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**Let's Talk it Out:
Thinking Through Reading Comprehension**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study shares the observed and reported experiences of a first grade teacher and her focused participant group of students when reading comprehension strategies were modeled through authentic read aloud lessons, and then practiced by students during guided reading. Five first grade students participated in the study in a suburban elementary school in Northeastern Pennsylvania, in the United States. Students were encouraged to talk out their thoughts and actively engage with texts as they developed metacognitive behaviors. This study examines students' interest in reading, comprehension, their application of strategies during reading, and awareness of personal strategy use. Methods of analysis include student work, student surveys, student interviews, student observations and anecdotal notes, curricular and norm referenced assessments, a research into peer-reviewed educational studies and philosophies, coding and theme statement development. Findings suggest that students use strategies to self-monitor while reading, but need time, practice, and consistent modeling to develop accuracy in the use of these strategies, self-awareness of strategy use and appropriateness, and their overall metacognition.

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Researcher Stance

I have been engaged in a love affair with reading since before attending kindergarten. Books themselves, with their soft or smooth pages, musty smells, intricate illustrations or no illustrations at all, precise fonts and creaky spines, have always drawn my sensory-oriented self to them like a magnet. As a child I would request books for gifts, wave Scholastic book order forms at my mother, treasure my library card, beg for round two during bedtime story hour, read by flashlight when I should have been asleep, and count down the days until library class each week at school. I could never understand my peers' preference for playing Nintendo over reading on a rainy afternoon.

As an adolescent, I developed an interest in people of the world, social issues, and history, and books were the bridge that led me to the knowledge I wanted to devour. Fiction written decades and centuries before my time introduced me to cultures that fascinated me, and nonfiction texts (especially those with authentic photographs) enthralled me and enhanced my desire to learn. As an adult, I prefer a book to a tablet, and I read to learn as well as for escape. All in all, reading has always been my greatest hobby, and a love that I've always shared with others.

However, there are moments that involve reading that are etched in my memory and could have derailed me. I remember regularly being the last student finished with independent reading passages and comprehension questions in

elementary school, and although my teachers reassured me that taking my time was fine, I knew there was something amiss. I was a slow reader, plain and simple. I was also not very good at self-monitoring. Many times, I would arrive at the end of a paragraph having no idea what the paragraph was about. I became a regular re-reader, and I got by. So what if it took me an hour to read 10 pages? I would chalk it up to my deep-thinking ways, attributing my re-reading to searching for nuanced meanings, and allowed myself a pass because I knew time had been spent on important reflection during reading.

I continued to read for pleasure, enrolled in honors level English classes throughout high school, and graduated from Moravian College in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in English Literature and Language. Aside from a handful of times when I was called on to share my synthesis of a selection, only to realize my response was in left field while the rest of the class' syntheses were somewhere in right field, I did just fine and considered my work (and grade point average) successful.

When I was very young, I knew I wanted to become a teacher. This was probably because I loved the majority of my elementary school teachers, who were women that made learning enjoyable, challenged me to be better, and chose to highlight my talents for me instead of dwelling on my weaknesses. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to build kids up the way they had built me up. I taught full day kindergarten for three years, and now I am in my fifth year teaching first

grade. Every day, since day one, I have gone to work with the intention of strengthening children and helping them to recognize and act upon their potential.

Coincidentally, much of the focus in primary classrooms is literacy, and I found myself beginning my career by teaching the way I was taught, and it wasn't working. Not every child comes to school with an inherent desire to read and read well; in fact, many do not. I knew that I owed it to these children, and to myself, to find a better way and to be able to add tools to their proverbial tool kits that were more effective than my old faithful, re-reading. Thus I embarked on my master's work in reading.

My studies at Moravian over the last four years have undoubtedly made me a better teacher of reading. McNiff (2013) says you need to "think carefully about the circumstances you are in, how you got here, and why the situation is as it is," and the active work involved in every course leading up to this moment caused me to do this regularly (p. 25). I am proud of my improvement in developing students with strong phonemic awareness and phonics skills, decoding and encoding abilities, and fluency. Reading comprehension is an area where I want to make improvement. Over the last two years, I have begun informally studying ways to improve reading comprehension in my students, but admittedly I want to learn more.

Meanwhile, my school district recently adopted a reading program called *Superkids* from the Rowland Reading Foundation in an effort to comply with the

Common Core expectations. One selling point of the program to us teachers was its use of a common cast of characters throughout the fictional stories students read, instead of starting from scratch and needing a new palette of background knowledge for every text. By meeting this cast of characters and getting to know their personalities in kindergarten, first grade students should have more brain energy available for deep comprehension. Though largely impressed with this new program, I reflected on the first year of implementation and realized one big piece was missing: regularly scheduled, instructional read-alouds. We were encouraged to do most, if not all, of our reading in a guided reading setting. Time previously spent thinking aloud and modeling reading strategies was significantly cut down, since we were following the program as prescribed and found that doing so absorbed our allotted language arts teaching block. The program offers suggestions for read aloud material which parallel the program's themes, but I did not have much time left over for that.

When considering how best to focus my thesis research, I recalled Dr. Conard emphasizing that, in order for us to do right by our students, we need to make time to do the things we know work best for them. So, I set to work on learning what works best in building reading comprehension. The research all pointed to direct instruction on strategies, and modeling them through read and think-aloud mini lessons. Thus, my research question was born: *What are the*

observed and reported experiences of first grade students when read-alouds are implemented to improve reading comprehension?

Above all, I want my students to love reading as I do, because I know the doors it opens throughout life. I hope to play some role in shaping them into lifelong readers. However, I also want to prepare them to be confident, successful, and self-reliant lifelong readers. My goal is to see each first grade student leave my classroom at the end of the year as a competent reader who can create his or her own understanding and rely on an arsenal of strategies automatically. This is something that I never developed automaticity of as a young reader, and because I didn't, I struggled unnecessarily.

Through my research, I hope to discover what role systematically and intentionally implemented read-alouds will play in improving my students' reading comprehension. McNiff (2013) calls action research, "A particular way of looking at your practice to check whether it is as you feel it should be" (p. 23). I hope to come away from this study with my methodology improved and with new questions about how learning happens best.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Reading comprehension and suggested strategies

Strong reading comprehension is something good readers have, but what is it exactly? Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000) claim, “True comprehension goes beyond literal understanding and involves the reader’s interaction with the text. If students are to become thoughtful, insightful readers, they must extend their thinking beyond a superficial understanding of the text” (p.8). Described this way, becoming a comprehending reader is a constructivist task. Harvey and Goudvis explain, “Comprehension means that readers think not only about what they are reading but what they are learning. When readers construct meaning, they are building their store of knowledge. But along with knowledge must come understanding” (p.9).

The National Reading Panel (2000) acknowledges that reading comprehension wasn’t always something directly instructed. “Although instruction on text comprehension has been a major research topic for more than 20 years, the explicit teaching of text comprehension before 1980 was done largely in content areas and not in the context of formal reading instruction” (p.4-5) They continue to elaborate on how this instruction should look in classrooms: “Explicit or formal instruction of these strategies is believed to lead to improvement in text understanding and information use. Instruction in comprehension strategies is carried out by a classroom teacher who demonstrates,

models, or guides the reader in their acquisition and use. When these procedures are acquired, the reader becomes independent of the teacher. Using them, the reader can effectively interact with the text without assistance” (p.4-5).

In order for students to be up to this heavy lifting task, there are strategies they should become fluent in using. Harvey and Goudvis suggest making connections between prior knowledge and the text, asking questions, visualizing, drawing inferences, determining important ideas, synthesizing information, and repairing understanding (pp. 10-12). Susan Dymock and Tom Nicholson’s (2010) research on effective strategies for understanding expository texts led them to suggest these five strategies: activating background knowledge, questioning, analyzing text structure, creating mental images, and summarizing (p.167). Finally, Kathy A. Mills (2009), a former classroom teacher and trainer of pre-service and in-service teachers of literacy, shares her top strategies: activate prior knowledge, make inferences, use knowledge of text structures, visualize, generate and answer questions, and retell and summarize (p. 325). Considering the strategy research I read, and the developmental appropriateness for the age group I work with, I selected the following strategies to focus on during read aloud lessons.

Activating background and prior knowledge

Mills (2009) states, “Students’ reading comprehension ability often has more to do with their relevant prior experiences and knowledge of the topic,

genre, or vocabulary than their cognitive ability” (p. 325). Students may have this knowledge base and the teacher needs to help unlock it, or perhaps the knowledge base needs to be built ahead of reading. Teachers can determine where students are coming from through some initial questioning, as Dymock and Nicholson (2010) suggest. They reinforce the importance of background knowledge, stating, “Knowing about Mars, Jupiter, and so forth helps readers when reading about the solar system. Knowing about Meriwether Lewis and William Clark helps readers when reading about the Oregon Trail. Knowing about mammals and how they differ from other animals can help readers when reading about polar bears, skunks, or beavers” (p. 167).

Mills (2009) suggests an activity that lends itself to teaching children how to make predictions that she calls Telling Tales. This pre-reading speaking activity causes students to practice predicting about narrative text. The teacher can model by thinking aloud about what the text may be about, solely by observing the pictures, and not referencing the words of the text. This requires students to tap into the visuals, wake up their inference skills, and tell a tale of what they think will happen, based on the sequence of images available to them (pp. 325-326).

In his list of things to do during a read aloud lesson, Jim Trelease (2011) simply states, “Before you begin, discuss the illustration on the front cover. Ask,

‘What do you think this is going to be about?’” (p. 74). Spending a little time on this simple routine can help to foster strategic pre-reading thinking.

Questioning

Dymock and Nicholson acknowledge that questioning should begin before reading. They say, “Prior to reading, good readers ask themselves questions that activate background knowledge” (p. 168). This is “highly metacognitive,” according to Mills (2009), and when students “generate and answer their own questions” such as ‘What is the most important information here for my purpose?’ ‘What have I missed?’ and ‘What is my opinion of this issue?’ they are “improving comprehension of texts” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002) (p. 327).

How does this happen? Engagement. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) call questioning “The strategy that keeps readers engaged. When readers ask questions, they clarify understanding and forge ahead to make meaning. Asking questions is at the heart of thoughtful reading” (p. 11).

Should readers generate and answer questions before, during, and after reading the way their teachers do? The signs point to yes, because questioning “propels readers forward,” and when readers have questions, “they are less likely to abandon the text” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, p. 22). Questions can be directed at the author, the content, and the ideas of the text. Questions can bring clarity during moments of confusion, assist in constructing meaning, acquiring

new information, or locating specific information (p. 22). Mills (2009) has used an activity called Interview a Character to practice developing thoughtful questions during and after reading stories or autobiographies. Student pairs use an interview script outline to develop interview questions to ask the main character. Students can practice differentiating between information recall questions and questions that require inferences (p. 327).

Making Connections

Connections go hand-in-hand with activating background because “When students have had an experience similar to that of a character in a story, they are more likely to understand the character’s motives, thoughts, and feelings. And when readers have an abundance of background knowledge about a specific content area, they understand more completely the new information they read” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, p. 21).

In reflection on her study about children making meaning of texts through dialogic transaction, Fiona Maine (2013) re-tells a day in her study when her students created an oral story about a specific illustration. She says, “They created a story and empathized with the character in the picture to explain why she might be there. The idea of being told off for getting muddy seemed reasonable for two 6-year-old children, so they related their own experiences to help them make sense of what they saw. They synthesized the elements of the picture to incorporate them into their narrative.” (p. 152). Much like Mills’

(2009) Telling Tales activity, this experience that Maine (2013) recalls solidifies the impact that background knowledge and connections can make for readers' comprehension.

Visualizing and Text Structure

“Readers, as they process the text, should be able to get a visual image of its ribs and bones, its structure” (Dymock and Nicholson, 2010. p.171). Students should be able to visualize the imagery of what is happening and who is in the story if they are reading narrative, as well as the main topic of study and the details surrounding it if reading nonfiction, and according to Dymock and Nicholson, this is key for understanding text structure. Diagrams and concrete tools help students to comprehend *who* and *what*, as well as the entire structure (p.171).

Three-Step Freeze Frames is an activity Mills (2009) suggests to aid students in learning how to visualize during and after reading. It is also excellent for kinesthetic learners. Groups of students dramatize three frozen action shots of events in the text, without speaking. Groups perform their visualizations for their classmates, and allow for discussion and feedback (p. 327). This method also allows for sequencing and summarizing, since three freeze frames could logically be performed in terms of first, next, and last important events.

In order to visualize during reading, though, readers must be active readers. Say Harvey and Goudvis (2000), “Active readers create visual images in

their minds based on the words they read in the text. The pictures they create enhance their understanding” (p.11). When children need assistance developing this mental imagery-making skill, they can use crayons and paper to illustrate what they are imagining while reading or listening to a text that does not include pictures. Doing so requires the reader to determine the most important details. These intentional readers "differentiate between less important ideas and key ideas that are central to the meaning of the text” (p.11).

Plus, as Jim Trelease (2011) points out, this practice can keep certain children more engaged in the experience of being read to. He says, “Reluctant readers or unusually active children frequently find it difficult to just sit and listen. Paper, crayons, and pencils allow them to keep their hands busy while listening” (p. 76).

Summarizing

Summarizing ties everything together. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) say “thoughtful readers grasp essential ideas and important information when reading. Readers must differentiate between less important ideas and key ideas that are central to the meaning of the text” (p. 11). This sifting process is essential for summarizing and retelling.

Dymock and Nicholson (2010) outline the makings of an effective summary: “First, read the text. Second, identify the text structure the writer has used. Third, make a diagram of the structure. Fourth, discard redundant

information so that only key ideas remain. Fifth, circle only the critical ideas that you need for the summary” (p.172). Though first grade students are not writing such extensive summaries as this, this method of thinking about a text is helpful for them to see and hear modeled.

Reading aloud

Jim Trelease (2013), author of *The Read Aloud Handbook*, writes about an observation he once made: “There were isolated classes in which kids were reading- a lot! How is it, I puzzled, that these kids are so turned on to reading while the class across the hall (where I had visited the previous month) wasn’t reading anything? Same principal, same neighborhood, same textbooks. What’s up? When I pursued it further I discovered the difference was standing in the front of the room: the teacher. In nearly every one of the turned-on classes, the teacher read to the class on a regular basis. Maybe there’s something to this, more than just the feel-good stuff” (p. xxiv).

Why do we read aloud to children, both at home and at school? Trelease says, “We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire. But in reading aloud, we also: build vocabulary; condition the child’s brain to associate reading with pleasure; create background knowledge; provide a reading role model; plant the desire to read” (p. 6). This is the why, but what about the how? Not all read alouds are created equal.

Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) asked the same question, and “decided to study the read-aloud practices of teachers who enjoyed the reputation of being exceptional models of read-aloud instruction and whose students consistently performed at or above the school norms on reading achievement” (p. 9). After this, the researchers would compare and contrast these procedures to those of other teachers in an effort to determine what sets effective read alouds apart from the pack.

In Phase I of their study, Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) sent letters to 65 school administrators in the San Diego County urban schools, introducing their research and requesting nominations of expert read aloud conductors whose students demonstrated reading gains consistently. 25 teachers representing 25 schools were selected for observations. The researchers noted the components of their read aloud lessons. In Phase II of their study, the researchers randomly selected 120 other teachers in the area. Interestingly, these 120 teachers had not been nominated as expert read aloud conductors, but were regularly used as cooperating teachers for San Diego State University student teachers. The researchers observed these 120 teachers to note the components of their read aloud lessons and evaluated them against the components observed in Phase I (p. 10).

After observations, interviews, and data analysis was complete, Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) were able to identify seven components of an effective interactive read aloud lesson that all of the expert teachers used:

- “Books chosen were appropriate to students’ interests and matched to their developmental, emotional, and social levels” (p. 10).
- “Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher” (p. 10).
- “A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established” (p. 10).
- “Teachers modeled fluent reading when they read the text” (p. 11).
- “Teachers were animated and used expression” (p. 11).
- “Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics in the text” (p. 11).
- “Connections were made to independent reading and writing” (p. 11).

Text selection by the experts was purposeful and “teachers were consistently observed selecting high-quality children’s literature,” oftentimes award-winning texts (p. 11). Teachers had visibly prepared for their lesson, using sticky notes to remind them when to pause, and which questions to ask. They paused at key points to think aloud, ask questions, or otherwise engage their students. They also pre-determined key vocabulary at which to stop at and involve the students in examining (pp. 11-12). Purpose was clearly established at

the beginning of the lesson, and many teachers were observed using visual aides that reminded the students which strategies they were learning and how to use them appropriately (p. 12). Rarely did the researchers observe pronunciation errors, a lack of prosody, or a lack of expression. Teachers had obviously practiced their books ahead of the lesson. Additionally, students were engaged by the gestures, facial expressions, vocal inflection, and overall animation and enthusiasm with which their teachers read (p. 12). A variety of questions were asked of children, ranging from questions intended to ensure understanding of text details, to questions meant to bolster student connection with the text. Teachers used yes/no cards to allow for student response, think-pair-share and partner talk, and large group discussion to facilitate a teacher-led, but student supported, understanding of the reading (p. 13). Finally, expert read aloud teachers connected the focus of their lessons to independent reading and writing extensions after the lesson concluded. Some teachers had students free write in response to the reading, while others gave specific prompts. Some teachers had children choose related independent reading material, or work with literacy centers pertaining to themes or strategy work from the story/lesson. The expert teachers were intentional in creating a situation in which the read aloud was not an isolated incident, but rather a gateway to more learning (p. 13).

Renowned author Mem Fox (2013) says, “Listening to an adult read aloud cultivates the essential enchanting engagement with books, stories, rhymes, and

songs that every child has to experience before the formal teaching of reading can begin” and contrasts books children listen to, to basal readers, which are often used for instruction and written with “stilted” language (p. 4). She acknowledges the naysayers and refers to them as the “anti-read aloud brigade” who claim that reading aloud to children is a waste of precious literacy program time in schools (p. 4).

Fox describes accounts from parents and teachers, who attest that reading aloud to children in and out of school creates improved behavior and reading readiness (pp. 4-5). Her approach is holistic, and she credits student response to read alouds based on the idea of less is more. She says, “Once I start- once we teachers start- once we stop droning on in an irritating, foolhardy attempt to teach or ‘orientate’ children to a book and *finally get going*, the children are transfixed. And the sooner they’re transfixed, the sooner they want the book again. And the more they hear the story, the more they hear its fabulous language, and *understand* its fabulous language, and *learn* its fabulous language, and *use* its fabulous language. Without wasting a single minute on inane questions and activities, a wide and exquisite vocabulary is absorbed, as well as difficult grammatical constructions that turn out not to be difficult at all in context” (2013, p.7).

