

Out Loud Reading: Is it Beneficial?

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 Submitted June 2000

Community Context

I did my research project in Glasgow Middle School, located on the borders of Alexandria and Annandale, Virginia. The school was formerly known as a rough school, but in the last five years has started to have a better reputation. The areas from which the students come include mainly low-income families, mostly who come from apartment complexes. However, new housing has been built in the last five years bringing in students from high-income families. Before the construction of this housing, there were mostly low-income families with very few high-income families within the school boundaries. With the influx of this newer group of students test scores improved, detentions and suspensions have been down, and the overall feeling at the school improved from one that focused more on failure to one that centers around achievement. However, challenges still remain.

School Context

There were approximately 1200 students, ranging from grades six through eight with 400-450 per grade level. The overall population of the school was distributed among the following groups:

African American - 12%	American Indian/Multiracial - 2%
Asian - 21%	Caucasian - 29%
Hispanic - 37%	

The year I completed this project, Glasgow had students from 67 different countries with 31 different languages spoken. The percentage of students in special needs or regular classes was as follows:

ESL (English as a Second Language students) - 35%
GTC (Gifted and talented students as a center) - 11%
LDR (Learning Disability students) - 23%
RS (Regular students) - 34%

Some of the students had more than one of these labels but could only be put into classes according to the most prominent need or label. One other important factor was that 63% of the students are on free or reduced lunch, which helped to understand the economic status for the majority of the students.

There are approximately 110 teachers at Glasgow, 74 female and 36 male. There are 83 Caucasian, ten African American, seven Hispanic, three Asian and three multiracial. This ratio does not coincide with our population of

students. The school put a big emphasis on S.O.L. (Standards of Learning) for the state of Virginia and P.O.S. (Program of Studies) set by Fairfax County. Teachers were held accountable for ensuring that students were taught the information they need to pass these tests. At Glasgow a big emphasis was also placed on Reading scores. Each year they were given the D.R.P., a reading test that was taken at beginning and end of the year. Three years ago the Reading scores at Glasgow were some of the lowest in the county. Because of this, the principal allotted 45 minutes of Reading time each day for sixth graders. Since this time, reading scores improved greatly and this reading schedule was still followed.

Classroom Context for Research Project

The class I chose to do my research in was my 6th grade reading class. Out of the eight students in the class, seven were Hispanic and one was Caucasian. Most of these students had been in the Spanish Immersion program for the past couple of years. These students took their Math and Science classes in Spanish and took their Social Studies, Language Arts, PE, and Elective classes in English. Out of the 19 students in the 6th grade Spanish Immersion program at Glasgow, these eight were the lowest readers of the group. The others are reading at or above grade level. Also, out of the 19 students, all seven of the Hispanic students are in this lower reading class. The other higher level students were all Caucasian. I wondered if the gap in reading levels might have been due to the fact that many of the Hispanic students were also ESL students. In fact, they had not been placed into the Spanish Immersion program until 3rd or 4th grade. The Caucasian students had been all placed in the program in 1st grade.

As I mentioned earlier, all 6th grade students had a 45-minute block of time set aside just for reading. My reading class had eight students whose DRP scores indicated they were reading between a 3rd and a 4th grade level. At the beginning of the year their DRP reading levels were the following (from lowest to highest): 3.4, 3.7, 4.0, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8, 4.8, and 4.8.

During the 45 minutes of my class time each day, 20-25 minutes was used for silent reading and taking AR (Accelerated Reader) tests, 10-15 minutes was used for reading instruction and 10-15 minutes was used for out loud reading. Glasgow used the Accelerated Reader program, which assigned a certain reading level to each book and had tests set up on the computer to take for these books. Students were assigned a reading level according to the DRP test, and as they did well on these tests, the reading levels were increased. If they did poorly on tests, the reading level assigned was decreased until they did sufficiently well on these tests.

In general, the overall behavior of the class was very good. I set up a routine at the beginning of the school year. When the students entered the class, they were to immediately start silent reading. When we had instructional and out-loud reading time, the students were usually eager to participate. This was a small group and they seemed to feel comfortable with one another. There are a

few that communicated less than the others, but when they were called upon they responded and participated in the discussion.

