, these upsetting experiences could have been avoided.

Book recommendations from colleagues, other professionals, or students are also great resources that allow the teacher access to more personal and detailed information about the book being considered. Recommendations from other people

allow the reader or teacher to be able to ask questions about characters or plots to ensure that the book will be a good match for their students.

Handbooks are also resources that provide information on children's books. One such book is *The Read Aloud Handbook* (Trelease, 2001) which includes a *Treasury of Read-Alouds* section that offers valuable information on books that are perfect for reading aloud. The first edition of this book was written in 1979 and has been revised and updated many times since. Trelease's *Treasury* contains two different lists. The first list contains book titles and plot synopses. The second is a list of titles which includes a listening grade level, the number of pages and publisher information, a synopsis, other books by the author, related books, and information for author studies. The books are also listed by genre (Trelease).

Another similar guide is Judy Freeman's (1995) *More Books Kids Will Sit Still For*. Her guide includes listings organized by title, age groups, genres, author, and subject matter. The book listings include a synopsis and a list of related books. Both books also include other valuable information regarding read alouds and how to choose books that will appropriate for particular students. Using these types of handbooks as guides when choosing books read aloud can dramatically reduce the amount of time spent looking for quality books to use during read alouds. Freeman also provides an informative list of things to look for when choosing a book for read alouds. The list includes criteria for books such as a universal plot, unforgettable, colorful and believable characters, settings that allow us to experience a new and different environment, language that flows well when read aloud, stories that make

children laugh, books that provoke interesting discussions, and experiences when hearing the book read aloud that causes the students to want to continue reading on their own.

Educational resources and websites such as scholastic.com offer a *Booklike* feature that allows the user to search their database for similar books. The user only needs to type in the title of the book. Searches can be individualized and adjusted to student needs based on content and reading or grade level. Horn Book publications also offer several choices to learn about children's and young adults' literature. *The Horn Book Magazine* is a bimonthly journal that offers opinions, reporting, and timely reviews of the best titles children's and young adult literature. *The Horn Book Guide* reviews, indexes, critiques, and ranks more than 2,000 books in semi-annual issues. The Horn Book Guide Online is an electronic database of reviews. *Booklist* magazine, published by the American Library Association, offers recommended-only reviews of books, audiobooks, reference sources, video, and DVD titles. *Booklist Online* also offers similar reviews.

Genres and topics.

Many teachers rely on narrative texts books as the staple for their read alouds (Doiron, 1994), but narrative texts are just one of many genres. Students need to be exposed to a wide variety of genres because each genre provides different learning opportunities that are relevant to the students' lives (Neuman, 2006). Including different genres for read alouds makes the read aloud interesting and less predictable. By including multiple types of fiction, such as narratives, fairy tales, poetry, science

fiction, fantasy, and mysteries as read alouds, the teacher is allowing students to explore many different styles of writing that may be unfamiliar to them and which may actually be very enticing to them.

While it is true that fiction delights and engages the listener, nonfiction also has many benefits to contribute to a classroom read aloud. Nonfiction books appeal to both the able and struggling reader (Meehan, 2006). Nonfiction books give all students an opportunity to increase their knowledge about topics of interest and they frequently motivate excitement and curiosity about reading to learn (Dreher, 2003). Past research agrees that students are intrigued about how the world works and that they can learn a great deal from information books (Neuman, 2006). Doiron (1994) agrees that children are naturally curious about the world around them and suggests that if more expository texts were read aloud to students, it might promote even more curiosity and interest, and reading expository texts will become more natural and easier. Despite this motivation to use non-fiction books, Jacobs, et al. (2000) showed that “very few teachers, at the primary or intermediate grade levels, read or introduced information books to their students” (p. 187). Using both fiction and nonfiction books allow for a well-rounded and interesting experience (Doiron). Balancing the use of both genres establishes an equal opportunity to act as a model for students, which will help them develop a schema for both types of texts, and to motivate them to read (Doiron).

A variety of topics should also be included in read alouds. Many students do not have the initiative to pick up an unfamiliar text on a brand new topic without

knowing what is interesting about that book (Ivey, 2003). Read alouds that include new and different topics are keys to getting students to choose unfamiliar books for independent reading.

Book introductions.

Book introductions provide the initial opportunity to engage students in reading. Book introductions allow the students to receive a well-informed glimpse into the book and allow the student to become interested in the topic or genre (Jacobs, et al., 2000). By simply opening the book in front of the students and reading aloud the parts of the book that make it worthwhile to read, the teacher is providing a powerful way to get students to read new texts on their own (Ivey, 2003). Jacobs et al. found that some teachers read excerpts of books as a way to entice students to read. As students become intrigued by characters, plot, and other literary features, the students may choose to read these books on their own. Ivey also agrees that reading excerpts from a range of materials help students select books that match not only their interests but also their reading levels. In addition to reading introductions or excerpts, Trelease (2001) suggests that reading the first book in a series can also inspire a student to continue to read the rest of the books in the series independently.

Another important element of a book introduction is that it provides the students with relevant and interesting information about the author (Trelease, 2001). This would include information such as the reason why or what inspired the author to write the book and other books written by the author. The student can then use this

information to assist them in finding books for independent reading on their own or with help from an adult.

Book introductions can also provide opportunities for students to activate their schema and to build their background knowledge (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Engaging their interest this way in the book topic will help create a more successful experience (Morrison & Wlodarczyk).

Although book introductions are beneficial for all ages, Jacobs et al., (2000) found that primary teachers in their study introduced students to books and recommended specific titles more often than the intermediate teachers. Given the research that has been conducted and the findings that indicate the benefits that book introductions provide, book introductions should be included for every age group, not just primary students.

Student engagement.

In order for a read aloud to be successful and beneficial, students must be engaged with the text (Teale, 2003). Just choosing a text that is interesting is not enough (Teale). The reader must be able to keep the students' interest as they are reading. There are numerous ways to engage students during read alouds. The reader must be able to make the characters come alive and become interesting to the listeners by using voices, gestures, and expression (Lane & Wright, 2007). By giving each character a distinctive voice, using intonation while reading, and reading with enthusiasm it will help students to connect with the characters and help them to better understand the text (Ivey, 2003). When students develop a deeper understanding of

the characters, and therefore the plot, they become engaged with the text and want to learn the outcome of the story (Ivey). Their interest and curiosity will be engaged.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) have reported that some students indicate that hearing a teacher read not only makes them want to read that same book on their own, but also that the teacher makes a difficult text interesting and comprehensible. “The bottom line is that when teachers read to students they enhance students’ understanding and their inclination to read independently” (Ivey, 2003, p. 812).

Frequency and length.

Frequency and length of read alouds vary from classroom to classroom and from grade level to grade level. Yet, both frequency and length can increase the success and enjoyment of read alouds (Trelease, 2001). Reading on a daily or frequent basis allows the students to keep their interest and engagement in the book, especially if the teacher is reading a chapter book where the plot and characters may be forgotten if there are too many days in between readings (Trelease). This is also true if the read alouds are done for only a few minutes at a time. The brief time spent reading aloud does not allow the students to efficiently engage in the text (Trelease). In short, brief readings do not allow for adequate comprehension of the plot.

The study by Jacobs, et al. (2000) showed that teachers in primary grades read more frequently to their students than teachers in intermediate grades. Lane and Wright (2007) state that the amount of appropriate read loud time differs from student to student and that the amount of time is based on the students’ prior experiences. The back ground experiences and schema of students who attend a high poverty

school are going to be much different than that of students who attend a more affluent school (Lane & Wright). Students from a high poverty school may not have had the same literacy experiences and book exposure and may need more read aloud time in school in order to back ground knowledge and literacy experiences. This information should encourage teachers to get to know their students and to reflect on the appropriate amount of time to spend on read alouds for their particular students.

Atmosphere.

When reading aloud to students, the atmosphere of the classroom is also an important factor that should not be minimized or overlooked. Dickinson, McCable & Anastasopoulos (2003) recommend that classrooms should have a designated area for read alouds and that the area should be inviting and comfortable for the students. Braxton (2006) suggests using a rug to help define the area, which can also help students remain in that designated area. Braxton further recommends an environment in which students are not distracted by other activities. A space that includes posters and displays that incorporate favorite characters and items that create connections to the books will encourage the students to choose similar books for independent reading (Braxton). Trelease (2001) suggests that students sit in a semicircle around the reader, with the reader slightly above the students so that students can easily see picture when shown and allows for the reader's voice to carry throughout the area. Teachers should experiment with different settings to determine which fits their classrooms and students best.

Conclusion

A rich and engaging read aloud can be the ideal activity to motivate a student to read independently. Read alouds are a powerful tool that, when implemented with thoughtful planning and insight, can have positive effects on students' literacy development. Research has shown that book choice, book introductions, student engagement, frequency of read alouds, and classroom atmosphere are all important and essential elements of a successful and positive read aloud experience, which will in turn benefit a student's literacy development by assisting them in their book selections and increasing a student's motivation to increase their independent reading.

