The Benefits of Direct Instruction in Combination with Teacher Read Alouds

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At Pulaski Community Middle School (PCMS), language arts scores on the eighth grade Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE) have been lower than the district's goal of 70% proficiency for the last two years (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008). As a result, PCMS has come to realize that a focus on literacy is as important in the middle school as it is in the elementary school. Administration, literacy support staff, and several communication arts teachers at PCMS are currently working together to explore teaching strategies that will help more students become proficient. One of the strategies being examined is the teacher read aloud (oral reading of a novel, article, or short story by the teacher, with the intention of student enjoyment).

Read alouds are often used on a regular basis in middle school literature and language arts classrooms; some non-communication arts teachers use them in their classrooms, as well. This activity can be an enjoyable experience for both the teacher and the students, but is it actually beneficial for middle school students academically? Numerous studies have resulted in research that proves reading to young children is academically advantageous, but there is less information available about the academic significance of reading aloud to middle school students (Ariail & Albright, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of read alouds on reading achievement for eighth grade students.

Research Question

Do students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud?

Sub-Question

What impact does direct instruction have on reading achievement?

Research Hypothesis

Reading aloud positively affects academic achievement of all students.

Null Hypothesis

Reading aloud has no effect on academic achievement of all students.

Definition of Terms

literacy – the ability to read and write proficiently

read aloud – oral reading of a novel, article, or short story by the teacher, with the intention of student enjoyment – while reading aloud, the teacher is modeling strategies that good readers use

"think aloud" technique – while reading aloud, the teacher orally expresses questions, comments, connections, etc.; it is a way to model the strategies that good readers use

Limitations

Conclusions based upon data from this study are restricted to 8th grade students and may not be applicable to all middle school students.

Students were not randomly selected but are the students of the researcher.

The students participating in the study were of varied academic ability level.

Students' responses to surveys may not be truthful and may not reflect their true attitudes.

Students' responses to surveys are based upon students' perceptions.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of read alouds on academic achievement for eighth grade students. This chapter is in topical format. The first part of the review briefly looks at effective literacy instruction as a whole, the second part examines effective read aloud instruction and is divided into two parts: 1. effective methods/strategies that teachers use in combination with reading aloud, and 2. the impact of read alouds on students' attitudes toward reading. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

The following is a summary of related professional research and a synthesis of its pertinence to this research.

Effective Literacy Instruction

An effective way to teach literacy is to use a balance of four components: read alouds, shared reading, independent reading, and guided reading (Brown & Fisher, 2006; Ivey, 1999; Rief, 2000). This is called the balanced literacy approach (Brown & Fisher, 2006).

During read alouds, the teacher reads a novel, article, short story, etc. orally to the students. Shared reading is a time where students follow along in their own copy while the teacher reads the passage aloud. For independent reading, students choose their own reading materials and are provided with class time to read (Brown & Fisher, 2006). The teacher monitors what each student is reading and uses positive, one-on-one discussions to motivate students (McCordle & Chhabra, 2004). For guided reading, teachers work with small groups of students who need improvement on the same skill. During this

time, students read sections silently; then the teacher asks questions and works with the students after each section (Brown & Fisher, 2006).

Effective Methods/Strategies Used in Combination with Read Alouds

Traditionally, assigning a novel for the whole class to read, both as a whole group and independently, has been a large part of the literature curriculum. Unfortunately,

> comprehension tools and literary devices don't jump out at the reader in difficult texts; students simply don't get good at reading comprehension, understanding literary devices, literary response, or writing by reading hard books. Students don't learn how to write a persuasive text or how omniscient point of view works from reading one difficult short story. (Fisher & Ivy, 2007, p. 497)

Students do, however, learn how to do these things by reading many texts and through modeling by the teacher – at first, very obvious modeling, then through more complex examples (Fisher & Ivy, 2007). A good way to model is by reading aloud.

Throughout literature for teachers, the following message is conveyed loud and clear: Teachers should read aloud to their students. According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985), reading aloud is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual reading success" (p. 23).

The message is loud and clear; unfortunately, the method is not. Should teachers just open a book, read aloud for a few minutes, then close it and teach the lesson for the day? Or is there more to it?

Research shows that background knowledge, comprehension, and language skills can be built upon through teacher read alouds when the teacher uses specific activities to do so (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). In fact, read alouds should include before, during, and after

teaching components, enhanced with comprehension strategies and text-based discussions, to positively impact student performance (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008).

