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Use of read alouds to increase reading comprehension

Heather Cynthia Williams

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USE OF READ ALOUDS TO INCREASE READING COMPREHENSION

A Project
Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Education: Reading/Language Arts

by Heather Cynthia Williams June 2006
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READING COMPREHENSION

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[June 9, 2006]
ABSTRACT

There is a shift from learning to read towards reading to learn beginning in the fourth grade. This project focuses on the use of read alouds to teach concepts such as inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions to increase reading comprehension in fourth graders. Literature supports the importance of read alouds to increase vocabulary, listening skills, and reading comprehension.

Student and teacher questionnaires were used to determine beginning and ending beliefs about and skills to use with reading. Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading scores were used to establish baseline, formative, and summative scores that measure readability levels, as well as, reading comprehension. Eight read aloud sessions were conducted using children’s literature to teach fourth graders how to question, make predictions, and organize their reading in a Reader’s Notebook.

According to the follow-up student questionnaires, the students’ perceptions about reading became that reading is not so hard given the ideas to organize reading thoughts in the Reader’s Notebooks. The students’ reading scores gradually increased throughout the school year as well.
Reading aloud allows students the freedom to "think" through a book without the problems of decoding, interpreting, and comprehending simultaneously. The fourth grade students became aware of the idea that reading is about questioning, predicting, and making generalizations to draw conclusions.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In Kindergarten reading comprehension is primarily taught through read-alouds because the students are learning letters, sounds, sight words, and phonics, rather than reading for comprehension. However, through guided reading, the books that are independently read at this level are highly decodable and patterned. Consequently, there is very little story involved to assess comprehension on an independent reading basis. I have found that through read-alouds, the students are able to make connections and get a better understanding of the text. I believe this is mainly due to the fact that they are able to talk out the story as a group, with teacher guidance, through the entire story. It is not merely left to their interpretation. All of the text-talk is generated through predicting, questioning and making connections.

This got me to thinking about other grade levels where reading instruction typically ends after the third grade. By the end of third grade, the general belief is that students should have the necessary foundation of reading to be successful, literate, life-long learners and
no further instruction is needed. My belief is that students do not fully begin to read until after the second or third grade. In general there is not enough time left to plan for reading instruction, and even if there is a little time, it is not small group instruction, such as guided reading. In the fourth grade, there is also a switch from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" using non-fiction texts. As a result, there are many, many students who begin to falter in reading and writing because they are not able to comprehend the texts they are trying to read.

Just like we also need a break from doing our own writing, we all need a break from reading. Sometimes the frustration level of my students increases when they are writing because they are just beginning. It is at these times that I like to give them a chance to dictate their thoughts to me, so I can be the transcriber. Similarly, I will do the reading with read alouds and let the students decipher the text as we go through it together, discussing concepts of print, story elements, prediction, and many other strategies. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) ascertain that, "because children move from hearing to reading to telling to writing original stories that include the literary patterns to which they are exposed
(Peck, 1989), the read-aloud is paramount in a child’s literacy development” (p. 15). Therefore, read alouds and the ensuing discussions are used to increase comprehension.

Statement of the Problem

The switch from learning to read to reading to learn is difficult for many students. In 1994, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that about “42 percent of fourth-graders were reading at a ‘below-basic’ level” (Kame’enui, Adams & Lyon, 1996). However, there has been a shift from 1994 to 2001. According to the National School Boards Association (April 24, 2001), “more than a third of U. S. fourth graders—37 percent—read at the below-basic level.” There are many new texts introduced in the fourth grade, especially non-fiction texts, that the students are expected to learn from by reading. The problem is that there are so many elements involved in understanding non-fiction text, which it makes it difficult to decipher what is wanted from the text and/or assignment. Similar to the concept of small group guided reading, these students will need to be introduced to book elements, such as headings, subheadings, and glossary. The general idea is to be able
to navigate through these texts with ease and read to
learn, ultimately comprehending what is read.

The same holds true for fiction texts as well. There
are many, many books within a child’s career as a student
that should be read and comprehended. Comprehension is a
daunting task in and of itself. The students must be able
to decode, make inferences, make generalizations, and
drawing conclusions. All while, connecting with the text
on three levels: text to self, text to text, and text to
world.

Questions Answered

This research will investigate the use of read-alouds
to increase reading comprehension. What is the impact of
teaching inference, generalization, and drawing
conclusions concepts through read-alouds on the reading
comprehension of students in grade four? Are the students
being exposed to read-alouds often enough to understand
their importance in terms of independent reading? Do the
students understand the concepts and strategies being
taught through the use of read-alouds and reader’s
notebooks? Are the students transferring the inference,
generalizing, and drawing conclusions concepts taught
through the read-alouds and reader’s notebooks to their independent reading?

Significance of the Project

Reading instruction occurs in Kindergarten, first, second and third grades. After third grade, students are expected to know how to read and practice doing so with fluency and complete comprehension, then, students begin reading to learn. Kindergarten, first, second, and third grades are simply the stepping-stones of lifelong reading. Kame‘enui, Adams and Lyon (1996) assert that, “During the first three years of schooling, ‘students learn to read’...Starting in fourth grade, schooling takes on a very different purpose, one that in many ways is more complex and demanding of higher-order thinking skills.” It is difficult to make the shift towards reading to learn, but if the foundation is not well established, the task will be overwhelming, and discouraging as well.

In fourth grade and beyond, students begin to use reading as a tool to learn new information. Because this type of reading requires the use of new comprehension strategies, reading instruction needs to be continued throughout the schooling process of the students. There are many reading strategies and concepts that cannot be
meaningfully taught until the students are at least in grade four and have been introduced to new textual structures and genres.

There are three interrelated aspects of reading that are especially difficult for fourth graders who have made the shift towards reading to learn: inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions. This project will focus on using read alouds, a reader’s notebook and graphic organizers, to make clear the concepts of inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

Definitions of Terms
Read Aloud: A book read orally to students for story, content, intonation, concepts of print, and other reading elements.
Independent Reading: Individual reading.
Guided Reading: Small group reading instruction.
Inference: Using the information given to arrive at a conclusion or assumption.
Generalizations: Make a general conclusion from a general rule.
Drawing conclusions: Using the information given from a text and understanding what will happen next.
Accelerated Reader (A.R.): A reading program that uses leveled texts to measure independent reading comprehension by allowing students to take computerized quizzes.

STAR Reading: Assesses the reading levels of students, measures growth throughout the school year, and predicts results on major tests.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): “The Nation’s Report Card,” is the measure of student achievement that compares the performance of students across the nation.

Text-to-Text: Connections that are made by the reader that remind them of a previous text that they read.

Text-to-Self: Connects that are made by the reader that reminds the reader of something that has happened in his/her life.

Limitations of the Project
The research was limited to one, self-contained fourth grade classroom. The research was limited to in-class reading experiences, such as independent reading, read-alouds, and guided reading within the respective classroom. The research was limited to the use of Reader’s
Notebooks at school and at home during read aloud and independent reading sessions.

The research did not include read alouds for fun, such as "fillers." The research did not include Corrective Reading time when the students are mixed grade levels and classrooms. The research did not include collaborative readings, such as those provided by the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts Series.

Organization of the Remainder of the Chapters

Chapter two will contain a review of the literature relevant to the impact and importance of using read alouds to increase independent reading comprehension in the classroom. Chapter three will discuss the inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions concepts to be taught through read alouds, using a reader's notebook and graphic organizers, as well as the implementation of the project. Chapter four will explain the findings from the read aloud sessions, Accelerated Reader quizzes, reader's notebooks, and questionnaires. Chapter five will discuss the conclusions of the data collected and presented in chapter four.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to the Chapter

There is a shift in the fourth grade for students to read to learn. Once students have completed the primary grades, students are expected to read independently (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001/2002, p. 335), therefore, it is thought that there is no longer a need for formal reading instruction.

