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How To Make A Read-Aloud Engaging To Students In A Multi-Age Setting

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HOW TO MAKE A READ-ALOUD ENGAGING TO STUDENTS IN A MULTI-AGE

SETTING

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Teaching kids to reflect, wonder, and draw conclusions based upon what they read can sometimes be a breeze, while other times it can be a struggle. It is a teacher's duty to find stories and assignments that are both meaningful and engaging to help foster this skill. McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) believe that reading aloud to a child is one of the single most important things one can do for a child. With that in mind, I've chosen to create a project to help me answer this fundamental question: *How can teachers make read-alouds engaging to students in a multi-age setting?* This project aims to utilize a variety of engaging and comprehension activities such as discussion based activities, vocabulary development games, and writing activities so that students will better understand and comprehend the stories that are read to them.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will provide some personal background information by reminiscing on my own childhood and schooling and how it shaped my love for reading. Then, I will describe how my current literacy instruction is set up and the rationale for this project. Finally, I will discuss the potential benefits this project could have when the activities and strategies are applied.

Background

Personal Experiences. Ever since I can remember, storytime, in some capacity, has been a part of my daily routine. I always read to either myself, my parents, or my

little brother. I looked forward to this time, diving right into a good book to see where the story would take me.

At school, story time varied with each passing grade. In kindergarten, first and second grade, I remember reading more picture books and easy chapter books. Plots became more complicated and the introduction of summarizing and story recall in a discussion format were new skills that were taught. I remember in third grade, my teacher introduced me to Roald Dahl's writings: *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *James and the Giant Peach.* His books helped me fall in love with the fantasy genre. These books were just some of the fantasy books I would read throughout the years.

In regards to our read-alouds, in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade the books became more complex and more was expected of us. We learned how to discuss, infer, and predict the text both on our own and with our small reading group. We also had to write our responses to various questions that would help us summarize and draw conclusions from the text. Vocabulary activities taught us new meanings for certain words. Quizzes throughout the story helped our teacher craft future activities and discussions. Finally, many times, there was a culminating project to finish the book. Anytime this culminating project was something other than a traditional paper book report, I flourished. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) recognize creativity and its importance by saying that there is "nothing is more important than teaching young people to use and recognize the power of their own minds" (p. 439).

Finally, during my elementary and early childhood education coursework at Southwest Minnesota State University, I was taught how to implement different reading

strategies into my curriculum from toddlers to sixth graders. Reading interventions were also taught. Having multiple strategies to teach one skill was beneficial because not all children learn the same way. I also minored in Special Education. Taking these classes provided me with the necessary tools to help these students when they are in my classroom. My favorite class throughout my time at Southwest was Children's Literature. This class was dedicated to picture and chapter books from different genres and how to meaningfully integrate them into any subject and curriculum. Many of the ideas that I learned from this class will be discussed in my literature review.

Professional Experiences. When students first enter school, they are taught how to read. As they get older, they are taught how to read for comprehension. If taught properly during the primary and intermediate elementary grades, this skill will help them better comprehend the complex texts found in middle school, high school, and postsecondary education. As an elementary teacher, teaching literacy is something I do everyday.

One of my first teaching jobs was working for Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) as a Literacy Tutor. My job was to use research-based literacy interventions to improve students' literacy skills. The interventions I used were letter and sound identification, blending and segmenting words and word chunks, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. When selecting a student to tutor, I took fall benchmark data to assess where each student was at. This program is offered to students who are below benchmark but do not already receive Special Education, English as a Second Language, or Title 1 services. After making a list, notifying parents, and talking with their homeroom teachers,

I created a schedule and worked with students one on one for 30 minutes. I would monitor, track, and assess their growth weekly. Once they reached their targeted score for their grade level for a set period of time, they graduated from the program. Over the course of the year, I helped over 30 students improve their reading skills and graduate from the program. After my one year of service, I continued to work at that school for two more years in various positions. Seeing the continued success of my MRC kids was very rewarding. While I was teaching at this school, none of my former students needed any further reading interventions outside their homeroom. Sometimes kids just need a little extra attention to jump start their educational journey. I was glad that I could be a part of that.

When it came time to leave the district, I found a job teaching in a third and fourth grade multi-age classroom at a private school. This was my first multi-age classroom. Literacy is one of the subjects that I teach both grades separately and together. While I am teaching my third graders, my fourth graders work on their center activities. Halfway through my literacy block, I switch and meet with my fourth graders and my third graders work on their center activities. My center activities include writing, spelling, reading, vocabulary, and comprehension development. More specifically, students compose a writing piece based on the daily journal topic, complete a daily spelling practice, read or listen to books from either our classroom library or on their iPads, and work on their vocabulary and comprehension skills while playing various activities found on their iPads. While students work with me, we complete a reading lesson from our reading curriculum. This lesson will incorporate reading fluency and comprehension. After the

reading portion of the lesson, I will go onto a vocabulary or grammar lesson that correlates with our weekly theme and story. I also continue literacy in the afternoon with Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time. This is our read-aloud time. Right now, this time allows students to listen to a story. There is little interaction during this time and that is why I wanted to create this project. I want to utilize this time to its fullest potential. I want to include other literacy components during this time in order to continue the learning rather than just listening.

Rationale

Nowadays, there is a lot that rides on a child's test scores. School funding, teacher performance, and student achievement is partially determined by these test scores. Whether it is a smaller weekly comprehension test, a Reading Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, or the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), all these scores tell administrators, teachers, and parents how each student understands and comprehends the material. It is important for students to have these reading and comprehension tools and strategies so they can successfully take these tests.

There are many ways teachers develop these crucial reading skills. Spelling and vocabulary activities, individual and partner reading, and literacy based apps on their iPads are just a few ways that teachers utilize their daily literacy instruction (Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts 2015; Pang 2013). Also, McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) state that read-alouds are an important aspect of daily literacy instruction. Their research suggests that read-alouds can improve certain literacy skills such as listening skills, oral language skills, vocabulary development, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. My

project will focus on engagement and comprehension during read-alouds. There are various student engagement activities that are suited for children at all ability levels. Literature circles, vocabulary development games, and writing activities are just a few activities students will partake in. The hope is by using different strategies, students will better understand and comprehend the stories they read.

Our school is small, but we do have students who receive extra services. Some of our younger students receive Title 1 services, other students receive Special Education services, and one student receives advanced reading instruction because we do not have a formal Gifted and Talented program. In addition to those the services, the homeroom teachers provide whole and small group literacy instruction.

My colleagues and I want our students to succeed academically in our classroom. There are many ways this project might impact future action in our classrooms. There are many stories from all different genres embedded into our literacy curriculum and our DEAR time. The teachers at my school vary the activities that go along with each given story. Some of these activities include discussing the text with their peers and with their teacher, summarizing the text, analyzing the illustrations, making connections between the text and other texts, themselves, and their world, vocabulary development, and creating predictions. Having another resource to teach these same skills will hopefully give teachers and students a variety of resources for their reading instruction.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my personal and professional relationship with reading, literacy instruction, and literacy interventions. My capstone project utilizes a

read-aloud and several hands-on, engaging lessons to improve reading comprehension. Hopefully future readers of this capstone can take this information and the documents provided in the Appendix and apply them with a book of their choosing.

In Chapter Two, I will explore the current and past literature on my topic. My literature review will cover topics including reading strategies and interventions as well as the role engagement plays in the learning process. In Chapter Three, I will further explain my read-aloud unit and its components. Finally in Chapter Four, I will reflect on my capstone journey and what I learned by going through this process.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following chapter reviews both current and past literature on read-alouds as an addition to a language arts curriculum. As a multi-age classroom teacher, trying to incorporate activities that both third and fourth graders can do together is something I strive to do. This literature review will help reveal and answer the guiding question: *How can teachers make read-alouds engaging to students in a multi-age setting?*

This literature review provides further information on what read-alouds are and its components. The next section describes what a multi-age classroom is, the history behind these types of classrooms, the benefits for both students and teachers in this learning environment, and how someone looks at the language arts standards when two grades or more are present in one classroom. Third, this chapter explores two different learning theories that support reading comprehension. These two theories include the schema theory and transactional theory. The fourth topic explains how read-alouds promote engagement between the student, their peers, and their teacher. This section will also provide information on understanding the needs of a classroom based on multiple intelligence and specific learning needs of the students whether they receive Special Education, English as a Second Language, or Gifted and Talented services. Finally, the last section discusses how read-alouds foster literacy comprehension. The focus will be

on different reading strategies that one can incorporate throughout a read-aloud and the types of assessments that gauge comprehension.