In their study, Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2007) noted that expert literature teachers used the following seven components for an effective read aloud:

> 1. Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched to their developmental, emotional, and social levels. 2. Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher. 3. A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established. 4. Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text. 5. Teachers were animated and used expression. 6. Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text. 7. Connections were made to independent reading and writing. (p.10)

Of the many studies that have been done, only a few gave specific methods for read aloud activities (particularly, methods that can be applied in a middle school classroom). The few that did, however, provided the following insight into some techniques used during teacher read alouds that had a positive effect on student achievement and/or attitude toward reading. Prior to the read aloud, teachers should set a purpose for reading (Lane & Wright, 2007; Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008; Wilhelm, 2001), as well as activate students' background information so students can make connections to text and engage in listening (Lane & Wright, 2007; Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008). Throughout the read aloud, teachers should help students visualize the "scenes" from the reading, continuously check for comprehension, and immediately address any issues with comprehension (Wilhelm, 2001). Both the teacher and the students should engage in think aloud activities during the activities listed above (Wilhelm, 2001). When the read aloud is finished, the teacher should have discussions

with students to allow them to connect what has been read to their own lives. These discussions give the teacher insight into the connections that the students are making and make the teacher aware of any concepts that may not have been obvious to the students (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Smith, 1990; Wilhelm, 2001).

The Impact on Students' Attitudes Toward Reading

Middle school students have a reputation for their negative attitudes and their apathy, some even say they are resistant to reading (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). It seems, though, that as with most other people, if students aren't engaged in what they are doing, they don't enjoy it. And, of course, students don't often want to waste their time doing things they don't enjoy – especially in this day and age of My Space, video games, and texting. This can be applied to reading. In order to instill a love of reading, and for students to find value in it, it is imperative that students are engaged – and teacher read alouds are "critical to their reading engagement (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 367)."

From elementary to college age, groups of students claim that their number one reading motivator is being read to by their teachers (Artley, 1975; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). In addition to motivation, teacher read alouds provide opportunities and experiences for students who might not have access to a variety of books because of ability level (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Rief, 2000). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) noted that the two literature and language arts classroom activities sixth grade students preferred the most were free reading time and teacher read alouds. In addition to enjoying teacher read alouds, students were able to provide specific reasons why they enjoyed the teacher read aloud and how they benefited from the readings (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Summary

Research has certainly provided a solid foundation for the idea that "a systematic approach to reading aloud can yield important academic benefits for children (Lane & Wright, 2007, p. 673)," as well as enhance students' attitudes about reading. Students whose teacher effectively reads aloud to them become better readers. However, specific methods for the middle school classroom were limited, as far as availability and specificity.

CHAPTER THREE: PROCEDURES

Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of read alouds on academic achievement for eighth grade students. The design of this study was quasi-experimental, action research that produced both qualitative and quantitative data.

The treatment was applied on students in the researcher's eighth grade literature class, which was assigned to the researcher by the administration of Pulaski Community Middle School. The students were given a pre-treatment survey designed by the researcher to establish their perceived knowledge and usage of reading strategies. The researcher read aloud two or three times per week. During each read aloud, the researcher used direct instruction to focus on a specific reading strategy using pre, during, and post activities, along with activity sheets that the students used to help them practice the strategy.

Prior to the treatment, the researcher had finished reading a novel aloud and was going to start a new novel called *Jude* by Kate Morganroth (2006). Also, each student had just chosen their own Holocaust themed novel to read.

On the first day of the treatment, the researcher started by reviewing the strategies that good readers use, reminding students that the researcher had been modeling those strategies during read aloud since the beginning of the year, and sharing that the researcher will continue to model the strategies – with the addition of the following: the researcher will debrief with the students about what she is doing, the students will practice applying the strategy, and the students will show the researcher how they apply the strategy to their own

reading. Next, the researcher discussed that the *predict* strategy can be used in many different ways and "sections" of a book or passage. The researcher explained that the class would start a new read aloud novel by using the *predict* strategy in probably the most obvious way – by making some predictions before reading the new book. The researcher then modeled using the *predict* strategy while she introduced the new novel, *Jude* (Morganroth, 2006). Below is what the researcher said to the students:

> The book I have selected for our next read aloud is called *Jude*, by Kate Morgenroth (2006). [While holding up the book for the students to look at…] The cover is very dark, all black and grey, with a picture of a teenage boy – a profile of his head. Across the cover, on both sides, words and phrases are written, but they blend in with the picture and background. The words seem to be related to the legal or court system – for example, here it says "on behalf of defendant and counterclaim," here it says "United States District Court," over here it says "Plaintiff," and here it says "Subpoena in a Criminal."
>
> On the back cover, there is a review by the *Washington Post*, which is a prominent newspaper and trusted book reviewer, which reads… [The researcher read the review aloud to the students].
>
> There is another review by Erika Holzer, author of the book *Eye for an Eye* that reads… [The researcher read the review aloud to the students]. Also on the back cover, there is an excerpt from the book. It says… [The researcher read the excerpt aloud to the students].

I love books that are dramatic and suspenseful so, it seems like it will be right up my alley! Of course, there are plenty of other reasons to choose a book. What are some reasons you and others select books? [Students responded to the question.]

Now that I know a little bit about the book, I am able to make some predictions.

[Prior to class, the researcher had written the sentence starter "I predict the book *Jude* is about..." on the whiteboard and had the words *who, what, when, where,* and *why* across the whiteboard starting above the blank space after the sentence starter.]

I think the book is about [writing under *who* on the board] a teenage boy whose mom has asked him to do something illegal.

[Writing under *what* on the board…] He gets caught and keeps his mom's involvement a secret.
The picture on the cover looks pretty current, and I don't have much else to go on, so I predict that this is happening in the [writing under *when* on the board] present time.

Most of the story takes place [writing under *where* on the board] in a courthouse and in prison.

> [Writing under *why* on the board…] Jude's mom abused him growing up and Jude thinks it's because she doesn't love him, which he blames himself for. He committed the crime because he thought that would make her love him more.

Students were then given the ""Predict Graphic Organizer – A" (Appendix D) and directed to use it to make a prediction about the novels they had chosen to read (by filling out the top portion of the organizer). The students and the researcher hung their graphic organizers up in the room. Students were then given the opportunity to look at the predictions made by their classmates. They filled out the "check-up" sections at the middle and end of *Jude* (Morganroth, 2006).

The researcher used methods similar to the example above throughout the treatment, to provide direct instruction of the *predict*, *visualize*, *connect*, and *identify* reading strategies. The researcher read aloud from *Jude,* as well as from *The Day the Women Got the Vote* by George Sullivan (1994), *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco (1994), various science magazines, and *Sharks* by John Bonnett Wexo (2003). During the read aloud, the researcher modeled the *focus* strategy using the "think aloud" technique. After the read aloud, the researcher debriefed by asking the students questions about the researcher's "think aloud" comments and how students could connect the "think-aloud" to the focus strategy. Depending on which reading strategy was the focus, students practiced the strategies while reading novels of their choice or passages provided by the researcher. The students did activities that reinforced the strategies, as well as provided the researcher with evidence of their ability to apply the strategy while reading independently.

The breakdown for the focus on each of the strategies was as follows:

- *predict* strategy = four read alouds; "Predict Graphic Organizer – A" (Appendix D); "Powerful Predictions" graphic organizer (Appendix I)
- *visualize* strategy = three read alouds; "Are You Thinking What I'm Thinking?" bookmark – Activity 1, 2, and 3 (Appendix E)
- *connect* strategy = four read alouds; "Come to Think of It…" bookmark – Activity 1, 2, 3, and 4 (Appendix F)
- *identify* strategy = eight read alouds; "Think Big" bookmark – Activity 1, 2, 3, and 4 and Find the Main Idea (Appendix G); "Think Small" bookmark – Activity 1, 2, 3, and 4 (Appendix H)

The researcher used three methods to assess the academic impact of the treatment on the students: 1. The researcher used a rubric (Appendix J) to assess the graphic organizer and activities. 2. The researcher met with each student on a one-on-one basis about each of the focus strategies. First, students were asked to verbally explain the reading strategy to the researcher. Then, students were required to read aloud to the researcher to show the researcher whether or not the student could apply the strategy while reading independently. A rubric (Appendix C) was used to assess the student's ability to explain and apply the strategy. 3. During the one-on-one conferences, the researcher also had conversations with each student about whether the student felt the direct instruction of the strategy was beneficial. The researcher notated the students' comments.

Upon the conclusion of the treatment a post-treatment survey was given to the students, and the information from the rubrics, notes, and surveys was compiled.

Sample

The sample in this research study consisted of students in an eighth grade literature class at Pulaski Community Middle School in Pulaski, Wisconsin. Overall, there were twenty-one students – nine boys and twelve girls. All of the students were aged thirteen or fourteen. All of the students were Caucasian, with the exception of one Hispanic.

Pulaski Community School District services three counties – Brown, Oconto, and Shawano – and includes five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, for a total of 3675 students enrolled. PCMS has a total of 885 students in grades six through eight.

The district consists of rural communities outside of Green Bay. This area has experienced significant growth recently and as a result, there is a diverse mix of farming, blue collar, middle class, upper middle class, and affluent community members.

Instruments

1. Pre- and Post Treatment Surveys were used to measure students' perceived knowledge about and use of the reading strategies (Appendices A and B)
2. Researcher-created rubrics (Appendices C and J)
3. Graphic organizers (Appendix D and I)
4. Bookmarks from *Strategy-Building Bookmarks: To Use with Any Text* by Bernadette Lambert (2007) (Appendices E, F, G and H)
5. One-on-one conferences between the researcher and students

Data Analysis:

Bar graphs and a t-test were used to express quantitative results.

Calendar

- 01/12/2009: Pre-Treatment Survey was administered
- 01/13/2009 – 03/11/2009: A focus on reading strategies was added to the read aloud routine in the researcher's literature class
- 01/28/2009 – 01/30/2009: One-on-one meetings between researcher and students
- 03/04/2009 – 03/06/2009: One-on-one meetings between researcher and students
- 03/13/2009: Post-Treatment Survey was administered
- 03/13/2009 – 03/16/2009: Researcher analyzed data
- 03/20/09: Researcher submitted first draft to advisor
- 05/08/09: Researcher submitted paper for final approval

Budget

The cost for the research was minimal.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of read alouds on reading achievement for eighth grade students. The study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of 21 students in a literature classroom taught by the researcher.

