

The Potential Impact of Structured Read-Aloud on Middle School Reading Achievement

Jennifer Kohart Marchessault

Grand Canyon University

jennifer.kohart@gmail.com

Karen H. Larwin

Youngstown State University

klarwin@ysu.edu

Abstract

Read-aloud is a technique predominantly utilized at the elementary level. This study was designed to research the effectiveness of this technique at the middle school level, specifically, students who were not receiving special education or additional reading intervention services. For the current investigation, students in two middle schools within the same Virginia school district were assigned to receive the treatment of Structured Read-Aloud or received traditional middle-school reading instruction. These students were tested using the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) both in the fall before the intervention was implemented, and then again in the spring of the same year to assess gains. Results indicate that the use of Read-Aloud instruction had an impact on student DORA scores and implications of the research are considered.

Keywords: Read-Alouds, Middle School Reading, Reading Assessment

Structured Read-Aloud in Middle School: The Potential Impact on Reading Achievement

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

Why Read-Aloud?

Teacher read-aloud is not a new concept. In the 1985 *Becoming a Nation of Readers* report, it was maintained that reading aloud to young children was the “single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23). The commission also stressed that reading to children should continue throughout their schooling, no matter the child’s age. This recommendation is supported by research demonstrating that as the amount of time adults read aloud to children declines, the amount of time students spend on recreational reading similarly declines (Lesesne, 2006; Trelease, 2006).

In a study conducted for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Elley (1992) found that the United States placed *second*

in the ability of nine-year-old readers internationally, but dropped to *eighth* when fourteen-year-olds were evaluated (Trelease, 2006). This is but one study that demonstrates that while we have success in reading education in the primary grades in a global comparison, reading skills begin to decline as children grow older. The drop in reading success could be credited to a variety of reasons from the type of material used, the difficulty of the text, or the curriculum as a whole. Another possibility is that this decline could be partially attributed to the changes in instructional strategies as students move through their primary education.

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

The Ivey and Broaddus (2001) survey brought read-alouds in middle school into the research spectrum. As the topic becomes more and more prevalent, more research is taking place in regard to read-aloud both in relation to teachers and students. Albright and Ariail (2005) found that teachers in the middle grades are beginning to utilize read-aloud

for reasons such as: modeling fluent reading, making texts more accessible and ensuring all students were receiving the information from the texts. The use of read-alouds also gives students exposure to literature that students may not have received with a traditional textbook. Reading aloud can contribute to increased student engagement, understanding, and motivation (Albright, 2002).

Modeling Through Read-Alouds

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

“Reading aloud provides a natural context for modeling and applying elements of strategic reading such as self-questioning, prediction, and rereading” (Atwell, 2000, p.145). When the teacher is reading, the students have eliminated the stress of performance and pronunciation and can concentrate on comprehension. The teacher then models appropriate questioning techniques to promote the skills of proficient reading comprehension, namely prediction, inference and utilizing context clues. Teachers can take the opportunity to utilize class discussion to compare and contrast language and vocabulary from other texts, other time periods and other content areas (Harvey, 1998).

Teachers need to model how to decipher vocabulary meaning through the use of context clues while reading. When teachers correctly utilize read-aloud for the benefit of comprehension improvement and vocabulary acquisition, they are modeling to students how to use thinking, reading and language strategies to process and understand the text they are reading (Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008).

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

In a study conducted by Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2008), teachers were asked to read aloud from the text while discussing their own processes for comprehension. This read-aloud and think-aloud combination gave the students a model of what happens while a good reader is processing the information from the text. The teachers would model fluent reading during the read-aloud sections and would then walk through their own comprehension processes to understand the text. This proved to be a strong modeling process in which a multitude of strategies could be addressed. For example: making connections to characters from other books and texts, utilizing prior knowledge to help understand vocabulary or characters, identifying text aspects like theme and story

elements, or comparison of style of the author to other authors/texts (Spranger, Sandral & Ferrari, 2011). When the idea of simply addressing one strategy at a time was brought up, teachers explained that their own thought processes do not work that way, so why would they assume students did? Teachers have discovered that they need to reinforce automatic usage of strategies; for example: “We need to show students how to incorporate these things automatically and not artificially stop and summarize or question or whatever. I used my guided instructional time to focus on specific strategies with specific students who need attention in a specific area” (Fisher, et al., 2008, p. 551).

