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**THINKING SHOULD BE THE STUDENTS' JOB:
THINK-ALOUDS IN NINTH-GRADE ENGLISH**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative teacher action research study documents the experiences of honors-level students and their teacher as they engaged in think-alouds during their study of Early American literature. Twenty-nine ninth grade students participated in the study in an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse suburban high school containing approximately 1400 students. Methods of data collection included teacher observation, interviews, open-ended surveys, and student artifacts. Instructional activities took place before, during, and after reading texts and included teacher modeling of the think-aloud strategy, student thinking aloud in small groups and pairs, individual students recording their thoughts during independent reading, and small group discussion about the reading process. The purpose of think-aloud implementation was to facilitate participants' development of an active approach to reading by shifting the cognitive demand of reading from teacher to student. Study findings suggested that think-alouds helped students to utilize a variety of reading strategies independently, enhancing their reading comprehension. Think-alouds also increased student engagement by transforming the learning environment into a more student-centered one rich in collaboration and meaningful conversation about literature.

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RESEARCHER STANCE

Teaching: A Career Path for Social Change

Unlike so many other educators I know, I did not always want to become a teacher. When I became old enough to reflect seriously on my future career path, around high school or so, it was the legal profession that seemed a perfect fit for the adult I was becoming. After all, I excelled in reading, writing, and the study of history, and I relished my position as the rebuttalist on the high school debate team. For a teenager, I had an uncommon interest in politics, or more specifically, the way in which people in positions of power could use their influence to improve society, particularly for the economically disadvantaged. I, too, wanted to work my way up to public service at the national level. I dreamed of becoming a senator or even a Supreme Court justice, one who would make sweeping reforms to ease the daily struggles of the poor and write groundbreaking legislation that would help to eradicate hate crime. Most politicians began as attorneys, I reasoned, so a bachelor's degree in political science followed by three years at a prestigious law school formed my post-high school plan. As a freshman at Moravian College, I immediately took the steps needed for realizing my dream of becoming a lawyer—I studied Latin, joined the pre-law club, and researched the college's semester in Washington D.C. program for upperclassmen.

College-aged men and women change so quickly—hairstyles, significant others, religious affiliations, and academic majors—as they go about the process

of ‘finding themselves’ and uncovering their adult identities. Around my sophomore year of college, I began to reflect upon and question my future plans. Would I really be able to make the kind of social changes I so wanted to see in the world as a lawyer or politician? Or would I, as a novice attorney fresh out of law school, end up taking a position in a big city law firm, arguing cases on behalf of large corporations whose ideals couldn’t be more different from my own? I pictured myself as a cutthroat attorney in my thirties or forties, motivated solely by the almighty dollar and contributing little to the well-being of those who truly needed advocates. I wanted a career in which my idealistic need to work for social change could withstand the test of time and become part of my daily reality. I realized the answer to this moral dilemma could be found in teaching.

Even today, in my fifth year as an educator, it is that thirst for social justice that remains at the heart of my work. As a teacher of the English language arts, I know that the reading and writing skills I help my students develop are crucial to my professional vision; after all, literacy is power. It is through literacy that my socioeconomically disadvantaged students can fully realize all of the educational and career options available to them after high school, and, just as importantly, it is through literacy that *all* students can become socially knowledgeable citizens who later become positive agents of change in their communities. Because of my strong belief that literacy is crucial for creating a

just and equitable society, I knew that effective reading instruction would be at the forefront of my action research study.

A Love Affair with Reading

As is the case with most teachers, particularly those of the English language arts, I have experienced a lifelong love of reading. As soon as I was able to read well on my own, around the second or third grade or so, my books and I were inseparable. On long car rides, at mealtimes, while my parents visited friends at their homes, at bedtime, and first thing in the morning, I devoured chapter books of all kinds; series like *The Babysitters' Club*, *The Boxcar Children*, and *Nancy Drew* mysteries stand out vividly in my memory even now. Not to say that nonfiction didn't excite me as well; I poured through books on astronomy, marine life, and religion with equal fascination. Today, as a busy professional and graduate student, I am not able to read for pleasure nearly as often as I would like, though my passion for reading continues. However, I do read rather quickly, so I make up for a great deal of lost ground over summers and holiday breaks, finishing a new book every couple days or so.

For the most part, we enjoy the things we are good at and avoid those activities that present a struggle. By commonly accepted standards, I am a good reader. Like nearly all good readers, I use a variety of strategies to maximize what I take away from my chosen texts. I jot personal connections and 'aha!' moments in the margins of my books, I reread when I realize my mind has wandered

elsewhere, I highlight or underline passages that stand out to me, I visualize characters and settings in my mind, I stop periodically to reflect upon the main ideas of a passage, and I do all of these things almost as naturally as I breathe. I am active while I read; the machinations of my brain never cease as my eyes move across each page, but I take these inclinations of mine for granted.

Because my active strategy use has always been so automatic, I have often failed to notice that the same just is not true for my students. Instead of teaching my students the methods employed by proficient readers, I spend the majority of our literature classes facilitating discussion of the universal issues in our texts. Though such discussion is certainly a valuable use of time, it is simply not adequate in and of itself. While my students are often engaged and thoughtful participants in these conversations, they still struggle with making meaning of some of the course's more demanding literary selections independently. By memorizing my comments and explanations of the speeches, stories, and poems of the curriculum, these students, even many at the honors level, are oftentimes able to pass course assessments despite their comprehension problems. They leave my class without the strategies and skills necessary for navigating new texts by themselves, only to progress to sophomore English relying again on teacher explanation and not their own abilities. Perceiving this rather pressing need, I searched for an instructional intervention that would transform my students into active, self-regulated readers armed with an arsenal of effective strategies.

It's All about the Students

Thanks to Moravian College's progressive teacher preparation program as well as some innovative, forward-thinking cooperating teachers during my student teaching, I was able to develop a student-centered, constructivist vision for my classroom early on in my career. In this vision, students are the ones doing the majority of the thinking that goes on in my class while they work on inquiry-based, self-selected projects, produce authentic writing for a real audience, collaborate with peers to utilize technology in new, exciting ways, and interact with text in a way that is rich, personally meaningful, and far beyond the superficial. Despite my good intentions, full implementation of this vision continues to pose a challenge.

Teacher-directed instruction consumes much more of each class session than I would like, and I leave school mentally exhausted, having taken on much more of the cognitive burden than my students. In many cases, this seems especially true with regard to our study of literature. Because students struggle to comprehend the challenging texts of our curriculum, I fall into the all too common trap of explaining the content of these pieces, becoming the notorious 'sage on the stage.' Comprehension difficulties also mean that students do not come away from reading these texts with an individualized interpretation full of personal connections to their own experiences and worldviews. As a result, I direct class discussions of the literary selections instead of just facilitating and allowing

students to steer the conversation toward the aspects of the text that interest them. In my search for an instructional strategy to implement for my action research study, I considered the need for students to take more ownership over their reading processes, collaborating with peers to make meaning and thinking for themselves instead of looking to me for all the answers.

Finding My Focus

My hopes of pinpointing a student-centered instructional strategy designed to improve students' reading comprehension and empower them with literacy led me to the think-aloud, and the research question guiding my study became, "What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of teacher and student when implementing think-alouds in a ninth grade English language arts classroom?" While still recognizing and embracing the notion that teacher research often brings about surprising, unexpected results, I anticipated that think-aloud implementation would lead to increased reading comprehension among my students. Because of the active, strategic approach to reading that think-alouds support, I expected that my students would be able to make meaning of more challenging texts with ease and would interact with all texts on a deeper, more sophisticated level. I anticipated that my students would take away more from what they read in my course—understandings of universal issues and themes, understandings of themselves as readers, and valuable literacy skills and strategies

for future reading. Indeed, reading comprehension was the primary dependent variable upon which I would focus my data collection throughout the study.

However, I wondered also about the effects of the intervention upon more affective aspects of the learning process, such as students' engagement and motivation to read. Would students enjoy making note of their own thoughts while reading, or would they prefer a more traditional approach to literature study? Would use of the strategy excite students to read more, or would they see the think-aloud as a tedious process that always accompanied the reading that went on in my class? It was my hope that the expected benefits of the intervention with regard to reading achievement would translate into positive student attitudes toward its use; however, the uncertainty surrounding the affective dimension coupled with my own curiosity would trigger additional data collection focused upon motivation and engagement throughout the course of the research study. Ultimately, I trusted that the journey to my question and the journey that would be my action research study would lead to a compelling destination for both my students and myself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a typical high school, there are actually students who cannot read, and these students customarily do not receive special support and are not pulled out of their regular classes for reading remediation. Instead, their inability to make meaning of text too often goes unnoticed by dedicated, conscientious teachers working with them everyday. How can this be? Quite simply, these students can decode. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of secondary-level students can decode with ease, but “decoding” is not synonymous with “reading.” Though quite proficient with decoding the words on the pages of their textbooks, many high school students struggle with the complex process of actually making sense of these texts (Ness, 2007). Since the textbook is often at the heart of high school content-area courses, a student’s inability to comprehend it can be absolutely detrimental to his or her learning and overall achievement in the upper grades (Ness, 2007). This struggle to comprehend is time and again a result of a student’s passive approach to the reading process (Walker, 2005). The think-aloud strategy, the instructional intervention at the center of this teacher research study, is designed to transform the student’s process of reading from a passive one to an active one.

A think-aloud consists simply of verbalizing one’s thoughts while reading. In a particularly compelling analogy, Berne (2004) describes thinking aloud as the “verbal equivalent of the cartoon thought bubble” (p. 153). The process of making

meaning involves constant mental interaction with the text and dialogue with oneself, as well as deliberate use of a wide variety of reading strategies. As is the case with all complex cognitive tasks, the comprehension process is an invisible one, hidden away in the mind of the reader (Walker, 2005). With the think-aloud strategy, this seemingly mysterious thought process is brought to light.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility

The concept of the think-aloud strategy is centered upon a gradual-release-of-responsibility model, meaning use of the strategy begins primarily under teacher direction and gradually shifts until students assume control without teacher support (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). Specifically, the teacher will begin implementation by performing think-alouds during a shared reading, modeling the strategic thought process of a skilled reader through carefully planned commentary after short excerpts of a reading selection (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). Over time, students can take a more active role in these teacher-led think-alouds; for example, the teacher may model a strategy during a think-aloud and then require students to practice it immediately (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). Similarly, after some teacher modeling, the teacher may read a paragraph from the shared reading selection and invite think-aloud comments from the whole class, perhaps recording these comments on the board (Oster, 2001). Through these methods designed to make the teacher-led think-aloud interactive, students are not

only listening and observing, but they are also becoming participants involved in a whole-class process of making meaning.

After students gain experience and become comfortable with the think-aloud in a whole-class format, implementation can then progress to students doing their own think-alouds in pairs or small groups, taking turns reading a selection aloud and thinking aloud after regular intervals of reading (Oster, 2001). Finally, students can think aloud during individual reading by writing their comments as they read. Students may think aloud in writing by annotating the text itself at various places or by recording their thinking in a double-entry journal with quotes from the text in the left column and their thinking, reflections, and reactions in the right column. Following up as a whole class on the paired or individual think-alouds through discussion can be particularly advantageous, as students compare and contrast the types of comments they made with those of their classmates and gain a valuable awareness of the different perspectives that so often result from many individuals reading the same text (McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007).

As responsibility for the reading and thinking aloud shifts gradually to the student, the student moves closer to the ultimate goal of this intervention—internalizing the strategic inner-thought process that is emphasized during teacher think-alouds and crucial for comprehension (Walker, 2005). Lapp, Fisher, and Grant (2008) summarize the student growth that occurs over the course of think-

aloud implementation, stating that students “observe, recognize, emulate, adopt, practice, and self-regulate these metacognitive [reading] strategies” (p. 372). In this way, students make the practices of a skilled reader their own, practices that can then be applied to the new, more challenging texts they will undoubtedly face as their academic careers progress.

To facilitate the process of students internalizing the reading strategies incorporated in think-alouds, Walker (2005) suggests the use of self-evaluation sheets for students. After students independently read and capture their thinking in writing, they take time to reflect on their progress, rating themselves on their use of various strategies and writing in an open-ended format on the quality of the reading session. These self-evaluation sheets help struggling readers recognize the strategies they are adept at using, building confidence and self-efficacy, and serve as a springboard for goal-setting for future reading. Benefits of the evaluations are enhanced when they are followed by a whole-class conversation on reading strategies in the context of the session’s particular text.

The Substance of the Think-Aloud: Key Reading Strategies

Reading strategies, or “cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral processes that are deliberately and consciously employed as a means of attaining a goal,” are central to teacher think-aloud commentary and, through careful scaffolding and a gradual release of responsibility, must become the focal points of students’ thinking aloud as well (Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, & Madden, 2010, p.

258). Thinking aloud can take place at all points of the reading process—before, during, and after reading; for each stage of the process, certain strategies are particularly fitting (Block & Israel, 2004). Before reading, thinking aloud can focus on the visual elements of the text, such as cover design, headings, subheadings, pictures, captions, graphs or charts, etc., and how such elements can prompt the reader to activate her prior knowledge and make predictions for what is to come in the content of the text (Mills, 2009).

Certainly, the greater part of thinking aloud takes place during actual reading. Strategies for use during reading will frequently address unfamiliar vocabulary; thinking aloud about unknown words will focus first on knowledge of word parts and utilization of context clues before consulting a dictionary (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). Text structures and features, aspects of text frequently overlooked by struggling readers, are valuable resources for making meaning and, thus, may also be featured in a teacher's think-aloud commentary. For instance, when thinking aloud about a work of nonfiction, the teacher may model discerning the relationship between the content of a passage and a subtitle (Block & Israel, 2004). Similarly, the teacher may demonstrate analysis of the author's writing style in a think-aloud, or, more specifically, how awareness of typical locations in the text where major ideas tend to be introduced or signal words favored by the writer can further aid comprehension. Additionally, with regard to thinking strategically about text structures and features, Mills (2009) suggests the

importance of educators using digital, nontraditional texts such as online articles, emails, and blogs, which tend to contain new patterns of organization.

Additional strategies for use during reading include predicting, self-questioning, and inferring (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008). Block and Israel (2004) note the importance of teachers explaining *how* they arrived upon a prediction as well as following up on its accuracy after reading further. For developing the skill of self-questioning, teachers must model the difference between questions that involve only simple recall and those that go deeper into the essence of the text (Mills, 2009). Furthermore, think-alouds focusing on inferences must demonstrate the process of connecting what is read to one's prior knowledge in order to make new meaning that goes beyond the superficial.

Finally, strategies to underscore in think-alouds after reading include summarizing, which requires the reader to distinguish between essential and nonessential content, as well as reflecting upon the overall significance and value of the reading selection (Block & Israel, 2004; Mills, 2009). Because of the plethora of strategies available for all stages of the reading process, Block and Israel (2004) and Oster (2001) note the importance of teachers thinking aloud about *how* to select strategies that will be effective for varying textual demands. For example, making personal connections to one's own life experiences may help the reader make meaning of narrative, but would be less helpful for comprehending an informational piece. Developing understanding of when

strategies will prove helpful as opposed to when these techniques will seem less effective is a critical piece in students becoming self-regulated readers.

Benefits of Think-Aloud Implementation

Increased reading comprehension is undoubtedly the primary benefit of think-aloud implementation; indeed, use of the strategy has resulted in students' enhanced ability to make meaning in several research studies across different settings with diverse student populations (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009; Ghaith & Obeid, 2004; Oster, 2001; Scarlach, 2008). Study outcomes revealed affective benefits as well, with gains made in self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009; Oster, 2001; Scarlach, 2008).

Perceiving the ineffectiveness of decontextualized reading strategy instruction, Scarlach (2008) designed and implemented a framework called START—"Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text" (p. 20). The START framework entailed teacher participants modeling eight comprehension strategies, such as predicting, visualizing, self-questioning, and making connections, by means of thinking aloud during shared reading; as implementation progressed, teachers gradually released responsibility so that students assimilated the strategies for their own use. As a scaffold for this process, students practiced annotating their texts, recording their thoughts and making note of which strategies they had used during their independent reading. In her study of the framework's effectiveness across five third-grade classrooms with eighty-one

student participants, Scarlach found that students of all reading levels made gains in comprehension when comparing results of a reading pre-test with results of a similar post-test. In addition, post-study survey data indicated students' increased levels of reader self-efficacy and enhanced motivation to read.