During the treatment, the researcher read aloud for 10-15 minutes two to three times per week. Before the read aloud, the researcher presented a reading strategy as the focus. During the read aloud, the researcher modeled the focus strategy using the "think aloud" technique. After the read aloud, the researcher debriefed with the students about the strategy the researcher modeled. Then the researcher either modeled how to complete the student activity (based on what was just read during the read aloud) and/or showed the students an example of the activity that had been completed previously by the researcher. Finally, students were given time to read independently and apply their knowledge of the strategy by completing the activity individually – based on books they had chosen to read or a passage the researcher provided.

Findings

Do students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud?

The researcher gave the students a Pre-Treatment Survey (Appendix A) prior to the treatment and a Post Treatment Survey (Appendix B) after the treatment. The surveys were divided into two sections: 1. students' perceived

understanding of how to use each of the reading strategies, and 2. how often students perceived that they actually used each of the strategies.

Table 4.1 compares the percentage of students who reported that they "completely understand" or "have a good understanding" on the Pre-Treatment Survey and Post Treatment Survey in response to the question "How well do you understand how to use each of the reading strategies?"

Table 4.1

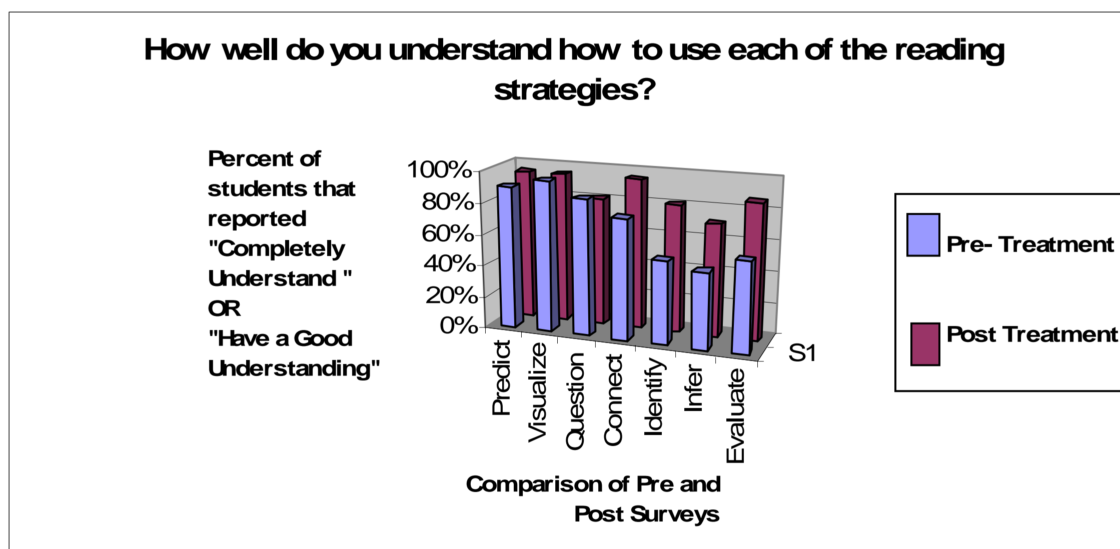
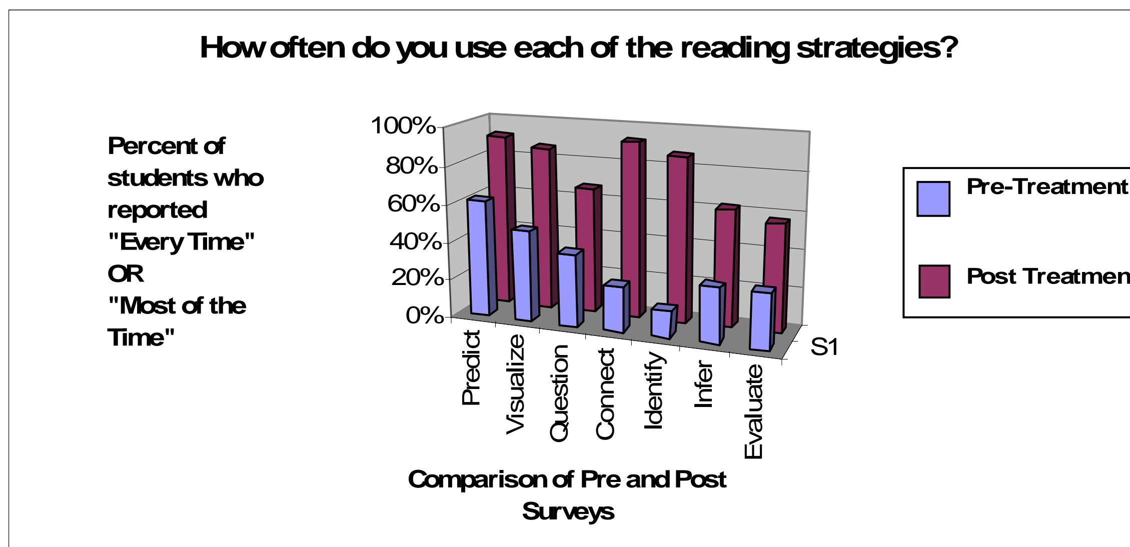