Considering all the habits that the most effective read aloud teachers used in Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey’s 2004 study, does a classic and well respected

author such as Fox agree with what adults should do when they read to children? She calls herself feeling “desolate when ill-advised but well-meaning teachers kill the delight and dig graves for my stories by doing things that seem so harmless at the time,” and proceeds to give an example of a “dumb question” a teacher may ask her students when analyzing a character (p.7). Instead, she advises, “The best way to ‘use’ books is to read them over and over and over again, especially on the day they’re first introduced. Read with vitality and wild enthusiasm and giggles and laughter and craziness and quietness and zest. Don’t waste ‘teach-ery time’ introducing the books to the gorgeous kids in your classroom: they won’t concentrate until you actually start to read them and then whammo, you’ll have them in the palm of your hand, and you’ll make a HUGE difference. Lucky them!” (p.8).

Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004), Mem Fox (2013), and Jim Trelease (2011) can all be taken into consideration when designing read aloud lessons. Most heavily considering the research of how read alouds can be most effective in schools from Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004), my read aloud lessons serve as a platform for teacher modeling. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) *zone of proximal development* theory, “The zone of proximal development permits us to delineate the child’s immediate future and his dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what already has been achieved developmentally but also for what is in the course of maturing” (p.87). The purpose of the read aloud in

this study is to engage students with reading enjoyment, but mostly to model the use of strategies that will aid in furthering their developing, independent reading comprehension, because “If confusion disrupts meaning, readers need to stop and clarify their understanding. Readers may use a variety of strategies to ‘fix up’ comprehension when meaning goes awry” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, p.12).

Student Talk

Let’s face it; most young people like to talk. I pursued the following research with the desire to learn how I could capitalize on this and make my read aloud lessons as beneficial to student success as possible.

In reference to her strategy-based activities that are highly student-driven, Kathy A. Mills (2009) says the strategies are motivating and engaging, multimodal, open ended, and supported by evidence-based research. In addition, they draw on students’ existing language resources, create space for diversity, and require few resources. Teachers find them easy to adapt for use with students of varied levels of language competence. Most importantly, they contribute to a classroom culture in which collaboration and meaningful social interaction form the sea upon which readers can set sail” (pp. 327-328).

When reflecting upon the experiences her subjects had in her own study, Fiona Maine (2013) reports that the “dialogic space” between themselves and the text allowed the students to construct meaning in a creative way (p. 154). She reports specific quotes heard, such as “‘I think I would probably...’ and ‘I

personally wouldn't" as her students projected themselves into the character's experiences (p. 153). Through these experiences, Maine says, students "co-construct meaning from the text" and the reading experience "gains depth" (p. 151). She did not observe a rigid set of comprehension strategies at play amongst her students. Instead, "comprehension was enabled through creative thinking and dialogue, with children building on the ideas of each other in a dialogic space that existed between themselves and the text. The children used text that was open, suggestive and negotiable, meaning that different interpretations or priorities for discussion were possible" (154). The student experience was talk-based and student-driven.

Think alouds and metacognition

Sherry Kragler and Linda Martin conducted a study on first grade students' use of metacognitive strategies in their reading. In their 2009 write up, they state, "Though much is known about metacognitive strategy use of older readers, little is known about the metacognitive behaviors of young children" (2009, p.512). Their study took place over the course of a year, and examined both "awareness and use of metacognitive reading behaviors" (2009, p. 512). Kragler and Martin's research question is "What metacognitive reading strategies do first-grade students report and use while reading?" (516).

The researchers collected running records to analyze miscues and corrective strategies, listened to retellings to gauge comprehension (rather than

students answering specific questions), and kept anecdotal notes throughout the study. Kragler and Martin also issued informal reading inventories and conducted interviews with students regarding their metacognitive reading behaviors (516). In their interviews, the researchers asked students the following questions: “What makes someone a good reader? What do you do before you read a book? What do you do when you come to a word you do not know? What do you do when you read something that does not make sense?” (518). Four times throughout the study, a think aloud was conducted and researchers took notes as the children read and responded. The format was as follows:

- Researcher uses initial moments to talk with the student about the school day.
- Before reading, background knowledge for the book is activated.
- During reading, researchers asked the protocol questions: What are you thinking? What was easy? What was hard? Did you have any problems? What did you do?
- When the student was finished reading, a retelling was done.
- The interview concluded with an opportunity for the student to contribute anything else about the book or their reading (p. 518).

Two of the students in Kragler and Martin’s study were struggling readers throughout the year. Both students’ think alouds showed that they were actively thinking while they read and that they each used strategies, but one student was

able to tell about his strategy use, while the other was not (p. 524). Another two students were average readers. The data collection showed that they both knew becoming a good reader takes practice, and that both students had some self-help strategies, but that one of the students continued to default to asking an adult for help, even at the end of the year (p. 527). Two above-average readers were also studied. These students used picture clues, sounded out unknown words, and re-read text when it was confusing (p. 528). However, of all the readers in the study, they mentioned and demonstrated use of the fewest strategies. These two readers quickly named words and books that were easy but hardly mentioned any books or words that were challenging to them, even words read incorrectly and books that they did not give a detailed retelling of (p. 531).

Kragler and Martin determined that 5 out of 6 students in their study used more strategies than they self-identified (p. 531). Only one reader mentioned actual strategy language before reading a book, while others used routine-based language (making predictions vs. reading the title or taking a picture walk) (p. 532). Interestingly, “Even though the children did miscue and could identify difficult words, they did not perceive making miscues as being problematic” (p. 534).

The study seemed to cause students to think of words and language in a hyper-focused way. Throughout the year, they continued to categorize words as being easy or hard, and in interviews, placed value on learning how to read new

words and understand their meanings. Students demonstrated use of phonics over pictures to do so (p. 534).

Kragler and Martin reflect on the lack of change in student language as they referred to what they did metacognitively, and mention: “It would be interesting to investigate the types of metacognitive conversations these children had with their teachers. For example, it is evident that the teachers were modeling some pre-reading behaviors such as read the title, identify the author, look at the cover, and look at the pictures in the book. The children also knew what to do when confronted with unknown words, such as sound it out and ask for help. Even so, they had fewer strategies to use when confronted with confusing texts. Most students, even the above-average readers, mentioned skipping that part” (p. 535).

Gradual Release of Responsibility

Through teacher modeling, such as during read aloud lessons, “The teacher explains the strategy. The teacher demonstrates how to apply the strategy successfully. The teacher thinks aloud to model the mental processes she uses when she reads” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, p. 13). Next comes guided practice. “After explicitly modeling, the teacher gradually gives the students more responsibility for task completion. The teacher and students practice the strategy together. The teacher scaffolds the students’ attempts and supports student thinking, giving feedback during conferring and classroom discussions. Students

share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading and small- and large-group discussions” (p. 13). Finally, students arrive at independent practice. “After working with the teacher and with other students, the students try to apply the strategy on their own. The students receive regular feedback from teacher and other students” (p. 13).

Though students receive modeling and guidance from the teacher and peers during the learning process, “Eventually, the goal is for readers to use these strategies automatically and seamlessly. No one envisions readers lying in bed with a great book and having to get up, find a pencil, and jot a question on a sticky note” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000, p. 12).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Goals

As the semester began and I was preparing to start implementing my study, I felt myself continuously tapping the breaks. When I designed my study, I knew I would be implementing it at the beginning of the school year. Still, even after eight years in the classroom, I had forgotten just how needy the children are when they arrive in the fall when compared to how they leave in the spring. I wrote my plan last spring and the children I have this year felt very different after the first week of school than the children I had last year or in years past. So I hesitated, a lot. Yet I realized I needed to begin, and went forth knowing that if the pace was a little slower than I had originally intended, that's just the way it would have to be. So, I revisited my research question, got my starting documents in order, and got to work.

I believe primary students and beginning readers can make great reading comprehension gains by being read to and involved in a discussion about a text. My research question sought to understand the impact regularly scheduled and intentional read-aloud lessons would have on my students' interest in reading and their comprehension. When I began re-reviewing the literature I had chosen regarding read aloud lessons to help me fine-tune which strategies I wanted to teach, I found myself gravitating towards the think-aloud practice. From there, a secondary question evolved: *“What are the observed and reported experiences of*

first grade students who think aloud about their reading?” I knew that modeling specific strategies through a think-aloud format was helpful during read aloud lessons, but I wanted to see if children would be more greatly engaged if they too could participate in the think-aloud process. My hope was that their thinking-aloud would better help me gauge their processing during reading and would help them be more greatly aware of their own comprehension (or lack thereof). I really began to wonder whether my read-aloud lessons would boost metacognition, therefore creating stronger comprehending readers who can monitor and fix up as they go. My main research question and subsequent sub-questions guided the *I-do-we-do-you-do* process by which I conducted my study.

Setting

My study took place in my general education first grade classroom in a suburban public school district in Northeastern Pennsylvania. I have a 90 -minute language arts/literacy block every morning for guided reading and whole group instruction, and an additional thirty minutes at the end of each day. Read aloud lessons took place during the thirty-minute block an average of three times per week, with the entire class. Guided reading lessons with my focus group took place two times a week for twenty minutes each, always during the morning block. Interviews and surveys took place during one of the two literacy blocks.

At the time of my study, my first grade class consisted of 18 students, 8 girls and 10 boys. My class was composed of 94% white/non-Hispanic students

and 6% Hispanic. 17% of my students qualified for free or reduced lunch and 44% of my students received additional support in the area of reading. All students participated in class instruction during read aloud lessons, but only my focus group participated in related instruction during guided reading, and data was only collected on these 5 students. I began collecting data from all students at first, and my focus group did not solidify itself until one month into the study. Regarding my focus group, 100% were white/non-Hispanic, 0% qualified for free or reduced lunch, and 0% received additional reading support.

My focus group was chosen because of the direction the study went in. When I shifted my focus to studying the impact of thinking aloud about their own reading, I needed to be studying this in readers. Therefore, I selected my most fluent students according to the AIMSweb fall oral reading fluency and nonsense word fluency benchmarks as my focus group. The students in my class who were not yet demonstrating fluency or accuracy in their independent reading participated in the whole group read aloud lessons, but it was my judgment that their guided reading and small group time would be better served with instruction that would build their foundational reading skills.

Trustworthiness

As a teacher and a researcher, I need my study to be trustworthy, ethical, and reliable. My first step was to secure approval to complete my study from Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) (Appendix

A). Next, I notified my building administrators and parents of my students, of my study and its purpose, through written consent forms (Appendices B and C).

Then, I shared my study and its purpose with my students, whom also completed written consent forms (Appendix D). These consent forms described the nature of my study, outlined confidentiality measures, provided contact information for the involved staff at Moravian, and assured all parties that students and parents had the ultimate say in participation or withdrawal from my study at any time without consequence.

All documents related to my study were kept in a secure cabinet in my home to insure the validity of my results and the confidentiality of my participants. In addition to hard copies of surveys and student artifacts, I maintained an electronic field log on my personal laptop, to which only I have access. Throughout my field log and my thesis, participants are referred to by pseudonyms so as to conceal my students' identities.

I collected data on my study for a total of 10 weeks, to allow for the tweaking of my research question and focus group, stages of implementation of my study, and prolonged observation. During my study, I was a member of an inquiry support group, made up of my fellow researchers. We actively discussed emerging themes in our research and helped one another troubleshoot or work through evolving research questions. Through "peer debriefing," (Hendricks,

2006) my fellow researchers were able to “assist in formulating new directions for ongoing study” (p.106).

Student work, surveys, interviews and member checks, observations, and assessments were all used as data collection sources. The goal of having such a variety of evidence was to triangulate the data for increased validity (Hendricks, 2006, p.107).

Methods of Data Collection

My Field Log

My field log was the crux of my data collection, and I wrote in it every single time I had an observation, as well as a reaction to my other sources of data. I used my field log to record what happened, capture direct quotes from participants, note participation and changes, and most insightfully, outline my reactions and gleanings from all of it. Through this reflective practice, I realized when changes needed to be made to my study and that my primary question had organically led me to a secondary question. Reflections and connections in my field log frequently brought me back to surveys and student work to check against any bias or confusion in my findings, and spurred the initiative to implement new data points.

Survey Data

At the outset of my study, my students completed a survey (Appendix E) on their engagement with and attitude about reading in different forms (being read to, reading with a peer, reading independently). I adjusted my surveys as the study continued to include questions that would show any change in engagement or attitude, and which strategies the students found most helpful to their comprehension (Appendix F).

Student Work

During read aloud lessons and guided reading lessons, students at times were required to complete paper and pencil work to accompany their reading or listening. Graphic organizers were used most often and gave abstract concepts like visualizing and understanding story structure some level of concreteness. I evaluated them formatively to inform my instruction.

Conferences and Interviews

Each participant had a conference with me halfway through the study, and we had another conference at the end. I kept notes about our conferences in my field log. Conferences were discussions of which strategies students were using, which strategies were helpful, and which

strategies were not helpful. I was able to provide feedback on student application of think-alouds in their reading as they read to me.

Interviews were conducted with the members of my focus group when it was first established, and again at the end of the study. I asked students about what good readers do, how they see themselves as readers, what they do before, during, and after they read, and their use of strategies (Appendix L).

Member Checks

In order to complete member checks, I met with each individual in my focus group at the halfway point of my study and at the conclusion of my data collection. My goal was to share with them my interpretations of the findings and check whether or not the student interpreted the findings similarly (p.108).

Bias

I need to recognize that I came into my study with some bias; that is, an opinion of what would be best practice. I have long felt a dissonance in my curriculum as an early literacy teacher, and the amount of time I spend reading to children. This is not to say that I do not believe that time spent on all the other building blocks of literacy are less important. Simply put, I believe all the pieces of the pie matter, but I struggle with making all the pieces fit, and I'm not alone. There's a

feeling out there that there simply isn't enough time to read to kids in school, and not enough evidence to prove that read alouds are worthy of our precious time.

First, I do not believe that students just develop holistically into natural readers who comprehend what they read. I believe there are five pillars of reading for a reason and that each pillar supports the whole. Students who are not given a model of a fluent reader who questions while reading and monitors her understanding, will probably not just one day begin to do so themselves. And, though some students may not see themselves as deep thinkers, they can become that way when taught how, and when given opportunities to really absorb a text and practice thinking.

I have a big problem with the emphasis words-per-minute are given in the gamut of fluency, the daily rush of squeezing every component of the curriculum in, and the lack of time given for children to learn to love reading. However, I've always heard that time is not the enemy; how you use the time you have is what counts. I created this study to test the waters on whether giving time to something I had a bias for was truly worthwhile for my students.

I also made a decision, due to the large gap of readability amongst my class at the outset of the school year and the range of other more foundational needs that many students displayed, to limit my research to

students who were already considered readers. This is a limitation of my study and I would be remiss if I did not expressly say so.

My Story

How did I get here?

My original research question, “What are the observed and reported experiences of first grade students when exposed to daily read alouds?” and my adjusted question after my study started to take on new life, “What are the observed and reported experiences of first grade students who use thinking aloud to monitor their understanding of a text?” both were born out of a need to help children become more self-sufficient independent readers.

From a very young age, I admired my own teachers for their ability to see strengths in me that I did not know were there. I wanted to give that to children, too. Teaching was what I thought I was destined to do, but the road certainly has not been smooth. Despite getting a top-notch undergraduate education, I was underprepared to student teach. In fact, my supervisor pulled me aside after she observed me once and gave me the talk, without any sugar coating, about what needed to be fixed if I wanted to pass the semester. I will never forget that, and I am thankful that she cracked the whip, because it forced me to examine my craft with a critical eye and to grow. I learned more from the fourth grade students I taught that semester, than I had from any textbook previously. I came out of that semester eager for my own upper-elementary classroom, yet such dreams were of no avail.

As luck would have it, 2008 was the year my first district (comprised of six elementary schools at the time) decided to double its kindergarten staff in order to provide a full-day kindergarten education to its students. I landed my first job the July after graduation with the mentality of getting my foot in the door so that I could dazzle my principal with all of my upper-elementary prowess and transition to a more favorable grade level the next year. Therein lay reality check number two.

Had it not been for a fantastic reading specialist who was assigned to my classroom, I don't think I would have made it through that first year. What I had overlooked was just how needy those little pre-readers assigned to me would be. Each day, she came into my room with her bag of tricks, her rhymes and strategies, her perfected evil eye and her warm sense of humor. She took the children (and me) on a ride that began with figuring out how to hold a pencil and form a letter, to recognizing rhymes and phonemes, reading sight words, and writing accurately. It didn't take me long before I buckled down and told myself, "I want to get really good at this too."

For three years I prided myself on having re-learned the building blocks of reading and applying them all with passion. I taught children who flourished and who loved to be read to, loved learning to read, and learning to write. Then the economy blew up, the budgets crashed, and in 2011 I was furloughed. I was fortunate enough to land a first grade position in a new school district, and both

my interview committee and myself thought it would be a natural transition from kindergarten to first grade. Not quite.

Certainly, I was able to bring a lot of the oral language, phonetic and phonemic awareness, and foundational blending knowledge that I had gained teaching kindergarten with me to help my first graders. However, I quickly learned that the amount of content covered in first grade is vastly more than kindergarten, the pace never lets up, and there is never quite enough time in the day to do it all. I felt underequipped, and having been down that road before, I knew I needed to grow my skillset. Voila: Enroll in the reading track of the master's degree program at Moravian.

Through my work at Moravian, I was always hearing the importance of making time in your school day for the things that will really help kids. When considering what to research for my study, I realized that although I know modeling reading comprehension strategies is a valid teaching method, I was hardly able to make the time to do so. Our literacy block is filled with phonics, phonemic awareness, spelling, guided reading, and writing time. There is hardly enough time to get in everything that is required, let alone make room for anything "extra." Yet those words kept ringing in my ears, and I knew that I wasn't being true to them. I couldn't remember the last time I read to my class *the right way*, and really allowed time before/during/after reading for a meaningful lesson. So there it was, my topic for research.

I wanted to learn what would happen if I purposefully and meaningfully read aloud to my students regularly. Could I model comprehension strategies? Could my modeling transfer into their application? Could their reading comprehension improve as a result? So much of my language arts instruction is centered on building fluency (after all, these are beginning readers), but comprehension strategies are not taught as succinctly and directly as I find the research suggests they should be. Knowing that children very quickly go from hand-held readers to readers expected to read for meaning, I wanted to learn if teaching comprehension strategies through read aloud lessons would create a bridge to comprehension, increase student awareness of their comprehension, increase interest and engagement with the learning of strategies, and be overall effective for my students.