Ghaith and Obeid (2004) also studied the effects of the think-aloud instructional strategy on students' reading comprehension. Their study, which included thirty-two eighth grade participants in a Middle Eastern country, was distinct from other think-aloud research in that it examined effects of implementation on two discrete types of reading comprehension: literal and higher order. The authors defined literal comprehension as a reader's understanding of content stated explicitly in the text, while readers adept in higher order comprehension make sophisticated inferences and evaluate the ideas presented in the reading. Students in their experimental group, who received think-aloud instruction highlighting such strategies as predicting, visualizing, identifying problems, retelling, and self-questioning, attained improved levels of reading comprehension, particularly in the higher order category. As English language arts teachers strive to help their students develop skills necessary to engage with texts in a way that goes beyond the literal and superficial, these findings supporting think-alouds are significant.

Oster (2001), a teacher researcher, found the results of her qualitative study in her seventh grade English language arts classroom echoed those of

previously published research. To examine the effectiveness of the think-aloud strategy, Oster followed the gradual-release-of-responsibility model, modeling think-alouds for her class first and slowly removing supports until students were thinking aloud successfully during paired or individual reading. Results of the action research study indicated that students enjoyed an increase in reading comprehension; for example, the author observed that when assigning students to write their think-aloud comments about a novel chapter for homework, students' responses were of higher quality than when she had assigned comprehension questions in the past. In the same fashion, Oster noted a substantial increase in her students' engagement levels. Specifically, think-aloud use allowed Oster's students to raise the same key points in their work that she would have during a teacher-directed class discussion about literature; in this way, students had ownership over their study of literary works, resulting in increased engagement.

Finally, in a particularly promising investigation of think-aloud effectiveness, Fisher, Frey, and Lapp (2009) implemented a series of literacy interventions, in which think-alouds were at the forefront, on a school-wide scope. As of 2002, only twelve percent of this large high school's ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged student population had scored proficient or advanced on the state standardized test in reading; naturally, teachers were under tremendous pressure from the state to increase student reading achievement. Authors of this article provided the faculty with support in designing and

implementing an intervention across all content-area classes consisting of daily teacher think-alouds in addition to a consistent system of note-taking and silent sustained reading. A mere two years after implementation, students' test scores allowed the school to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress in reading. Engagement levels, too, increased, with one teacher participant noting that over the course of her entire class sessions, students were consistently most engaged during the think-alouds. During the study, she remarked, "[My students] can't wait to hear what I think about what we're reading" (p. 391).

The Think-Aloud and Small Group Discussion

Collaboration and discourse are crucial to students' comprehension processes (Mills, 2009). Therefore, the think-aloud strategy and small group literature discussion form a natural pairing; small group conversation is a particularly meaningful follow-up for when students have read and recorded think-aloud comments independently. Focused on the reading strategies members used in their own reading processes, such group discussion allows students to debrief the meaning-making process with their peers, increasing the benefits that accrue, such as improved reading comprehension, engagement, and self-efficacy, from utilizing student think-alouds alone (Berne & Clark, 2008). Both Berne and Clark and Metzger (1998) make suggestions for best facilitating this small group talk.

Berne and Clark (2008) encourage a scaffolded implementation of these literature discussion groups. To begin, the teacher introduces the activity and explains its purpose to the students. A group of adults, including available teachers from the building, parent volunteers, teacher aides, student teachers, or administrators in addition to the teacher herself model a discussion a group might have after independently reading and thinking aloud. The whole class then discusses what occurred, paying special attention to the types of comments and questions members made. During a later class session, the teacher leads a ‘fishbowl’ discussion with a few students while the rest of the class observes; again, a whole group conversation follows. As a class, students create a list of effective behaviors and talk stems (“I agree with _____ because _____”) for group talk about literature, pulling from the adults’ model conversation and the ‘fishbowl’ discussion held previously. Finally, students begin practicing discussion in their own small groups while the teacher facilitates as needed.

Metzger (1998) promotes Socratic seminars, or “focused discussion[s] on a short piece of writing,” as another classroom activity for using peer conversation to enhance the comprehension process (p. 241). To hold a Socratic seminar, a teacher assigns a short selection to be read and annotated with think-aloud comments for students’ homework. During the subsequent class session, students form an inner and outer circle. Using their written think-aloud comments as a starting point, the inner circle discusses the process of making meaning of the

assigned reading selection, while the outer circle carefully observes and takes notes on the conversation. Lastly, the outer circle wraps up the Socratic seminar by sharing their feedback with their inner circle classmates.

As in the Berne and Clark (2008) piece on literature discussion groups, Metzger (1998) conveys the importance of teachers scaffolding the Socratic seminar, a rather sophisticated format for discussion that may prove challenging to students initially. To support students' participation, the teacher might facilitate the inner circle's discussion initially; furthermore, the teacher should explicitly model appropriate feedback that the outer circle might provide to assist those students in their role. Metzger utilized student exemplars as a scaffold as well, passing around examples of assigned texts covered with students' think-aloud comments to model how one effectively prepares for Socratic seminar participation. Overall, through this noncompetitive conversation process, groups arrive at an interpretation of a text much richer than that of any individual student.

Summary

Literacy is, undoubtedly, at the heart of students' success in both high school and beyond. Therefore, students' development of an active, strategic approach to all stages of the reading process is absolutely essential. By shedding light on the invisible thought process of an adept reader, the think-aloud represents a powerful instructional strategy designed to cultivate such an approach in our students. Indeed, implementation of the think-aloud strategy has led to

increased reading comprehension in research studies across settings and grade levels (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009; Ghaith & Obeid, 2004; Oster, 2001; Scarlach, 2008). The teacher who embraces the think-aloud strategy may very well witness a transformation in her classroom, in which students begin by contributing ideas to a teacher-led, whole class meaning-making process and end by conversing confidently with their peers about their unique courses of action for making sense of challenging texts and their resulting interpretations. In the end, truly, the thinking that is central to the think-aloud is the students'.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of think-aloud implementation upon students' reading comprehension and engagement in our class's study of literature. With this purpose in mind, I set about designing my research study, outlining a plan for think-aloud instruction that would work effectively with the existing American Literature curriculum and, even more importantly, meet the unique needs of the class upon which I focused.

Additionally, I carefully selected data gathering methods that would shed light on my students' experiences over the course of the intervention and set in place a plan for maintaining trustworthiness as a teacher action researcher.

Setting and Participants

My study took place in a suburban high school in the northeastern United States with a student population of approximately 1400. The high school's student body consisted of 69% Caucasian, 14% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 4% Asian students. About 27% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school did not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress in 2011. Block scheduling was utilized in this building, meaning that students had four ninety-minute classes per day, and all classes lasted for a single fall or spring semester.

The class upon which I focused for this research study consisted of 29 ninth graders—12 males and 17 females. All 29 students opted to serve as study participants. Of the 29 participants, two were African American, two were Asian,

one was Latino, and one student was of mixed heritage; the remainder were of Caucasian descent. Four of the participants had gifted IEPs, and one student had a 504 plan. This class was an honors-level English course. Students interested in taking honors had to secure a teacher recommendation from their middle school English language arts course in order to enroll in the class.

Data Gathering Methods

In order to set about answering my research question, “What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of teacher and students when implementing think-alouds in a ninth grade English language arts classroom?”, I formed a data collection plan consisting of various methods. It was my hope that these data collection tools—participant observation, student work, and surveys and interviews—would help to paint the picture of what really occurred over the course of my two and half month think-aloud intervention in a way that would be as detailed and comprehensive as possible. The wealth of data I gathered during the ten week study using these methods was added chronologically to my field log. This compilation of participant observation entries, survey and interview responses, and student artifacts represents a multifaceted portrayal of both teacher and student experiences during the research study.

Participant Observation

Hendricks (2009) asserts that observational data form “the most important source of information in an action research study” (p. 90). Accordingly,

participant observation field log entries make up the bulk of data gathered during my research study. I formally observed my students several times per week over the course of the ten week think-aloud intervention. During the beginning of implementation, instruction was teacher-directed, with me modeling my reading process for the students. As the intervention progressed, I stepped back and my role became more of a facilitator, assisting as needed with paired and small group reading, thinking aloud, and discussion. Even so, I was nearly always an actively involved participant in the daily life of the classroom, which made taking detailed field notes rather challenging. Therefore, most of my notes written during observations were quite brief, consisting of key words and phrases summing up what occurred over the course of a class period. These key words and phrases were then meant to jog my memory when I sat down to write a much more detailed narrative after class (Hendricks, 2009; Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997). The specific class I studied was fourth block, the last period of the day, making it very convenient for me to write up my field log entries immediately while the events of the class session were still fresh in my mind.

My typical field log entry contained a detailed, chronological account of each class session. To provide some context for each observation, most entries began with a brief description of the plan of instructional activities for the day as well as the literary selection being studied. Emphasis was placed upon the students' reactions to the work we did and, most significantly, their voices;

whenever possible, I captured any direct student quotes in the log entries that seemed at all helpful in providing an answer to my research question. Not only did field log entries consist of descriptions of what happened in my classroom, but they also contained my own reflection. This reflection focused upon my feelings about how the intervention was progressing as well as my hunches about both the reasons behind certain student behaviors and generalizations, patterns, and themes that seemed to be emerging. To ensure that my own thinking remained distinct from the more objective descriptions of what I observed, I used brackets to separate teacher reflection within the text of the log entry (Ely et al., 1997).

Student Work

A second form of study data came in the form of student artifacts, or, more specifically, work samples students produced over the course of think-aloud implementation. Because my data collection centered upon information that would indicate the effects of the think-aloud intervention upon my students' reading comprehension, I gathered student work samples that would shed light on students' ability to make meaning while using the think-aloud strategy. The intervention progressed from teacher-modeled and led thinking aloud to reading and thinking aloud in small groups, pairs, and, finally, individually; I collected student work from the later phases of the intervention, during which students were working collaboratively or on their own.

For example, small student groups read monologues from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and annotated these texts with notes that captured their thought process; I added these annotated monologues to my field log. Student pairs took turns reading and voicing their thinking about literary selections written during the American Revolution; students recorded their partners' think-aloud commentary on a specially-designed note-taking handout. Samples of these, too, were added to the field log. During individual student reading, students recorded their thoughts about specific passages on a double-entry journal. These journals, which students completed toward the end of the intervention, were a valuable source of information about each student's reading process, strategy use, and ability to make meaning of challenging text independently as a result of think-aloud implementation. Finally, since I was also investigating how individual thinking aloud could serve as a jumping off point for small group discussion about literature, I collected student groups' self-evaluations, in which group members articulated the strengths and areas for growth within their conversations.

Surveys and Interviews

The think-aloud was meant to transform my classroom into a more student-centered one; therefore, in data collection, I was primarily interested in how the *students* perceived the work we were doing. Hendricks (2009) asserts that such data can "provide a researcher with participants' perceptions about the effectiveness of an intervention, ways the intervention could be improved, and

feedback regarding positive and negative aspects of the intervention” (p. 97).

Indeed, inquiry data, in the form of open-ended surveys and interviews, helped me to gain a sense of students’ perceptions, particularly their opinions regarding the effectiveness of various instructional activities I implemented throughout the research study.

Recognizing the need for some baseline data, I administered an open-ended survey prior to beginning my plan for think-aloud implementation (see Appendix A). This simple, five-question survey inquired about students’ perceptions of themselves as readers and their opinions about which class activities or strategies proved helpful as well as less helpful to their reading comprehension in past English language arts classes. A follow-up survey upon the conclusion of the intervention, also open-ended, asked students to rank the helpfulness of and describe their experiences with a variety of learning activities related to the think-aloud: reading and annotating a text in a small group, reading and thinking aloud with a partner, capturing their own thinking during reading on a double-entry journal, and participating in a small group discussion after reading independently (see Appendix B). This post-study survey also asked students to consider the role of text difficulty in determining the helpfulness of the think-aloud strategy, to list reading strategies they found themselves using most frequently, and, finally, to compare and contrast the think-aloud approach with more traditional methods of literature study. Because I was working with a rather

large group, these open-ended surveys enabled me to gather information on *every* single student's perceptions of what we were doing without having to engage in the lengthy process of transcribing individual interviews. Furthermore, since these students were honors-level, they tended to be strong writers who were more than willing to write thorough, detailed responses, meaning I could be confident that the surveys would garner an abundance of rich information.

Though the majority of the inquiry data I gathered came in the form of the students' detailed responses to my open-ended survey questions, I interviewed my class in a whole-group setting on at least two occasions when the think-aloud intervention was in full swing. Interview questions focused upon some practical considerations for think-aloud implementation such as the role of text difficulty with regard to think-aloud effectiveness as well as the ideal frequency for pausing reading to vocalize one's thoughts. Similar to my participant observation field log entries, I jotted down brief keywords and phrases during the interview that I used to jog my memory later on when writing a full account of my conversation with the class.

I recognized that my students, many of whom were the type who always strived to please their teachers, might respond to my survey and interview questions with answers they thought I wanted to hear. MacLean and Mohr (1999) acknowledge this tendency but assure teacher researchers, "Students are often very helpful and honest in interviews, if they believe you are able to listen and to,

occasionally, hear a difficult message” (p. 46). Therefore, I emphasized the need for students to be very honest in all of their responses, assuring them that I would not take any critical feedback personally.

Trustworthiness Statement

Ethical considerations were central to the planning and implementation of this teacher action research study, ensuring that the study was valid and reliable and protected all student participants from potential harm. To help ensure the latter, I began by submitting my study proposal and personal plan for protecting participants to the college’s Human Subject Internal Review Board. After obtaining their authorization, I sought the approval of my building principal by means of a consent letter (see Appendix C). This letter outlined the purpose of my research as well as the measures I would take to guarantee that no students were harmed. Similarly, an informed consent letter was distributed to each student in my class for review by parents or guardians (see Appendix D). Explained in this letter were important protections for all students involved; specifically, the document made clear that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw from it at any time without penalty (Hendricks, 2009). Information regarding only those students from whom I received parental consent appears in this and any other written reports of my research.

Complete confidentiality also minimizes risk for student participants. For example, no student names appear in any written reports of the study; instead, pseudonyms were used. The pseudonym key as well as my personal field notes, student artifacts, and other sensitive materials were stored on a password protected computer to which only I had access. Hard copies of these documents were kept in a secure location within my private home, and all research materials were destroyed upon the conclusion of the research study.

Validity

In addition to measures designed to protect study participants, validity forms an important piece of a study's trustworthiness. For research study results to be considered valid, data must reveal an account of what happened that is as accurate and truthful as possible (Johnson, 2008; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). To increase my research study's degree of validity, I utilized a variety of procedures suggested in the published literature on conducting teacher action research studies (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). First, I engaged in a sustained period (more than two months) of observation and other data collection; this increased the likelihood that potential patterns and themes could not be attributed to mere coincidence (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008). While conducting participant observations I was sure to include abundant detail in my field log in order to capture what occurred as closely and thoroughly as possible (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008). Writing field log entries shortly after each

class session when events were fresh in my memory also helped me to maintain valid, accurate data. To remain as true to the students' voices as I could, I made frequent use of direct quotations. Additionally, over the course of the research study, I reflected continuously upon what had occurred as well as my next course of action in the form of written reflective memos (Hendricks, 2009; MacLean & Mohr, 1999).

Embracing multiple perspectives was crucial to ensuring that my interpretations of collected data were valid. One important source of varied points of view was my teacher inquiry support group (MacLean & Mohr, 1999). As individuals somewhat removed from my study implementation, members of my support group were able to provide fresh, compelling insights into aspects of my data that I might have overlooked. Immersed in my data collection and analysis on a daily basis, I needed the professional judgment and feedback of fellow educators familiar with the process to add richness and new dimensions to my interpretations. Reading and study of a variety of educational theories and philosophies, from such great minds as Kozol, Freire, Vygotsky, and Dewey, also provided me with several new lenses through which to view and analyze the data I collected (MacLean & Mohr, 1999).

Researcher Bias

Any interpretation of data is quite susceptible to being influenced by the researcher's personal biases (Hendricks, 2009). Biases that could have had some

bearing upon my research study relate to my view of reading and reading instruction. For instance, I see reading as an active, process-based activity that requires use of a variety of strategies. I see reading as absolutely essential to learning across all content areas; therefore, I believe that every teacher is a teacher of reading, even at the high school level. Though some see high school courses as content-based, I believe that instruction designed to teach students the skills and strategies necessary for navigating the texts specific to each discipline represents an invaluable use of instructional time. To me, then, the think-aloud intervention does not take time away from my teaching the American Literature curriculum, but instead embodies a powerful, promising way for students to uncover the texts in the curriculum themselves. Finally, I view reading as a pursuit that is both highly enjoyable and potentially empowering. This opinion could have made relating to those students with intensely negative feelings toward reading somewhat difficult. However, openness to a multitude of perspectives, whether those of my teacher inquiry support group colleagues or renowned education theorists, helped me to keep my biases in check while analyzing data and arriving upon preliminary findings.

