

Running head: PERSPECTIVES OF INTERACTIVE READ ALOUDS

Literature Review

Teacher Perspectives of Implementing Interactive Read-Alouds in 4th Grade Classrooms

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Abstract

Too often teachers thoughtlessly select a book off the shelf and spontaneously read aloud to a classroom of disengaged students. Is there a more effective and beneficial way to read aloud? This study examines teacher perspectives of Interactive Read Alouds with questionnaires, interviews, and limited observations. An Interactive Read Aloud places emphasis on teacher selection and preparation of the text and student interaction during and after the Read Aloud. Findings indicate a strong emphasis on the benefits of Interactive Read Alouds as compared to an ordinary read aloud. Interactive Read Alouds engage students, encourage oral and written literacy development along with listening and reading skills. The author suggests that educators should implement Interactive Read Alouds to create a positive, social and engaging learning environment.

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Teacher Perspectives of Implementing Interactive Read-Alouds in 4th Grade Classrooms

Introduction

While researchers viewpoints are contradictory regarding the benefits of read alouds (Meyer, Wardrop, Linn, & Hastings, 1993), it is widely agreed that there are essential components that can make these read alouds effective (Lane & Wright, 2007; Fisher, Flood, Lap & Fray, 2004). Is there a more effective way to read aloud? Perhaps, an Interactive Read Aloud is more beneficial than an ordinary read aloud.

Fountas and Pinnell (2006) describe Interactive Read-Alouds as a well structured read aloud that creates an environment in which children are strong participants in their own learning. An intermediate, suburban school in New York decided to take a new approach to preparing for the New York State English Language Arts test by implementing Interactive Read Alouds into their Language Arts program.

My research examines teacher perspectives of their implementation and the results of Interactive Read Alouds in their 4th Grade classes. I determined how well their definition of an Interactive Read Aloud matched that of Fountas and Pinnell, whom read alouds were supposed to be model after. I also determined how they implemented the Read Alouds in their classroom, whether or not they liked the Interactive Read Alouds, and what results they think they saw or did not see in their classroom.

Theoretical Framework

In this section I first discuss how Interactive Read Alouds fit within the New Literacy Studies. Afterwards, I discuss reader responses to text. Finally, I define what an Interactive Read Aloud is.

Contextualizing Interactive Read Alouds

A child acquires oral language and literacy from being submersed in a literate culture. Literacy is a social practice that is grounded social, historical, cultural and political contexts of use (Street, 1995). Rogoff, Goodman-Turkanis, and Barlett (2001) stated that children are key in constructing the learning; children are not ‘constructed’ in some linear way by teachers. Children learn from repetition, imitation, and socialization and the people a child interacts with act as demonstrators, mediators, and guides. Gee (1996) stated that literacy learning is interactional and that language is a mediating tool in the construction of identity, social languages, and community languages that serve as resources by students and teachers in the co-construction of literacy knowledge. The child is not a passive recipient of the language but experiences and encounters language data expressed by others within a communicative context.

Dyson (2003) discussed the functional and social purposes of literacy. Children are submersed in literacy and their culture. Intrinsic motivation is a major principle in literacy acquisition. Children don’t wake up in the morning and say to himself or herself, “I think I’ll learn some language today!” Learning language, for the most part, is not a conscious decision for a child. A child does not learn language for its own sake. Children are born into a world in which the use of language and literacy is everywhere. Language is used as a communicative tool and also serves as a functional system and the language creates and expresses meaning and acts on the world (Dyson, 2003). The child quickly develops a desire to enter this world. Adults are not passive viewers as a child acquires language. Adults demonstrate the dimensions of language to their child. They also mediate and support the child’s attempts to use language. The child and the adult

socially and collaboratively construct the dimension that exists in literacy (Halliday, 1973). Literacy learning does not just occur simply in formal or informal settings but also in-between in every interaction as tools for building and maintaining social relations (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993). Literacy is not simply an individual cognitive activity. It is a communicative tool for different social groups (Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