Table 4.2 compares the percentage of students who reported "every time" or "most of the time" on the Pre-Treatment Survey and Post Treatment Survey in response to the question "How often do you use each of the reading strategies?"

Table 4.2



On Pre-Treatment Survey, a large percentage of the students (3/4 or more) reported that they completely understood or had a good understanding of how to use the *predict, visualize, question,* and *connect* reading strategies, while more than half of the students reported that they completely understood or had a good understanding of how to use the *identify* and *evaluate* reading strategies.

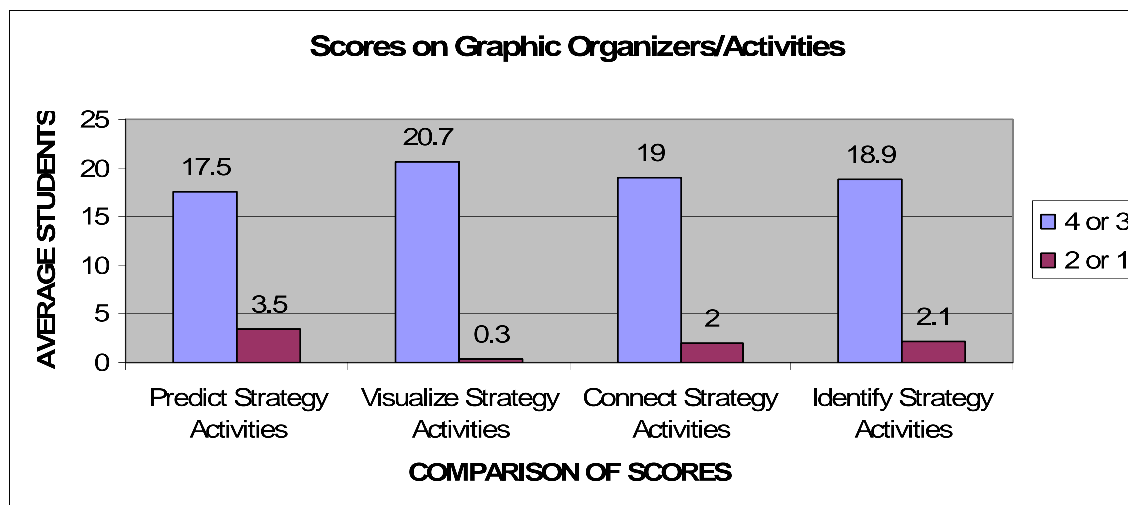
The Post Treatment Survey showed an increase in understanding in all of the strategies, with the exception of the *visualize* (the percentage remained the same) and *question* (the percentage decreased by 5%) strategies.

Although high numbers of students reported understanding most of the reading strategies prior to the treatment, the percentage of students who reported regularly (every time or most of the time they read) using the strategies was much lower. Prior to the treatment, the strategy that most students reported using was the *predict* strategy, with 62%. The percentages dropped dramatically for the other strategies, ranging from 38% of students who reported using the *question* strategy to 14% of students who reported using the *identify* strategy.

Even though in-depth direct instruction was not provided for all seven of the reading strategies during the treatment, the Post Treatment Survey showed a marked increase in student use of ALL the reading strategies. Almost 60% of students reported regularly using all seven of the strategies. The percentages ranged from 95% of students who reported regularly using the *connect* strategy to 57% of students who reported using the *evaluate* strategy. The strategies that the most students reported using regularly were the four strategies that the researcher focused on during the treatment (*predict* =90%, *visualize* = 86%, *connect* = 95%, and *identify* = 86%). High numbers of students also reported using the other three strategies (*question* = 67%, *infer* = 62%, and *evaluate* = 57%). While there was not a focus on these strategies during the treatment, the researcher often mentioned the strategies or modeled using them, in addition to briefly discussing them during the debriefing, when appropriate.