Triangulation, Member Checks, and Negative Case Analysis

Triangulation, member checks, and negative case analysis also help to ensure that such findings are valid ones (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). Specifically, I utilized data triangulation by requiring

that any finding or theme I arrived upon was reflected in at least three sources of data (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). For example, if I perceived a pattern of student behavior in notes from participant observations, it must also have appeared in survey or interview data as well as in student work to have been accepted for the final report. Member checks involve seeking feedback from study participants (Hendricks, 2009; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). When drafting theme statements, I had a few participants read them over and share their opinions with me. Did my findings seem accurate to them, or was I way off base? Since student experiences are at the heart of this study, the students themselves provided me with a crucial resource for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of my interpretations of those experiences. Finally, I employed negative case analysis, refusing to dismiss data that did not support my findings (Hendricks, 2009; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). Searching, instead, for reasons that the outcomes for certain students did not fall in line with the majority undoubtedly resulted in more powerful learning for me as the teacher researcher.

Reliability

Finally, reliability, or the ability for an intervention to be repeated with similar results, is another characteristic of trustworthy research (Johnson, 2009; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). To maximize reliability, I provided thick description of the context of my research study, such as students' racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, achievement levels, interests, etc., so that readers of my research

might determine if they could expect similar results in their own classrooms. The human element of qualitative research means that no two interventions could ever be the same, and results can never be generalized as they are in quantitative research. Even so, the story of my study, written with every attempt to remain true and faithful to the students' experiences and to meet the guidelines for trustworthiness, represents a small, yet significant, contribution to the growing body of teacher action research.

RESEARCHER'S STORY

It was 2:00pm on a Monday in November, and it had been another hectic day in the life of a freshman English teacher. No time for sitting, a three-course lunch inhaled in record time, and barely a moment to catch my breath, let alone to use the lavatory. But then, much to my surprise, I found myself taking one of those deep, purifying breaths that are usually reserved for lazy days at the spa or at least for my blissful, Friday afternoon drive home from the high school. My students, seated in clusters or small circles, were discussing literature. And not just any literature—they were talking self-assuredly about Ralph Waldo Emerson, an author whose visions and ideas I didn't truly "get" until my sophomore year as an English language and literature major at Moravian College.

I listened in closely to the energetic chatter of the groups around me.

"He was focused on individualism," began Eva, and, pointing to her copy of the text, continued, "No one knows your duty better than you know it."

"I think it's about being reflective," said Roger dramatically, clearly basking in the spotlight of his group as usual. "You don't need to worry about what others think, but you should take constructive aspects of their criticism to better yourself as a person."

"Society is just not allowing people to be themselves," asserted Chloe, shaking her head ruefully.

Indeed, my students were excited to be discussing challenging literature, and, judging by the inferences, connections, paraphrases, and statements of theme that I was hearing, they were doing a fine job at it. Even more astoundingly, they were doing it *without me!*

My name is Kelly Lesh, and I am a control freak. I derive ridiculous amounts of pleasure from writing to-do lists. I was the type of student who would re-copy notes at home if they weren't written neatly enough during the teacher's lecture. Making plans is my specialty—lesson plans, recreation plans for my husband and me, plans for what I will cook and even wear throughout the work week. Admittedly, I enjoy when my classes run like well-oiled machines.

One can imagine that it was a long road to get my ninth-graders to the point where they could hold mature, insightful conversations about classic works of American literature independently. However, it was also quite the journey for me, as a teacher and as a person. My primary challenge over these several months was relinquishing the control that I so dearly loved.

Don't get me wrong. I was never the type of teacher who would stand up for ninety-minutes and lecture. My students rarely copied notes off of an overhead projector. Collaboration and creativity were part of our classroom culture. However, I planned the study because I saw the need for change. I was doing far too much explaining, particularly with regard to the literature we read. I still held

the vast majority of control over the class's interpretations and analyses of each text in the curriculum. Throughout my teaching career, I always wanted my students to become active, strategic readers who could tackle cognitively-demanding literary selections with ease, all on their own. But they weren't doing this, and they didn't have to when I nearly always ended up explaining what everything we read was about. They rarely had the chance.

The think-aloud strategy was our vehicle for getting to this place, the place in which the students took control over their reading, their strategy-use, their thinking, and their interpretations. At times, it was a rough road, but there were also striking sights and sounds along the way. And by the end, my students took the driver's seat, and I could sit back and enjoy the ride.

Meeting My Class

The first week of school flew by in the usual whirlwind of syllabi, establishment of rules and procedures, textbook distribution, introductions, and icebreakers. Still in my relaxed summer mode of wearing flip-flops instead of constricting high heels and sleeping in until 9:00 instead of waking to an alarm blaring at 5:20, I was completely exhausted once the afternoon of Friday, September 9th finally rolled around. Even so, I took some time to reflect on my initial impressions of this group, my fourth block Honors American Literature I class.

My class consisted of twenty-nine incredibly outgoing ninth-graders. As a teacher who made it a top priority to speak individually with every single student every day, I knew this sizeable number would pose a challenge. Even after only four fast days of class, I could tell that the room was filled with huge personalities, students who loved to be the center of attention, showing off their quick wits, strong opinions, and senses of humor. Immediately, I perceived that the large class size combined with the students' larger-than-life personalities added to the class's timing at the very end of the day would often make for a rather noisy classroom and a quite frazzled teacher. However, the budding teacher researcher in me also saw these factors as potential sources of rich data for my study—I knew these kids would have a lot to say!

Reflecting upon my initial impressions through the teacher researcher lens, I also began to discern some students who might serve as key participants in my study. With a tiny stature that could barely contain an enormously charismatic personality, Roger was, undoubtedly, the first who came to mind. Hilarious, fast-talking, and adored by his classmates, he jumped at every chance to engage in friendly arguments with me about issues in the content, and his willingness to debate with me revealed an intelligence and insightfulness beyond his years. A 504 plan did outline academic accommodations for Roger, a result of ADHD and OCD, but I really couldn't fathom this star student ever needing them.

Friendly and likeable, Will, too, certainly made his mark in those first few days. With a fondness for speaking in foreign accents (Russian was his favorite) just for the fun of it, he, much like Roger, reveled in being the center of his classmates' rapt attention. Will did not seem capable of speaking without physically gesturing, and his gestures often involved his whole body as opposed to his hands alone. His emotions were never a secret; instead, he displayed them through a wide range of intensely animated facial expressions. Like so many of his enthusiastic classmates, Will shot up his hand at every opportunity; his natural inquisitiveness meant that asking me questions was his favorite mode of class participation.

I would never finish my study without Julia's voice being heard, I knew. With a maturity that belied her fourteen years, Julia, the quintessential extrovert, had a flair for talking with her teachers as if she was just another adult in their social circle. One of those rare types who make you feel as if you are the most important person in their world, Julia rarely entered my classroom without giving me a warm, friendly embrace and inquiring about my day so far. I immediately envisioned this bright, sensible young woman serving as a wildly successful leader among her classmates.

Clearly, shy students were rare in this group, but soft-spoken Amy fit the bill. She was one of the few students who I was unsuccessful in getting to know very well in those first four days. She didn't even know there was a summer

reading assignment (tests on the two summer novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *Flowers for Algernon*, were scheduled and administered during the first week), which is pretty much unheard of for an honors student. Perceiving the risk of Amy's getting lost in the shuffle among such outspoken classmates, I vowed to make a special effort to connect with her.

My initial impression was that these four students would serve me well as key participants for my research study. Indeed, my intuitions proved accurate in this regard, and Roger, Will, Julia, and Amy remained individuals of marked interest to me over the course of the intervention. Though each of these students was undoubtedly unique and defied labeling, they were, in some ways, representative of general types of students in the class. Roger represented the very high achievers, while Will embodied that student for whom learning must truly be a social process. Amy was illustrative of those learners with introverted personalities who perhaps prefer listening to speaking. Finally, Julia's fondness for talking openly with her teachers and expressing her opinions about all aspects of class made her a natural key participant. With characters in place, this year's story was ready to unfold.

Introducing My Study

It was Monday of the second week of school. Things were starting to feel familiar; both my students and I were starting to enjoy that comfortable sense of routine. The time was right to explain to my students that they were a special

group, that I would be learning from them in so much more depth than I had ever learned from a class before.

“Even though I’m a teacher, I’m actually still a student, like you all are. I’m working on my master’s degree in education at Moravian. This is my last year, and I need to study one of my classes. I’ll be writing up what I find into a *huge* paper, almost like a book. I need to study how to help my students become the absolute best readers they can be. I chose you!” I explained.

“You’re writing a book about us?!” asked Austin, wide-eyed.

“Yeah, you could definitely think of it like that. It is like a book,” I said. “Throughout this semester, I’m going to be asking your opinions on lots of different things that we do, so I hope you’ll be willing to share lots of your thoughts with me.”

“Can we all get a copy when you’re done?” Matt inquired.

“Well, it’s going to take all year for me to do this, and by the time I’m done, you’ll all be off in your second semester classes!” I answered with a chuckle.

I went on to explain how I would need their consent as well as the consent of their parents in order to be able to write about their experiences in my class. I distributed my parental consent form, and we read through it together. Much to my delight, all twenty-nine students opted to serve as participants.

Introducing the Think-Aloud

My plan for think-aloud implementation was divided into four phases: I would begin by modeling the strategy during shared readings, gradually eliciting the thoughts and participation of the whole group. After several rounds of these teacher-led think-alouds, students would read a short selection in a small group, annotating copies of the text with their thoughts before presenting their reading process to the class. Students would then move on to reading and thinking aloud with a partner, and, after a few tries at this, the intervention would culminate with students reading for homework and capturing their thinking in a double-entry journal. These journals would then serve as jumping off points for small-group literature discussions during subsequent class sessions. All of these activities would utilize the normal texts in the American Literature curriculum, so my implementation plan would be seamlessly integrated into the course, a requirement in my building where the expectation was consistency and uniformity among teachers of the same course.

However, I wanted to get my students excited about the work we were going to do, and that might have been too tall of an order if I introduced the think-aloud with one of the texts up first in the curriculum sequence—a nonfiction selection by the Native Americans or the Puritans. Instead, I chose a song. After all, many songs, with their use of figurative language and other literary devices, resembled poetry, perfect for close reading and analysis. Coldplay, a mainstream

band with poetic, rather puzzling lyrics, fit the bill, and “Clocks,” a song I played repeatedly throughout my four years of college but whose meaning had eluded me, seemed the perfect piece for modeling my thinking process while reading.

I began my “Clocks” lesson by asking the group about the terms “think-aloud” and “talk to the text” (“talking to the text” is common terminology for capturing one’s thinking process while reading by writing directly on the text). I already anticipated that the students would have a fair amount of knowledge about thinking aloud; my implementation plan would not be the first time they had heard about or dealt with the strategy. Specifically, conversations with our District’s Supervisor of Literacy informed me that students had practice with the think-aloud in a middle school course on academic strategies. From what I gathered, however, this course focused on students practicing reading strategies on excerpts of literary selections completely devoid of context, very similar to what one might find in a standardized test preparation workbook. So, yes, my students might be able to define a think-aloud, but did they really perceive it as useful to their own reading? I was hoping that my plan, with its emphasis upon authentic strategy use, would help change their minds if they arrived with negative attitudes resulting from their past experiences.

Indeed, the students seemed to have a solid understanding of what it meant to think aloud. When I casually mentioned their eighth-grade academic strategies class, the class let out a collective groan. Will even put his fingers to his head in

the shape of a gun. I explained to the group that I hoped our work with think-alouds would seem much less painful to them, more part of a normal routine to help everyone understand the literature better.

Then, I told my students I was going to model a think-aloud while reading the lyrics to Coldplay's "Clocks," annotating my thoughts on an overhead transparency. I told them to listen for the general types of comments I was making and the strategies I was using. Not surprisingly for this outspoken group, students were extremely eager to share their opinions and their thinking about the lyrics, calling out comments and connections. For example, when I shared how the title of the song made me visualize a painting by Salvador Dali with melting clocks, Tim yelled out the painting's title, *The Persistence of Memory*. Though I was certainly interested in hearing the students' thoughts, I asked for their patience, "I would like to finish demonstrating this for you. But please don't worry; you'll have many, many opportunities to share your thinking with each other down the road."

After I finished my reading and thinking aloud, I asked the class to brainstorm a list of the types of comments I made. Lauren recorded these on the board. Here is what the students came up with, in their words:

- Picturing
- Using background knowledge
- Summarizing
- Paraphrasing
- Predicting

- Personal experiences
- Emotions
- Connections

During my post-lesson reflections, I marveled at the thoroughness of their list; the students, obviously careful, perceptive listeners, pinpointed pretty much every reading strategy I had woven into my think-aloud. Thinking back on how uncomfortable I was in past years trying to model my thinking process while reading, I celebrated the confidence with which I was able to explain my thoughts as a result of the extensive planning I had put into this lesson. Most of all, however, I found myself quite excited to hear more of *their* thinking, and, certainly, this opportunity would come before I knew it.

A Pre-Implementation Survey

Shortly after my introduction to the think-aloud with the “Clocks” text, I administered a short, open-ended survey on students’ perceptions of themselves as readers and past experiences with reading in their English courses. After reassuring the class that I would not judge them in any way based on their responses, I encouraged them to be open and honest in their answers to my questions and to take their time. Students spent about fifteen to twenty minutes on the survey, and to my surprise, my usually lively group wrote in complete, uninterrupted silence.

Do you consider yourself a good reader? Why or why not?

Roger: Absolutely! I am an extremely fluid reader and am able to use reading strategies like second nature when I am engaged in a book. I am able to comprehend any material I read very well.

Will: Good but slow. I understand things pretty well, but am slow.

Julia: Not really. Sometimes I read too fast and forget important details.

Amy: Yes. I ask questions, reread, and talk to the text.

In past English classes, which class activities, strategies, or homework assignments helped you to understand the texts you had to read?

Roger: Outlines, interactive class discussions, skits, and asking questions.

Will: Going over it as a class.

Julia: Reading silently. Poster projects. Essays.

Amy: Reading as a class.

Which class activities, strategies, or homework assignments were not as helpful for you in understanding what you had to read?

Roger: Read alouds.

Will: Reading it and answering questions by ourselves.

Julia: Group reading.

Amy: (didn't answer this question)

Figure 1. Examples of Student Responses to Pre-Study Survey Questions

After a careful read-through of the students' survey responses, several commonalities became apparent. First, the vast majority of the group (25 students) identified themselves as good readers, not surprising for a class of honors students used to succeeding in school. Even so, when asked what goes through their minds as they read, most students only mentioned visualizing the

text and making predictions. Only Amy mentioned self-questioning, and Gina alone cited making meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary words through context clues. Students did not mention making use of numerous other reading strategies like making connections to other texts or personal experiences or stopping periodically to summarize what has been discussed. It was certainly possible that students used these strategies regularly but did not mention them on the survey, but, even so, I perceived that their reading could still be taken to the next level and that most of the group could develop a more active approach to their reading—particularly when trying to make meaning of high school, honors-level texts they had not encountered in the middle school.

Also unsurprising to me were the five students who expressed dislike for talking to the text, a written method of thinking aloud. I surmised that this aversion might have again been a result of the de-contextualized, rather inauthentic curriculum in their eighth grade academic strategies course. Since 27 of the students indicated that they found middle school texts very easy, it also seemed possible that students may have deemed think-alouds ineffective because they may have been forced to do them while reading text simple enough to comprehend with minimal strategy use. This hypothesis made one of the goals for my study—students’ think-alouds arising out of actual need, not just because of teacher requirements—seem even more significant.

Finally, several students expressed dislike for boring text, which served as a sort of warning for me. Many of the text selections in the American Literature curriculum, particularly those written during the very early history of the country, could certainly be deemed boring. Though it was not in my power to delete low-interest texts and insert new ones, I knew I could help counteract this challenge throughout the study by planning compelling pre-reading activities meant to capture student interest in the reading ahead.

My Thinking Aloud Begins

The class burst into an enthusiastic round of applause as Victor and Will finished their turn at impromptu storytelling. Students had just finished sharing their work on a pre-reading activity for a traditional Cherokee myth, “How the World Was Made.” They were to imagine that society had no scientific explanation for why the moon changes shape throughout the month and create an original myth that would account for the shifting phases. Students readily rose to the challenge, telling tales that incorporated such fanciful ideas as giant space babies and mommies and the moon as a giant chocolate chip cookie.