Vygotsky (1981) felt that we know ourselves because of our interactions with others, socially meaningful activity. Most of what a child knows about language is learned through social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) said:

The mechanism of social behavior and the mechanism of consciousness are the same....We are aware of ourselves, for we are aware of others, and in the same way as we know others; and this is at it is because in relation to ourselves we are in the same [position] as others are to us. (30)

The focus on instruction should be communication and meaning. Vygotsky (1981) also stated that in order to build a new concept, a child must interact with others who provide feedback for their hypothesis. Children need to be able to talk about a new problem or a new concept in order to understand it and to use it (Vygotsky, 1978). Social interaction and communication should be prominent when children are responding to text.

Reader Responses to Text

Rosenblatt (2005) pointed out how often the popular view is that the reader finds the meaning from within the text. Another popular view is that one finds the meaning for the verbal symbols from within himself. However, Rosenblatt (2005) felt that both of these assumptions alone were wrong and in fact, “The finding of meanings involves both the author’s text and what the reader brings to it” (p.29). Reading involves not only the author’s intentions but also the reader’s background knowledge and schema. The text

impacts the reader's future perceptions. The reader not only learns from the text but also brings new interpretations and emotion to it as well. Therefore, the text has a give and take relationship with the reader (Rosenblatt, 2005). Researchers (Bransford, Stein, Shelton, & Owings, 1981) have supported getting students to extend and modify their verbalizations through questioning and summarizing during a reading lesson. Reading comprehension is, "The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written text" (RAND, 2002). During an Interactive Read Aloud children can verbally discuss their comprehension with their peers and enhance each others understanding of the text.

What is an Interactive Read Aloud?

An Interactive Read-Aloud, as defined by Fountas and Pinnell (2006) is a deliberate and explicit method of reading aloud where the teacher models for the whole class vocabulary development, reading fluently, and comprehension strategies and allows for students to join in the discussion and become interactive. This well structured read aloud creates an environment in which children are strong participants in their own learning. Students need to be able to talk about what they know before they can write about what they know. An Interactive Read-Aloud consists of selection and preparation, an opening, reading aloud, embedded teaching, text talk, discussion, a record of reading, written or artistic response and self-evaluation.

Sternberg and Grigorenko (2000) said that stories are not just what we read to ourselves or our children to put us to sleep. Nor are they only what we read in literature classes. Rather, they are the essence of intelligence. To understand intelligence we must understand stories, their meanings, retellings and structure. According to Anderson,

Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) reading aloud is now being called the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading.

Interactive Read Alouds incorporate aspects of Cambourne's conditions of learning (1988) and of Goldenberg's instructional conversations (1992/1993). Cambourne's theory of language learning asserts that immersion, responsibility, use, approximations, demonstrations, feedback, expectations, and engagement lie at the core of effective teaching and learning in natural settings. Classroom teachers must simulate these conditions. All of these conditions have implications for interactive storybook readings. Demonstration and engagement especially support this approach to reading aloud. According to Cambourne, students do not learn from demonstrations when they are passively absorbing information. They learn when they are engaged with the demonstration and during interactive read alouds children have the opportunity to respond to the text and discuss it with their classmates allowing them the opportunity to internalize the ability to use process and strategy information. Engagement is enticed, not forced to implement instructional conversations. Goldenberg (1992/1993) calls these conversations a, "Particular kind of lesson [that is] geared toward creating richly textured opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development" (p. 317). The focus of these lessons is on developing conceptual information, but the discussion is conversational in nature. Interactive read alouds are similar to instructional conversations because they aim to engage students in learning through natural interactions with stories, peers, and the teacher. They differ from instructional conversation because the conversation is ongoing during the reading rather than conducted only before or after the reading. Therefore, an Interactive Read Aloud is more powerful than a plain read aloud.

Review of Research

In this section I will discuss the research for and against reading aloud in the classroom. The essential components of an Interactive Read Aloud are mentioned next. Also discussed are read alouds in a diverse classroom, read alouds at home, and student and teacher points of view on reading aloud, text talk, and classroom interactions.