Failure to Launch

When I planned this research study last spring, I knew that it would be conducted during the beginning months of the school year. Yet, even after 7 years in the classroom, I forgot just how dependent new first graders are in September. The amount of blooming we as primary teachers get to witness over the course of a school year is extraordinary; it makes the start of a new year feel like you are teaching children many years younger than the year before. They come in after a carefree summer expected to transition from half-day kindergarten, large open classrooms, spacious tables, and small class sizes to a

busy 9-3 school day jam-packed with transitions, work at a desk, responsibility for personal materials, an expectation to work somewhat independently at a greater level of rigor, and to get along peacefully with more students in a tighter space.

It's a leap for all of them, every year. In fact, since teaching first grade, I have always felt that it is not until Thanksgiving that we really get ourselves into a groove. This year's class still felt more needy in the first week or two of school than any I have had in years. Many behavior issues, weak levels of independence or self-assurance, and greater academic needs were what I surmised relatively quickly. I always devote much time during the first two weeks of school to rules, routines, community building, and learning about one another but for some reason I just felt stuck this year. As a result, I found myself failing to launch my study.

I kept thinking, "When am I ever going to find the time to sit and read to them?" "When will we get to a place where they can collectively sit still and be quiet for more than 5 minutes?" "Will I be able to read uninterrupted?" After meeting with my cohort and listening to how many of them had already introduced their studies to their students and had begun collecting data, I knew I just had to jump in. Set the bar and we will rise to it together, right?

Getting Started

I planned some time at the end of the Language Arts block on September 8th to announce my study to my class. I can't believe how nervous I was about it!

I was worried they wouldn't understand the importance of what I was saying. I shared with them that I am a student just like they are. I said, "I am a student who goes to school, to learn the best ways to teach you, so that you can keep getting smarter." A bit to my surprise, they were hanging on my every word. Questions like, "Where do you go?" and, "Do you do it here like us?" popped up pretty quickly. One student shared, "Yeah. My dad does that too."

Then I told the students that we would be having more read alouds and that while we listened to these stories, I would be teaching them new strategies that would help them be better at understanding what they read. This elicited cheers and the question, "Are you going to read Monty like that class over there?" (The class across the hall just began a chapter book series about a boy named Monty and some of my students had noticed.) I told them that we would be reading all kinds of books, from fiction to non-fiction, trade books to chapter books, and even some poetry.

I ripped the Band-Aid off! I wondered as I ate my lunch that day, what had taken me so long to do it? Why had I been nervous to declare my study? Most students seemed excited about being read to more often, and curious about me being "one of them," as if we now had this secret between us. I wondered if they really understood what this was about, or if they would even remember tomorrow. Overall, I was relieved that I had taken the leap and was prepared to keep the momentum going.

Ducks in a row

All of the paperwork went out. First, I obtained my administrator's approval for my study. Next, I sent home the parent consent forms which delineated the purpose of my study and trustworthiness/confidentiality safeguards. Then, I re-capped my study for my students in kid-speak as I guided them to complete the student consent forms. My administrator consented, all students consented, but I did not receive back parent permission from all parents. Therefore I weeded out two of my eighteen students from my data reporting pool.

Just like one study I read about when conducting my article research, I set up a focus group of five students, ranging in reading abilities. I chose two above average readers, one on-level reader, and two below average readers. These choices and level determinations were based on baseline reading data and classroom observations up until that point in time. Though I had established my focus group for data collection and analysis, all children in my class participated in the read aloud lessons and activities.

“Read Aloud! Read Aloud!”

Since announcing my study, I had purposely started incorporating fifteen minutes of read aloud time during my afternoon reading block each day. I selected short poems from Where the Sidewalk Ends and shorter-than-usual trade books, just to start developing the routine of daily reading without setting their short attention spans up for failure. I also primarily wanted to build up the

stamina of their positive reading behaviors, which included sitting still, focusing on the reader and the book, and how to correctly do a think-pair-share and respond to questions or comments from the teacher or a peer.

There were days when it was tough and a five minute read aloud turned into ten, but I knew I was doing the right thing by breaking them in when one morning, two of my very active boys entered the classroom, looked at the daily schedule, and exclaimed, “Read aloud! Read aloud!”, like it was as riveting as an extra recess period.

Meet My Kids, Part One

When originally designing my study, I wanted to determine the impact daily read alouds would have on my students, with a primary focus on their reading comprehension. In this original plan, I had an objective of learning whether all children would benefit, so I selected participants for a heterogeneous focus group based on data collected in the first week of school. This data included baselines in sight word reading and a fluency check, as well as my anecdotal observation notes. I selected two above average readers, two below average readers, and one reader who seemed to be on level.

Through the first several weeks of my study, I conducted my read aloud lessons and instructed students on two comprehension strategies in a whole group setting, which I will elaborate on later. I made observational notes (which is challenging when you’re reading to kids effectively, but somehow I made it

work!), and collected their surveys and classwork associated with my study. My intent was to continue to deliver the instruction my study was built upon to all children, but to narrow my focus to this handful of students so as to make a more personal connection with each participant and afford myself the time to deeply examine each participant's experience along the way.

There was one pitfall, though. I was really enjoying my study, and the visible change I could almost immediately see; I could quickly feel a change in my class' pulse on reading. Yet I grew curious. Like the six and seven year olds that I teach, my initial question lead to another. Implementing daily read aloud lessons was clearly improving engagement, according to my initial surveys and observations. But if I wanted to know whether they impacted my students' reading comprehension, how would I test that? Well, like most teachers, I ultimately wanted to see children apply what they had been taught to do and guided to do, to something new, independently. While I would certainly balance my data collection by including performance on curricular comprehension passage question-and-answer assessments, I also wanted to witness it in action- in authentic text reading action. I decided I wanted to scaffold my study. I would teach during read aloud lessons, and children would practice during guided reading.

Sounds simple enough right? This was the beginning of guided reading for the school year, so I set up my groups based on the data I had and matched the

available texts to the children. What I quickly learned was that guided reading with my on-level and above-level readers looked very different from guided reading with my below-level readers. I will share more about the way my application-to-guided-reading with that group flopped later, but for now, just know that the reflective teacher in me tapped the brakes and re-evaluated what was best for my students in conjunction with what I hoped to learn from my study.

So, the kids you are about to meet are not the kids I originally selected as members of my data collection focus group. Those first children got me through the fog and inspired my research to go a little deeper. The new members of my data collection focus group were children who I determined through the baseline data I mentioned earlier as well as Fall Benchmark AIMSweb data in oral reading fluency and the Superkids Placement Test (a curricular assessment tool), were already readers. I came to decide that I wanted to learn whether my teaching and modeling of strategic approaches to reading and comprehension during read aloud lessons could be orally executed by first grade readers and improve their own comprehension of new texts. I could not study this in children who were still learning to blend and differentiate vowel sounds. They had bigger, more immediate fish to fry during small group instruction. It wasn't best practice or fair to them, and it wasn't informative to my study.

Meet My Kids, Part Two

Take a blank wall. Paint it peony pink. Splash on some red and purple, and coat it all with silver glitter. That's my student *Patricia* (pseudonym.)

Patricia is a rule follower, a pleaser, a kid who likes to giggle with her friends and her teacher and draw everyone pretty pictures. She is a six year old who loves her family and uses more of her voice around her siblings than with anyone else. She is used to her brothers and has no qualms with giving the many boys in our lopsided ratio of a class a piece of her mind. Yet if she thinks she has disappointed you, the tears come faster than a flash flood. She is a visual learner. She isn't shy about reading and always tries her hardest. Patricia is a student that looks great on paper, but through some closer examination, has some holes (phonetically and in her comprehension) that need attention.

Then, there's my yellow wall with orange zigzags. Speckle it with flashing bulbs and one giant Slinky. That's *Aaron* (pseudonym.) Adjectives that come to mind for Aaron are cheerful, outgoing, friendly, rambunctious, on the move, knowledgeable, and always coming up with connections or new ideas. In a conversation, Aaron can go from topic to topic while his listener is still digesting the first. He adds in varying voices and volumes for dramatic effect, and he never fails to show you his joy when something you say pleases him. On other days, though, he will tell me he needs pure silence around him to concentrate, and will problem solve a situation by talking it out in an almost-whisper voice as he

exudes calm and reason. These moments are quite less frequent, but they do come. Aaron learns best when his voice and his appendages are engaged, and when he is given a structure to follow. As a reader, Aaron verbalizes many connections and questions, and displays both great interest and background knowledge in a variety of topics and story structures. He also boldly corrects others' misconceptions about the meaning of what was read. However, channeling all of this verbal thought into writing and critically examining a text areas Aaron needs to grow.

Moving away from color pallets, I turn to a sunflower. It is tall and cheerful, yet in that peaceful and self-assured kind of way. It's strong, it strives for the sky, and it does not disturb the growth of those around it. *Stephanie* (pseudonym) is the sunflower of my focus group. I didn't think she would say a peep the entire first week of school, no matter how many icebreakers I played or how many ways I mingled the children. Then, a smile cracked. A giggle escaped her lips. I've grown to know Stephanie and interact with her as a learner. Her seedpod has split, her seedling sprouted, and she has gone on to grow and truly flourish with pride. I have watched her be helpful, yet mind her own business. I have heard her offer reassurances to the friend that struggled. I have listened to her volume grow in both speaking and reading to an audible level rooted in confidence. I have watched her smile at those who needed it, and lead her group as they persevered through text dependent questions that were challenging even

for the strongest comprehending readers. At the beginning of my study, it was hard to know what she understood because she was willing to offer so little. As she continues to emerge and shoot toward the sky, so does her level of readability and understanding.

Growing alongside my sunflower is my palm tree. The pseudonym for this easy breezy character is *Robert*. Robert goes with the flow, likes to “feel green,” which according to his input during our discussion of Dr. Seuss’ My Many Colored Days, means “I like being calm and just learning my stuff.” Robert is the sponge of the focus group. His eyes are glued to my face, my mouth, my hands, what I write, and what I display. He strides to and fro with a bounce, a bob, and some chatter, but when it comes time to learn, no commotion can interrupt his focus. A snow squall or a thunderstorm crashes the party outside our classroom window, and everyone but Robert will run to watch. He sits still and asks me, “Can you explain that again? I didn’t hear it right.” As a reader, Robert has advanced fluency, and actively reads for meaning. He enjoys texts that are nonfiction and devours a handful of books on the same topic before moving on to another topic. Where Robert needs to stretch is his critical reading of fiction texts, and his metacognition. He is very auditory and visual. He recently discovered a pleasure in writing, though does not like to engage in many kinesthetic learning activities unless he is building something. He comes from a family who has poured a plentitude of background knowledge and worldly

exposures into him, and has a strong reading stamina. He also rises to a challenge, and brings that hunger to our guided reading group regularly.

More than just a mixture of colors or plant imagery, my final student in the focus group is like a shiny mustang running through western hills. He's fast, he's sleek, he's smooth, and he's wild. This student is a fluent reader, and at the beginning of the year, was the fastest reader in my class. The first several times I listened to him read, I needed to remind him to take a breath! He reads with expression and lights up when he realizes he can read a passage aloud that comes equipped with dialogue and exclamation marks. He prefers to move around the classroom in a herd and is an interpersonal learner. If he can put his learning into action with a peer, the experience is sure to be beneficial. He hardly ever walks-but runs, skips, dances, and sings his way from point A to point B, all day long. As he reads, he wonders aloud to himself naturally, and this read aloud/think aloud study has seemed organic for him. He has some kinks to work out, however. His thinking does not go as deep as I would like, and he over connects or does not connect at all. If he can be reigned in and shown through modeling and work with similar leveled peers how to slow down, be purposeful, and apply strategies, I believe he will become an amazing reader. Let's call him *Gene* (pseudonym.)

Throughout my story, you will get to know these five children as people and as readers. I've told the rest of my story in sequence of strategies that were

introduced through read aloud lessons and practiced in guided reading. Where I gave a survey or conducted an interview, that information has also been included. At the end of my story, I share what came of student-driven independent application of what we learned, their feedback, their comprehension data, and my opinionated suggestions for next steps.

As you read, always remember that these young, colorful characters are true children. They are three male and two female six and seven year olds, with tiny bodies, big curious minds, and even bigger hearts. I believe they have taught me just as much, if not more, than I taught them.

Strategy One: Making and evaluating predictions

Now that you have met my kids, allow me to step back to the time in my study that was spent preparing my students for lessons that would last long enough for some strategy work. As I read trade books by Ann Morris, and Shel Silverstein poems such as *“It’s Dark in Here,” “Smart,” “Boa Constrictor,” “The Planet of Mars,”* and *“The Long Haired Boy,”* I increasingly found my students settling in to the reading zone. At the time, our reading zone stamina lasted maybe ten minutes at most and it was all teacher lead, but in my eyes this was progress.

I began every lesson by introducing the cover art or poem art, the title, and the author/illustrator. After the second Morris book and the second or third Silverstein poem, the children were able to articulate some characteristics of these

people's works and what they expected to see and hear. I read to build reading time habits and stamina, but I also took note of who was willing to discuss and who wasn't, who was willing to question and who wasn't, and who seemed engaged and who wasn't. I noted that the children seemed engaged by peculiar texts, especially some of the poems that did not end up being about what they thought they'd be about, or gave them pause at the end and surprised their minds.

Considering their natural curiosity at this age, the importance I was noticing in framing the reading, and their gravitation toward wondering, I revisited my research on making and evaluating predictions. It is one of the building block strategies mentioned throughout my resources on comprehension strategies, and seemed like a natural first step. So, I gave my students an interest inventory and then pursued texts that would lend themselves to teaching that strategy.

The first book I selected was Miss Nelson is Missing. Before reading, I asked the class if any of them had read the book or heard it before. Surprisingly, only two students had! Aside from other text elements that make it a great book for prediction work, the fact that it was new to the majority of my class made it even more fitting.

This lesson took place on September 17th. By then, my children were accustomed to my introduction of a text: I read them the title and the author. Then, I shared my observations about the cover art aloud, and thought through

connecting the title to what I saw. I wondered aloud what “missing” could mean, why she was missing, and connected it to our class. I said, “If I am missing, you have a substitute teacher. Maybe these kids will have one. Or maybe the teacher is missing for good.” I then allowed a few other children to share what they were thinking with the class. After this talk time, I explained our objective (to practice making and evaluating predictions.) When I asked the children if anyone knew what a prediction was, only Robert raised his hand. Without hesitation, he said, “When you guess what happens next in a book.”

I was surprised that he was the only one who knew what a prediction was. When I asked him why good readers predict he said, “Eh. I don’t know.” On the easel I wrote a T chart. The left side said, “What we predict” and the right side said, “Why we think so.” I talked to the children about what I predicted and why I predicted it, referencing my connections to them and the cover art. I jotted down my ideas in the t-chart. I shared that predicting is like playing a guessing game between you and the author. When we play guessing games like “I Spy” and “Heads Up Seven Up,” the game is most fun when it requires lots of guessing- not as fun when the answer is deduced right away. We would read this book like we were playing a guessing game, and by doing that; we would practice paying attention to all the important clues and details the author gives. Then, I had a few other children share their predictions for what the story would be about, and why they thought so, and recorded their dictations in the t-chart.

As I read aloud, I paused throughout to think aloud about my original prediction and whether or not I was correct. I made new predictions based on the twists and turns of the plot, and added them to the chart. Each time I heard evidence of my prediction being true or false, I thought about it aloud.

After reading, I asked the children to help me notice something that was the same about all of my prediction sentences. A non-focus group student picked it out: “You always wrote ‘I think’ at the front of it what you wrote,” she said. Then, we reviewed each prediction and why I thought it by re-reading them together. I asked children to evaluate whether my predictions came true in the story or not. We talked about whether that was okay (yes) and that predicting is a guessing game that requires you to use the clues as best as you can, to make your brain pay closer attention to and enjoy the story, and is not necessarily about “getting it right.”

After this discussion, I asked the children to give me thumbs up or thumbs down answers to these questions: “Did Miss Nelson go missing forever?” “Was my before-reading prediction correct?” “Do you understand how to predict?” “Did you enjoy predicting before hearing the story?” “Did you enjoy predicting what would happen next in the story?” “Did predicting help you understand what was happening in the story?” “Do you think you will ever use predicting with other stories?” Then we defined predicting one last time, and reviewed predicting language: “I think that....”, and, “I think that because....”

Some reflections I had noted in my field log were that the children were totally engaged. They were focused, quiet, and attentive throughout much of the story. There were gasps and giggles, and at some points in the story they blurted out questions or remarks that they were thinking. They were not used to me doing so much thinking aloud though. In fact, they wanted to answer my questions (often shouting answers out impulsively) that I was asking myself as I was getting ready to make my next prediction out loud. One student, not in my focus group, did remark while I wrote one of my predictions, “Can we just read the story and not keep stopping?” The lesson was about 20 minutes long, which was longer than any read aloud lesson we had done thus far.

Over the next few days, we practiced predicting through read aloud lessons with trade books The Stray Dog, Ruby the Copycat, and Caps for Sale. Children practiced making predictions through think-pair-share. I wanted to make sure I gave them the opportunity to share their opinions and use their voices, since it seemed like torture to them when I was the only one allowed to do so. However, I still continued to use my thinking aloud approach to lead them to appropriate places to make their predictions. Children practiced using “I think” language to frame their predictions, and “I think so because...” to explain how they arrived at their predictions. There were a handful of moments when other students chimed in with, “Oh yeah! Oh yeah!” “No, because....” “You’re right,” and general sighs or grunts of agreement or disagreement when their peers. I

always recorded what was said, word for word, in a t-chart. We always paused to check the prediction at an appropriate time- either immediately after the event, or at the end of the story. I did not allow children to make as many predictions as they raised their hands for, in order to keep the pace moving.

The following week, I decided to attempt some transfer from teacher driven to teacher guided prediction making. At this time in my study, I was still closely examining my initial focus group. Since this was a heterogeneous group, I had members of the group in two different guided reading groups, working on two different leveled texts. At this time, I introduced the Prediction Planner graphic organizer (Appendix G), to allow for some structure and to remind students that their predictions should be based on something they see in the text/on the cover, and possibly their background knowledge.

My above-level reading group met to read a leveled reader called Don't Quit Frits! Before reading, we reviewed the definition and purpose of predictions, and how to frame them. Robert volunteered to share and said, "I think this book will be about Frits ice skating and trying not to quit it. I think so because that's what he is doing in the picture." I called on Patricia to give a prediction. She said, "I think Frits will quit and get in trouble. I think so because someone is yelling at him in the title."