With students’ interest levels at a respectable high, the class was ready to read, so we briefly went over a think-aloud reference sheet meant to review its purpose as well as a number of useful reading strategies to consider utilizing while thinking aloud (see Appendix E). After that, I was ready to take my first turn at modeling my thought process during reading via a think-aloud.

Understandably, I was somewhat nervous about trying an instructional technique with which I had little experience; however, I had adhered small post-it notes to the pages of the myth, prepared in advance with key words and phrases meant to jog my memory about my thought process while reading the piece. These did much to appease my anxieties and enhance my confidence. After a deep breath, I began my modeling, reading aloud and pausing approximately twice per paragraph to vocalize my thinking.

Text	My Commentary	Reading Strategies Addressed
<p>“The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardigan points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock. When the world grows old and worn out, the people will die and the cords will break and let the earth sink down into the ocean...”</p>	<p>“I’m trying to form a picture in my mind of what’s being described here. I see a big island hanging from a sky made of rock by four thick cords. It’s definitely much different from the way we visualize the sky and our planet.”</p>	<p>Visualizing</p>
<p>“Of the trees only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end, and to them it was give to be always green, and to be the greatest for medicine, but to the others it was said: ‘Because you have not</p>	<p>“I’m noticing some personification. They use the word ‘hair’ to refer to the trees’ leaves. This makes a lot of sense to me with what I already know about the Native Americans. Given their respect for the earth and nature, it makes sense that they would</p>	<p>Connections to prior knowledge, making meaning of figurative language</p>

endured to the end you shall lose your hair ever winter.”	consider plants on equal footing with humans and would use personification to describe them.”	
“Men came after the animals and plants. At first there were only a brother and sister until he struck her with a fish and told her to multiply, and so it was. In seven days a child was born to her...”	“It’s really interesting; I’m noticing a bunch of connections to the Bible and its version of how the world was created. The brother and the sister are like Adam and Eve. And they use the number seven here, which is all over the Bible, like how God rested on the seventh day after creating the world or the seven deadly sins.”	Connections to prior knowledge, connections to other text

Figure 2. Examples of Teacher Think-Aloud Commentary for “How the World Was Made”

In an effort to make my think-aloud more interactive, I invited class participation at several points during my reading of the selection. For example, after reading a particularly puzzling part of the myth in which the author discusses a parallel world with opposite seasons, I expressed my confusion and asked for some clarifications from the class about what the author might be referring to. Rose guessed that this parallel world could be an underwater environment, while Will thought that the passage was describing the center of the earth. Jasmine volunteered her idea of this world being the southern hemisphere, and Roger stated boldly, “This place is definitely heck!” In a similar fashion, members of the class shared what they visualized most vividly during my reading as well as some of their questions about the piece.

In reflecting on the lesson, I was rather pleased. Extensive planning and preparation of my think-aloud commentary had allowed me to describe my thought process with confidence and to address a variety of reading strategies. This modeling was powerful, I thought, for instead of just *telling* my students the importance of being actively involved while reading, I was *showing* them. And by inviting my students' participation and calling upon them to share what was happening in their minds while I read, a teacher-centered lesson became a more interactive one. It was official; the first phrase of my intervention—teacher-led think-alouds—was now underway.

Time—Always a Headache!

“Announcements! Announcements!” cried Roger, reminding me to turn the television on for the 2:40 high school news program. Sighing disappointedly, I reached for the remote control. It seemed as if we had just barely gotten started, and it was already time to wrap up for the day.

It was the third week of school, and the issue of never having enough time with this class was becoming exasperatingly apparent. My second block class was also an Honors American Literature I course, but we always managed to accomplish so much more than we did in fourth block. For one thing, fourth block was actually five minutes shorter than block two. This difference, combined with the five minute news program at the end of class, meant that block four was shortchanged ten whole minutes each day. The twenty-nine rather chatty students

in fourth block also contrasted sharply with second block's relatively introverted group of nineteen, making the time difference even more evident, and, all too often, my attempts to move the class through all the activities I had planned left me feeling like a lone fish trying to swim upstream.

After my first, moderately successful attempt at modeling a think-aloud with the Cherokee creation myth, I did go on to carry out teacher-led think-alouds during reading of two more Early American texts—Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, a firsthand account of the pilgrims' journey and first year in the New World, and Bradstreet's "Upon the Burning of Our House," a poem about the Puritan author's emotional response to a fire in her home—with similar results. However, this particular class session did not seem to be progressing as productively, and the time issue was at least partially to blame.

Today's literary selection was an excerpt from a slave narrative by Olaudah Equiano, a Nigerian kidnapped and sold into slavery at age eleven. In an effort to pique students' interest and activate some of their background knowledge on the topic, I began the lesson by projecting some interesting quotes from the text on to my Promethean board. I gave the students no context, but simply had volunteers read each aloud. Afterward, I asked the students for their predictions about the text; Hope immediately connected the quotations with the slave trade, citing the lines about family members being separated and words that conveyed a ship for a setting.

As was the case with the two selections by the Puritan authors, my plan was to model reading and thinking aloud through the first few paragraphs. I would then continue the shared reading but invite student think-aloud comments after each paragraph or so.

“Wow, I’m noticing how the word ‘cargo’ is used to refer to the slaves on the ship. That word usually isn’t used to refer to people, but it does fit in with what I know about slavery and how slave traders viewed Africans as less than human,” I explained.

Before I could proceed with the reading, Roger shot up his hand, obviously dying to share something.

“Last year in social studies, I learned about how slave ships used either a tight pack or a loose pack for transporting the slaves. So, that was the connection that came to my mind right away. I’m wondering which one was used on this ship,” he mused.

Though I had planned to model my thinking through this first part of the text, only inviting students to share once our reading was well underway, it was difficult for me to deny any members of the class the chance to make their voices and opinions heard, even if it did mean getting off track a bit. After all, since the ultimate goal of my intervention was for the students to be doing the thinking during reading, I saw no reason to stop any student endeavoring to do this.

Before I knew it, however, class had literally flown by yet again, and I ended up assigning the rest of the selection to be read as homework with a graphic organizer on characterization. Indeed, I did not finish what I had planned for today, and there was much more important work to be done with the reading of this selection; students reading the piece on their own, without all of the discussion of reading strategies my lesson was meant to incorporate, was not part of my plan. Taking an extra day to finish the reading probably would have been the wiser decision, but I gave into the perennial pressure for coverage that plagues so many high school teachers and hoped for a more favorable outcome next session.

The Final Teacher-Led Think-Aloud—Ending on a High Note

“You know, it seems like this guy is talking like he knows hell when no one really does!” asserted Tim.

“I disagree, because, actually, they talk about hell a lot in the Bible. So he could know what he’s talking about,” countered Steve.

“Steve, you must have some background knowledge about the Bible,” I said. Steve nodded, and the conversation continued.

“It really seems, the way the author describes it, that God enjoys having this power,” shared Eva.

“Yeah, I agree with Eva, and I was picturing a man in limbo between two places,” added Greg.

Julia joined in, stating, “It reminds me of puppets on a string, and God can just cut the string at anytime.”

“What Julia just said reminds me of that Shakespeare quote, ‘All the world’s a stage,’” said Tim.

“I picture God’s hand letting go of a guy and a man burning in a fire,” Rick said.

“The angry God in this sermon reminds me of the angry God in the Bible who flooded the earth,” Will remarked.

Shooting up his hand yet again, Tim offered, “The spider web image really stood out to me, because I imagined hell on one side of the web and heaven on the other.”

Scribbling furiously, I tried my hardest to capture the students’ rich commentary in my journal. Our reading today had begun with my modeling the thought process needed to make sense of the opening to Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards’s sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” After playing a bit more of the professional recording of the sermon, I paused the CD and invited students to share some of what was going on in their minds. Clearly, the kids had a great deal to say. The closing to my journal from this session read as follows:

“In reflecting on what happened, I was blown away by the thinking that was going on. I guess I really hadn’t given students the opportunity to

share their thoughts like this in past classes. So I didn't realize what the kids were capable of. They were pretty much only answering my questions about what I personally focused on in the text. Opening things up like this makes me realize the kids have a lot to say about what we read, and they can learn from each other."

The Early American literature unit had come to a close, and the time seemed right for me to take a step back from all of the teacher modeling and give the students more responsibility. I knew that our next unit—*The Crucible* by Arthur Miller—would present a nearly ideal opportunity for doing just this.

Beginning *The Crucible*

Extensive background knowledge is needed to comprehend Arthur Miller's classic drama, *The Crucible*. Readers need a sense of the Puritan religion and way of life, as well as some awareness of what occurred during the Salem Witch Trials. Understanding that Miller wrote the piece as thinly-veiled criticism of the McCarthy era communist investigations would also prove helpful in making meaning of the selection. Therefore, I devoted several class sessions to pre-reading activities meant to help my students acquire this needed background. For instance, student pairs completed an interactive witch hunt activity on National Geographic's website, and we held a debate on whether it is a better choice to confess to something you did not do and spare your life or refuse to tell this lie and be executed as a result.

When it was finally time to begin reading, students volunteered for the roles that appealed to them. Several students were interested in major roles, not surprising given the huge personalities in this group, so I had to assign speaking parts fairly by having those interested pick numbers between one and ten, with the students who came closest to my chosen number receiving their desired roles. During Act I, numerous students demonstrated their superb fluency as readers, with Roger, Skye, and Tim all doing top-notch jobs reading their lines with appropriate emotion and expression.

In reflecting on the class's progress with the reading, I found myself feeling quite insecure and weary of the long road that lay ahead in the transformation of my classroom. I realized how frequently I had paused the students' reading to discuss the text with them or to pose some basic comprehension questions and remembered hating when the teacher did just that back when I was a student, feeling that as soon as I started getting into the reading, the teacher had to interrupt my train of thought. In short, I felt I was still doing far too much explaining, when the goal of my study was to do just the opposite.

While I felt insecure about my shortcomings, I did try to focus on the positive. Progress *was* being made. I considered how in the past, we zipped through *The Crucible* and, for the most part, students obtained only a cursory understanding of the plot and never had the chance to do truly close reading and

in-depth analysis; thanks to my intervention and my study, this year's students would get that chance very soon.

Small Group Think-Aloud Presentations with *Crucible* Monologues

Six groups of my students sat in clusters around the room, huddled around overhead transparencies of one of Abigail Williams's monologues from Act I of *The Crucible*. I had just finished explaining guidelines for the task. Small groups of four to five students were to read carefully through the monologue, discuss its meaning, and find four to five spots where they might share their thinking with the class. Comments to be shared might involve higher-order questions, personal connections, paraphrases, vocabulary meanings derived from context, or inferences about the characters. Students were to annotate the monologue to facilitate their presentations. I modeled a sample think-aloud presentation using a different monologue than the one with which students would be dealing. The monologue I selected for the students' group work appears below.

Abigail:

“Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mind, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! Now you—sit up and stop this!”

Figure 3. Crucible Monologue Used for Group Think-Aloud Presentations

While students were discussing the text and preparing their presentations, I focused on observing the two groups closest to me. Nick made meaning of one of the lines, stating, “She’ll cut them. She’ll stab them.” Rick referenced his textbook, possibly to see the monologue in context and utilize the footnotes provided in the book. Roger and Rose were involved in a rather heated debate over whether the monologue had a sexual double meaning, and Roger kept insisting, “There’s a violent, sexual connotation,” which Rose vehemently denied.

For the presentations themselves, I left it open for student groups to decide if they wanted one student to serve as a spokesperson or if they wanted to read and think aloud in a more collaborative fashion for the audience. All groups opted to appoint a spokesperson, and all students who served in this role were very confident in explaining their groups’ thinking. Roger compared the girls’ situation to a conspiracy and made a modern-day connection of Abigail exhibiting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Ever the leader, he even quieted the class at one point when a few side conversations broke out. Megan did a fine job of making character inferences, deeming Abigail a controlling leader. Will was a standout as well, using high drama and a Russian accent as he explained his group’s interpretations. Though he went on occasional tangents (like explaining small drawings he had included on the transparency that were only loosely related to the text), he was still largely on track with his thinking.

When all groups had had their turn, I wanted to debrief some aspects of the process, and the following conversation ensued:

[The mood in the room is happy, relaxed, and informal. Many students are still seated in their groups, and some are perched atop desks. MRS. LESH is sitting at a student's desk, a part of the group herself.]

MRS. LESH: I think you guys did a really nice job with those presentations. So, I want to ask you, what was the value of every group looking at the same monologue?

GREG: *[confidently]* Different perspectives!

RICK: *[nodding in agreement, and adding]* You may have missed something in your own reading and other groups point it out.

MRS. LESH: Thanks, Rick. *[Pause—carefully]* Because of some past experiences, I know some of you have had negative attitudes with regard to the kind of thing we just did, talking to the text or whatever you want to call it. I would never ask you to think aloud and talk to the text about the entire play.

JULIA: *[with laughter]* Whew, thank God!

MRS. LESH: *[laughing too]* Of course not. You would get so wrapped up in doing that for every single line that you'd lose the meaning of the whole thing. But do you see any value for doing it for a small piece, like one monologue?

MANY: *[nearly in unison]* You understand!

HOPE: *[elaborating in the shy, serious voice that is typical for her]* You understand more about the character and where she's coming from.

[MRS. LESH writes furiously in her journal, unable to hold back a smile, indicating how pleased she is that her students see at least some value in what she is having them do.]

Figure 4. Drama—Follow-Up Conversation for Crucible Think-Aloud Group Presentations

A week later, our class repeated this entire process for different monologues pulled from later points in the drama. When it came time for me to

reflect on the activity as it occurred over both instances, I perceived a great deal of value in what we had done, but also a few areas which needed improvement.

The lessons' strengths and weaknesses are summarized in Figure 5.

Successes	Areas for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students had increased responsibility for making meaning and discerning what was important. In the past, I would have ended up explaining what Abigail was saying in her monologue or asked a student or two a comprehension question about it. ✓ Students got to hear one another's thoughts about an identical piece of text. They could see what was similar, validating their own thinking, and what was different, building upon their own thinking with multiple points of view. ✓ Students, because of the collaborative nature of the task, were engaged in what they were doing—much more so than if they were passively listening to me. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Time—with this group, it seemed we were always running out of it. ✓ The social personalities of many in the class meant that groups occasionally veered off-task, despite the established expectations and norms for cooperative activities. ✓ Some of the groups' monologue annotations indicated a focus on the superficial and a distinct potential to analyze text at a deeper level.

Figure 5. Crucible Think-Aloud Group Presentations: Successes and Areas for Growth

Despite a few stumbling blocks, I still felt the strong points of the task outweighed any negatives and that, overall, the class and I were headed down the right path. A new unit was on the horizon, and it was time for me to take yet

another step back, closer to the sidelines, and for students to take even more responsibility for and more ownership over our study of literature.

Thinking Aloud in Pairs

A pre-Revolutionary War letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, who was away working in the Continental Congress, describing the state of war-torn Boston. An excerpt from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography in which he travels fifty miles by foot to reach Philadelphia. Sounds pretty riveting, right? Probably not, unless you are a true history buff. However, these were the types of texts up next in the ninth-grade American Literature I curriculum. Literary nonfiction written during the American Revolution formed the content of the unit, and my study had reached the point in which students would take on more of the cognitive burden for making sense of the texts we were studying. I had done extensive modeling of an active, strategic approach to reading with numerous texts from the Early American literature unit. Small student groups read and employed the think-aloud together with short pieces from *The Crucible*. Now, students would have increased responsibility for making meaning, reading and thinking aloud in pairs.

I knew my students were ready for this new, challenging type of task; judging by the quality and sophisticated level of analysis I observed during *The Crucible* monologue presentations, I knew they could succeed with less teacher support. My main concern, instead, was the rather low-interest level of these Revolutionary-era texts. I could not deny the importance of these primary source

documents to the history of our nation, and, as an adult who had considered majoring in history, I had enjoyed reading them. However, I knew the same would not be true for the typical freshman English student, and though I was confident that my hardworking students would do whatever I asked of them and surely rise to the challenge of working through these pieces, I could not envision them very engaged while doing so.

An enjoyable pre-reading activity was absolutely crucial in this case; my goal was to spur some curiosity in my students for the reading that lay ahead. Since we would be working with Abigail Adams's 1776 letter to John, I placed the class in small groups and provided them with the task of writing a present-day letter to a significant other or spouse away fighting in a war. I hoped that writing from this perspective would help the group make some sort of personal connection to Abigail's writing. After about ten minutes of collaborative writing, students shared their letters with the whole class. As was always the case with this group, the letters sparkled with creativity—some humorous, some melodramatic, some sweetly heartfelt.

