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Texas Journal of Literacy Education is the official journal of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE), the Texas affiliate of the International Literacy Association. TJLE is a peer-reviewed journal published twice each year, in the Fall and Spring. We seek original research and practitioner articles related to language and literacy practices, from early childhood through adult, inside and outside of the classroom. We welcome all voices from literacy researchers, classroom teachers, and graduate students.

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Editors' Introduction

This year has been a challenge within Texas literacy settings. Whether you are in a literacy classroom teaching in the K-12 setting or educating preservice teachers who will lead in the future, it has been a time like no other. From more books being banned, to pandemic learning loss, to navigating spaces in which educators are retiring or leaving the classroom at an all-time high—our plates are full. Though our plates are full, we challenge you to reflect upon what makes Texas literacy education spaces amazing and unique. Give praise or a compliment to your colleagues that you serve with in school every day. Go and watch another literacy educator teach. Swap literacy teaching ideas with educators in other districts. Share your research with someone who has never heard it before. Dig into creative ways to teach by taking part in action research. Take opportunities to write for reflection and write for fun. Most importantly, keep creating magic with your students (younger and older) to instill a love of literacy!

As we close out 2023, the TALE Journal Editorial Board wishes to thank everyone who was a part of this issue—authors/researchers, new reviewers, and our faithful reviewers who are always there for us (we couldn't produce this without you). As you browse through the scholarly and practitioner works in this issue, think about how the work can impact your classroom or someone you know. Share the journal contents, but also consider sharing your expertise as well. We want the TJLE to shine and reach the world with issues and solutions in literacy from the heart of Texas— we cannot do that without you.

All the best in the New Year,

Dr. Kamshia Childs (Lead Editor)
Dr. Laura Slay (Lead Editor)
Dr. Juan Araujo (Associate Editor)
Dr. Tami Morton (Associate Editor)

Preface/In This Issue

When schools resume in January, preparing students for high-stakes state tests may take an increased focus in curriculum and instruction. Test results from curriculum-based assessments may call for intervention and hopefully, a continued emphasis on best practices in literacy instruction. Reading comprehension, of course, is key to student success regardless of the grade level or content area. We hope that the articles in this Fall 2023 issue of Texas Journal of Literacy Education will offer evidence to support teaching reading with best practices. This issue contains research studies of literacy education across primary, secondary, and preservice teacher education—while focusing on reading comprehension, online learning, multicultural literature, read alouds, and a comparison between structured and balanced literacy. Each of these articles discuss different aspects of reading instruction related to developing both proficient readers and creating a positive, engaging learning environment.

Readers interested in adolescent literacy intervention may be interested in reading the first article, "Okay, Miss, I want to talk it out: Text-Centered Dialogue Supporting Adolescent Literacy". In this study, Blippert presents five text-based dialogic patterns observed in a case study of a seventh-grade student receiving reading intervention. The second research study supports the importance of creating inclusive multicultural learning environments. In "Assessing the Scope: Examining how Primary Teachers use Multicultural Texts for Classroom Read Alouds", Lemke and Wilcoxen used an open-ended questionnaire to examine how primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds. Another study about read alouds underscores the importance of implementing read alouds across content areas and grade levels. In "Exploring the Relationship Between Teacher Demographics and the Frequency of Read-Aloud Practices in the Classroom", Schwab et al. surveyed PK-12 teachers to explore the relationship between teacher demographic factors and the frequency use of read alouds in their classrooms. The fourth article turns to higher education and online learning. In "Social Presence and Online Learning Communities", Bradley explored preservice teachers' engagement in online learning communities within their online courses. Finally, readers interested in the debate about balanced literacy and structured literacy may be interested reading the final article, "Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater: What Should Remain from Balanced Literacy" in which Schreck contrasts critiques and benefits of the two approaches to reading instruction.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue, and that you take the time to rejuvenate, reflect, and prepare to enter 2024 strong!

"OKAY, MISS, I WANT TO TALK IT OUT": TEXT-CENTERED DIALOGUE SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT LITERACY

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Abstract

The question posed in this analysis is: What is the relationship between text-centered dialogue and reading comprehension? This article examines one student's behaviors while reading challenging texts. This qualitative case study explored the verbal behaviors of Robert (pseudonym), a seventh-grade student receiving reading intervention. As his text-centered dialogue increased, his comprehension increased as well. Over the course of 11 weeks, Robert (pseudonym) *improved his success rate in an online reading intervention program from 3 successful attempts mid-year to 31 successful attempts by the end of May. Using a comprehension-as-sense-making theoretical frame, findings suggest that providing at-risk adolescents opportunities to engage in dialogic strategic behaviors could encourage successful problem solving when working with challenging texts, an asset-oriented approach to intervention.*