My internal reaction to both predictions was that the students successfully framed their sentences, and demonstrated understanding of how to predict.

Robert's was a bit more grounded in evidence, whereas Patricia's seemed reaching and assuming. The exclamation mark inclined her to think Frits was being yelled at, which signaled to me that I would need to clarify the function of exclamation marks.

During reading, Patricia made another shallow prediction. I thought aloud to the group about what would happen next, and then a few pages later at another point in the story poised for predicting, I pondered again, "Hm... I wonder what will happen next." She took the bait, and said, "I think the duck will skate." When I asked why she thought so, she said, "Because it will be funny." Happy as I was that she was participating and attempting to predict, I was confused, because we had just read on the previous page that the duck fell down when trying to skate.

Overall, between the lack of participation from the rest of the group members, and the shaky application from one of my focus group students, I knew we were edging near a zone of proximal development and that this was a strategy we should continue to work on applying in the guided reading setting.

When I met with my below-level group, to read a different text on their reading level, I began the lesson the same way as before and framed the use of predicting. One student said, "I don't even know what that means" in a frustrated tone. Another student I had selected to be in my focus group at the time made inaccurate predictions both before and during reading. She focused on what she

liked about the pictures, and talked about general knowledge she had of the main character from seeing her in other stories. I realized that the students were struggling to accurately decode the text, let alone comprehend without more support from me. If I wanted to use these students' input in the study, we would need to be working with independent level texts. Yet, even so, I realized these children's biggest need was work with sounds and accurate blending, not comprehension at this time. They would get the benefits of the read aloud lessons that the whole class participated in, and other comprehension work targeted at their level, but for the purpose of this study and the direction I wanted to take it in, I could not be collecting data on these children.

Even after introducing other comprehension strategies, I continued to call my students' attention to making/checking predictions during read aloud lessons. I wanted them to see me model a fluid use of combined strategies as I read. As readers, we execute multiple strategies during a single reading, and we do so without being cued. I wanted my students to see how I could call upon a formerly learned strategy to help my comprehension of a new text, or to assist with another.

When I read Pumpkin Town aloud to my students during a late September read aloud lesson, I incorporated some thinking-aloud to model, as well as an opportunity for students to think aloud with a partner, about their predictions before and during reading. I incorporated think-pair-share by modeling it first, and then had students participate with a partner at prompted times, because I

wanted to boost engagement and participation and I wanted to hear more students' predictions than just the few who continuously raised their hands to speak.

Though I listened to all students' responses they shared with their partners, I intentionally called on my focus group children to share out. At one point, Gene shared an inaccurate prediction, due to a misconception about the author's humor. Aaron jumped in to correct Gene. I found it noteworthy for a few reasons. During some past prediction work, Aaron himself has made predictions that seemed to come from left field instead of using text and picture clues like we have practiced. Also, Gene did not react well to Aaron stepping in to correct his flawed understanding. He retorted, "It's not about being right or wrong it's just what you think." I used this as a teachable moment. Yes, you need to grant yourself forgiveness when predicting and allow for some leeway, but your prediction should be text-based and close if you're using clues the way we have learned to. Some authors are tricky and say less, meaning we have to use clues even more and do more thinking to understand. This allowed me to introduce the term "Drawing conclusions" and I shared with my listeners that this was another strategy we'd be working on soon during our read alouds. Finally, I noted in my field log that I was really impressed with how tuned in Aaron was to the innuendo and humor of the author. This is something that he may need less practice with, and something Gene may need more practice with.

Strategy Two: Questioning

Questioning was a natural fit to teach soon after I introduced and modeled predicting. Questioning was a precursor to making the prediction, and a bridge between the prediction and the evaluation of it. By questioning, both the children and I were engaged with the reading material and using our questions to clarify our understanding. When confusion reared its head, questioning got us back on track.

I found that some of my students had a tough adjustment to the reality that they weren't always correct, and lacked the stamina or perseverance to question and sift back through what they had read to glean clarity. Maybe part of the reason this new reality was so hard for them was because learning new material historically came easily and naturally to them. According to conversations with their parents, the students in my focus group had been read to from a very young age and/or had picked up reading early on. Pulling words off the page was never a challenge for these students, but synthesizing their meaning, when it wasn't presented in a familiar text structure or pattern, or required some inferring, could be challenging and uncomfortable.

In a conference with Robert in late September, I asked him what he does when he doesn't understand what he is reading. He said, "I don't know." When I prodded a little more by asking, "If a book gets a little confusing, do you give up on the book or do you do something to help yourself?" he responded with,

“Sometimes I will just go back and read it again and sometimes I just skip what I don’t know. And sometimes I just figure it out later if something else happens.” This is a child who is using fix-up strategies without realizing it. If his two main strategies, though, are re-reading and skipping, he needs more tools in his arsenal. Otherwise, he will spend lots of time on a reading assignment and probably have many holes in his comprehension of it. Not once did he mention that he asks himself or the author questions. If he could employ strong questioning, he may catch his misunderstandings earlier and have them clarified sooner.

Pulling from my research, I chose to implement questioning before reading, during reading, and after reading. The before reading questioning is meant to activate background knowledge. During reading questions keep the reader engaged and help him to forge through when things become unclear. After reading questions should be those that reflect on what was read, and question applications of the text beyond its conclusion.

To begin, I opened a read aloud lesson by posing my own question to students: “Why do you think teachers ask you questions when we read stories to you or with you?” Patricia replied, “To see if we’re paying attention.” Stephanie added, “To know if you understand the story.” Then, I asked, “Do any of you ever ask yourselves questions when you read?” That question received a resounding silence and batch of blank stares. One student outside of the focus group giggled and said, “Sometimes I ask my baby brother questions when I read

to him and play school.” This lined up with what I had seen during inside recess from some of the girls in my class: Pretending to be the teacher, reading a book, and asking questions to the other children. Though totally adorable, this observation also signaled to me that I hadn’t modeled how they could and should ask their own questions while reading.

From there, I said, “Today I am going to show you how I can ask myself questions before I read, in order to help get myself ready to understand the story. My questions might connect to my prediction too.” I displayed the book Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. I told students to listen to my questions, and instead of answering me, to wonder about the questions in their mind as I did. I read the title, the author, and the illustrator, as Jim Trelease recommends that you always do. I pondered aloud, “Hm... I have had a bad day before.... But terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day sounds extra bad. Why is Alexander’s day so extra bad? Did he get a punishment? Did he have a friendship problem? Did he lose a favorite toy? I see he is in bed. Is he sick? Will he spend the whole story in bed? I should read to find out.” As I spoke, I jotted down on the easel next to me, a few key words from these questions. I told the students that I was writing them down so that I could remember to notice whether my questions were answered as I read. Then I asked the class if they were wondering any other questions. Gene said, “I am wondering if he is going to have an extra bad day forever and stay in bed forever!” To

which, Aaron promptly retorted, “That’s impossible and I know that he won’t stay in bed forever because I think I read this before.” I replied, “It’s always a good idea to use your schema when you ask yourself questions. I also didn’t think he would be in bed forever, because in my schema, I know that kids like to run and play, not be in bed for a really long time. I also know that in the title, it said this is Alexander’s terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day- not week- not month- not year- not life.” To which Gene let out an, “Oh!” Sometimes I think he just likes hyperbole. Next, I tied this into predicting by saying, “Using what I’m wondering about and what’s in my schema, I’m going to make a prediction. I think this story will be about Alexander’s extra bad day, why it’s so bad, and how it gets better. I predict Alexander’s day isn’t really as bad as he thinks it is, but because he’s upset, it just seems that way. Have any of you ever had a day like that?” (Hands raised, heads nodded.) “Me too. Let’s read and find out.”

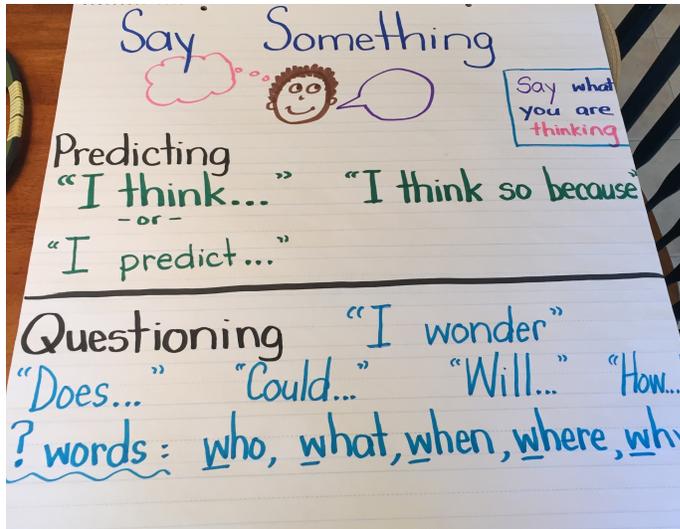
As I read the story, I paused throughout to reflect on the story and how it was answering my initial questions. I reminded the children, “Good readers monitor their understanding, and think back to their questions to see if they’ve been answered.” When I got to the page that talks about desserts in the children’s lunch boxes, I asked aloud, “Will Alexander’s day ever get better?” Many of the children replied out loud. I asked, “How many of you were also wondering the same thing?” Hands shot up. I said, “Good! That means you’re using the

questioning strategy! Sometimes you get new questions in your mind while you're reading.”

After reading, we reviewed the questions I had asked, and whether they had been answered. I reminded the children that because I asked these questions, I wondered about them the whole time I read, and it kept me focused on understanding the story. I also modeled revisiting my prediction and whether it was accurate or not.

Over the next several weeks, I incorporated think-alouds in which I modeled questioning the author and the text before/during/after reading. I continued to jot down key words to provide that visual reference point for my students, which helped to keep them focused and engaged as I modeled. I also created a “Say Something” chart (Figure 1) based on an idea a former colleague shared with me. It was a list of sentence starters to help me verbalize my thoughts according to which strategy I was using. For predicting, the chart said “I think that...” And “I predict that...” For questioning, the chart said “I wonder...?” “Does...?” “Could...?” “Will....?” “How...?” and the 5 W questions (who, what, where, when, why.) I referenced this visual aide during every think-aloud I modeled for the children, and during guided reading lessons with my focus group, I prompted them to use the “Say Something” chart to do their own thinking-aloud.

Figure 1: Say Something chart



During the next guided reading lesson after my Alexander read aloud, I made note in my field log of student application of both making and checking predictions and questioning. We were reading a decodable core text, called The Big Box Fix Up. We reviewed the purpose for using each strategy, and which “Say Something” prompts they could use as springboards. Each child was given three chips, to signify three speaking opportunities. By the time our lesson was over, each child should be out of chips because they have spoken their predictions, questions, or re-evaluations of them, during the course of the lesson at least three times.

All students eagerly gave away their first chip after sharing their predictions. Gene and Patricia’s predictions were guesses made without using the picture clues available to them, and therefore rather inaccurate. Gene’s was

particularly silly or imaginative, however you wish to look at it (a pattern I have noticed with him): “The Superkids are going to take a box and fly in it to the moon!” Robert, Aaron, and Stephanie made more sensible predictions that were evidence-based. During reading, I listened and watched in amazement as application unfolded eagerly. Students were making new predictions based on what we had read so far in the (albeit) short story. They were using the “I wonder...” statement to talk about questions they had. Robert even used one of his chips during reading to help clarify for Gene his inaccurate prediction. He said, “See how on every page it’s a different box for a different invention? (pointing to the pictures) They didn’t have one box that they did something like go to space and they made lots and lots of things.” At the end of the story, I prompted each child to evaluate his/her prediction(s) aloud. Patricia reflected, “I predicted they were just going to make a new club or bus or something but they used them to do other new things.” Gene added, “I thought they were just going to use the one box the whole time but they used a lot of boxes to do different things. Every thing was different.”

This lesson was noteworthy for a few reasons. First, it was the beginning of really having my students decide for themselves when they would like to share their thoughts out loud. I gave them the chips as a way for me to monitor who was voluntarily speaking and how often, while also being able to jot down their words. I also gave them the chips to motivate them to participate. I would

eventually like to see them generate thoughts aloud spontaneously, but since this is brand new, I thought structure would be a supportive scaffold to that. During this lesson, I was able to see that the students were much more comfortable with making and confirming predictions than questioning, which I expected, since generating their own questions while reading was still quite new for them.

Because they had to speak three times, they made more predictions along the way than I think they normally would. The riddle-and-answer story structure also helped with this too. This was the first time in a small group setting that one student corrected and clarified what another student said using the text. It was powerful to have that interaction, for both the child who got the clarification from a peer, and for the peer who was actively engaging with another's interpretation of the same text evidence. I learned that Patricia and Gene still need work with using the text to form predictions and questions. I also learned that Stephanie is still reluctant to think aloud or share her thoughts without being asked, as she still had two chips left at the end of the lesson.

Over the next several weeks, I continued to model questioning before/during/after reading during whole group read aloud lessons. During guided reading, my focus group continued to use the discussion chips. As a result, the students in my study gained a lot of practice in thinking aloud about what they were reading. Through the thinking aloud process, they engaged with one another and the text in ways I hadn't seen them doing before. During a

guided reading lesson using the leveled text Grandpop's Cabin, I recorded some of the questions the students asked them selves aloud, and their ability to use that question to a productive purpose. Some of the questions I jotted down were:

- Robert (front cover): “Who’s Grandpop is it, Icky’s or Frits’?”
- Aaron (front cover): “Why are they at the cabin and what are they going to do there?”
- Patricia (page 5): “I noticed Grandpop has a big sandwich and I wonder why?”
- Gene (page 7): “Why is Frits in a real bed and Icky is on that other one?” (A cot)
- Stephanie (page 8): “What will they do now that it’s a rainy day?”

Robert was able to use picture clues, and Gene’s question about the different beds, to answer his own question, and determine that Grandpop was Frits’ grandfather. While Robert talked himself through it, Gene was following along and agreeing, referencing the pictures for us all to see. Aaron was able to recall details that answered his question. Stephanie recognized the problem in the story, and her question allowed her to re-tell the solution after reading. Yet, Patricia’s comprehension was still off. She remarked, “Well, on the page before, Grandpop had the biggest watermelon, so he had the biggest sandwich.” Stephanie replied to her, saying, “That’s because he’s the grown up and probably the hungriest.” “Yeah,” said Patricia. The other four students asked themselves

questions that were pertinent to understanding the story, but Patricia's seemed very surface level and non-consequential. She was asking a question just to ask it.

Strategy Three: Making Connections

Making connections is a natural thing for children to do, especially at this age. They filter everything around them through the lens of *How does this relate to me?* So, instruction on how to think about connections beneficially came naturally right around the time questioning was introduced.

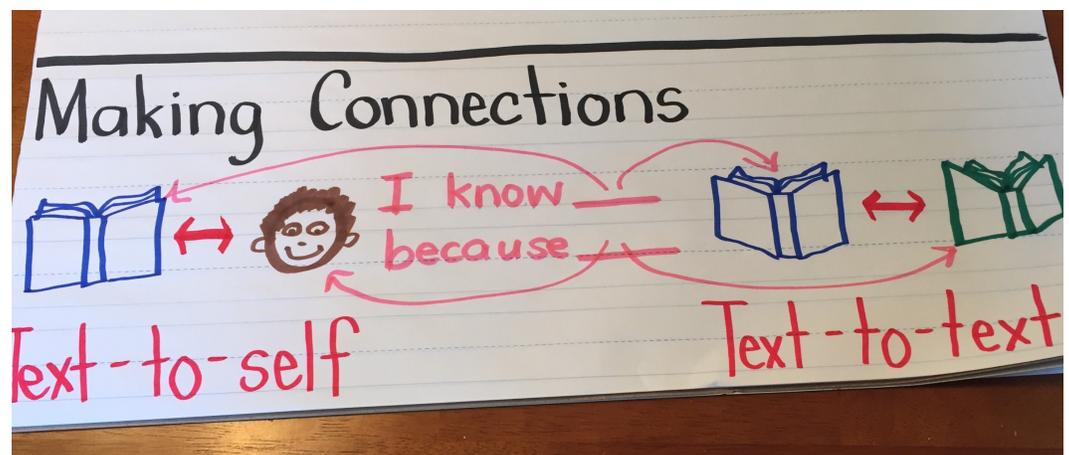
I modeled making connections, along with predicting and questioning before reading, when I began reading The Dot. I said, "Good readers make connections to texts. You can connect a story to yourself. I see a little girl painting a big paint splotch. This reminds me of how I used to paint, before I practiced and got really good at it. In the beginning, I used to just make easy pictures, like dots and lines. Maybe that sounds familiar to some of you, too." As I read, I continued to connect the girl's feelings, struggles, and actions to that of my own, and make comments like, "Wow, Vashti's teacher must be really proud. I remember a time my teacher hung my work up in a special place, too. It made me feel like I had done amazing work. That made me proud."

Later, I read a version of The Little Engine That Could. I modeled making text-to-text connections, thinking aloud back to Vashti throughout the story. I made statements such as, "This reminds me of how Vashti almost gave up too. She didn't think she could draw, just like the other engines think they can't get the

toys up over the hill.” “I like that the little engine tried even when things were hard and the other engines failed, like Vashti tried even when she wasn’t sure how her picture would turn out.”

I did not instruct or model for students the text-to-world connection, but did add it to the “Making Connections” chart (Figure 2) we made as a reference point for our classroom. Some students attempted to use text-to-world connection when reading, but most were more comfortable with text-to-self connections.

Figure 2: Making Connections chart



The guided reading lesson using the text Grandpop’s Cabin afforded me the chance to hear my focus group students using connections to think aloud and fix-up their comprehension. Three students (Robert, Aaron, and Patricia) used their talking chips toward making connections.

- Patricia, on page 3: “I know that Grandpop is really fun because he’s goofing around with the flippers, yeah, and my Grampy does stuff like that, like Grandpop.”
- Aaron, on page 4: “I know that it’s summer because they were just swimming and now they have watermelon and you have that in the summer when it’s hot and it’s sweating all over.”
- Robert, on page 7: “I know that Icky and Frits are really tired because they just left all their stuff all over the room when they went to bed.” When I asked if he does this too, he said, “Sometimes but I’m not supposed to.”

Though their connections were mostly picture-based, it was great to hear them out loud. This showed me what the students were learning from the pictures, through their connections and background knowledge, that wouldn’t have been demonstrated by the questions I had planned to ask them.