I shared some brief background information on Abigail's letter, reminding students that because this was a personal letter, we were not the intended audience, so it was only natural if we couldn't understand everything she was saying. I read and shared some of my think-aloud commentary for the opening of the letter and then explained that students would be paired up and would be taking

turns finishing the reading and thinking through it, just like I did. The student who was not reading and thinking aloud would jot down the comments his partner made on a note-taking sheet I had prepared (see Appendix F).

Careful observation of the students' talk as well as a thorough examination of their note-taking sheets revealed a strategic approach to reading that was often quite impressive, especially in light of the complex use of language in the piece. Some highlights of their work are captured below—paraphrases, summarizing statements, and inferences about the text.

<p>Austin: “She’s getting happy because of the temporary peace. She revels in what’s right now.”</p> <p>Rick: “She feels more confident now than she did a month ago.”</p> <p>Victor: “They were afraid for their lives but not anymore because the war is out of Boston.”</p> <p>Lily: “[John] should use his power to get more rights for women.”</p> <p>Gina: “The phrase ‘gaiete de coeur’ comes from French. It means she is looking at the bright side of things.”</p>

Figure 6. Students' Think-Aloud Comments during Paired Reading of Adams's Letter

Not all of the students' comments indicated a high level of thinking, however. For instance, Julio commented on Abigail's choice of the word “mansion” to describe the president's house: “She uses ‘mansion’ because he’s the big guy.” Though I appreciated Julio's sincere attempt to get *something* out of the text, his rather superficial remark served as an important reminder to me that not every student in this honors-level class was making such noteworthy progress. My intervention

would not prove effective for everyone; some students, undoubtedly, would require different approaches in order to improve as readers.

After the paired think-aloud activity, I brought the class back together to talk about the text and their reading process. I first asked the group about what they perceived as the major points of the piece. They seemed to focus more on the second half of the letter, which is about women's rights, probably because they could connect to it a bit more than the first half about war-torn Boston. Similarly, when I questioned the students about the purpose of reading something like this, they concentrated on the feminist implications of the letter. For example, Gina raised her hand and said, "It was a first step for women's rights." Additionally, Greg pointed out, "It shows how far we've come since then," and Roger summed up, "It shows a women's perspective during the Revolutionary period."

Finally, at the end of the whole-class conversation, I inquired about how the students' reading went. Matt complained humorously, "Ugh, if I was reading this letter back then and it was like twelve pages long, I would just be like, 'Okay, honey...'" Clearly, students like Matt were turned off by the dryness of the piece. Using notes from conversations I had with Matt, I constructed the following narrative to sum up his experiences with this unit.

<p>This reading was just deadly! When I heard we were going to be studying Revolutionary War literature in here, I got really excited, because that's my thing. I love learning about war. I get all A's in history. I mean, I even want to join the army as soon as I get out of high school. But a girl's letter that rambles on and on about pretty much nothing? That is definitely not what I expected to be reading in</p>
--

this unit. Where are all the stories about battles and weapons and stuff? Plus, not only was this boring, it was *hard*. I really tried my best to figure out what she was saying while we were reading, and I think I summarized most of the important parts pretty well with my partner, but her word choice made it crazy tough. Who writes like that in a letter?!

Figure 7. Matt—A First Person Narrative

Responding to some students' comments about the challenging level of the text, Rick made an interesting remark about the process, sharing, "It was actually easier because I knew I had to be thinking about it after each paragraph." His words seemed to affirm think-aloud implementation—for some students, think-aloud activities would promote a more active approach to reading.

Overall, I felt there were many interesting implications to this lesson. I concluded that my students got more out of this selection—particularly with regard to the feminist aspects of the text—than they ever had in previous classes when we read, answered teacher-generated comprehension questions, and discussed the responses. I attributed this to the fact that students were given the opportunity to think for themselves, freeing them to focus on what they found important and interesting and making their reading more personally meaningful.

The low-interest level of this reading selection did spur further inquiry on my part, however. I saw that with both this lesson and with our previous paired think-alouds with the Franklin autobiography excerpt, students did make sincere efforts to wrestle with the texts through active strategy use, but they would have had quite a bit more to say had the selection been something they actually *wanted*

to read. At this point, the American Literature curriculum was nonnegotiable, but I wondered where I could give students the opportunity to read and discuss self-selected text, something I knew was absolutely crucial for promoting lifelong reading, but not yet implemented in my course. Though still searching for answers to this particular dilemma, I found some comfort in the light Romantic literature up next in the curriculum, knowing that these texts held more opportunities for students to make personal connections. Surprisingly, my study was rapidly coming to a close, and, thankfully, the Revolutionary War literature unit was over. Both students and teacher were ready to keep on fighting.

More on Julio—Negative Case Analysis

After our work with Abigail Adams, I realized that Julio could perhaps be deemed, in researcher's terms, a "negative case." Given that Julio was the lone Latino student and one of only a handful of students of color in this predominately white, middle-class honors group, this was especially sobering to me, particularly in light of my ultimate goal of teaching for social justice. Reflecting on his apparent difficulty with making meaning of Abigail's letter, I realized it was possible that Julio was at a disadvantage in our class. For one thing, he was surrounded by students quite different from him, young people who most likely came from very different worlds than he did. Understandably, this could have made reading and vocalizing his thoughts with a partner a somewhat uncomfortable experience, even though our group was a very close-knit learning

community. Furthermore, while the literary selection was difficult and dry for all of the students, it, along with numerous other pieces in the American Literature curriculum, may have been particularly out of touch with Julio's background and life experiences. For Julio to be left behind in my class for reasons such as these was absolutely unacceptable to me. The need for students to read more engaging texts, possibly of their own choosing, as part of the course now seemed even more pressing.

I regretted that it was so difficult for me to give Julio the individual attention he may have needed because of the demands of teaching such a large class. I regretted the possibility that Julio may have felt like an outsider, at times, in my classroom. I regretted that the school system was structured in such a way as to make these sort of racial achievement gaps all too common. Though such systemic inequities were beyond the scope of my current research, I knew that as I moved forward with my study and my overall practice I needed to continuously question, examine, and refine those factors I *did* have the power to influence in order to make my classroom a place in which all students had truly equal opportunities to succeed.

An Informal Whole-Class Interview

“For what we've been working on lately, you stopped to think and comment after every paragraph or so. In my own experience, I've found that stopping to do so after every sentence can make the reading *more* confusing

because I lose track of the overall meaning of the text. Do you find the same is true for you? Is it helpful to stop and think after every paragraph, or more or less often? And why?" I asked the class.

"A paragraph is the right amount because you're not reading for too long. So it's easier to stay focused and on topic," said Rick.

"If you stop after every sentence, you're going to end up writing things down that you don't need. Like if it said, 'Franklin walked down Market St.,' what are you going to write about that?" Nick added.

"Definitely a paragraph because there's more information. You don't get something out of every sentence," volunteered Matt.

"A paragraph usually focuses on a single topic so it's a good amount," Will said.

"Thanks, everybody. OK, let's think about something else. When reading is easy, it can seem pretty pointless to stop and think about it all the time because it comes so naturally. I never really wrote much on my texts until I saw other people doing it, like college professors. Now I find that the harder a text is, the *more* I write on it with comments and questions and things," I explained. "So when I'm taking a grad class and we have something hard to read, I can contribute more to discussions because I stop and think and write on my text. Do you find that thinking aloud and writing things down about your thinking as you go is more useful when the reading is hard?"

Roger was the first to raise his hand, as was so often the case. He declared, “Absolutely! It allows you to break apart a text and get all the needed, vital details. Otherwise, you end up just reading for the big picture and you miss important points.”

“Yes, because it helps you on the test. You don’t need to spend time going over the easy stuff,” added Victor. Several members of the group nodded in agreement.

Wrapping up, I asked, “OK, now please consider this, if you will. I know that you had to take Academic Strategies in middle school and that involved a lot of reading, thinking aloud, and talking to the text. From talking to you guys, I know that a lot of you didn’t like the class. What made the think-alouds so bad in that class?”

This question was one about which I was most curious. I had many goals for my intervention—I wanted the students to become better readers, I wanted them to employ a variety of reading strategies with ease, and I wanted the learning environment to become a student-centered one where collaboration was the norm. However, I also wanted my students to enjoy themselves along the way; simply put, I hoped the learning process and the reading process would be fun. So, I was really dying to know why they had found last year’s academic strategies course, which used instructional approaches similar to what I had employed for this study, to be so excruciating. Thankfully, my students had quite a bit to say on

this subject; using direct quotes from Rose, Skye, Victor, and Roger’s responses, I constructed the following poem.

Two Years

Two years,
Two years of the same thing.
Twenty comments,
That was the requirement.
No one really cared about quality.
We didn’t care either—
We just wrote until we had twenty.

The readings were horrible,
Really easy!
“Carlos rode his bike.”
How am I going to write twenty thoughts about that?!
And how is that going to help me?
This class isn’t really meant to help me—
It’s all about standardized tests.

Three letters,
Three letters were what mattered.
AYP.

Figure 8. Poem—“Two Years”

The entire conversation above represented one of several informal interviews I conducted with the whole group over the course of my research study. This particular dialogue represents a blend of an interview and a participant check. Because of the ongoing nature of data analysis in this research, I was nearly always on the lookout for hunches that might turn into themes by the end of the study. Once I became aware of these hunches, I could better focus my data

collection; the above interview was my effort to obtain feedback from my students on some potential themes related to the frequency of pausing reading to think-aloud as well as the role of text difficulty in the strategy's perceived effectiveness. Indeed, this interview garnered useful information for me as I moved forward—with both this particular research study and with my practice in the future. The closing of my journal entry written after this interview effectively summed up my thinking:

“When a text is too easy for kids, why ask them to use strategies they don't need? That is NOT authentic. Thinking aloud and its accompanying strategy-use are authentic when they arise out of actual need, not just because of a teacher's requirement.”

Certainly, authenticity emerged as an essential goal as I planned the last few lessons of my think-aloud intervention and looked even farther ahead to improving upon what I had begun with my next group of students in the spring.

My Story Comes Full Circle

Here, the telling of my story reaches the point at which I had begun. I, the type-A control freak, stood back and observed contentedly while my students discussed their individual reading processes and interpretations of Emerson's *Self-Reliance*. No longer was I explaining my take on the text as I had so many times in years past; all of the thinking going on in the classroom belonged to the students.

The students themselves also perceived the strengths of their conversations (as well as some potential areas for growth), as indicated on their post-discussion self-evaluations:

Gina, Rick, Roger, Katie: “We all agreed and contributed equally. It was easy to discuss and understand because we can communicate easily. Next time, we’ll take more thorough notes so we can look back and have even more in-depth conversations.”

Greg, Jasmine, Julio, Julia: “We all respected each other. Most of us participated. We worked off each other’s ideas. Next time, we’ll work harder to make sure everybody understands all of the reading.”

Patti, Lina, Tracy, Rose: “To tell the truth, our discussion was excellent. We included all of our opinions. We don’t see how it could get much better.”

Figure 9. Examples of Students’ Post-Discussion Self-Evaluation Responses

Here, I would love to declare that my classroom had reached a state of literary utopia and that all was simply perfect and that my study was one for the history (of education) books. I would love to be able to assert that Patti, Lina, Tracy, and Rose’s comment above captured the essence of all of our experiences. Yes, the group and I had come a long way; the progress we had made in shifting our reading and study of literature from teacher-controlled to student-centered was undeniable and certainly worth celebrating. However, as all teachers know, true perfection in one’s classroom is all but impossible, and the work my students were doing with *Self-Reliance*, though superb, wasn’t perfect. In their self-evaluations, two student groups, for example, rated their discussions as only fair, and in reflecting on my observation of the session, I noted that some of the

conversations seemed rushed. I attributed this to people's natural tendency to want to get a group task finished quickly and efficiently so that they can socialize instead, knowing that I, too, was guilty of this in meetings or college classes. Accordingly, as I looked ahead to the intervention's final literary selection, I vowed to emphasize the importance of groups talking things through thoroughly so that students wouldn't cheat themselves out of the fullest understanding possible.

The Journey's Last Leg—*Walden*

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*—looking back, I can't imagine a more fitting piece of literature for the conclusion of my research study. In this legendary literary work, Thoreau realizes it is time for a change; he wants to come closer to realizing life's true meaning. So, he moves far away from the city and lives on his own in a cabin for two years, observing the splendor of nature that was all around him. At the end of the two years, Thoreau perceives that he took what he needed from the experience and that the time had come to move on to uncharted territories.

Ever the English teacher, I couldn't help but notice how Thoreau's journey could be viewed as a metaphor for my own experiences within the study. I, too, realized it was time for a change in my practice, for I was holding on to too much control over our class's reading and literary analysis. I designed an intervention, quite far away from the teacher-directed, business-as-usual approach to covering

literary works, which would last for approximately two months. Over those two months, I observed everything around me, just as Thoreau did in the woods, and at the end of my time, I would need to take what I could from the experience and apply it to all that lay ahead.

Thoreau and Emerson were the authors whose writing formed the material for my research study’s final phase, in which students would read independently, record their think-aloud comments on a double-entry journal, and discuss their processes and interpretations in small groups. As was the case with *Self-Reliance*, the students’ work with *Walden*—in the form of both their double-entry journals and their small group discussions—indicated a solid level of comprehension, active strategy use, and sophisticated, in-depth analysis. Examples from both their writing and their talk are shown below:

Quote from Text	Thought/Comment/Reaction/Etc.
<p>“You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns...”</p>	<p>Chloe: “If you stay in nature for a long time, the creatures/animals living there will soon accept you and they won’t try to harm you. Rather than if you sit in nature quick and leave, they’ll be afraid of you and won’t trust you.”</p> <p><i>(Close reading/paraphrase)</i></p>
<p>“Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?”</p>	<p>Stacy: “I completely agree! Don’t waste your childhood and teen years acting grown up and live your life to the fullest because you only get one life to live!”</p> <p><i>(Personal response)</i></p>

<p>“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”</p>	<p>Greg: “When setting goals, your goal is the castle, and the foundation is the work you put in to reach that goal.”</p> <p><i>(Making meaning of figurative language)</i></p>
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Figure 10. Sample Comments from Walden Double-Entry Journals

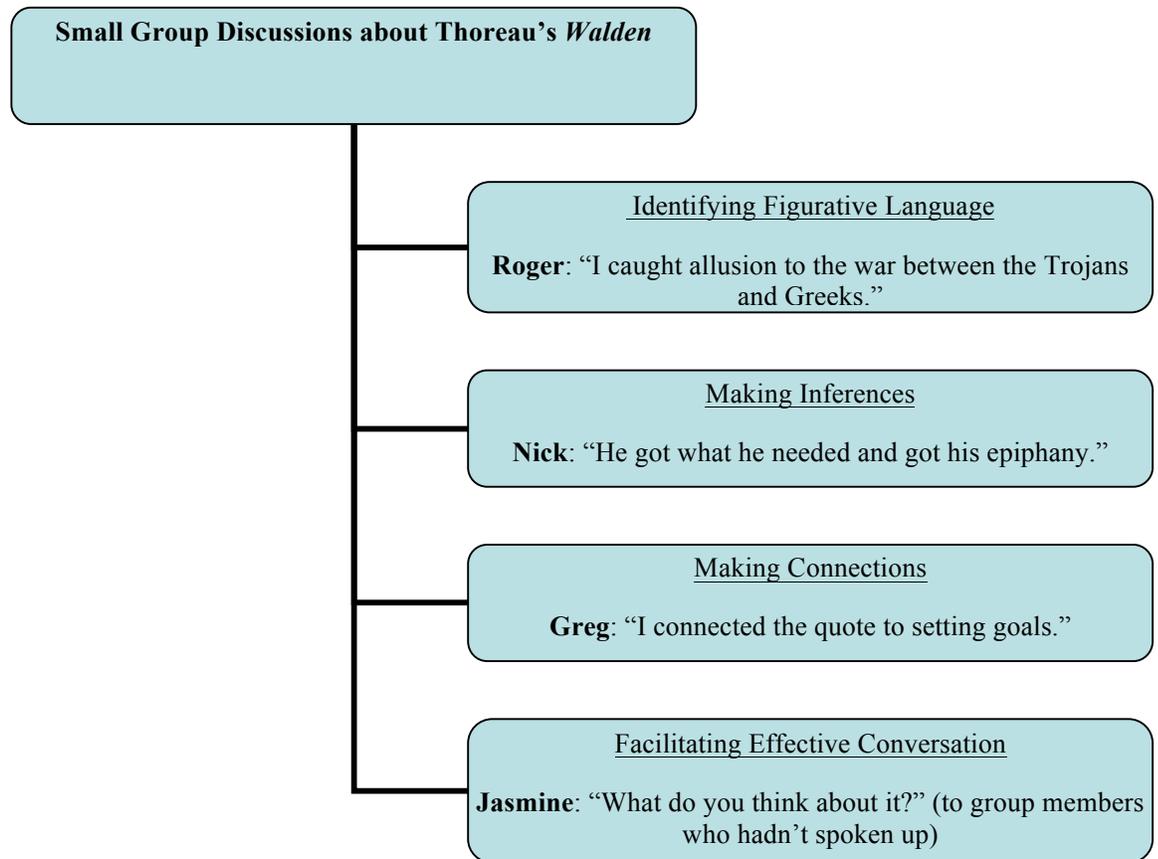


Figure 11. Sample Comments from Walden Discussions

Clearly, the strengths of the students’ reading and conversations were many. As always, though, there were areas that needed improvement, areas that we would continue to work on even though the formal intervention was over. I perceived that some students did not read the entire selection because they seemed

stuck on some of the more specific questions on the discussion agenda. I knew that part of the reason for these students' lack of preparation could have been my failure to do enough pre-reading activities to build student interest and prior knowledge before giving students the reading assignment—time, as it had so often over these past months, had presented a formidable obstacle. A handful of students' double-entry journals revealed thinking that never ventured beyond the superficial and an overall lack of attention to detail. And despite student leaders, like Jasmine, trying to draw their peers into their conversations, some of the quieter members of the class, like Amy, said little during the small group literature discussions.