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to determine how two fourth-grade teachers' use of read alouds in their classrooms effected their students' independent reading choices. The study was to determine if the use of read alouds introduced students to books in ways that would generate interest in an author, topic, or genre which would then enable the students to more easily find choices for independent reading books and increase their independent reading. Observation of teacher practices, such as frequency and length of time of read alouds, book introductions, and teacher enthusiasm, in addition to student response was evaluated.

Research Question

Over the course of my study, I explored the following research question:
How does the use of read alouds by two fourth-grade teachers effect their students' independent reading choices?

Participants

The participants of this study were two fourth-grade teachers and their students. The teachers were both employed by the same elementary school and were located in the same rural, western New York town. One of the teachers is female and one is male. The fourth-grade students ranged in age from nine to ten years old. There were a total of forty students who returned assent forms. Of those forty students, twenty were girls and twenty were boys. All teachers' and students' names are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am currently a graduate student working toward a Master's degree in Childhood Literacy. After the completion of the Spring 2011 semester, I have only one additional class to complete. I currently hold New York State initial certification in Childhood Education Grades 1 – 6 and Students with Disabilities Grades 1 – 6. I have invested the last eight years studying childhood education and childhood literacy, along with a major in literature. Over the past two years, I have been a substitute teacher in two school districts, putting what I have learned into practice in real life situations.

I have limited professional connections with both the teacher participants in the study. One is a teacher in whose classroom I have occasionally been a substitute, and the other is a teacher with whom I have had professional and personal conversations.

I believe that literacy is the basis for all learning. I also believe that having a positive attitude about reading is an important factor in all students' literacy development. I believe that read alouds are an essential and positive component in a student's literacy experiences and that read alouds done with enthusiasm and excitement will encourage a student to seek out similar books to read independently, which will then help increase the student's desire to read more both in school and at home. I believe the act of providing a positive role model during read alouds has the ability to increase students' desires for independent reading, which will promote lifetime readers.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

To ensure that my research design was valid, several procedures were established. The study was conducted over a consecutive six week time period. All sources of data that were collected were reviewed, analyzed, and triangulated to establish accurate, informative findings. All findings were concluded from the collected data and were verified using the accurate and detailed data collected throughout the study. Detailed descriptions of the process procedures were established for before, during, and after the study and were accurately followed. All research procedures were thoroughly explained to all professional and student participants.

Data Collection

I collected data using four different instruments to assess how the two fourth-grade teachers' use of classroom read alouds effected their students' independent reading choices. The four instruments used were teacher interviews, student surveys, observations, and book questionnaires. Data was collected at different points throughout the course of the six weeks.

The initial form of data collection was a one-on-one interview with each teacher. I used a pre-written data collection sheet that consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions to record each teacher's responses. I then gave all participating students surveys to complete which provided data that determined how the students chose books for independent reading and provided insight regarding their attitudes toward read alouds. During the actual read alouds, I observed both the teachers and

their students. Descriptive, detailed fieldnotes were completed during every observation to record as many behaviors, practices, actions, and comments made by the teachers and students as possible. I provided each classroom with a collection of related books based on the current book being read in each classroom or a recently finished book along with a supply of book questionnaires. Students completed the book questionnaires and placed them in a book questionnaire box once the borrowed book was returned to the collection. The completed book questionnaires provided valuable data which determined if the student's selection of the book could be attributed to the read aloud book currently being read in his or her classroom or one that had recently been read aloud.

Teacher interviews.

The initial form of data collection was a one-on-one interview with each teacher with the information being recorded using both open-ended and close-ended, pre-written questions on a data collection sheet. Data that I collected using close-ended questions from this interview included frequency of read alouds, length of each read aloud session, and how the book was selected. The open ended questions provided data regarding the teachers' personal views on the use and importance of read alouds in the classroom.

Student surveys.

Once parent/guardian consent was received, students were asked for assent. As signed assent forms were returned the students were given a survey to complete. Students then placed the completed surveys in a specified location in the room which

I then collected prior to the first observation. The completed surveys provided data which determined how the students chose books for independent reading. The survey also provided insight regarding their attitudes toward read alouds by their teachers, whether they would like the frequency to increase or decrease, the reasons they liked or disliked read alouds in general, and what made a read aloud interesting to them

Observations.

During the actual read alouds, I observed both the teachers and his or her students for a total of six consecutive weeks. Observations took place approximately once per week for each teacher and classroom, for a total of five observations in each classroom. Descriptive, detailed fieldnotes were completed during every observation to record as many behaviors, practices, actions, and comments made by the teachers and students as possible.

While observing the teachers, I recorded data such as the teachers' use of book introductions, author discussions, enthusiasm and animation of the teacher during the read alouds, and the use/opportunity of discussion after the read aloud.

While observing the students, I recorded data such as positive or negative remarks or actions, enthusiasm displayed, participation in discussions, types of questions asked, body language or movements that indicated their levels of interest, and indications of noninterest.

Book questionnaire.

A collection of related books were made available to students based on the read aloud book that was currently being read or one that had been recently finished

in each classroom. Similarities of the books included such aspects as author, topic, and genre. The collections were placed in each classroom during the second week of observations along with blank book questionnaires and a book questionnaire box used to collect completed book questionnaires. The book collections remained available to the students throughout the remainder of the study, along with the book questionnaires and a book questionnaire box that was used to collect completed questionnaires. The blank book questionnaires were located in a designated, labeled tray near the collections and the completed book questionnaire collection box

Students were able to borrow the books from the provided collections that were made available to each classroom. Students signed the books out and then filled out and turned in a completed book questionnaire when the students returned the book to the collection. Table 1 and Table 2 show a sample of books that each classroom was provided with.

Table 1

Sample of Books from Provided Collection to Teacher 1's Classroom

| Title | Author | Connection to Read Aloud |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Fudge-a-Mania | Judy Blume | Same author |
| Frightful's Mountain | Jean Craighead George | Same topic-survival |
| Hatchet | Gary Paulsen | Same book |

Table 2

Sample of Books from Provided Collection to Teacher 2's Classroom

| Title | Author | Connection to Read Aloud |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------|
| The Celery Stalks at Midnight | James Howe | Same genre-mystery |
| Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh | Robert C. O'Brien | Same genre-fantasy |
| From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler | E. L. Konisburg | Same book |

The completed book questionnaires provided valuable data that determined if the student's selection of the book could be attributed to the read aloud book currently being read or the one recently finished in his or her classroom by learning the reasons why the student selected that book from that collection. The questionnaire also determined if the student would recommend the book to a friend and the reasons why or why not.

Data Analysis

When the six week study was completed, I examined all collected interviews, student surveys, observation fieldnotes, and book questionnaires. I reviewed, color coded, and analyzed the data to present them in a cohesive, informative, and professional manner. Student surveys and observations were color coded based on interest level, their likes and dislikes regarding read alouds, classroom read aloud book selection, and how they chose books for independent reading. I then correlated the students' views with the teachers' beliefs and practices of their teachers that I observed during the read alouds and established one or more relationships.

I color coded the observation fieldnotes based on common traits listed on the observation form used during the classroom observations. I also developed theories regarding ways this coded information could then be related back to both the teacher interviews and student surveys. Themes developed were based on enjoyment levels of read alouds, teacher and student desires to increase amount of time spent on read alouds sessions, what elements made the read alouds interesting and enjoyable, and how read alouds assisted students with independent reading choices.

I used the data gained from teacher interviews and observations to establish the quality of the read alouds. Quality was based on the teachers' enthusiasm displayed, animation, use of book introductions, and discussions about the read aloud book. Additional factors for quality were the number of times per week, how long the read alouds lasted, and method of book selection. I also analyzed the environment during the read alouds. Such things as location of the read aloud, student activity, noise level, and teacher movement were factors that could enhance or detract from a positive environment.

Student interest was determined using data gathered from student surveys and student observations during the read alouds. Interest during observations of the read alouds was determined by remarks made by the students, enthusiasm displayed, body language, and questions asked regarding the book. Student surveys provided data on the students' feelings about read alouds by their teachers and their feelings about what made a read aloud good and interesting for them.

Student surveys provided data establishing the manner in which the students made book choices for independent reading. The student surveys also indicated their feelings about the book choices made by their teachers for read alouds and whether they would like to be an active participant in the choices.