Keywords: reading, middle school, dialogue, asset-orientation, strategy, engagement, intervention

Introduction

With the passing of House Bill 4545, public schools in Texas are required to provide accelerated intervention support to students who were not successful on their State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for reading and mathematics (TEA, 2021). As a result, schools have ramped up their efforts to provide this required intervention to their students. Post-pandemic, the teaching field has experienced an increase in teacher retirement as well as teachers leaving the profession. In the state of Texas, the numbers of teachers leaving the profession rose to 12% in 2022, up from the previous academic year of 9%; teachers retiring the profession rose to 8,000, up by 1,000 from the previous academic year (Lopez, 2022 July 25). On the national level, a survey conducted in May of 2022 (Marshall et al., 2022; Steiner & Woo, 2021) indicated that 75% of respondents considered leaving their teaching positions in the coming academic year. While there are several factors contributing to why we are seeing the increase in teachers leaving the profession in Texas, House Bill 4545 complicates the issue by intensifying the need for an adequate number of teachers and tutors in public schools. Schools in Texas are scrambling to find ways to provide intervention in reading and mathematics to students. However, schools should consider the ways in which this intervention is delivered.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), it is recommended that middle schools provide the following to support readers who had not performed proficiently on the STAAR Reading (TEA, 2019):

> Guide students during text-related oral and written activities that support the interpretation, analysis, and summarization of text. Foster student small-group discussions and enhance understanding through teacher-guided conversations… Have student take part in partner reading... Organize students into collaborate groups for reading tasks. Implement strategic reading practices within these groups or implement team-based learning to clarify, apply, and extend students' understanding of text and content (p. 2).

The purpose of this study is to explore how one student's reading comprehension were met through the use of strategic dialogue. While the TEA acknowledged that collaborative dialogue is beneficial for student reading comprehension and content learning, teachers should be provided with an understanding of how collaborative dialogue can be utilized by teachers and schools effectively.

Typically, reading strategies have been taught to students using a "comprehension-as-procedure" method (Aukerman, 2008; 2013). This method addresses comprehension as dependent on teacher modeling, guided practice of a set of strategies, and reinforcement of a "correct" use of strategies in an effort support comprehending a text. The intent is that through teacher modeling and student practice of strategy procedures, strategies become automatic and used by students at times when they are in need of support during independent reading. While studies suggest that there is little evidence that independent strategy use occurs with students (Rand Reading Study Group, 2002), teachers should consider how student engagement and strategy use are related (Goldman et al., 2016) and involve various cognitive processes.

This article provides a close analysis of one seventh grade student, highlighting the reading strategies that allowed him to engage with challenging texts, subsequently supporting his success with reading. While schools grapple with providing the human resources necessary to deliver required reading interventions, they first need to consider the assets that all students bring to literacy tasks. In the example that follows, this asset consisted of text-centered dialogue.

Robert (pseudonym) was a 7th grade student in an urban middle school in south central Texas in 2016. The situation that schools are facing bring to mind the ways in which students like Robert engage with texts to support comprehension. Robert, like many students, had his own strategic repertoire that was not recognized or valued in the classroom. However, his school utilized a computer-based intervention program in an effort to provide assistance to as many students as possible. Such programs often support a limited set of reading strategies, such as making predictions, summarizing, and making connections. While these strategies are important for students to apply, they do not constitute the various ways that students may engage with a text. Tapping into students' existing strengths as readers may help them recognize and utilize their strengths, an asset-oriented approach to reading comprehension instruction. Often, these strategic behaviors are rooted in dialogic behaviors, such as think-alouds, read-alouds, asking questions, text discussions, and collaboration. The question posed in this analysis is: What is the relationship between text-centered dialogue and reading comprehension?

Robert, the focus of this article, talked a lot. Over the course of 11 weeks of computer screen and audio recording, the investigator noticed that in most of the transcripts, Robert spent

much of his time talking to himself and to others in the classroom during the reading intervention period. Robert relied on self-talk and social interactions while reading to aid in comprehension. This was Robert's strength as a reader: engaging in dialogue about texts and using spoken language to problem-solve through difficult comprehension questions. These types of strategies helped him become increasingly successful over the course of the 11-week study.

Theoretical Framework: Comprehension as Sense-Making

An individual's text comprehension is not reducible to a set of strategy procedures, but often involves hypothesizing about texts through collaboration (Aukerman, 2008; Boardman et al., 2017). Whether a student's hypothesis about the meaning of the text is correct or not is less relevant than the fact that decisions are made about the meaning of the text. Only through collaboration and discussion of the text can the student clarify if they hypothesized correctly or not. This is at the expense of valuing a more dialogic, sense-making ideology of reading comprehension, which would embrace student discussion and collaboration.