The literature review helped to determine the impact of teaching concepts and strategies using a reader’s notebook through read alouds to increase reading comprehension in the fourth grade. Read alouds are used to engage the student listener while developing schema, increasing comprehension skills, and nurturing critical thinking skills (“Read Alouds,” n.d., para. 1). Students need to be taught to tap into their own schemas and prior knowledge for comprehension and connectedness.

The literature review will address three topics: (a) exposure to read alouds, (b) understanding of inference, generalization and drawing conclusion, and (c) transference of these concepts to independent reading. The present view is limited to the investigation of the
importance and impacts of read alouds. Studies targeting read alouds for fun in school are excluded.

The Exposure to Read Alouds

Research has shown, as proven by renowned author, Jim Trelease, of *The Read Aloud Handbook* (2001), "that reading aloud to a child is the single most important factor in raising a reader. These inexpensive fifteen minutes a day are the best-kept secret in American education" (p. xiii). Reading aloud is the best time-filler whether the child is at home, at school, in the car or in the doctor’s office.

Reading about more than words. It is about emotion, connections, predictions, sharing, and excitement.

According to Jim Trelease (2001),

Whenever an adult reads to a child, three important things are happening simultaneously and painlessly: (1) a pleasure-connection is being made between child and book; (2) both parent and child are learning something from the book they’re sharing (double learning); and (3) the adult is pouring sounds and syllables called words into the child’s ear. (p. 39)

It is quite an enjoyable experience to hold your child on your lap and read together, making comments and
explanations as you read. But, when should the reading aloud stop?

When they can read independently? When you feel they are too old? It is important to continue reading aloud to your child even if he learns to read on his own allows the child to learn a lot about the flow of language. Their vocabulary increases and they are afforded many, many opportunities to hear what good reading sounds like (Coiro, 1998). Reading to your children should never stop, just as reading to your students should never stop simply because they seem to be too old. No one is ever too old to stop listening to someone read to you.

Teachers often find it pleasurable to sit and read to their students, especially those in the primary grades. Although it is accepted for the primary grades, many teachers of intermediate students find that there is little relevance to their subject matter and/or curriculum or to their students. Reading aloud with older students supplies an opportunity to hear diverse interpretations, share ideas with everyone, and expand their own understanding skills (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 11). Something can always be learned from reading, whether a text is being read to you, with you, or by you.
Some texts are difficult to read, and require much effort on the part of the reader. Being read to, allows the listener to focus on the content of the text, to make connections and to use prior knowledge, rather than deciphering the language of the text. Once a child begins reading independently, his vocabulary will expand greatly with the help of reading literature. Jim Trelease, (2001) author of The Read Aloud Handbook said,

Reading aloud to children helps them develop and improve literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. And since children listen on a higher level than they read, listening to other readers stimulates growth and understanding of vocabulary and language patterns. Therefore, children can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own. (p. 45)

Reading aloud leaves room for the student to do all of the other skills that are necessary for comprehension, such as analyzing the text.

Read alouds are not merely an at-home activity. They should also be a large part in school curriculum across the grade levels. A variety of research studies indicate
that reading alouds occur predominantly in the primary grades, rather than in intermediate classrooms. Unfortunately, when read alouds are used, it is often seen as a way of calming the students down, rather than as an important reading instructional strategy (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, pp. 6-7).

Reading aloud is a great way to focus on strategies and concepts that the students are having difficulties understanding and using.

Teachers will have to be trained to effectively use a read aloud to support the curriculum in the classroom. Reading aloud is not only for primary grades either. It is useful across the school spectrum. “In the upper grades, most children need direct instruction in reasoning and responding to text” (Schifini, n.d.). In conjunction with read alouds the students could use a reader’s notebook to use as a personal dictionary to write down words and definitions of interesting and unknown words, make connections, make comments, ask questions, organize thoughts and information, and write.

Reading aloud is an excellent technique to introduce students to the conventions of print in the primary grades. As the students get older and begin to learn more and more information daily, it is crucial to go on with
teaching the next concept and the next strategy. An article titled, Research Based Teaching Practices on the Foundation for Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning web site (www.cell-exll.com), states that “[t]he listening and thinking skills used during reading aloud help students with the development of comprehension skills that are used when students read themselves.” Read alouds give the students a chance to be active listeners and participants in their own education.

Theories Related to Reading Acquisition and Comprehension

Reading acquisition begins at birth with reading to and talking with a child. We read and talk to children for all the same reasons. We read to reassure, entertain, and to create a bond. We read to inform or explain and to arouse curiosity, as well as to inspire. “But in reading aloud, we also: condition the child’s brain to associate reading with pleasure, create background knowledge, build vocabulary, provide a reading role model” (Trelease, 2001, p. 6). Reading aloud enables the reader and the listener(s) to connect with the book and each other.

Even before a child is able to read the words on a page independently, he is developing vocabulary by hearing words in conversation and through books read to him. The
listening vocabulary becomes the reservoir of words that supply the speaking and writing vocabulary—all at the same time (Trelease, 2001, p. 9). Everything works together to build upon each other. The scaffolding of language vocabulary, reading, and writing is ever-expanding and interweaving.

Vocabulary plays a huge role in reading acquisition and comprehension. Researchers believe that on average, a person with a good vocabulary will acquire or learn fifteen new words a day. This is definitely more words that can be explicitly taught within a classroom setting daily. Vocabulary acquisition is based on classroom teaching, reading, television, and conversation. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (2003) and vocabulary experts agree that,

Adequate reading comprehension depends on a person already knowing between 90 and 95 percent of the words in a text. Knowing that percentage of words allows the reader to get the main thrust of what is being said and therefore to guess correctly what the unfamiliar words probably mean. (p. 16)

This makes perfect sense especially in terms of academic reading as compared to enjoyable reading.
If a student is reading a chapter in a textbook for school, for example, he might struggle through the pronunciation as well as the meaning of many words, and read at a much slower rate. Confusion was due to the less someone knows about a subject or the associated vocabulary, the slower one must read. This caused the onset of difficult Reading Comprehension. The less one understands, the less you, the more difficult the reading becomes. (Trelease, 2001, P. 11) Because the student spent much of his reading time decoding the text, little comprehension has taken place, and possibly little retention. There is a snowball effect that begins occurring with each faltering step in the process of reading.

Reading aloud to kids will help to bridge the gap between reading frustration and reading comprehension. Carol Blessing affirms that,

Studies by Stephen Krashen, Jim Trelease, and Janet Allen have shown that reading to kids boosts their reading comprehension, increases their vocabularies, and helps them become better writers. In fact, students who are read to are more motivated to read themselves-increasing the likelihood that they will one day become
independent lifelong readers. (Blessing, 2005, p. 44)

Students need to hear what good reading sound like so there is something for them to model after or use as a guide to help assist in their own reading.

It is difficult to pinpoint how or what to teach students to comprehend what they read. Research conducted by John Guthrie and his colleagues shows that reading instruction, which focuses on a coherent knowledge field over a period of time, enhances students' general vocabularies. It also improves their general fluency and motivation to read (Hirsch, 2003, p. 28).

Again, scaffolding that is explicitly taught, implied upon, and inherent, every aspect of reading and writing builds and interweaves to domain knowledge; the basic knowledge that is needed to comprehend and move to the next level. E. D. Hirsch Jr. (2003), says of scaffolding that,

There is current scientific agreement on at least three principles, which have useful implications for improving students' reading comprehension. 1. Fluency allows the mind to concentrate on comprehension. 2. Breadth of vocabulary increases comprehension and
facilitates further learning. 3. Domain knowledge increases fluency, broadens vocabulary, and enables deeper comprehension.

(p. 12)

The Understanding of Concepts: Inference, Generalizations, and Drawing Conclusions

Reading aloud is good modeling of the necessary components of reading through language and oral speech. Reading aloud provides exposition of oral reading and fluency. Teachers demonstrate the way stories are constructed and how language in books is different from the language in oral speech" (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 7). Through read alouds, the students are given the opportunity to not only hear fluency and vocabulary, but to learn how to read by making connections, using prior knowledge, and developing vocabulary and pronunciation.