During these times, there was a great deal of student-teacher interaction and some student-student interaction. The students seemed content with one another and were not afraid to say what they thought. There was a relaxed atmosphere in the class, mostly due to the small class size and the students' knowledge that they were all pretty much on the same level. Because of this, we had some really good discussions and students were very open to learning and sharing.

I begin to think about what I might do to bring these students up to a higher level of reading. I have always liked to read books out loud to my classes. I decided to explore an approach that fit with my strengths as a teacher. I have always enjoyed theater and acting out different characters in the book. When reading out loud, I have tried to make the books come alive as I read them and the students have always seem to respond positively to this. I also noticed that my students seemed to do well on the tests they have taken on the books we have read out loud as a class.

Issue/Problem

For my research project, I wanted to really find out if reading out loud to the students was beneficial. I wanted to find out if students really did as well as or even better than overall on tests taken on books read out loud as opposed to books they have read silently on their own. I also wanted to find out about how students felt about silent reading as opposed to out loud reading. Did they really enjoy being read to? Would they rather not be read to and just read to themselves? Did they feel that they did better on tests for books read silently or read out loud? Why?

I also wanted to observe the behaviors of the students as they were read to and as they were reading silently. Was there a difference? Did they have better attitudes at one time over another? Were there mixed feelings in the class? Did some students enjoy reading to themselves and others enjoy being read to? For my own benefit as I teacher, I really wanted to find out if the 10-15 minutes I was spending on reading books out loud to my students was truly helping them. If so, I would continue to do this but if not, I wanted to find a different activity that was more helpful to the students. I wanted to make sure that I was using my reading time wisely, but more importantly that the time I was spending reading out loud to the students was really helping them.

Literature Review

Most of the information I researched for this project stated that out loud reading was very beneficial. This followed my own thinking and helped me see others who had done their own research with reading.

I focused on my role as a motivator of students. Jim Trelease (1989) states that "reading aloud is motivational, the desire is the 'lead role.' It is the teacher's job to be the leader, the motivator, the simulator, the one who creates an exciting atmosphere. Reading aloud can provide this atmosphere, this

motivation." Hearing books read aloud by an enthusiastic teacher is an important motivating factor in helping children become readers (Huck, 1979). Teachers influence children by interacting with reading material to increase comprehension (Rumelhart, 1984). R. Smith (1980) echoed this by explaining that

most people, regardless of age, can be captivated by a good story teller. Children are especially susceptible to the charm of a good story being read by a good reader. Therefore, teachers should consider the reading of good stories to children as one of their major responsibilities in the development of positive attitudes toward reading.

Reading aloud will motivate students to embark on other areas of interest (Casteel, 1989). Students are given an opportunity to enjoy reading when teachers motivate them and read aloud (Johns, 1978).

I also explored techniques for what I might do as I was reading out loud to my students. Thompkins & Weber (1983), describe a five step teaching strategy to direct students' attention to features of a book while reading aloud:

1. Read the title aloud, show the cover and/or illustrations and ask the students to predict what they think the story is about.
2. Read the first few pages, stop and ask the students to predict what will happen next or what a character will say.
3. Ask the students why they made their predictions.
4. Read the next few pages and have students confirm/reject predictions.
5. Continue reading the selection repeating steps two, three, and four.

A.S. Artley (1975) surveyed 100 junior and senior education majors and asked them to remember what turned them on or off about reading when they were in elementary school. He noted, "The greatest number said that teachers reading to the class on any level was the thing they remembered and enjoyed the most."

There are many benefits to reading out loud to students. L. Lamme (1976) and Sloan, (n.d.) noted that many educators assume that once children know how to read, there is no longer a need to read orally to them. Since permanent reading habits develop between the ages of ten and twelve, it is crucial that educators do everything possible to instill a love and respect for reading in students during that time period.

Kemmel & Segal (1988), stated that reading aloud to children builds the desire to read. They stated, "Reading is one of the most basic educational practices. It is through reading aloud that children learn that reading for pleasure is worthwhile." G.L. Macroll (1989) in his research found support for the following statements about reading aloud to students and how it benefits the total reading program:

1. Helps them get off to a better start in reading.
2. Improves their listening skills.
3. Increases their abilities to read independently.
4. Expands their vocabularies.
5. Helps them become better speakers.
6. Improves their abilities as writers.
7. Improves reading comprehension.
8. Improves quantity and quality of independent reading.