One of my favorite quotations of all time is the one Greg cited in his double-entry journal for *Walden*: “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.” Perhaps my colleagues in the English department would deem my vision for a freshman American Literature class full of actively involved, consistently engaged, metacognitive readers as a “castle in the air.” And all of those areas still needing improvement, even upon the end of the study, could make this castle appear even farther out of reach. Still, over these past few months, the students and I had built something. The foundations we had put in place were undeniable, and we were on our way.

A Post-Study Survey

The intervention had come to a close, at least formally, and it was time to administer my post-study survey. Coupled with my observations, survey responses, I knew, would give me a comprehensive picture of my students' experiences over the past ten weeks. I emphasized the importance of the survey to both my study and my teaching and, in hopes that students would really take their time and give some honest feedback, assigned it as the only homework for one evening.

The survey began by asking students to rate the helpfulness of the various activities in which they had participated over the course of the study. After rating each task, students were also asked to explain their response in a sentence or two. The following graphs display the breakdown of student ratings (the number of students who rated each activity not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, or very helpful). Three students of the twenty-nine were absent or did not return their surveys.

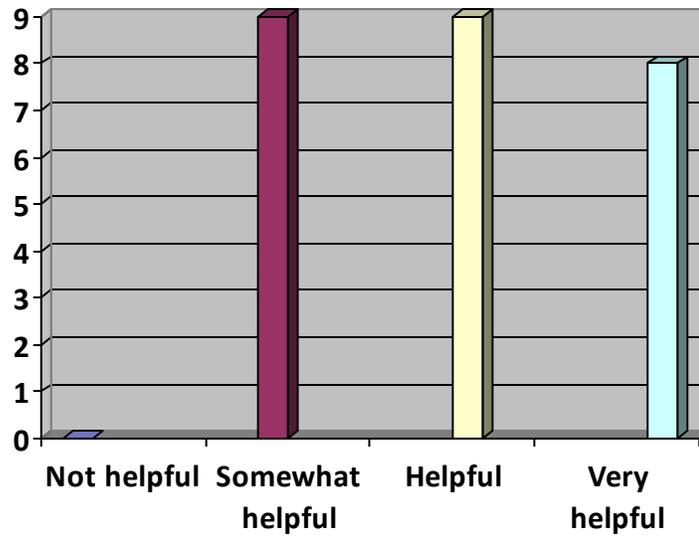


Table 1. Students' Rating of Reading, Thinking Aloud, and Annotating a Text in Small Groups

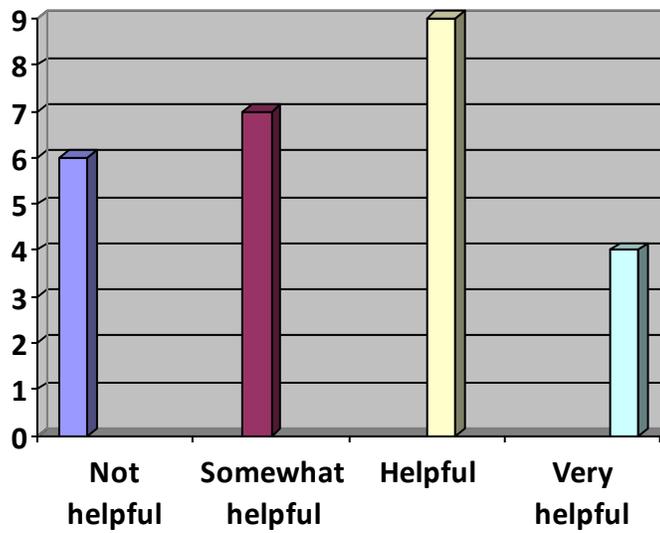


Table 2. Students' Rating of Taking Turns Reading and Thinking Aloud with a Partner

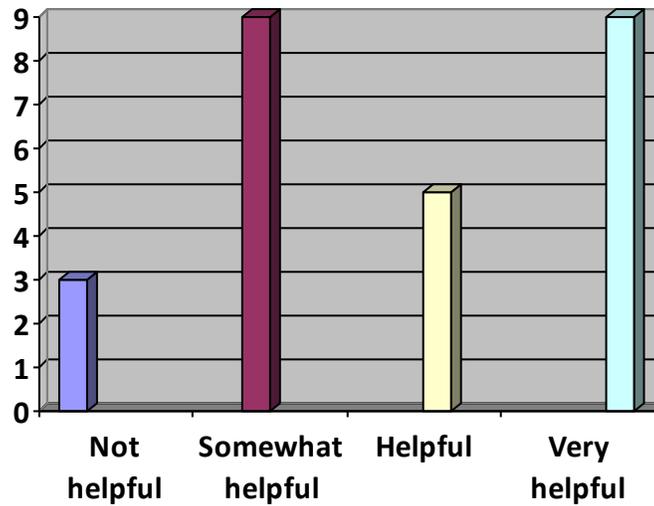


Table 3. Students' Rating of Reading Independently with a Double-Entry Journal

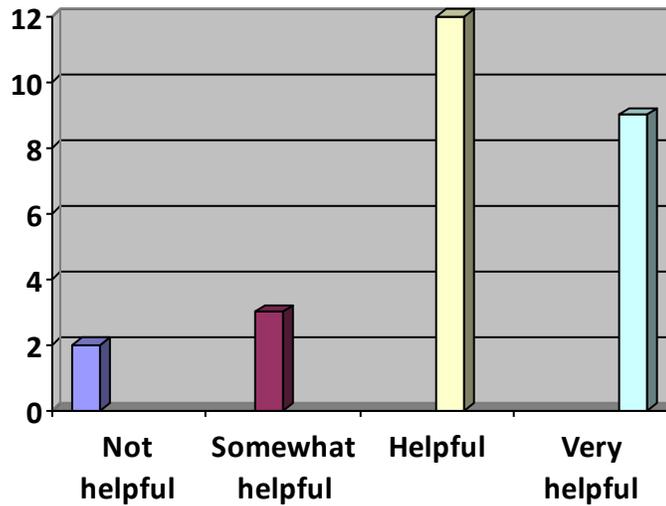


Table 4. Students' Rating of Small Group Discussion after Independent Reading

Not surprising for such a diverse group, students' ratings differed greatly.

Ratings are summarized below:

- 17 out of 26 students found group reading and thinking aloud helpful or very helpful.
- 13 out of 26 students found taking turns reading and thinking aloud with a partner helpful or very helpful.
- 14 out of 26 students found reading independently with a double entry journal helpful or very helpful.
- 21 out of 26 students found discussing literature in a small group after reading independently helpful or very helpful.

With the exception of reading and thinking aloud in pairs, the majority of students found the tasks helpful to their reading processes and comprehension. The above results also demonstrate that students in this particular class found working in small groups most effective. Finally, I was particularly encouraged that the task rated mostly favorably—discussing literature in a small group after reading independently—represented the ultimate goal of the think-aloud intervention. It was in these small group discussions where class was most student-centered, where students had the most ownership over the reading and analysis, and where I was doing the least explaining; in a sense, it was to this place where all of our work these months had been leading. I was pleased, then, to see that students viewed this type of class session in a positive light.

Even so, old habits can die hard. I wondered how the group, honors-level students who had mastered the “game of school” and its traditional, teacher-

centered instructional approaches, would compare my new methods with the time-honored approach of reading and answering the questions at the end of the story. To obtain a sense of where students stood on this matter, I asked them to respond to the following statement in the survey: *I would rather write my own thoughts about a reading selection than answer questions on a study guide handout.* As indicated by their response to this survey item, students preferred the traditional method. Specifically, 12 students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 11 were neutral, and only three agreed. In explaining their choice, the most commonly cited reason for preferring study guides was their usefulness when studying for a test. For these honors students, grades remained paramount, so they valued the “right answers.” Study guides would give them these answers, while thinking for themselves during and after reading might mean missing something that would appear on a test. As long as students grew up in a school system where tests scores were valued over intrinsic motivation, authenticity, inquiry, and true creativity, I suspected many students might continue to prefer traditional approaches. While I respected their feedback and recognized the importance of a balanced approach to studying literature, I still believed in the inherent value of the more student-centered methods I had employed, particularly for my students in the long run as they encountered more challenging texts in the upper grades and beyond. Some growing pains were surely inevitable.

Key Participants' Perspectives

Using their survey responses primarily and my observational data as a supplement, I constructed the following first-person narratives, intended to represent the thoughts and reflections of my four key participants upon the end of the study.

This experience was a good one. Honestly, and at the risk of sounding arrogant, but I'm able to succeed at pretty much anything a teacher throws at me. I'm an extremely adept reader. You name a strategy, and I'd bet anything that I do it. Making inferences, making connections, character analysis, you name it. Some of the readings were tough this year, and I like that. You really had to look into them. I like that I got the chance to go a lot more in depth than we did in middle school. I also liked helping other kids, like Steve and Julio, out when they were struggling, like when we were working in groups.

Figure 12. Roger—A First Person Narrative

I thought most of the stuff we did was helpful! I liked working with other people and being able to talk. Face it, there's no way I can be quiet for a whole block! And I always like having a big role in things, so it was great when I got the chance to lead our group's think-aloud presentation of the *Crucible* monologue. It's cool that Mrs. Lesh doesn't mind when I present in an accent or something; as long as I talk about the main points, I get to be funny. Sometimes, she's the one laughing the hardest at me, in fact. We didn't do a whole lot of working by ourselves this year, except for homework, and for me, that's a good thing.

Figure 13. Will—A First Person Narrative

*I definitely saw some major pros with the way we approached literature these past few months. Like when we did a think-aloud presentation for *The Crucible*, it really*

helped me understand the character's point of view. And discussing in a group is good because my peers can explain things to me in a simpler way I can understand more. The only problem with that is that sometimes I wasn't paired with the right people, if you catch my drift...not everyone in here is mature or the best at staying on task. Overall, though, a lot of what we did made me think and read more carefully, and I can definitely appreciate that.

Figure 14. Julia—A First Person Narrative

OK, I KNOW I WASN'T THE BEST AT EVERYTHING WE DID, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE WERE IN A GROUP. I'M DEFINITELY KIND OF SHY WHEN I'M NOT WITH MY FRIENDS, AND NONE OF MY FRIENDS TOOK HONORS. BUT I DID LEARN A LOT BY LISTENING TO EVERYONE ELSE, EVEN WHEN I WASN'T REALLY SAYING MUCH. I LIKED BEING ABLE TO LEARN FROM OTHERS. AND WHEN PEOPLE DID LEARN FROM MY IDEAS, I WAS REALLY PROUD OF MYSELF.

Figure 15. Amy—A First Person Narrative

Each of these students had something important to teach me. While Roger was one of those students who would probably perform astoundingly well no matter who was his teacher or what strategies she utilized, he needed opportunities to be challenged in order to make real gains as a reader and a learner. The think-aloud activities gave Roger the chance to analyze literature in as much depth as he could manage. Will, with his fun-loving, quirky personality and penchant for drama, reinforced the importance of making class as engaging as possible and the classroom environment one in which he could safely be himself; sitting passively and listening to the teacher's explanations would never work for students like him. Mature Julia, always honest and insightful with her feedback, reminded me

that seeking my students' opinions about my teaching is invaluable and should continue to occur even when I'm not involved in a formal action research study. And, finally, Amy's lessons for me were twofold: I must ensure that quieter students are not lost in the shuffle, but, at the same time, just because one is quiet does not mean that one isn't mentally engaged. Throughout the study, Roger, Will, and Julia all made their growth as readers and learners clear by voicing their thoughts; though Amy's think-alouds were not, perhaps, quite so *loud*, she, too, was thinking.

Final Thoughts

In just over two months' time, meaningful changes had taken place. Thanks to the think-aloud and its gradual release of responsibility, I had witnessed a sort of transformation in my classroom with regard to our reading and study of literature. Key differences between my pre-study classroom and the post-intervention learning environment are summarized below:

My Classroom Then	My Classroom Now
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I have control over the class and its interpretations of literature. When it comes to literature, I am the expert. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The students and I share control over our interpretations of literature. We learn from each other.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ With regard to our reading, I am doing most of the work and the thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ With regard to our reading, students are doing most of the work and the thinking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students respond to my questions orally or in writing. Questions relate to what I think 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students write and discuss what they find important or personally meaningful within

is important in a text.	their reading.
✓ Students may not have to actually read to get by in class. They can memorize my explanation of a literary selection's content.	✓ Students need to read. Participation in small group discussions with their peers about their reading impels many to stay accountable and complete their reading.
✓ Reading strategies are rarely addressed. I assume students learned such strategies adequately in middle school. The reading process is invisible.	✓ Needed reading strategies and the reading process is emphasized just as much as the content and themes of a literary selection.

Figure 16. My Classroom—Then and Now

While these final outcomes appeared rather impressive and made me proud of both my students and myself, I felt in many ways that my journey was just beginning, for I found myself with more questions than I had answers. For instance, how could I encourage quieter students to speak up more in small group discussions? In what places could I add in assessments that were as authentic as our newly-revised learning processes? In an already jam-packed curriculum, where I could add in opportunities for students to read and think about texts of their own choosing? What culturally-responsive practices could I add to my repertoire of instructional strategies to ensure that my students of color, like Julio, were on equal academic footing with their classmates?

Teacher action research is always described as cyclical, so I suppose it never truly ends, and I suspect that this sort of work is just beginning for me, even though my thesis study is complete. My next action research cycle is looming, it

seems. Do I sense a to-do list that needs writing? This (recovering) control freak is on it!

DATA ANALYSIS

Unlike quantitative research, in which a distinct boundary typically exists between collecting data and analyzing it, qualitative research lends itself more to an ongoing approach to data analysis. Hendricks (2009) recommends, “The analysis of data is an ongoing process that should occur throughout the study rather than at the end of it” (p. 127). Similarly, in my case, analysis began almost immediately after I had begun gathering observational data, survey responses, and student artifacts, and this attempt to make meaning of what I had collected continued throughout the entire research study.

Analysis through Writing

To write is to think. For that reason, a great deal of my thinking about what occurred in my classroom took place through the process of writing. Specifically, I analyzed my data by writing a variety of different memos over the course of the action research study.

I wrote reflective memos most frequently, on nearly every instance in which I collected data. For example, after I observed my students during class and turned any field notes into a much more detailed narrative describing what had occurred, I concluded the log entry with my reflections. These reflections included anything from my feelings to inquiry questions for further investigation to potential patterns in what I was observing in the classroom. The reflective memos I wrote after conducting interviews with the group or after examining

survey results were similar in nature, focusing upon commonalities among the responses as well as consideration of students' opinions which were much different from the majority. Additionally, every time I collected work samples from the class, such as their double-entry journals or their annotated texts, I wrote brief reflective memos exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the work and any implications for my upcoming instruction. In short, reflective memos represented my efforts to work through my thoughts about the data I was collecting and allowed me to crystallize this thinking at various points in time during the study.

Methodological memos were key during the planning of the study, but also to data analysis. Most significant was the mid-study methodological memo. In this memo, I briefly summarized the data I had collected so far and, perhaps more importantly, wrote a concise statement of each piece of data's overall importance and potential usefulness in answering my research question. The memo concluded with my attempt to put into words four very preliminary theme statements I had developed during early data analysis.