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

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

When reading aloud, I go for it, changing my inflection for the different characters and moods of a text. I change my face, too – smile, frown, show anger or surprise or the effects of suspense or enlightenment – and I modulate the volume, louder or softer, to match the mood. I read slower than I speak, and I pause before and after parts I want to stress, to let things sink in. I ask questions...I show the illustrations (p. 145).

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

Interactive Read-alouds

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

Modeling thought processes during the read-aloud is of importance as well. Think aloud provides the means to demonstrate the questioning and the manner in which good readers achieve comprehension. "Reading requires the orchestration of many skills such as the ability to activate prior knowledge, make connections, question and monitor one's own reading throughout the reading process" (Spranger, et al., 2011, p. 33). When teachers model how they extract important information from text to further dissect and reflect to achieve a deeper meaning, students then have a basis to do the same when they read (Caldwell & Leslie, 2010). In a study by Caldwell and Leslie (2010), data found that

when “students thought aloud they made more inferences in recall than when they did not think aloud, and the associative inferences made used text information” (p. 334).

Inference is a skill that is important for middle school students to become proficient with due to the increased level of sophistication in the materials they will read, so this reinforces how read-aloud and think aloud can work together to achieve this goal.

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

Repeated exposure to read-alouds with modeling of appropriate language and fluency encourages the love of reading. The teacher becomes the vessel from which positive feelings toward reading are shared. This is also an opportunity to address how spoken language differs from written language (Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004). This technique also exposes students to a variety of books they may not have normally read, which becomes the catalyst for developing lifetime learners and lovers of reading. Another skill that is often a result is critical thinking (Greenawalt, 2010). When teachers serve as a model for how to ask questions, how to delve deeper into the text and how to

connect the text to other knowledge, students are given a classic example of the processes needed to fully engage with the text.

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

Read-Aloud In Middle School

Clearly supporting the read-aloud technique in middle school, Ivey (2003) states, “The bottom line is that when teachers read to students, they enhance students’ understanding and their inclination to read independently” (p. 812). In elementary school, the motivation for students to read is there; students are there to learn to read. However, when they enter middle school, sometimes their reading ability does not match what they are expected to read. The disparity between reading ability and text often becomes clearer in these grades. Teacher Linda Rief understands how important read-aloud is in bridging students’ reading difficulties with the text “[it is] because of the struggling readers, who don’t really read on their own when given the choice, that I must find the time to read the

stories aloud” (Ariail & Albright, 2006, p. 69). In fact, Ivey and Broaddus’ (2001) survey of 1,700 middle school students found that students preferred teacher read-aloud as a method of delivery and that read-aloud brought about positive student attitudes toward reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ariail & Albright, 2006; Ivey, 2003).

Follos (2007) shares, “Elementary school children love story time. Removing read-aloud structure from the secondary curriculum places an inordinate amount of stress on students who struggle with independent reading skills” (p. 20). Rycik and Irvin (2005) convey support of the read-aloud in middle school, but note that they understand why some may be apprehensive to try this strategy. “Some middle grades teachers might be concerned that read-alouds will make their students passive or dependent, but reading aloud to students actually whets their appetite for reading on their own” (p. 105).

Teachers must employ questioning techniques within the read-aloud to ensure that students are paying attention and comprehension questions are correctly answered.