To Read or Not To Read Aloud

Despite the benefits of an Interactive Read Aloud, some critics have found shortcomings. Meyer, Wardrop, Linn, and Hastings, (1993) found in their research that there are a few negative correlations between the time teachers spend reading aloud and their students' reading achievement. Reasons cited for this negative correlation were there in these classrooms there were fewer interactions with students and students spent less time reading on their own. However, not all classrooms that use read alouds experience these negative effects. In fact, there have been many benefits of reading aloud.

Reading aloud can increase children's vocabulary(Lane & Wright, 2007; Fisher, Flood, Lap & Fray, 2004)), experiential backgrounds (Fisher, Flood, Lap & Fray, 2004), listening comprehension skills(Lane & Wright, 2007), it can promote their syntactic development (Lane & Wright, 2007), and it can increase their ability to recognize words (Lane & Wright,2007) and concepts of print and story (Fisher, Flood, Lap & Fray, 2004). In order to see these benefits the teacher must do more than simply select a random book of a shelf and read it thoughtlessly. The teacher needs to consider the amount of read-aloud time, the choice of the text for read-aloud activities, the method of reading aloud, and the fit of the read-aloud in the curriculum (Lane & Wright,2007).

Essential Components of an Interactive Read Aloud

Fisher, Flood, Lap, and Fray (2004) suggest that there are essential components of an interactive read-aloud that help to make it truly beneficial. The components were: (1) Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched their developmental, emotional, and social levels. (2) Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher. (3) A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established. (4) Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text. (5) Teachers were animated and used expression. (6) Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text. (7) Connections were made to independent reading and writing. Children ask questions and openly respond to the questions of others during an Interactive Read Aloud This provides teachers with the opportunity to model expert meaning-making, reasoning, and comprehension processes. Scaffolding, modeling reading strategies, supporting risk taking, and sharing control by teachers during interactive read alouds produces greater gains than that of teachers who waste their time dominating the instructional conversation (Smolkin & Donovan, 2003).

During many read-alouds the adult leaves out a critical feature which is the contributions of the child. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) stated that, "If children have been allowed to be interactive, their own queries and comments frequently compel adults to make not only the meaning but also their own cognitive strategies visible" (p. 16). Oyler and Barry (1996) agreed that the important role that the teacher plays as she builds on students' initiations during an Interactive Read Aloud. After one student recalled a book with more information about the subject at hand the teacher encouraged him to get the book and read out loud to his peers, rather than reprimand him for getting off topic.

During these read-alouds students interrupted the reading of the text to ask questions and make comments. Frequently, students would speak directly to each other. As children interacted, and lead the discussion, the teacher would acknowledge it and then extend their thoughts. “By creating a room for students to initiate and make read-alouds interactive, classroom talk becomes an opportunity to construct shared understandings through the connections made visible by intertextuality” (p.328).

Effective teachers model the role of an ideal reader as they read aloud (Cochran, M., 1984) An ideal reader intuitively and unconsciously makes appropriate inferences, predictions, and constantly rethinks the events in the story. Teacher’s personal involvement comments prompted children’s personal engagement reactions. Teachers’ reenactment was followed by children’s imitations of such reenactment and teachers’ voice intonation elicited children’s personal engagement and comments (Cochran, M., 1984, Moschovaki, Meadows, & Pellegrini, 2007).

Read Alouds in a Diverse Classroom Atmosphere

One way that a teacher can help her students in a diverse classroom is to find stories that relate to the students. Meier (2003) said, “Books are not meaningful to children who do not see themselves represented in them. Especially for very young children, learning occurs most productively and profoundly in a context of familiarity” (p. 247-248). Another way to help children is to teach the book reading behaviors that not all children may be familiar with. A teacher can also make the book come alive with the use of puppets or dramatization. All of these ideas would be very helpful in the classroom.