Finally, I wrote analytic memos exploring my data through the lens of four different great minds of education—Dewey, Vygotsky, Freire, and Kozol—and their theories. Writing these allowed me to analyze my data on a deeper level, lending my analysis a richness that would not have been possible without my consideration of these philosophers' ideas. In each of these analytic memos, I

selected five passages from the chosen writer's work that seemed most salient to my research; then, I reflected upon my data as it related to each passage.

Analysis through Coding and Binning

The coding process was at the heart of my data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). In order to code my data, I read carefully through my field log. During my reading, I annotated the margins of each page with words and phrases intended to capture the main ideas of that particular log entry. These codes, such as "collaboration" or "teacher frustration," would allow a reader to gain a sense of what had occurred on a specific date, just by glancing at the page. In 21st century terms, the coding process can be likened to tagging an online article or blog post with summarizing keywords intended for easier web searching. My coding process was not a once and done effort; instead, I read through the same pages of my field log at least three times, revising codes and adding new ones. For just as one notices previously overlooked details upon the second viewing of a movie, I perceived new areas of interest in my data during each additional reading.

Once my data were coded, I considered which codes were closely connected to one another and grouped the codes into categories or "bins." Thus, each of the seven bins represented a wealth of related data from the course of the entire study. Each bin also embodied a distinct aspect of teacher and student experiences with the think-aloud intervention as well as a potential answer to my

research question. Lastly, focusing my thinking upon a single category of codes at a time, I developed a theme statement corresponding to the contents of each bin.

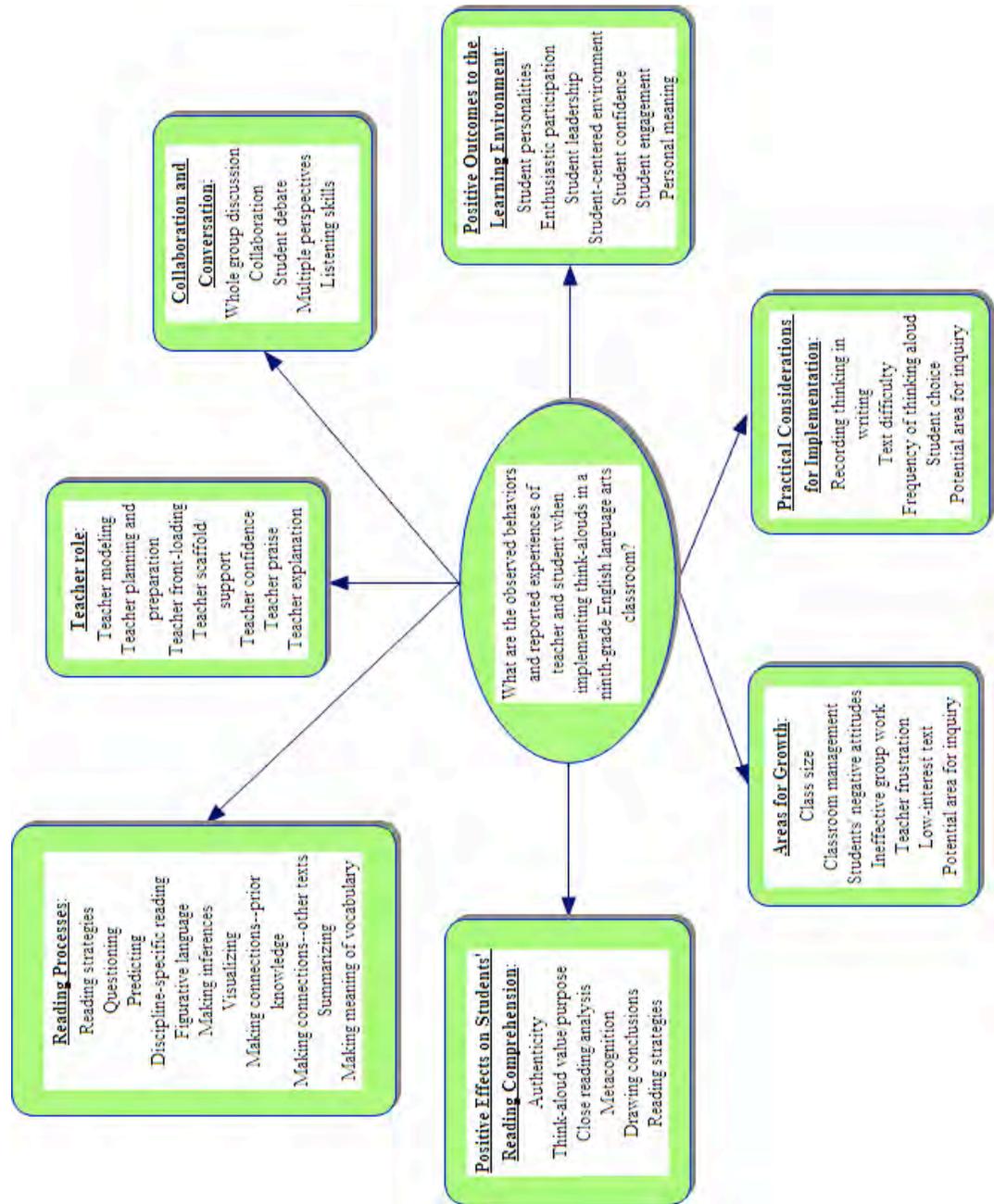


Figure 17. Bins and Codes

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to go about finding an answer to the question, “What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of teacher and students when implementing think-alouds in a ninth grade English language arts classroom?” The effect of think-alouds on students’ reading comprehension was of particular interest to me, as well as their role in engaging students and stimulating meaningful small group discussion. The following theme statements represent some potential findings with regard to these areas, as well as some new insights related to issues I had not anticipated when planning the study.

Reading Processes

Students used think-alouds to support active reading through questioning, predicting, visualizing, analyzing figurative language, making inferences, making connections to both prior knowledge and other texts, summarizing, and making meaning of vocabulary.

Throughout all four phases of think-aloud implementation (teacher-led, small group, paired, and individual), active use of reading strategies was at the heart of our work, and strategy-use took place during all stages of the reading process—before, during, and after reading. I began the intervention with seven lessons in which I modeled my own reading process with the texts in the Early American literature unit. When planning my commentary for these teacher-led think-alouds, I made sure to incorporate a variety of reading strategies that would

be appropriate for the unique demands of each literary selection. For example, with its rich use of imagery, Jonathan Edwards's sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, necessitated extensive use of visualization; therefore, I focused upon use of this strategy when thinking aloud for the students. On the other hand, the Puritan-age language in William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* could pose quite an obstacle to even a very basic understanding of the story, so when modeling my thinking for this piece, I demonstrated the process of formulating a summary for small chunks of the text.

After these seven lessons, I took a step back and students did more of the reading, in small groups, in pairs, or independently. In both their talk and their written work, I observed students using many of the same reading strategies I had modeled in the beginning of the intervention. For example, during a single lesson in which students read and annotated a *Crucible* monologue in small groups and presented their thinking to the class, I recorded instances of summarizing, making inferences, questioning, and making meaning of vocabulary. In the same fashion, students' double entry journals, completed during their independent reading of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, showed deliberate use of analysis of figurative language, making connections to prior knowledge, making inferences, making meaning of vocabulary, questioning, and summarizing. Students' survey responses, too, revealed an increase in active strategy use. Specifically, in the pre-study survey, students reported using only two reading strategies regularly—

visualizing and making predictions; post-study survey responses indicated continued use of visualizing and predicting along with consistent use of connecting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Overall, an active, strategic approach to reading became the norm for both students and teacher, a central part of the way we read American literature on a daily basis.

Positive Effects on Students' Reading Comprehension

Authentic use of think-alouds facilitated reading comprehension as students read and analyzed literature more closely and strategically, while also becoming more metacognitively aware of their reading process.

The primary purpose of think-aloud implementation was to enhance my students' reading comprehension. Research studies conducted by Fisher, Frey, and Lapp (2009), Ghaith and Obeid (2004), Oster (2001), and Scarlach (2008) found that think-alouds facilitated students' ability to make meaning; I found a similar outcome in my own classroom.

A key reason for this shift was that think-aloud implementation meant that students were actually called upon to comprehend. In past years, this was not always the case. In his description of the "banking model" of education, Freire (1970/2011) suggests, "The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher" (p. 80). Such was the case when it came to reading and analyzing literature in my classes prior to the study. Students read literary works, but I nearly always ended up summarizing them and

explaining important points for the students. Students could listen to what I had to say, take notes on it, memorize it, and “regurgitate” it on our assessments. They could do all of this to a great degree of success without ever actually thinking about the text for themselves or, at times, even actually reading. Think-aloud implementation, which showed students the strategies needed to make meaning and gave them constant opportunities to do so, helped to counteract this highly ineffective routine.

Additionally, think-aloud activities facilitated students’ reading comprehension by requiring them to read closely and to adopt a metacognitive awareness of their reading process. Called upon to think aloud about a text and share their thinking with others, students had to read much more closely than they would have had they merely been skimming a text in search of answers to study guide questions. During my classroom observations, I often witnessed students extracting meaning out of a single sentence at a time, which certainly qualifies as close reading. As indicated by their survey responses, students also recognized the role of think-aloud activities in helping them read more closely. For instance, Gina described her thoughts about capturing her thinking on a double-entry journal, stating, “This was helpful because breaking down a phrase and taking the time to interpret it really works,”; similarly, Skye explained that she “actually took the time to think about and read through the story rather than skim through it really fast.”

Furthermore, think-alouds helped my students to become more metacognitive during their reading, which certainly proved helpful to their comprehension. For example, during a conversation with my class after paired reading and thinking aloud about Abigail Adams's letter, students noted the high level of difficulty of the piece but shared that the activity helped them to monitor their comprehension and maintain focus. These points were echoed in students' post-study survey responses. Simply put, students were thinking more about their thinking while reading.

Positive Outcomes to the Learning Environment

Think-aloud implementation helped to create an engaging, student-centered learning environment in which students participated enthusiastically, took leadership roles with confidence, and focused on what was personally meaningful in texts under study.

As the study progressed, I became less and less the proverbial "sage on the stage" and students took the spotlight; in short, my classroom became far more student-centered than it had ever been before. I began the intervention doing most of the thinking, the reading, and the talking, but by the end, the ratio was turned upside down, and students were doing the vast majority of all three. In their research, Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2009), Oster (2001), and Scarlach (2008) found an enhanced level of student engagement as a result of implementing think-alouds, and my study supports this conclusion. Throughout my intervention, I

observed my students highly engaged and enthusiastic about the work they were doing.

Part of what made the work so engaging was that students had the opportunity to step into the role of leader. Such opportunities included acting as a spokesperson during *Crucible* monologue think-aloud presentations and informally facilitating small group discussions about light Romantic literary works. My observations indicated that Steffy, Austin, Roger, Megan, Will, Jasmine, Greg, Rick, Skye, and Julia all thrived in these roles. In the past, I was almost always the one in charge; now, interested students could try their hand at leading others, and this meant that I had the chance to learn from them. Freire (1970/2011) describes this sort of learning environment, “The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own” (p. 81). This mutually beneficial arrangement certainly occurred during *Crucible* monologue think-aloud presentations; for instance, one group leader made a comparison between a statement of Reverend Hale’s and the story of King Midas and the Midas touch—it was a perfect analogy that had never occurred to me. So, by giving students the opportunity to lead class and voice their thinking, I learned just as much from the process as they did, even about matters within my area of expertise.

Finally, think-aloud activities allowed my students to focus on what they found most interesting and personally meaningful in the texts we were studying; this was, perhaps, the strategy's most important aspect in making the learning environment student-centered and engaging. Previously, I generated almost all of the questions for students' writing and class discussions about literature, so really, students were focusing on the parts of the text which I deemed important. With think-alouds, students had much more freedom to zero in on what they found most compelling in a selection and could concentrate upon this in their writing and in their talk. This meant that students had much more ownership over our study of literature. I observed this shift during our work with Abigail Adams's letter. While reading the letter and thinking aloud with their partners, students focused most upon the part about women's rights; their freedom to do this gave their work some personal meaning, something especially vital when dealing with a low-interest piece that could be potentially alienating to young readers.

The conclusion of an October field log entry sums this up nicely:
"Students seem more engaged during these activities; after all, it's gotta be better than sitting there listening to me!"

Collaboration and Conversation

Think-alouds facilitated an environment rich in collaboration and meaningful conversation about literature, in which students participated in both whole and

small group discussions as well as listened to and debated a multiplicity of perspectives about their reading.

Think-alouds helped my classroom to become a place in which student collaboration and compelling discussions about literature occurred on a daily basis. For one thing, collaboration and conversation were built right into the structure of think-aloud activities and became the expectation for success in my class. Specifically, students read together, annotated texts as a group, listened to and recorded other classmates' thinking during reading, and discussed their interpretations with their peers after reading independently.

Consideration of multiple perspectives about a text was, perhaps, the most beneficial aspect of such collaboration. This was especially evident during *Crucible* think-aloud presentations, in which six student groups read a monologue from the drama, annotated it, and presented their thinking to the class. My reflections in the field log entry from the session focus upon the benefits of students being exposed to multiple perspectives:

“Students got to hear each other’s thoughts about an identical piece of text. They could see what was similar, validating their own thinking, and what was different, building upon their own thinking with multiple points of view. As a class, we built a collaborative interpretation of an important passage that was so much more than I could give with my own explanation.”

Students' survey responses also highlighted the benefits of taking into account their classmates' differing points of view. For instance, Amy reflected, "You share your thoughts about the selection and people learn from your ideas and you learn from theirs." Similarly, Greg wrote of collaborative think-alouds, "It helps you get more ideas out on the table and lets you be open to more ideas." And, not only were students listening to each other's perspectives, they actually became involved in informal debates on several instances, defending their own points of view and evaluating those of others.

Teacher Role

To help ensure a confident and successful implementation of think-alouds, the teacher's role included extensive planning and preparation of think-aloud commentary, modeling the mental process of an expert reader, front-loading for challenging text, and appropriately utilizing scaffolds, praise, and explanation.

Though the think-aloud intervention involved shifting control to the students and allowing them to take center stage, I still had an important role throughout the study. Dewey (1938/1997) suggests, "The educator is responsible for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend themselves to social organization, an organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something..." (p. 56). Indeed, Dewey's words sum up my role in implementing think-aloud successfully. I needed to know my participants and my content area

and use this knowledge to plan think-aloud lessons that would lead to the desired outcome of all students contributing to the class's interpretation and analysis of literature.

I did a great deal of modeling, particularly during the first few weeks of the intervention. In order for this modeling to be effective, a great deal of time was needed to plan meaningful think-aloud commentary. To plan my commentary, I needed to analyze my own thought process and strategy use for each text and find ways to articulate this process in words accessible to a ninth-grader. I found it especially helpful to annotate my own copy of the text with post-it notes summing up my thinking; these notes were invaluable for enhancing my confidence while modeling. I continued to model even after the intervention's first phase; before students began any think-aloud activity, I modeled the process of doing it myself.

Front-loading was an important part of my role in the study from start to finish, particularly because of the challenging nature of the texts in our curriculum. Before beginning reading, I nearly always planned for some activity that would spark students' interest and/or activate their background knowledge in the topics and issues central to each text. For example, before students read Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, they responded to statements on an anticipation guide related to the themes of the essay, such as not caring about what others think and teenagers imitating others to fit in, and discussed their standpoints as a whole

group. By stimulating students' thinking about the essay's main points early on, this pre-reading activity increased the likelihood of student success with reading independently, recording their thoughts, and discussing their thinking with their peers, particularly in light of Emerson's rather demanding writing style. During small group discussions about *Self-Reliance*, I did observe students making connections between the text and our pre-reading conversation, which speaks to the value of such front-loading. On the contrary, when I did not take the time to implement a ramp-up activity before students read, as with *Walden*, some students' performance on the tasks seemed to suffer.

Finally, my role also included providing scaffolds, such as the think-aloud reference sheet, and occasional explanation, particularly when students were truly stuck and wanted some clarification. Praise and encouragement, too, were vital; to maximize the value of my feedback, I tried to make it as specific as possible so that students knew exactly what they were doing well.

Practical Considerations for Implementation

When designing a plan for think-aloud implementation that would maximize the approach's effectiveness, the teacher needed to consider the difficulty level of the text, in what form students would record their thinking, how often to pause reading to verbalize thoughts, and those ways in which students might make meaningful choices about their learning experiences.

