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And Then They Talked Back and Took Over: One Teacher's Journey Towards Creating a Meaningful Read Aloud Practice

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And Then They Talked Back and Took Over:
One Teacher's Journey Towards Creating a Meaningful Read Aloud Practice

By

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Abstract

Read alouds are an important component of a balanced literacy curriculum, namely because of the opportunities they present for students to practice comprehension strategies such as making text to self connections, as well as finessing their speaking and listening skills while other students are voicing those connections. Despite this, read alouds were not occurring within my classroom. For this site based inquiry research, I delved into how I, as the teacher, could establish an effective read aloud practice within a busy classroom. I explored the teacher moves during read alouds, and monitored the students' responses to gauge how they were interacting with the text. I categorized the students' responses according to levels of engagement, and used that data to consider how to make those interactions more purposeful. Classroom teachers of other grades were also surveyed in order to gain data about the various ways they incorporate read alouds into their routine, and their responses were intended to inspire my own practice. My goal in conducting this research was to discover the how behind establishing a read aloud curriculum, starting with such practical adjustments as making the time in our schedule, and then moving on to discovering the most potent teacher moves that would create a high level of engagement from behalf of the students.

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Introduction

Rationale

I can remember the anecdote like it was yesterday. I was an associate teacher in a first grade classroom, and we were immersed in delving into and falling in love with the Irma Black Award 2017 nominees. My head teacher had bestowed the honor upon me to read *The Night Gardener* (Fan & Fan, 2016) to the class, and with every word that I narrated, I felt myself walking deeper into a magical world. An animated discussion followed, where students shared their opinions on the book. With a heavy heart, the read aloud was finished, and I placed the book in our book display. Two days later, a sweet, but at times volatile, boy approached me with the book in hand. “Hey Alix,” he said, opening up to the cover flap illustration, “If you just look here, you kind of already know who the night gardener is!” He was so proud of his discovery, and I responded with a matched delight in his close reading of the illustrations and asked if I could read the book to him. “Sure,” he said. This occurred during morning choice time, where students are free to draw, play with Lego, or peruse our classroom library. This boy’s choice was to explore our library independently, as his friends crowded around the Lego box. After I finished reading the book with him, I remarked that I was going to buy myself a copy of the book for my apartment. He responded with a smile that crossed his face way too infrequently and said, “Yeah, me too.”

As I began this academic year as a lead teacher for the first time at the L School, I immediately was overwhelmed with a new classroom, new students, new school culture, and a new curriculum. I dove into my teaching practice thinking about that boy and how I

wanted my students to fall in love with books as he did, but the crucial element to that equation was missing: read alouds. In a dual curriculum school, our day was jam packed and the pressure to cover reading and writing units was palpable across the grades. Time was not carved out of our schedule for a meaningful read aloud practice.

This realization and the feelings of both stress (“How am I going to fit it into my schedule?”) and regret (“How can I be a self proclaimed lover of reading and writing and not be exposing my students to the magic of a read aloud?”) that came along with it prompted me to respond in an almost knee jerk reaction way of needing to secure a book to read aloud as soon as possible. When I approached another teacher of the same age range and asked her if she had *Thank You Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (2012) for me to borrow, she asked why I needed it and I responded that I wanted to do a read aloud. She was incredulous. “Really? But there’s no time!” I walked away knowing that this was a bigger issue than I had realized. That same day, in an effort to gather some suggestions for books to read out loud, I took a vote from my students about what their favorite read aloud books were. I defined what I meant by the phrase read aloud and cited two of the books I had read to them so far this year to jog their memory (again adding to my regret was that it was November and I could remember only two books I had used as read alouds). My students responses were as follows: “Books that someone I know wrote;” “Solar system books;” “Mystery books.” At this point, I had a hunch that they were not naming read aloud books and I called them out on it, saying that the books they’re naming sound like chapter books they had read on their own. “What about books that I read out loud to you as a whole group?” They responded unwaveringly, “Science books;” “Mystery books.”

The proof was in the pudding, as my students could not call to mind their favorite read aloud books since there was no tangible read aloud practice occurring within my classroom. With this, I decided to focus my research on how to implement a realistic read aloud practice within my Language Arts curriculum with second graders.

What is a read aloud?

The practice that is termed as a “read aloud” might seem self explanatory: you read a book out loud to a class. One can infer that its moniker is not trying to hide anything about the practice. It is a widely used classroom tool, as Nina Jaffe writes that, “Early childhood and elementary grade teachers are trained in, and often most comfortable with, the read- aloud mode for centering their children’s attention and work on story reading and writing” (Jaffe, 2000, p. 164). The read aloud seems to just be. But then you read Lawrence Sipe’s article *Talking Back and Taking Over* (2002) and lines such as, “In this type of response, anything goes because children abandon any attempt in interpretation or understanding and treat the story as a launching pad for the expression of their own creativity “(p. 478) make you whip your head back around. A read aloud is certainly more than a simple reading of a book, and rather, is a pandora’s box of possibilities for its listeners.

The literature that surrounds read aloud practice highlights that there is a fine line between teacher led discussion and student spontaneous engagement, both facets which I discovered while conducting my field research. Lawrence Sipe writes that when analyzing his data on children’s engagement in read alouds, he “paid special attention to children’s

conversational turns that represented expressive engagement beyond the usual analysis and interpretation of plot, setting, characters, and theme (which was the major activity in which the children were engaged)” (2002, p.477). Sipe’s vision of children “talking back and taking over” occurred in the spaces between those teacher led conversations, and that’s when they truly were engaging with the books in their own way. Mem Fox, the prolific Australian author of children’s literature, has something to say about the emphasis that teachers put on the “major activity” work during a read aloud. She writes,

I ask myself why we feel it’s necessary to ask tedious, obvious questions before, during, and after we read a book... My intention, when I write for children, is to amaze and inspire; to delight and comfort; to excite and entertain; to thrill and enchant; to calm; to amuse; to make them want to come back, and back, and back to my books so they can learn from my words how words work. So you’ll understand why, as a writer, I’m 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, such as asking this dumb question (regarding Hattie and the Fox): “How do you think Hattie feels when she knows it’s a fox in the bushes?” (Fox, 2013, p. 7).

In essence, Fox is advocating for all of the magic that happens without the teacher posing a question that is meant to support their comprehension. According to Fox, all of that stopping and starting while reading “digs a grave” for the story itself. In addition to Sipe and Fox, my work was influenced by *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (Martinez & Roser, 1995) in which the teacher’s role when

initiating conversation around a book focuses on modeling rather than directly asking. In this way, students feel invited to share their thoughts on a book even if the teacher did not present a question. Throughout the span of this research, I referenced these three authors and turned to them for ways in which to guide my practice.

Setting

The L school is located in Downtown Brooklyn, in an old warehouse that was remodeled. The surrounding neighborhood of Prospect Heights is a mix between rent controlled buildings and newer, more expensive buildings, thus making the social makeup of the neighborhood heterogenous. From the outside, there is no sign that marks the building as a school, and it falls relatively incognito on the block. There's a music studio right next door, and then an ice cream shop on the corner that is frequently packed to the rim with people waiting in line. On the other side of the building is another warehouse, and adjacent to that is a public school that takes up the remainder of the block. The school has been around for ten years and started off in an apartment building with seven students, and has now grown exponentially to have over 100 students. It might seem like the L School attempts to check a lot of boxes at once both religiously and academically. The mission statement refers to the L School as a progressive interpretation of the yeshiva day school and calls for an emphasis on Jewish values, intensive text study, and Hebrew language immersion. Their goal is to create a cultural mosaic that is reflective of the community and the world. The L School is Montessori inspired, which is manifested in the

mixed age groupings within classrooms (each classroom is referred to by the age of the students within it, instead of by grade level), materials that are used, and the general teaching philosophy that affects the flow of the classroom: that the teacher is to be the guide on the side. In terms of curriculum, the school follows the Common Core Standards. For math, they incorporate Montessori materials and supplement where necessary. For Language Arts, they follow the Teacher's College Reading (Calkins, 2015) and Writing Workshop (Calkins, 2013). For spelling, they follow Words Their Way. For grammar and social studies, they do utilize the Montessori curriculum and materials.

The physical environment of the L School is as follows. It is two floors. The first floor has a physical therapy gym, technology lab, small gym that is also used for performances, and three classrooms. On the second floor are two 5-7 classrooms, and two 7-9 classrooms. My classroom of focus, and the one in which I teach, is one of the large 7-9 classrooms with plenty of room. There are four teachers in a classroom of 28 students, with some students having paraprofessionals. The ratio of students with disabilities to neurotypical students within this particular classroom is 1:1. There are lockers outside of it for students to store their jackets and backpacks, and cubbies inside for classroom materials such as folders and binders. Inside the classroom, muted colors are encouraged in order to inspire a calm atmosphere, a Montessori aspect that the school embraces. There are wooden tables and chairs throughout the classroom as well that vary in size, and students only sit at tables when working independently; for lessons, students sit on the rugs. Although the classroom is large, different areas of it are sectioned off by the natural

construction of the room, so that if you are standing in one of the four corners of the room, the entire classroom is not visible to you.

Although the entire classroom houses both second and third graders, lessons are taught according to grade level so that all second graders are in lessons together and vice versa. As far as subject materials are concerned, each section of the room has a corresponding set of shelves where the teachers place that subject's materials and/or works. For example, both second and third graders are schedule to have Language Arts at the same time of the day so the lessons occur on two opposite sides of the room. For practical purposes there are therefore two Language Arts bulletin boards and two Language Arts shelves, each in proximity to the lessons as they occur. The classroom collection of books is organized according to reading level, each level receiving its own bin and some occupying more than one, and larger picture books are organized by content. I refer to this as a classroom collection rather than a library because there is no designated space in which the books live. Rather, they occupy shelves throughout one side of the room in no cohesive manner. If students wish to read a book, they walk over to a shelf and bring the book back to their spot, as there is no space designated for students to just curl up and read.

Participants

The participants in this study are fourteen second graders, colleagues who teach in other grades throughout the school, as well as myself, the classroom teacher for those fourteen students. Of the fourteen second graders, twelve of those students are returning

students and have attended the L School for at least one year prior, one of whom is repeating second grade; two students are new to the school. Eight out of the fourteen students have a learning variation that is diagnosed, examples of which include sensory seeking behavior, attention difficulties, and language based struggles; the ninth student voluntarily does not attend lessons and so he receives an individualized educational plan. He would occasionally join our read alouds when something peaked his interest, but was not involved in our discussions as he would leave as soon as I paused from reading. The majority of these second graders came into my classroom with above grade reading levels, but upon assessing them using running records, I uncovered that their comprehension was not matching up with their decoding abilities. Two students were below grade level; one student who was new to the school and lacked explicit reading instruction last year, and another student who received an Individualized Education Plan at the onset of the year that outlined her language difficulties. All fourteen students are new to Reader's Workshop, as their teacher last year did not utilize that curriculum.

Curious about the read aloud culture of the school, I sought to reach out to fellow teachers across grade levels in order to get a picture of how they use read alouds in their own classrooms. I interviewed five classroom teachers and one former teacher who now took on a leadership role as the Director of Teaching and Learning in the lower school. Of those five teachers, I spoke to one teacher from both of the 5-7 classes (kindergarten and first grade), as well as one teacher from each of the two 7-9 classes (second and third grade). Since I teach in one of the two 7-9 classrooms, one of those teachers I spoke to was my team member, and only teaches Language Arts to third graders. Finally, the fifth

classroom teacher I spoke to teaches fifth grade. I chose to interview her because she was my mentor, and I met with her weekly as a support set up by the L School for first year teachers. The previous year she had taught in the same grade level classroom as the one I am currently in, and so I was curious about her thoughts on read alouds and the role they play in the classroom. Four out of the five teachers are returning to the L School for at least their second year, while only one teacher is new to the L School. She has been a lead teacher for multiple years in a previous school.

Alas, that leaves me to introduce myself, the researcher on the field. I am a new first year teacher, having previously taught as an associate in a first grade classroom in another school. I am in my last year at Bank Street College of Education, and am pursuing a dual certification in General Education and Reading and Literacy. I am the only second grade Language Arts teacher in my classroom, but there is another Language Arts teacher for the third graders. The third grade teacher is the team leader for the teachers in my room, a title which gives her the final say in our classroom decisions, such as where materials go and how our schedule runs. At the beginning of the year, she decided the setup of our classroom, and thus situated our classroom collection of books where she felt they fit.

Methodology

Data Collection

This site-based inquiry exploring the teaching practice of read alouds occurred across the span of four months, beginning in the middle of November and continuing

through the end of February. To collect data throughout my development of a read aloud practice I tapped into three outlets: first hand observations and recordings of my own practice, my students' comments during each read aloud, as well as surveys from teachers about their read aloud practices. In order to use my own read alouds as a source of data collection, I recorded each read aloud and would replay the audio afterwards to search for any themes or findings in my practice and in my students' engagement. I began recording my read alouds in November and continued through the beginning of February. Besides for interruptions from holidays or vacation, a read aloud occurred every Tuesday during the Language Arts block of the day. Nine read aloud experiences are explored in the data below for the purposes of my focused study, but read alouds did occur after that mark as part of a then established read aloud practice. About a month into my data collection, I reflected on my findings so far and began making changes to my practice, concerning both the selection of books I was making, as well as what was happening during the read aloud itself. The data collected in the beginning stages of my field research will be compared to the data collection that followed, as a means to analyze what I was doing as the teacher during a read aloud and how that affected my students. I will refer to that first batch of data from November until the middle of December as Phase I, and the data that followed from the end of December until February as Phase II. The books that I chose for read alouds came from sources outside of my classroom collection, such as the Bank Street Library as well as personally owned books. All names of students used in my data collection are pseudonyms.

In addition to analyzing my role as the teacher within my research, I studied the comments made by my students during read alouds, looking for moments of high engagement. I categorized comments as “highly engaged” when students were partaking in actions that I unpacked in greater detail at the beginning of this paper; when students were spontaneously commenting on some element of the text, instead of responding to a teacher’s question in a game of ping pong (teacher asks, student responds, and the game continues rather blandly). The analysis of my own teaching practice often correlated with the students engagement during a read aloud, and as I moved towards more of a teacher modeling role, my students engagement increased; as I scaled back on the amount that my voice was heard within the pages of a book, my students’ voices had more opportunities to be heard. This relationship between my role and my students’ engagement will be delved into in further detail under the Data Analysis section of this paper.

My interviews with the six teachers took place while in the middle of my field research. I had a prepared set of questions, and recorded down their answers in writing while they spoke. These were purposefully conducted while I was engaged with my research, instead of prior to my research beginning or at the conclusion of it, in order to, as the expression narrates, “add fuel to the fire.” I wanted my conversations with my colleagues to either provide insight about how to fit a meaningful read aloud practice into the curriculum or confirm what the teacher whom I asked to borrow *Thank You Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 2012) from had echoed about the constraints of our schedule. I was hoping that with either outcome, their words would fuel my practice and assist me by either giving me practical advice or motivating me to accomplish the powerful work that so desperately

needed to be done. I organized their responses into a table under the Data Findings section of this paper, so that the common answers across the teachers would be visible, and unpacked the common themes amongst their responses under the Data Analysis section. Upon receiving permission from the teachers, I used their actual first names when analyzing the themes brought up by their interviews.

I decided to categorize my research findings into two sections, aptly titled Phase I and Phase II. Phase I details my initial foray into this research, and the decisions I made before continuing forward. In layman's terms, Phase I gives off the air of a teacher warming up before gaining true speed. Phase II follows the data that I gathered as my read aloud practice began to become more purposeful, and as I incorporated elements from the research that surrounds effective read aloud practices, namely *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (Martinez & Roser, 1995). Thus, during Phase II is where the real work began, and I have titled that section as such.

Phase I: Noticings

I began, or so I thought I began, the process of implementing a read aloud practice into my curriculum by choosing books to read to my second graders whenever I could find the time. I began by selecting a book from my classroom, titled *Someday* by Eileen Spinelli (2007). I selected it partly because I felt it would appeal to my students in a social emotional light, and partly because the illustrations were so full of detail that I was confident it would draw the students into the book. This first read aloud was influenced heavily by my knowledge about how to support students in comprehension through

guiding pre, during, and post reading questions; in other words, I was a teacher leading her students towards the kind of book talk that Mem Fox (2013) abhors. I trudged on, beginning by posing questions about the cover illustration, continuing to pause every page to guide a discovery about some element of the text, and then thinking deeper about the connection between the storyline itself and about what it is that's making the character daydream. Once we noticed the pattern to her daydreams, students were asked to make predictions after hearing the daydream about what the present day page might be. I'll pause here to point out the most notable anecdote from that first read aloud. On one page, it talks about the character daydreaming going to the president, and a boy raises his hand to say in a silly voice, "I'm not sure the president right now would really want that." Now, readers, my response back to him was not in accordance with those theorists I mentioned at the onset of this research, and I was embarrassed as I listened back to the recording. Instead of welcoming in this student's spontaneous talking back to the book, I shut him down by saying that he was not answering my question. In my narrow sightedness to support my students in the major activity work, I failed to see the beauty in this child's breakthrough. I had my gaze planted firmly on having a "productive" read aloud, but I had lost sight of what my end goal was. I wanted the students to be engaged, and yet here I was relying heavily on a teacher's scaffolds of textbook like questions.

My next read aloud was fruitful. I use the word fruitful here to describe my second dive into the read aloud waters because of the insight I gained from it. We read *The Book With No Pictures* by B.J. Novak (2014) and had a wondrous conversation that centered around the purpose of illustrations in a book. Before reading, I posed the question of how

important really are the illustrations to a book, and a lengthy discussion ensued. In it, students took it upon themselves to respond to one another and build upon each other's thoughts. Take the following excerpt of student discourse as an example:

S: You can tell what's happening just by looking at the pictures. In a book that only has pictures you can know what's going on.

E: But you actually have to be trained really well because you don't know if you're telling the story the right way.

S: But if it's a book with *only* pictures then you can read it because that's the way it was meant to be.

E: I see your point because it would be fun even if you didn't get the right story. It would be fun to try and make up your own story.

D: The pictures aren't important at all. Because like in *Owl Moon*, you kept telling us that the whole point was the words, that you're supposed to picture it in your mind!

E: Actually, D, I know some people like to picture it in their mind, but some people don't like it because they just want to read that book. For example, if it's a homework book, they don't want to stop on every page to picture what's happening. They just want to read and look at the pictures to help them understand, and then they can be done reading and maybe get screen time.

D: I agree to that but the reason why that happens. What you're supposed to understand is what's going on without the pictures. Like let's say your mom is reading you a book, all you hear is the words!

I interjected here to say that what I'm hearing is that there are different purposes to books depending on the type of book and depending when we're reading it. Although I started off with a deliberate question, the conversation morphed into the students actively engaging with the topic, voicing their opinions proudly. This is the kind of work that is referenced in *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (Martinez & Roser, 1995), where the teacher sets the stage but allows the students to take the lead. The rest of the read aloud involved countless moments where my students called out responses like, "You're supposed to whisper it," "You chose it so it's not our fault!" and "Here comes the funny part." This piece of data stands in contrast to my first, because here I had students calling out comments left and right, their voices amplified within the opening of the read aloud space. The caveat here is that I did not consider this talking back completely authentic for two reasons. First, the majority of the class had heard this book before and entered into my reading knowing they loved it and excited at the prospect of hearing it again. Secondly, the format of the book invited in the students to talk back to it, as the words on the pages were posed as questions so that as I read, it seemed as though I was asking my students those questions. I saw the power of having my students engaged, but I knew that every text would not be as deliberately inviting as B.J. Novak's. How could I duplicate this level of spontaneous engagement across all texts, albeit unfamiliar texts to my listeners as well as texts that weren't formatted in the same way as Novak's which practically relied on the student's laughter?

Phase II: The Real Work Begins

Mid December I realized that simply grabbing a book to read whenever I could find the time was not considered a meaningful read aloud practice, and was not leading me on the yellow brick road towards the spontaneous engagement across all texts that I had situated as my wizard. Operating this way meant that my students could not rely on the knowledge of when they would be privy to a read aloud, and I as the teacher was not preparing for this practice enough to make it meaningful. I decided that I needed to allot one Language Arts lesson a week to this powerful work. I filled my students in on this decision, and told them that from now on we would be calling Tuesdays, “Dessert Tuesdays.” This second half of my research still reflects shifts in my thinking throughout, as the move to designate a specific time for our read alouds was only the first step.

When deciding which book to restart with, I naturally gravitated towards my favorite authors, authors that I wanted to share with my impressionable readers and writers. Patricia Polacco was my first pick, and although I was planning on reading *Thank You Mr. Falker* (2012), as I perused her books in the Bank Street library, I came across *The Art of Miss Chew* (2012), a book that I hadn’t read. Why not explore new literature along with my students as they did? And with that, my “first” read aloud was selected.

I began this read aloud as I had been doing, generating a pre reading conversation around predictions of what the book would be about. Once we had ventured into the depths of Patricia’s writing, I asked if anyone has ever felt stressed with time like Patricia, knowing that my students had expressed such worries and wondering if they would share them out. Debbie Miller in *Reading With Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the*

Primary Grades (2013) discusses and emphasizes the power of educating students about how active readers make connections to what they are reading in order to build comprehension (p. 79). During this read aloud, as well as during future read alouds, I sought to bring students to make connections to the text, and it became a practice that they took upon themselves fairly quickly. Additionally, John Dewey writes that there must be an “organic connection between education and personal experience” (1938, p. 25) and when students respond with a text to self connection, they are morphing the experience of a read aloud into a meaningful learning moment for them. Thus, I saw bringing my students to make text to self connections a goal to be attained. Anya, a student who I know has complained of feeling stressed with her work and not having enough time, said yes, and cited a specific work that caused her to feel that way; Ben said that he felt that way basically always this year. Simon, a student who was held back a year and is in second grade now for his second time, reflected that he had felt that way all of last year. And then came Eitan, volunteering that Alexander Hamilton had the same exact story where he was never having enough time. This simple question allowed them to make a connection to their own lives, and they felt comfortable sharing their anxieties in a safe space. As I continued reading, two students stopped me. They noticed that the illustration on a page matched the smaller sketches on the inside flap of the book. I was impressed by how close their attention was to detail. Although this wasn’t what Sipe (2002) would refer to as talking back to the story, there definitely was an active engagement piece to them noticing something without me saying it, and then stopping me to share it with the class.

This particular read aloud ended up spanning three days, because our lessons got cut shorter. Each day, the students would ask me if today was the day we were going to read it again. On the final day, I said, “Today we get to finally finish our leftover dessert!” to which a student responded, “This is the only kind of leftovers that I like!” Before I began reading, one student stopped me and said that he had told the art teacher about the book. He said that she responded by saying she was wondering why everyone was so into art that day! He said that it was because he personally was excited to try out negative space after we read about it, and he’s sure that other people felt that same way too! I was flabbergasted at how he was able to not only bring a read aloud across curriculum and impact his daily life, but how he also picked up on one small detail from one page and expanded it into a tool he wanted to try. Another student then raised his hand to share that he wanted to make a “personal connection” (language I had been conditioning them to use when reading, as inspired by Miller’s [2013] words echoed earlier in this section) before we began, and shared that just like Mr. Donovan’s father had passed away, his fish had also passed away the night before. (To which another student responded in an annoyed voice that he had already shared that earlier, but I said that he was making the connection to our book and that was exactly what readers do.) When the book came to a close, I drew our attention back to how there’s only one name on the cover, showing us that Patricia Polacco is both the author and illustrator. This led two boys, Simon and Ben, to debate whether Patricia had written this story about herself or if she had made it up. One girl interjected to say that it’s possible she changed some parts of the story to make it sound

more interesting. As occurred in *The Book With No Pictures* (Novak, 2014), two students were voicing their stances and having a respectful back and forth about their opinions.

After Patricia Polacco, the next author on my internal list was Leo Lionni.

Knowing that his books are short and sweet, I chose two to read on two consecutive Tuesdays, having in mind that I would create a follow up work that would tap into both readings. *Fish is Fish* (Lionni, 1970) came first, but an unplanned meeting caused me to be out of the room during our normal read aloud time. Since I was in the heart of establishing this read aloud routine, I didn't want to change our schedule before it was rock solid, and so I asked the teacher covering for me to take over and do the read aloud as planned. The next day, I chose to use *Fish is Fish* as my mentor text for the TC Reader's Workshop (Calkins, 2015) lesson on how authors create links within the story (the link here was "fish is fish"). Although I thought it would be an ideal text to highlight how authors repeat phrases at the beginning and end of stories, I selfishly wanted to get a firsthand taste of the dessert I had missed out on that week; I wanted to hear their voices talking about the text. We read it together, and students who were absent the day before were pleased that they too would not miss out on dessert. Since I had the intention of focusing on the follow up work and recognized the time constraint that placed on my reading time, we did not pause for any meaningful dialogue (and the students did not stop me either). When we moved on to independent work, I told them that they were going to try their hand at writing stories where the characters are animals, just like in Leo Lionni's book. They all got to writing right away, and some students played around with having multiple animal friends in their stories; one student made an animal amalgam who was

part lion part other animals and part human; another student focused on one cat, named it Petey, and described his adventure at the park. The lesson ended with them sharing out their writing and begging to continue working on their stories. This excitement continued across days, and at the beginning of every Language Arts lesson they would ask if they could continue working on these stories.

When I introduced *Inch by Inch* by Leo Lionni (1995) the next Tuesday, I prompted my students to think about anything they noticed in both of Leo Lionni's books so far. I made the decision to barely pause during this read aloud for comments based on my understanding that the text was fairly simple and would not lend itself to overly rich discussions. Instead, I again relied on the post reading conversations. We discussed the illustrations, and Sela noticed that they seemed "textured." David also noticed how the worm is on every page. After contemplating the style of the illustrations, I sent them off to continue writing their stories but with the question of illustrations for their stories in mind. There were two notable experiences that this read aloud and writing adventure illustrated for some of my struggling writers. The first one occurred with a student who has language processing issues, and is an adorably confident girl who is positive that she has followed directions, even if her work reflects a misunderstanding. I had reviewed her writing after last week's lesson, and I noticed that she had written a story wherein she was the main character and discussing how much she loved animals. I had an unofficial conference with her wherein I clarified the directions, but noticed that she was still insistent that her character was indeed an animal. In this moment, the power of a mentor text was poignant, as I referenced *Fish is Fish* (Lionni, 1970) and *Inch by Inch* (Lionni, 1995) and asked her

if there were any humans in the book and brought her to realize that the only characters were animals. She then went to write and tried it out successfully!

Another notable moment occurred with the student, Simon, who came up with the amalgam character. Held back a year, Simon was becoming more active in my lessons and in this moment, his passion was really obvious. He explained how this character came to be, and continued working independently with his learning specialist on it during their sessions, even turning it into a whole typing project. Simon recently informed me that he was now planning the second chapter in his installment. Thus, although both of Leo Lionni's books didn't reveal moments of my students talking back during the read aloud, the activities that followed *did* allow them to take over the story by making their own versions of it.

The second shift in this second bend of my research happened before our next read aloud, as a result of again reflecting on how my process was going so far. *The Art of Miss Chew* (Polacco, 2012) had wondrous book talk happening, but Lionni's books did not. What was I doing and what could I do more of to encourage the lively book talk my research was about? My decision is reflected in the update I gave my students before our next read aloud:

You might have noticed that I record our read alouds, because I love to hear your comments. But something I've noticed is that I ask you all a lot of questions, and you respond beautifully to them. I want to hear more of your voices, without my voice constantly posing questions; I want to hear more of your own thoughts. As

I'm reading, if you have something to say, raise your hand and I'll stop to hear what you have to say.

I told them that I'm going to try my best not to ask questions, but that sometimes I just can't help myself because I want to know their ideas on things. One student pipes up, "There's no such thing as too many questions!" And so we begin, and after I read the title, *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco (2001), I spy hands already up in the air. "I recognize the name Patricia Polacco because we read *The Art of Miss Chew*;" "She's the same author as the book about art;" "I was going to tell you that before you even starting reading books by Patricia Polacco that she was my favorite author;" "In both books, the characters are named Patricia." As I read, students were raising their hands to make personal connections, share noticings, and ask questions about vocabulary ("I like where they put the words, that they're in the pictures. Some books put them in the clouds.").

I did direct their attention to the illustrations on one particular page, where I was hoping the students would notice the usage of color to highlight aspects of the quilt from back home Russia.

Me: Look at the color in the illustrations, and think about what you notice.

A: The quilt is in color on both pages.

Me: And the people are in black and white. Why might that be?

R: To show that it's the most important thing on that page.