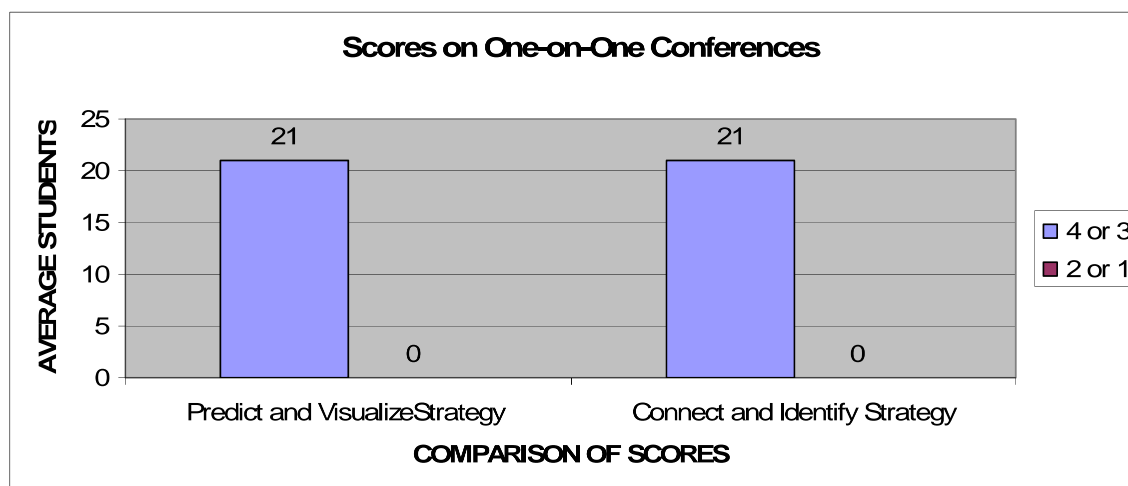
Another piece of evidence that supports that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies the teacher read aloud is the high evaluations that students received on their graphic organizers, activities, and one-on-one conferences with the researcher (Appendix L). Table 4.3 compares the average number of students who received a rubric score of advanced or proficient (four or three) with the students who received a rubric score of basic or minimal (two or one) on their graphic organizers and activities for each of the reading strategies.

Table 4.3



During the one-on-one conferences between researcher and students, all of the students received a score of three or four for both the oral explanation and the application requirements, demonstrating proficiency (or better) for each of the focus reading strategies. Table 4.4 illustrates this.

Table 4.4



In addition to surveys and scores, the students' own reflections/comments provide evidence that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud. Below are quotes from students that the researcher notated during the one-on-one conferences and classroom discussions.

- "I always thought I was a bad reader. Really, I just didn't know what it meant to be a good reader. It's pretty easy if you know what to do."
- "Watching you do the question one [meaning – the question strategy] made me realize it's something little, not some big, hard thing – but it makes a big difference."
- "I didn't realize making predictions could help with textbooks. Now I make a prediction before I read any textbook, and I always stop and make predictions about the next part. It's sort of like a little game – will I be right? It makes the stuff less boring and I actually learn something sometimes."
- "Connecting reminds me of *six degrees of separation*. It's weird how, if I think about it, I can make a connection to almost everything. I like that."
- "My mind wandered a lot more before. If I stop to ask questions enough, then my mind doesn't get a chance to wander."
- "I am a good reader and I did this already. But I guess talking about it and watching you do it lets me see what other people do and gives me ideas."
- "Before, when you just read to us, I didn't realize you were doing all of this stuff." [The researcher then asked, "Even though I always modeled a lot of the strategies before?"] "But I didn't realize that was what you were doing until you debriefed with us. That helps."
- "Reading strategies are just a way to talk about what people who are good at reading do. It's like a way to make it easy to understand and talk about. Now I know how to tell you what I am having trouble with."
- "The reading strategies are helpful."

- "Knowing about the reading strategies makes it easy to set goals and work on the goals."

What impact does direct instruction have on reading achievement?

Direct instruction about the reading strategies provided a common language for the students and the teacher to use in the classroom. This common language enabled the teacher and the students to make connections from day-to-day lessons to the reading strategies, making instruction more relevant. Also, a common language allowed for open communication between teacher and students about individual student deficiencies, goals, and growth. Because students had a clear understanding of the reading strategies, they were able to understand what they needed to do to become better readers.

Students took the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test in fall and again in April (after the treatment). A t-test was conducted utilizing the MAP test data for the 21 students, with a critical value of 2.086 ($p=.05$). The resulting t-value of 1.17 is not significant enough to reject the null hypothesis.

Summary

Much of the data supports gains in student achievement; however, the researcher could not reject the null hypothesis due to statistical data (t-test).

Prior to the treatment, a high percentage of students reported understanding how to use most of the reading strategies. However, most students reported that they did not use the strategies regularly. After the treatment, more students reported understanding and using the four strategies

that were focused on during the treatment. In addition, an increased number of students reported using two of the three remaining strategies.

After direct instruction of each of the individual strategies, high percentages of students scored proficient or advanced on activities that accompanied the instruction. All students were able to explain the strategies to the researcher and demonstrate application of the strategies at advanced or proficient levels during one-on-one conferences with the researcher.

The common language that resulted from knowledge gained from the direct instruction allowed for students' ability to analyze and discuss personal deficiencies or areas that could be improved upon. Students were able to use this language to set goals for themselves, which led to an increase in scores on the MAP test for 52% of students.