Over the course of the intervention, a number of practical issues arose that required my careful consideration. For one thing, it was an ongoing goal for me to implement the think-aloud in a way that would be as authentic as possible; I wanted students to use the approach because it held value for them, not just because it was part of “playing the game of school.” Requiring students to think aloud only about texts with a fair degree of difficulty helped lend some authenticity to the strategy’s implementation. Informal interviews with the group indicated that they had found think-alouds quite useless in previous classes, in large part because they were required to use the approach for texts that were so easy that they required minimal strategy use. In the post-study survey, 25 out of 26 students indicated that they found thinking aloud more useful when reading a difficult piece of text; on her survey, Gina elaborated, “With easier ones, the [think-aloud] activities are unnecessary.” Certainly, when instructional time is already so precious, why waste it having students complete unnecessary work?

A second practical consideration involved the forms in which students would record their thinking. These written forms varied and depended upon both the text and the intended purpose of the task. When small groups were going to present their think-aloud comments, it was vital that the whole group be able to see the presenters’ annotations. Therefore, recording thinking on an overhead transparency worked well for this activity. For independent work, I wanted students to be able to jot down their thinking during their actual reading.

However, students were not allowed to write in their textbooks, and my supply of post-it notes was limited. Double-entry journals—with excerpts from the text in the left column and students' think-aloud comments in the right—provided an ideal solution.

How often to pause reading to think aloud was also a question that arose during lesson planning. Workshops I had attended in the past recommended stopping to think aloud after each sentence, but this seemed too frequent. When I tried doing just this during my own reading, I found I lost sight of the main idea of the text; I couldn't "see the forest through the trees." However, if stopping to think aloud was too sporadic, important details might be overlooked. I found that for most prose, it worked best to pause and verbalize thoughts upon the end of every paragraph or so. Lengthy paragraphs needed to be chunked. For the one poem we studied, chunks of five lines were manageable amounts.

Finally, knowing the role of student autonomy in engagement and motivation, I was always on the lookout for opportunities for students to make meaningful choices. Choice was built into students' independent reading, as they were able to choose parts of the text for in-depth analysis, and I was able to incorporate choice into several pre-reading activities. However, one of the most significant opportunities for student choice in English language arts—students' reading and analysis of self-selected texts—did not take place with this group. It is an area I must consider for the future.

Areas for Growth

Sources of teacher frustration during the think-aloud intervention included large class size and the accompanying management concerns, students' pre-existing negative attitudes about reading, occasional off-task behavior in groups, and the low-interest literary selections in the course curriculum.

I consider myself fortunate that think-aloud implementation progressed so well with this particular group of students. However, the intervention was not without its sources of frustration. Foremost among these was the large size of this class. A class size of twenty-nine meant that I could not always give each student the attention he or she deserved; there just wasn't enough of me to go around. The large number of students also made for a very noisy classroom at times. The volume in my rather small space became almost intolerable during group work, even though students were largely on task. This made my taking notes difficult, and I'm sure students had some trouble listening closely to one another. But while the noise was sometimes frustrating to me, I needed to be careful not to take it as an automatic sign of an ineffective learning environment. After all, Dewey (1938/1997) reminds us, "Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from disclosing their real natures," (p. 62). Though irritating, the noise often meant that exciting learning was taking place.

On a handful of instances, I observed some off-task behavior in groups. Sometimes, when close friends were grouped together, they gave into the

temptation to socialize. On other occasions, students felt uncomfortable with some pairings and ended up working independently and saying little to one another. Since I always assigned groups (knowing that some students might be left out otherwise), re-working group arrangements usually counteracted this obstacle.

Lastly, though many participants were avid readers, a few, like Patti and Lily, expressed a profound distaste for books, and the low-interest level of numerous texts in our curriculum did not help things. Pre-reading activities helped to make some of the pieces seem more interesting and relevant to the students' lives, but even so, I sensed that we would have seen even more success and learning gains with the think-aloud intervention had students read more current pieces or even some young adult literature. Finding ways to incorporate more high-interest selections within a nonnegotiable curriculum represents an important area for future inquiry and action research. Overall, though all of these challenges were frustrating at times, they did provide the best opportunities for my professional growth.

NEXT STEPS

Despite the fact that my research study has ended, I remain committed to implementing think-alouds effectively in my classroom. As I move forward with the approach, authenticity is at the forefront of my mind. I want to make my classes' work with the think-alouds as authentic as possible, so that students' participation in them reaches beyond merely "playing the game of school" and ventures into truly sophisticated interaction with text.

With this goal in mind, I have devised new ways of teaching my students the foundations of thinking aloud. During the study, I devoted extensive time to modeling my reading process for the students using the texts in the American Literature curriculum. Because thinking aloud in this way was outside my comfort zone as an educator, I planned my think-aloud commentary ahead of time. This meant, however, that my modeling did not represent a reader's real attempt to make meaning of a text she had never encountered. In short, the modeling was not entirely authentic. Therefore, in the future, to supplement my planned think-alouds, I will try thinking aloud while reading texts I have never seen before. Students can bring in a variety of texts that are of personal interest to them, like popular song lyrics, video game manuals, blog posts, etc., and I will demonstrate my attempt to make meaning of them. This will add a degree of student ownership and authenticity to our work that was somewhat missing during my first attempt at implementation.

In addition to improving upon my own practice, my next steps must also reach beyond the confines of my classroom, for meaningful change cannot take place in isolation. As an educator committed to empowering all students with literacy, I consider it my responsibility to help ensure that effective reading instruction takes place across my building. Certainly, this is an undertaking best carried out not alone, but with a similarly-minded colleague, and the second-year teacher in the classroom next door may be the ideal partner. Like me, she consistently strives to make her instruction student-centered, engaging, and relevant to the students' lives; her commitment to professional growth is admirable. Moving forward, I envision us collaborating more often on our lessons, sharing best practices with our colleagues within the English department as well as the ninth-grade academy, and perhaps even putting together a proposal for incorporating high-interest young adult literature into the American Literature I curriculum.

Finally, I may consider taking my work outside of the classroom somewhere down the line. In order to enact the kind of powerful changes I hope to see in schools, I may be more effective in a position other than that of a classroom teacher. Undoubtedly, I will continue my education, perhaps working towards additional certifications or even a doctorate degree. One day, this may lead to my obtaining a position as a district-level administrator in charge of curriculum and instruction or, perhaps, a coordinator within one of the local

intermediate units responsible for designing high-quality professional development for area teachers.

Looking ahead, I remain hopeful that between my work in the classroom with best practices such as think-alouds and my collaboration with colleagues to support effective literacy instruction in my building, combined with my potential, future work on a larger scale, my dream of true teaching for social justice will, someday, become a reality.

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Appendix A—Pre-Study Survey

Reading Survey

Directions: Answer the following questions as completely, thoughtfully, and honestly as possible.

1. What goes through your mind as you read?
2. Do you consider yourself a good reader? Why or why not?
3. Throughout your past English classes, have you found most of the texts you had to read easy or difficult? Provide specific examples if possible.
4. In past English classes, which class activities, strategies, or homework assignments helped you understand the texts you had to read?
5. Which class activities, strategies, or homework assignments were not as helpful for you in understanding what you had to read?

Appendix B—Post-Study Survey

American Literature Reading Survey

1. Rate each of the following activities on how they help you gain an understanding of literary selections in the course:

a. Reading a text with a small group, discussing it, and writing down your thoughts on an overhead transparency (example--*Crucible* monologues):

Not at all helpful *Somewhat helpful* *Helpful* *Very helpful*

Explain: _____

b. Taking turns reading with a partner and talking about your thoughts on each paragraph (example—Abigail Adams’s letters):

Not at all helpful *Somewhat helpful* *Helpful* *Very helpful*

Explain: _____

c. Reading on your own and taking notes on a double-entry journal (example—*Self-Reliance*):

Not at all helpful *Somewhat helpful* *Helpful* *Very helpful*

Explain: _____

d. Discussing what you read with a small group of classmates:

Not at all helpful *Somewhat helpful* *Helpful* *Very helpful*

Explain: _____

2. Are activities such as the ones above more useful to you when the reading selection is a difficult one? Why or why not?

3. When discussing your reading in a small group, what did your group usually do well? What needed improvement?

4. Circle the strategies you find yourself using most often. Circle any that apply.
 - Paraphrasing
 - Summarizing
 - Making inferences
 - Connecting
 - Predicting
 - Visualizing
 - Questioning

5. Respond to the following statement: *I would rather write about my own thoughts about a reading selection than answer questions on a study guide handout.*

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Explain your choice: _____

Appendix C—Principal Consent Letter

Dear Mr. _____,

Currently, I am enrolled in Moravian College's master's degree program in curriculum and instruction. Moravian's program helps me to refine my practice to make the instruction I provide as effective as possible. Central to the program is teacher action research, in which teachers investigate an area for improvement in their practice, implement a solution, collect and reflect upon data with regard to the solution, and make adjustments to the solution before beginning the cycle anew.

For my teacher action research study, I will be investigating the effects of think-alouds upon students' reading comprehension. A think-aloud is simply the verbalization of a reader's thoughts as he or she is in the actual process of reading a text. The teacher can model thinking aloud for the class, and students can practice it independently or in small groups with fellow classmates. The goal of the think-aloud is to bring to light the invisible thought process that a strong reader undergoes while reading a challenging piece of text. Once students become aware of effective use of reading strategies by means of a teacher's thinking aloud and engage in extensive practice of these skills, they are far more likely to use them when reading independently. In short, participating in teacher and student-led think-alouds is a research-based strategy designed to improve students' abilities to make sense of what they read across all content areas.

As part of my study on think-alouds, I will observe students reading and thinking aloud in small groups, in pairs, or independently during class. Students will also respond to open-ended survey questions about the think-aloud practice before, during, and upon the conclusion of my study. Finally, I will collect student work samples, such as note-taking sheets on which students have recorded their thoughts as they read a literary selection. Data collection is anticipated to begin around mid-September and wrap up by the beginning of December.

All students in my classroom will participate in the think-aloud activities and discussions as part of the regular American Literature I course. However, participation in the study is entirely voluntary and has no effect upon the instruction or grades students will receive. Additionally, students are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If parents/guardians do not give consent for their children to participate in my study, or if they choose to withdraw their children at any time from the study, information about them will not appear in any written report of my research. There is no anticipated risk associated with participation.

Students' names will not appear in the written report of the study, nor will the name of the school. Instead, each student participant will be assigned a pseudonym. All notes and research materials will be kept in a secure location in my private home. Furthermore, all materials will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the study.

My faculty sponsor for this research study is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be reached by phone at 610-861-1482 or by email at jshosh@moravian.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about my research, please let me know. Otherwise, please sign and detach the consent form below. Thank you for your help and support!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Kelly Lesh

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand this consent form, and that I received a copy. Kelly Lesh has my permission to conduct this study at _____ High School.

Principal's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D—Parental Consent Letter

Dear parents,

Currently, I am enrolled in Moravian College's master's degree program in curriculum and instruction. Moravian's program helps me to refine my practice to make the instruction I provide as effective as possible. Central to the program is teacher action research, in which teachers investigate an area for improvement in their practice, implement a solution, collect and reflect upon data with regard to the solution, and make adjustments to the solution before beginning the cycle anew.

For my teacher action research study, I will be investigating the effects of think-alouds upon students' reading comprehension. A think-aloud is simply the verbalization of a reader's thoughts as he or she is in the actual process of reading a text. The teacher can model thinking aloud for the class, and students can practice it independently or in small groups with fellow classmates. The goal of the think-aloud is to bring to light the invisible thought process that a strong reader undergoes while reading a challenging piece of text. Once students become aware of effective use of reading strategies by means of a teacher's thinking aloud and engage in extensive practice of these skills, they are far more likely to use them when reading independently. In short, participating in teacher and student-led think-alouds is a research-based strategy designed to improve students' abilities to make sense of what they read across all content areas.

As part of my study on think-alouds, I will observe students reading and thinking aloud in small groups, in pairs, or independently during class. Students will also respond to open-ended survey questions about the think-aloud practice before, during, and upon the conclusion of my study. Finally, I will collect student work samples, such as note-taking sheets on which students have recorded their thoughts as they read a literary selection. Data collection is anticipated to begin around mid-September and wrap up by the beginning of December.

All students in my classroom will participate in the think-aloud activities and discussions as part of the regular American Literature I course. However, participation in the study is entirely voluntary and has no effect upon the instruction or grades your child will receive. Additionally, students are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you do not give consent for your child to participate in my study, or if you choose to withdraw your child at any time from the study, information about him/her will not appear in any written report of my research. There is no anticipated risk associated with participation.

Students' names will not appear in the written report of the study, nor will the name of the school. Instead, each student participant will be assigned a

pseudonym. All notes and research materials will be kept in a secure location in my private home. Furthermore, all materials will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the study.

My faculty sponsor for this research study is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be reached by phone at 610-861-1482 or by email at jshosh@moravian.edu. The building principal, Mr. _____, has also approved my study and can be reached by phone at _____ or by email at _____.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research, please don't hesitate to contact me at leshk@_____. Thank you for your help and support!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Kelly Lesh

I attest that I am the student's parent/legal guardian, I have read and understood this consent form, and I received a copy.

Student's name _____

_____ I give permission for my child to participate in this research study.

_____ I prefer that my child not participate in this research study.

Parent/guardian signature _____

Appendix E—Think-Aloud Reference Sheet

American Literature I: Think-Aloud Reference Sheet

~A think-aloud involves the reader stopping periodically while reading to say his or her thoughts aloud.

~Talking to the text involves the reader jotting down his or thoughts right on the text (or perhaps on another sheet of paper if you can't write on it) while reading.

~While doing a think-aloud, a reader may choose to also talk to the text at the same time. Naturally, you can also think aloud without writing down your thoughts.

~Types of comments you might make:

- ✓ Predictions about what is to come in the text—these could be based on headings, subheadings, pictures, or what you've read so far
- ✓ Follow-ups regarding the accuracy of your predictions—were your guesses accurate? How do you know?
- ✓ Connections—what does the text remind you of? Other things you've read? Background knowledge you have? Experiences in your life?
- ✓ Paraphrases—putting complicated sentences into your own words
- ✓ Summaries—overall statements about what the passage is about; the most important information
- ✓ Questions—questions for yourself or the author; the answers may or may not be in the text
- ✓ Confusions—what don't you understand? What needs clarification?
- ✓ Visualizations—mental images the text is creating in your head
- ✓ Inferences—conclusions you are coming to based on what the text says mixed with what you already know
- ✓ Judgments/evaluations—your personal opinions of what the author states. Do you agree or disagree? Do you think the text is accurate?
- ✓ Vocabulary—unknown words and how you go about figuring out the meaning through context clues, knowledge of word parts (roots, prefixes, suffixes), or outside resources.
- ✓ Text structure and features—the way the text is organized as well as pictures, captions, bold words, subheadings, etc. can help you reach a deeper understanding of what you've read.

- ✓ Figurative language—is the author using devices like similes or personification?
- ✓ Others—the possibilities are endless!

Why bother doing this?

- ❖ Reading needs to be an active process. Having to think aloud and/or talk to the text ensures that you are actively involved in your reading.
- ❖ You will get so much more out of your reading by thinking deeply, noticing your thinking, and stating it aloud or in writing!

Appendix F—Paired Reading Note-taking Sheet

Our names: _____

**From “Letter to Her Husband” by Abigail Adams
Paired Reading Note-Taker**

Guidelines:

- ✓ *Designate a Partner A and a Partner B.*
- ✓ *You’ll be taking turns reading and talking about the selection.*
- ✓ *When expressing your thoughts about what you read, push yourself to go beyond a single comment.*
- ✓ *Focus your thoughts on summaries, paraphrases, inferences, connections, what you visualize, and your confusions/questions.*

1. Partner A reads aloud from “The town in general” until “make it good.”

Partner A shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.

Partner B records Partner A’s thoughts here:

2. Partner B reads aloud from “Others have committed” until “and traitor.”

Partner B shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.

Partner A records Partner B’s thoughts here:

3. Partner A reads aloud from “I feel very” until “good of the land.”

Partner A shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.

Partner B records Partner A’s thoughts here:

4. Partner B reads aloud from "I feel a" until "deserted habitations."
Partner B shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.
Partner A records Partner B's thoughts here:

5. Partner A reads aloud from "Though we felicitate" until "or representation."
Partner A shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.
Partner B records Partner A's thoughts here:

6. Partner B reads aloud from "That your sex" until the end of the piece.
Partner B shares his/her thinking about what he/she just read.
Partner A records Partner B's thoughts here:
