Reading Aloud:

Companion Reader vs. No Companion Reader

An Experimental Research Study

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Children begin school with various reading experiences. There are children who begin school with rich experiences of parents reading to them on a daily basis. On the other hand, there are children with hardly any experiences at all. Children who come from homes that provide rich experiences enter school with a large vocabulary while children with less exposure to reading experiences enter school with a much smaller vocabulary.

Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard (2000) stated that The Commission on Reading concluded that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23). Some children enter school with well over 1,000 hours of being read aloud to by parents while others enter school with less than 20 hours of being read aloud to by parents.

Being read to has many benefits for children. Through this read aloud interaction children:

- Build vocabulary
- Develop oral language
- Develop written language
- Develop social skills
- Develop phonological skills
- Begin to make connections between their world and that of the text
- Begin to question the text being read

Theses benefits help the children from primary grades well into intermediate and high school years (Honig & Shin (2001), Morrow & Smith (1990), and Burgess (2002).

What is reading aloud?

Reading aloud is a parent, adult, or teacher choosing a book and reading it to a child. During a read aloud the person reading the story guides the listener and helps him or her become an active participant by asking questions and responding to pictures, meaning, and language. The reader assists the listener in making connections between text and personal experiences.

> "Reading aloud is the foundation of the early literacy framework. By being immersed in a variety of well-chosen texts children not only learn to love stories and reading but they also learn about written language. Children assimilate a sense of structure of written language and can produce it in a way that sounds like reading and approximates text. It allows the teacher to demonstrate ways to make personal connections and comparisons with books that children use for interactions in literature circles and forms a foundation for other reading and writing activities" (Fountas & Pinnell,1996).

Benefits of reading aloud to children

Reading aloud to children both in the home and in the classroom is a practice that has been recommended for decades. Durkin (1996) found that children who came to school already knowing how to read had been influenced in many ways by their parents' literacy activities, including having been read to by their parents (Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard, 2000).

Beck & McKeown (2001) state that the most valuable aspect of the read-aloud activity is that it gives children experience with decontextualized language, requiring them to make sense of ideas that are about something beyond the here and now (Cochran-Smith, 1984). Children can understand more words than they can read therefore they can understand more challenging text when it is read aloud.

Through picture book sharing with very young children, caregivers boost prereading skills, attention span, word comprehension, and pleasure with books (Honih & Shin, 2001). Honih and Shin state that while they recite cadenced poetic words or nonsense rhymes in picture books and stories, teachers stretch young children's imagination. Honih and Shin also state that as teachers offer new vocabulary words and labels, caregivers focus infant listening skills, thus increasing brain synapse development (Nash, 1997).

As teachers and caregivers read to young children, they develop cognitive and linguistic growth as well as early reading skills. Children also begin to develop listening skills and social skills. They begin to answer questions from memory and they have the opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts. Children begin to learn skills such as turning the pages of a book, responding to questions from a story, and having a conversation regarding the story being read in which both the reader and the listener take turns in commenting about the story.

Familiarity and repetition of favorite and interesting books also helps a young child develop pleasure from reading books. Hearing vocabulary used in stories over and over again and seeing the pictures, also repeatedly, builds children's confidence in interactions with reading. Their vocabulary grows as they listen to the repeated words and they use it to discuss the story.

Chomsky (1972) showed that children who have been read to increase in their linguistic development (Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard, 2000). Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, (1986) found that children acquainted with books also develop understanding about letter/sound relationships that peers who are not read to do not develop as quickly or as fully (Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard, 2000). Students who have had early exposure to reading develop improved comprehension, are able to tell well-formed stories, and are able to infer cause-effect relations in text.

Teachers tend to often read aloud to students in the primary grades. Unfortunately, this tends to happen less often as students move up into the intermediate grades and even less in high school. As students moved into the middle grades, teachers tended to use books for informational text or chapter books as they read aloud (Albright & Ariail, 2005). In part, teachers in the intermediate grades and above indicate that they do not have time to read aloud to their students, not realizing the benefit that this could have. The teachers who read aloud to their students did more so to model fluency and make text more accessible to students. Research indicates that motivation, interest, and engagement are often enhanced when teachers read aloud to middle school students (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Students feel that the teacher is helping to make the text more comprehensible and more interesting as the text is read aloud.

Abundantly clear is the value of reading to students, and children benefit in many ways from this practice, both academically and emotionally (Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard, 2000). Cosgrove (1988) showed both attitudinal and achievement effects of having a teacher read orally to fourth- and sixth-grade students (Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard, 2000).

Reading aloud has been shown to benefit students both in the primary grades as well as in the intermediate grades. Exposing students to a variety of genres in the classroom throughout all grades will help increase reading development and skills. Teachers should read aloud to their students on a regular basis to meet their literacy needs.

Vocabulary acquisition during read alouds

Senechal and Monique (1995) stated that young children have a remarkable facility to acquire new vocabulary (Carey, 1978) and it is estimated that during the first 6 years of life, children will have acquired 8,000 words of English (Templin, 1957). Senechal and Monique (1995) found that there was a relationship between preschoolers' prior word knowledge and their

ability to acquire new reading skills from events that occur naturally. They also found that exposure to storybook reading differed among students with different word knowledge. They stated that direct instruction accounts for some vocabulary acquisition during the preschool years as it does with older children, but a substantial number of lexical items must be acquired incidentally to account for the large gains during the preschool period (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987) and one situation in which young children learn words incidentally is while listening to adults read storybooks (Robbins & Ehri, 1994). Vocabulary acquisition can take place while children are listening to stories and there is no direct teaching taking place.

In Senechal and Monique's (1995) experiment, they found that the more exposure children had to a story and targeted vocabulary in the story, the more they would be able to retrieve the targeted vocabulary. Children were able to retrieve vocabulary when questioned about the story. The frequency in the readings of the story and the number of times the vocabulary was used in the story also played an important role in vocabulary acquisition.

Senechal and Monique (1995) suggested that frequent book reading at home makes a significant contribution to vocabulary acquisition over and above the influence of parental education level and individual differences in analytic intelligence. They felt that children who had a greater vocabulary prior to the beginning of the experiment were able to gain more vocabulary than children who began the experiment with less vocabulary. These findings are important because they demonstrate that the frequency of book reading events in the home account for significant portions of the variance in children's vocabulary knowledge (Senechal & Monique. 1995). Frequent book readings make a significant, albeit modest, contribution to vocabulary development (Senechal and Monique, 1995).

As Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) stated in the beginning of their article, reading aloud has been a cornerstone of literacy development and classroom practice for over a century (Huey, 1908; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). They also agree that by listening to stories, children learn about relationships between print and speech (Clay, 1991, 1993), oral and written registers (Feitelson, Goldstein, & Share, 1993) and nonstandard and standard forms of language (Cullinan, Jaggar, & Strickland, 1974). Reading aloud serves as a primary transmitter of cultural capital and gives students access to cultural literacy regardless of reading ablility or exposure to language and books in the home and community (Cazden, 1992).

Reading aloud helps students gain significant vocabulary as well as gives them access to enriching literacy regardless of their reading ability or the amount of book exposure in their home or school. During read alouds children develop an understanding of literary elements and they also develop an understanding for the content area that is being presented.

Based on the information gathered, it was found that teachers read aloud to their students more for enjoyment than for instruction. Approximately 11% to 28% of teachers said they read for instructional purposes. According to Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) teachers read aloud to simulate discussion, build comprehension, impart knowledge, and build vocabulary (Lickteig & Russell, 1993). During the read aloud, children who participated in the discussion and interacted with the teacher and the text improved with reading skills more than did children who just listened to the reading and had no interaction with the text (Brabham and Lynch-Brown, 2002). Teacher's reading styles that invited children into the text and allowed them to participate with what they were reading gave children the opportunity to develop their reading skills and their vocabulary.

In one of the books used in the experiment performed by Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002), children's vocabulary acquisition showed a significant gain after the read aloud by teachers who used interaction and performance reading styles as compared to teachers who just read the story with no interaction from students. While the vocabulary acquisition showed significant increase the comprehension scores did not show increase from the read alouds.

According to Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) the effects of reading-aloud styles were statistically significant and consistent for vocabulary acquisition scores for informational storybooks while just reading produced the smallest vocabulary gains with greater gains for performance reading and the greatest gains for interactional reading. They also stated the following: "results from this experimental comparison of reading-aloud styles support the hypotheses that verbally mediated, interactional and performance reading-aloud styles are more effective for vocabulary acquisition than is just reading aloud with no discussion. The findings confirm teacher that explanations and student discussions are critical factors that benefit students' learning of words and concepts and construction of meaning from texts read aloud in the early grades of elementary school" (Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002), p. not available).

In reading Brabham and Lynch-Brown's article (2002) and viewing their findings it is clear that reading alone to students does not have the same benefit as reading and discussing the book with children. Talking about the books and the information that was read seems to help children with understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and knowledge. The style of the teacher reading aloud is also key to children's outcome of the read alouds.

Brett, Rothlein and Hurley (1999) stated that offering simple explanations of words in the context of an interesting story is a practical and effective method of vocabulary instruction. The experiment they conducted was to see how much gain would take place with vocabulary

acquisition when children were read aloud to with discussion and explanations of target words. The authors took two groups of children to test their hypothesis. Both groups of children were read two stories, one group had the stories read to them with explanations of the target words and the other group had the stories read to them with no explanation of the target words. The results indicated that there was a significant gain in vocabulary acquisition with the group whose stories were read along with explanations of target words. The authors found that incidental learning of vocabulary took place when children had repeated readings of the stories, but when the explanations of the target words were added to the repeating of the reading, the vocabulary gains more than doubled.

Another point made in the above article was the use of repetition in both the reading of the story and the number of times a word was used in the story being read. The authors found that the more times the word occurred in the story read the more likely it was that the children would learn the word. They found that children were able to recall words three months after the word had been learned. Brett, Rothlein and Hurley (1999) found that students in the story-with-word-explanation group not only learned more new words, but they also remembered them 6 weeks later. They also stated that students in this study who heard the stories along with explanations of words learned the meaning of an average of three new words for each of the two books and remembered the meanings of an average of six new words 6 weeks later. Although repeated readings of the same stories are beneficial to help children acquire vocabulary it is not necessary if explanations of target words are given when they are encountered in the book.