Data that I acquired from the student surveys and observations were color coded based on interest level, their likes and dislikes regarding read alouds, classroom read aloud book selection, and how they chose books for independent reading so that I was able to determine an overall picture of the students' views, opinions, and

practices from each classroom. I then correlated the students' views with the personal beliefs and practices of their teachers and established that teachers and students liked the read alouds, that both students and teachers felt that the read alouds helped students discover new and interesting author, topics and genres, that read alouds allowed students to find books for independent reading easier by students picking the same or similar read aloud books, and that having the teacher read with enthusiasm, intonation, and character voices made the read alouds engaging and easier to comprehend.

I reviewed the observation fieldnotes and color coded all information based on common traits. I also developed theories regarding ways this coded information could then be related back to both the teacher interviews and student surveys.

Book questionnaires were placed in a designated, labeled box near the books in the collections that I chose and were placed in each classroom during the second week of observations. The blank questionnaires remained in the labeled box throughout the study. Students completed the book questionnaire and deposited it into a book questionnaire collection box when the students returned a borrowed book to the collection. The book questionnaires provided data on why the student chose the book, how long it was borrowed, if the student finished reading the book, how much the student liked the book, and if the student would recommend it to a friend. The completed book questionnaires were collected on a weekly basis, which was the day of the weekly read aloud observation. The surveys were examined to determine common traits or trends each week and compared to previous weeks' book

questionnaires collected throughout the study period. This data then established the reason the book was selected for independent reading by the student. The reason was then compared to the analyzed interviews, surveys, and observations and relationships. These relationships indicated how multiple components of a read aloud converged and influenced a student's independent reading book choice.

Time Schedule

I collected data in the form of teacher interviews, teacher observations, student observations, student surveys, and book questionnaires over the course of six weeks, during the months of May and June, 2011. Teacher and student observations during read alouds were conducted simultaneously. Observations were conducted approximately once per week for each classroom participating in the study, for a total of five observations for each classroom. Data analysis was conducted throughout the study and immediately following the six week study.

Limitations

As with all studies, there were some limitations for this study. The first was the time frame of the study. The study took place during the months of May and June 2011. This was the time of the school year when many teachers were preparing for state tests and students were taking state tests. Also, there were end of the year field trips and activities that took place that. For these reasons, the daily routine schedules were sometimes altered. The teachers sometimes decided to omit the read aloud sessions from their schedules in order to prepare for or take the tests or to do the end of the year activities or fieldtrips which limited the number of times that I was able to

observe each teacher's read aloud session to five times for each classroom. Another limitation was obtaining genuine responses on the student surveys regarding the students' feelings about their teachers and their read aloud session. Even though the student surveys were completed anonymously, some students may have felt that they needed to respond positively to ensure there were no negative responses or actions from the teacher toward them. A final limitation was the number of responses I received from the book questionnaires. Not all students who borrowed books from the provided collection returned a completed book questionnaire. These responses were a vital part of the study and would have provided additional valuable data which would have more accurately determined whether students used the provided library for independent reading choices which were based on the read alouds.

Chapter Four: Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine how two fourth-grade teachers' use of read alouds in their classrooms effected their students' independent reading choices. The study was conducted to determine if the use of read alouds introduce students to books in ways that would generate interest in an author, topic, or genre which would then enable the students to more easily find choices for independent reading books and increase their independent reading.

Teacher Interviews

The study was conducted in two fourth-grade classrooms in the same school district. The first step of the study was to interview each classroom teacher. I conducted the two interviews separately from each other and recorded the teachers' responses on a pre-written questionnaire sheet. Table 3 below summarizes the responses received during the interviews with Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

Table 3

*Teacher Interviews
Summary*

| | Teacher 1 | Teacher 2 |
|--|--|---|
| Background of Teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -male -7 years teaching experience -began using read alouds during first year teaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -female -3 years teaching experience -began using read alouds during student teaching |
| What are some positive or negative aspects of read alouds on literacy development? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develops interest in books -settles students -gets students' attention focused -students can experience a wide range of emotion -poor choices in book -don't always know if students are fully comprehending | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -fluency is modeled -makes reading more interesting -enjoyable literacy experience -provides opportunity to incorporate other literacy activities |
| Setting and structure of read alouds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -goal is 5 days a week -10 to 20 minutes long -time varies -students are seated at desks -teacher seated on stool -students are mainly just listening | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -4 to 5 days a week -20 minutes long -same time of day -students seated on carpet -teacher seated in rocking chair -students are mainly just listening |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How do you determine book choice? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -interesting to all -widely known -personal favorites -recommendations by others -previous books read -student vote -variety of genres, authors, topics -includes topics interesting to boys -stays away from fairy tales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal favorites -favorite authors -familiar books -award winning books -student vote -previews book with students -variety of genres, authors, topics -mostly fiction |
| What makes a productive, worthwhile, and interesting read aloud? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -book choice -using intonation -using character voices -consistent reading times | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -using character voices -related activities -viewing same title movie -include read alouds in daily routine |
| How do you suggest independent reading choices? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -own personal favorites -topics he likes -find appropriate reading levels by reading first page -student recommendation board | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use five finger rule on first page -books by same author -personally assist student |
| Personal feelings on read alouds? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -should definitely be included in classroom instruction -would like to increase frequency and length | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children should be read to frequently -she is providing a positive role model -provides example of fluent reading -provides students a positive literacy experience -increases students' desire and frequency to read -read alouds are a priority |

Teacher 1 is a male who has been teaching at the school district for seven years. Six of the seven years have been at the fourth-grade level and one year was in special education. Teacher 1 began including read alouds during his first year of teaching and feels that they are a positive aspect of literacy development. Teacher 2 is a female who has been teaching for a total of three years. All three years have been for the same school district and at the fourth-grade level. She has included read alouds in her instruction since beginning her student teaching for the same district. Even though read alouds are not a required component of her curriculum, Teacher 2 has made it a priority to include it in her instruction.

During their interviews, both teachers stated that they felt read alouds had a positive influence on their students. Teacher 1 stated that some of the positive aspects of read alouds are that they help develop interest in books and reading and can help students focus on choices when getting books from the school library. Teacher 1 stated that read alouds provide the teacher with a beneficial activity that helps settle students down and gets their attention focused on something worthwhile. Teacher 1 also feels that read alouds can provide an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of emotion while listening to the book. When I asked Teacher 1 if there were any negative aspects he said not really anything he could think of except maybe in making poor choices for the book being read aloud or that he cannot always be positive if every student is fully comprehending the story.

Teacher 2 states that although there are many academic benefits of including read alouds in classroom instruction, she includes them mainly as an enjoyable

literacy experience for her students. Teacher 2 will occasionally associate small projects with the book, have the students write alternate endings for the book, or have the students summarize the story in writing.

When asked about the frequency and length of the read alouds, both teachers responded with some similar answers. Teacher 1's goal for read alouds is five days a week, but he also said that the goal is not always met. The read alouds last for approximately ten to twenty minutes, with ten minutes being a more typical time frame due to time demands of other subject areas and schedules, but he would like to see that time increased more frequently to twenty minutes. Teacher 1 stated that the read alouds are typically done after lunch, at the end of the day, or before their last subject switch, whichever time meets their demands for the day.

Teacher 2 includes read alouds approximately four to five days a week, and the readings last about twenty minutes. These daily read alouds take place at the same time each day between the daily special class and lunch break. Her read alouds are definitely not just a filler activity and are included in her daily instruction. Teacher 2 may also read for about ten minutes at the end of the day or after lunch on occasion.

The settings for read alouds in the two classrooms are different. During the read alouds in Teacher 1's classroom, the students are seated at their desks and he is seated on a stool in the front of the room. Teacher 1 states that he prefers his students to just listen as he reads so that they can enjoy the book. He stated that he wants the read alouds to be done strictly for their listening enjoyment although there are always

a handful who get the same book and read along silently with him. He does allow the students to color or maybe finish some work as long as they are also paying attention to the reading.

In Teacher 2's classroom, read alouds take place in a designated area of her room. The area has a carpet for the students to sit on while she sits in front of them in a rocking chair. She believes that sitting on the carpet provides a more comfortable setting than if the students were sitting at their desks but also states that sometimes it can be distracting for the students to be sitting so close to each other. During the read alouds the students are permitted to eat their snacks. Although she prefers them not to do anything but relax and listen, the students may do other things such as read along or other non-distracting activities as long as they pay attention to the read aloud. Students are permitted to use the bathroom only in emergency situations.

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher responded that they use a variety of methods to determine which books to use for their read alouds. Teacher 1 stated that he tries to choose books that will be interesting to all students. Books that are widely known, books that are his own personal favorites, or books that have been recommended by others are some ways in which he decides what to read aloud. He feels that books that have been received positively in the past by his classes tend to be a good choice. Teacher 1 stated that books that seem to be popular at the time also influence his book choice. Another method that Teacher 1 uses for book choice is that he will write down titles and then let the students vote on which book to read. Many times, he stated, students will want the second book in a series to be the read aloud choice.