Read alouds are part of the process of teaching reading, and just like any other subject skill, concept, or strategy taught, it is imperative that the teacher is well versed with the text as well as with prepared discussion points. Planning is required in developing comprehension strategies through read alouds. It is also important to set up an atmosphere of thinking, listening, and discussion (Gold & Gibson, 2004, para. 1). When
teaching a concept through a read aloud, the teacher must first preview the text, mark stopping points and questioning, make personal connections, and deeply look at the text for higher level thinking questions that help the students to really delve into the concept.

Students are believed to become literate explorers. (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 10). We want them to make text-to-text connections, have intelligent, relevant text discussions, and to fluently understand the meaning, both prevalent and obscured of the text. But most importantly, through these "lessons" the students should be developing a love of life-long reading. After all, it's all about the ability to make text-to-text and text-to-self connections. This is an important skill readers use to make sense of their literary experiences (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003, p. 11). Everything comes down to making connections.

Teaching the concepts of inference, generalization and drawing conclusions through read alouds is not restricted to books used as reading merely for the sake of reading. Many of the state and district adopted Math, Science, and Social Studies series' are complimented with read aloud books that help enhance the concepts to be taught. In The NERA Journal (Volume 34, Number 1, 1998), Donna Maxim wrote, "[w]hen I plan for reading aloud during
math time, I choose books that invite my students to think and talk mathematically, that pose a problem, or that highlights a particular math concept or strategy” (para. 1). Teachers ought to consider stories that are focused on teaching concepts as well. These stories are often interactive in nature. They expect the students to question, think, and solve the situations/problems presented to them.

Reading aloud is a process of gathering and deciphering information in an enjoyable setting. As more material is introduced and reintroduced to the student, there should be a system of practice in place for the student to try on his own, such as the reader’s notebook, graphic organizers, or post-its. As described in the book, *Guided Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6*, by Fountas and Pinnell (2000),

The Reader’s Notebook helps students account for what they read and become better readers by engaging in critical thinking and reflection about how to interpret a text; connecting reading and writing in many genres; and using the notebook to promote and support discussion. Emphasize the intersection of thinking, talking, and writing in students’ reading of a text. Have
them use the Reader’s Notebook and explore the opportunities to expand their skills. (p. 10)
The student can take whatever skill was taught, and try to apply it to their independent reading time to reflect what was learned. After all, we are providing our students with the foundation of life and a pathway to a successful future.

Students in the fourth grade have difficulty grasping the idea of inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions. Each of the three areas is on the same level because they are intertwined together. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, to infer means, “to arrive at a conclusion from facts or premises.” These three areas need to be explicitly taught for comprehension to be complete. Research states that the value of explicitly teaching children skills, such as inference, is that reading is enjoyed. It is therefore more likely to be embarked on readily, even by those who found reading to be difficult (Johnson & McGee, 2003, p. 49). Inference, generalizing, and drawing conclusions are complicated to understand and incorporate into their own reading. Explicitly teaching these skills, especially through read alouds, affords the students a real example to refer upon when independently reading.
As stated earlier, a good reader knows 90 to 95 percent of the words in the text so that most of his attention will be to use higher order thinking skills, such as inference, to help in comprehension. Research states that one of the most effective ways to increase vocabulary and reading levels is by reading. Hirsch believes that, we learn from infancy that oral language comprehension requires reading. Reading to a child will help to construct meaning by furnish the child with missing knowledge. Therefore, the child is able to begin making predictions based on the pictures and the text. Prior knowledge is essential in the comprehension of written texts. Reading comprehension depends on reading between the lines and sorting out the story. Once the words have been decoded, reading comprehension requires the active construction of inference/prediction from remarks that are full of unstated premises (2003, pp. 17-20).

Paired with reading, conversation is also an essential tool for vocabulary development and reading skill. However, vocabulary development doesn’t only rely on being introduced to a word only once, it is the repeated exposure of words that help to build all the connotations and denotations of words. Vocabulary grows
gradually, moving from exposure to a word to a full and flexible knowledge (Stahl, 2003, p. 19). This is the exact reason why reading more can increase vocabulary and will build a better reader.

Once a sufficient vocabulary bank is built up, students will be introduced to reading for meaning. Inference allows a reader to “read between the lines and make predictions” using prior or background knowledge. Trabasso and Magliano, 1996, noted that there are three kinds of inferences,

Backward inferences (explanations)...concern the reasons why something occurs, such as motive, physical cause, or enabling condition...Concurrent inferences (associations)...provide information on the features and functions of persons, objects, and events in the text. Forward inferences (predictions)...inferences made by readers about future consequences of a focal event. (Narvaez, van der Broek & Barron Ruiz, 1999, p. 488)

No wonder, inference, making generalizations, and drawing conclusions are such complex skills. They are not clear-cut; rather, they are so intertwined and not
"right-there" skills. These skills have to be discovered within a text.

Using higher level thinking skills is the fun part about reading. When a reader is able to make connections with the text and relate them to other things in and outside of the text, that is the meat of what is being read. The Cuesta College web site testifies that,

In drawing conclusions (making inferences), you are getting at the ultimate meaning of things—what is important, why it is important, how one event influences another, how one happening leads to another. Simply getting the facts in reading is not enough—you must think about what those facts mean to you.

The idea behind these concepts is to use everything that is already known by the reader and build upon it more and more. The reader needs to get inside the story for total comprehension to become evident.

Fiction and Non-Fiction Strategies

Since there is a reading shift beginning in the fourth grade from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," there is also a shift from primarily fiction towards primarily non-fiction, as with textbooks. Research
has shown that reading aloud to students, even in the intermediate and middle school grades, is an effective tool in teaching content-area strategies. Lettie Albright (2002) asserts

Reading picture books aloud is an ideal strategy for content-area teachers because of the short format, in-depth treatment of topics, and visual and content appeal of the books. In addition, picture books attend to a wide variety of topics and can be used in any content area. Although many intermediate and middle school teachers do not consider using them because they believe they are for younger children, numerous picture books are better suited for older readers, because they address more mature issues.

(Colker)

In these instances, read alouds become more than listening for pleasure. Deanna Camp (2000) advocates that in the elementary grades, many teachers couple fiction and nonfiction texts together to supplement for content areas. Nonfiction books are used to answer questions in a straightforward manner, while fiction texts present the content in an easy-to-comprehend manner (Colker). They are used for both fiction and non-fiction content area topics.
The shift towards non-fiction in the fourth grade is important because informational texts will help to improve literacy development. Jeanne Chall believes that there is a need to place greater emphasis on nonfiction in language-arts classes. This is essential for children to learn the words and concepts they need to understand general nonfiction texts around them, such as: newspapers, magazines addressed to the general public (Hirsch, 2003, p. 21). Non-fiction texts are very informational in form partly due to the inclusion of graphical devices.

The Transference of Concepts to Independent Reading

Read alouds should not always be "just for fun." They should be read sparingly, at least in school; use the "fun" books for at-home read aloud checkout. This helps to make the home reading experience more enjoyable as well. The Foundation for Comprehensive Early Literacy Learning web-site suggests that,

Reading aloud to students allows them to experience great examples of literature, works they would not be able to read on their own at this point in their learning, and to experience a variety of forms and styles of writing. It acquaints them with the language and form of
books and allows them to appreciate the pleasure that comes from reading without having to concentrate on the mechanics of decoding the printed word. Reading aloud encourages them to want to emulate the reader and to acquire the skills that will allow them to enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction of reading themselves.

School is concerned with teaching those things that need to be learned within a given period of time. Educators should keep the majority of read alouds for concept and strategy teaching, across the curriculum, of course. Previewing books before they are presented to the students for reading and discussion will lead to more successful lessons.

It is important for children to not only listen to a read aloud, but also to become an active participant. Lawrence R. Sipe (2002) states, "I constructed five conceptual categories in order to describe conversational turns that indicated expressive engagement...dramatizing, talking back, critiquing/controlling, inserting, and taking over" (p. 447). With these five typologies, the student will read between the lines, visualize the story, make connections, understand text vocabulary, etc... The
goal of using read alouds is to increase comprehension, especially during independent reading.

Educators often assume, or rather, hope, that every text a child picks up and reads will result in complete fluency and total comprehension or understanding by making text-to-text and/or text-to-self connections with the events and themes of a book (Bluestein, 2002, p. 433). But we know that this is not the case. It takes time to teach students the strategies of good readers and writers.

It is not easy to learn and use complete comprehension, but it is not a lost cause either. Educators must challenge their students. As Snow and Dickinson (1991) pointed out, "Comprehending and finding language to express ideas that go beyond the here and now is a new and challenging experience for young children" (Beck & McKeown, 2001, p. 12). Then, in order for students to take the information presented to them, the teacher should give them opportunities to apply the teachings to their independent reading and writing.

Through all of the instruction and guided practice, the students will begin to see and use the ideas that have been offered to them. Language is not an isolated activity, but a fundamental instrument used for dealing with the world. The best way to expand student language is
to increase their understanding of what language is (Hirsch, 2003, p. 22). It is essential for the teacher to revisit the concepts through different read alouds throughout the school year. Teachers will model what their students are to learn or do.

Conclusion of the Chapter

Serafini and Giorgis (2003) believe that, “Reading instruction in schools should develop students’ passion to read, support their engagements with texts of all sorts, and encourage them to become lifelong readers capable of fully participating in a democratic society” (p. 7). Reading instruction means giving students strategies that work. Reading instruction is guided and independent practice, as well as, developing listening, questioning, and decoding skills. Reading instruction is vocabulary development, improving fluency, and a guide to comprehension. Hirsch (2003) states that, “[l]anguage is not an isolated sphere of activity but our fundamental human instrument for dealing with the world. The best way to expand students’ language is to expand their understanding of what language refers to” (p. 22).

The literature studied for this review suggests that read alouds can and should be done regularly with all age
and grade levels. Read alouds foster critical and higher level thinking skills if presented in the correct format. Read alouds should not be done in isolation, but full of discussion and regularly.

The goal for any read aloud should be to engage the listener. There should be a reading environment created, packed with eyes, ears, inquisitive minds and voices of the reader(s) and listener(s).

While engaged, the listener should be able to process the text, make connections, form text-related questions, read between the lines, and discuss the text with peers.

The read aloud gives the students an opportunity to become familiar with texts that might be out of their comfort zones. They will be introduced to different genres and authors. Students will get the chance to hear what a text should sound like orally. Students may feel comfortable enough to go beyond what is typically their taste in literature.

Are students being exposed to read alouds often enough? Yes and no. Many primary students are exposed to read alouds frequently. However, I wonder if they are quality read alouds, or more for fun. On the other hand, intermediate students are not exposed to them often enough. But there is huge learning potential available
from using read alouds to enhance the curriculum, especially in the intermediate grades.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Chapter

This research investigated the use of read-alouds to increase reading comprehension in the intermediate grades. The question that guided the investigation was, "What is the impact of teaching the concepts of: inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions through read-alouds on the reading comprehension levels of fourth grade students?"

In order to determine the strength of using read-alouds to increase comprehension, there were several additional questions to be answered during the course of the research. Are the students being exposed to read-alouds often enough to understand their importance in terms of independent reading? Do the students understand the concepts of inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions that are being taught through the read-alouds? Are the students transferring these concepts taught through the read-alouds to their independent reading?

Methodology

The methodology used for the present research project is a case study. My study, according to LeCompte and

The case study was conducted at Four-Hands Ranch Elementary School in Beaumont, California. The case study focused on the students in one self-contained fourth-grade classroom with a total of twenty-nine students. The research component began in July of 2005. The classroom portion of the case study and data analysis began March 20, 2006 and continued until April 28, 2006. There were six full weeks of data collection, with one week off for Spring Break.

Sample Population

The Four-Hands Ranch Elementary School had a “high” 2004 Academic Performance Index (API) Base score of 777. The Hispanic subgroup API Base score was 747. The White (not of Hispanic origin) subgroup API Base score was 804. The Socioeconomically Disadvantaged subgroup API Base score was 734. Four-Hands Ranch Elementary School has a 2004 Statewide Rank of seventh. (http://api.cde.ca.gov/API2005/2004BaseSch.aspx?allcds=33669933331089)
I met with the principal of Four-Hands Ranch Elementary School to discuss the research proposal. There are four, fourth grade classrooms at the school. We worked together to examine the academic standing of all of the fourth grade classrooms. The classroom chosen was self-contained with a large portion of average-achieving students, and few Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) identified students. I met with the teacher before beginning to collect data, to discuss her read aloud experience within her classroom and her interest in participating in the study.

Data Sources

The study began with preliminary Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading scores of the students. These preliminary reading scores served as a baseline for average reading levels and comprehension.

A reading questionnaire (#1) was given to the students (see Appendix A), and a similar, but different one to the teacher (see Appendix B) before I began in the classroom. The student questionnaire analyzed reading habits and strategies, making personal connections, reading beliefs, and the definitions of inference, generalizing, and drawing conclusions. The teacher
questionnaire discussed classroom reading and read aloud background, read aloud strategies, thoughts reading to and by students, the problems students face with comprehending text, and the definitions of inference, generalizing, and drawing conclusions.

The students' preliminary Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading scores was collected from the classroom teacher. These scores are reported in grade levels. Each teacher works with the students in their classroom to set up goals for points and reading levels to be achieved in a given period of time; usually one trimester. The students read books within their reading levels range and take computerized tests to measure comprehension of the text.

The read aloud component of the project was imperative to the case study because the interviews, preliminary scores, and questionnaires, alone, simply could not answer the project questions. I selected and reviewed literature that was appropriate for teaching the concepts of inference, generalizing, and drawing conclusions, as well as the underlying concept of making connections. I created discussion questions, prompts, and strategies.

Graphic organizers and Reader's Notebooks were used as strategies to teach inference, generalizations, and
drawing conclusions. Graphic organizers were introduced as thinking maps, a means to organize details and thought about readings. The Reader's Notebooks were divided into three sections: dictionary, read alouds, and reflection, to aid in the comprehension of the concepts being taught with the texts. The dictionary section was used for defining unfamiliar words. The read aloud section was a place to ask questions, make predictions, generalizations, and make connections, draw conclusions, and graphic organizers. The independent section was a free write/journal section to write about the students' independent reading.

Once the read aloud sessions were complete, I collected the Reader's Notebooks from the students and observed their levels of thinking during the read aloud sessions. I went through each notebook taking notes on each component of each session. I made generalizations based on their reading and our session discussions. The notebooks were beneficial to the students because they contain many useful ways to organize thoughts while reading.

Follow-up questionnaires #2 (see Appendix C) were given to the students. The questionnaires determined
whether reading perceptions and pre-, during, and post-reading activities have changed.

The students' post-Accelerated Reader scores were collected from the classroom teacher.

The students will not be taking the STAR Reading test until later in May, so the post-scores were not available for the conclusion of the project. However, those scores will be available in the future.

Data Collection Procedures

The facts from the study were arranged in a logical, chronological order, which began on March 20, 2006 and ended on April 28, 2006. The facts began with the preliminary questionnaires and reading scores, then lead into read aloud sessions on a weekly basis. The facts concluded with post-questionnaires, reading scores, and reviews of the Reader's Notebooks.

The classroom teacher was orally interviewed about her interest in the project, scheduling of the read aloud sessions, and the concepts that were taught. Then she filled out a questionnaire about her classroom read aloud experiences and beliefs, as well as her expectations of the sessions.
Preliminary Accelerated Reader (AR) and STAR Reading comprehension scores and average reading levels were collected from the classroom teacher for all students. These reading scores helped to determine baseline-reading levels of the students.

The students filled our questionnaires to find out about their reading experiences (procedures before and during reading, and making connections), beliefs, read aloud exposure, and definitions of inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

The Reader's Notebook was introduced as a strategy for the organization of reading. The notebook contained reading strategies to organize thoughts dealing with making connections, inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

Read aloud sessions were thirty minutes long, two days a week using predetermined literature and the Reader's Notebooks. A new read aloud was chosen for nearly every session based on inference, generalizing, and/or drawing conclusions.

As the facilitator, I also kept a Reader's Notebook to help plan for and reflect on read aloud sessions. I included the read aloud titles, focus concepts, graphic organizers used, and reflections on the sessions.
Formative and Summative Accelerated Reader (AR) scores were collected to show growth in reading averages and reading comprehension amongst the students.

Follow-up, revised questionnaires were filled out by the students. These questionnaires focused on the definitions of the focus concepts, pre-reading strategies, being read to, and decoding and comprehension strategies.

The Reader's Notebooks were collected and reviewed for understanding and transference to independent reading. The notebooks also became a useful reference tool for the students during independent reading.

Data Analysis Procedures

The literature review supplied the background and research-based information necessary to analyze the impact of read alouds. The information that was collected proved that reading aloud works at any age and/or grade level. Read alouds are found to be effective as the students get older to aid in the teaching of concepts such as inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

The data was used as a guide to analyze the preliminary, concurrent, and subsequent reading skills and knowledge of the students. The steps I used to analyze the data collected are as follows:
Categories

The data was put into categories, such as, questionnaires, Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading scores, Reader’s Notebooks, and read aloud sessions.

The teacher reading interview and questionnaire determined the concepts that were taught through the read aloud sessions. The concepts that guided read aloud choice were inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

The student reading interviews/questionnaires were reviewed and analyzed for generalizations that were made regarding reading perceptions and skills. The preliminary questionnaires were also examined alongside the post-questionnaires.

The baseline Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading scores determined beginning, average reading and reading comprehension levels of the students. These levels allow the students to read books independently within a certain range.

The read aloud sessions emphasized the students listening skills. The read alouds became think-alouds as a means of giving the students an example of how to go about becoming a comprehensive reader. Graphic organizers were made in the Reader’s Notebooks as a method of organizing the text and the reader’s thoughts.
The post-Accelerated Reader scores determined ending, average reading and reading comprehension levels. These ending scores showed the independent reading growth of the students.

Focus

The problem statement concentrates on the switch from learning to read towards reading to learn amongst fourth grade students. As a result, the focus of this project was on the read aloud sessions and the use of the Reader’s Notebooks to organize thoughts brought forth by the read alouds.

1. Day 1: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. The Reader’s Notebook and its components were introduced. The question: what is reading? Was answered in the Read Aloud section.
   b. Read Aloud: Click, Clack, Moo Cows that Type
   c. Connections were made and written down by the students. They also jotted down notes about facts from the text and pictures, every couple of read pages.
   d. The question: what is reading? Was revisited and refined.
   e. Conclusion: Reading is thinking!
2. Day 2: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. Explained what African tales are.
   b. Read Aloud: When Hippo Was Hairy
   c. Pre-reading skill: Made generalizations based on prior knowledge of hippos and of Africa.
   d. Made predictions throughout the text about what the hippo and hare would do.
   e. Answered the question: what happened to hippo?

3. Day 3: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. Pre-reading skill: Used prior knowledge to examine the pictures and title and make connections and some predictions.
   b. Read Aloud: The Emperor’s New Clothes
   c. Pre-reading skill: Asked questions that would be answered once the book was read.
   d. Graphic organizer: T-chart (left side: “It says...” and right side: “I know...”)
   e. Used key words (maybe, I think, it could be, perhaps, it means that...) to begin making inferences in the “I know” section of the T-chart.
   f. Drew a conclusion based on the text and inferences made.
4. Day 4: (Inference Cards)
   a. What is inference?
   b. Read Aloud: Inference Story Cards from the Manatee School District website (stories and questions)
   c. Passed out two inference and drawing conclusions index cards per table from the Springfield School District.
   d. Students read the cards and wrote down “why” the situation happened and “what” happened as a result of the action.
   e. Whole class discussion of the inference cards.

5. Day 5: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. Pre-reading skill: used prior knowledge to examine the pictures and title, and make connections and predictions that answered the question, what is tar beach?
   b. Read Aloud: Tar Beach
   c. Made connections with the read aloud on the top part of the page.
   d. Graphic Organizer: Cluster Web with the question, what is tar beach? in the middle,
and information bubbles coming out around the center bubble.

e. Used the bubble information, to answer what tar beach is.

f. Conclusion: Tar beach is the rooftop of her building. A place to relax and use your imagination.

6. Day 6: (in Reader’s Notebook)

a. Pre-reading skill: Made generalizations about bears and hares in a T-chart. Then, made predictions based on the cover and title of the book.

b. Pre-reading skill: Asked questions that would be answered once the book was read.

c. Read Aloud: Tops and Bottoms

d. Made predictions throughout the book about what vegetables are tops and which are bottoms, what happened next, and consequences.

e. Made text-to-text connections with The Little Red Hen and The Tortoise and the Hare.

f. Made predictions about what vegetables are middles.
g. Left with homework to research vegetables, which are good in the middle.

7. Day 7: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. Read Aloud: Tops and Bottoms
   b. Reviewed first half of the book.
   c. Wrote predictions for the rest of the book.
   d. Reviewed, modified, and answered the questions.
   e. Drew conclusions about the moral based on the story.

8. Day 8: (in Reader’s Notebook)
   a. Pre-reading skill: Asked questions that would be answered once the book was read.
   b. Made connections with taking a vacation, visiting family, a car-ride, or a plane-ride.
   c. Made assumptions about the relatives and the visit throughout the book.
   d. Reviewed the questions and drew conclusions based on the information of the story.
   e. Reviewed the car ride in the story and listed describing words.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn from the data collected through the questionnaires, reading scores, and read aloud
sessions. The questionnaires acted as an agent to the insight of the reading knowledge of the fourth grade students: their beliefs, thoughts, and definitions. The reading scores showed improvement in reading levels and comprehension. The read aloud sessions provided the students with important, standards-based concepts taught creatively through reading/discovery sessions. Then, the data was scrutinized for patterns found and generalizing their reasons. Conclusions were drawn based on the effects of teaching inference, generalization, and drawing conclusion skills through read alouds to the students towards the goal of increasing reading comprehension.

Conclusion of the Chapter

The methodology used for this qualitative research project is a case study of one self-contained, "average" fourth grade classroom. The data for this case study took six weeks to collect. The sample population of this fourth grade class was chosen with the help of the school's principal based on the following criteria:
1) self-contained classroom, 2) a mix of average-performing students, and 3) classroom teacher interest and enthusiasm.
The data sources used for this research project consisted of five types of data. Pre- and post-questionnaires were filled out by the students regarding their reading experiences and beliefs. Pre- and post-Accelerated Reader scores were used to measure growth in average reading levels and reading comprehension. Reader’s Notebooks were used during the read aloud sessions to generate thinking skills during reading.

The data collection procedures began with the literature review in chapter 2 to analyze the impact of read alouds. This led into teacher and student questionnaires that inquired about reading experiences. Preliminary AR scores were used as a baseline. The Reader’s Notebook was introduced and used throughout the read aloud sessions to help organize reading skills, such as, making connections, inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions. Final AR scores were used to show growth. The students filled out follow-up questionnaires. The Reader’s Notebooks were collected and reviewed.

The data analysis procedures helped to guide in assembling and evaluating the data collected. The data is considered the facts of the research and the project. The data was put into usable categories. The data focused on
the read aloud sessions. Conclusions were made based on the data analysis procedures.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

Introduction to the Chapter

Are students exposed to read alouds often enough to make a legitimate impact on their independent reading comprehension? Are the read alouds the students are exposed to used to teach concepts such as making connections, inferring, generalizing, and drawing conclusions? Are there methods or techniques to organize a reader’s thoughts while engaged in a text? These are some of the questions that guided the data collection and analysis of this research study.

Data collection consisted of several different methods. Student and teacher questionnaires were filled out to inquire about reading experiences, feeling, and beliefs about reading before the read aloud sessions began, and again, once they were complete to identify attitudinal and academic changes. AR and STAR Reading test scores were used as baseline reading comprehension and average reading levels, as well as to measure growth. Eight read aloud sessions were held over a six-week period, which fostered the teaching of concepts such as inferring, generalizing, and drawing conclusions. Each
session was documented with Reader's Notebooks containing the graphic organizers used for arranging information while reading.

The findings gleaned from the study are laid out in this chapter. The findings will help to answer the question of whether the use of read alouds can help students to increase their independent reading comprehension. The following section breaks down the results into categories based on the type of data collected.

Presentation of the Findings

Teacher Questionnaire

What is the significance or importance of reading aloud to children? The teacher believes that students need to hear good literature. Reading aloud allows her students to experience books that are beyond the students' current reading levels.

How often do you read aloud to your students? The teacher usually reads aloud to her students about three times a week for about twenty minutes, or the length of a chapter.
How do you read aloud to your students? The teacher's students stay in their desks and the teacher sits at the front of the room on a chair.

How do you teach Reading? Reading is embedded in the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts curriculum. The teacher uses separate vocabulary time to teach isolated vocabulary to the students.

What areas are the students having difficulty with in independent reading and comprehension? The students have a very hard time with making inferences, or predictions, making generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

What types of books do you read aloud to your students? The teacher reads aloud chapter books that are interesting, but at a slightly higher independent reading level of the students.

Student Reading Questionnaires #1

Why do you read and how does reading help you? It is very clear that the students understand the importance of reading. Their answers included learning new vocabulary, to read better, to get smarter, to meet AR goals, to learn new information, and to pass the fourth grade. The students also enjoy reading because it is fun, interesting, useful, and enjoyable. About ninety percent of the students genuinely enjoy reading because they will
learn new things and expand their current realm of thinking. The students believe that reading is helpful with both oral and written vocabulary, as well as being entertaining and making them smarter.

What do you do well as a reader? These things that the students do well as readers differ. Some are good at reading fast, while others are good at reading slow. Some are good at vocabulary and pronunciation, and others are good at decoding and reading simpler words. Some earn lots of AR points and meet their goals, at the same time, as others are good at imagining what is happening in the story.

What do you have trouble doing as a reader? The same holds true for those things that the students have trouble with as readers. There is difficulty in the transference of silent to oral words. Some find it bothersome that they do not challenge themselves to read harder and longer books. Several students find vocabulary and comprehension difficult when reading. Various students have trouble with finishing chapter books on time or reading hard words, or understanding things from the books.

What do you do before you start reading a book or a story? Some pre-reading skills of the students include reading the title or the back of the book, making
predictions, finding a book at the correct level. Other students find a quiet place to read, get a glass of water, and read in bed.

*Have you made a connection with a book or a story?* Of the twenty-nine fourth graders in the class, only seven have made a connection with a book. These connections consist of text-to-self and text-to-text. It was apparent that many students were not familiar with the concept of making connections and that it can be done so easily.

*Do you like to read and why?* Ninety percent of the students enjoy reading because they learn new vocabulary, become smarter and better readers. They find reading fun, relaxing, and interesting. However, when asked if they like someone to read to them, they were split quite equally. Those students that do not enjoy being read to explain that wither, the reader is too slow, it is hard to understand and follow, or they are not in control of the book.

*What are inferences? What are generalizations? What is drawing conclusions?* The last three questions dealt with the definitions of inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions. This was very difficult for the students. There were only seven answers per question, the remaining twenty-two being, "I don’t know." It was
apparent that some of the answers are entirely, or partially incorrect. These concepts definitely posed a problem for these fourth graders.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, to infer means, “to arrive at a conclusion from facts or premises.” Inference is figuring out what the subjects are about. It is guessing what is coming next. Inference is questioning throughout the text and picturing what is happening.

Making generalizations are finding the details and figuring out the big picture. They are the basic outlines of the story. Generalizations are figuring out the big idea.

Drawing a conclusion goes with a story; it is adding up all the details. It is guessing what will happen next in the story and picturing it all in my head. Drawing conclusions is figuring out what is going to happen from the clues.

Accelerated Reader Scores

The students took the Accelerated Reader tests throughout the school year. AR measures comprehension levels of students’ independent reading.

First Trimester Accelerated Reader Scores. These scores reflect an average of tests taken beginning August
of 2005 through November of 2005. Within the entire class, three hundred and forty-five tests were taken and three hundred and nineteen tests were passed. The goal for the percent correct was eighty-five percent and the average was eighty-two point two percent. The goal for the number of points earned was three hundred and forty-seven, and the number of points earned was four hundred and nineteen point two. The goal for the average book reading level was three point nine-seven, and the average book level was four point zero.

Second Trimester Accelerated Reader Scores. The scores reflect an average of tests taken beginning November of 2005 through March of 2006. Within the entire class, four hundred and seventy-seven tests were taken, and four hundred and sixty-two tests were passed. The goal for the percent correct was eighty-five percent and the average was eighty-seven point seven percent. The goal for the number of points earned was six hundred and four, and the number of points earned was seven hundred and twenty-nine point seven. The goal for the average book reading level was four point two, and the average book level was four point four.

Beginning of Data Collection Accelerated Reader Scores. The scores reflect an average of tests taken
beginning March 6, 2005 through March 20, 2006. Within the entire class, seventy-three tests were taken, and seventy tests were passed. The goal for the percent correct was eighty-five percent and the average was eighty-seven point nine percent. The goal for the number of points earned was not established, but the number of points earned was one hundred and fifty point one. The goal for the average book reading level was four point eight, and the average book level was four point seven.

End of Data Collection Accelerated Reader Scores.

STAR Reading Scores

STAR Reading scores create a mean for many areas of scoring. The following are the acronyms used in the STAR Reading reports: (GP) Grade Placement, (SS) Scaled Score, (GE) Grade Equivalent, (PR) Percentile Rank, (NCE) Normal Curve Equivalent, and (IRL) Instructional Reading Level.

First Trimester STAR Reading Scores. The scores reflect an average of student tests taken in August of 2005. The mean Grade Placement (GP) score was four-point zero-eight. The mean Scaled Score (SS) was four hundred and ninety-five. The mean Grade Equivalent (GE) score was four point five. The mean Percentile Rank (PR) score was fifty-six. The mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) was
fifty-three point three. The Instructional Reading Level (IRL) was four point one.

**Second Trimester STAR Reading Scores.** The scores reflect an average of student tests taken in February of 2006. The mean Grade Placement (GP) score was four-point five-nine. The mean Scaled Score (SS) was five hundred and seventy-one. The mean Grade Equivalent (GE) score was five point four. The mean Percentile Rank (PR) score was sixty-sour. The mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) was fifty-seven point seven. The Instructional Reading Level (IRL) was four point seven.

**Third Trimester STAR Reading Scores.** These scores were not available for the end of the project. The test will be taken at the beginning of June.

**Read Aloud Sessions/Reader’s Notebooks**

The read aloud sessions were a forum for think alouds while reading aloud. They provided the students with questioning techniques, pre-reading strategies, and thinking maps/graphic organizers. The sessions allowed the students to become familiar with making inferences, making generalizations, and ultimately drawing conclusions based on the findings within the text. The data collected in the notebooks is as follows.
Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type. Reading fills an entire spectrum of learning. The students were asked to answer the question: What is reading? The students believe reading is learning. Learning to understand new words, vocabulary and grammar. Reading will help you say and read words correctly. One student suggested that reading is great because it is understanding and leaves room for a response. Another student suggested that reading is learning facts and using your mind. Another believes that reading is fun because you get better all the time.

This question led into the students writing down what they saw, heard, and read in the book. The students jotted down facts, connections, predictions, comments, and questions based on each page of reading. The students wrote about the text on the page that was read aloud, as well as the about the pictures.

Upon seeing the last page in the book, that contained no text, simply a picture, the students became the authors and wrote the last line of text. We discussed the fact that there wasn’t any text on the page, yet they still had an idea about the rest of the story. The students discussed the power of pictures as well as text. They said, “We never thought about being able to read a book without words and actually having a story.”
This discussion led to a revision of the question: What is reading? The students’ consensus was that reading is thinking. They elaborated the statement also. Reading is using your eyes and ears to think. Reading is using your mind, imagination, and searching between the lines. Reading is thinking about the meaning of the pictures because they help to tell the story.

**When Hippo Was Hairy.** The students’ prior knowledge was tapped into with two questions: 1. What do you know about hippos? And 2. What do you know about Africa? Many students responded to the color of hippos as: gray, brown, black, or purplish, and that they roll in the mud to keep their skin cool and protect them from the sun. A common response was that hippos are big, herbivores, live in water, and can hold their breath for about five minutes. The students said that Africa is a continent that has many wild animals. It is hot, dry, and abundant with trees. Africa is filled with grassy plains in the Northern part of the world. Even though the responses amongst the students varied quite a bit, the goal of the activity was to get their minds moving.

Beginning with prior knowledge, helped to make predictions about the story as it was read to them. There were two major predictions made. The first was about what
will possibly happen to Hippo. Most students predicted correctly saying that he will get burned and will end up without hair. The second was about Hippo’s feelings after the fire. The agreed upon emotions were mad, sad, ugly, and embarrassed.

The Emperor’s New Clothes. The session started with questions that should be answered about the text. 1. What kind of clothes does the Emperor wear? 2. Where does the Emperor live? 3. Why does the Emperor need new clothes? 4. Why is he an Emperor? The questions led the students into looking through the text for answers.

Once the questions for the story were established, a T-chart was introduced with “It says...” on the left side and “I say...” on the right side. The “It says...” side contained six quotes from the text that were written down as they were read by the facilitator on the board and by the students in their notebooks. The “I say...” side contained inferences that began with starters such as: I think, Perhaps, I’m guessing that, It’s because, and maybe. The students wrote down their predictions after each quote was written.

The inference starters allowed the students a beginning point for their thoughts. The students’ predictions were synchronized with the text. Conclusions
were drawn based on the questions asked at the beginning of the session.

**Inference Cards.** This session did not include a read aloud book, rather short story and inference cards were used. The students were read eight short stories, separately and asked to answer simple inference questions based on the stories.

Next, the students were given two index cards for each table of five. Each card contained a situation that would require prior knowledge and inference to be explained. The students made two assumptions based on the cause of the situation and an effect related to the situation.

Last, each table of students took turns reading their cards and telling the cause and effect of each situation. Some of the answers were silly, yet possible. The students worked well together discussing their cards.

**Tar Beach.** Again, the session started with one central question associated with the text: What is Tar Beach? The students’ predictions included not being a real beach or being a beach of tar. Possibly, Tar Beach is a place to go swimming where the people swim in the tar.

These predictions led to analyzing the cover of the book. The students, again realizing the importance of
pictures to text, notice several things happening on the cover. This is what the students found on the cover: family together, a boy and girl lying on a mattress looking at the moon, tables and chairs, the top of a building, a bridge, on the roof of an apartment building in the city. The cover was a good representation of the book itself.

The students listed facts from the story in the form of a cluster web. The central web including the question: What is Tar Beach? The bubbles coming out included: using her imagination, there's tar instead of sand, the roof, she made it up because she was dreaming, she was happy when flying, and that it's her favorite place. From the cluster web, the students answered that Tar Beach is an imaginary place on the roof of her apartment building.

Tops and Bottoms. This session involved many pre-reading activities. The students were involved in activating their prior knowledge and making generalizations of bears and hares. Bears have long claws. Bears are mean and wild. Bears live in caves and hibernate in the winter. Bears eat berries and bugs. Hares are fast and they hop. Hares have big feet and ears, bushy tails, and are bigger than most rabbits. Hares eat plants and carrots.
The students were then required to generate questions that would be answered from the text. 1. Why does the bear have clothes? 2. (Why) Is the hare feeding the bear? 3. Why is the book called, Tops and Bottoms? 4. Are they on a farm? 5. Are Hare and Bear friends?

This led to a discussion of vegetables. What they are? What make something a vegetable? What animals eat which vegetables?

While the story was being read, the students made predictions about which vegetables were good on the top, which were good on the bottom, and which were good in the middle. They also predicted what Mr. Hare and Bear would do next at significant points within the story.

Text-to-text connections were also made. There was an implied reference to the losing race by the Hare from the book, The Tortoise and the Hare. Several students picked up on this subtlety and made reference to it.

After the completion of the story, the students went back to the questions that were generated so that conclusions could be drawn. 1. The bear wears clothes because he is a farmer and a businessman. This is an example of personification. 2. The rabbit is not feeding the bear. He is holding the vegetables that he harvested. 3. Tops and Bottoms refers to the edible parts of the
vegetables. 4. Yes, they are on a farm. No, they are in a vegetable garden. 5. In the beginning they were business partners. In the middle, they were not friends, possibly even enemies. In the end, they were still not friends, just neighbors.

The Relatives Came. Again, the session started with questions that should be answered about the text. This time the students produced seven questions to be answered.

1. Who are the relatives? 2. What is the book about?
3. Where are they going? 4. Are the relatives nice?
5. When does it happen? 6. Where did the relatives come from? 7. How was the car ride?

While the book was read, the students were asked to make connections with the text and to activate prior knowledge. All of the students had relatives. Many students, about one-third, have been on a vacation, either by car or by plane. There was a discussion about their trips and their arrivals.

The students drew conclusions about the text by attempting to answer the questions at the beginning of the session. 1. The relatives are going to their family's house, but the students don't know where the family is. Question two was saved for later. 3. The family is going to visit their family. 4. Yes, everyone is nice and gets
along with each other. 5. The story takes place in the summer, when the grapes were almost ripe enough to pick. 6. The relatives came from Virginia. 2. The book is about relatives and visiting. The relatives could be aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, cousins, brothers, and/or sisters.

Question seven asked about the car ride? The book was reviewed again, beginning with the cover. The students were told to look at the pictures of the car ride on each page. The car ride was bumpy, crazy, terrifying, insane, weird, reckless, odd and terrible. Many of the boys decided that the ride would be fun. Many of the girls decided that the ride would be too scary for them.

Student Reading Questionnaires #2

What is reading? The students responded that reading is asking questions, learning something new, understanding what the book is about, and making connections with a book. Reading is fun, informative, and relaxing. Reading is looking at and understanding words. Reading is thinking!

What do you do if you have trouble reading? The two most common responses to this question were 1) re-reading for understanding and clarification and 2) asking a family member or teacher for help. Other students suggested they
use sounding out skills, dictionary skills, and look for picture cues.

What do you enjoy about being read to? The overwhelming comments to this question was that the students like when someone read to them because they got a chance to learn new information because of extra explanation by the reader. The students also enjoy the different voices portrayed, the chance to listen to stories that are too hard to read themselves.

How do you make an inference? Inferring is guessing or predicting what will happen next. Inference asks and answers questions, and leads to thinking and curiosity. This time, there were only two students, as opposed to twenty-two on questionnaire #2, who did not know what inference meant.

How would you make a generalization? This question was still difficult for the students to understand. There were ten students who answered, “I don’t know” to this question, while the rest of the students responded vaguely and with little understanding. A good portion of the answers was based on inference and drawing conclusions, rather than using new and prior knowledge of a subject to make general statements. The teacher also commented that the students did still not understand this concept.
What would you do to draw conclusions? Drawing conclusions is trying to figure the story out using questioning skills and clues from the book. According to one of the fourth grade students, drawing conclusions is “gathering information and making an ending if the author does not.”

What are your pre-reading skills? The three most common pre-reading skills associated with choosing a book are 1) looking at the cover, 2) reading the title, and 3) reading the back of the book. The three most common pre-reading skills associated with continuing to read a book are 1) skimming over and thinking back on what was previously read, 2) asking questions, and 3) making predictions.

Why are making connections important? On questionnaire #1, there were very few answers to the question about connections. The key answers this time to the importance of making connections were: knowing what the book is about, understanding the story more, and as one student wrote, “If you don’t make connections, you probably won’t like the book as much.”

Why should you ask and answer questions about a book? The students believe that it is important to ask and answer questions about a book because the questions will
help to understand the story better. The questions give the reader insight to the book. The questions lead to more information, which leads to making predictions, and finally drawing conclusions.

*What did you learn from the Read Aloud sessions?* Many students responded that they learned how to make inferences and draw conclusions while they were reading. Many of the answers were quite interesting though. One student learned that it's ok if you don't know anything about the story; there are ways of learning more. A few students learned that reading isn't hard it’s fun. The most significant answer was from a female student who learned that, “You don’t just read the books. You think about what the page and the words mean.” After all, it’s good to study the pictures for meaning as well.

**Conclusion of the Chapter**

The teacher questionnaire suggested the concepts to be taught: inference, generalizations, and drawing conclusions. She is not able to teach many reading lessons outside of the district-adopted Language Arts curriculum.

The student questionnaires (#1) suggest that the students had a good understanding of what reading entails. Reading deals with manipulating words, grammar, and
vocabulary. Reading is a to becoming more knowledgeable, and it is fun and exciting, when connections are made, because it takes you places. However, the students’ ideas of pre-reading skills varied among a few such as checking book levels and previewing the back and cover of a book. While others, find a quiet place to sit and relax.

There were four mean scores for the Accelerated Reader tests. These scores suggested a steady growth in student reading levels from the baseline and formative scores. The average baseline, first trimester, reading level was at a four point zero. This led to a four point four second trimester and a four point seven at the beginning of third trimester. The summative score progressed to a four point eight. The summative goal for third trimester was a four point eight.

There were two mean scores for the STAR Reading tests. Again, the scores suggested steady growth in independent student reading levels. The baseline mean score was four point one for first trimester. The formative mean score for second trimester was four point seven. The summative mean score for third trimester was not available due to testing at a later time.

The eight Read Aloud sessions employed the Reader’s Notebooks to ask questions, make predictions and
generalizations, use graphic organizers, and draw conclusions. The notebooks contain a place for troubled words, as well as independent reading. The sessions were interjected with think alouds, conversation, and opportunities to write.

The student questionnaires (#2) showed that the students did learn some new techniques to implement while independently reading. They became familiar with the concept that reading is thinking. There are more things involved in reading than simply the words on the page. As a reader, one must question, predict, make connections, and draw conclusions. The students learned that reading is fun, meaningful, and worthwhile.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to the Chapter

Through the course of the Read Aloud sessions, the fourth grade students became exposed to read alouds, think alouds, thinking maps/graphic organizers, and concept teaching. The question that needs to be answered is if students are exposed to read alouds often enough to understand their importance in terms of the strategies and benefits of reading.

This chapter will use the data collected and presented in chapter four to discuss the effectiveness of the case study. Conclusions will be drawn based upon the data from the reading questionnaires, AR scores, STAR Reading scores, the Read Aloud sessions and the Reader’s Notebooks. Recommendations will be made resulting from the conclusions. These recommendations will be towards the read aloud sessions and the Reader’s Notebooks.

Discussion of the Findings

The teacher provided insight into the use of read alouds within her classroom. She did not necessarily pick read alouds that focused on concepts, rather, she chose books that were of interest to her students and at a
slightly tougher readability for independent reading. The students struggle continuously with the concepts of inference (making predictions), generalizations (common information), and drawing conclusions (using the information to read between the lines).

The preliminary student questionnaires supplied personal information about reading beliefs and thoughts. The questions were somewhat vague at times and resulted in a gamut of answers. The students had a good surface idea of reading, which were words, vocabulary and grammar.

The post-questionnaire illustrated the elaboration of reading. Reading became an art of looking for clues by asking questions and making predictions. Reading became fun, exciting, and interesting.

The Accelerated Reader scores provided evidence that independent reading levels have increased over the course of the year. The classroom average of reading levels was a four point eight, which was the end of the third trimester goal for reading levels.

STAR Reading scores showed growth from first to second trimester. The students were not taking the STAR Reading test again until after the completion of the project. Upon further investigation, I predict that the
reading level scores will also increase a significant amount from second trimester scores.

The Read Aloud sessions proved to be quite beneficial to the students. As the sessions progressed, the students began feeling more comfortable with the process and willing to participate and give their input. During the last session, the students easily generated seven questions that they wanted answered about the book, and were willing and ready to provide more questions.

The Reader’s Notebooks proved to be an asset to the Read Aloud sessions. They provided the students with a place to organize their thinking. It was multi-functional to both the teacher and the students because of its labeling/sectioning system. The three labels/sections were: 1) Dictionary, 2) Read Alouds, and 3) Independent Reading. They were also useful by supplying a contained place to keep all writing based on a particular book, or several books. The Reader’s Notebooks offer flexibility to all parties. Since the sections are labeled with post-its, the notebooks can have as many sections as needed. The students found the notebooks to be fun, easy, light, and useful.
Conclusion of the Chapter

Are the students being exposed to read alouds often enough to understand their importance in terms of independent reading? No, the students are not exposed to read alouds that focus on their independent reading skills that are giving them hardships. However, the students are being read to on a fairly regular basis.

Did the students understand the concepts of inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions that are being taught through the read alouds during the read aloud sessions? The students were able to make inferential predictions based on the pictures and texts of the books. They understood the importance of making predictions throughout the read alouds as a process of comprehension. The students were able to take the general information of the stories and read between the lines to help them draw conclusions. Generalizations still prove to be a problem for the students. They do not grasp the concept of using knowledge that is imbedded within them and text knowledge to look for common attributes that lead to making generalizations.

Are the students transferring the concepts of inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions taught through the read-alouds to their independent reading? The
data collected does not particularly imply that the students are transferring these concepts to their read alouds. If there had been more time for the read aloud session and implementation of the independent reading section of the Reader’s Notebooks, the answer to this question would be more apparent.

What is the impact of teaching the concepts of: inference, generalization, and drawing conclusions through read-alouds on the reading comprehension levels of fourth grade students? This is the umbrella question for the project. The impact of the teaching of these concepts is provided most explicitly in the students’ reading questionnaires #2. The students have learned about the specific meanings of inference and drawing conclusions. They make references to how important it is to ask questions and make predictions before and during reading. They realize that reading also includes analyzing the pictures as well as the text to increase their comprehension. Although, making generalizations still poses a problem for the students, possibly they are not developmentally ready for this particular reading skill. Upon further investigation, I believe the students will use the skills and strategies introduced during the read
aloud sessions to improve their independent reading scores.
APPENDIX A

STUDENT READING QUESTIONNAIRE #1
Tell me why you read.

Tell me how reading helps you.

Tell me what you do well as a reader.

Tell me what you have trouble doing as a reader.

Tell me about reading at home. How often? What do you read?

Tell me what you do before you start reading a book.

Tell me about a connection you made with a book or story.
Tell me why you do or don’t like to read.

Tell me why you do or don’t like to be read to (either at school or at home).

Tell me about when someone reads to you (a teacher, parent, or someone else).

Tell me about making *inferences* when you are reading.

Tell me about making *generalizations* when you are reading.

Tell me about *drawing conclusions* when you are reading.
What is the significance or importance of reading aloud to children?

How often do you read aloud to your students?

Why do you read aloud to your students?

Tell me about how you read aloud to your students.

How do you teach reading?

What areas are the students having difficulties with in regards to independent reading?

What areas are the students having difficulties with in regards to comprehension?
What types of books do you read aloud to your students?

Tell me what you do before you start reading a book to the students.

Do you teach concepts or strategies during read aloud time? Explain.

Tell me about inferences.

Tell me about generalizations.

Tell me about drawing conclusions.
APPENDIX C

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE #2
Name: ________________________________
Student Reading Questionnaire #2
Fourth Grade

What is reading?

When you have trouble understanding something in a book, what do you do?

What do you enjoy about having someone read to you?

How do you make an inference?

If you were given a bunch of information, how would you make generalizations?

What would you do to draw conclusions?

What are some pre-reading skills you do before actually reading the book?
Why is it important to make connections with a book?

Why is it important to ask questions before and during reading?

Why is it important to answer those questions? (Conclusions)

What did you learn from me (Mrs. Williams) working with you?
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