I: It looks like the author is trying to make the babushka stronger than the people.

S: It's like they're dead and the only thing alive is the blanket.

Me: And where is the blanket from? Russia... let's keep that in mind as we read.

My students loved the empowerment that they were given in sharing ideas as it came to them, as evidenced to the multiple voices that would share out their noticings at once. At some moments when I felt details needed to be pointed out, I would gently prod them by saying things like, “Who can make a personal connection here to the wedding that’s happening?” Sometimes as I sensed the silence, I would start formulating my question and a hand would pop up, as if my stopping and recognizing that this is a moment to comment on was scaffolding enough for my students.

For my third and final shift, I was propelled by *Book Talk and Beyond* (Martinez & Roser, 1995) to rework the format of my read alouds. I had been moving towards it by empowering my students to share comments whenever they were moved to, but that was a baby step and this shift felt like more of a substantial step. For starters, I was not purposefully cultivating a back and forth in responses between my students, yet I was recognizing and appreciating it when it occurred. After reading the section in *Book Talk and Beyond* (Martinez & Roser, 1995) that references grand book talk conversations, I highlighted ways to scaffold my students in their discourse practice, by reminding them that when a peer shares a comment and you want to respond to it, one way to do so is by saying that you agree or disagree and sharing why. Having to raise your hand before responding almost impedes that back and forth. I had been pondering Dewey’s (1938) thoughts about rules, and how some are restricting while others, like in games that children play, are necessary (p.52). I felt that the rule of having to raise one’s hand before sharing a comment was restricting the spontaneous nature of talking back. Recognizing at the same time that there does need to be a sense of order that Dewey illustrated, I also

explained to my students how to go about respecting one another's voice by speaking one at a time. There could be order without strict limitations. Additionally, another feature emphasized in *Book Talk and Beyond* (Martinez & Roser, 1995) is where the students are seated when the read aloud occurs. In order to welcome in every voice to the conversation and set the tone that the students' voices are just as welcome as the teacher's voice, we began sitting in a circle during our read alouds. I explained both of these additions to our practice to my students prior to reading, and told them that I know they all have so much to say, so who am I to tell them when it's okay to say it?! The one condition I established was that they had to wait until the end of a page to say a thought, and that only one voice could be heard at a time. "You don't need my permission to have an opinion!"

Elena's Serenade by Campbell Geeslin (2004) was the next world we traveled into, plucked from the shelves of the Bank Street Library because I was drawn by the powerful girl empowerment message it had pumping throughout its veins, as well as the exposure to another culture. I began first by modeling what I was thinking about the cover illustrations, and some students shared their comments. On the first page, a student proposed why Elena was being compared to the sun and the moon: because her name was composed of both the sun and the moon. A bunch of hands popped up, and I had to referee who would speak first. I reminded them that they do not need to raise their hands, but as the hands went up again, I recognized that this was going to be a process. As another student, Mia, shared her wondering and hands were raised to answer her, I asked the students to turn towards Mia while they respond to her. As we continued reading, I scaffolded the students by continuously reminding them to respond directly to the student,

and watched as students were talking to one another instead of just to me. At one point, a student did not know how to share a new idea into the conversation. I told him that he could simply say, “I have a new idea” and share it. His thought was that the father was being sexist, and I asked him to unpack what exactly that meant, and he explained empathetically that the father was saying that just because she was a girl she could not be a glassblower which was not fair. A few pages into the book, the students became more comfortable with sharing their thoughts without raising their hands, but I still would scaffold them at moments by asking if anyone agreed or disagreed to a comment that was shared, and then pushing them further to explain their stance. We had an amazing moment where one such thought that was shared was Sela noticing that the sun looks like the chicken on the page. This noticing excited us, and she urged us to turn the pages to find out if her hunch was indeed true, that the sun matches each animal that Elena is meeting, and it was! I was the most excited member in the group, amazed by her careful attention to detail. “You all have so much to teach me, this is why I love Language Arts!” I exclaimed. Asher called out in response without missing a beat, “We also learn so much!”

Prior to reading *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Pena (2015), we discussed what are some ways you can see different kinds of people, in the world or even in your community. Students got so excited with ideas that voices were talking over one another, and we had to practice our respectful practice multiple times. Some suggestions were traveling by boat, walking around your neighborhood, having a garage sale that people can come to, and one final student suggested taking a bus, at which point I introduced the read aloud for the day. *Last Stop On Market Street* was also a Bank Street

library possession, and I chose it because it had been mentioned in a few of my graduate classes. In a moment of talking back to the text, when CJ's Nana says that a tree is drinking through a straw, a student questions which part of the tree would be the straw, and if indeed that was an accurate comparison. One student noted, "I think the roots are like the straw, because they suck up the nutrients and then the trunk is almost like the stomach." A few students debated this, feeling welcome to consider and question the words in a book, and in essence thinking like writers themselves. I intervene here to ask what they're thinking about CJ and his Nana so far, and some thoughts are that they're poor, "They don't have a car," and that he's lonely, "Because it's just him and his grandma." Another student suggests that they don't have a car, "Because she cares for nature" and when I ask him how he came to know that idea, he says because the book tells us that "She knows a lot about nature." A few hums of, "I disagree" are heard, but then another student pipes in to buttress the statement his friend made. "What I have to say is that when he asks how she knows that it needs the rain, she knows the answer. It takes hard work to learn about plants and learning about plants to know those answers." Within the same read aloud, another opportunity for the students to pose and then resolve queries about the text occurred. There's a phrase that discusses the bus breathing fire at which one boy asked how that could be, "besides for the dragon printed on the side of it." In response to this one boy calls out, "The grandma was trying to make it more exciting for him that they're riding the bus so she compares it to a dragon!" "It's the engine!" another boy responds. Towards the end of the book, I heard one boy call out, "See they *are* poor, because they go to a soup kitchen," appreciating how he was using the text to confirm his

predictions, while also recognizing that his conclusion was not accurate. I then responded with, “Hmm, let us look closely at the illustrations. What other reasons would CJ and his Nana have to be at the soup kitchen?” because I wanted to make sure my students were not missing a key element of the story. Before we end, I ask them to consider how CJ acted at the beginning of the book, to how he acted at the end. “He’s angry that it has to rain” one boy says, and then another boy adds in that “He was negative at the beginning and now he’s positive.”

For our final hoorah with book number nine, I took inspiration from a book read aloud to me by a professor in one of my current graduate classes. *Jabari Jumps* (Cornwall, 2017) we begin by making predictions based on the cover illustration. “I think that book will be a collage on the back of the buildings. They’re made of newspaper and shaped to look like buildings.” Another student chimes in, “And watercolors!” Back to our predictions, a girl suggests that “He’s about to jump off of it and it’s about to break;” “I think that this book is going to be good but that’s because I think that about every book;” and one final prediction, “I think that this book is about courage because he has to jump off of the diving board.” Later on in the book, when Jabari’s father squeezes his hand, a student calls out that his father is scared, and another student adds that “He probably squeezed back because he’s scared also.” Another voice suggests that, “I think that he’s excited!” When Jabari’s father suggests that he take a small rest and climb down from the diving board ladder, my little scholars begin commenting:

Ethan: He’s gonna let go really hard.

Syan: No he’s not!

Asher: He's gonna fall down.

Me: What makes you think that he's going to fall down?