In addition, strategy instruction should not be limited to a small set of visible and quantifiable strategies. While students should be provided instruction in summarizing and paraphrasing, inferring information from the text, and making connections, teachers need to also stress the importance of comprehension monitoring strategies that may not necessarily be as clearly visible to teachers (Maniates & Pearson, 2008; Pressley, 2000). Students should be encouraged to actively engage with the text; they should be provided a variety of ways to engage with texts if we want them to move beyond declarative and procedural strategy use, and toward the development of conditional strategy use tailored to the students' reading needs. For students to be able to choose strategies that they find most beneficial, they first need a selection of strategies that does not minimize nor lessen the importance of those that may not be tracked either in written format or on a computer-generated student report. Relying on a limited set of conveniently identifiable and visible strategies will not meet adolescents' strategic needs.

How schools approach comprehension instruction suggests a culture that values certain strategic behaviors from teachers and students in the classroom (Bippert, 2020; Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009). This curricularization of strategy instruction and student responses would carry what Bourdieu (1991) would describe as "capital" within the classroom. Guided by the teacher, a particular way of showing textual sense-making is honored, while other genuine student interactions with the text may be disregarded, discouraged, or even dismissed (Aukerman et al., 2015). However, shared reading and peer collaboration has shown to positively benefit students' strategy use (Boardman et al., 2017; Farkas & Jang, 2019). Teachers become so entrenched in how strategy instruction should look according to the dominant culture in the classroom that they may miss opportunities to foster text engagement with students who may be identified as struggling readers.

Review of Literature

Struggling Reader Identity

The most common label used to describe individuals who find difficulty in reading or engaging with texts is "struggling reader." Over the years, concerns about student reading achievement have resulted in a series of deficit-oriented labels designed to describe and remediate the reading proficiency of students who fail to perform well on state and national reading assessments. Over the past century, these deficit-oriented labels have placed the learner at the center of the problem surrounding their achievement disparities (Brooks & Frankel, 2018; Dudley-Marling, 2011; Marsh, 2019). These labels potentially affect an adolescent's perception of their ability, without taking into consideration other variables that play into how students are deemed proficient at reading.

The term "struggling reader" has been commonly used in an attempt to encompass the variety of explanations for how students find difficulty reading and connecting with texts. This term expresses the students' struggle with a multitude of factors such as difficulty with vocabulary, English language proficiency, cultural differences, and the inability or unwillingness to relate to texts used within schools. The label "struggling reader" was an attempt to not only describe the complex mix of students who, for many reasons, were not engaged in literacy activities in ways that are valued by schools and the traditional ideas that encompass reading and literacy, but also intended to counter such highly student-deficit labels as remedial or low reader (Alvermann, 2001; Dudley-Marling, 2011).

An adolescent's reading identity can lead to multitude of consequences, both positive and negative. The development of a negative reading identity can affect the adolescent's connection and belonging in the school context, and events that seem simple for a typical student, such as visiting the school library, may be overwhelming and alien to a struggling, adolescent reader, resulting in their belief that they are not only incapable but unworthy to take part in the school literacy Discourse (Moje & Dillon, 2006; Hall, 2009). Their reading identities are often shaped through negative interactions in and out of school that ultimately shape the student's identity in detrimental ways, causing the adolescent to associate reading with emotions such as anxiety, fear, and avoidance (Tripplett, 2007).

According to Klauda, Wigfield, and Cambria (2012), an adolescent's motivation for reading can be affected by teachers and peers in two ways: affirming aspects and undermining aspects of motivation, based on the peers' attitudes toward reading. The norms and expectations that exist in school also shape students' reader identities in either positive or negative ways (Tripplett, 2007). Interactions and feedback from teachers and peers can affect not only the student's identity, but also the willingness that a student has to participate in school reading contexts. For example, in a case study conducted by Hall (2009), one adolescent student admitted to resisting participation in class not because she did not care about improving her reading abilities, but because she feared the negative responses she may have received from her fellow classmates. Although this student quietly followed along with the text when it was read aloud by the teacher and other students, her silence had been misinterpreted by the teacher as apathy toward reading.

Additionally, the power that teachers and peers hold in the persistence of students' in-

school reading identities often conflict with these students' desire to enter into the school reading Discourse. However, many students realize this change in identity can be difficult to overcome, despite the efforts of the struggling adolescent reader. In a case study conducted with two adolescents described as struggling readers, Enriquez (2011) found that despite the efforts of these participants to improve in school reading activities, their identity as struggling readers appeared to be "fixed" in the minds of teachers and peers (p. 117). Although the two adolescents described in the study had taken steps toward becoming a part of the school literacy Discourse, these steps were not acknowledged by teachers, administrators, or classmates, and their change in personal identity remained unrecognized.