Brett, Rothlein and Hurley (1999) stated that listening to stories has resulted in positive effects on first graders' comprehension and use of language (Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986) and has resulted in higher scores on measures of decoding, reading comprehension, and

vocabulary (Galda & Cullinan, 1991). Furthermore, they agree that the single most important activity of building the knowledge required for children's eventual success in reading is reading aloud to them (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

According to Elley (1989), oral story reading constitutes a significant source of vocabulary acquisition, whether or not the reading is accompanied by teacher explanation of word meanings… and that this incidental learning was relatively permanent.

Many studies have shown that reading to children in their preschool years benefits them in their reading and language development as they begin school and that regularly reading aloud to children in their daily school program also produces a significant increase in their reading and listening skills. Elley (1989) agrees that one of the major benefits of reading aloud to children in their school setting is vocabulary acquisition, whether it is from single readings or repeated readings of the same story.

From Elley's (1989) experiment, based on pretest and posttest scores, word knowledge showed significant gains. Given three readings of a story over a week, without any explanation of target words, the first class showed a mean gain of 19 percent in their understanding of words; given one reading, with brief explanation of target words as they were read, the second class produced a mean gain of 20 percent; and given three readings, as well as brief explanations, the third class achieved a mean gain of 33 percent (Elley, 1989). As these results show there was a significant increase in vocabulary knowledge when both repeated readings and explanations of target words were given.

Elley (1989) also agrees with Brett, Rothlein and Hurley (1999) that the number of times a word is presented in a story is a strong variable in acquiring the vocabulary. He feels that a strong verbal context along with a strong pictorial context provides cues for the children, as

readers, to gather the meaning of the story and acquire the vocabulary presented. When all these elements are presented in the story and the teacher adds explanations to target words it becomes easier for the child to develop understanding of the story, concepts of the story, and vocabulary of the story. According to Elley's findings children can develop vocabulary acquisition incidentally through read alouds of storybooks that is supported by verbal and pictorial context and with the incorporation of explanations of unknown words and through repeated readings, this can lead to permanent learning.

According to Smolkin & Donovan (2003) "what goes under the name of skill, strategy, or structure instruction is much more accessible, interesting, and sensible when it is embedded within a real problem, a real text, or a real body of content…The best way to help students develop highly transferable, context-free literacy tools is to teach these tools as if they were entirely context bound" (Pearson, 1996. p.271). Smolkin & Donovan (2001) agree that learning occurs in a context (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). They focused on how children can transfer the comprehension skills of their spoken language to their reading and how they can use that knowledge to develop new strategies for reading through read alouds of informational books.

Stories have been used by teachers to provide students with the opportunity to connect their spoken language with written language. Through reading children make inferences about characters and events in a story. Smolkin & Donovan (2003) go on to say that not only do children learn much about how stories operate, but, as has been known for quite some time, children have opportunities to enhance their vocabulary knowledge (Cohen, 1968).

Through the use of read alouds in the classroom children develop their language acquisition and they develop reading comprehension and strategies. During the read alouds,

interaction between teacher, students, and books helps children take an active part in their learning and provides opportunity for the children to use the terminology used in the story. Repeated use of this terminology helps embed the information in the children's minds and makes for permanent learning to take place. Children become comfortable with the interaction by commenting on their thinking which in turn leads to more understanding. The teacher is modeling the skills and children are taking part in the modeling through interaction. The teacher is teaching without labeling it as direct teaching. Smolkin & Donovan (2003) state that as children listen to information books, they seem to be working actively to integrate new information with their existing understandings (Oyler & Barry, 1996). The focus is on providing children with many opportunities for discussion of text that informational books offer. This discussion offers children that are not yet literate the ability to develop comprehension of the written language as well as develop their vocabulary.

The number of words that children are expected to know by the end of third grade is 80,000 (Burgess, 2002). They should be able to recognize the words as well as understand them. Burgess (2002) states that the process of learning to read starts before entering school for many children and children enter school differentially prepared to benefit from formal educational experiences. These differences often translate into subsequent differences in achievement in reading and in other subject areas (Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994). A home that is rich with literacy is beneficial to the development in language and literacy to a child beginning school. Burgess' study focused on shared reading and how it affected oral language and its relation to receptive and expressive vocabulary and the phonological sensitivity. It also focused on families from middle-income homes.

He found that early exposure to books and literacy in the home helps prepare children for formal school instruction. The more exposure a child has, such as reading with parents and listening to stories at home, the more of a foundation the child has with early literacy skills. Burgess (2002) states that early exposure to literacy in the form of shared reading is related to more successful educational and developmental outcomes (Koskinen, Blum, Bisson, Phillips, Creamer, & Baker, 2000). Many studies have documented how vocabulary and literacy skills development are effects of shared reading and read alouds. Burgess emphasizes that the gains in vocabulary and other reading-related skills are due to the effects of shared reading at home. The more experiences with shared reading a child has the more developed his or her literacy skills will be.

Reading Aloud of Informational Books

Although teachers love storybooks as much as anyone, many understand that offering early access to the ideas, vocabulary, syntax, and text structures of informational texts helps prepare children for the time in school when the emphasis in reading instruction shifts from learning to read to reading to learn (Smolkin & Donovan, 2003). "Viewed in the past as sterile, dry, and uninteresting, informational books now include imaginative, detailed, and interesting text to match colorful and creative visual presentation…In reading such books, readers can become familiar with good models of expository prose, text organization, and book design" (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000, p.188). In reading informational books children become curious and are encouraged to ask questions and seek answers about the world around them. When a child asks a question or makes a comment during the read aloud of an informational text it shows the moment when the child is trying to make a connection or is reasoning with a new idea or concept. It can also lead children to further reading on the subject they are curious about

or another subject pertaining to what they were reading about. Teachers should read excerpts from informational texts aloud to their students to spark curiosity and have class discussions on the topics presented in the books.

Informational storybooks engage young readers in an imaginary story experience that is filled with factual information (Brabham, Boyd, & Edgington, 2000). Brabham, Boyd, & Edgington also state that reacting to these texts both efferently (to carry away information) and aesthetically (to vicariously experience the story) allows the reader to connect with the information in a variety of ways which may strengthen the learning process (Leal, 1994). It expands world knowledge as new information and concepts are presented, frequently in far greater depth than in subject-area textbooks (Smolkin & Donovan, 2003).

Reading informational books helps students distinguish between fact and fictional elements, helps them increase reading comprehension, and also helps them build and develop their vocabulary. Brabham, Boyd, & Edgington (2000) state that reading informational storybooks aloud can produce significant increases in the number of unfamiliar words related to science and social studies concepts that elementary students understand, and that these findings give teachers a much needed rationale for dedicating valuable instructional time to reading aloud even in subjects such as science and social studies.

Students respond favorably to informational text books, especially boys and struggling readers, as they tend to hold their attention more than storybooks. The results of reading informational books aloud are positive because it allows students to connect both efferently and aesthically with the text. With careful planning, preparation, and discussion, elementary teachers can take advantage of the mixture of fact and fiction in informational storybooks to stimulate

curiosity, expand vocabulary, provide challenges that develop critical reading skills, and motivate learning for students across the curriculum (Brabham, Boyd, & Edgington, 2000).

In using informational books as read alouds the teacher gives the students the opportunity to direct their learning in the direction they want it to go. They are no longer passive learners, but become interactive learners. During read aloud it is important that the teacher allow the students to share the authority of the information being shared. He or she allows this to happen by making students comfortable to clarify misunderstandings as they listen to the story. As the students ask questions other students can answer the questions. This allows the teacher time to check for understanding as the students help to answer each others' questions. They are able to connect personal experiences to topics and concepts in the texts, and are they able to speak with authority and expertise to their peers and teacher (Oyler, 1996).

Reading Aloud as a Test Accommodation for Students with and Without Learning Disabilities

Test accommodations are intended to mitigate the effects of students' disabilities so that more appropriate and interpretable test score information is obtained (Meloy, Deville, & Frisbie, 2002). Test accommodations include changes in the length of a test, breaks given within the time frame, use of a separate location, different type of test format (large print or Braille), different presentation of a test, or the way responses are given (use of computers, test read aloud or signed).

One accommodation that is getting mixed reviews involves the test being read aloud to students with disabilities. Meloy, Deville, & Frisbie (2002) state that the read aloud accommodation is intended to provide access to content so that the student can demonstrate his or her achievement in that area without interference from deficiencies in the enabling skills of

reading decoding and/or comprehension required by the usual test format. The use of this accommodation is not to give students an advantage over others who do not get the accommodation but to assist those who have a reading deficit. The desired effect from accommodations is to have a differential benefit, with the accommodations helping only those students who need them (McKevitt & Elliott, 2003). The read aloud accommodation should not be used with a reading comprehension test or test of reading vocabulary where the student's true skills are to be measured (Meloy, Deville, & Frisbie, 2002). Reading a reading test aloud to a student fundamentally changes the skill being assessed (listening comprehension vs. reading comprehension) yet still provides information related to the underlying construct (text comprehension) (Crawford, Tindal, 2004).

There has been different literature written on testing accommodations. According to Meloy, Deville, & Frisbie (2002), Koretz (1997) found that students with specific learning disabilities, among them reading, obtained a higher score when read to than students with learning diabilities who were not given that accommodation. In a study by Meloy, Frisbie, and Deville (200) results indicated benefits for both students with and without disabilities tested with the reading accommodation (McKevitt & Elliott, 2003). The accommodation had the same impact for all students on reading comprehension therefore showing no significant interactions between the groups and condition.

Researchers believe that the way information is received is the only difference between reading and listening to a given text (Crawford and Tindal (2004). Crawford and Tindal (2004) reported that listening will be superior to reading when the child has very poor skills or when the material exceeds the capabilities of the student. "Alternatively, reading will be superior to listening when the students have well developed reading skills and when the test materials are at

or below the skill level of the student" (p.194) (Royer, 1986). Readers who are developing their reading skills tend to focus more on self-monitoring, rereading, and adjusting their pacing when reading a text that is slightly below their reading level making meaning easier to comprehend (Crawford & Tindal, 2004). When the text is above their reading level, it becomes more difficult to gather meaning because they are more focused on decoding the text (Crawford & Tindal, 2004). When reading this more difficult test to the student that is developing his/her reading skills, he/she can focus on the comprehension and not need to worry about decoding the difficult text.

Crawford and Tindal (2004) conducted a study in which they presented a video as the read aloud test accommodation. In this study thirty-three percent of students with disabilities demonstrated an increase of five points or greater on the video presentation versus the standard presentation; 12% of Title One students also demonstrated a substantial increase as well as 13% of students in general education. The students with learning disabilities benefited most from the test accommodation in this study. Reading the reading test aloud improved the test scores of students regardless of their learning classifications. Crawford & Tindal found that students with disabilities improved significantly more that did students in either general education or Title One (Crawford & Tindal, 2004).

This accommodation has also been used during math tests. Students with learning disabilities benefited from the read aloud when the test consisted of problem solving more that students without learning disabilities (Crawford & Tindal, 2004). In the case in which the math test consisted of computation or concepts/applications, the results from the read aloud was not as high. According to McKevitt & Elliott, (2003) in math and science tests administered orally as a test accommodation, students with learning disabilities scored near the mean of those students

without disabilities (Koretz, 1997). This accommodation seems valid to use on math tests, but does not on reading tests.

When asked their thoughts about using the read aloud test accommodations, students had mixed feelings. Forty-two and a half percent of the students with learning disabilities liked the test accommodation that was provided to them, while 43.6% of students without learning disabilities said they liked the test both with and without the accommodations.

The question of validity in using the read aloud accommodation for students with learning disabilities is of great concern. When students are given this accommodation are the results a true representation of their reading skills? When these accommodations were presented to students with reading disabilities and without reading disabilities, both groups benefited from the accommodation and they both received higher scores. These results warrant caution when using the read aloud test accommodation. Many educators and testing experts consider reading aloud the test content (i.e. a read-aloud accommodation) of a reading comprehension test to be an invalid accommodation because the test is intended to measure reading skills, including word recognition, fluency, and comprehension (McKevitt & Elliott, 2003). Yet, read-aloud accommodations are currently allowed with no restrictions in at least nine states (Thurlow, Seyfarth, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1997). This accommodation has been shown to be effective and valid for use on tests other than reading where it does not interfere with the tested construct (McKevitt & Elliott, 2003).

Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, & Saleh (2004) took a different approach to a read aloud during a test of reading comprehension. In their study, they had the students of middle school and high school read the story aloud themselves. Students were told to read aloud at their own pace and proceed with answering the questions that followed the passage. In this study students

without learning disabilities seemed to have benefited more from the accommodation than did students with learning disabilities. Students without learning disabilities scored above the mean and students with learning disabilities scored below the mean. On a repeated measure, it was predicted that scores would be different: students with learning disabilities would score higher and closer to the mean and students without learning disablities would score lower (closer to the mean). The accommodation boost was thus recalculated as the residualized change score; that is, the gain was calculated with regression effects removed (Campbell & Kenny, 1999). Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, & Saleh (2004) reported that when regression effects were more stringently controlled, students without LD, as a group, appeared to have benefited more from the accommodation than students with LD.

On this type of accommodation, where students with learning disabilities had to read the test aloud themselves, there were no significant gains. Only 17% of the students with learning disabilities performed better with this test accommodation while for 20% of the students with learning disabilities it impaired their performance. This lends questions to validity because this accommodation did not benefit the group with learning disabilities when the accommodation was administered more than to students without learning disabilities (Elbaum, Arguelles, Campbell, & Saleh, 2004).

What is Shared Reading?

Shared reading is when children join in and read the text of a book with the person who is reading the story. In shared reading the text should be large enough for the children to see clearly in order for them to be able to engage in the reading. The person reading the story helps guide the children by pointing to the text as the story is being read. By pointing to the text as it is being read the children pay close attention to print and focus on reading behaviors such as

reading from left to right. Shared reading provides many opportunities for incidental learning about the way written language works (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Share reading:

- Builds on previous experiences with books
- Provides language models
- Expands vocabulary
- Lays a foundation for guided and independent reading
- Supports children who are on the verge of reading so that they can enjoy participating in reading whole stories
- Provides an opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate phrased, fluent reading and to draw attention to critical concepts about print
- Provides a context for learning specific words and features of words
- Helps children become familiar with texts that they can use independently as resources for writing and reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Shared reading provides children with a high level of support. Readers support each other as they are reading. The group can work as a team for problem solving and there can be a lot of conversation taking place to gather meaning of the story. During shared reading the children often work together and help each other as they discuss the story and make connections to the text. Just like in read alouds, the teacher draws the children into the text and asks questions about the story and begins conversation for children to become active participants.

Storybook Readings

Justice & Lankford (2002) state that emergent literacy generally describes young children's knowledge concerning the forms and functions of print and the relationship between oral and written language (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Children usually develop their first knowledge concerning print during their preschool years. Emergent literacy is comprised of written language awareness and phonological awareness. Written language awareness (also called print concepts) is the child's knowledge of the functions of print such as features of the alphabet letters and environmental print. Phonological awareness refers to the structure of spoken language. Children begin to develop their oral and written language through informal and naturalistic settings and interactions. Therefore, storybook reading is considered to be a very powerful factor in a young child's literacy development. According to Sipe (2000) some benefits that storybook readings offer are the development of a love of books (Holdaway, 1979), the forming of emotional attachments with caregiver (Bus, 1993), understanding the difference between oral language and decontextualized book language that does not relate to the child's immediate physical world (Snow, 1983), and the development of sense of story structure and narrative (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990).

The interaction between the adult and the child during storybook reading allows the child to be an active learner. As an active learner the child gathers meaning and begins to construct meaning about the written language and how it functions. When children are exposed to a print rich environment and participation is promoted during storybook readings they will develop more highly developed written language awareness than children who are exposed to a less print rich environment (Justice & Lankford, 2002).

It is also very important that the adults who are reading attend to and reference print as they read to the children. If the adult reading does not reference print while he or she is reading then the child will "rarely initiate their own verbalizations about print" (Justice & Lankford, 2002). The role of the adult is to engage the child in the oral and written language of the storybook. As they read they should be having discussions with the child and asking questions about what is being read. Adults should be allowing the child to make comments and ask questions to clarify any misunderstandings they may have.

Another point made is that children extract meaning about print by visually attending to print during storybook reading (Justice & Lankford, 2002). The more a child attends to and is fixated on the print as the story is being read the more knowledge he or she will gather about print (Justice & Lankford, 2002). A strategy that can be used during storybook reading is to emphasize print concepts by pointing to words and discussing print throughout the reading. By using this strategy children will focus more on the print and connections to print will be made.

Shared storybook reading helps children make life-text connections to make sense of the literature which is what adult readers do unconsciously. Throughout shared reading the teacher elicits discussion from the children. The children can be led in a discussion where they question the author or/and illustrator. Children and teachers begin to question the author and the illustrator by discussing if they think the author and illustrator made good decisions in their book. The children begin to construct meaning from a variety of sources such as how the author uses color to portray a certain type of feeling. Questioning the author focuses on text ideas and encourages students' participation in building meaning from those ideas as they read the text (Beck & McKeown, 2001). They also begin to make intertextual connections by discussing how the book they are reading aloud is similar to previous books read. They make personal

connections, enter the world of the story to become one with it, and enter the world of the story and manipulate it for their own purpose. Focusing on the main ideas of the story in the discussion while the story is being read, instead of after the story is read, allows the child to be more reflective (Beck & McKeown, 2001). All of these aspects of literacy are taught through the shared storybook reading.

As children enter primary grades they begin to focus on other aspects of reading. As they begin to develop their reading skills they begin to respond to reading in different ways or read for different purposes. According to Sipe (2000) readers read in order to take some information away from the text, or to analyze its formal properties; Rosenblatt called this the efferent stance (1978), or readers can read simply to engage in a lived-through experience of the text, entering the text, as it were, and experiencing its literary power; which Rosenblatt referred this type of stance as aesthetic (1978). Children begin making their connections of what they are reading to their personal lives. They build on what they already know and begin to form new concepts as they read. The storybook read-aloud situation is one of the most important approaches for the formation of literary interpretive community (Fish, 1980) in the classroom according to Sipe (2000).

Storybook Reading and Group Size

Reading aloud to children is very beneficial in the development of children's literacy development and language development. According to Morrow and Smith (1990) the most beneficial read-aloud events appear to involve social interaction between an adult and a child, in which both participants actively construct meaning based on text (Bloome, 1985).

In a school setting, working one-to-one is not as feasible as working with a small group. Morrow and Smith (1990) state that groups of two to four students can accomplish some learning

tasks better than students working alone (Klausmeier, Wiersma, and Harris, 1963). When working with small groups during read alouds children are engaged in more verbal interaction therefore gaining more literacy development as opposed to working in a whole class group where less verbal interaction takes place. Children are able to ask more questions and make more comments when they are in a small group versus a whole class discussion. Children also tend to answer each others questions and to work as a team when they are in small groups. Therefore, the small group setting can enhance listening comprehension, and possibly literacy development in general, allowing verbal interactions that are not possible in whole group or one-to-one settings (Morrow and Smith, 1990).

According to Morrow and Smith (1990), Good and Brophy (1984) found that students in the primary grades learned better in classrooms with more small-group activities and fewer whole-class activities and fewer whole-class presentations, and that student involvement was highest in teacher-led small groups.

Parents and Shared Reading

When considering strategies for promoting written language awareness in preschool children, adult-child interactions during shared book reading have been targeted as potential contexts for bolstering children's skills (Justice & Ezell, 2000) as reported by Justice, Weber, Ezell, & Bakeman (2002).

Justice, Weber, Ezell, & Bakeman (2002) stated that adults rarely reference print, either verbally or nonverbally, when reading picture books and rhyming books to young children (Ezell & Justice, 2000). Therefore, it is suggested that parents/adults should pay closer attention to their reference to print when reading to young children. As they read to children they should make more reference to print by asking questions, commenting on what is being read, and make

requests about print. As the parent is reading they should allow and request children to make responses as they read. Responses can be verbal, non-verbal, or a combination of the two.

As the reading is taking place adults should be able to scaffold the questioning and requests being made. They should be able to help the child make the connection depending on the level he or she is at. It is also important that during shared reading the child has the opportunity to read to the parent. As the parent listens to the child he or she can help the child make a connection to the print by asking questions or commenting on what is being read. If the child makes reading miscues the parent can give him or her feedback that will guide them to making corrections. This will help them self-correct in future readings.

Areas of Agreement

Reading to children by adults helps to expand written and oral language awareness and development by facilitating interaction between children and print. Many researchers have found that reading aloud to children will benefit them in their literacy development. Through this interaction children will begin to focus on print and begin to raise questions about print and text. As Fountas & Pinnell (1996) stated, reading aloud is the foundation of the early literacy framework and by being immersed in a variety of well-chosen texts children not only learn to love stories and reading but they also learn about written language. The more interaction children have with books, read alouds or shared reading, the easier it will be for them to develop literacy skills, develop vocabulary, and make connections and inferences about the various texts they read.

Reading aloud to children takes advantage of the sophisticated vocabulary that is used in the stories found in children's trade books. Exposing and encouraging children to use these words from the story helps build their vocabulary. As children listen to and read vocabulary

used in the text they develop a more sophisticated oral language. Children need to hear words in stories repeated. The more a word occurs in a story the easier it is for the child to retain the word. When you add explanations of target words, the vocabulary gains can as much as double. Explanations of words are not necessary for vocabulary acquisition. Repetition of the story alone is beneficial.

Findings also support theoretical assumptions about the construct of text comprehension (people understand information better when it is read aloud if they have weak decoding skills or if the passages are above their reading level) in that a greater percentage of students with disabilities profit tests being read aloud than do students without disabilities(Crawford & Tindal, 2004).

As this literature review indicates there has been a lot of research on the benefits of reading aloud to children from their early years (pre-school) through high school. Research has been done to gather information on the effects of reading aloud on language development, social development, school readiness and administering assessments. However, there lacks sufficient research regarding the effects of reading aloud to children when the child has a copy of the text versus where the child does not. Therefore, this study has been done to gather data as to whether there is improvement in vocabulary development, reading comprehension and reading fluency when a child is read to aloud and he or she has a reading companion as opposed to not having a reading companion.

Method

SUBJECTS. The subjects used in this experiment were 15 first grade students ranging from 6 to 7 years old. Eight students were Spanish bilingual students and two were Portuguese bilingual

students, all of which receive ELL (English Language Learner) services. Four students were Spanish bilingual but have tested out of ELL services and one student was an English speaking student who receives no services.

The majority of the students entered first grade reading below grade level according to their DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) levels. DRA levels ranged between 1 and 6. Students should enter first grade on level 6 or 8. The students are well behaved and attentive. They are very quiet and hesitant to answer questions when asked. Repetition of questions and directions are often given in order to get some kind of response. Students also have difficulty recalling and retelling information.

MATERIALS. Within a six week period students were read six different first grade leveled readers. After reading each story a cloze paragraph (see Appendix A) was administered to gather data on reading comprehension. Following the cloze paragraph a vocabulary test (see Appendix B) was administered to gather data on vocabulary acquisition and a running record was used to determine reading fluency with one student.

PROCEDURE. Students were randomly divided into two groups – Group A and B. Group A had the companion text for week 1 and Group B did not. The second week Group A did not have the companion text and Group B did. This procedure alternated weekly for the duration of the experiment. The students in Group A sat on one area of the rug and Group B sat on the opposite area of the rug so they would not be able to look over at the text if they did not have a book. Throughout the reading of the story, the target words used for the vocabulary test were briefly discussed as they were encountered in the story.

After the story was read aloud to the students a cloze paragraph was administered. The paragraph consisted of 50 words where every 10^{th} word was omitted for the student to fill in.

The first week of the study a word bank was not given and the students had difficulty choosing a word for the blank. They did not know what type of word to fill in. The second week of the experiment, and there after, a word bank was added to help students fill in the blanks. The word bank was added to ease the anxiety students were having.

When students completed the cloze paragraph they were given a vocabulary test. The vocabulary section consisted of five sentences with a blank which students had to fill in. A word box was given at the top of the page for students to use. The words in the vocabulary test were used in the same context that they were used in the story and in the same way they were discussed when defined throughout the story.

When both the reading comprehension and vocabulary test had been administered a running record was performed on one student to gather data on reading fluency. The same student was used for all stories to see if there was any improvement in reading fluency with or without a reading companion. Results were then recorded and sent to a statistician for final analysis.

Results

Raw data for this study are presented in Table 1 to show the results for vocabulary acquisition. A series of Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data. An alpha level of .05 was used on all statistical tests. A Repeated Measure ANOVA was used to see if students holding their own copy of text would influence vocabulary. There was no main significant effect for having their own text, $F(1,13) = 1.354$, $p = .266$. There was no significant main effect for order, $F(1,13) = .110$, $p = .746$. There was no significant interaction between having their own text and the order the test was conducted, $F(1,13) = 48.765$, $p = .707$. Although statistical significance was not achieved, students holding their own copies of the text

outperformed students who just listened to the teacher read aloud to a non-significant degree. The means and standard deviations are represented in Table 1.

Table 1- Vocabulary Aquisition

	With Text		Without Text	
Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
With Text First	7.00	3.11	5.43	4.69
Without Text First	7.38	5.18	6.50	3.25
Total	7.20	4.20	6.00	3.87

A Repeated Measure ANOVA was used to see if a student holding their own copy of text would influence comprehension. There was no significant main effect for having their own text, $F(1,13) = 1.691$, $p = .216$. There was no main significant effect for order, $F(1,13) = .875$, $p = .367$. There was no significant interaction between having their own text and the order the test was conducted, $F(1,13) = 41.077$, $p = .859$. The means and standard deviations are represented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Story Comprehension

	With Text		Without Text	
Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
With Text First	6.29	4.50	6.00	4.36
Without Text First	7.38	4.96	5.63	2.07
Total	6.87	4.61	5.80	3.21

Although, statistical analysis of this data revealed that no significant differences were found students with the text outperformed students without the text to a non-significant degree.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gather and evaluate data on the effects of reading aloud to students with and without a companion text. The study was designed to evaluate vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and reading fluency in a first grade classroom. Although research has been done on the benefits of reading aloud to children in their pre-school and early years through high school no research had been found on the effects of reading aloud to students who have a companion text versus those who do not. Within a six week period students alternated listening to a read aloud with and without a reading companion text. After each story was read aloud students were given a cloze paragraph and a vocabulary test in order to gather the data needed for the experiment. Final analysis from the statistician reports that there were no significant differences in the vocabulary or comprehension test scores of the students, although in students with the texts outperformed students without the texts to a non-significant degree on measures of vocabulary and comprehension.

The results from this experiment suggest that students with a text outperformed students without a companion text, although not to a significant degree. During this experiment, students without the text seemed to be a little more attentive because they didn't want to miss out on what the teacher was reading. Students with the text seemed to be a little more distracted. They looked at the pictures as the teacher was reading and didn't seem to focus as much on the text as they should have. They also looked at the students without the text to see what they were doing. Through the discussion of the story both groups of students seemed to participate equally in response to questions from the story.

When both assessments were given after reading each story, students would always seem a bit nervous. They would look up and around the room as if looking for something to remind

them of what the story was about. They were not as confident and comfortable in these assessments because there was no type of review or going over the words and sentences on the test. Students seemed to panic a little when the tests came around. Some students took longer than usual to complete the tests because they kept reading and rereading the text and would erase and change their answers a few times before handing in their test. Most of the students in this experiment are bilingual. They are beginning to understand the mechanics of the English language and because they are still a little hesitant of their own speaking and writing there might have been some impact on their performance.

The research that has been conducted on the effects of read alouds has been extensive. In past studies, during the read alouds students would listen to the story and following the reading students would revisit the text in some form or another. They might have done some vocabulary activities or have had some other interaction with the book in smaller groups and the adult or teacher reread the story at some time during the next few days. During the present experiment, students only heard the story once being read aloud. Students did not have another opportunity to revisit the book. The vocabulary was also presented as the story was being read. Students did not have the opportunity to see the words prior to reading the story and did not have the opportunity to "play" with the vocabulary as they often do during other literacy circumstances.

One limitation of this experiment was various exposures to the stories and the vocabulary being tested. Although students did have some exposure to the text and the vocabulary it might have been insufficient exposure since it was only once. Also, with the exception of one student, students were of bilingual background where Spanish or Portuguese is the language spoken at home. It is also important to note that the reading level of the text given to students was middle

to end of first grade level and some students are functioning at a beginning first grade level. More exposure to the story and vocabulary might have shown further differentiated results.

Reading aloud to students has been shown to improve many literacy skills for students from early years throughout high school. This experiment was designed to see the effects of students having a companion text or not when they were read to aloud. Although this study did not show any significant difference on students having a reading companion versus not having a reading companion the trend of the results are promising and more research should be done on this topic. The effects of multiple exposures to the same text with and without companion books should be evaluated. Also, if activities are done orally and students do not see the text after the first reading what will the results show? Finally, if students are given texts at their individual level would the results be different?

Overall, this study did not show any significant differences in the results of students having a reading companion versus not having a reading companion during read alouds. However, students with the texts achieved higher vocabulary and comprehension scores to a non-significant degree. These findings suggest an important trend worthy of further investigation.

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Appendix A

Name _____

Date _____

The Strongest One of All

Beach strongest hill beautiful mouse

1. **The mouse walked over the _____ to talk to the sun.**
2. **The girl was very _____.**
3. **Who is the _____ one of all?**
4. **They walked on the _____ to talk to the statue.**
5. **The _____ was the strongest one of all.**

Appendix B

Name _____

Date _____

The Strongest One of All

left lived one her a

Once upon a time in a small village, there _____ a father mouse and a mother mouse.

The had _____ beautiful daughter whom they loved very much. They wanted _____ to marry the strongest one of all.

So they _____ the village. They went far to find the strongest _____ of all.