Carol Fisher & Barbara Alleman (1984) have done research on what they call the "Read Aloud Remedy." They have developed a list of ten reasons to read aloud to children of all ages:

1. Reading aloud introduces pupils to new words.
2. Reading aloud introduces pupils to more complex sentence structure.
3. Reading aloud exposes them to more standard forms of sentence structure.
4. Reading aloud exposes pupils to various styles of written language.
5. Reading aloud develops a sense of story.
6. Reading aloud motivates children to refine reading skills.
7. Reading aloud provides structure and motivation for creative writing.
8. Reading aloud serves as a springboard to discussions or creative activities.
9. Reading aloud enriches general knowledge.
10. Reading aloud adds pleasure to the day.

According to the Commission on Reading in *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985), "reading aloud is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading."

Data Collection

With this list of benefits in mind, I began watching my students more closely. I chose to analyze the behavior of the students by writing in my journal least twice a week on everything I observed about behaviors in the classroom. I not only observed their reactions when they were silent reading, but when they were being read to as well. I also observed reactions to class discussions, instruction, and questions about books that they were reading and being read to.

I also kept records of all the tests that students took on books including books that they read silently and books that I read to them. I had students keep a hard copy of the tests so that each time they took one they had to write the date, title of book, genre of book, number of questions on the test, reading level of book, and percentage scored on the test. There were also records kept on the main computer system at school, but we have had many problems with it and I thought it safest to also keep a hard copy. The hard copy was also beneficial so students could see progress or digressions at a glance by looking at the record

they were filling in. I have them keep the records for the whole year, but for this project the results are from tests taken from September 1999 until May 2000.

At the end of the project, in May 2000, I gave the students a survey. After having Reading class for the past 7 months, I wanted to find out about their attitudes towards reading, specifically silent reading versus out loud reading. The questions I asked students on the survey are included in the "Results" later on in the paper. I told the students to be completely honest in their answers so that the answers would help me have the best Reading class possible. After reading the results of the survey, I think for the most part the students were honest.

Results from Data Collected

Results from my journal entries. I want to share the following information that I observed and wrote about over the past months. First, I want to write about what I observed during my out loud reading. Over the year, we were able to finish reading five novels out loud as a class. The levels of the five books we read in order were: 4.5, 5.0, 5.1, and 5.4, and 5.7. All five books were above the reading level that the students came with into the class. I chose higher level books with the hope we could discuss any difficult parts as a class and the students would do well. While reading out loud to the students, I used the following strategies to help with comprehension:

1. Prediction questions - I would ask students to predict the next part of the story. I followed the steps of Thompkins & Weber I mentioned earlier in the literature I researched.
2. Questions from the day before- I would ask students questions about what had happened in the reading from the day before.
3. Summaries from the day before-I would ask for students to give me a summary about what had happened the day before when we read.

I also read the books using added inflection in my voice, stopped for more difficult vocabulary words, helped students with strategies for sounding out words, and stopped in the middle of reading to summarize and predict. The students seemed the most interested when we used these strategies and for the most part responded very well by volunteering and sharing answers with the class. I tried to watch and observe students as much as possible as I was reading. Most students during out loud reading were intent and interested. They would laugh at the appropriate parts, gasp, sigh or protest at other parts and overall seemed truly involved in the books I read to them. I rarely found students talking as I read, and if I did, I would always ask them about what I just read and that usually got them back on task. Whenever I had to stop reading in the middle of the chapter because class was over, the students were disappointed and wanted to keep reading. They would even ask me at different times of the day in different classes if we could continue reading the book, especially during "really good parts", as they put it. Whenever I asked for summaries from the day

before, I never had a problem finding volunteers to share them. Out of the eight students, five of them could tell me about summaries without ever having a problem. The other three could for the most part, but would occasionally look somewhat lost and not really remember what happened. Of these three, they would admit to sometimes not paying attention or not understanding what had been read. These three were also the students who came into the class with the lowest reading scores.