Asher: Because a tiny rest is good and I don't think he's going to have the energy to climb all the way up.

Me: And Syan, why are you disagreeing with Asher?

Syan: Because I don't think he would do that because then he would fall on the ground and then he wouldn't even be able to jump.

When the author writes that Jabari loved surprises, S calls out that, "This is kind of making me think that the author is going to give us a surprise." When Jabari is standing at the top of the diving board again, saying "I love surprises," the talking back continues:

K: It looks like he's going to land on the sand because it's from the side angle.

(I had been directing their attention towards the use of perspective in these illustrations, and how we can almost feel as high up as Jabari is.)

R: No, it wouldn't be that.

S: The first time I went up in Mexico there was an eight feet tall.. Like when you went out of the house and down the stairs, on the side there was a balcony with a space and no gate, and down below there was an eight feet drop into the water and you were able to jump off the edge. The first time I tried, I didn't go.

A: I never went off a diving board.

S: It was kind of like a lake.

Towards the end of the book, Jabari turns towards his father to say something and as I go to turn the page, a boy calls out in a reader's voice as if to be Jabari, "It was real

scary!” Another student responds saying that she’s thinking something that might happen next is that he goes up to jump in again.

Teacher Interviews

After conducting individual interviews with six faculty members at the L School, I highlighted relevant phrases from each interview and organized them into the chart below. For grade levels where I interviewed two teachers, one from each of the two classrooms for that grade, I differentiated between each teacher by the color font used.

QUESTION	5-7 (K-1st grade) teachers	7-9 (2nd-3rd grade) teachers	9-11 (5th grade) teacher	Director of Learning for Lower School
What is a read aloud?	<p>Whitney: When I have kids in front of me, I’m reading a story to them, working on reading skills, strategies... interactive. But mostly I’m reading to them.</p> <p>Iana: To me, a read aloud is when I use a book to help convey a message or teaching point that I am sending to my students.</p>	<p>Nora: Anything read out loud, from a book to a magazine.</p> <p>Rebecca: Read alouds are meant to help facilitate the reading comprehension of students.</p>	<p>Jen: It’s a multi sensory experience of hearing a story. Children can be immersed in the story by listening and making a picture in their mind.</p>	<p>Sara: An intentional choice of a book read aloud to children, where the teacher is looking to develop a specific skill.</p>

<p>How do you use read alouds in your classroom</p>	<p>I use them to intro some writing units... Sometimes we do just for fun for holidays, sometimes when they just need a relaxing time. This year it's hard to find the time... We do it during lunch and they can still raise their hand... we hear them continuing the conversation later between each other and us...</p> <p>We use read alouds all of the time!!!! We use them in the morning during reading mini lessons, we use them before we start math, and we use them in the afternoon before transitions! There are zero limitations, we can always make time for a read aloud.</p>	<p>At lunch we do read alouds but it's not a discussion. Sometimes it's as management... In Language Arts it's used to spark discussion and illustrate strategies.</p> <p>Unfortunately, there is not enough time for read alouds. There is a curriculum to follow, multi subjects to teacher, which leaves NO room for read alouds - just scrunching it up here and there, isn't as effective or as powerful as it should be.</p>	<p>Unfortunately right now there's not enough time in our schedule for it. But typically I use mentor texts when I'm teaching a reading or writing skill.</p>	<p>I love to use read alouds for content area learning.</p> <p>For me it was always very important and it did mean shortening my lessons sometimes. A lot of it was about figuring it out and finding out how to budget my time. A lot of teachers spend a lot of time introducing and explaining a concept and really you just need to give kids time to go explore this on their own. The time you spend together as a community you can focus on read alouds.</p>
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<p>How do you use the book?</p>	<p>Sometimes I do something totally different than I had planned because of the way they're connecting to it.... That's not listening to your students! Pausing in books is so important too- if you pause and look at them, you need to give them wait time and think time.</p> <p>At times, I use it as a mentor text and therefore stop often to point out some tips/ strategies the author is using.</p>	<p>Sometimes it's just pure comprehension so I'm reading and asking them comprehension questions. Sometimes it's to practice the strategy in a full group, to give the mini lesson. Sometimes it's to point out strategies that an author used.</p> <p>I typically choose books that convey a message or a teaching point</p>	<p>In my planning I find places to stop when I think that students will connect their own lives or what they're learning with the text.</p>	<p>I give kids a follow up work and have the book available for the kids... Sometimes it's just for pleasure: the pleasure piece cannot be underestimated. There's no reason to just not thoroughly enjoy the book. Sometimes teachers can kill the book if they add too much onto it. You don't want to use the book too much.</p>
<p>Do kids ever stop you?</p>	<p>Yeah all the time, to ask questions or make comments... it leads to those teaching moments that you wouldn't have expected.</p> <p>Yes they do! Often! I still remind them to raise a hand though because their excitement will often cause multiple children speaking out at once</p>	<p>Yeah but I think that's part of the procedure.</p> <p>While I encourage my students to raise their hand before they speak during a read aloud, I secretly enjoy the fact that they call out. It's coming from a good place and they love it so much, they just feel the need and urgency to call out.</p>	<p>Yes all the time</p>	<p>Yeah. I think it's a fine balance between losing the rhythm of a book. Like when one kid stops to interrupt and share a story and you lose the rest of the class. Probably more if I pause though... they're more likely to comment if I pause.</p>

Reflections on Practice Centered in Data Analysis

My recordings became the wheels that kept this work going, as they fueled my practice because of the reflective nature they allowed me, and the data collected therefore reflects shifts in my practice that are clearly discernible across time. Below I discuss how my reflections concerned such aspects as, respectively, the practical modifications of both our schedule and the books selected, the gradual release of responsibility model (Miller, 2013) I was implementing, students' seating during read alouds, and the sense of community that our read aloud practice created.

The first shift in the data, and the most memorable one for my students, was marking Dessert Tuesdays on our calendars. Like the sentiment that Rebecca and Jen echoed, teachers in two different grade levels, our schedule left little time for read alouds to be occurring. Prior to speaking with Sara, the Director for Teaching and Learning in the Lower School and essentially what you might refer to as my supervisor, I had made the decision to establish Dessert Tuesdays. Brought back to life by the dearth of talking back that I was noticing amongst my students, I knew I needed to make a change in my teaching schedule. I almost savored this piece of information like it was mine and my students' secret. Gauging the feelings based on my colleagues' sentiments that there simply was not enough time for read alouds, I felt that sharing that not only was I making the time for them to happen, but I also was designating a whole Language Arts period to do so, would be considered blasphemy. Now Sara's words of, "For me it was always very important and it did mean shortening my lessons sometimes. A lot of it was about figuring

it out and finding out how to budget my time” provide the comfort that a teacher’s role in getting read alouds into the curriculum is based upon reworking the time in your schedule to make it work for you. As a new teacher overwhelmed by the demands of the curriculum, it would have been helpful to hear those words at the beginning of the year, and perhaps begun the process of amplifying my students’ voices within the read aloud forum a lot sooner.

Once I recognized that I needed a designated slot for a weekly read aloud, my book selections followed suit, and not only did I begin researching books on my own time, but I also began purchasing books for my own classroom collection. By the fourth and fifth read alouds, I dabbled in follow up work, and unintentionally shifted away from the purposeful talking back during a read aloud that I was trying to achieve. In my excitement over book selection, I selected books that, although heartwarming and full of creative illustrations, did not lend themselves to the same level of engagement that warrants jumping out of your seat because you have something that you need to say. Recognizing that those books shifted us away from the real work I wanted to zoom in on, the next four read alouds moved back to what was happening before and while the book was being read, and how to cultivate that activity.