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

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

Middle school is the time when reading skills start to catch up to listening skills (Rycik & Irvin, 2005; Seefeldt, 2003). As reading and listening skills do not normally converge until around eighth grade, it stands to reason that reading to children is an activity that does not have an expiration date (Biemiller, 2003). Students who are read to

are exposed to new and interesting experiences with literature that they may not have otherwise had access to if forced to read everything independently (Seefeldt, 2003). This is also a time for middle school students to just enjoy the literature (Tingley, 1986). Read-aloud for this age group should show that reading is not just about answering the questions at the end of the passage or chapter; it should be about showing how literature can be enjoyable (Seefeldt, 2003). For many students, reading in the middle school is centered on a textbook passage and follow-up questions. Read-aloud can expand students' exposure to reading materials, even materials above their instructional level, by utilizing their listening skills. When the students' only task is to listen to the material being read, not worrying about pronunciation, taking turns reading, etc., comprehension becomes the end result. Teachers can take advantage of the fact that many students have a higher listening capacity level than reading level by utilizing read-aloud. According to Walther and Fuhler (2008), "All in all, read-aloud time is relaxing, enjoyable, educational, and thought provoking – a time when an author's words can fill the classroom and the minds of the listeners. Who knows the long-term impact of those words?" (p. 8). Moreover, it is interesting to note what students are saying about their experience with read-alouds in middle school.

Ivey (2003) compiled student responses from a study she and Broaddus completed on teacher read-alouds. Some of the responses received from students in the intermediate grades contained thoughts that may make the difference between wanting to try this strategy and maintaining middle level status quo. Student reactions on how the teacher makes the text more understandable include:

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

- She makes it so interesting.
- If it was me reading I wouldn't finish it because I thought the beginning was kind of not interesting. But since she's been reading it every day it's getting more interesting, so [I] like that.
- When other people are reading to me, they can explain it better or something. And they got a better accent in saying it and stuff (Ivey, 2003, p. 812).

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

- Sometimes my teacher reads from big books with small writing and makes it interesting. She makes us want to read it.
- I want to read in this class when the teacher reads a little part of the book. If it is interesting, I want to find out about the rest of the book (Ivey, 2003, p. 812).

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

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

- I did not experience the joy of being read aloud to until the 11th grade. My English teacher brought stories to life. When he read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to us, he gave each character a personality beyond words. His style of reading and the fact that he read aloud brought excitement into my life that I had not felt since the first grade.
- Read-alouds provided me with an opportunity to model the many different purposes for reading. I could demonstrate the variety of resources that readers use daily, the pleasure readers draw from the activity, and the volume of information that is available in books.
- It is not just what you read but the teaching strategy that is modeled that makes an impact (p. 3).

If read-aloud is to become commonplace in the middle school, all teachers should understand the importance. “By expanding their read-alouds to include expository, descriptive, and poetic text, teachers increase students’ opportunities to read in these areas and build their knowledge base” (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010, p. 181). A group effort is required to support the continued literacy improvement of secondary students. The science teacher can scaffold difficult sections through read-aloud supported with charts, graphs, pictures, maps, etc. (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010). A myriad of trade books is available to read aloud in a history classroom. Finally, math teachers can utilize books in the “Math Out Loud” series by Pat Mower (2003); this series gives teachers and students the tools to read about the math problems and talk their way through them.

Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011) recount their classroom experiences with read-aloud as a support in the acquisition of informational texts. They report that when the read-aloud began, most students sat quietly listening, but this changed over time.

Students began making connections to the text, text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world. The independent connections by the students may not have taken place without the scaffolding of synthesizing information (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011). “Content area literacy instruction can be beneficial for all students, including those who struggle; done well, it provides them with needed guidance in using a broad range of texts and literacy practices” (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009, p. 5).

Middle school teachers’ confidence in read-aloud is essential. Albright and Ariail (2005) administered a survey of read-aloud practices in a study of middle school teachers. Research is limited in the middle school read-aloud and the responses that they received were from one school district, but the findings were promising. A survey of 141 middle school teachers from a school district in Texas, 85.8% of teachers reported reading aloud with their students; this included all special education and reading teachers (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Modeling, accessibility of text and increasing understanding were the top three most frequent answers given by the teachers for their basis of read-aloud. “I read aloud to my students so students can concentrate on comprehension rather than focus on pronunciation” (Albright & Ariail, 2005, p. 585). The top reasons for not reading aloud included: books not being appropriate for the content and not thinking about read-aloud as a strategy. The researchers found that when read-aloud was introduced as a plausible technique through a course, in-service or workshop, the number of teachers who incorporated read-aloud went from 57.4% to 81.4% (Albright & Ariail, 2005). However, as these researchers present across the country, they have found that teachers are eager to share their read-aloud practices and experiences; Ariail and Albright (2006) are now looking for more supporting rationale for a strategy they feel is essential. The hope and

expectation of the researchers is to provide evidence for advocating the read-aloud technique.