Whenever we predicted something that was going to happen, it always seemed to grab their attention immediately. I could tell some students really thought out their predictions because they were logical and followed along with what had already been read. Others had more illogical predictions. Regardless of their prediction, when we came to the part in the story to reveal the answer, all students were paying attention. When we got to that point, there were always comments like, "I knew it!" or "I was totally wrong!" etc. I know making predictions helped to hold their interest.

When the students were silent reading I noticed that for the most part they seemed interested in the books they were reading. I saw pages turning and faces interested in what was going on. At times, I had trouble with the positions they chose to read in. Some would put their head on the desk and read facing sideways. Others would put their head on the tip of the desk and hold the book below the desk to read.

Usually, I would call attention to the position they were using as they read. Then, I would ask them if they really thought they could get the most out of the book in their current position. They would usually change positions after I said something. It really made me wonder if the position they read in really affected comprehension. There was really no way I could tell just by looking at them, unless they were sleeping or something. I think this would be a good study to do in the future. Does the position students use to read affect reading comprehension? This was something I thought about over the year, and still think about.

While the students were silent reading, I did notice that some were looking off into space at times and were not reading. I would usually walk next to them and ask them what they had just read. They seemed to get back on track quickly when I did this. It made me wonder how often it happens when I do not catch them and how much of silent reading time is spent daydreaming as opposed to really reading. I noted several times in my journal and stated to the class that I hoped they were using some of the same reading strategies that we did when we were out loud reading. Some assured me that they were, but it is tough to determine if they really were.

Results from students' tests taken on the books they read - Overall the results from the tests taken showed that students did better on the books read out loud to them, regardless of reading level, than on the books they read silently. The results were as follows:

Test average for:	Silently read books	Out loud books
(Hispanic male) Student #1-	72%	90%

(Hispanic female)	Student #2-	60%	93%
(Hispanic male)	Student #3-	67%	83%
(Hispanic male)	Student #4-	92%	97%
(Caucasian female)	Student #5-	88%	93%
(Hispanic female)	Student #6-	96%	100%
(Hispanic female)	Student #7-	98%	97%
(Hispanic male)	Student #8-	74%	90%
Overall class average-		80.9%	92.8%

Results from student survey taken in class. I am going to list the questions and then quote the students that had answers that were the most revealing as to how the overall class felt:

1. What have you liked about Reading class this year?

"I liked it because I got to practice my reading because over the summer I didn't read any books."

"I liked silent reading and choosing my own books to read."

"I liked when the teacher read to us and they are great books."

"I liked only read alouds."

2. What have you disliked?

"Sometimes it gets too long and boring."

3. Do you prefer silent reading or having a book read to you? Why?

"I prefer a read aloud because you get to laugh and it is entertaining and you get to express your feelings."

"I prefer silent reading because I can read at my own pace and if I don't understand a part I can read it again."

"I prefer a read aloud because it sounds more interesting than reading to yourself."

4. What have you liked about silent reading? Disliked?

"I disliked that sometimes I lose track of where I am."

"I liked it because it is very silent and I can concentrate better."

"I liked that we could read books that interest us without loud noises."

"I disliked it when it was too quiet because that distracts me."

5. What have you liked about out loud reading? Disliked?

"I liked that it makes you pay more attention to the book because you are not the one reading."

"I disliked that sometimes the teacher goes too fast."

"I liked it because I understand a lot more that when I read silent."

"I liked it because you can hear differences when there are different characters and it is more fun."

6. Do you usually do better on reading tests for books you have read silently or books that were read out loud to you? Why?

"Out loud books because I don't get lost on a page."

"Silently read books because if I don't understand something I can read that part again."

"Out loud books because I understand better than when it is silent and I'm

reading to myself. Sometimes I get lost."

7. What should I change about reading next year?

"Read more read alouds."

"Read more out loud books than silent reading"

8. Do you like to read? 7 students said "yes". 1 student said "no".

9. How often do you read? Most students said 30 minutes/day. Some said up to 2 hours.

10. Do you read for pleasure? 3 students said "yes". 5 students said "no".

11. Do you like to be read to? 6 students said "yes". 2 students said "sometimes".

12. Do you think reading is only a school activity? Everyone said "no".

13. When someone reads to you what do you do or think about?

"I think about the book and I pretend I am a character of the book."

"I picture what is going on in the book."

"I try to picture the scene in the book".

Results taken from DRP tests taken in the middle of the year (February)

The students took another DRP test in February to determine if any progress had been made with their reading levels. The following scores are the result:

DRP reading level determined:		September Test	February Test	May Test
(Hispanic male)	Student #1-	3.4	4.2	4.3
(Hispanic female)	Student #2-	3.7	3.9	4.6
(Hispanic male)	Student #3-	4.3	5.0	6.2
(Hispanic male)	Student #4-	3.7	3.6	3.8
(Caucasian female)	Student #5-	4.6	5.4	5.9
(Hispanic female)	Student #6-	4.4	5.2	5.8
(Hispanic female)	Student #7-	4.6	5.2	5.8
(Hispanic male)	Student #8-	4.8	5.4	5.4
Overall class average-		4.28	4.74	5.22

Conclusion: How Do I Interpret Data? / How Will Data Affect my Teaching?

After reviewing the results from the literature I researched and the data I collected, I have concluded that it is beneficial to read out loud to students. I will continue to have students silent read and also have out loud reading time in my Reading class. Student scores have shown that out loud reading is beneficial and in most cases students do better on the tests taken for books read out loud than on tests taken for silently read books. I do not know all the reasons for this, but I think it is safe to say that higher comprehension levels were reached when students were able to discuss situations and asked questions as a book was read. Out loud reading was also a good way to model desired strategies for silent reading or any reading the students do on their own. When the students

received models of strategies as a book was being read, they were able to see how to use the strategy during their own reading.

I was surprised to see just how much better some students did on tests for books read out loud than on books read silently. It is not because the silently read books were more difficult because most of them were lower reading levels than the out loud read books. Many of the students are not comprehending and retaining the information when they are reading silently. More of my time needs to be spent on modeling strategies for what to do when they silent read. Unfortunately, it is difficult to monitor if students are using strategies, but the more you model them, the more likely the students are to use them. I am considering using even more time of the Reading class to read out loud and model these strategies for the students. In some cases, students did equally well on tests taken for both out loud books and silently read books, but they rarely did worse on them. Other studies in the literature I researched and shared also confirm the benefits of out loud reading. For this reason I am convinced that regardless of the student's level, reading out loud to them is beneficial. Regardless of reading level, students achieved comprehension about what was going on in the books read out loud. This happened much less in silently read books. The goal as a teacher is to have the students comprehending books at similar levels regardless of whether it is read out loud or silently. Until I achieve this, I will continue to spend more time reading out loud and modeling strategies while still allowing students to read silently to practice newly learned strategies. I feel students will do even better on both tests if I do this.

The results of the DRP test taken in February and May show that students continued to progress in their reading levels during the year. Some students progressed much more quickly than others. From this study, you cannot say whether silent out loud reading was responsible for this. You can only conclude that having 45 minutes of reading each day was definitely beneficial. The overall average of the class reading level at the beginning of the year was 4.28. By the end of the year, it was 5.22. As a class, scores went up a grade level which is definitely positive. Most students are still not up to their grade level, but have at least made a big jump in that direction.

Some of the Hispanic students, even though they were ESL, improved more than a grade level over the year and did very well on both silent and out loud read books. Others did not improve a grade level and did poorly on silently read books, but better on out loud read books. The only conclusion I can make from this is that students, regardless of race, culture or school-given labels, start a school year at different levels. We can never assume because of race or because a student is ESL or some other label that a student is going to achieve more or less than another student. Putting labels on students can make a teacher think that a student might not be able to achieve as much or should be able to achieve more. In some instances this is the case, but as seen in the results of my reading class, this does not always happen. Many times, regardless of level, students will rise to the challenge presented to them. As teachers, we need to try to challenge our students sufficiently to bring out their

potential. We have to be careful of labels or judging students because of race or culture.

Finally, this study showed me that having 45 minutes of reading everyday was beneficial to students. In just five months most of my students went up a full grade level in their reading levels. Students who came into the class with the lowest reading levels did not seem to improve as much as the higher level readers. My goal for next year is to continue to try strategies to help the lowest level students in my class achieve a higher rate of success. Some success is being achieved now, but more can be done to achieve even more. I need to determine more ways to help them find the success they need.

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