Read-Alouds

This section of my literature review defines what a read-aloud is, specifies the components teachers should consider when planning a read-aloud, and describes the benefits read-alouds can have on students.

Defined. A read-aloud is any text read aloud that includes discussion and an activity. McCormick (as cited in Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009) states, while reading, teachers need to incorporate variations in their pitch, tone, pace, and volume. This allows the students to hear how it's read and visualize the story. Barrentine and Sipe (as cited in Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009) continue to say that reading aloud to children develops and supports their listening and speaking abilities while strengthening their overall language development. Doman (n.d.) advises teachers to pick quality literature based on its Lexile level, length, and relatability. The Lexile level measures two things, how difficult a particular text is and a student's reading ability level.

Drogowski (2009), McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017), and McClure and King Fullerton (2017) all agree read-aloud lessons teach important literacy skills such as predicting, monitoring, context clues, recall, point of view, plot development, and citing evidence. Read-alouds also provide opportunities for oral language development, literacy benefits, and conceptual knowledge. Finally Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) credit read-alouds as an effective way to model how to read and find the joy in reading.

Stages in a read-aloud. When selecting a text to use as a read-aloud, there are

many things to consider. McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) recommend reading the book beforehand, teachers are able to select important spots in the text to hold meaningful discussions. Teachers should also mark the pages in some way so they know where and how to start the discussion. The questions posed should be open-ended so it allows for more than one right answer. According to McClure and King Fullerton (2017), teachers should also ask questions to activate their students' prior knowledge. By doing so, teachers provide and facilitate opportunities for their students to learn from one another and learn more about a particular subject. Finally, framing questions beyond simple recall allows students to lift the level of their thinking in order to extend their thought process and knowledge.

McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) also suggest that teachers should provide copies of the book to each student. This allows the student to go back through the text and complete assignments and reread on their own for further clarification and understanding. With each lesson, teachers should assign at least one writing assignment. One writing assignment could be defining new words in their vocabulary journals. Another idea would be to keep a journal. Fisher et al. (2004) suggest students write down their thoughts, reactions, predict upcoming events, and make connections between the text and their own lives.

Then during discussion time, Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) recommend that students share their ideas with other classmates before sharing ideas out to the whole class. This allows students to listen to other perspectives that will either support or challenge their thinking. Teachers remember, speaking in front of a large group can be

intimidating for some kids. Small group or partner discussion allow the more reserved students a chance to share their knowledge without the whole group factor to worry about. Turn and talk allows students a chance to ask their peers questions. Students can support each other with unfamiliar topics, words, or phrases. McClure and King Fullerton (2017) state teachers should model how to have these conversations during whole group discussion. By doing so, students learn how to agree or disagree with someone, cite evidence, and expand on each other's thinking. This type of discussion allows for deeper, meaningful conversations.

When students share ideas with one another in a small or whole group setting and actively listen to their classmates, they are able to understand multiple perspectives. Students understand and comprehend more when they hear responses from both their teacher and their classmates. Finally McClure and King Fullerton (2017) and Lennox (2013) agree, by listening into their conversations with each other and what they share out loud to the class, teachers can direct the discussion in a way to best suit the needs of their students.

Benefits. There are numerous benefits that can come from read-alouds. McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) discuss how read-alouds improve certain literacy skills such as listening skills, oral language skills, vocabulary development, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. In addition to these literacy skills, students also learn how to empathize with others in their class and with the text. Certain stories allow students to experience different types of people they might not encounter in their everyday life. Such differences are, but not limited to: race, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, and

other cultures.

Also, by reading these stories out loud students are able to comment, pose questions, and see how their other classmates relate and respond to certain characters and situations. Also, when exposed to different genres, students see how various texts are organized. According to Fisher et al. (2004), read-alouds allow children to express their personal views, connect with their teacher and classmates, and make sense of the events happening in their world. Finally, Fisher et al. (2004) and Lennox (2013) both agree that different types of books can spark curiosity. Students are more likely to choose books for their independent reading time that are similar to those they have heard their parents and teachers read.

Summary. A read-aloud is any text read aloud that includes a discussion and an activity. While the story is being read, students will actively listen and visualize the story by using their imagination. Teachers should ask a wide variety of questions to allow students to share their prior knowledge, ask questions, and support each others' learning. By listening to and discussing multiple perspectives, students are able to critically think about the text. Finally, there are numerous benefits of read-alouds. They can improve literacy skills such as listening, oral language, vocabulary, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. In addition to these literacy skills, students also learn how to empathize with others in their class and within the text.

The next part of the literature review, will discuss my findings on what a multi-age classroom is, its history, how it affects teachers and students, and how to incorporate multiple grade level standards into one literacy lesson.

Multi-Age Classrooms

This next section of the literature review will define what a multi-age classroom is and how it's different from a multi-grade classroom. This first section is a brief history of multi-age classrooms and how they came about. Next, it describes two different multi-age classrooms and how the teachers of these rooms make it work. Following that, it discusses the effects that students and staff have working in this type of learning environment. Finally, this sections looks at the Minnesota Language Arts and Common Core Standards and demonstrates how teachers can incorporate two or more sets of standards into one literacy lesson.

Defined. When people think of multi-age classrooms, they think of a one-room schoolhouse, set in the past. Although the majority of schools now have one grade level per classroom, one can still find schools where students from multiple grades are taught by one teacher. Keep in mind, terms like multi-age and multi-grade are not interchangeable. Veenman (1995) defines a multi-grade classroom as one that has two or more grades in it and the teacher uses different curriculums to teach each grade separately. A multi-age classroom has two or more grades, but one curriculum is used to teach all the students at the same time.

Even though one type of curriculum is used, teachers still utilize small group instruction. They group students by ability level, rather than age. These groups are meant to challenge or support their students' learning. When students are not participating in small group direct instruction, they are working independently or asking other students for help. Cater (2005) claims this type of classroom allows children to learn

interdependence and it helps form and strengthen the bonds between the various age groups of students.

The history. In the 1830s and 1840s the term multi-age classroom was first defined. Given the subject matter, children of various ages studied separately or together all in one classroom (Song, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2009). Muse, Smith, and Barker (1987, as cited in Carter, 2005) note that in the early twentieth century, 70 percent of the public schools in the United States were one-room schoolhouses. Since the mid 1970s, many schools have utilized these classrooms for a variety of reasons; the two main reasons were financial cuts and declining student enrollments. This was because communities could not find enough teachers to teach their students or the enrollment was inconsistent from year to year. With that said, there were too many students in one grade, but not enough students to make a full section of a different grade. Cormican and Larsen (2015) and Veenman (1995) both claim it is typical to have two grades together but not uncommon to have up to three in one classroom. With this in mind, one teacher was in charge of those student's education. However in recent years, Song et al. (2009) recognized that many schools discontinued their multi-age programs. This is due to the grade-level standards and testing requirements set in place by the No Child Left Behind Act.

How do multi-age classrooms function today? Multi-age classrooms can be found all over the country, in both urban and rural neighborhoods. Examples of how two schools came to adopt this type of classroom are described below.

Elliot (1997) observed and interviewed many staff members at an multi-age

school in Nevada. At Helen Herr Elementary school in Las Vegas, Nevada, students in the primary grades (first and second) are grouped together and students in the intermediate grades (third, fourth, and fifth) are grouped together. Primary and intermediate classrooms are placed side-by-side. These two classrooms are known a family. Even though these classrooms are separated there are times when the two come together to work on various projects. This allows the teachers a chance to collaborate with each other and the students a chance to work with and interact with students not in their home classroom. Elliot (1997) referenced a poll done two years after the school was open and it found that the majority of parents were happy with how their child was learning and felt that multi-age instruction were meeting their child's needs.

At St. Paul's Catholic School in Lethbridge, Alberta two team teachers, Sandra Cormican and Carmen Larsen (2015) discuss how how multi-age classrooms work for them at their school. At their school kindergarten is taught separately, first and second grade are together, third and fourth grade are together, and fifth and sixth grade are together. At their school, classrooms are called communities. The students know what grade they are in, but the classroom runs as one cohesive community. The combined grades have two teachers. While one is giving direct instruction to one group the other is meeting with another group either supporting or extending their learning. Some subjects, like science and social studies are on a cycle. What that means is one curriculum, say third grade, is taught one year and the fourth grade curriculum is taught the following year. That way all students receive both sets of standards within the two years they are in their classroom community (Cormican & Larsen, 2015).

Benefits. For teachers and students, there are numerous benefits of teaching and learning in a multi-age setting. Carter (2005) states multi-age classrooms help build strong, lasting relationships with teachers, students, and their families. Since the teacher is with a particular child for a number of years, the emotional bond grows. When this takes place, the teacher can reach the student on a more personal level which makes the learning process easier. Bailey, Werth, Allen, and Sutherland (2016) note these types of classrooms naturally allow students to progress socially and academically. The four authors also cite theorists Jean Piaget, Albert Bandura, and Lev Vygotsky who all claim students thrive in a safe and trusting environment. In these classrooms, students can explore the world around them, try new things, and challenge themselves.

Finally, Song et al. (2009) believe schools that are able to effectively run a multi-age classrooms have teachers who are dedicated to their work and their students. The school itself will help teachers achieve this by offering ongoing professional development in areas that benefit them as multi-age teachers.

The benefits for students should also be noted. Students develop strong bonds with their classmates. Elliot (1997) states, students learn from classmates who are different in age and ability. Veenman argues (1995), when students have a chance to form relationships with younger and older students, children have a greater sense of belonging, support, security, and confidence. Often, the older students are role models to the younger students. They can model certain tasks and behaviors for the younger students such as how to provide more detail in their writing and discussion.

Carter (2005) points out that children who are the same age will have different

reading levels. Teachers can use this to their advantage. They can group students in flexible, cooperative groups. The younger or less able students are able to learn from the older or more capable students. Carter (2005) and Bailey et al. (2016) agree by scaffolding the lessons, teachers are able to tailor their lessons to the particular needs of that group. These groups also allow teachers to observe and build upon their classes' strengths and weaknesses. When children work and share their ideas with their classmates, it could further spark discussion and deepen their knowledge of a particular subject. Drawing from what their classmate said, they might be able to make connections to help them better relate to the subject matter.

Song et al. (2009) also note the great emotional growth this type of learning environment provides. By being together for two or more years, the students develop close bonds with their classmates and teacher. These bonds are particularly helpful for those who have a less than ideal homelife. Students know that they have a support system at school that will help them get through whatever troubles them when they are not at school.

Many classroom teachers have expressed mixed feelings about teaching in a multi-age setting. However, teaching in a multi-age setting, the benefits become evident. Elliot (1997) and Song et al. (2009) have similar thoughts regarding multi-age classrooms. Teaching the same group of kids over the course of several years allow teachers to get to know their students and watch them grow over time. One of the biggest benefits take place at the beginning of the year. Since half of the class is returning, they will already know the rules and routines. They can model these for the younger students.

This makes it easier for the teacher because they have the older students to help the younger ones. Teachers also like the idea that there is flexibility in the curriculum they teach. Student-centered and project-based learning are more likely to take place in a multi-age environment.

However, it is also important to note that not all teachers like the idea of teaching in a multi-age environment. Veenman (1995) notes that with two or more age groups in one classroom, there's more planning and preparation that takes place. Even though only one lesson is taught, all grade level standards need to be addressed. In some cases that adds another element of work. Another aspect to consider is that many teachers who end up teaching these classrooms have no training. In Canada, a survey was conducted amongst principals and teachers who worked at these types of schools. The survey discovered that 80 percent of those interviewed had no training on how to teach in a multi-age setting.

Language Arts Standards. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) state that students are going to have to think and comprehend if they are going to meet the Common Core State Standards. Every lesson relates back to the standards and teachers need to know the standards and how to implement them. Taking a closer look at both the Minnesota Language Arts and Common Core Standards, I noticed how each lesson within my unit supports student learning.

In the following paragraphs, will relate back to the the third and fourth grade standards. These benchmarks include informational text, foundational skills, writing, and speaking and listening (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010; National Governors

Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Informational text. Depending on the grades that make up a classroom, this can be done orally through discussion or written through written response activities. Both NGA (2010) and MDE's (2010) state reading, speaking, and listening standards require students to be able to ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of the text by referring to specific details and examples. Students also need to identify the main idea and its supporting details, sequence events, and identify the cause and effect in the text. Both McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) and Galda (2013) agree that open-ended questions can help student think critically. These types of questions allow for more than one right answer. Students learn more when given a opportunity to talk about their discoveries

Another aspect that is essential for a literacy lesson is vocabulary development. The reading standards put this under the craft and structure category (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010). Pulling out key words and phrases help students develop necessary vocabulary skills. Building upon the words they already know allow students to make connections to these new words. Lennox (2013) also suggests putting words into different contexts. Then, students start to realize that words can have multiple meanings.

Foundation skills. Under this section, the standards split this category into two sections: phonics and word recognition and fluency (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010). By reading out loud and listening to their teacher and peers, students can hear how a passage is read. Fisher el al. (2004) also agree that the fluctuations, the pauses, and the rate at which a story is read are a few ways students understand language expression and fluency.

Writing. By the time students are in third and fourth grade, they should be able to write a response with details from the text. They should also be able to summarize, sequence events, and give a detailed reaction to a particular part of the story (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010). Teachers should make sure the writing piece is meaningful to the lesson and allow students the opportunity to share and publish their writing. Fisher et al. (2004) suggest one writing assignment could be defining new words in their vocabulary journals. Another idea would be to keep a journal. In this journal they could write down their thoughts, reactions, predict upcoming events, and make connections between the text and their own lives.

Speaking and Listening. According to the MDE's (2010) and NGA's (2010) speaking and listening standards, students at this age should be able to effectively collaborate with their teacher and peers. They are prepared to talk about the passage, follow discussion rules, ask questions for clarification, and explain their own thoughts and opinions based on information they have gathered from the text. El Zein, Solis, Vaughn, and McCulley (2014) use a social skills technique called SCORE to make sure students listen and speak effectively. To determine a child's SCORE, teachers follow an observational checklist to see if their students are: (s) sharing ideas, (c) complimenting others, (o) offering help, (r) recommending change, and (e) exercising self-control. An in depth explanation of this checklist is shared in the assessments portion of this chapter.

Summary. As noted in this section, a multi-age classroom is any classroom that has two or more grades it in. Even though they are becoming less popular, some schools need to have multi-age classrooms for financial or student enrollment reasons. Even with

the two or more grades in one classroom, teachers still need to meet the needs of all their

students by incorporating multiple grade level standards into one lesson. By looking at

the Minnesota Language Arts Standards and the Common Core State Standards, teachers

can find the grades they teach and compare. Many are similar and can be tweaked to fit

the specific needs of their students.

The next section of the literature review will discuss findings on two different

theories that support reading comprehension, the schema theory and the transactional

theory.

Theories of Reading Comprehension

Certain reading theories are important for teachers to keep in mind when planning

their read-aloud. The two theories that will be further defined and discussed are the

schema theory and the transactional theory.

The schema theory. The term "schema" was first used in psychology by Bartlett

(1932) as "an active organization of past reactions or experiences" (as cited in An, 2013,

p. 130). Later, Rumelhart (1980), Carrell (1981), and Hudson (1982) used the previous

definition of schema and related it back to reading comprehension (as cited in An, 2013).

These researchers agree when discussing a book, an individual's background knowledge

helps them relate to the text, and therefore understand it better. In a sense, the text

provides the necessary directions for the reader and helps relate the two together (An,

2013). Anderson (1994) adds, "readers construct new ideas and concepts based on their

prior knowledge" (as cited in Morrison & Wlodarcyzk, 2009, p. 113). An (2013) and

Nassaji (2007) also note a person's schema can be formed by culture, previous life

experiences, watching films or televisions, reading similar texts, or from others.

Relating to read-alouds. It is essential for teachers "to assist students in building prerequisite knowledge or remind them, through review, what they already know before introducing new reading material" (Little & Box, 2011, p. 25). Fisher and Frey (2004, as cited in Little & Box, 2011) note that activating prior knowledge before a read-aloud will help students figure out what schema of theirs will best fit the topics the text covers. Activities that can help teachers with this include chapter summaries, vocabulary development, and plot outlines. An (2013) states that students constantly decode and interpret the stories they read or hear. If a student does not know the meaning behind a word, they will not fully understand the passage. If they know the word, but its definition does not fit within the context of the text, they will not fully understand the text. Both Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) and Nassaji (2007) agree as teachers read, allow the students to make connections, answer questions, ask questions themselves, and present alternative perspectives. By doing so, other students schema's can be activated too.

It is also important to keep in mind how students' culture can affect their schema. Their culture provides the student with a lot of background knowledge. An (2013) recommends teachers use this background knowledge to their advantage. Teachers can use discussion as a way for children to think about the text in this way. Also Little and Box (2011) suggest incorporating visual aids and graphic organizers into a lesson. These two additions are known to help students build their schema and make these connections. One visual aid is a semantic map. Semantic mapping is a pre-reading strategy where students generate ideas and what they already know that relate to a topic that is covered

in the text. Using the information from the map, teachers can determine if pre-teaching is necessary. After a portion of the text is read, the teacher adds to the map created before to see how much whole-class acquisition there is.

Finally, An (2013) and Little and Box (2011) agree when a student struggles to comprehend the text, teachers should question how well the student relates to the book. If there is a lack of background knowledge, problems in reading comprehension will arise. This is especially relevant when presented with cross-cultural situations and with students who are lower academically.

The transactional theory. Rosenblatt (1994) credits prior researchers John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley as she forms her own interpretation of the transactional theory. Dewey and Bentley define "transactional" and "transaction" as "an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 17).

Connell (2000) cites Rosenblatt's work when describing the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader. The author has one interpretation of the story while the reader has their own interpretation. Rosenblatt (1994) describes interpretation like the inkblots of a Rorschach Tests: no one interpretation is completely right or wrong. A sentence, paragraph, or passage will capture different images for each reader. According to Rosenblatt in Connell (2000), the reader plays an active role in constructing meaning from the text. It is important that students are allowed to have these personal experiences with the text. Connecting with the text will help the students better understand what they read.

Relating to read-alouds. Children's literature allows students an opportunity to read, write, talk, and listen. Reading and listening to others read allow children to improve their own ability to read and read fluently (Galda, 2013).

As stated in Connell (2000), Rosenblatt suggests that teachers pick texts that relate to the students' needs and interests and not just their current interests. By doing so, students immerse themselves in the text. Engaging with the text through imagination, like putting themselves in the characters' situations, promotes empathy and sensitivity towards others. Galda (2013) notes activities like actively listening, asking questions, and clarifying parts of the text can be challenging at times. Making these personal connections, though hard at times, help transform the text and help with comprehension.

Summary. As teachers start to plan out their read-alouds they should incorporate elements of both the schema theory and the transactional theory into their lessons.

The schema theory allows students to activate their prior knowledge and relate to the text. Activating their prior knowledge before a read-aloud will help students figure out what schema of theirs will best fit the topics covered in the text. A person's schema can be formed by culture, previous life experiences, watching films or television shows, reading similar texts, or from others. Without an activated schema, comprehension is nearly impossible.

The transactional theory allows students to make their own interpretations of a text. The reader plays an active role in constructing meaning from text based on live-through and aesthetic experiences. Children's literature allows the student an opportunity to read, write, talk, and listen. These types of activities will help students

immerse themselves in the text.

The next section of the literature review will discuss the findings on how read-alouds promote engagement in the classroom and helps a teacher create lessons that can adapt to the specific needs in their classroom.

Promoting Engagement During Read-Alouds

According to Fisher el al. (2004), teachers use read-alouds to motivate their students to read and build knowledge about a particular subject. Boyd and Devennie (2009) also add read-alouds encourage children to read with expression and make connections across various subjects. The focus of this section will be engagement as it pertains to selecting a text, developing lessons, and how read-alouds are adapted to fit the many student needs present in a classroom.

Selecting the text. Before using a read-aloud, teachers need to understand how to make the book comprehensible to their students. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) recommend teachers keep their students' interests in mind when selecting a book. Boyd and Devennie (2009) also suggest involving the students. When students are involved in the selection process, they realize their teacher values and respects their opinions. Fisher et al. (2004) state read-alouds are an effective way to introduce students to the joy of reading. Choice is one of the biggest factors for reading. When teachers read a story, students are more likely to pick out similar books to read during their independent reading time.

Lesson development. Children's literature as a read-aloud is a purposeful way for children to engage with books. Galda (2013) claims when students read, write, talk, and listen to books, they make connections, think critically, and learn valuable reading skills

such as fluency, rate, and expression. Boyd and Devennie (2009) claim read-alouds provide a variety of content for learning. Books introduce students to different authors, genres, topics, and others ways of thinking. They invite personal connections and shared experiences and is known to make learning more effective and enjoyable.

When developing a lesson to pair with a read-aloud, teachers should consider how students will relate to the text. Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) claim when students listen to a story, they draw on prior knowledge and relate it back to what they have already read, heard, and experienced. Students should have numerous opportunities to relate the text back to themselves, other texts, and their world.

Text-to-self engagement involves a student relating the information from the text to an event they have a personal connection to. According to Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009), teachers can model this by asking questions like, "this part reminded me of a time when…" or "I can relate to the character because...." (p. 114). By doing so, it allows students to share their thoughts and opinions out and invites others to do the same.

Text-to-text engagement involves a student relating the information from the text to another story. Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) recommend teachers ask questions like "this made me think of another book where…" or "this part is just like…" (p. 114). By doing so, it allows students to share their thoughts and opinions out and invites others to do the same.

Text-to-world engagement involves a student relating the information from the text to something that is or had happened in their neighborhood, community, country, or world. This type of connection often relates to the theme of the story. Morrison and

Wlodarczyk (2009) state by identifying the theme, it allows students to relate it back to not only themselves, but what is going on in the world around them.

McClure and King Fullerton (2017) also claim discussions during an interactive read-aloud provide multiple opportunities to scaffold students. Students interpret the text, make connections, and expand their knowledge of a particular topic all through discussion. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) suggest these discussions help students develop self-awareness. Teaching children to listen to their inner voice while they read or listen to someone else read allows them to stop, think, and react to the information rather than simply read without comprehension.

When planning for discussion and the projects associated with a read-aloud, Harvey and Goudvis (2013) recommend teachers keep these five things in mind. First, ask literal questions and work up to more complex, upper-level questions. Students need to have a solid foundation (answering literal questions) before they can successfully answer critical and analytical questions. Next, students need to be able to retell the story. This could be through discussion, a worksheet, or a project. Asking literal questions and retelling helps lay a basic comprehension foundation. The third step is to merge thinking with the content. Connecting to, questioning, inferring, visualizing, and synthesizing information from a story provides students an opportunity to construct meaning. The fourth step is to acquire knowledge through various comprehension strategies. Some of these comprehension strategies include small and whole group discussions, literature circles, and vocabulary development and writing activities. However, teachers can use the comprehension strategies that best work with their students to think about, question,

synthesize, and gain further insight. Finally, students need to actively use the knowledge given to them. That means teachers should provide learning opportunities, either written or orally, where they can apply the text to experiences, situations, or other circumstances that occur in their daily life. This gives the content meaning and purpose which leads to better comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2013).

Overall, when students are engaged as readers they make connections to others and themselves. Ivey (2014) states being socially engaged in the text includes talking about the text in a variety of ways. However, the learning does not have to stop there. Students can picture themselves in the various scenes. Engagement in this way can help students better connect on an emotional level with the characters in the story.

Adapting to student needs. No matter the size of the class, the students will have a variety of needs. Some students might receive Title 1 services (reading intervention), some might receive Special Education instruction, some might receive Gifted and Talented instruction, and some might receive ESL (English as a Second Language) services. No matter the class make-up, it is the teacher's job to find ways to meet the needs of all of their students. According to Bailey et al. (2016), differentiated instruction can support all students so they do not have to leave the general education setting.

Teachers create multiple pathways to engage students in literacy instruction. Elliot (1997) suggests one of the benefits of teaching in a multi-age setting is that the curriculum is not rigid. Teachers have more flexibility when developing their curriculum and can adjust it to meet the students' individual needs.

A way to adapt a lesson and engage students is through oral language and

vocabulary development. Pang (2013), Lennox (2013), and McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) all agree when students are unable to understand the key vocabulary, they will not fully understand the sentence or paragraph. Lennox (2103) credits several studies that confirm read-alouds as a useful tool to increase vocabulary. In order for children to make vocabulary gains, they need to understand that words may have multiple meanings. One way to help students see this is to find words in the text. Lennox (2013) also suggests teachers explain how a word may mean something now, but in a different context, it may mean something else. When students encounter a new word in context and it is defined and applied, they start to make new connections. Giroir et al. (2015) recommend teachers provide opportunities for students to use new vocabulary words with their peers. This solidifies the new meaning of the word. When students are able to correctly use the new word in discussion, they are more likely to understand it and use it correctly in future discussions.

Another way for teachers to adapt and engage their students in their read-aloud lesson is to use different types of stories in order to improve their language expression, fluency, and comprehension. Fisher et al. (2004) state when students read and listen to their teacher and peers, students can hear how a passage is read. The fluctuations, the pauses, and the rate at which it is read are just some of the ways students understand language expression and fluency. Pang (2013) also credits reading comprehension with reading fluency.

Another source of differentiation is through graphic organizers. Pang (2013) also acknowledges the importance of graphic organizers. Graphic organizers involve students

in the story. They are a way for students to predict what the story is about and what is coming up next. Teachers can use what the students write as a way to check for understanding.

Finally, incorporating a student's prior knowledge gets students engaged in the read-aloud lesson. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) encourage teachers to ask their students to turn and talk to a classmate or share in front of the class what they know about a topic. Based on what the students know, the teacher can provide further clarification, address any misconceptions, or support their thinking. In order for students to comprehend the text, they need to access their prior knowledge. McLaughlin (2012) states, "meaning is constructed when readers make connections between what they know (prior knowledge) and what they are reading (the text)" (p.432). Depending on the level of background knowledge, teachers can use this to form future lessons. The more students know about a particular topic, the more they are able to connect with the story on a personal level. With that said, El Zein et al. (2014) claim students are able to understand social situations within the story and the emotional drive behind the decisions. With a better understanding of the story as a whole, the more likely a students will comprehend it.

Summary. Teachers use read-alouds to motivate their students to read and build knowledge about a particular subject. These stories also encourage children to read with expression and make connections across various subjects. Before using a read-aloud, teachers need to understand how to make the book comprehensible and take their students interests into consideration when selecting a book. Once a book is selected, teachers can come up with ways students can be engaged in the story. Finally, no matter

the size of the class, the students will have a variety of needs. Differentiated instruction can support all students in developmentally appropriate ways.

The final part of the literature review will elaborate on the findings on comprehension as it relates to read-alouds.Then, different reading and thinking strategies and types of assessments will be discussed. These activities and assessments will engage and assess their student's knowledge of the book.

Supporting Comprehension During Read-Alouds

According to El Zein et al. (2014), reading comprehension is the result of word recognition and oral language comprehension. Weakness in one or both areas could lead to lower comprehension scores. Beck and McKeown (2001) also suggest read-alouds require students to take ideas from a book and think beyond the here and now. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) also note comprehension instruction is effective when teachers incorporate reading and thinking strategies into their lessons. Cooperative learning strategies are strategies that get students to work and learn from one another. There are numerous reading and thinking strategies that teachers can use during their read-aloud time that involve cooperative learning.

Reading and thinking strategies. Discussion is a key component in any read-aloud lesson. Reading books out loud enhances a child's language. Beck and McKeown (2001) recommend using the Text Talk discussion technique. The Text Talk is a discussion technique where teachers stop frequently while reading and pose questions to their students. These initial questions are open-ended so multiple perspectives are taken into consideration. From there the teacher can come up with follow-up questions to

support their students as they construct meaning and think critically about their answers. There are benefits from the Text Talk discussion strategy. Beck and McKeown (2001) state first, students learn how to construct and interpret meaning from the text rather than just retrieving it. Second, students learn from one another by gaining new meanings from a text. Third, students learn how to talk about a text in a meaningful way. Building on what others have said or asking follow-up questions for further clarification. Finally, it allows students to incorporate their background knowledge in a meaningful way.

Harvey and Goudvis (2013) recommend scaffolding these types of discussion techniques with children. Teach them how to ask questions, clarify confusion, and make connections with the text. When students go beyond the literal understanding stage, they can focus on the bigger, more complex topics. Through discussion and follow-up questions, teachers can encourage kids to expand their thinking. If the question involves complex thinking and interpretation, Beck and McKeown (2001) encourage teachers to ask the question first, read the section, pose the question again, and read the section for a second time. Repeating these steps allows students to focus on just one element of the text. This process does take time, but Beck and McKeown (2001) claim that it does help students construct meaning and comprehend the text.

Another read-aloud strategy that helps children develop reading and listening comprehension is ELVES (Excite, Listen, Visualize, Extend, Savor). An article by Levesque (1989) describes ELVES as a way for students to become emotionally invested in the text. By doing so, they become better connected with the events and the characters in the story. The first step is the excite the reader. During a pre-reading activity teachers

can grab the students attention with a tease. Reading the back of the book or making

predictions based on the cover art gets students thinking about what is to come. The

second step is to listen. Levesque (1989) recommends while reading the story, ask

comprehension questions throughout. These questions should be a mix of literal and

critical thinking questions. The third step is visualizing. Guided mental imagery is a way

for students to create their own mental pictures while listening to the story. Teachers then

encourage students to draw or explain their mental images. This allows other students to

discuss how their pictures are alike or different. Levesque's (1989) fourth step is extend

their learning. Listeners better comprehend the text when they make connections. Making

these connections to themselves, another story, or an event that happened in their world

allows them to better understand the character's behavior and motivations. Finally,

Levesque's (1989) the last step is to savor the book. When planning, teachers should

allow students time to reflect on the feelings and thoughts they had while listening to the

story or partaking in a corresponding activity. Rushing through the story or activity with

little time for reflection eliminates potential clarification, connection, and comprehension.

Another strategy is to let children take turns reading. The National Reading Panel

is cited in Arens et al. (2018). They believe if children read out loud with speed,

accuracy, and proper expression, they are more likely to comprehend the text. Reading

fluently allows students to focus on the meaning of the text rather than decoding the text.

Types of assessments. Whether they are formal or informal, standardized or not,

teachers use a variety of assessments to assess their student's knowledge. There is a

plethora of information on assessments, how to administer, what to look for, and what

types to use. Here is a brief overview of some of these assessments.

First, during discussion or work time, teachers should model how to answer questions, give feedback, and support their answers with facts from the text. El Zein et al. (2014) cite a 1996 article from Vernon et al. In this article, Vernon el al. (1996) suggests grading students based on their discussion SCORE. This strategy is used with children on the Autism Spectrum, but can easily be adapted to work with any child. Using an observational checklist, teachers identify the child's discussion SCORE. The "S" stands for sharing ideas. Teachers take note of how the child shares their ideas. Do they support their reasoning by citing the book? Can they connect to the character or events personally? The next four elements relate to how the child interacts with other students and their teacher. The "C" stands for compliment others. Students should be able to acknowledge other student's answers positively. Even if they disagree, they acknowledge the answer and give constructive feedback. Vernon el al. (1996) "O" stands for offers help. Students should work together to help brainstorm ideas, offer to help students when asked, and not complain. The "R" stands for recommends changes. Students providing feedback to one another during discussion or work time is important. Teachers should model how to give constructive criticism and offer advice. Students can help their classmates by building off what they said or did in order to make it better. Finally, the "E" stands for exercise self-control. How well a student takes criticism is important. Exercising self-control is an important social skill to develop. Students need to exercise self-control when giving and receiving feedback. In order to improve, one must realize where improvement can take place. Another element of self-control is taking turns while

answering questions. El Zein et al. (2014) recommends teachers moderate the discussion so certain students do not dominate the discussion. During whole group discussion, calling on all students provides them the opportunity to talk. Sharing ideas with a partner is another way to insure all students participate, especially for those who prefer to share in a small group setting.

McLaughlin (2012), states that assessments show an individual's strengths and needs. Providing a variety of activities such as writing, discussing, and creating, allows students to showcase their knowledge and their ability to comprehend the story. Observing, administering, and correcting tests and projects are just a few ways for teachers to gather data on a student. They provide valuable information that teachers can use to shape their lessons.

McLaughlin (2012) also recommends the critical literacy approach. The teacher models how to do this by asking questions like, "whose viewpoint is expressed?", "whose voices are missing, silenced, or discounted?, and "what action might you take based on what you have learned?" (p. 349). This usually takes place during whole group discussion, but can be an individual writing activity. When students are engaged in critical literacy, they tend to be open-minded, active, and strategic readers who can better comprehend the text.

Another way to assess students is through graphic organizers. Merkley and Jefferies (2000) state graphic organizers allow students to connect new information with past learning, make references to new learning, and support their thinking with textual evidence. If teachers decide to use graphic organizers as a means to grade

comprehension, here are some ways to do that.

McMackin and Witherell (2005), recommend using tiered graphic organizers. Tiered graphic organizers are leveled. The goal of these leveled graphic organizer is to have students successfully complete the one recommended for them based on their reading and comprehension level. Based on previous reading test scores and interests level, students complete one of the three different graphic organizers. The three include one for advanced students, one for benchmark students, and one for students who need extra support. They cover the same concepts, sequencing of events, plot structure, cause and effect, and so on, but the difference is the amount of detail required to answer each section and the wording of each question. McMackin and Witherell (2005) also claim these graphic organizers will help students who are developing these reading skills and the those who are advanced and need to think more critically. Tiered graphic organizers allow teachers to consistently assess whether a task is too difficult or not challenging enough. By looking at the completed organizer, teachers can move students up or down to further support or challenge them.

Finally, teachers should make sure the assessments are varied. Oral and written response are fine, but not all students are able to successfully showcase their knowledge if these are the only two types of activities. McLaughlin (2012) recommends teachers find meaningful hand-on activities, such as drawing, acting, modeling, songwriting, and other creative means of expressing their knowledge. McMackin and Witherell (2005) suggest teachers create a rubric because they are easiest way to grade these types of projects. Providing one beforehand lets students know what is expected of them. By

offering multiple modes of response, students take responsibility for their learning and demonstrate their level of comprehension.

Summary. Teachers can utilize read-alouds as a means to gauge comprehension of the book and other reading and listening skills. Read-alouds require students to take the ideas from a book and think beyond the here and now. Comprehension instruction is effective when teachers incorporate cooperative learning strategies. These learning strategies include both reading and listening activities. By sharing ideas and personal connections, students learn from one another.

From formal to informal, standardized or not, teachers need to use variety of assessments to assess their students' knowledge. Assessments are there to show an individual's strengths and needs. Providing a variety of activities such as writing, discussing, and creating, allow students to showcase their knowledge and their ability to comprehend the text. By offering multiple ways to respond, students take responsibility for their learning and level of comprehension.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed both current and past literature on read-alouds as an addition to a language arts curriculum. The literature review also analyzed and discussed what read-alouds are and the components that make up this reading strategy. Next, it defined what a multi-age classroom is, the history behind these types of classrooms, the effects for both the students and teachers, and how one looks at the language arts standards when two or more grades are present in one classroom. Then the chapter explored two different learning theories that support reading comprehension: schema

theory and transactional theory. The fourth topic covered was how read-alouds promote

engagement between the student, their peers, and their teacher. Finally, the literature

review discussed how read-aloud activities foster literacy comprehension.

In Chapter Three, I will utilize the research findings to create a read-aloud unit to

go along with my language arts curriculum. I will describe my unit and the reading

theories that guided it. Then, I will describe the lesson plan template teachers can use as

they plan out their activities and assessments. Finally, I will explain the setting and

participants for this unit.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

My experience as a third and fourth grade multi-age classroom teacher has taught me how to create lessons that fit the needs of both my third and fourth graders. Most of the lessons I teach are done simultaneously. One of the activities that I enjoy doing as a whole group is our read-aloud. During this time my students listen to a story I've picked out. However, I want to do more with this time and make it more meaningful. That idea led me to my guiding question for this project: *How can teachers make read-alouds engaging to students in a multi-age setting*? By conducting a literature review on this topic, I found many answers to this question. The research I collected helped me create a read-aloud unit to go alongside my language arts curriculum.

In this chapter, I describe my unit and the two reading theories that helped shape it. Next, I provide the lesson plan template I created using elements of the Understanding by Design model (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006) and my own personal lesson plan model. This chapter also includes a description of the activities and assessment tools I used during this unit. Finally, I will explain the setting and participants this unit was created for.

Reading Theories

Schema theory. Background knowledge comes from one's culture, life

experiences, the media, other similar books, and the people we meet. The schema theory

uses a person's background knowledge to form and make new connections (An, 2013;

Nassaji, 2007). According to Little and Box (2011), it is a teacher's job to "to assist

students in building prerequisite knowledge or remind them, through review, what they

already know before introducing new reading material" (p.25). Taking their students'

schema into consideration, teachers can select books and activities that best fit their

students' needs.

  Transactional theory. Immersing oneself in a book and emotionally connecting it

to the plot and its characters is an element of the transactional theory (Connell, 2000).

The other element revolves around the interpretation of the text. Rosenblatt (1994)

describes stories as inkblots, no one interpretation is completely right or wrong. Engaging

with the text through imagination, like putting themselves in the characters' situations,

promotes empathy and sensitivity towards others (Connell, 2000). Other activities like

actively listening, asking open-ended questions, and clarifying parts of the text can be

challenging for some. WIth this in mind, Galda (2013) recommends teachers model how

to do this in order to make the process a little easier. Making these personal connections,

though hard at times, help transform the text and aids in comprehension.

  The read-aloud unit. My unit incorporated elements of both the schema theory

and the transactional theory. The discussion activities had students thinking about the text

and how it related to them personally. The discussion activities also allowed students to

connect with the characters on a personal level. Students contemplate what they would

have done if they were in the character's shoes. The writing activities also had students

make connections between themselves, the events that took place, and the characters in the story. Finally, the culminating activities allowed students to put everything they learned throughout the story into one final project. Making connections along the way, they seamlessly incorporated their own opinions and experiences with details from the story to create a project of their choice.

When selecting a text, pick one that students can make connections to. Pre-teaching is something teachers can do. Providing students with a little background knowledge helps later on during the discussion and activity portion of each lessons. By incorporating teacher and student led discussions and vocabulary development activities, teachers help their students interpret and make connections with the text.

Summary. Some teachers define a read-aloud as a book they read aloud while their students listen. Every once in a while the teacher will ask a literal comprehension question to make sure the students are listening. However, read-alouds can be so much more. With that in mind, I created a unit that gives students an opportunity to interpret and connect with the text on multiple levels. Researching and learning about the schema theory and the transactional theory solidified the importance of engagement during read-aloud time.

Participants and Setting

Participants. My read-aloud unit was a template teachers can use once they select a read-aloud book. I have experience teaching third and fourth graders in a multi-age setting. With that said, my intended audience was third and fourth grade students in a general education setting. When I created this unit, I used the Minnesota

Language Arts Standards and the Common Core Language Arts Standards to guide my instruction. While I designed this unit for my third and fourth graders, my hope was that other multi-age teachers are able to utilize this unit if they teach in the middle to upper elementary setting.

Setting. My school is a private pre-k-6 elementary school. Due to the size of enrollment we are a multi-age school. Preschool and kindergarten students are separate, but first and second grade are together, third and fourth grade are together, and fifth and sixth grade are together. Each lesson in my read-aloud unit took about 30 to 40 minutes to complete and was embedded into my literacy block.

Summary. My read-aloud unit was intended for third and fourth grade students. However, my hope was that other multi-age teachers are able to use this unit if they teach in a middle to upper elementary setting. Taking place during my literacy block, I spent 30 to 40 minutes a day reading a passage from my book, discussing the chapters, and completing one other activity.

Project Description

In this section, I reference the lesson plan template I created found in Appendix A. The lesson plan template was one I created, however I did incorporate elements from the Understanding by Design model (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). In the lesson plan section, I explain what each section was and what goes in it. Next, in the activities section, I describe several activities that develop skills supported by the schema theory and the transactional theory. Third, I provide an assessment idea that allow students to show their level of comprehension.

Lesson plan. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) there are three stages of lesson planning. First, teachers need to identify the desired results. Teachers look at the standards to figure out what their students should know, understand, or be able to do by the end of the lesson. In my plan, the teacher identified the standards their lesson covers and the necessary skills students need to actively participate in the lesson. When looking at the standards online, it is easy to compare particular benchmark across two or more grades. For this read-aloud unit, I was able to find exactly how each lesson tied back to the standards.

The next stage was the assessment stage. The important consideration here was how will the teacher know if their students met the lesson's expectations (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006)? In my plan, the teacher identified how they will assess their students. My unit incorporates four different rubrics. Each rubric was assigned a topic: discussion, writing, vocabulary, and culminating activity. The grading scale was similar to the one I use in my classroom. I will go into further detail about these specific rubrics in the assessment section.

The final stage was planning the learning experiences and instruction. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) agree that once the first two stages are in place, teachers can think of engaging and effective learning opportunities that help students achieve the desired outcome. Reading a part of the book and doing at least one activity that correlated with the passage was included in this section. Discussing, writing, acting, predicting, and applying new vocabulary terms were just a few of these activities. I will go into further detail about of these in my activities section.

Assessments. Assessments come in a variety of formats. Assessments show teachers a natural, viable, and continuous way for students to demonstrate their understanding (McLaughlin, 2011). The assessments used in this read-aloud unit include four rubrics. These rubrics are to go along with each lesson. The rubrics have a four to one rating scale. Four was the best meaning zero mistakes and it exceeded grade level expectations. Three means very few mistakes and it met grade level expectations. Two means a few more mistakes and it was slightly below grade level expectations and a one means there were many mistakes and it was below grade level expectations. Teachers can decide if this scale was appropriate for their students. When thinking about grade level expectations, as a guide, I used my school's standardized report card and both the Minnesota Language Arts Standards and Common Core Language Arts Standards.

The following rubrics are included in my read-aloud unit, an observation rubric, a written response rubric, a self-assessment rubric, and a culminating project rubric. Appendix B was the observational rubric. Teachers observe the way a student interacts with the teacher and their peers during discussion time. Do they build on what others say, can they connect to the material in some way, and can they cite their evidence? These are all questions that are answered by listening to their responses (Fisher et al., 2004; Galda, 2013; Pang 2013). Formal and informal written responses also help teachers determine whether a student understood and comprehended the text (McLaughlin, 2012). Appendix C, the written response rubric, helps teachers assess a student's written responses. Appendix D was the self-assessment rubric. Levesque (1989) recommends students reflect on their learning. Without doing so, it eliminates potential clarification,

connection, and comprehension. Students think about and grade themselves based on what they learned and how well they participated in the activity. The last rubric was Appendix E, the culminating project rubric. Students take an active role in their learning. McLaughlin (2012), recommended a variety of activities such as writing, discussing, and creating. This allows students to showcase their knowledge and their ability to comprehend the story. When given four choices, students pick the culminating activity to showcase their learning.

Activities. Burke (1998) and Lennox (2013) both propose many different activities to do before, during, and after a read-aloud. These activities are based on their work, but I have modified them to make them my own.

Each lesson I created was roughly 30 to 40 minutes long. It entailed reading two to three chapters and some sort of activity. My unit contained three discussion based activities. Some of these activities were whole group, small group, and partner based discussions. The unit also contains three writing based activities. The activities had students thinking about their life and how they relate to the characters and the events in the story. The next group of lessons were vocabulary based. Teachers made a list of vocabulary words that were incorporated throughout the story. Using creative writing, drawing, and game based activities, students used and applied these new vocabulary words in a meaningful way. Finally the culminating activities allowed students to incorporate all elements of the book, from start to finish, into one student choice project. Once the four culminating activities were introduced, students picked the one they wanted to do. Teachers used the corresponding rubric to grade each type of activity.

Summary. The unit showcased the different assessments and learning activities done during the read-aloud. Before selecting a book and planning the read-aloud, teachers have to think of their class and the specific needs of their students. Teachers can easily tweak the assessments and activities in order for them to work in their classrooms.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a brief summary of both the schema theory and the transactional theory. These theories shaped my read-aloud unit. Then, I went into detail about the participants and setting for my read-aloud unit. Next, I gave an overall description of the project. First, I discussed the lesson plan template and what type of information goes in each section. Following that, I explained the different corresponding rubrics. Finally, I described the four different types of activities found within this unit. Each assessment and activity can be tweaked to fit the needs of the students.

In my final chapter, I will reflect on my capstone journey. I will discuss what I have learned throughout this process, how my project will benefit other teachers, and how I see my project used in the future by myself and other teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

When I first began this capstone journey, I knew I wanted to create a unit that I could use in my classroom with both my third and fourth grade students. Teaching in a multi-age classroom, I strive to find activities that incorporate learning objectives and activities suited for both grades. With that in mind, I created an interactive and engaging read-aloud unit to help me answer this question: *How can teachers make read-alouds engaging to students in a multi-age setting?*

Children's literature as a read-aloud is a purposeful way for children to engage with books. McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) discuss how read-alouds improve certain literacy skills such as listening skills, oral language skills, vocabulary development, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. In addition to these literacy skills, students learn how to empathize with others in their class and with the text. Now that I created a read-aloud unit and reflected upon this journey, this chapter highlights some of of the things I've learned. First, I will discuss how my literature review shaped my read-aloud unit. Then, I will describe the potential implications of my project within my school and other multi-age classrooms. Following that, I describe the hopes I have for this project moving forward and the future projects I hope to do with younger students. Finally, I conclude the paper with my own personal reflection on this project and what I learned about myself while researching and creating this read-aloud unit.

Relevance of Literature Review

When I created my read-aloud unit, there were many elements from my literature review that guided and shaped my unit. At my school, all teachers have two grades in their classroom. Veenman (1995) describes a multi-age classroom as a classroom with two or more grades in it learning from one curriculum. Bailey et al. (2016) also state that multi-age classrooms naturally allow students to progress socially and academically. My read-aloud unit provides third and fourth graders an opportunity to work together, create, discover, and make connections to the book, their peers, and themselves.

When teaching two grades together, teachers think about the two grade level standards they have to incorporate. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) state that students are going to have to think and comprehend if they are going to meet the Common Core State Standards. Taking a closer look at both the Minnesota Language Arts (MDE, 2010) and Common Core State Standards (NGA, 2010), each lesson within my unit supports both the third and fourth grade language arts standards. If one looks at each lesson, the section for the standards is vague. That is so the teacher can insert the specific grade level standards they teach. The lessons incorporate several different language arts categories such as informational text, foundation skills, writing, and speaking and listening.

When creating my unit, there were two reading comprehension theories that influenced each lesson: schema theory and transactional theory. When developing a lesson to pair with a read-aloud, teachers should consider how students will relate to the text. Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) claim when students listen to a story, they draw on prior knowledge and relate it back to what they have already read, heard, and

experienced. Students should have numerous opportunities to relate the text back to themselves, other texts, and their world. When students make these connections they are engaged in their learning. Ivey (2014) states being socially engaged in the text includes talking about the text in a variety of ways. Engagement in this way can help students better connect on an emotional level with the characters in the story.

The term "schema" was first used in psychology by Bartlett (1932) as "an active organization of past reactions or experiences" (as cited in An, 2013, p. 130). Fisher and Frey (2004, as cited in Little & Box, 2011) note that activating prior knowledge before a read-aloud helps students figure out what schema of theirs will best fit the topics covered in the text. Both Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) and Nassaji (2007) agree as the teacher reads, they should allow students to make connections, ask and answer questions, and present alternative perspectives so their students schema's can be activated. When looking at my discussion, writing, vocabulary, and culminating activities, one will notice how they all allow students to activate their schema in one way or another.

Next, the transactional theory is "an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 17). Children's literature allows the student an opportunity to read, write, talk, and listen. As stated in Connell (2000), Rosenblatt suggest teachers pick books that relate to the students' needs and interests. By doing so, it helps the student immerse themselves in the text. Engaging with the text through imagination, like putting themselves in the characters' shoes, promotes empathy and sensitivity towards others. When looking at my discussion, writing, vocabulary, and

culminating activities, one will notice how they all allow students to make personal connections to the characters and events in the book.

Next, when planning for discussion and the projects associated with a read-aloud, Harvey and Goudvis (2013) recommend the following five things. First, ask literal questions and work up to more complex, upper-level questions. Students need to have a solid foundation (answering literal questions) before they can successfully answer critical and analytical questions. Next, students need to be able to retell the story. This could be through discussion, a worksheet, or a project. Asking literal questions and retelling helps lay a basic comprehension foundation. The third step is to merge thinking with the content. Connecting to, questioning, inferring, visualizing, and synthesizing information from the story provides students an opportunity to construct meaning. The fourth step is to acquire knowledge through various comprehension strategies. Some of these comprehension strategies include small and whole group discussions, literature circles, and vocabulary development and writing activities. However, teachers can use the comprehension strategies that best work with their students to think about, question, synthesize, and gain further insight. Finally, students need to actively use the knowledge given to them. That means teachers should provide learning opportunities, either written or orally, where students can apply the text to experiences, situations, or other circumstances that occur in their daily life. This gives the text meaning and purpose which leads to better comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2013).

Finally, I use rubrics as a means to assess my students' knowledge. McLaughlin (2012), states that assessments show an individual's strengths and needs. Providing a

variety of activities such as writing, discussing, and creating, allows students to showcase their knowledge and their ability to comprehend the story. Using the the four different rubrics included in my unit, teachers are able to observe and reflect on each student's performance. The data collected from these assessments provide teachers with valuable information that they can use to shape future lessons.

Implications

Even though I created this unit for myself and my students, I hope many other teachers will benefit from it. One group in particular is my own school community. As multi-age teachers we are always looking for other ways to engage all of our students. With several different types of discussion, writing, vocabulary, and project based activities, this unit could easily be implemented into both language arts curriculums. I kept my current group of third and fourth graders in mind as I created each lesson's expectations. However, teachers can make adjustments and accommodations to fit the specific needs of their students.

Depending on the chapter book selected, teachers can also make this unit cross-curricular. Students are exposed to many different genres and topics on their state's standardized tests. Using this unit along with books that incorporate science or social studies topics will expose students to different types of reading commonly found on these tests. By incorporating these type of books, students will also learn the necessary vocabulary and critical thinking skills that will help them succeed on these types of tests.

Moving Forward

Now that I've completed this project, I already have a few books in mind that I

want to use with this unit. I am also excited to share my project with my other colleagues at my school. The fifth and sixth grade teacher at my school was also my content expert. From her feedback throughout this process, I could see her using some of these ideas with her students. Once published, many other multi-age and single grade teachers will be able to see this project and be inspired by it. As a teacher, I've taught in both multi-age classrooms and single grade classrooms. This unit allows all students to learn alongside their classmates. As long as the teacher has a passion for reading and student engagement, this project is for them.

Looking towards the future, I would love to expand this unit to younger students, kindergarten through second grade. If tweaked, many of the lessons could be used with younger students. Using picture books or chapter books geared towards younger students, all of the discussion activities are still relevant. As for the writing activities, one could turn them into simple writing activities where students are given sentences starters. Also, the teacher could use pictures as a form of writing. The two vocabulary activities that could work with younger students are Vocabulary Memory and Vocabulary Write and Draw. The biggest change would be to the Vocabulary Write and Draw activity. Students could come up with the sentences together as a group and draw the corresponding picture by themselves. Finally, the culminating activities could still be used. However, I recommend changing the amount of writing for each project. Teacher could use sentences starters to help students answer the questions and allow them to draw more pictures and use the pictures as a way to communicate what they remember about the story. If the teacher decided to use the poem activity, they could select one type of poem and split the

class into several small groups. Each small group would work together to create one poem.

Personal Learning

Throughout this process I've learned many things about myself. The time and dedication it took to research and construct this paper and corresponding read-aloud unit proves I am capable of many things. Working towards my Master's in Education was just one more step in my educational journey. I am very proud of myself and what I've accomplished.

As a researcher and writer, I've learned how to use my personal background, my love of literacy, and my career as a teacher to help me write my Chapter One. I also learned how to read and sift through countless educational books, articles, and journals to find relative information on multi-age classrooms, reading comprehension theories, promoting reading engagement, and supporting reading comprehension. By reading through these sources, taking notes, and summarizing my findings, I wrote an in depth and concise Chapter Two.

As a creator and teacher, I used the knowledge I gained from all the research and what I've learned from teaching literacy for the past six years to create my read-aloud unit. My unit incorporates three small and whole group discussion activities, three different individual and cooperative writing based activities, two writing based vocabulary lessons, one group vocabulary game, and four different culminating activities. These activities incorporate creative thinking and writing, drawing, and technology. My read-aloud unit was proposed in Chapter Three and reflected on in this chapter.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I recalled important and relevant information I've learned from my literature review to help me answer my guiding question: *How can teachers make read-alouds engaging to students in a multi-age setting?* I also discussed the implications for this project, the future of my read-aloud unit, and how I would like to expand this unit to younger students. Finally, I concluded the chapter by reflecting on the many things I learned about myself as a researcher, writer, creator, and teacher by creating this read-aloud unit and corresponding capstone paper.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan Template: (Tomlinson, C. A., & McTighe, J., 2006, p. 30-31)

Stage 1- Desired Results
Standards:
Necessary Skills: Students will be able to…
Stage 2- Assessment Evidence
Assessment Techniques:
Stage 3- Learning Plan
Learning Activities:

Appendix B

Observational Rubric: (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010)

Sticky Note Discussion, Dice Discussion and "What if" Discussion

Name:	4	3	2	1
Student cites their responses with text-based evidence				
Student summarizes the text pointing out the main idea and supporting details				
Student makes connections to the text (text-text, text-self, text-world)				
Student effectively engages with their teacher and their peers. Building on others' ideas and expressing their own thoughts				
Student follows the discussion rules set in place by the teacher				

Appendix C

Written Response Rubric: (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010)

Dear Diary, Postcard, and Question and Answer

Name:	4	3	2	1
Student uses grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules correctly				
Student states their opinion and cites their responses with text-based evidence				
Student summarizes the text pointing out the main idea and supporting details				
Student makes connections to the text (text-text, text-self, text-world)				

Appendix D

Self-Assessment Rubric: (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010)

Vocabulary Game, Vocabulary Journals, and Vocabulary Write and Draw

Name:	4	3	2	1
After the activity, I can correctly define 4 + words				

Those words are:	List any extra words below:
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

Appendix E

Culminating Project Rubric: (MDE, 2010; NGA, 2010)

Book Collage, Book Talk, Jigsaw Puzzle, and Poetry Mobile

Name:	4	3	2	1
Student uses grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules correctly when writing and speaking				
Student states their opinion and cites their responses with text-based evidence				
Student summarizes the text pointing out the main idea and supporting details				
Student makes connections to the text (text-text, text-self, text-world)				
Student successfully creates a project according to the teachers direction				
Student is able to answer both questions about their project from their peers and teacher				