The students own words are the last piece of data that supports gains in student achievement when direct instruction accompanies read aloud. Many students commented about their increased abilities as a result of the direct instruction.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of read alouds on reading achievement for eighth grade students. The study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of 21 students in one literature classroom, which was taught by the researcher. In this chapter, the researcher will examine the results and evaluate the information gathered from this study to determine what conclusions can be made and what recommendations can be given.

Discussion of the Findings:

On the Pre-Treatment Survey, a high percentage of the students reported that they completely understood or had a good understanding of how to use the *predict, visualize, question,* and *connect* reading strategies, while more than half of the students reported that they completely understood or had a good understanding of how to use the *identify* and *evaluate* reading strategies. In contrast, low percentages of students reported that they regularly used the reading strategies.

Two possibilities that might account for this are as follows. Students reported understanding the strategies because students knew the definitions, which they might have thought meant the same thing as actually understanding the strategies. (However, as teachers, we know that there is a big difference). This would cause an inflated percentage of students who reported that they completely understood or had a good understanding of the strategies. Or, prior

to the treatment, students didn't realize just how often they actually used the strategies, resulting in a deflated percentage of students who regularly used the reading strategies. Based on interactions and conversations with the students, both in large groups and on an individual basis, I believe it was a combination of the reasons listed above, depending on the strategy and the student.

Even though in-depth direct instruction was not provided for all seven of the reading strategies during the treatment, the Post Treatment Survey showed an increase in **understanding** of all of the strategies, with the exception of the *visualize* (the percentage remained the same at 95%) and *question* (the percentage decreased by 5% from 86% to 81%) strategies. It also showed a marked increase in student **use** of all the reading strategies. Despite the fact that there was not a focus on the *question*, *infer*, and *evaluate* strategies during the treatment, the researcher often mentioned the strategies or modeled using them and briefly discussed them during the debriefing, when appropriate. This seems to be a reasonable explanation for the increase in understanding of the *infer* strategy, and the increase in use of the *question*, *infer*, and *evaluate* strategies reported on the Post Treatment Survey. Although there was an increase in the use of all of the strategies, more students reported using the strategies that were the focus of the direct instruction. This supports a conclusion that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud.

I can only speculate about why students did not report an increase in understanding of the *visualize* and *question* strategies on the Post Treatment Survey. Considering that 95% of students reported understanding the *visualize* strategy on the Pre-Treatment Survey, the margin for improvement includes only one student, thus leaving minimal opportunity for an increase. The

decrease in understanding of the *question* strategy is not as clear cut. My thoughts are that, during read aloud, I often stopped and asked questions, but did not always point out that I was using the *question* strategy. In fact, this is the strategy that probably received the least mention throughout the treatment.

Another piece of evidence that supports a conclusion that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud is the scores that students received on their graphic organizers and activities. The majority of students proved they understood the focus strategies and could apply them during independent reading time. Students could successfully take the information from the direct instruction, along with what they had seen me do while reading aloud, and put it to use while they read. I was impressed with what many of them wrote on their graphic organizers and activity sheets. During the one-on-one conferences between researcher and student, all of the students demonstrated proficiency (or better) for each of the focus reading strategies. I think it is important to take into consideration that one-on-one conferences with the researcher took place anywhere from a day or two to a week or two after the direct instruction (depending on the strategy). This provides evidence that not only could students apply what they learned, they retained the information. It also indicates that the increase in knowledge and use reported on the Pre- and Post Surveys is accurate.

This evidence is aligned with the third and seventh components of an effective read aloud, as noted by Fisher, Flood, Lap, and Frey (2007): a clear purpose should be established for read aloud, and connections to independent reading and writing should be made. During the treatment, I discovered that when direct instruction accompanies read aloud, setting a purpose and making

connections to independent reading and writing is already built in. The students' scores definitely indicate that the read alouds were effective.

During classroom and one-on-one discussions, students conveyed an overwhelmingly positive response to the direct instruction of the strategies, which was a bit of a surprise to me. In my experience, eighth grade students can often be apathetic (or worse) when teachers ask them to do work that requires thought and insight. Because this treatment involved numerous activities that do just that, I expected many students to be indifferent, at best. Instead, I found that most of the students found value in what we were doing and were eager to take part in the activities and discussions. They were willing to try new things and report about their struggles and successes. There was an inspiring give-and-take between students who had conquered specific strategies and those who struggled – students with confidence in using a strategy often gave meaningful advice to students who were struggling with it. I observed the formation of a community of learners who looked to each other for guidance. This open communication and sense of community played a significant part in building students' confidence and ability, as evidenced by the students' own comments and reflections. As stated in Chapter Two, in order to instill a love of reading, and for students to find value in it, it is imperative that students are engaged (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The activities and discussions that accompanied the read aloud provided opportunities for students to become engaged, which definitely contributed to a positive attitude about reading and working to become a better reader.