Later in the study, I had each child individually read a leveled reader called Benjamin’s Octopus to me, and provided them with discussion chips as I took notes on the child’s think-aloud thoughts before/during/after reading.

Here are some key observations as they relate to connections:

Patricia:

- Front cover: “So I already know this is fiction! You can’t have an octopus and you can’t swim in your pajamas.”

- Page 6: “The octopus is just being crazy and making a mess. And Benjamin’s going to get in trouble. You get in trouble with a mess in your room like that.”
- Page 18: “I know he’s really happy because he’s his real friend.”

From Patricia’s connections (which also translated into a bit of a prediction in her second one) I could tell that she understood the key details of the story, and the relationship between the Octopus and Ben. Though, by the last statement, I can glean that she may need instruction on discriminating realistic fiction and fantasy.

Aaron:

- Front cover: “Oh this is going to be good! This is going to be like Spongebob!”
- Page 2: “I know what it is, I know what it is. It’s the octopus. I read a story like this.”

Aaron only made two connections out loud. In fact, he only made the minimum 5 think-aloud statements total over 22 pages of text. I observed that he reads the story aloud, pauses at the ends of sentences to check out the pictures, and mulls over a story pretty slowly, but doesn’t like to say much out loud about it. When he got to page 16, I reminded him that he still had 3 of his five think-aloud chips to use. Then, he crammed in faulty

(and overly silly) predictions in the last few pages of the story to use them up.

Robert:

- Pages 10-11: “I think this story is like The Cat in the Hat because it’s just like it. The octopus is all over the house, messing things up and then the mom comes home, like in that story with the cat. But in the other story, the mom doesn’t know and now in this one she’s mad ‘cause there’s such a mess with this octopus.”

Robert only used one of his discussion chips for a connection, but what an astute text-to-text connection it was! I have to admit, I have taught this text before, and not even I had thought of that connection. This reaffirmed for me that Robert is not only well read and remembers what he reads, but is actively thinking while he reads new texts.

Stephanie

- Page 1: “I know that Benjamin likes the ocean because he is smiling in his dream and that’s what I do.”
- Page 4: “I know that this is just make-believe.”
- Page 7: “I know that Benjamin’s mother will get mad.”
- Page 22: “I know that he had another dream.”

I was a bit surprised by Stephanie’s connections. Though I was pleased with how much she had to say about this text (she used up her 5 discussion chips less

than half way through the text and she is typically very quiet), I was disappointed with the lack of depth to her connections. She simply identified key details and observed them out loud. I jotted them down as connections, but the way she worded them, they really weren't.

Gene

- Page 11: "I know that Benjamin's mom is really mad 'cause she's yelling and pointing and saying 'Clean it up' with a mad face."
- Page 17: "I know that the octopus loves Ben because he's hugging him. They're probably best friends."

Like Robert, Gene did not use all of his discussion chips. Like Stephanie, his connections seemed more like statements that draw on background knowledge than those which explain where the background knowledge is coming from. However, for first grade students, overall I felt like they productively spoke about the text and concentrated their connections on what they saw in the book. Many times, connections can start out that way before veering off a long and winding course. This focus group did not let their connections veer. Though they weren't very astute (overall), they were mostly focused and text-based.

Strategy Four: Visualizing

Much of my modeling during read alouds up to this point in the study (4 weeks in) had been an auditory and visual experience for my students. They heard me talking- a lot. Sometimes I would talk from my mind and my heart (predicting, questioning, connecting) and sometimes I would talk while referencing the illustrations. This made the experience more visual for the students. Still, they were just observers and not active participants in the practice. For some children, all that noise and all that sitting (though the lessons never went beyond 20 minutes) was leaving them disengaged, restless, and even disruptive. So, I knew it was time to introduce visualization.

Though we were not yet ready for text without illustrations, I knew it was coming, via cold read fluency probes and authentic texts. I chose to model in small chunks. The first time I introduced the strategy, I picked the Shel Silverstein poem "*Snowball*." I used my words and my illustrating to talk to children about what I imagined the poem was about. I discussed *making a movie in my mind* and trying to see the characters, the setting, and what was happening. I said, "By imagining while I listen, I notice important things that I might not have otherwise. Does the main character- the one talking- does he or she wet the bed in the poem?" (To which I received a resounding laugh and boisterous, "NO!") I asked, "What then? How does the bed become wet?" To which Stephanie responded, "It got wet from the snowball when it melted in the night."

I asked, “Well, why did it melt? I don’t remember the author saying that it was very warm in the room.” Aaron observed, “Well yeah but he made him pajamas so he probably got overheated and melted faster.” I said, “Great job listening to details. Could you imagine the pajamas on the snowball?” Heads nodded.

The next day, I had the children show me what they were visualizing. I said, “Yesterday, I drew for you what the movie in my mind showed. Now, I want you to draw for me the movie in your mind about the new poem I will read.” I distributed paper and instructed the students to sketch while they listened, or after they were done listening- their choice. We had learned about Christopher Columbus already, so I thought the poem, “*The Edge of the World*” would be fitting. I thought this explicit imagery used would cater to appropriate scaffolding. As I finished reading, exclamations like, “Read it again, I wasn’t ready!” erupted. So I did read it again- 4 times, in fact. Then, the children shared with each other their illustrations. I listened to their conversations, and how they described the components of their pictures based on the text. There were a few students who added in other details that were not text related and detracted from the meaning, but everyone in my focus group’s illustration was on point with what they would have visualized.

The following week, when I met with my focus group, I did a mini interactive read-aloud with them, in which they knew that we would be practicing our visualizing. I set the expectations as such: Sometimes they would share orally

with a think-aloud, sometimes they would share through drawing, but throughout the reading of the text they should be practicing visualization. I told them that this book did have pictures, but that I would not be showing the picture until after I had finished reading the page. This would exercise their visualizing, but also provide them a self-check. I proceeded to begin reading A Very Brave Witch. Since I was solely focused in this lesson on scaffolding their visualizations, I did not do too much thinking aloud about anything other than what I was visualizing, and even so, only intermittently.

Each time the author had a question written into the dialog, I paused and gave the students in my focus group time to illustrate their visualization of what was happening, and what would happen next. Stephanie circled this back to predicting, saying “Do you want us to make a prediction too?” I clarified and explained that when you’re visualizing while you read, your mind is probably already anticipating, or predicting, what will come next. I asked, “Isn’t it cool when strategies work together?” She smiled and nodded, and then completed her illustration.

What I found was that this exercise also lent itself to drawing conclusions. Though I did not bring it up, many of the illustration opportunities came at places in the plot that required the reader to make an inference about what would happen next instead of there being an explicit pattern. The visualizations that my students

illustrated were very telling about both this, as well as their understanding of key details.

The detail of Aaron's illustrations somewhat matched the text. The flaw I'm finding with his work at this time, is that he tends to draw more heavily on his personal ideas and background knowledge (he over connects) than on the text or picture clues. Robert's drawings show that he is re-telling what he sees in the illustrator's drawings. Where he needed to draw conclusions, it is clear that he did. He is able to understand what the author is not explicitly stating. Stephanie was also successful. She demonstrates that she can draw conclusions, understand character feelings, and make text-based logical predictions. Gene came through victorious today, too. His illustrations depict an understanding of the relationship between the real witch and the dress up witch, and his illustrations were all relevant and focused. Patricia was absent.

At the very end of my study, I began reading Charlotte's Web aloud to the class during read aloud time. Though I continued to reference back to all of the strategies in my think-alouds, I really honed in on visualization. Some days, I had children sketch the chapter events to show their interpretation of who and what was most important, what it looked like, and what the problem or solution was. Other days, I asked children to close their eyes as they listened, and when I paused reading, to share what they saw in their mental movie. Still other days, I took the liberty myself of thinking aloud about my visualization so as to model

this skill and guide my listeners to be on the right track with their own mental movies.

Strategy Five: Analyze Text Structure

The next logical step was to work on developing our understanding of text structure. We were working primarily with fiction texts in our core curriculum as well as through our leveled readers and read aloud lessons, so that's where I began.

I used one of my favorite beginning of the school year stories, Ruthie and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie in a read aloud lesson, and before I began, I asked children to think-pair-share about this question: "What are the most important elements to know about a story, to show you understood it?" Students generated a list containing: characters, what happened, where it's happening, who the evil one is and who the good one is, why things happen, and main character. Quite interesting, and honestly, better than I expected! From there, I clarified story elements and displayed my graphic organizer for a typical fiction text.

I said, "We know that fiction stories have characters. I'm so happy to see that you know how important understanding characters and the main character is! Good readers can always tell the 'who' and the 'what' of a story. The 'what' is what happens in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Good readers know the order of events. Good readers also pay attention to the setting- that's where and when a story is happening. Something else good readers notice is if there's a

problem, and how it gets solved. Some stories even teach us a lesson, or have a moral.” As I explained, I had children repeat the terminology as I pointed to each word in the graphic organizer. Then I explained, “Today I’m going to read you a new story that has all of these elements, because it’s a fiction story. I’ll need your help. When you notice that the author or illustrator has revealed a story element to us, raise your hand so that I can add it to our graphic organizer. By the time we are done reading, we will be able to use this information to re-tell the story.”

As I read Ruthie and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie, students enthusiastically participated by raising their hands to share story elements they had noticed. I jotted their ideas down into the graphic organizer, using bulleted lists and important phrases instead of complete sentences. I thought aloud about chunking the text into beginning, middle, and end to guide them. After reading, I modeled using the visual aide to re-tell what happened in the story. Then, I had partners work together to do the same.

During the next whole group read aloud lesson, I revisited an old favorite from our very first read aloud lesson: Miss Nelson is Missing. This time, I had key words that aligned with this text’s story elements posted on sentence strip cards on the board. The children and I reviewed the graphic organizer, and how being familiar with this text structure would cause us to pay attention for these elements, and in turn, be able to re-tell the story accurately. Each child received a copy of the graphic organizer, and we reviewed the word cards together. Then, as

I read, the students wrote the words from the cards into the appropriate boxes on the graphic organizer. When I was finished reading, partners checked one another's work. After that, volunteers shared their responses. All of my focus group was present except Aaron, and the other four students volunteered correct responses. Lastly, I reminded the children that the goal is to be so familiar with the text elements in the structure, that we can re-tell the story without the book in front of us. Partners worked together to practice, and groups shared out.

Certainly, I carried this over to an instructional- level text in guided reading. We revisited Grandpop's Cabin. Without re-reading together, I told each child they'd be re-reading the text with a partner or independently, and completing the graphic organizer that we had practiced with during the read aloud lessons. When Gene said, "But we already read this one," I replied, "That's right. There may be some story elements that are simple for you to identify because your comprehension was so good last time you still remember them. Others, like summarizing the beginning, middle, and ending events, will be a bit more challenging." I then paired the children up: Stephanie and Gene, Aaron and Patricia. Robert worked alone because I wanted to see what he would produce independently, since he appeared to be my best comprehending reader at this point in the study.

At this time (first week of November), I looked back over my study and realized that I had done a lot of work using fiction texts, and not nearly enough

using nonfiction texts. In fact, I hadn't documented any nonfiction text work for my study. So, during the next guided reading lesson, we used the nonfiction leveled reader called Swimming, Springing, Splashing, Singing Humpbacks. Using a picture walk, students generated a list of ways this nonfiction text "looked different" and was "set up different" from the stories we were used to reading. Patricia noticed the key words bolded and colored. Aaron noticed that some pages had boxes of text separate from the rest of the text on the page. Robert noticed that the pictures had labels. Aaron also pointed out that the pictures were photographs instead of drawings. Stephanie said that there was less writing on each page. After I listed their ideas, we went back through each one to discuss why we thought that was the case. Students learned that the text features in nonfiction lend themselves to the text structure.

I introduced main idea. I said that it is "what the book is mostly about," since no one in the group could define it themselves. Stephanie asked, "So, humpback whales?" "Yes!" I said. "This book is filled with details about humpback whales. Just from the title, can you determine any details we will probably read about these whales?" Robert read the verbs in the title, and I jotted them down. Then I distributed a graphic organizer to each child. I said, "To stay organized, sometimes non fiction authors choose just one detail to write about on each page, and they give even more specific details about that detail, too. Let's take a look at page 4."

Page 4 begins with, “The humpback is an acrobat.” We copied that sentence at the top of our papers. I asked students to silently read that page to themselves. Then I asked, “Did you notice that this is the main idea of this page right here? And that the author gave you details about how humpbacks are like acrobats?” Heads nodded. I said, “Great! Let’s see how many details we can pull out of the text. Does anyone have a detail to share?” Together, we pulled the details out. I shared with them that many times in nonfiction, when we are looking for details, we can usually just copy the words out of the book. So, we began to fill in the graphic organizer with details on our papers together. When finished, I asked, “So Aaron, what was this page mostly about?” He replied, “How humpbacks are acrobats!” (and added in a little acrobatic move himself, to which a storm of giggles responded.) I assigned each child another page to diagram the same way, independently. On the text structure anchor chart, I added information about the text structure of nonfiction texts and how they differ from fiction texts. Text structure was hard to model or teach children to think aloud about during reading, but was very useful in oral re-tell after reading.

Think Aloud and Talk It Out

My goal going into this study was to learn whether or not regularly scheduled, intentional read aloud sessions with the children in my class were effective. I wanted to see whether or not engagement with reading would improve, and ultimately whether comprehension would improve.

I set out to strategically choose texts that would lend themselves to modeling key comprehension strategies. I planned on having my lessons be mostly modeling, with some interactive opportunities sprinkled in for engagement and effectiveness.

When I realized that my class was composed of children who love talk- love to hear it, love to do it, all the time- and I re-read my research on metacognition, I decided to make a shift. I thought, “Why not capitalize on their interest and their strength, and test whether metacognition is effective in boosting their comprehension this way?” So, as you’ve read, my study took a turn in that direction.

Certain strategies, such as making and checking predictions, questioning, and making connections, fit this verbal modality perfectly. Visualization needed scaffolding from concrete to abstract, and even once we moved away from drawing, it took some practice before students felt comfortable describing their visualizations out loud. Text structure was the most challenging. The only way for the students to really think aloud about the text structure was to state what they were noticing, whether that be that characters or setting were introduced, or that we had arrived upon the problem or the solution. Text structure in nonfiction was only really discussed if I prompted it to be.

Week over week, I supported my focus group as they dabbled with this “thinking through reading” approach we were trying. Going back through my

field log, I tried to re-state their words within the context for you to understand our journey. What I have yet to share much about is what the children themselves had to say about thinking aloud.

At the beginning of the data collection for my focus group, I met with students individually to interview them. The questions I asked were, *“Tell me what you think good readers do?”* *“Are you a good reader? How do you know?”* *“What do you do before you read a book?”* *“What do you do after you read a book?”* *“What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?”* I asked the children these same questions at the end of my study. I wanted to gauge whether their perceptions of themselves as readers, their reading habits, and their strategy awareness had changed metacognitively.

In my data analysis section, there is a table for students’ first interview responses to these questions, and a second table for students’ second interview responses.

I Can Do It On My Own

During the last week of school before Thanksgiving break, I gave the students an opportunity to demonstrate, individually, what thinking aloud about their reading looks like and sounds like. Each child chose a familiar text to model thinking aloud with. They were instructed to use page-marking flags to mark the pages of the text they wanted to think aloud for. I video recorded each child, in order to capture their oral reading fluency, their exact thoughts spoken aloud, and

any other important behaviors I noticed. Patricia was absent and did not participate in this exercise.

Gene went first and selected Benjamin's Octopus. He read the title, and quickly opened the front cover to begin reading. He skipped over his flag, so I said, "I see you have a flag here. Is there something you wanted to say?" He replied, "There can't be an octopus in your room" very matter-of-factly. As he read the first page, he confirmed his previous statement by pointing to the picture and stating, "You can see the octopus in his bed right there." As he went to turn the next page, before continuing, I observed him flip back and re-check the front cover illustration. This would have been a great time for him to think aloud and state why he revisited the illustration. As the events unfolded, and the reader came to confirm through the text that the octopus was indeed said to be in Ben's house, Gene reiterated "And an octopus can't go in your house unless there's water in it." His thinking aloud seems to come from an evaluative place. He's not asking a question aloud, necessarily, but his mind must be asking whether or not this could really happen, or whether this is a fantasy story. This relates back to the story structure work we have done together.

As the story continued and the octopus started doing very un-realistic things, like wearing hats and eating waffles, Gene continued with his clarification. "And octopuses don't eat hats... wear hats.... Or eat waffles but they do eat fish." I jumped in and made an observation. "So you're making connections to what

you know about an octopus, and thinking about how that relates (or doesn't relate) to this story. So what are you thinking about this story so far?' He replied, "That it's fiction." He continued with another clarification. When Ben, the boy in the story, hugs the octopus goodbye, Gene said, "People wouldn't want to hug an octopus 'cause they're dangerous." On the next page of the text, he spontaneously talked aloud about a slightly hidden picture clue: "Hey, that's monkey, he's on the next page!" When he read about Ben waking up to find a banana in his bed, he asked his question aloud with a smirk, "How can a banana get in your bed if you didn't even bring it in your bed?" As he turned the page and looked at the pictures, he said, "Uh oh. That's the monkey from the other page, right there," and he flipped the pages back cleverly.

After he was finished reading, I prompted: "So, can you re-tell this story for me? What was this story about, and what happened?" Gene said, "An octopus went in Benjamin's room.... And he had dreams, the octopus had to go back home. And then the monkey was in his room. In the dream. In the next dream."

Gene's oral reading fluency was both smooth and expressive. He added inflection to his voice in appropriate places, and through his facial expressions, I could tell he found humor in all the right spots. His thoughts aloud demonstrated his understanding of the genre and its importance to the story events. He drew on his background knowledge to understand this. His question that he asked aloud was appropriate and beneficial to comprehension. His thinking aloud, over all,

was not as robust as I had sometimes noticed during guided reading instruction, but he was focused on the text and confident in his reading. He needs to develop his ability to re-tell a narrative.

Next up was Aaron. Aaron selected a text that I had just recently had him read in an effort to find something he wouldn't call "boring." During one-on-one conversations with me, he struggled to identify what kind of books he enjoys reading. The leveled reader he chose to read was one he really seemed to like. It is called Rebecca's Story. It's a historical fiction piece that portrays a family's move west during the late 1800's, and it is told through the eyes of a young girl who is sad to be leaving her friend and home. I was pleasantly surprised to find Aaron attracted to this story. When I asked him why, he said, "I just like it and I like stories about families and friends."