Conrad, Gong, Sipp, and Wright (2004) found text talk as a gateway to culturally responsive teaching. Text talk uses challenging text to improve students' oral language and comprehension abilities with focused read-alouds. Culturally responsive teaching builds on students' language and background by making connections to extend their literacy development. Together, they provide a gateway to successful reading for students who find learning to read challenging.

Read Alouds at Home

Every child is born into a certain culture. They acquire literacy at home with their family and social group before they even reach school age. Heath (1982) says,

“As school-oriented parents and their children interact in the pre-school years, adults give their children, through modeling and specific instruction, ways of taking from books which seem natural in school and in numerous institutional settings such as banks, post offices, businesses, or government offices” (p.73).

Heath's article discussed three very different communities, Maintown, Trackton, and Roadville. Maintown families immersed their children in literature by reading stories and interacting with the child while reading. They asked meaningful questions and referred back to the book throughout the day. When they arrived at school they were well prepared, new how to hold a book, how to wait and raise their hand, and how to answer questions meaningfully.

However, children in Roadville and Trackton were not brought up different. Although Roadville babies were read to, they were not asked as many questions while reading and did not relate the books as much to outside life. Although they preformed well in school initially they would often have trouble down the road when it came to answering more in-depth questions or comparing and contrasting subjects. Trackton babies were not read to, however they still acquired language through socialization.

Their attempts at speech were often ignored at first until they began to imitate the adults around them. Trackton children would become amazing storytellers. However, when they came to school they would often not be prepared to read and write which would set them behind the other students in their class.

Points of View

Ariail and Albright (2006) surveyed teachers' read-aloud practices in middle schools. They found that the majority of teachers read aloud to promote a love of literature and reading, to enhance understanding and comprehension, to model fluent reading and pronunciation, to build interest to a specific topic, and to expose students to books that they might not otherwise read. Teachers who did not read aloud stated their reasons for not reading aloud such as it was not appropriate for the subject, they didn't have enough time in the day, they didn't think about it.

Johnson (2005) assessed fourth grade students' conceptual understanding of proficient reading with a questionnaire. The questionnaire is an open-ended series of five questions that is used to inform the teacher about her students' understanding of what proficient readers do to comprehend text, not whether or not students are using the reading strategies. This questionnaire was given to a fourth grade class in August and again in January. The results were that students expanded their views upon those they saw as good readers to include more peers. Also, students had more ideas on what "good" readers do than they had shown in January. A questionnaire like this might be appropriate to assess the effects of interactive read alouds before and after a teacher starts to use them in her classroom.

Students are able to discuss complex ideas relatively easily in spontaneous conversation. However, when students attempt to express complex ideas in a written paper, students often experience great difficulty. Krych-Appelbaum and Musial (2007) found that students perceive value in actively talking with others about their papers. Students prefer face-to-face conversing with a classmate compared to non-interactive written peer feedback. Therefore, research has found that teacher and student point of view tend to think positively of social interaction and activities like interactive read alouds, that allow for interaction in the classroom.

Methodology

I position myself within an interpretivist framework because I am interested in the perspectives of other people and I plan to be making sense of and interpreting those perspectives. Because of this I have used questionnaires, interviews and observations during my research. My research is social and gives teachers a voice. I feel that there are multiple perspectives and multiple truths. Sipe and Constable (1996) write that for Interpretivist, reality is subjective and constructed and researchers are trying to understand the world however, I was not trying to change or critique what I learned.

I used a combination of teacher questionnaires, interviews, and observation to collect data. The questionnaires and interviews asked questions to help me determine the perception teachers have about Interactive Read-Alouds. I asked teachers to define an Interactive Read Aloud and I compared that definition to that of Fountas and Pinnell. I asked them to describe how they prepare for an Interactive Read-Aloud and what it looks like in their classroom. This helped me determine if they were accurately implementing

an Interactive Read Aloud, under Fountas and Pinnell's definition, in their classroom. I asked them what benefits and problems occurred while implementing the Interactive Read-Aloud and how they felt the Interactive Read-Aloud affected the children in their classroom. During my observations I watched teachers and reading specialists conduct an Interactive Read-Aloud to a classroom of forth grade students. This furthered my idea of whether or not their implementation of an Interactive Read-Aloud matched their perception of what an Interactive Read Aloud was and provided me with the opportunity to see first hand what they were doing positively in the classroom.