About half of the students that participated in the treatment received an increased score on the reading portion of the MAP test. Because more students

did not do better on their MAP test after the treatment, I am not able to reject the null hypothesis. Even though I would have liked to see an increase in more of the students' scores, I still think the direct instruction was a valuable contribution that played a part for those scores that did increase.

I believe there are a few factors that contributed to the rest of the scores. First of all, the treatment was only six weeks long. There was about four weeks between the treatment and the spring MAP test in which the *infer* strategy was the focus for about two weeks; the other time was spent on other curriculum items. Had this been something I had started at the beginning of the year and used as a foundation for everything else we had done in the classroom, using the strategies would be second nature to the majority of students by the second MAP test. As a result, I think I would have seen more students with elevated scores. Also, I had not yet covered two of the strategies. Some students may have already done well in the areas on the MAP test that the strategies we already focused on correspond with. Those students may not yet have gotten direct instruction on strategies that they needed to improve upon in order to score higher on the test. Lastly, my student teacher took over shortly after the treatment. Because of her inexperience and the adjustment period for her to get the routine down, there was a void of time in which the connections between the strategies and the curriculum were being enforced. Even when the *infer* strategy was the focus of the direct instruction that accompanied the read aloud, the student teacher's instruction and routine were obscure. The spring MAP test came during this time. With connections and reinforcement about how to apply the strategies lacking, the knowledge some students had gained was lost.

In my opinion, conclusions of this study support my research hypothesis. As their teacher, I observed changes in the students' confidence, attitudes, knowledge, and application of knowledge throughout the treatment. Nevertheless, in the development of this research, there may have been some limitations. Pre- and Post Treatment Surveys were based on students' perceptions, conclusions based upon data from this study are restricted to 8th grade students and may not be applicable to all middle school students, students were not randomly selected, but are the students of the researcher, and the students participating in the study were of varied academic ability level. Also, I did not explore the impact that the choice of genre for read aloud books may have had; especially related to boys verses girls (I did, however, try to use a variety of books and passages).

The validity and/or reliability of the instruments I used to collect data are also debatable. The Pre- and Post Treatment Survey results are based on students' perceptions, which may not accurately reflect their knowledge or use of the reading strategies. In addition, the students may not have been truthful on the surveys. Another possible concern with the instruments is that the scores students received for the graphic organizers, activity sheets, and one-on-one conferences were subject to the researcher's opinion. Rubrics, however, were used to limit the subjectivity.

After reviewing the data, there are still some unanswered questions and things I would have done differently. One thing I would have liked to have done is, on the Post Treatment Survey, asked questions about the students' opinions on the following: the connection between their abilities to effectively use reading strategies in connection with their own reading comprehension and

enjoyment, a question about the students' opinions about their own growth while learning about the strategies, and a question about the students' opinions about whether direct instruction of the reading strategies made a difference. Also, since most students said they understood how to use the strategies on the Pre-Treatment Survey, I would have liked to have asked them something about whether their knowledge of the strategies prior to treatment was accurate, or if, in hindsight, they knew less than they thought they did or were actually using the strategies, but didn't realize it.

Based on the results of this study and my observations of and conversations with students during the treatment, some other questions have arisen. Question number one: How often should read alouds be done? Sub-question: Should direct instruction accompany all read alouds? Question number two: Should all content teachers be required to reinforce the use of reading strategies?

Summary and Future Implications

To summarize, students orally reported that they benefited from direct instruction in combination with read aloud, as well as demonstrated this during one-on-one conferences with the researcher, which reinforces their reports. The results of the Pre- and Post Surveys, the one-on-one conference demonstrations, the improved test scores, and the researcher's conversations with students all lead to the conclusion that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud.

Regardless of the possible limitations, questions, things I would have done differently, t-test results, and possible uncertainty about the reliability of

the instruments used to collect data, I am now confident that students benefit when direct instruction accompanies read aloud. I am certain that student achievement, both in academics and confidence, is positively impacted by this. Because of the findings from this research, I feel good about spending so much class time on read aloud. I am convinced that students benefit from the read alouds, and I am now able to provide concrete reasons as to why read alouds are good for students.

I would recommend read alouds, with direct instruction, as a way to increase achievement for students. I will certainly continue using it in my classroom this year. In future school years, I will start the year by including direct instruction of the reading strategies. Once I have taught all of the reading strategies, I will continue using direct instruction along with read alouds to focus on other components of literacy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Pre-Treatment Survey

Appendix B
Post Treatment Survey

Appendix C
One-on-One Conference Rubric

Appendix D
Predict Graphic Organizer – A

Appendix E
Are You Thinking What I'm Thinking?

Appendix F
Come to Think of It…

Appendix G
Think Big

Appendix H
Think Small

Appendix I
Powerful Predictions

Appendix J
Using the Reading Strategies Rubric