To begin his reading and thinking, he stated the title. He read the first page of the text, which discussed the setting as spring in Lexington, and it being a sad time for the narrator. He turned the page without doing his pre-planned think aloud, so I redirected and asked what he had wanted to say. He replied, "I don't remember." I said, "Usually at the beginning of a story, it's a good time to check in with story elements, make a prediction, or maybe even ask a question. Do any of those help you remember?" He replied, "Prediction. Well, that, I predict Rebecca's going to be sad." I pointed out to him that the text tells us that. I

prompted, “Maybe you have a question about that?” He replied, “Why is Rebecca so sad?”

A few pages later, we learn that Rebecca’s family is moving, and that she is sad to leave her friend behind. The family is beginning to pack their belongings, and the author indicates that the family will be leaving soon. Aaron predicted, “I predict that Rebecca is still going to be sad, and she’s going to miss her friend Helen.” The next page is told from Rebecca’s voice, and she talks about all the things and people she doesn’t want to leave behind. Aaron’s think aloud is summarizing in nature, very focused on understanding the character, and also a bit muddled because he talks about what will happen next. He says, “I predict that she’s going to be sad about Helen and she’s going to be sad about Lexington because they’re not going to be there anymore. And I don’t want Rebecca to be mad when they are camping because she is mad and I don’t like when she’s mad.”

In reflection, Aaron’s read aloud/think aloud was similar to Gene’s. He was not very detailed, but more general in recapping what he understood so far based on what he found to be important. Aaron’s oral reading was less fluent-stopping and starting, partially due to checking pictures but partially because he just seemed to be stopping to process.

Next, I listened to Stephanie read. She selected a text that she had independently read during the first week or two of the school year, but had never

been instructed on. She began by reading the title, "Doc's Costume Contest," and immediately pondered, "I wonder if Doc's going to make a costume. And have a contest." She opened the book, and began reading. After reading that Doc does make a costume, and suggests for the other Superkids to make costumes too, Stephanie questioned, "I wonder what the Superkids are going to make?"

She read through the middle of the story, which chronicled each of the Superkids' costumes and what junk from the bus they used to make them. At the end, she read that the costumes were cleaned up and that Doc was glad the mess was gone. In the illustration, the Superkids are shown outside the bus, and only Doc is left inside. Stephanie said, "I wonder where the Superkids are going!"

When I asked her to re-tell, she said, "The kids made costumes and Doc picked up the rest." When I asked her to tell me the problem, she identified the problem incorrectly. She did, however, come up with a logical, text-based solution to her perceived problem. Stephanie's oral reading fluency was smooth and expressive, and when she thought aloud, she had a very adult manner. Her self-generated think aloud stops were great examples of actual thoughts good readers would have while reading this book. Questioning was the predominately used strategy.

Finally, Robert read. He selected Jill the Pill. He read the title, and began reading right away. After the first short page, discussing an upcoming festival, he said, "I predict this is going to be a very happy story." Though there were several

opportunities for thinking aloud to question vocabulary, idioms, illustration details, and character relationships, the next thought Robert shared aloud was “I predict this won’t be a happy story anymore.”

Robert demonstrated decent reading fluency. His expression during character discussions was accurate and added meaning. In fact, he caught himself once when he forgot to read a dialogue as such. He said aloud, “I have to go back and re-read that with expression” before doing just that. He has shared with me in one-on-one conversations that he prefers reading silently. After reading more reasons why the narrator finds her sister to be a *pill*, Robert said, “And here I predict this definitely won’t be a good story.”

After the story events take a turn and Jill acts like a friend rather than a pill, Robert thought aloud, “I predict this won’t be bad anymore. It’s starting to get better.” When a new problem arises, Robert proclaimed, “I don’t think this will be a good story anymore!”

When I asked him to tell me about this story after reading, he said “It’s about Jill. Being a pal and a pill. And how she’s acting to her sister at different times when things happen, like at the festival.”

I was impressed with his oral reading fluency. Lately, I’ve noticed him re-reading words at various parts of sentences, and there was much less of that this time. His attention to dialogue shows me he is monitoring the words and text

features actively. Like most of the other children in the focus group, though, his think aloud statements are very general and thematic, rather than detail oriented.

This process was so interesting to observe. Unrealized to me until it was happening, I ended up in a position to compare and contrast how the students thought aloud about the text when it was a cold read versus a warm read, and how they thought aloud about a text when they were completely in control of when they would speak and what strategies they would tap into.

This was the last major activity during my data collection period, aside from a final survey and interview with each child in the focus group. I reflect on and analyze my findings further in the next chapter.

DATA ANALYSIS

A variety of data were collected for this study. Each data point served a purpose, and was meant to demonstrate the focus group's feelings, capabilities, and growth in regards to reading, over the course of my study. When these sources were reviewed, I was able to glean a broader understanding of the impact strategy instruction during read aloud lessons, and the practice of thinking aloud, were having on my students.

Surveys

Initially, I predicted that the activities students participated in in my study, would lead to an improved attitude about reading. I also set out to equip students with strategies they could apply independently when they ran into trouble reading. So, my surveys reflect both of those criteria. Students were asked to identify how they feel about reading, being read to, reading independently, and about thinking aloud, and to identify strategies that they use to help themselves understand what they read. I administered the survey at the beginning of my study, three weeks in, and again at the ten week mark.

Table 1: Reading attitude and strategy use surveys: Beginning, middle, and end of the study.

	How do you feel about reading?	When my teacher reads me a story, I feel...	When I read a story by myself, I feel...	How do you feel about thinking aloud?	What is a strategy you use to help you understand a story?
Patricia	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : N/A	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : N/A	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : N/A	1 st : N/A 2 nd : Bored 3 rd : N/A	1 st : Guess 2 nd : Picture clues and predicting 3 rd : N/A
Aaron	1 st : Bored 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Bored	1 st : Bored 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Bored 2 nd : Bored 3 rd : Frustrated	1 st : N/A 2 nd : Confused 3 rd : Confused	1 st : Guess 2 nd : Predicting 3 rd : Ask questions
Stephanie	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : N/A 2 nd : Bored 3 rd : Confused	1 st : Guess 2 nd : Picture clues and predicting 3 rd : Predictions
Robert	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Bored 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : N/A 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Skip the confusing part 2 nd : Picture clues and predicting 3 rd : Story Structure
Gene	1 st : Happy 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Worried 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Sad 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : N/A 2 nd : Happy 3 rd : Happy	1 st : Guess 2 nd : Predicting 3 rd : Predict and making connections

Through the surveys, I was able to determine whether there was any improvement or change of feeling and understanding, regarding reading and using strategies. All students except Aaron maintained a positive outlook on reading in general. When I discussed this individually with him, he alluded to not being interested in the texts we usually read. All students ended the study feeling “happy” when their teacher reads a story to them. This was a change for Aaron and Robert, who had originally said they felt bored, and for Gene, who had originally said he felt worried. When asked why their feelings changed, each child gave different responses. Gene said, “I like the stories better.” (Though, I am not sure what was worrisome about not liking the stories before.) Aaron said, “I love chapter books!” Robert said, “Because I love reading, all kinds of reading.”

Three out of four students who answered the final survey responded that they feel happy when they read independently. All had responded with “happy” throughout the study, except for Gene, who had originally responded with “sad.” Aaron responded frustrated, and when asked to elaborate, he said, “Because when I ask for help everyone says I can do it by myself but I get... I feel frustrating when I am stuck on a hard word.” Robert and Gene responded that they felt “happy” about thinking aloud, but the other students either responded with bored or confused. When I asked Stephanie what was confusing, she said, “Sometimes I don’t know what to say.” The last question asked for strategies. Students went

from responses such as “guess,” and “skip the confusing part,” to naming specific strategies we had practiced together.

Based on this survey data and their individual interviews, which I will elaborate on next, I find an improved attitude toward reading and being read to, but not strong evidence that students can explain how they used their strategies and why they used specific ones. They are good at naming them, but struggle to identify how they use the strategies in real life reading scenarios.

Interviews

I found interview data very insightful to the participants’ metacognition and perception of how to apply what we were learning. I interviewed students at the end of September and again mid-November, after my study had concluded. The interview responses are shown in tables below, with one table for each participant. The only participant that I do not have a second interview for is Patricia, who was out of school.

The interview questions for all students, on both interview days, were:

- 1) *Tell me what you think good readers do?*
- 2) *Are you a good reader? How do you know?*
- 3) *What do you do before you read a book?*
- 4) *What do you do while you read a book?*
- 5) *What do you do after you read a book?*
- 6) *What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?*

Table 2: Patricia’s Interview on Reading Habits Response: Beginning of the study

Interview Question #s	Beginning Interview	Ending Interview
1. <i>Tell me what you think good readers do?</i>	“They read smooth and sound it out”	X
2. <i>Are you a good reader? How do you know?</i>	“Yes. I can always sound out.”	X
3. <i>What do you do before you read a book?</i>	“I take a picture walk.”	X
4. <i>What do you do while you read a book?</i>	“I sound out the words and check the pictures.”	X
5. <i>What do you do after you read a book?</i>	“I get a new book or do my work.”	X
6. <i>What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?</i>	“Skip it.”	X

Patricia’s interview answers show me that her perception of a good reader is one who can read accurately and fluently. Comprehension is not at the forefront of her mind when asked about good reading habits. She comes into the study knowing helpful routines, such as taking a picture walk before reading. However, she does not have any strategy in place other than “skip it” when she becomes confused while reading. If she does, she does not verbalize that here.

Table 3: Aaron’s Interview on Reading Habits Responses: Beginning and end of the study.

Interview Question #s	Beginning Interview	Ending Interview
1. <i>Tell me what you think good readers do?</i>	“Sounds out words they don’t know.”	“Read fluently and by themselves. They visualize.”
2. <i>Are you a good reader? How do you know?</i>	“Yes. I can figure it out when I try it.”	“Yes. I read billboards, magazines, books, comics.”
3. <i>What do you do before you read a book?</i>	“I see if I want to read it. If it looks cool.”	“I read the title. I look at the front page and see what picture is there and I visualize what the story will be about.”
4. <i>What do you do while you read a book?</i>	“I look at the pictures and say the words.”	“Take a break to catch your breath. Match my connection to the story to the pictures. Connect all the words to the pictures I mean. To make sense.”
5. <i>What do you do after you read a book?</i>	“You’re done.”	“If you liked it you should read it again. I tell my parents about stories I like.”
6. <i>What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?</i>	“I just ask for help or skip it.”	“I ask my mom or dad and show them the book. I ask a friend. Sometimes if you add connections it helps.”

Aaron’s interviews demonstrate a change in his understanding of what good readers do. He clearly references strategies he learned and uses the correct terminology to name and describe them. In the beginning of the study, he spoke in very simplistic terms about what he does as a reader and how he sees himself as a reader. At the end of the study, he could elaborate more and give examples. He

identified himself as a good reader because he reads all the print around him, and he skirted around naming an actual strategy that he uses; yet, he mentioned strategies like visualizing and how to do it earlier in the interview.

Table 4: Stephanie’s Interview on Reading Habits Responses: Beginning and end of the study.

Interview Question #s	Beginning Interview	Ending Interview
1. <i>Tell me what you think good readers do?</i>	“Sound out the words you don’t know very well.”	“Make predictions, read it carefully, listen for the story structure.”
2. <i>Are you a good reader? How do you know?</i>	“Yes because I could sound out words but sometimes I ask my mom.”	“Yes because I know words better than I used to.”
3. <i>What do you do before you read a book?</i>	“Read the title and look at the front cover for a minute.”	“I predict what would be in the story.”
4. <i>What do you do while you read a book?</i>	“After I read everything on the page I would check pictures to make connections to the words.”	“Check the pictures.”
5. <i>What do you do after you read a book?</i>	“Look at the front cover again.”	“Look at the front cover to make connections.”
6. <i>What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?</i>	“Ask my mom what it means.”	“I just skip it.”

Stephanie, like Aaron and Patricia before her, continues to associate being a good reader with being able to read words well at the word level. When she was first interviewed, she said that something she does while reading is “check

pictures to make connections to the words.” This demonstrates an awareness of how she actively monitors her comprehension. She no longer mentions needing mom for help reading words or understanding them, but when asked for a strategy she uses to help herself when a text is confusing, she just says, “Skip it.” This is not a strategy we’ve learned. She also clearly uses picture clues to support her understanding before and during reading, though she does not show in her interview that she can identify that as a self-help strategy. She may perceive that as more of a routine.

Table 5: Robert’s Interview on Reading Habits Responses: Beginning and end of the study.

Interview Question #s	Beginning Interview	Ending Interview
1. <i>Tell me what you think good readers do?</i>	“They read all the words. No skipping. And they read it with expression.”	“Good readers make predictions, pay attention to the story, ask questions to them selves and try to answer them.”
2. <i>Are you a good reader? How do you know?</i>	“Yes. I know a lot of words.”	“I’m super fluent but if I get stumped I sound it out. I try to understand the story.”
3. <i>What do you do before you read a book?</i>	“I pick a book and make predictions.”	“I check the cover and the title and pictures and then I try to predict what is going to happen.”
4. <i>What do you do while you read a book?</i>	“I read smoothly and do voices for the characters.”	“I think about what the pictures would be if there aren’t any. I like reading silently mostly.”
5. <i>What do you do after you read a book?</i>	“I don’t know.”	“Sometimes I like to read it again or go to another book.”
6. <i>What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?</i>	“I usually just ask someone or skip it if I don’t know.”	“I could ask my parents or I sound it out and ask myself if it makes sense.”

In his initial interview, Robert described readers as being able to read words accurately and with expression, without skipping any. When asked what he does while reading when he is confused, he answered that he asks for help, or skips. Yet, he called himself a good reader because he knew a lot of words. At the end of the study, his focus shifted to strategy usage. However, when asked what he does when he is confused, he still answered the question at the word

decoding level. Now instead of skipping, he says he sounds out words and evaluates whether or not they sound right, if he cannot find someone to help him.

In his ending survey, he mentions that he uses what he sees on the front cover to predict before he reads. He also says that he visualizes while he reads texts without pictures, and that he likes to read silently. There may be a connection between this and his very general oral statements during think alouds.

Table 6: Gene’s Interview on Reading Habits Responses: Beginning and end of the study.

Interview Question #s	Beginning Interview	Ending Interview
1. <i>Tell me what you think good readers do?</i>	“They sound out the words right.”	“The read good stuff. They read books so they can get smart. They look at the pictures.”
2. <i>Are you a good reader? How do you know?</i>	“Yes because I’m good at reading and I read to everyone.”	“Yes because I read really good. I keep getting better at sounding out.”
3. <i>What do you do before you read a book?</i>	“Pick it.” (The book)	“Read the title.”
4. <i>What do you do while you read a book?</i>	“Sound out the words I don’t know.”	“Sometimes I draw a picture so I understand.”
5. <i>What do you do after you read a book?</i>	“Something fun.”	“I play video games.”
6. <i>What do you do when you’re reading and something confuses you?</i>	“Ask for help or skip it.”	“I get a friend to help me.”

Gene identifies good readers to be good decoders, like his peers. He lumps himself into the good reader category because he reads a lot and keeps improving at sounding out words. He does not mention any comprehension

strategies in his initial interview. In his ending interview, he mentions using picture clues and drawing pictures (a visualization method we practiced). In both surveys, he did not mention anything related to comprehension that he does when he is finished reading. He does not mention, in either survey, that he himself uses any of the comprehension strategies we learned.

Fluency

The students in my focus group were chosen because they were readers. With the wealth of reading that these students were doing, in addition to my model of fluent reading in the frequent read aloud lessons, I expected to see a fringe benefit of increased reading fluency. Though this was not the focal point of my study, I believe showing that these students continued to make progress in all areas of reading (both in spite of and in case of their work related to my study) is important. As educators we need to be sure that we are causing good, and not harm, with our instructional choices.

Table 7: Aimsweb Benchmarks, Oral Reading Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency: September and January.

	R-CBM (Oral Reading Fluency)- September 2015	R-CBM (Oral Reading Fluency)- January 2016	Nonsense Word Fluency- September 2015	Nonsense Word Fluency- January 2016
Patricia	42	n/a	57	n/a
Aaron	65	71	81	99
Stephanie	63	94	68	112
Robert	94	112	61	112
Gene	98	98	125	139

According to the Oral Reading Fluency (R-CBM) scores above, all students except Gene made growth in the words they were accurately able to read per minute on a cold read passage. Aaron made a gain of six words, Stephanie made a gain of thirty-one words, Robert made a gain of eighteen words, and Gene remained at ninety-eight words. Patricia did not take the assessment in January.

According to the Nonsense Word Fluency scores, all students demonstrated growth in the correct sounds they were accurately able to read per minute on a cold read set of make-believe words. This is demonstrative of their decoding skills and blending. Aaron made a gain of eighteen correct sounds, Stephanie made a gain of forty-four sounds, Robert made a gain of fifty-one

sounds, and Gene made a gain of fourteen sounds. Patricia did not take the assessment in January.

Stephanie and Robert made the most growth in both areas. Aaron made growth in both categories, and Gene increased his correct sounds per minute while maintaining his correct words per minute.

Comprehension

The goal of increasing the participants of my study's aptitude for using comprehension strategies and self-monitoring independently is to improve their reading comprehension, or maintain it, as texts continue to increase in difficulty. The next table illustrates how these students performed in the comprehension sections of their curricular reading assessments.

Table 8: Patricia’s Comprehension Scores: Curricular baseline and bi-unit assessments.

Comprehension sections on assessments	Placement Test (9/29/15)	Progress Test 1 (10/29/15)	Progress Test 2 (12/3/15)
Section 1	75% (Draw Conclusions)	100% (Cause and Effect, Important Ideas)	100% (Sequence Events, Recognize Plot, Problem and Solution)
Section 2	100% (Recall Details)	100% (Draw Conclusions, Understand Characters)	X
Section 3	100% (Skills 1 and 2, and understand characters)	X	X

Through these scores, Patricia demonstrates proficiency with all comprehension skills taught and practiced so far. She demonstrates improvement in drawing conclusions.

Table 9: Aaron’s Comprehension Scores: Curricular baseline and bi-unit assessments.

Comprehension sections on assessments	Placement Test (9/29/15)	Progress Test 1 (10/29/15)	Progress Test 2 (12/3/15)
Section 1	75% (Draw Conclusions)	50% (Cause and Effect, Important Ideas)	100% (Sequence Events, Recognize Plot, Problem and Solution)
Section 2	83% (Recall Details)	75% (Draw Conclusions, Understand Characters)	X
Section 3	100% (Skills 1 and 2, and understand characters)	X	X

Aaron demonstrates proficiency with recalling details, sequencing events, recognizing plot, and problem and solution. He demonstrates basic abilities in drawing conclusions. He inconsistently demonstrates proficiency with understanding characters. Cause and effect and determining important ideas need improvement.