I included 4th grade teachers and reading specialists, from an Intermediate School in a diverse suburban school in NY, whom implemented Interactive Read-Alouds during the 2007-2008 school year as part of their improved language arts program to prepare students for the New York State English Language Arts test. Every teacher or professional in the school, who participated in implementing Interactive Read-Alouds, was asked to participate. I protected the rights of the participants by receiving their consent before conducting my research, by allowing them to stop their participation at any time for any reason, and by keeping the information they provide me with confidential. Also, I did not use names in my research.

Findings and Discussion

In this section I will present the findings of my research. First, I will discuss what makes a good Interactive Read Aloud, according to teachers. Then I will discuss how teachers model good reading behaviors during Interactive Read Alouds. Lastly, I will discuss how Interactive Read Alouds are engaging but they need to be structured.

Point 1 – What Makes a Good Interactive Read Aloud?

Since some research (Meyer, Wardrop, Linn, and Hastings, 1993) has suggested that read alouds are not beneficial in the classroom, I researched teacher's perspectives on a more involved read aloud: the Interactive Read Aloud to see if they are seen in a more positive light. Before getting too far into teacher perspectives on the benefits and problems with Interactive Read Alouds versus regular read alouds it was important to find out if teachers could decipher between a read aloud and an Interactive Read Aloud. This would help determine whether or not they understood what an Interactive Read Aloud is so that I could analyze their perspectives based on the type of read aloud they were talking about. If teachers are confused about what an Interactive Read Aloud is and how it differs from a regular read aloud then that may alter their perspectives on the benefits and problems of them.

An Interactive Read-Aloud, as defined by Fountas and Pinnell (2006) is a deliberate and explicit method of reading aloud where the teacher models for the whole class vocabulary development, reading fluently, and comprehension strategies and allows for students to join in the discussion and become interactive. This well structured read aloud creates an environment in which children are strong participants in their own learning. An Interactive Read-Aloud consists of selection and preparation, an opening, reading aloud, embedded teaching, text talk, and discussion.

All of the teachers cited differences between the two types of read alouds. Some suggested that during an Interactive Read Aloud the teacher is able to model the reading behaviors that they think the kids need help with. Student participation then allows the students to practice those behaviors in a guided practice setting. One teacher said that an

Interactive Read Aloud is, “more than just reading the words on the page. It is the process of reading a story together, and stopping and discussion story elements, asking each other questions, making predictions, and just plain talking together about the book.”

Teachers said that a read aloud is just reading a book without any interaction. An Interactive Read Aloud has much more interaction between the reader and the audience. The audience is also given the opportunity to interact with itself. The key is that students are aloud to interact freely so a comfortable learning environment must be established in advance. These responses were consistent with the Fountas and Pinnell’s (2006) definition of an Interactive Read Aloud.

Most teachers’ answers were similar. No one struggled with defining an Interactive Read Aloud or stating how it is different from an ordinary read aloud. Fisher, Flood, Lap, and Fray (2004) suggest that it is essential to be well prepared for an Interactive Read Aloud. Teachers prepare by choosing books that are appropriate to students’ interests and matched their developmental, emotional, and social levels. They then preview the text and practiced reading it. A clear purpose for the read-aloud is established and there are stopping points marked, often with a post it note, as cited by many teachers. One teacher wrote that, “If you are a good teacher than there is no difference because all read alouds should be well prepared and interactive.” This statement supports my argument that Interactive Read Alouds are more beneficial than regular read alouds and teachers who see no advantage in reading aloud to their class probably are not well prepared and making the reading interactive.