Teacher 1 also stated that even though his book choices are sometimes a little bit higher reading level than some of the students, it allows them to listen to the same stories as some of their classmates are reading. Teacher 1 stated that he has never started a book and decided to abandon it because he is usually familiar with the books he chooses and tries to make sure that each book is a good fit for his classroom.

The books used for read alouds by Teacher 2 are chosen in several different ways. Teacher 2's personal favorite books, favorite authors, familiar books, and award winning books are some of the ways she chooses what to read. Other books are sometimes chosen by class voting or topics that interest the class. Teacher 2 also may preview a book with the class by reading the first chapter aloud and then having the class vote on whether to continue reading or put it aside and choose another book. Teacher 2 stated that on occasion she will quit reading a book that she has chosen to read because of the students' lack of interest and, therefore, the behavior problems which would then develop.

When I asked Teacher 1 if he included a variety of genres, authors, and topics in his read alouds, he stated that tries to include books on a variety of topics, including ones that are interesting to boys. He stated that boys can be reluctant readers and finding topics that interest them is extremely important to help develop a desire to read on their own. Teacher 1 stated that he does include different genres, but tries to stay away from fairy tales. Teacher 2 stated that she does use a variety of topics, authors, and genres for read alouds, but she tends to read mostly fiction.

I asked Teacher 1 what he felt made a productive, worthwhile, and interesting read aloud and he stated that book choice is always very important. Also, how the book is actually read adds to the interest level. Teacher 1 said that he uses intonation when reading and uses different voices for characters and he stated that his students say it is more interesting when he does these things. Teacher 1 feels that being consistent with the read aloud times and reading daily allows the students to become engaged with the reading and stay engaged. In addition, Teacher 1 said that telling the students that he is personally interested in the story also creates a positive environment.

When I asked Teacher 2 what she felt made a productive, worthwhile, and interesting read aloud she stated that she always uses different voices for the characters in the books and she will occasionally dress up as a character from the books and do an activity or event similar to what occurred in the book after finishing the book. Teacher 2 stated that she will also sometimes watch a movie of the same title after reading the book in order to compare and contrast the two different media versions. Allowing the students to help choose the book and have a voice in the read aloud were also aspects that Teacher 2 feels are important, along with having the read alouds included in a daily routine to indicate their importance in the students' instruction

I asked Teacher 1 how he suggested independent reading choices for his students and he stated that he suggests his own personal favorites or topics he likes. Teacher 1 also teaches the students how to determine if a book is the appropriate

reading level for him or her by having the student read the first page and determine if it is a good fit. In the past, Teacher 1 has displayed book recommendations by students on a bulletin board which included one reason why they would recommend it to other students to read.

Some of the ways that Teacher 2 assists the students in choosing independent reading choices are by suggesting that they use the five finger rule on the first page of the book to ensure that the level of the book is right for them, encouraging the students to choose books by the same author of books they have enjoyed in the past, and not to look only at the cover, but to read small passages to see if it is interesting. Teacher 2 also stated that she assists her students in searching and finding books during library special class.

During the interviews I asked the teachers if they had ever personally witnessed the effects of read alouds on their students. Both teachers responded that each had seen positive influences. Teacher 1 stated that he has frequently seen students checking out from the school library books from the same author that he was reading aloud or a copy of the same read aloud book in order to read along during the class reading. He also had a student who liked a read aloud book so much that the student checked out the second and third book in the series to read on his own.

When I asked Teacher 2 if she had personally witnessed any effects of her read alouds on her students' independent reading choices, she stated that students will go to the library and check out the same book she is reading for read aloud and read along with her or that some students will check out the same read aloud book that she

has just finished reading in order to re-read it themselves. She has also had students who will look up the read aloud author and check out other books written by that author. She stated that in one particular incident she had a reluctant listener during read aloud who eventually check out the same book and would read it by himself under his desk!

Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 both expressed their personal beliefs about read alouds and including them in classroom instruction. Teacher 1 stated that he feels read alouds should definitely be included in classroom instruction because they offer many benefits to students. He also feels that he would like to include read alouds more frequently and for a longer time period in his own classroom but there is so much that is required in the curriculum that it leaves very little time for the read alouds to be included daily.

Teacher 2 said she feels that all children should be read to frequently, especially the students who may not be read to at home. She feels that by reading aloud to her students she is providing a role model for them to see that reading can be fun and interesting and that increasing their desire and frequency to read will be opening many doors for them. She stated that reading aloud is a priority for her students. Teacher 2 stated that she feels read alouds are an essential part of her classroom instruction. She stated that read alouds provide many positive opportunities for literacy development for her students. She feels strongly that read alouds provide an opportunity for her to demonstrate to her students what fluent reading should sound like. While listening to her, students could hear what an

appropriate rate would sound like, how to read with expression, and how to attend to punctuation. Teacher 2 stated that she feels read alouds also provide opportunities to introduce the students to a variety of authors.

Student Surveys

Student surveys were distributed to all participating students after the teacher interviews were conducted. In Classroom 1, twenty-one students returned assent forms, but only nineteen completed student surveys were returned. In Classroom 2, nineteen students returned assent forms and all nineteen completed and returned their student surveys. A combined total of thirty-eight student surveys were completed and returned.

The student survey consisted of nine statements regarding the read aloud time in their classrooms. The students were asked to use a Likert scale of one (strongly disagree with the statement) to five (strongly agree with the statement) to indicate their responses to the statements. The survey also included five open ended questions regarding read alouds and how the student chose books for independent reading. Table 4, following, shows the combined student survey responses received from the two fourth-grade classrooms. The table includes the statement, the number of responses, and the percentages.

Table 4

Teacher 1 and 2 Combined Student Surveys

| | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Neither Agree or Disagree | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|---|-------------------|-----|----------|-----|---------------------------|-----|-------|-----|----------------|-----|
| 38 Total Surveys | 1 | % | 2 | % | 3 | % | 4 | % | 5 | % |
| I like when my teacher reads aloud to the class | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% | 3 | 8% | 34 | 89% |
| I like the books my teachers reads to the class | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 4 | 11% | 16 | 42% | 18 | 47% |
| I would like to help choose the books my teacher reads to the class | 1 | 3% | 1 | 3% | 5 | 13% | 12 | 32% | 19 | 50% |
| Hearing my teacher read aloud makes me want to read more books on my own | 3 | 8% | 2 | 5% | 9 | 24% | 9 | 24% | 15 | 39% |
| I dislike when my teacher reads aloud to the class | 31 | 82% | 5 | 13% | 1 | 3% | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| I choose books that are similar to what my teacher reads aloud on my own | 4 | 11% | 7 | 18% | 17 | 45% | 4 | 11% | 6 | 16% |
| I would like my teacher to read more to the class | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% | 10 | 26% | 3 | 8% | 24 | 63% |
| The books my teacher reads aloud help me to discover other interesting or similar books to read on my own | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% | 10 | 26% | 18 | 47% | 9 | 24% |
| I would like my teacher to read less to the class | 30 | 79% | 5 | 13% | 2 | 5% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |

According to the survey, 89% (n = 34) of all students (n=38) strongly agreed that they liked when their teacher read aloud to the class, another 8% (n = 3) agreed that they liked when their teacher read aloud to the class for a combined total of 97% (n = 37) of all students who either strongly agreed or agreed. This left a remaining 3% (n = 1) who disagreed that he or she liked when the teacher read aloud to the class. The one student who disagreed that he or she liked when the teacher read aloud to the class also stated on an open ended question regarding what the student liked least about the read aloud was that “I’d rather read it to myself because sometimes my teacher don’t read the right words that it really says.” The results of a similar statement which determined if the students would like the teacher to read less showed that 79% (n = 30) of all students strongly disagreed and 13% (n = 5) of all students disagreed with the statement. Another 5% (n = 2) neither agreed nor disagreed that they would like the teacher to read less, leaving the same result of 3% (n = 1) who strongly agreed. This one student was the same one student who responded that he or she strongly disagreed that he or she would like the teacher to read more to the class.

The second scaled statement determined whether the students liked the books their teacher read to the class. Of the students surveyed, a total of 89% (n = 37) of all students strongly agreed or agreed. Another 11% (n = 4) neither agreed nor disagreed and no one disagreed or strongly disagreed. The high number of students who strongly agreed or agreed that they liked the books their teacher read could be attributed to the effort that each teacher put into the selection of the books, either by their own choice or by including the students in the selection.

The third scaled statement determined whether the students would like to help choose the books that were read aloud to the class. The survey results showed that 82% (n = 31) of all students strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to have some input in this decision. 13% (n = 5) of the students neither agreed nor disagreed, while 6% (n = 2) of students strongly disagreed or disagreed that they would like to help choose the read aloud book. This data gained indicates that students would be very enthusiastic in helping to make book choices. These opportunities are most likely events that students have participated in previously and enjoyed due to the fact that both teachers stated in their interviews that student vote is one method of choosing read aloud books that is already being implemented in their classrooms.

When asked to rate whether hearing the teacher read aloud made the students want to read more the survey indicated that 63% (n = 24) of all students strongly agreed or agreed read alouds made them want to read more on their own. In contrast, 13% (n = 5) of students strongly disagreed or disagreed that read alouds made them want to read more, while 24% (n = 9) of students neither agreed nor disagreed.

The survey results indicate that only 27% (n = 10) of all students strongly agreed or agreed that they choose books that are similar to what the teacher is reading aloud to them. Nearly half, 45% (n = 17) of all students, neither agreed nor disagree and another 29% (n = 11) strongly disagreed or disagreed that they choose books that are similar to what the teacher is reading aloud to them. The results of this question are in contrast to the results of statement 2 which showed that 89% (n = 37) of all students surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that they liked the books their teacher

read aloud to them. This indicates that even though the students like what their teacher is reading they do not necessarily choose similar books. These results are also contradicted by the number of students who borrowed books, 49, from the collection of similar books that were provided for each classroom. The book questionnaire results are discussed more thoroughly later in this section.

A total of 71% ($n = 27$) of all students strongly agreed or agreed that they would like the teacher to read more to the class. Another 26% ($n = 10$) of students neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 3% ($n = 1$) strongly disagreed that he or she would like the teacher to read more.

The similar statement of whether the student would like the teacher to read less to the class had results of 92% ($n = 35$) of all students who strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. Another 5% ($n = 2$) students neither agreed nor disagreed, and 3% or 1 student strongly agreed that he or she would like to teacher to read less to the class. These two similar questions show a contrast in results on the amount of time preferred spent on read alouds. An overwhelming percentage of students, 92%, strongly disagreed or disagreed that they would like the teacher to read less to the class and only 71% stated they would like the teacher to read more. The difference in percentages is also seen in the categories of students who neither agreed nor disagreed with either question, 26% and 5% respectively. These results could indicate that the students who neither agreed nor disagreed with wanting the teacher to read more felt that the time spent was already an enjoyable amount of time, which

based on the teacher interviews was four to five times a week for ten to twenty minutes.

According to the student survey, 71% or 27 students strongly agreed or agreed that the books their teacher read aloud help them to discover other interesting or similar books to read on their own. Another 26% (n = 10) of students neither agreed nor disagreed that read alouds helped them, while only 3% (n = 1) disagreed and no one strongly disagreed that it wasn't helpful. The results of this question could indicate that even though only 27% (n = 10) of students indicated that they chose a book that was similar to what the teacher is currently reading, 71% (n = 27) agreed that the read aloud helped them discover other interesting or similar books on their own.

There were an additional five open end questions on the student survey that the students were asked to respond to. The students were not limited to only one answer, but in all responses except for one, the students responded with only one answer. The one exception was for question 3 where one student had two separate responses to the question. Question 1 was: What do you like best about when your teacher reads aloud to you? Using a constant comparative method, I color coded the students' responses into five different categories. Table 5 below shows the five categories the responses were sorted into along with the number of responses and the overall percentage.

Table 5

Question 1: What Do You Like the Best About When Your Teacher Reads Aloud to You?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Uses character voices/lots of expression | 18 | 47% |
| Being able to relax and just listen | 8 | 21% |
| Book choice/interesting stories | 6 | 16% |
| Like reading along | 3 | 8% |
| Makes student think more deeply | 3 | 8% |

The survey results indicated that 47% (n = 18) of all students stated that what they liked best about when the teacher read aloud was when the teacher used different voices for the characters or used a lot of expression when reading the book. The second most frequent response, 21% (n = 8) of students, was that the student was able to relax and just listen to the teacher read the book. The third most frequent response was the actual book choice made by the teacher. Of the students surveyed 16% (n = 6) replied that interesting books were what the students liked best about when the teachers read aloud. These three most frequent responses, different voices, being able to relax, and book choice, were also things that both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 said that they thought made their read alouds productive, worthwhile, and interesting. The remaining students responded that they liked being able to read along with the teacher or that the read alouds made them think more deeply about the story while listening.

Table 6

Question 3: What Are the Things Your Teacher Does to Make the Read Aloud Interesting to You?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Teacher changes voices for characters/ noises/uses expression/creates suspense | 34* | 87%* |
| Book selection | 4 | 10% |
| Having a party like in the book or doing activities like they do in the book | 1 | 3% |
| *one student gave two responses that were separated into two categories | | |

After analyzing the data received from question 3 on the student survey, I was able to color code the information into three distinct categories to determine what the students felt made the read alouds interesting to them. One student gave two distinct responses and they were sorted into two different categories. According to the survey, an overwhelming 87% (n = 34) of all students responded that what made the read alouds most interesting to them was when the teacher used different voices for the characters in the story or read using expression and intonation to create suspense. Book selection was the second largest category with 10% (n = 4) of students who thought that it was what made the read alouds interesting. The remaining 3% (n = 1) stated that having a party or doing activities like what was done in the book made the actual read aloud interesting.

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated in their interviews that they read using different character voices, expression, and intonation and felt that using character voices made the story more interesting, and in some cases easier to understand. Teacher 2 stated that she felt that by including these characteristics she was demonstrating how a good, fluent reader should sound when he or she was reading aloud. Teacher 2 also stated that she feels the students enjoy doing the additional activities related to the book, but only one student indicated that it was what they thought made the read aloud interesting. This could indicate that even though the activities are enjoyable the students still found the actual story more interesting.

Table 7

Question 4: How Does Having the Teacher Read Aloud to You Help You Find Books to Read on Your Own?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Get the same book/author/topic | 19 | 50% |
| Helps student to find interests | 11 | 29% |
| It doesn't help | 5 | 13% |
| Misc | 3 | 8% |

Table 7 shows the results of question 4 on the student survey. The responses were color coded into four categories that indicated how read alouds help the students to find books for independent reading. Half of the students (n = 19) responded that

they would get the same book or author or that they would get a book on the same or similar topic. According to the survey read alouds helped 29% (n = 11) of the students find topics that they were interested in reading about. These two categories combined indicate 79% (n = 30) of all students felt that read alouds were beneficial to them when finding books to read independently. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated in their interviews that they had personally witnessed students borrowing the same books or books by the same author from read alouds. Another 13% (n = 5) of students responded that the read alouds did not help them in finding books to read for independent reading. The last category for question 4 was for responses that could not be identified as to whether having the teacher read aloud to the student helped the student to find books to read on their own.

Table 8

Question 5: How Do You Choose a Book for Independent Reading?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Reading the back/first page | 18 | 47% |
| Choosing by favorite/interesting topic | 7 | 19% |
| Choosing similar book to what the teacher is reading | 3 | 8% |
| Misc. | 3 | 8% |
| Choosing favorite author | 2 | 5% |
| Teacher assists in choosing | 2 | 5% |
| Length of book | 2 | 5% |
| Looks for new topics | 1 | 3% |

The last question on the student survey asked the students how they chose a book for independent reading. The responses were color coded into eight different categories. The category with the largest number of responses was the students read the back cover or the first page of the book. Of the students survey 47% (n = 18) stated that this was the method used to determine whether they read the book for independent reading. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated that they suggest this way to students when choosing books to determine if the book would be interesting and to determine if the book is the appropriate reading level for the students. The category of choosing books that were the student's favorite topic or was an interesting topic

consisted of only 8% ($n = 3$) of responses. Another 8% ($n = 3$) stated that they chose a similar book to what the teacher is reading. Three different categories compiled 5% ($n = 2$) of student responses each. Choosing a favorite author, having the teacher assist in choosing a book, and the length of the book were all additional methods for choosing books for independent reading according to the survey. Only 3% ($n = 1$) responded that he or she looked for new or different topics when choosing a book for independent reading. The miscellaneous category was comprised of 8% or two students who responded with “by in the classroom or from the library” and “it does not help me” and which I felt could not be categories in themselves.

Observations

Over the course of six weeks, I observed Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 and their students during their read aloud sessions. Each teacher was observed on five separate occasions. During each observation I was seated separately from the class to ensure that I would not be a distraction to the students or teacher

While observing Teacher 1 during read alouds, I noted that he would sit on a stool in front of the class. His students were sitting at their desks. This scenario corresponds to what Teacher 1 stated in his interview about the setting he prefers during read aloud. Teacher 2 also stated in her interview that she sits in a rocking chair while her students are gathered around her on a carpet which is what I observed each time I was in her classroom, with one exception when the students were at their desks and she was standing in the back of the room. On this occasion the students were acting out the read aloud story.

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated in their interviews that their students are mainly just listening during the read alouds with a few reading aloud or doing a quiet activity. This was also consistent with most of my observations. During observations in Teacher 2's classroom I observed students reading along, listening, and on several occasions playing the string game called Cat's Cradle. At first glance I thought that these students were not paying attention and would be a distraction to others around them, but after closer observation I noticed that the students were indeed paying attention evidenced by their laughter or smiles at appropriate points in the book and by glances at the teacher while she was reading. The same was true for Teacher 1's classroom. I observed one student playing with a matchbook car and he appeared to be not paying attention, but the student would laugh or smile at humorous points in the story.

The one occasion that the students were not sitting quietly during read aloud was during Observation #5 for Teacher 2. During this read aloud she read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. She had read this particular book to her students on another occasion and the students were very excited that they were able to read it together again. Teacher 2 made this more than just a read aloud for her students by having two of her students act out the two characters in the story as she read the story aloud to the entire class. The two students not only acted out the parts but also repeated their speaking parts after she would read them aloud. The rest of the class was extremely engaged and had an enjoyable experience! After the read aloud the students expressed their enjoyment and desire to do another similar read aloud and

Teacher 2 told them she knew of another story that would be perfect for such a read aloud activity and would try her hardest to fit it in over the next few days.

During all observations, one of the most noticeable characteristics during the read alouds was that both teachers read with enthusiasm, expression, and used character voices. During the reading of *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* and *Super Fudge* both written by Judy Blume, Teacher 1 would change his voice to sound like the toddler character Fudge in the books and consistently say “Peta” to correspond with the way the name, Peter, was written in the books. Each time Teacher 1 read “Peta” his students would laugh and mimic the way Teacher 1 would say it. Teacher 1 also changed his voice for the other characters and showed emotion and enthusiasm while reading. Teacher 1’s students referred to his use of voices and expression twenty-two out of thirty-eight times as being either what the students liked the best about the read alouds or what makes Teacher 1’s read alouds interesting on the student surveys that were completed by Teacher 1’s students.

Teacher 2’s use of character voices and expression and enthusiasm in her reading was immediately apparent during each observation in her classroom. She created voices for each character that were distinct and fitting. Teacher 2 stated in her interview that she feels very strongly about using voices during her read aloud and that she tries to pick books with a lot of dialogue. Teacher 2 stated she feels that using voices for characters helps her students understand the story and the characters better. She also said that her students really enjoy hearing the different voices which was corroborated with the data that I collected on the student surveys. According to

the student survey results, twenty-eight students indicated that Teacher 2's character voices, expressions, or enthusiasm are what they liked the best about the read alouds or what made the read alouds interesting to the students.

Another aspect of read alouds that I was looking for during observations was the quality and use of discussions that occurred. I did not observe any discussions during observations for Teacher 1. During observations for Teacher 2 discussions occurred during each session, either before, during, or after the actual reading took place, but not necessarily all three occurred in the same session. Discussions that occurred before the reading were reviews of what happened or predictions of what might be happening next in the story. Discussions that occurred during the reading were used for clarification of the plot, making connections, or making or confirming predictions. Discussions that occurred after the reading were used to confirm predictions, make predictions, or to clarify events that had taken place in the book. Students were eager to share make predictions and participate in the discussions.

During the course of my study both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 were reading chapter books for read alouds for all observations except one. Both teachers had already started the chapter book read alouds before my first observations and therefore I was unable to see record any data about the use or quality of introductions for these books. The one exception was while observing Teacher 2 during her reading of *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. Teacher 2 did a very quick introduction of the book for her class. This was a book that her students were already familiar with and therefore needed very introduction which consisted mainly of a

review of how the students were supposed to act out the story and repeat the lines of their corresponding book character.

Book Questionnaires

I provided each fourth-grade classroom with a collection of books that related to the current read aloud book the teacher was reading or one that was recently finished. Students could borrow a book from the collection and then complete a book questionnaire regarding the borrowed book. In the classroom of Teacher 1, a total of twenty-four books were signed out over the six week period. Of the twenty-four books, I received fourteen completed questionnaires. In Teacher 2's classroom, a total of twenty-five books were signed out with a total of twelve book questionnaires completed and returned. The combined total of book questionnaires that were completed and returned was twenty-six. The book questionnaire consisted of the title of the book, the dates the book was borrowed and returned, four open questions, and one scaled question.

Table 9

Question 1: What Was the Reason You Chose This Book to Read?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| Cover or back looked/sounded interesting | 6 | 23% |
| Because it looked good/interesting/funny | 6 | 23% |
| Liked the genre or topic | 4 | 15% |
| Read other books in series | 3 | 12% |
| Like the author | 2 | 8% |
| Already read the book and liked it | 2 | 8% |
| Wanted to try something new/didn't know what else to read | 2 | 8% |
| Because it had a funny name | 1 | 4% |

The results of question 1 were color coded into eight different categories.

According to the book questionnaire, the two most popular reasons the student choose the book to read was that the cover or back looked or sounded interesting or because the book looked good, interesting or funny. These two responses totaled 46% (n = 12) of the students. Results showed that 15% (n = 4) of students' book choice was based on their like of the genre or topic of the book. Another 12% (n = 3) of students responded that they had read other books in the series. The categories of liking the author, having already read the book and liked it, and wanting to try something new

or not knowing what else to read each consisted of 8% ($n = 2$). The last category was that the book had a funny name consisted of 4% ($n = 1$) of students.

The results on the book questionnaire that indicated 46% of the students who chose the book by reading the back or front cover or because it looked interesting or funny corresponds with the 47% of students who indicated on the student surveys that reading the back cover and first page of the book was how they chose books to read independently. This is one of the methods that both teachers taught the students to use when selecting books to ensure that the books were both interesting and at an appropriate reading level for the students.

Results between the student surveys and the book questionnaires indicated that choices based on favorite authors were also similar. On the student surveys 5% of students surveyed responded that they chose a book for independent reading by choosing a favorite author. The book questionnaire results indicated that 8% of the books chosen by the students from the collection were based on the appeal of the author. Similar results between the two surveys were also noted based on topic with 18% students indicating that was how they chose an independent reading book on the student survey compared with 15% with a similar response on the book questionnaire.

Question 2 on the book questionnaire asked if the student had help picking out the book from the collection. The results were that 100% of the students stated that no one helped them chose a book from the collection. Even though all of the students stated that no help was received, the fact that I had provided each classroom with a collection of related books that was previously unavailable still remains.

Table 10

Question 3: How Much Did You Like Reading This Book?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Strongly disliked | 0 | 0% |
| Disliked | 1 | 4% |
| Neither liked or disliked | 2 | 8% |
| Liked | 5 | 19% |
| Strongly liked | 18 | 69% |

For question 3 on the book questionnaire the students were asked to rate how much they liked reading the book that they chose from the collection using a Likert scale. According to the book questionnaire 69% (n = 18) of all students strongly liked the book and another 19% (n = 5) liked the book they had chosen. Another 8% (n = 2) neither liked nor disliked the book. Only 4% (n = 1) indicated that he or she disliked the book he or she had chosen. This one student also stated that he or she did not finish reading the book because “it wasn’t funny,” but this student also said that she would recommend it to another student “because she likes these kinds of books.”

Table 11

Question 4: Did You Finish Reading This Book?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|-------------|---------------------|------------|
| Yes | 17 | 65% |
| No | 6 | 23% |
| No response | 3 | 12% |

Students were also asked to state whether they completed reading the book. Overall, 65% (n = 17) of students stated that they had finished reading the book. There were 23% (n = 6) who stated that they had not finished reading the book. These six students were then asked to give the reason why they did not finish reading the book. Half of the students stated that they did not have enough time to finish and the other half stated that the book was not funny or not interesting to them. Data collected from the book questionnaire based on dates the books were borrowed and returned indicate that the average length of time the students borrowed the books was eleven days. Even though the study was conducted over a six week time period, the students who stated that they did not have enough time could be legitimate responses, based on when they borrowed the book, outside school activities, or time available during school hours. There was an additional 12% (n = 3) of all students who did not respond to whether they had finished the book or give a reason.

Table 12

Question 5: Would You Recommend This Book to Another Student?

| Category | Number of Responses | Percentage |
|-------------|---------------------|------------|
| Yes | 23 | 88% |
| No | 0 | 0% |
| No Response | 3 | 12% |

The last question on the book questionnaire determined whether the student would recommend the book to another student. An overwhelming 88% ($n = 23$) of all students indicated that they would recommend the book they had read. Of these 23 positive recommendations, 54% stated they would recommend the book because they liked it or the book was funny or interesting. Also included in the 23 students who would recommend the book was one student who neither liked nor disliked the book and one student who disliked book. These students stated that they would still recommend the book because “it was a very good book” and “because she likes these kinds of books” respectively. The remaining 12% or 3 students did not respond to the question. These three students were also the same three students who indicated that they did not finish reading the book and either strongly liked, liked, or neither liked nor disliked the book.

Summary

A great deal of valuable data was acquired as a result of this study. The evidence showed links between both of the teachers’ beliefs, classroom instruction,

implementation of read alouds, student enjoyment levels, and student independent reading choices.

Similar teacher beliefs that read alouds are a positive influence on students' literacy experience and that the read alouds should be an enjoyable, relaxing experience are demonstrated not only by the physical structure of the read aloud environment but also by the teachers' enthusiasm, intonation, and use of character voices while reading the book. This is reflected in an overwhelming number of student survey responses indicating that the teachers' use of character voices and enthusiasm while reading is what the students liked best about the teachers' reading aloud. Both teachers' preference that the students do nothing but listen to ensure they can become fully engaged while listening is also evidence to their beliefs of a positive experience. In addition, the teachers' dedication to include read alouds in their daily instruction, even though they are not a required part of their curriculum, also supports their beliefs that read alouds are worthwhile and important.

Evidence also linked having the teacher read aloud to helping students find books for independent reading by allowing the students to choose the same book, author, or topic and by helping students find new interests. Teacher instruction of how to read the first page or back cover to determine if the book choice was a good fit for the students also assisted the students in book selection.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine how two fourth-grade teachers' use of read alouds in their classrooms effected their students' independent reading choices. The study was conducted to determine if the use of read alouds introduce students to books in ways that generate interest in an author, topic, or genre which would then enable the students to more easily find choices for independent reading books and increase their independent reading. After completing this study, coding, and analyzing the data, I was able to determine some overall themes and conclusions of including read alouds in classroom instruction that I felt were important for a teacher to be aware of when planning and implementing read alouds in a classroom. The study showed that students liked when their teacher read aloud to them and would like their teachers to read aloud more, that having the teacher read books aloud helped the students to find books for independent reading in different ways, and when teachers read with enthusiasm, intonation, and character voices the students were more engaged with the read alouds.

Conclusions

Students like teachers to read aloud.

One important conclusion determined through this study was that almost all students surveyed responded that they liked when their teachers read aloud to them, indicating that it was an enjoyable and positive experience. The results showed that 97% or thirty-three out of thirty-four students surveyed responded that they liked when the teacher read aloud to them in class. The only student who responded that he

or she did not like the teacher to read aloud stated it was because he or she would rather read the story independently. Earlier research also found that among a group of sixth graders surveyed, 62% indicated that reading aloud was the preferred reading activity the students enjoyed the most (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Students would like teachers to read aloud more.

In addition to liking when their teachers read aloud to them, students also responded that they would, in fact, like their teachers to read even more. Of the students surveyed 71% responded that they would like their teacher to read more to them. During the teacher interviews both teachers stated that they included read alouds either everyday or four to five days per week and that the read alouds are from ten to twenty minutes long, with actual findings from observations that showed the overall average number of minutes the two teachers spent on reading aloud to the classes was sixteen minutes. Previous research has shown that the appropriate amount of time spend on read alouds differs from student to student based on individual needs (Lane & Wright, 2007). One of the interviewed teachers also indicated that he does not always meet his preferred goal of twenty minutes a day for read alouds. This unmet goal when combined with student responses that said they would like their teachers to read more could be an indication that some students' needs are not being met. Over all, the data confirms that the majority of students are experiencing a positive and enjoyable literacy experience by their teachers including real alouds in their classroom instruction

Read alouds assist students in finding choices for independent reading.

One purpose of my study was to determine if read alouds helped students find authors, genres, or topics that would interest the student, which would then assist students in finding choices for independent reading. The conclusion was that read alouds do assist students in finding choices. The study revealed that 79% of students surveyed stated that having the teacher read books aloud to the students helped them find books for independent reading by helping the students find their interests or by allowing the students to choose the same books as the read aloud or books having the same author, topic, or genre. An earlier study also revealed that 201 out of 331 students who said that other people made them want to read indicated that the other person was their teacher (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The same evidence showed some students chose similar topics or genres as the read alouds. Both teachers also stated that they had personally witnessed previous occasions when students made those similar book choices. Sometimes students do not have enough experience or knowledge regarding book selection and the simplest and quickest way to decide is to make a book choice that is similar to the book that the students are currently or have recently listened to.

Included in enabling students to more easily find book choices for independent reading was introducing students to new topics, genres, and authors which allows the students to make the choices. Read alouds expose students to a variety of authors, topics, and genres that may have gone unexplored by students for any number of reasons. It is important to remember that all students bring an

individualized schema and background knowledge to their literacy learning and that by exposing students to unexplored authors, topics, and genres, teachers are helping the students to increase schema and background knowledge as well as their interests. The participating teachers stated that they include a variety of genres in their read alouds, though I observed only fiction during the course of my study. Exposure to different genres, including expository texts, allows different types of interests to be developed and explored. Previous research also agrees that reading expository texts to students, in particular, may promote even more curiosity and interest, and reading of expository texts which will then become more natural (Doiron, 1994). No one type of genre or topic meets all students' interests, but by exposing students to many different types, the students are able to experience differences that could raise enough interest for that students will make similar independent reading choices.

The way a teacher reads during read alouds makes it interesting for students.

Another over whelming conclusion of this study was that a large majority, 89% or thirty-four out of thirty-eight students surveyed agreed that the way a teacher read during the read aloud was a major factor in whether the read alouds were interesting to the students. When observed, both teachers used enthusiasm, intonation, and character voices. By giving each character in the read aloud book a distinct and appropriate voice, the teachers were able to make the characters come alive and the stories interesting to the students. Previous research also found that reading with intonation, enthusiasm, and giving each character a distinctive voice

made the read alouds more interesting and helped the students to become engaged with the story and helped in comprehension (Ivey, 2003; and Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007). Both teachers stated in their interviews that they felt reading the book in this manner also helped to keep the students engaged and provided them with a model of what fluent reading should sound like. Classroom observations also confirm that when Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 were using character voices the students would respond in positive ways such as laughing at the way the teachers said things and mimicking him or her. One student laughed, saying “he sounds like a baby” referring to the way Teacher 1 said “Peta”. One student from Teacher 2’s classroom stated that Teacher 2 sounded “like an old lady”. Reading fluently allows the students to connect with the characters, increase their comprehension, and stay engaged during the read aloud.

Implications for Classroom Practice

The data gathered and analyzed from the course of this study shows that including read alouds have a positive impact on students’ literacy experience and on students’ independent reading choices. The implications for classroom practice would be that including read alouds in classroom instruction are beneficial to students and should be part of the regular instruction, that teachers need to be fluent and creative when reading aloud, and that thought should be put into book selection.

Including read alouds in the daily instruction, at a specific time and for a specific length, validate the read alouds’ importance in literacy development and provide an enjoyable and positive experience for students. Just as other content areas

and special classes are taught on a regular schedule, read alouds should be a part of that regular schedule. By knowing that read alouds are included daily, students can look forward to a time of day when they are able to relax and listen to a fun, interesting story and learn about new or different topics, genres and authors. This is the time when students are able to make think about what books to look for when choosing books to reading independently based on their interest level in the current read aloud or newly discover interests. This is especially helpful if they are choosing an independent reading book during library special where they are only given fifteen minutes to find a book and check it out. This short time frame may cause students to selection a book that is neither interesting nor at their appropriate independent reading level. Both teachers interviewed during this study stated that they include read alouds in their daily instruction, with one having a very specific time every day which the students look forward to and the other having one preferred time, but also alternative times depending on the classroom schedule for that particular day. Previous research has also shown that reading daily allows students to keep their interest and engagement in the read aloud book which contributes to the time being constructive and well spent (Trelease, 2001).

Evidence from this study showed that students felt that read alouds that emphasized character voices, enthusiasm, and intonation made the read aloud interesting and engaging. This evidence implies that teachers need to be not only very fluent when reading aloud but also very creative with the use of their voices to help ensure that students have a positive experience which could increase their desire

to read more and therefore increase their skills at reading. Read alouds provide students with an enjoyable experience, especially when the reading is done with all components of fluency executed at a high level. The one area of fluency that seems to make the most significant impact on the students' enjoyment level is intonation and enthusiasm in the form of character voices which appears to grab and hold the students' attention and interest. Past research shows that teachers are able to make the characters come alive and become interesting to students using character voices and students will become engaged and better understand the text and plot (Ivey, 2003; Lane & Wright, 2007).