Table 10: Stephanie’s Comprehension Scores: Curricular baseline and bi-unit assessments.

Comprehension sections on assessments	Placement Test (9/29/15)	Progress Test 1 (10/29/15)	Progress Test 2 (12/3/15)
Section 1	100% (Draw Conclusions)	100% (Cause and Effect, Important Ideas)	100% (Sequence Events, Recognize Plot, Problem and Solution)
Section 2	100% (Recall Details)	100% (Draw Conclusions, Understand Characters)	X
Section 3	100% (Skills 1 and 2, and understand characters)	X	X

Stephanie’s scores on her comprehension assessments indicate proficiency with all comprehension skills learned and practiced so far. She has maintained maximum scores throughout the first half of the school year.

Table 11: Robert’s Comprehension Scores: Curricular baseline and bi-unit assessments.

Comprehension sections on assessments	Placement Test (9/29/15)	Progress Test 1 (10/29/15)	Progress Test 2 (12/3/15)
Section 1	100% (Draw Conclusions)	75% (Cause and Effect, Important Ideas)	100% (Sequence Events, Recognize Plot, Problem and Solution)
Section 2	100% (Recall Details)	100% (Draw Conclusions, Understand Characters)	X
Section 3	100% (Skills 1 and 2, and understand characters)	X	X

Robert’s comprehension scores demonstrate proficiency in all areas, except cause and effect and important ideas. In these areas, he showed basic understanding.

Table 12: Gene’s Comprehension Scores: Curricular baseline and bi-unit assessments.

Comprehension sections on assessments	Placement Test (9/29/15)	Progress Test 1 (10/29/15)	Progress Test 2 (12/3/15)
Section 1	100% (Draw Conclusions)	50% (Cause and Effect, Important Ideas)	100% (Sequence Events, Recognize Plot, Problem and Solution)
Section 2	100% (Recall Details)	50% (Draw Conclusions, Understand Characters)	X
Section 3	100% (Skills 1 and 2, and understand characters)	X	X

Gene demonstrated a decrease in scores for the skills of drawing conclusions and understanding characters from the placement test to the first progress test. He demonstrated proficiency with recalling details, sequencing events, recognizing plot, and problem and solution. His understanding of cause and effect and important ideas needs improvement.

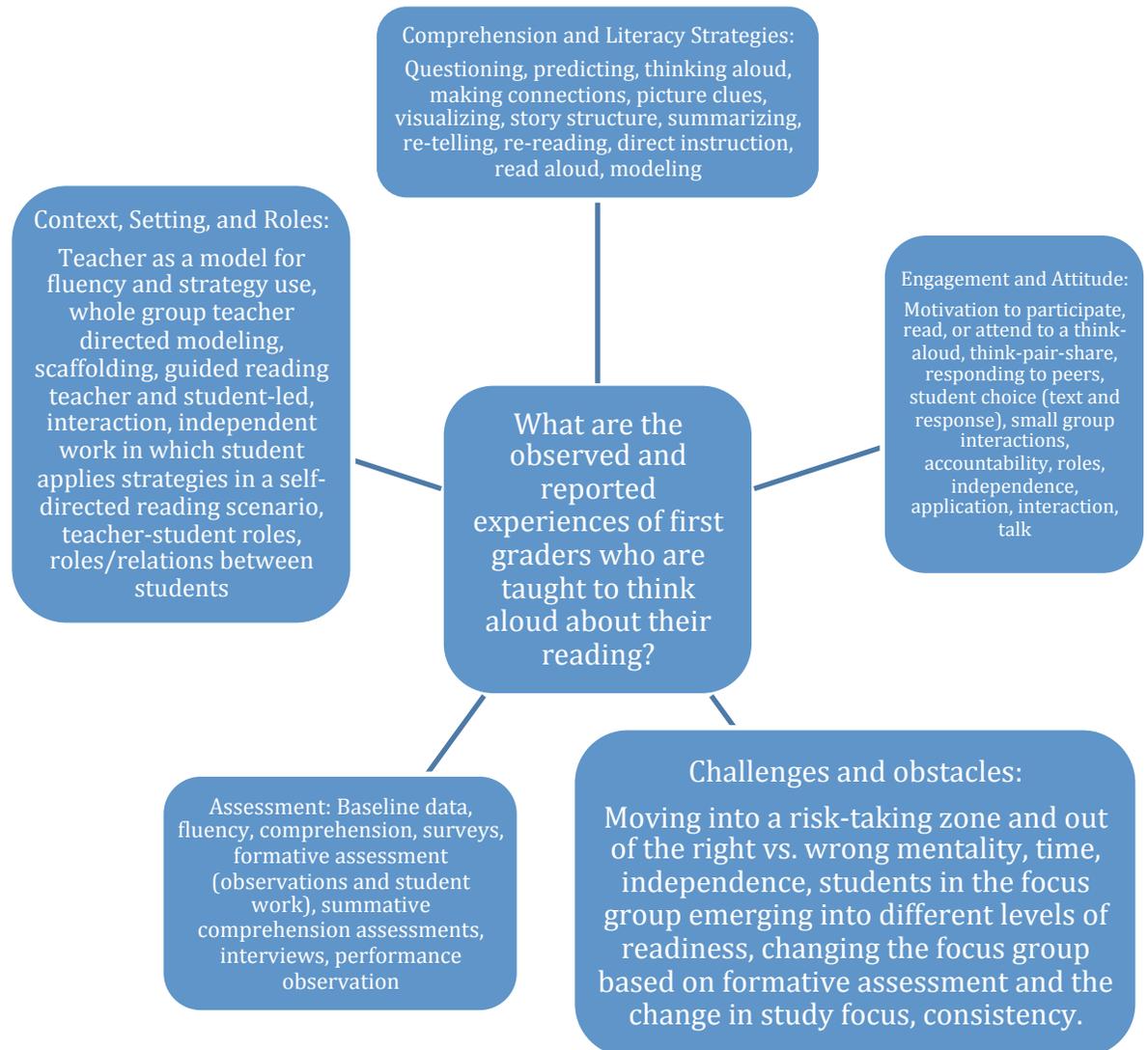
A limitation of examining these scores is that some of the comprehension skills are only represented one time over the course of two months. Another limitation is that each section of the assessments contains only four questions.

One benefit of examining these assessments is being able to see which skills specifically posed a challenge to students. Another benefit is that the format is always the same. The students do a cold read, independently, of a decodable passage, then independently read and answer multiple choice comprehension questions.

Bins

After scouring through my field log, assessments, and student artifacts, I used coding to derive repetitive themes. This was a very time consuming process, but it was not until this exercise that I began to gain some clarity about what impact this study really had. The bins are shown in the next figure. Each bin contains words, phrases, and summaries of what I was able to extract from my data sources most frequently. I used these bins to develop theme statements in relation to my research question. Those appear in the next section, after my bins.

Figure 3: Bins of common threads in the data related to my study



Theme statements

Comprehension and Literacy Strategies: *When exposed to read aloud lessons designed to model comprehension strategy use via thinking aloud about thinking while reading, first grade students can carry over strategy use, think aloud about their reading, and identify strategies that they use.*

Engagement and Attitude: *Student engagement with and attitude about reading improves when students are engaged with appealing and relatable texts, when they are read to regularly, when they interact with one another, and when they are encouraged to use a structure for discussion. Student attitude is influenced by comfort level.*

Challenges and Obstacles: *Students need to develop stamina for quality read aloud lessons. Discussing texts thoughtfully requires time, and learning to become metacognitive requires consistent practice, support, and strategic scaffolding.*

Assessment: *Observing students while they listen to reading and while they read alone or with others can inform teachers of student understanding and self-awareness. Checking formative observations against summative scores can reveal more information about student learning.*

Context, Setting, and Roles: *The teacher can be a model for fluent reading and strategy application, and a scaffold for student understanding and*

implementation. Students need the opportunity to implement in a guided and independent manner, across different settings and texts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Comprehension and Literacy Strategies: *When exposed to read aloud lessons designed to model comprehension strategy use via thinking aloud about thinking while reading, first grade students can carry over strategy use, think aloud about their reading, and identify strategies that they use.*

Coming into the study, the students in my focus group were unable to name any reading comprehension strategies that they use. In their first survey (see Table 1), students said they guess, skip, or ask for help when they are confused while reading. By the end of the study, students named using the following strategies: Asking questions, making predictions, making connections, and thinking about the story structure.

Throughout the study, students were observed and documented in my field log thinking aloud about their understanding while reading. This was possible after modeling through read alouds, and then providing students with structured ways to begin articulating their thoughts. This was done in a guided reading setting, which made students accountable to their teacher and their peers.

At the beginning and end of the study, students were interviewed to verbalize what good readers do, whether they are good readers, and how they help themselves when they are reading and get confused. Their responses demonstrate growth in metacognition about strategies and how to

use them (see tables 2-6). Aaron now says that he uses visualization, picture clues, and connections. Stephanie now says that she uses predicting, picture clues, story structure, and connections. Robert now says that he uses predicting, picture clues, visualizing, and questioning. Finally, Gene now says that he uses visualization and picture clues.

Engagement and Attitude: *Student engagement with and attitude about reading improves when students are engaged with appealing and relatable texts, when they are read to regularly, when they interact with one another, and when they are encouraged to use a structure for discussion. Student attitude is influenced by comfort level.*

I observed positivity in my students' participation and engagement with reading relatively early after incorporating intentional read aloud lessons. Some students had generally positive attitudes to begin with that were maintained, while others' attitudes improved. Some students lacked participation initially, and their participation increased.

This is supported by their surveys, which asked students how they felt about reading, being read to by their teacher, and reading independently, and their discussions with me about their responses. Patricia and Stephanie maintained their "happy" attitudes across the board. Robert maintained his happy attitude while also improving his position on being read to by the

teacher from “bored” to “happy.” Gene’s attitude about reading remained “happy” throughout the study, but his “worried” attitude about being read to by the teacher improved to “happy,” and his “sad” attitude about reading independently improved to happy. Aaron’s survey showed improved feelings about being read to by his teacher (adjusted from bored to happy), but fluctuated between bored and happy in his opinion on reading in general, and from bored to frustrated in his opinion on reading independently. Through discussion, I learned that he identified his barriers as being: uninterested in the texts he needed to read, and frustrated with not being able to ask others for help as often.

Challenges and Obstacles: *Students need to develop stamina for quality read aloud lessons. Discussing texts thoughtfully requires time, and learning to become metacognitive requires consistent practice, support, and strategic scaffolding.*

My story chronicles the building-up process I led my students through, to prepare them for meaningful read alouds and the focus that they take. We progressed from reading poems and short stories to trade books and finally, a chapter book. This was over a ten week period, with read alouds occurring at least twice a week. Students needed to practice appropriate read aloud behavior, and how to thoughtfully think-pair-share.

A significant set back in my study was changing my focus group after I had already started collecting data. I still believe this was an appropriate decision, but it wasted time. Based on their AIMSweb fluency data (see table 7) the students in my focus group were already accurate and fluent, reading a minimum of 42, to a maximum of 98, words per minute. My original focus group would have included students with less than 5 correct words per minute. If I wanted to measure their application of metacognitive strategies, I would not be able to do so by charging them with the task of reading independently.

Another challenge you can observe in the data collection is that Patricia did not participate in the final stages of the study. She was repeatedly absent at report card testing time, which meant that time spent making up assessments and graded work took precedence over work for my study. She withdrew from the district in December. Having final data on only four of my five students is an obstacle for making generalizations such as these theme statements.

Student acclimation to this vulnerable process of thinking aloud, being unsure, and investigating a text was a final challenge. As I mentioned regarding a discussion with Aaron, I learned that being metacognitive and self-reliant was “frustrating” to him.

One challenge for me personally, was time. I wish I had been able to conduct my study over a longer period of time. As you can read in my observational data during whole group read alouds and guided reading lessons, and in my transcriptions of student-led read alouds/think alouds, the children were inconsistent, even after ten weeks. Some children were able to articulate strategy use well in their final interview, but not demonstrate it in their read aloud. Some students demonstrated appropriate strategy use and metacognition about it, but failed to mention it or acknowledge that they know to do it, when they were being interviewed. It is my hypothesis that given more time, this may be improved.

Assessment: *Observing students while they listen to reading and while they read alone or with others can inform teachers of student understanding and self-awareness. Checking formative observations against summative scores can reveal more information about student learning.*

I learned so much from watching my students and listening to them talk. Teachers become so wrapped up in the demands of the summative assessments, that we don't always foster good formative assessment habits. We may be watching our children, listening to them, and checking their work, but how often do teachers write down, word for word, what a child says to another child during a lesson? How often do teachers video record their

students to study their actions after the lesson is over? How often do teachers give surveys and interviews to find out student opinion and self-assessment? These are methods I used to use, from time to time, when I was fresh out of college but that I unfortunately have gotten away from, until this process.

I can take my student observations from my field log (which appear in my story section of this document) and cross check them against the surveys and interviews that I conducted with each child. I can also hold that formative data against the curricular comprehension assessment scores in tables 8-12. The findings are interesting.

Patricia consistently surveyed as being happy about reading, her teacher reading to her, and reading independently, but said she was “bored” by thinking aloud. She reported through her survey that a strategy she likes to use is referencing picture clues and predicting. In her initial interview, not long after her survey, she reported “skip it” as he strategy of choice, yet also mentioned that she takes picture walks, sounds out words, and checks pictures. My observations of her during small group guided practice with the strategies depict a child who makes shallow predictions that are not necessarily evidence based and someone who has some difficulty asking meaningful questions while reading. Her curricular comprehension scores,

however, show her as proficient across all skill objectives. This leads me to believe that she is a more strategic reader than she realizes, and the verbal metacognition aspect of this study was a challenge for her, but one that could have been improved over time. I also believe that as texts increase in difficulty, her need to think critically will too.

According to Aaron's curricular comprehension scores, his strengths are sequencing, plot, and problem and solution. His areas he needs to improve are identifying important ideas, cause and effect, drawing conclusions, and understanding characters.

When I interviewed Aaron (see Table 3) toward the beginning of the study, he identified no strategies to help himself comprehend other than to "skip it." By the end, he was describing strategies like visualizing, predicting, connecting, and checking picture clues. He was also able to re-tell beneficial reading routines that he does. However, he did still mention asking adults and friends for help as his first line of defense when he feels confused. According to his survey, reading is boring, he feels happy when being read to, but frustrated when reading alone, and is confused by thinking aloud.

During guided work with peers, Aaron was prone to correcting others' predictions and observations, in an accurate way. He was also tuned into innuendo and humor that other students did not attend to. His evaluative

thinking about what others were thinking aloud, and his ability to inference showed me understanding of important details and an ability to draw conclusions. Yet, these are flagged as areas of weakness on his independent reading assessments. During a whole group read aloud lesson, he demonstrated an ability to identify cause and effect and important details.

When observing Aaron think aloud in a small group setting mid study, he shared 2 connections and 5 total thoughts aloud over the course of a 22-page text. During his own read aloud/think aloud demonstration, he re-tells important details and connects with how the character is feeling, but calls it predicting.

Overall, Aaron's data is showing me that he performs better, and is more comfortable, when the expectation is listening comprehension. His independent reading application of the strategies we learned is not accurate, nor is it very deep. However, Aaron is more insightful than others during whole group read aloud lessons and discussions of texts. He responds to others' thoughts in an evaluative and thoughtful manner. More scaffolding of metacognition for him in a guided setting may be beneficial.

Stephanie showed that she was able to maintain her comprehension as text level difficulty increased and objectives changed, according to her

100% comprehension scores (see Table 10). She had a gain of 31 correct words per minute, so her fluency also continued to flourish (see Table 7.)

In Table 4, her interview responses show that she knew to reference pictures to aid in understanding, but primarily resorted to asking for help. After the study, Stephanie referenced predicting, listening for story structure, checking pictures, and making connections as things good readers do and things that she does before, during, and after reading. When asked what she does when something confuses her, though, she does not mention any of these. She says, instead, that she skips it. This creates the questions, “Is she just good at naming what I want to hear, or does she not realize that she does these things herself? Does she not realize why she does them (to aid her understanding)? Does she not connect with my term ‘confused?’” In her survey response at the end of the study (see Table 1) she reports feeling confused about thinking aloud. My hypothesis is that she does not yet fully understand the purpose of learning to be metacognitive.

During the course of the study, I observed Stephanie increase her oral participation once the “Say Something” chart and the talking chips were incorporated. However, she was still reluctant. I also made note that her connections lack depth, which surprised me, because she is typically a

thoughtful, methodical person. She defaulted to retelling key details, rather than making personal connections, during a guided reading exercise.

Though she never mentions questioning in her final interview or survey as a strategy she knows or uses, this was the strategy I most frequently heard her use during her demonstration think aloud. This could be because of the particular text, or this could be reflective of her not having a full awareness of what she does as a reader.

Robert's attitude about being read to changed over the course of the study. He went from feeling bored to feeling happy, and reportedly feeling happy about every aspect of reading, even thinking aloud (see Table 1). This was important to me, because I would like to see all children enthusiastically engaged with reading, but especially those who possess so much potential.

In his surveys, he also reports using a different technique when he is consumed each time he was surveyed. He changes from skipping the confusing part, to predicting and using picture clues, to thinking about story structure. It lines up so that he is mentioning what has been most recently taught (Table 1).

During his interviews, Robert changed from being primarily focused on fluency (while mentioning predictions), to being hyper focused on comprehension. Impressively, he is able to not only name the strategies, but

also explain their use. He reports that good readers predict, ask questions *and try to answer them*, explains the predicting process he uses, explains visualizing and connects it to reading texts without pictures, and mentions his positive post-reading habit of re-reading. Through his own words, his metacognition shines through (see Table 5).

When I listened to him conduct his own think aloud, though, I was not impressed with his insights. He paused throughout to “predict” the change in whether it would be a “good story” or a “bad story.” He chose points to pause in which the events of the story were important, so this shows me that he was attending to story structure and key details, as well as cause and effect. Yet, he was not able to verbalize it in that way.

His curricular comprehension assessment scores were perfect, except cause and effect and important ideas. Interesting, since he clearly was attending to both of those during his think aloud. This may be reflective of the time needed to develop that manner of thought while reading, since the think aloud took place almost a month after the curricular assessment.