As I looked back through my data at the end of my field research, I realized that I had been trying to implement a gradual release of responsibility model (Miller, 2013, p. 18), although certainly not a perfect one. I began with the emphasis relying heavily on the teacher modeling stage. This is seen in my comments during my first and second read alouds, *Someday* (Spinelli, 2007) and *The Book With No Pictures* (Novak, 2014), where I

asked specific questions that I had chosen in order to support students in their comprehension of the text. By the third read aloud, I was giving students more responsibility within the practice, as their engagement naturally heightened based on my book selection. The stage where students engage in independent practice and are met with descriptive feedback occurred by the sixth read aloud. This was brought on by a personal reflection that there is a thin line between engagement and unruliness, and in an effort to not let my students get out of hand, I was constantly reminding them to raise their hands. It sounded almost army like! Here I was, a teacher who so desperately wanted her students to be overflowing with things to say back to the book, yet I was scaffolding them to the point where it was not supportive anymore and was limiting them. With each read aloud, it felt like I was inching closer and closer towards what I wanted to achieve, yet somehow missing an element each time. By the last three books, we reworked the expectations of what a read aloud looks like, and as my students sat in a circle with me in it, they shared their thoughts and opinions without raising their hands and while responding to their peers, representing the stage of independent practice. I still interjected my voice at times, to give either the descriptive feedback that Miller refers to, or to direct their attention to some detail that they had not picked up on and I wanted them to discover. Thus, at this last bend of my formal research I felt secure in my read aloud practice and knew that Desert Tuesdays had found its routine.

During the stage of independent practice during those last three read alouds, I experimented with how to make my voice heard within the read aloud. When reading the seventh and ninth book, *Elena's Serenade* (Geeslin, 2004) and *Jabari Jumps* (Cornwall,

2017), I made my voice heard when modeling what the book was making me think or feel. The students' comments during those read alouds seem to be echoing my modeling, demonstrating that my voice was supportive rather than limiting to their thought process. For example, in *Elena's Serenade*, a student notices something in the illustrations that I myself had not even noticed, and urges us to keep an eye out for it as we read on. In another moment, her peer brings up the idea of sexism, a term I'm not sure I would have thought age level appropriate to bring into the conversation. Both of those comments reflected a careful consideration of the text, and both of those comments were prompted by their own observations as readers instead of me directing them towards what they should be looking for or responding to. In contrast, when reading *Last Stop on Market Street* (Pena, 2015) I tried to ask more open ended questions as a way to guide my students without limiting them, but my intentions backfired. The most fruitful conversation came again from a spontaneous talking back that was initiated by a student when thinking about the phrase the Nana says about a tree drinking from a straw. Together with his peers, they debated the accuracy of such a comparison, and their fervor contrasted with a question I posed at the end of the book that asked them to consider how CJ had changed in character throughout the book. Although they did answer my query, that level of genuine excitement and engagement was not the same as when they were the ones calling the shots. From these three read alouds it became clear that my students were ready for their voices to do the real work of talking back, while my voice was ready to only appear as a gentle reminder at times.

Besides for discovering the balance between my voice and my young readers' voices within our read aloud discussions, another element that came to light as being important to a successful read aloud practice is the ability for my students to see the illustrations. What I'm referring to is not just seeing the illustrations as I read the words, but actually physically being close enough to the book so that they could reach out and turn back a page to reference something that happened, or be close enough to see the varying materials that the illustrator is using in order to achieve a collage effect. While reading *Last Stop On Market Street* (Pena, 2015), one student stopped me and inched closer to the book to analyze if a man with a tattoo was the same on both pages; the students were close enough to the cover of *Jabari Jumps* (Cornwall, 2017) to notice that the buildings in the skyline were made from collaged newspaper; and how could I forget Sela recognizing that the sun in *Elena's Serenade* (Geeslin, 2004) would resemble the animal Elena was meeting on that page, her discovery fueled by her ability to come closer and flip further through the pages to confirm her prediction.

I'm highlighting all of the above active engagement that occurred amongst my second graders, yet when I asked my teaching peers how they would define a read aloud, they all left out the students as part of the definition. Explanations like, "To me, a read aloud is when *I use* a book to help convey a message or teaching point that *I am sending* to my student;" "Where *the teacher* is looking to develop a specific skill;" "But mostly *I'm reading to them*," really hit hard. They were all positioning read alouds as a teacher heavy practice, instead of emphasizing the opportunities for talking back that a read aloud offers up to the malleable young minds listening to the book. When discussing how they conduct

a read aloud and in essence use the book while reading, a differentiation between grade levels became clear. Both of the 5-7 teachers, Whitney and Iana, discussed how often they use read alouds in the classroom and how they make room to their students' voices.

Whitney says, "Sometimes I do something totally different than I had planned because of the way they're connecting to it.... That's not listening to your students! Pausing in books is so important too- if you pause and look at them, you need to give them wait time and think time." In contrast, ebbing through the veins of the other teachers' descriptions of how read alouds happen was the desire to model a skill or strategy throughout the book. In essence a read aloud has been conflated with a mentor text in their mind. Why are these teachers of second grade and above not exposing their students to the valuable talking back to a book that a read aloud harnesses? With all this focus on modeling a skill, and emphasizing the teacher's role within the read aloud, I'm left picturing how rigid their read alouds might feel. That is not to say that there was not implicit modeling occurring while I conducted my read alouds, because there most definitely was. For example, as I read *Elena's Serenade* (Geeslin, 2004) and struggled to correctly pronounce the words written in Spanish, I modeled how a reader could flip to the back of the book where there was a glossary that defined each Spanish word, and provided a definition as well. The difference between my view and that of my peers' is that I see read alouds as an entry point into a wealth of rich student led conversations that cannot be summed up by saying, "I'm modeling a skill." There are implicit reading strategies that I know I'm exposing my readers to as I read a book out loud, but that was not my explicit focus during this study. My explicit focus revolved around nurturing rich book discussions, and so my teacher

modeling followed in those footsteps. At the beginning of these stretches of read alouds, my comments alerted my students about book features they could look closer at, such as the illustrations, as well as the power in making connections to the text (Miller, 2013) and their comments brought forth throughout my data reveal that by the end of the nine read alouds, they were noticing elements of the illustrations and commenting about their own textual connections on their own.

Besides for the rich dialogue that my data highlights, it was a love for our practice that developed as well. When a longer read aloud spanned across multiple days, a student commented that, “This is the only kind of leftovers that I like!” and I knew that my work was sinking into their hearts. Our routine created a sense of community amongst my readers, more than was evident during the times when we were not entranced by a book. There was one student in particular, Asher, who had commented before two separate read alouds that he wasn’t sure he was going to like the book (one time it was because he had heard it before, and the other time he was basing it off of the cover illustration); after both read alouds he concluded that he loved them. Before reading *Jabari Jumps* (Cornwall, 2017), his friend turned to him and asked, “Asher, do you think you’re going to like this book?” and we all laughed, knowing that we shared a common experience that no one else would understand (Taberski, 2000).