Other elements to consider when implementing a read aloud in the classroom should include careful selection of the book. My study showed that both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated they used more than one method in selecting the read aloud book and used different genres. Past research has shown that many teachers do not read non-fiction book at the primary or intermediate grade levels (Jacobs, et al., 2000) and I did not see the use of nonfiction books while I was observing either Teacher 1 or Teacher 2's read aloud sessions. Even though I only witnessed the use of fiction books during the course of my study, it is important to remember that non-fiction books could also be engaging and interesting to students. While a teacher's experience and knowledge about the many choices available from each genre for use as read alouds is invaluable, a teacher should not overlook the importance of allowing students to have a voice in book selection. The results of my study showed that 82% of students would like to help pick out the read aloud books. Using methods such as

having students offer suggestions for books or topics or by having the class vote on pre-selected books made by the teacher not only allows students to contribute their opinions, but it also allows the teacher to get a better understanding of what the students are interested in. Careful book selection also helps to ensure that the actual read aloud will be interesting to students and enjoyable, which could lead the students to read more books independently.

Recommendations for Further Research

One purpose of this study was to determine if read alouds could enable students to more easily find book choices for independent reading. While the book questionnaires indicated that no students had helping choosing the books from the collection that I provided for each classroom, the fact remains that I had provided the classrooms with a collection that had not been previously available. Future research could be conducted involving data regarding a matched collection of books that are selected by the teacher and made available to the students in a classroom with data from a classroom that does not have a matched collection of books. The study could investigate whether having a matched collection of books that is related to the read aloud and that is readily available in the classroom provide the additional assistance to find book choices for independent reading that some students might need because the collection is a more easily accessible source than trying to find a book from the school library where the selection may be overwhelming or in some cases where a student just doesn't know what to choose or time for selections can be limited. The independent reading choices could be analyzed and compared between the two

different classroom set ups to determine if book choices were similar and what factors influenced the choices.

The genre of the books that are used for read alouds could be another area that would benefit from closer study. During the course of my study and observations, I witnessed the use of only fiction books, even though both teachers stated that they use a variety of genres. It would be interesting to determine if the same type of results could be duplicated using non-fiction books. The results of this study showed that 89% of students stated that what made the read alouds interesting to them was having the teacher use characters' voices and reading with a lot of expression. This type of reading would be much more difficult to accomplish when reading non-fiction books. Non-fiction texts can offer motivation, excitement, and curiosity about a wide variety of topics which could increase desire to learn and read more about the topics (Dreher, 2003; Meehan, 2006; & Neuman, 2006), but it would be interesting and informative to survey the students and determine if the results were similar. It would also be interesting to determine if students had a preference between fiction and non-fiction read alouds.

Another area that could be researched further is the setting of the read aloud. The two teachers who were observed each had a different type of setting for their read alouds. The students of Teacher 1 sat at their desks while the teacher sat on a stool in the front of the classroom. The students of Teacher 2 sat in a designated area on a carpet with the teacher in a rocking chair in front of them. While Teacher 2's setting was the one recommended in previous research by Braxton (2006) and Dickinson,

McCable, & Anastosopoulos (2003) four students out of 19 indicated that the setting was what the students liked least about the read aloud. According to students in this study, sitting together as a class on a rug was not the preferred setting because other students were distracting due to talking among the students sitting next to each or the area being too crowded. In contrast, no students from Teacher 1's classroom indicated that the setting, sitting at their desks, was something they didn't like about the read aloud. Conducting a study to determine if having the students sit at their desks, on a carpet, or in a semicircle around the teacher (Trelease, 2001), could offer more informed data. Teachers could experiment with different types of settings over a period of time for each setting, and then have students report their likes, dislikes, preferences, and suggestions regarding their impressions of the ideal setting.

Summary

The findings and conclusions based on this study indicate that classroom read alouds are a valuable part of a student's literacy education. Evidence showed that students not only enjoyed listening to the teacher read aloud to them, but the students also wanted the teachers to read aloud more. Also by including read alouds in classroom instruction students were able to more easily find book choices for independent reading. Teachers can offer their knowledge and experience by making well-informed book choices for their read alouds which students can then benefit from by allowing them to choose books by similar authors or similar topics or genres. Read alouds are also a means by which the teachers can introduce new interests to students or help expand students' interests by incorporating a variety of authors,

topics, and genres into the read alouds which then allow students to make independent reading choices easier. Teachers are educated role models from whom students are able to learn. The teachers' ability to read aloud fluently and bring characters to life by emphasizing character voices while reading activated students' imaginations and set a positive and engaging mood during read alouds.

The implications for classroom practice would be that including read alouds in classroom instruction are beneficial to students and should be part of the regular instruction. Teachers need to make a conscious effort to include read alouds on a regular basis in their daily instruction and should be included in such a way that the read alouds are an engaging, positive, and educational literacy experience that students can identify as an important aspect of literacy and not just an activity that uses up a few minutes of spare time. Teachers also need to be conscious of the way in which they are reading aloud. Teachers need to be models of fluent reading with attention to aspects such as enthusiasm, intonation, and use of characters voices which contribute greatly to the engagement of the students and promote a positive literacy experience. Teachers also need to carefully consider the book selection and use resources available to aid in selection. Factors such as including a variety of authors, topics, and genres and allowing students to have an input on what book is used promotes interest and engagement which leads to a positive literacy experience.

While this study resulted in many informative and important conclusions there are still several aspects of read alouds that merit further investigation. A more in depth study regarding whether having a readily available matched book collection in

the classroom would promote an increase in independent reading or aid independent reading book selection is an area that could offer additional insight on reading habits. The aspect of fiction versus nonfiction books being used for read alouds could also provide valuable data to determine if one genre is more preferred by students and what makes that genre more appealing. A contributing factor in the enjoyment of a read aloud is the setting. A study which further examines different types of setting and what factors are a benefit or detriment in the success of the read aloud could help ensure that read alouds are a successful and positive literacy experience for all students.

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Appendix A

TEACHER INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION SHEET

Teacher # _____

First, I would like to thank you for participating in my study and allowing me to interview you and observe you and your students during your read aloud periods. As you know, the purpose of my study is to determine how the use of read alouds effects a student's independent reading choices.

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. When did you begin to include read alouds in your instruction? Is it required?
How does the school district feel about read alouds?

3. In what ways do you feel read alouds are a positive or negative aspect of literacy development?

4. How many days per week and for how many minutes is your normal read aloud period? Is there a "set" time?

5. Is this read aloud period done strictly for pleasure or are there assignments associated with it? Is it a "filler"?

6. What are students doing during the read aloud? Just listening? Using bathroom? Doing homework?

7. How do you determine which books to use? Award winners? Personal favorites? Do students have any input?

8. How do you use a variety of genres, authors, and topics?

9. What do you feel makes a productive, worthwhile, and interesting read aloud?

10. How do you suggest independent reading choices for your students?

11. How have you personally witnessed the effects of read alouds on a student's independent reading choice?

12. How do you feel about the frequency and use of read alouds in the intermediate grades? In fourth-grade in particular? Why?

Appendix B

STUDENT SURVEY

This survey will be completed without your name written on it so that I do not know who filled it out. Please use the following 1 – 5 scale to answer each question by circling the number next to the statement. Your responses will not effect your grades in any way.

- | | |
|-------|----------------------------|
| 1 - ☹ | strongly disagree |
| 2 | disagree |
| 3 - ☺ | neither agree nor disagree |
| 4 | agree |
| 5 - ☺ | strongly agree |

☹ ☺ ☺

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I LIKE when my teacher reads aloud to the class. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I LIKE the BOOKS my teacher reads to the class. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I would like to help choose the books my teacher reads to the class. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Hearing my teacher read aloud makes me want to read more books on my own. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I DISLIKE when my teacher reads aloud to the class. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I choose books that are similar to what my teacher reads aloud to read on my own. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I would like my teacher to read MORE to the class. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | The books my teacher reads aloud help me to discover other interesting or similar books to read on my own. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I would like my teacher to read LESS to the class. |

Please answer the following questions in your own words.

1. What do you like the BEST about when your teacher reads aloud to you?

2. What do you like the LEAST about when your teacher reads aloud to you?

3. What are the things your teacher does to make the read aloud interesting to you?

4. How does having the teacher read aloud to you help you find books to read on your own?

5. How do you choose a book for independent reading?

Appendix C

BOOK QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete this Questionnaire and put it in the **BOOK SURVEY BOX** when you return the book.

This is not being graded.

Name of Book _____

Date book borrowed _____ Date book returned _____

1. What was the reason you choose this book to read? _____

2. Did you have help picking out this book? _____ yes _____ no

If yes, who helped you? _____

3. How much did you like reading this book? Please circle the number.

- | | |
|-------|---------------------------|
| 1 - ☹ | strongly disliked |
| 2 | disliked |
| 3 - ☺ | neither liked or disliked |
| 4 | liked |
| 5 - ☺ | strongly liked |

4. Did you finish reading this book? _____yes _____no

If not, why? _____

5. Would you recommend this book to another student? _____yes _____no

Why or why not? _____