Gene’s data during the study demonstrated that he was proficient in all comprehension skills except for cause and effect, drawing conclusions, and understanding characters when asked to demonstrate his understanding of an independently read curricular passage (see Table 12.) I was not surprised to see this, as these more relational and inferential skills require deeper thinking.

Getting Gene to slow down and really think has been a mission of mine since day one, and it still is taking work.

In Table 7, it is evident that Gene made no gains or losses to his oral reading fluency over the time the study was conducted. This is sometimes alarming in first grade, but in my opinion, it is exactly what he needed. Slowing down to get ahead is the name of the game with him. He is still reading at a rate well above the end of the year expectation. Now, the goal is processing what is read.

When I interviewed Gene in the beginning of the year, he had mixed feelings about reading, being read to, and reading independently. By the middle and end survey, he was reporting as “happy” in all areas. The strategies he made mention of using when he is confused changed from guess, to predict, to predict and connect (see Table 1).

However, during his last interview at the end of the study, the only strategy he mentioned using was visualizing concretely during reading. He said, “I draw a picture so I understand.” He did mention some reading routines, though, and showed an improvement in awareness of what good readers do. It was no longer all about reading the words correctly (see Table 6).

His think aloud demonstration was impressive. He was expressive, he showed an understanding of humor, he accurately questioned the probability of the events of the story, and he spent most of his comments clarifying realism

versus fantasy. However, when asked to re-tell the story in his own words, he needed continued prompting. Analyzing story structure is a strategy he has never made mention of in any data collection throughout the study, and based on this last evaluation, it is clear that he needs more work attending to story elements instead of generalizing.

Context, Setting, and Roles: *The teacher can be a model for fluent reading and strategy application, as a scaffold for student understanding and implementation. Students need the opportunity to implement in a guided and independent manner, across different settings and texts.*

I collected data on students across a range of contexts, settings and roles. I did this to attempt to derive trends about what students could do when I was the model, when we tackled reading comprehension together, and when they applied what they had learned independently.

Through the positive maintenance or change in students' perception of being read to by their teacher, and their acquisition of reading routines and strategies as documented in their surveys, interviews, and my field log observations, I found teacher led read aloud lessons to be a beneficial practice in my classroom.

Through observation during guided practice with my focus group, I was able to detect holes that I would not have detected in the large group setting. Aaron is a perfect example of a child who appeared very comprehending and

engaged during read aloud lessons, but struggled to match that engagement and ability level in the small group or independently. By working together on these strategies in a small group and in a structured setting, children had many opportunities to verbally share and get feedback from the teacher and their peers. They were also able to practice their personal reading in a multitude of new and familiar texts, and their fluency improved or remained high as a result (see Table 7). The variety in texts yielded different levels of participation, interest, and demonstration of metacognition.

Putting students in the driver's seat and allowing them to select a text and demonstrate their metacognitive understanding of it created ownership for them and assessment of application for me. Had I not gained this data, I may not have learned where their zones of proximal development were at the end of the study. I learned that many of the students were demonstrating excellent comprehension on their curricular independent reading assessments, but were not able to verbalize that they were reading strategically. This does not necessarily mean that they do not read strategically; it may mean that they need more time to practice this, or a different way of showing their metacognition other than verbalizing.

Next Steps

If only there were more time! Time is eternally my nemesis, and the time for which I collected data on the students in my study is no different. After this data analysis process, I see glaring similarities between my data and the data from Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) that I referenced in my Literature Review. Their study ran over the course of a full year. I wonder what results I would see if I did the same! One of their conclusions to their study was that teachers had done a thorough job of modeling and teaching reading *routines*, but the researchers questioned the instruction of reading *strategies*. In my own study, I had modeled and introduced both, yet I see through my data analysis that my students were much better at demonstrating and recalling reading *routines*. Students did demonstrate some strategic reading, yet this was inconsistently articulated as being understood by them.

Though I did not continue to collect data on my focus group after my study concluded, we did continue to implement regular read aloud lessons. When appropriate (usually around a thematic connection to what we were learning), I read from picture books. Otherwise, I shifted to high interest chapter books. I revisited strategy conversations each time I read, modeled and referenced which strategy I was using and why I was using it. As more and more readers began

emerging in my classroom, the more I was able to weave the practices that I did with my focus group, into other groups' guided reading lessons.

This study has forever changed how I view instruction of comprehension. When there were busy weeks and I did not read to the children as frequently as I would have liked, it showed. Students need consistent and direct instruction and practice with strategies. Metacognition does not come naturally to most of them. They need time to absorb, time to practice, and time to implement. My goal going into this study was to learn whether this was time well spent, or not. Though my results were inconclusive at the end of ten weeks, I believe that the data points to this being a purposeful way to build positive reading habits and deeper thinking about reading.

In the future, I will continue to teach through read alouds, and I will do so using the effective techniques I learned from this study and my literature research. I would like to incorporate more of Kathy Mills' (2009) activities, and in hindsight, should have done some digging into my students' multiple intelligences before beginning. I plan to continue to stretch my ability to collect formative data on my students in an intensive way, like this. The data I collected through watching and listening to my students as they participated in my activities, and took ownership of their own, made their summative data so much more informative and made my understanding of where they really were as readers so much clearer.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: HSIRB

Account, HSIRB <hsirb@moravian.edu>

8/16/1

5

To me, Richard

Dear Ms. Southern,

Thank you for submitting your revisions. You have addressed the concerns listed in your conditional approval. The HSIRB has completed its final review of your proposal, "Implementing Read-Alouds in a First Grade Reading Classroom to Improve Comprehension," and is granting approval of this proposal.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into topics other than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be. Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this email notification, you will need to file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB and receive approval of the changes before implementation. If you need a hard copy letter indicating your approval status for record keeping purposes, please let me know.

One last step. We need to collect your electronic signature and that of your research advisor. If each of you could respond to this email with your own name and the project title in the subject line, that will serve as your electronic signatures. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Good luck with your research!

Dr. Sarah K. Johnson
Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Moravian College
hsirb@moravian.edu
skjohnson@moravian.edu
[610-625-7013](tel:610-625-7013)

Appendix B: Principal Consent

Dear (XXXX),

I am currently taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a Reading Specialist certification at Moravian College. These courses allow me to learn about the most effective teaching strategies that I can implement in my classroom, in an effort to provide meaningful learning experiences for my students. This year, my coursework is culminating into a final action research project geared toward improving instructional practice.

During the Fall 2015 semester, I am first required to conduct a systematic study of my teaching practice. My research will examine the effect of interactive read-aloud/think-aloud lessons on student reading comprehension. My intent is to incorporate this practice in the beginning units of the already-existing Superkids Reading Program, with the goal of increasing student comprehension as they develop into more independent readers.

I will be gathering information to support my study through surveys, student interviews, work and assessment samples, and observation. By carefully analyzing these data, I will be able to reflect on and improve my teaching practice. All students will have the opportunity to provide valuable feedback through these methods; however, I will only use information collected from students who have permission to participate in the study. All of the students' names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers, other staff, and the school. Only my name, the names of my sponsoring professors, and Moravian College will appear in this study. No names will be included on work samples or in any reports of my study. All research materials will be kept in a secure location in my home.

Although lessons will be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, all students in my classroom will have access to the same standards-based instruction and objectives. Participation as a subject in the study, however, is entirely voluntary and will not impact the students' class experience negatively should he/she wish to abstain. Any student may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If the student withdraws, I agree that I will not use any data pertaining to him or her in any written reports of my research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to ask, as well as meet with me at any time. My Moravian College advisor is Dr. Elizabeth Conard, and my thesis chair is Dr. Richard Grove. Both can be reached at (610) 861-1482.

If you have no questions at this time, indicate your awareness and consent. I am looking forward to what I am sure will be a positive shift in my classroom. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Miss Julie Southern

Administrator Awareness of Study & Consent:

Appendix C: Parent Consent

Dear Parent(s) and/or Guardian(s),

I am currently taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a Reading Specialist certification at Moravian College. These courses allow me to learn about the most effective teaching strategies that I can implement in my classroom. My goal is to provide meaningful learning experiences for my students. This year, my coursework is a final action research project geared toward improving reading instruction.

During the Fall 2015 semester, I am first required to conduct a study of my teaching practice. My research will examine the effect of interactive read-aloud/think-aloud lessons on student reading comprehension. My intent is to incorporate this practice in the beginning units of the already-existing Superkids Reading Program, with the goal of increasing student comprehension as they develop into more independent readers.

I will be gathering information to support my study through surveys, student interviews, examples of student work, and observation. By carefully analyzing these data, I will be able to reflect on and improve my teaching. All students will have the opportunity to provide valuable feedback through these methods; however, I will only use information collected from students who have permission to participate in the study. All of the students' names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers, other staff, and the school. Only my name, the names of my sponsoring professors, and Moravian College will appear in this study. No names will be included on examples of student work or in any reports of my study. All research materials will be kept in a secure location in my home.

Although lessons will be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, all students in my classroom will receive the same standards-based instruction and objectives. Participation in my study, however, is voluntary and will not impact the students' learning should he/she wish to abstain. Any student may withdraw from the study at any time, and as parents and guardians, you may also withdraw your student from my study at any time by contacting me at (XXXX). If the student withdraws, I agree that I will not use any data pertaining to him or her in any written reports of my research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. My Moravian College advisor is Dr. Elizabeth Conard, and my thesis chair is Dr. Richard Grove. Both can be reached at (610) 861-1482.

If you have no questions at this time, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Miss Julie Southern

_____ I understand that Miss Southern will be observing and collecting data as part of her research on the effects of read-aloud lessons on comprehension, and my child has my permission to participate in the study.

_____ My child does not have permission to participate in the study.

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____

Appendix D: Student Consent

Dear First Grade Student,

Do you know that I also go to school? I learn new ways to be a good teacher.

I need your help. I need to try something new with you, to learn if it helps you become a better reader!

I will ask you questions, I will check your work, I will watch you in class, and I will use your tests. This will show me what you are learning. Only my teachers and I will see your work.

If you don't want me to use your work, I won't.

If you will let me use your work, please write your name and today's date. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Miss Southern

Appendix E: Beginning of the Study Reading Feelings Survey

Reading Survey



1. How do you feel about reading?			
 happy	 bored	 worried	 sad
2. When my teacher reads me a story, I feel			
 happy	 bored	 worried	 sad
3. When I read a story with a buddy, I feel			
 happy	 bored	 worried	 sad
4. When I read a story by myself, I feel			
 happy	 bored	 worried	 sad
5. If I don't understand what I'm reading, I usually			
Use my strategies	Give Up	Guess	
Ask an adult	Skip the confusing part		

Appendix F: Mid and End of Study Reading Feelings Survey

Reading Survey



1. How do you feel about reading?			
 happy	 bored	 confused	 sad
2. When my teacher reads me a story, I feel			
 happy	 bored	 confused	 sad
3. When I read a story by myself, I feel			
 happy	 bored	 confused	 frustrated
4. How do you feel about Thinking Aloud?			
 happy	 bored	 confused	 frustrated
5. What's a strategy you use to help you understand a story?			

Appendix G: Prediction Graphic Organizer

My Predictions

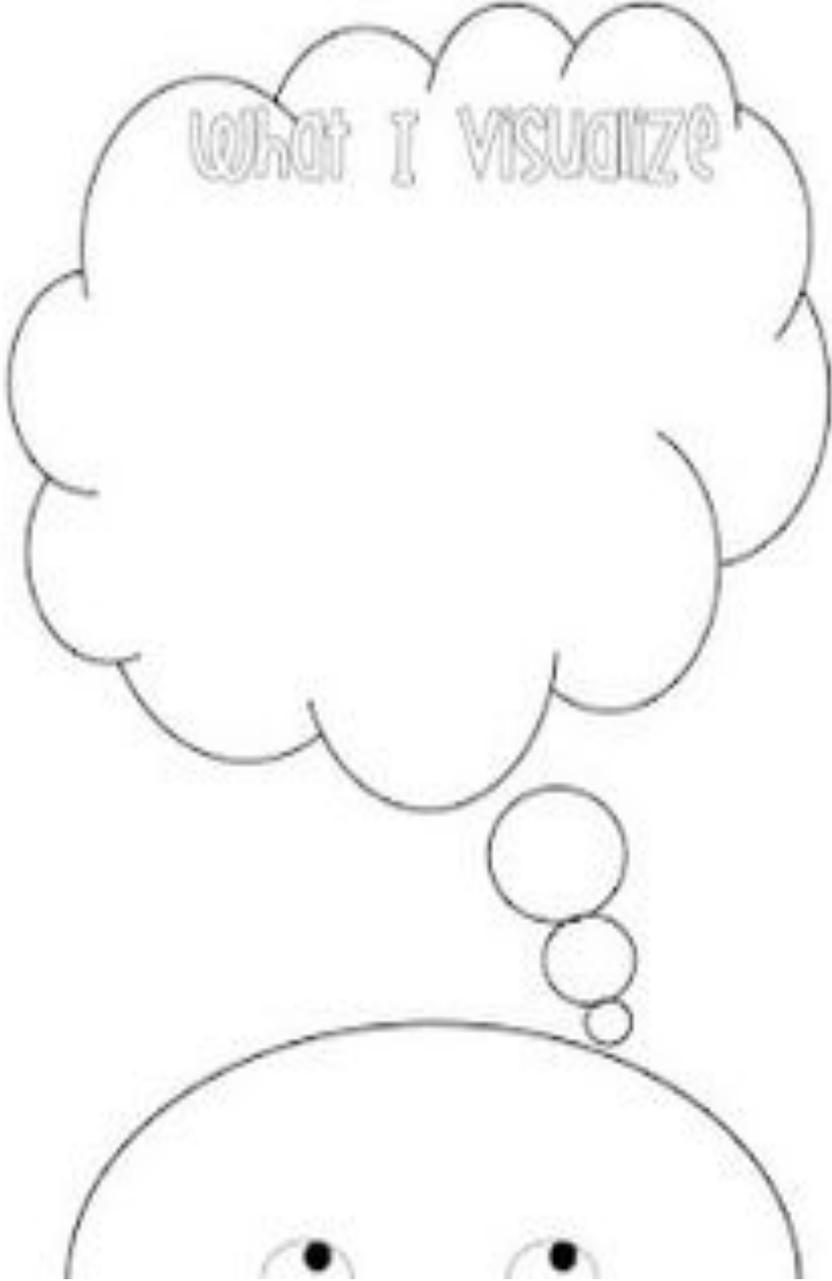
I think...	I think so because....

Appendix H: Questioning Guide

Questioning

I wonder	Does	Could	Will
How	Who	What	Where
When	Why	?	?

Appendix I: Concrete Visualization Guide

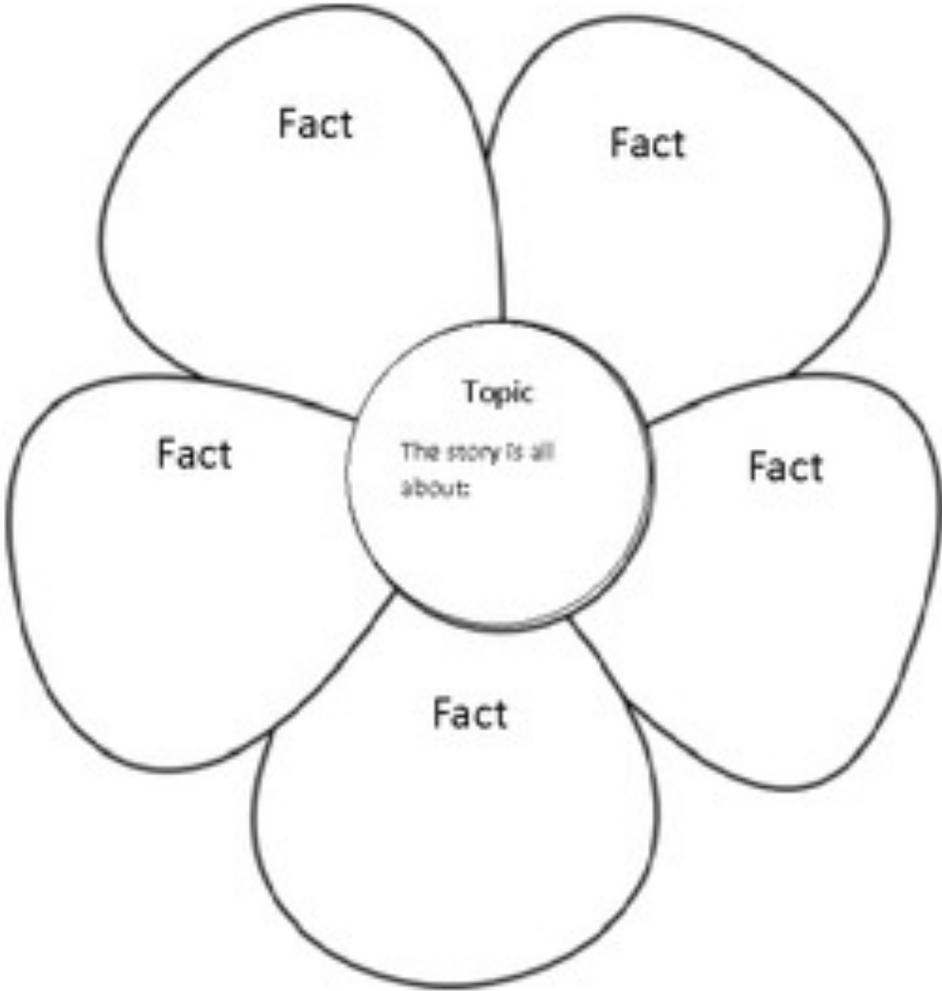


Appendix J: Story Structure- Fiction Narrative

Title:
Characters:
Setting:
Problem:
Solution:

Appendix K: Story Structure: Nonfiction

Non-Fiction



Appendix L: Interview questions

- 1) *Tell me what you think good readers do?*
- 2) *Are you a good reader? How do you know?*
- 3) *What do you do before you read a book?*
- 4) *What do you do while you read a book?*
- 5) *What do you do after you read a book?*
- 6) *What do you do when you're reading and something confuses you?*

Appendix M: Interest Inventory

Name _____ # _____ Date _____

READING INTEREST SURVEY

Do you like to read? Yes No Sometimes

How much time do you read every day?
_____minutes

Circle the topic(s) you like to read best:

history travel sports science fiction
adventure mystery animal comics jokes
funny _____

What books have you read recently?

Circle the type of reading material you like best:

chapter books magazines newspapers internet
cookbooks comic books picture books
nonfiction

If you could meet any character
from a book who would it be?