Is Read-Aloud the Best Solution?

Middle school teachers can choose from teacher-centered techniques like lecture to student-centered techniques like Literature Circles to a multitude of techniques that fall somewhere in between. Those that best fit the needs of the student and the teacher need to be implemented. Read-aloud has both strengths and weaknesses. With a technique that has proven success in elementary and intervention settings, investigating the strengths of this technique could deepen the pool of appropriate strategies for use in the middle school classroom. In essence, teachers should not limit their teaching techniques, but instead, have a variety that can be utilized as the situation arises.

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

The potential weakness of read-aloud can be seen as being too teacher-directed or lacking the release of responsibility to the students to take ownership of the learning.

Although students must be actively engaged in read-aloud, some may view it as a passive activity, with students simply being onlookers. When done correctly, the teacher and the students are both actively involved — the teacher actively reading and guiding questions and the students actively listening, processing the information and taking part in discussion. While one cannot say that read-aloud is the best technique for daily instruction, simply dismissing read-aloud as an elementary technique is being short-sighted.

Current Investigation

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

Methods

Participants

The groups studied were students in “Middle School X,” grade six, the control group; and “Middle School Y,” grade six, the experimental group. Each group was formed from two classrooms of students. The populations of the schools range between 300-500 students per year and are both within the same school division that has an overall demographic breakdown of 63:31 African American to White, with 40% being economically disadvantaged. The resulting sample included $n = 70$ students in the control group and $n = 90$ student in the treatment group.

Instrumentation

The use of literature and short passages aligned well with the baseline and final assessment, DORA. The DORA assesses comprehension with the usage of short passages; therefore, the skills taught during read-aloud included strategies the students could call-upon during various comprehension assessments. More information on the DORA assessment tool is available at www.letsgolearn.com.

Procedures

Prior to the beginning of the formal research study period, the researcher provided professional development for the teachers in the treatment group, first as an introduction to the study, in August, and at two other times coinciding with the beginning of the nine-week periods: October and February.

Time spent on read-aloud was to average at least three days per week for 15 to 20 minute time periods. Although treatment differed in delivery by teacher, the strategy remained the same, read-aloud. During the read-aloud, teachers stop, ask guiding and

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

The DORA test was administered to the control and experimental groups in September and October and April. The baseline data was collected during the first nine-week period; the final data was collected at the end of the third nine-week period. The data that was collected was the DORA raw scores for comprehension and vocabulary portions of the assessment.

Results

Demographics

For purposes of this study, the only demographical data analyzed were gender. Within the constructs of instruction, gender was the one area in which analysis was performed to note any trends. Table 1 provides a summary of gender throughout the study. The control group included $n = 41$ males and $n = 29$ females; the treatment group included $n = 52$ males and $n = 38$ females. Reliability analyses for both subtests were analyzed through Cronbach’s Alpha. Cronbach’s Alpha indicated acceptable reliability of each subtest results of $a = .976$ for comprehension, and $a = .971$ for vocabulary data.

Repeated Measured Factorial ANOVA

Based on the results of the tenability of assumption tests, it was determined that a Repeated Measures Factorial ANOVA was the most appropriate analysis for addressing research questions. Multivariate analysis indicates overall significant differences were found across the two groups, $F= 10.054, p <.001$ (Hotelling's Trace). This indicates that the intervention did have a significant impact on both the vocabulary and comprehension assessment scores overall, for the students in the treatment group relative to the control group.