Beyond establishing a repertoire of personal (or rather, classroom community) jokes, they utilized their conversations to become clarifiers of their own questions. On the pages of *Last Stop On Market Street* (Pena, 2015) there is a blind man sitting on the bus, and a student asked why blind people usually wear sunglasses. Unsure of the answer

myself, I turned towards my students to ponder their own answers. This was *their* conversation, and I did not need to have the final say on their wonderings, especially when I was unsure of them myself. We suggested some possible reasons, and launched into a larger discussion that left a big question looming of “Do blind people wear sunglasses because it helps them or because of how it makes other people feel?” When thinking about the words of the teachers whom I interviewed, this unplanned digression does not fit into their view of read alouds, yet it is the most beautiful element that a read aloud has to offer. Comments like this one came up throughout my nine read alouds that I never could have planned, and simply by opening up the forum for them to share their thoughts. Whitney, the Kindergarten teacher, said that sometimes what she plans out for the kids is not applicable because they notice totally different things. John Dewey, leader of the progressive movement in education, writes in *Experience & Education* (1938) that the outdated view of teachers was that they held all of the information, and that the students’ job was to absorb all of it passively. Dewey called instead for an interaction between student and teacher, holding that what is being taught is not a finished product. In essence, Dewey’s theory as applied to read alouds is then calling for an interactive read aloud practice, where the students’ voices are valued as part of the key learning experience. If we go into a read aloud so focused in on what we want the students to achieve and do not make room for their own comments in addition to our goals, we’re closing off a whole world of opportunity for talking back and taking over.

In an effort not to sugarcoat my practice, I need to highlight that of course their comments were not always perfect representations of how I envision my students making

sense of the text. Miller (2013) touches upon this concept when introducing this work to her students as well, acknowledging that learning which connections assist us in comprehending the text is a process in of itself that needs to be experienced amongst the students. A prime example of this is how while reading *Last Stop On Market Street* (Pena, 2015), my students launched into a tangential conversation about characters in other books whose names were similar to CJ's, and they needed redirection back into the book. I still appreciated their text to text connections that were evident in those comparisons, but recognized that from a behavioral standpoint I was losing them to the abyss of silliness.

Implications and Findings

The Teacher's Role

Allow me to start with my most groundbreaking realization from this research: possessing an innate love for read alouds is indeed second nature to a teacher, but the skill to implement them is one that has to be learned. Perhaps reading out loud a book and engaging in some skill focused work is the element that is second nature, but cultivating a community of readers who respond to text in an enthusiastic and thoughtful manner, such as one that Miller describes (2013) is something that takes practice. Once there is a will to establish it into your curriculum, the way to do so becomes clearer. The way often includes finding the time within your schedule to do so, and the actual books that will be the stars of this practice. For me, it meant putting aside my Language Arts curriculum for one day and devoting it to our read aloud practice. I was not satisfied at the prospect of

just tagging on a read aloud at the end of a lesson here and there whenever we had extra time, because that time would never allow for the amount of talking back between the pages that I wished for my students to be engaged in. As far as book selection goes, I quickly realized that to assume that my classroom had a mecca of read aloud books was a big mistake. I ventured into the Bank Street library for inspiration, my graduate school at the time that this research was taking place, and began purchasing my own copies of certain books whenever I fell in love with one of them. With the time to do so, and the books in my hand, my reflective nature along the way allowed me to work on cultivating my practice so that I was supporting my students in talking back to the books without stifling their comments or limiting them to a classroom protocol of raised hands.

Read Alouds as Springboards for Future Teaching Points

With the doors open into their young minds, their comments revealed larger issues that I needed to pursue at a later a time, such as a discussion around race. In *Last Stop On Market Street* (Pena, 2015), a student made a comment about how because the characters are black, they could not afford to have a car. Although this comment shocked me, I realized that it was simply a learning moment that we needed to pursue further (and that I needed to expose them to read alouds that revolved around characters of different ethnicities and from different cultures). While reading *Elena's Serenade*, a boy made a comment about sexism, and another student confused it with racism. As second graders who all have educated parents, it was clear that they were hearing these terms mentioned, but were not able to associate them with the appropriate context. My read alouds then

become a tool to research what topics were on my students' minds, and what they were ready to learn next, including, as well as beyond, the Language Arts curriculum.

To Follow Up With a Post Reading Activity, or Not: That is the Question

Along the way I discovered that I found myself continuously grappling with the idea of a follow up activity after a read aloud, given Mem Fox's words about just reading the book for the sake of the book itself. In the moment, I felt that a balance between both options should occur, as for read aloud numbers four and five I did introduce a follow up activity that spanned multiple Language Arts lessons. Those books were both by Leo Lionni, and it's interesting to note that the before reading (making predictions) and during reading discussions were not as lengthy as previous books, and I'm wondering if that aspect naturally lent itself to an extension after the read aloud. In other words, did I anticipate that the talking back during the book would not be plentiful, and so I compensated for it by implementing an activity afterwards that would engage the students in another way? This experience was unique to Lionni's shorter and less complex books, as the read aloud that I read the following week, *The Art of Miss Chew*, spurred the kind of talk that I keep chattering on about. As an educator, this alerted me to the fact that each book itself presents opportunities for talking back and taking over, and selection is crucial. Since my primary focus was on developing the quality and amount of talk generated while reading a book, I made the decision not to return to focusing on follow up work for the remainder of this study.

A Lasting Love is Established

Alas, where we went from here was just as magical as the adventure itself, as this was not the end of our read alouds or of our reading community. At a recent school gala, parents kept coming up to me and telling me that their kids come home asking to buy certain books, and that they are perplexed by why their kids are so insistent on these books specifically. Now, as these adults proceeded to list off names of books we had used in our read alouds, I thought my face would get stuck in a permanent smile or I would burst out into spontaneous tears of happiness. My students had been going home and extending their love for literature into wanting to buy their own copies of these books! I began my research motivated by my student from last year whose heart was captured by *The Night Gardener* (Fan & Fan, 2016) and I longed to plant the seeds for that same level of love within the hearts of my future students, and here were adults telling me that I could reap the fruits of my labor because I had indeed been successful. Furthering my delight, I had the third graders in my classroom (who I teach other subjects but not Language Arts to) asking me for a designated read aloud day as well.

In the penultimate moment that brought all of this work together, my students and I set out to rework our classroom library. When discussing how she set the scene for a purposeful reading curriculum, Sharon Taberski (2000) writes that, “The organization and look of our rooms, the materials we use, and the way we structure the day send a powerful message to children and parents about our attitudes towards teaching...” (p. 33). At the beginning of this research, I outlined how there was no designated library space within our classroom, as well as how a read aloud curriculum was lacking. Reflecting on Taberski’s

words, I can now say that both aspects were representative of one another. However, with the work I had been doing in implementing a purposeful read aloud practice into our weekly schedule, our room was ready to reflect that shift in our classroom values. We physically moved around the shelves in the classrooms, pushing bookshelves back and forth until we found the right spots. We cordoned off a cozy alley shaped area, with bookshelves framing both sides. I hung up a colorful poster that said, “Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are” and created a librarian job chart for my students to maintain responsibility over the organization of our library. We placed two cozy chairs within the space, and within the span of one afternoon we had found a place where our love for reading could settle in comfortably whenever we wanted to.

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Appendix of Children's Read Alouds

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