Although teachers mentioned only a few negative aspects of implementing read alouds in the classroom, the problems they found were consistent, dealing mostly with the difficulties of time constraints and student discussions going off topic.

The most common problem that teachers cited regarding Interactive Read Alouds was the time constraints. With Interactive Read Alouds, teachers do not spontaneously select a book off of the shelf and then immediately begin reading it. Instead, teachers have to take the time to select a book of high interest that matches the current curriculum as well as provides opportunities to model and discuss comprehension strategies that students might be struggling with. Aside from carefully choosing the literature, the teacher also needs to pre-read the story and find stopping points for further discussion. In the questionnaires and interviews, teachers mentioned using post-it notes to mark these stopping points.

Time constraints were not mentioned solely in regards to pre-reading preparation, but also during the implementation of the read aloud. Interactive Read Alouds take longer than ordinary read alouds because the teacher stops the read aloud frequently to discuss certain points with the students. The teacher does not just stop and ask a question, but poses a discussion topic or allows for students to chime in with questions and comments. Students are also encouraged to talk to each other about the text. They may discuss the text with partners, small groups, or as a whole class throughout the Interactive Read Aloud. Often times all students would want to participate and have a turn and there simply were not enough time during the read aloud for each child to voice their opinion during every stop.

Along with time constraints many teachers also mentioned that students would talk off topic. Students would have trouble determining between a comment that contributes to the understanding of the text and one that does not. Occasionally students would get off task during the discussion and would need redirection. This can be confusing to students who need more structure and a specific focus. This also may contribute to lengthening the time of the Interactive Read Aloud causing teachers to face time constraints. One teacher mentioned that the more prepared the teacher was then the more focus the Interactive Read Alouds and also student discussions.

One teacher offered a lot of suggestions for teachers with students who get off topic during an Interactive Read Aloud. Rules should be discussed before hand and the teacher should make her expectations clear to the class. The teacher might set up a signal, such as a raised hand, to signal students to quiet down if too many students talk at once or talk runs off topic. This signal should be practice before hand. When students are offered time to talk with peers, the teacher could set a timer to keep the discussion quick and meaningful. When other teachers heard some of these suggestions they agreed that they would be beneficial.

One teacher stated that, “A lot of teachers are looking for a quick fix and want fast results. Interactive Read Alouds are not a quick fix but over the end benefits outweigh any negative that you’ve occurred along the way.” Despite the demands and challenges of Interactive Read Alouds, the learning outcomes are so superior to regular read alouds that the time spent is well worth it.

Point 2 – Modeling Good Reading Behaviors

During an Interactive Read Aloud the teacher models good reading behaviors such as reading fluently with good intonation, expression, and pace, monitoring for meaning and decoding unknown words, and comprehending the story while thinking critically by making predictions, inferencing, visualizing, and more. Then students are given the opportunity to test out these strategies and behaviors in a guided setting not just with the teacher, but with peers as well. The setting is guided because the teacher is involved in the discussion to redirect the discussion or help students if they become confused. An Interactive Read Aloud lets the students see, hear, and think about reading and allows students to see that reading involves thinking. One teacher stated, “My students are able to vocalize what is going on in their head therefore allowing me a glimpse at their thoughts.” Other teachers also wrote that this gave them the opportunity to hear their students’ thinking process and then evaluate their comprehension levels during the read aloud.

While reading aloud the teacher is given the opportunity not just to ask questions but to model and give students the opportunity to make predictions, inferences, connections, and discover the meaning of new vocabulary. Teacher noticed that students’ vocabularies increased along with their ability to decode a new word or infer its meaning. Students also repeated good comprehension strategies that were modeled and practiced during the Interactive Read Aloud. Also, the more that a child heard the teacher read fluently, the more they tried to read fluently themselves.

One teacher wrote that reading aloud and becoming interactive with the text promoted students not only to read better but to also write better. Students need to be

able to talk about a text before they can write about the text. One teacher wrote, “students were better able to write responses to text after they had verbalized their ideas during an Interactive Read Aloud.” Interactive Read Alouds promote students’ oral language skills to develop further. Conrad, Gong, Sipp, and Wright (2004) found text talk as a gateway to culturally responsive teaching. Text talk uses challenging text to improve students’ oral language and comprehension abilities with focused read-alouds. As students hear not just the teacher, but peers talking about the text they begin to feel more comfortable talking about the text as well. As they develop their text talk their own reading and writing develop as well. Speaking, reading, and writing go hand in hand.

A child acquires oral language and literacy from being submersed in a literate culture (Street, 1995). Rogoff, Goodman-Turkanis, and Barlett (2001) stated that children are key in constructing the learning; children are not ‘constructed’ in some linear way by teachers. Children learn from repetition, imitation, and socialization. Gee (1996) stated that literacy learning is interactional and that language is a mediating tool in the construction of identity, social languages, and community languages that serve as resources by students and teachers in the co-construction of literacy knowledge. The child is not a passive recipient of the language but experiences and encounters language data expressed by others within a communicative context.

Point 3 – Structure and Engagement

Many teachers wrote that with Interactive Read Alouds, “Students pay closer attention to the read aloud.” They also said that Interactive Read Alouds were more engaging for students than ordinary read alouds. Teachers stated that before, when the teacher just read a book, students would daydream, draw, look out the window, and not

engage with the story. However, now that Interactive Read Alouds are being enforced in fourth grade, students appear to be more excited for Interactive Read Alouds and actively participate in discussions about the book.

During my observations of Interactive Read Alouds students appeared very engaged with the text and hands would shoot up not only to answer questions but also to ask their own and to bring new light to the text. During the Interactive Read Aloud, I observed the teacher stopping at pre-selected stopping points. Often these points were marked with a post-it note to help remind the teacher to stop. These stopping points had a specific focus.

One Interactive Read Aloud I observed was focusing on Inferencing. The teachers stopping points focused on Inferencing and helped guide the Interactive Read Aloud and keep student conversation on task. Often the teacher would provide students a chance to whisper their thoughts to a peer or with a few peers. This provided all students with a chance to talk, which aided in keeping them engaged.

Students love to take ownership of the text and the discussion. Since books for Interactive Read Alouds are chosen because they are of high interest and relate to the content matter students are hooked and eager to learn. Teachers mentioned that it is harder for students to “day dream or zone out” because they are eager to share their ideas and talk with their peers. Students enjoy any chance they get to speak what is on their mind, especially with their friends. Students are given an active role rather than a passive role.

Along with being more engaging, Interactive Read Alouds are also more planned and structured. The teacher spends a lot of time selecting a text, pre-reading it, and

selecting and marking stopping points to discuss certain aspects of the text. Teachers stated that they choose a focus for the read aloud and mark stopping points that correlate with their focus. These stopping points help focus the read aloud and keep the discussions on topic.

One teacher mentioned that preparing for an Interactive Read Aloud can take her up to a half hour. Since the read aloud is well planned out the read aloud is then administered in a more structured manner. Students enjoy structure and routine and it is necessary for a read aloud to flow smoothly. One teacher said that before she fully understood how to prepare and administer an Interactive Read Aloud she noticed that it was, “out of control.” Students would add random comments that were not on topic and there was no real focus to the lesson. Some students appeared to be more confused after the read aloud then before and it seemed like a class meeting, not an instruction reading time. However, she mentioned that as she began to plan and focus her Interactive Read Aloud more students began to focus their discussion as well and she could see the benefits in the room.

After the Interactive Read Aloud is well planned out in advance the teacher is then free to teach in the moment as well. Students may bring up ideas that the teacher might not have been able to come up with on her own. It is important for the read aloud to not only be structured, but also be open enough for teachers to know when it’s ok to follow the flow of the conversation and to see where it takes them without getting too far off task. One teacher mentioned that, “So often we become embedded in the requirements of the state and school that we forget what’s important. During Interactive Read Alouds students can relate the book to themselves and take the discussion in a

direction far more interesting, and more meaningful than anything the teacher could think of alone.” This is something that can not be done with an ordinary read aloud.

Conclusion and Implications

While researchers viewpoints are contradictory regarding the benefits of read alouds (Meyer, Wardrop, Linn, & Hastings, 1993), it is widely agreed that there are essential components that can make these read alouds effective (Lane & Wright, 2007; Fisher, Flood, Lap & Fray, 2004). Fisher, Flood, Lap, and Fray (2004) suggest that there are essential components of an interactive read-aloud that a regular read aloud lacks. This constitutes for the negative perceptions on ordinary read alouds. This research suggest that there is a better way to read aloud. Interactive Read Alouds are viewed as more beneficial in the classroom.

Throughout my questionnaires, interviews, and observations I found that these teachers defined Interactive Read Alouds the same as Fountas and Pinnell. This research indicates that teachers think Interactive Read Alouds are very beneficial in the classroom. They are more engaging than ordinary read alouds and provide a wonderful opportunity for teachers to model good reading behaviors and for students to practice them. Despite the challenges of preparing a well done Interactive Read Aloud, the teacher found the educational benefits well worth it. Now that teachers have learned more about Interactive Read Alouds they plan on implementing them more often in their classroom.

It would be of great benefit to continue to analyze the perspectives of teachers and reading specialists who implement Interactive Read Alouds in their classroom to see how they differ from ordinary read alouds and if they are viewed in a more positive light. As a teacher of fourth grade, I will be more aware now of what it takes to create a good

Interactive Read Aloud experience for students. It would be nice if teachers were provided with professional development opportunities to further their knowledge of Interactive Read Alouds. These professional development opportunities should provide teachers with models of Interactive Read Alouds, the difference between an Interactive Read Aloud and an ordinary read aloud, how to prepare for one, and how to structure one. It would also be nice for them to offer good books that work well during Interactive Read Alouds.

By determining that Interactive Read Alouds are more beneficial than ordinary read alouds teachers can be educated and informed about the differences and benefits of Interactive Read Alouds in the classroom. More research should be conducted to find the best practices when implementing an Interactive Read Aloud in the classroom. This information should then be published and made available to classroom teachers so that they can implement the best, up to date, practices in their classroom.

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Appendix

Teacher Perspectives of Implementing Interactive Read-Alouds in 4th Grade Classrooms Questionnaire

Please answer the questions below with as much detail as possible. Return the questionnaire to Jennifer Lincoln. By handing in this questionnaire I am consenting to participate in the research study. I understand that all information will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of a Capstone research project. I will not include my name, or the names of other individuals.



1. What is your definition of an Interactive Read-Aloud?

2. In your opinion, how does an Interactive Read-Aloud differ from a read-aloud?

3. How did you prepare for an Interactive Read Aloud?

4. How did you implement the Interactive Read-Aloud in your classroom?

5. When did you implement the Interactive Read-Aloud in your classroom?

6. What were the benefits of the Interactive Read-Aloud in your classroom?

7. What were the negative aspects of the Interactive Read-Aloud?

8. Do you plan on using Interactive Read Alouds in the future? Why or why not?

Appendix

Individual Interview Questions

Additional questions may be asked based on answers given to the listed questions.

1. How do you describe an Interactive Read-Aloud?
2. In your opinion, how does an Interactive Read-Aloud differ from a read-aloud?
3. How did you prepare for an Interactive Read Aloud?
4. How did you implement the Interactive Read-Aloud in your classroom?
5. What were the benefits of the Interactive Read-Aloud in your classroom?
6. What were the negative aspects of the Interactive Read-Aloud?
7. How did the Interactive Read-Aloud affect the children in your classroom?
8. Do you feel that other teachers in the building use Interactive Read Alouds as defined by Fountas and Pinnell?
9. Did you use Interactive Read Alouds before the 2007-2008 school year? If so, where did you first learn about them?
10. Do you plan on using Interactive Read Alouds in the future? Why or why not?