Gender was assessed in the multivariate analysis and was found not to be significant. Noteworthy, however, is that although not significantly different, the average mean change in comprehension and vocabulary scores across the two groups reveals the impact of the treatment that was demonstratively different for males relative to females. Specifically, gains were greater for the males on comprehension in the treatment group, and for the females on vocabulary in the treatment group, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Average Mean Change on DORA Comprehension and Vocabulary Scores

	Gender	Control	Treatment
Comprehension	Males	1.15	1.68
	Females	1.45	1.28
Vocabulary	Males	1.15	1.60
	Females	1.25	1.90

The test of between-subjects effects measures the impact of the intervention for each assessment independently. Vocabulary and comprehension analysis reveal no significant interaction across the two groups or genders, or for the main effect for

vocabulary. However, there is significant main effect with comprehension ($F = 7.496, p = .007$), with the male students in the treatment group demonstrating the greatest gains in comprehension across the three data collection periods.

Discussion

The current investigation indicates that read-alouds, as a reading intervention, may have an impact on student gains in vocabulary and most significantly in comprehension, as measured by the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment. Additionally, these gains were found to be greatest for treatment group male students on comprehension and for treatment group females on vocabulary.

While this research presents promising results for the implementation of read-aloud on student achievement, there is a limitation to be noted. Students were not randomly assigned to the control and treatment groups; their membership was determined by their classroom assignment. While this does present an internal validity limitation to these findings, the external validity (generalizability) of this investigation is maximized in that the study was conducted in real classrooms with real six grade students. Additionally, the data provides a snapshot of a full school year of students' potential gains. Seventy-one control group students and 90 experimental group students took both the pre and posttest. While a large sample is always desired, this sample size provided sufficient population for the analyses being conducted, and positive trends were revealed.

The data across both groups showed that students had improved in vocabulary and comprehension; this was positive data that also supported the research hypothesis. The control group did have gains in comprehension and vocabulary. On average, the boys gained the equivalent of a grade level and the girls gained the equivalent of a grade level

plus a few months. The experimental group boys averaged over 1.5 years of growth in comprehension and the girls averaged 1.25 years. Vocabulary for the experimental group demonstrated significant gains of over 1.5 years for the boys and nearly two years for the girls. As many of the students were not at grade level when the year began, these results speak to the potential benefit of the read-alouds in moving students closer to grade appropriate levels.

Within the treatment group, specifically the boys, notable gains were also discovered. As this was not a focus of the research hypothesis, this was an informative result of the potential impact of the read-aloud intervention. This is not to discount the gains made by the girls in the treatment group, but to look back at the charts depicting the gains the boys made from the pretest to posttest was rewarding. The results from the assessments also provided an additional link between the quantitative and qualitative data where the boys were especially involved and engaged in the activities during read-aloud time. Accordingly, their results confirmed that they were preserving the information and strategies from the lessons.

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

Other research on how to best motivate middle school boys to read address boys' book clubs which includes read-aloud practices (Mitchell et al., 2008). However, linking read-aloud to motivating middle school boys to read is a topic that needs further exploration.

Conclusion

Read-aloud is a technique that has been shown to be successful in elementary school. So much so that it has become a best-practice tool throughout the primary grades (Wolsey, Lapp & Dow, 2010). Steadily, research is beginning to support the continued implementation into middle school. Middle school students have differing needs and attitudes than their younger counterparts, but a successful technique crosses all age lines. The current investigation demonstrates the potential impact of read-aloud techniques with students in middle school, and most notably a positive impact with male students.

No one will disagree with wanting all students to be successful, so teachers in primary and secondary schools must implement a technique that supports vocabulary and comprehension acquisition. "One last thought about reading aloud: it can't be hurried. As the world spins faster and communication shrinks to the size of Twitter, we need to make room for the sound of a voice reading a story: details creating another place; the well-paced unfolding of plot; the blossoming of character; the luxury of language. Thus is culture passed on, through stories shared, language spoken and heard" (McDonnell, 2010, p. 73).

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