Creating a descriptor or label to help educators support students who experience difficulty with traditional school texts, and yet does not imply a deficit within the student, is difficult considering the reality of high stakes testing in the United States and schools' push to improve these test scores. The struggling reader label places a deficit within the student's reading ability rather than a lack of flexibility regarding teachers, schools, and curriculum to fit the students' needs (Risko et al., 2011; Dudley-Marling, 2011). However, to address the present needs of schools, educators should provide students with adequate instruction in comprehension and critical thinking skills, allow students to use their existing knowledge in literacies used outside of the classroom to support in-school literacies, and focus on decoding and word-recognition skills for only the small number of adolescents who need it.

Early Adolescent Readers

Early adolescent students are defined here as students aged 11-15 years. These students are found to be in the process of adapting from elementary to secondary modes of instruction, where they often experience less direct adult supervision and more freedom and choice during the school day (Roeser et al., 2000; Cipriano et al., 2019). Ealy adolescents are typically in the middle school grades 6-8.

Students at the middle school level have unique needs that cannot be generalized based on findings from studies based on elementary or high school participants (Allington, 2011). Research with students at the middle school level who are experiencing difficulties with reading and/or learning in the classroom is needed in order for schools to be better informed of the most effective tools and teaching methods for improving student reading achievement. Otherwise, based on the research available that addresses this student population, it is difficult for many of the currently marketed computer-based reading intervention publishers to claim improved achievement and motivation for students experiencing reading difficulties in our middle schools.

While elementary readers may have difficulty in decoding words and poor fluency, a very small number of adolescents need word-level instruction (Dennis, 2009). Middle school readers positioned as struggling have needs that cannot be met by reinforcing isolated phonics and comprehension skills alone; they need support and direct instruction in comprehension strategies (Reynolds, 2021). While behavioral engagement with texts is an expectation in a reading intervention program, a study conducted by Daley and colleagues found that this will not necessarily result in improvement in reading comprehension (2020). However, when a

socially constructive model of literacy instruction is provided alongside strategy instruction, including student collaboration, students' motivation and attitudes toward reading can improve (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Adolescents also benefit from opportunities to share their reading experiences with teachers and peers and engage socially with texts (Farkas & Jang, 2019; Ivey, 1999). While it is important for adolescents to have access to texts that are at a difficulty level that they can successfully and fluently read (Allington, 2007), schools need to also provide authentic purposes for reading, allowing students the agency to choose texts that they relate to, on topics that are relevant and that they are interested in exploring through extensive reading (Allington, 2011; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Ivey, 1999; Ivey, 2019).

Studies that measured the motivational effect of activities that promoted student agency and social engagement support these claims. In one study of sixth grade science students participating in an inquiry-based project (Harmer & Cates, 2005), students worked collaboratively to actively find solutions to stop the spread of the West Nile virus. Students were given choices of online articles to read in order to build possible solutions. Results from the study indicated that students were motivated by the freedom they were given in selecting reading materials as well as presentation delivery methods. Students were encouraged to discuss findings during the project and were found to eagerly share text resources with other classmates during these discussions. Another study conducted with a seventh-grade class (Meth, 2010) studied the motivational effect of student inquiry projects. These students, identified as struggling readers, participated in a Web quest activity. Students were given their choice of research topic based on a social justice issue or endangered species. The study found that by giving students the opportunity to self-selected texts based on topics of interest, these students not only increased in text engagement, but improved in comprehension strategy use. While commercially developed reading interventions can provide students some agency in choosing texts at a level they can successfully read, as with the program used by Robert and his classmates, technology-driven interventions still limit students' social interactions and the potential for further inquiry on students' topics of interest.

While strategy instruction is considered important for student success with comprehending difficult texts, a study by Hall (2012) found that students who identified as low reading comprehenders have been shown to have less flexibility in strategy use and will often rely on a limited set of strategies. Although low comprehenders could perform comprehension strategies at the procedural level, these students still relied on some comprehension strategies that served no further purpose than the performance of the strategy. This tells us that even students who identify as struggling readers are capable of performing the strategy "act" and still not be able to strategically use the strategy. This could be an effect of how the act of strategy performance has been valued as a form of social capital within the classroom (Davis, 2013; Handsfield & Jimenez, 2009). Teachers need to recognize when strategies are useful and valuable to a task, and not stress the performance of these strategies for the sake of the strategy performance.

Dialogic Reading Strategy

Dialogic reading strategies are founded in language and dialogue associated with a reading task, and support comprehension through text-based discussion (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). While typically associated with early literacy development, dialogic reading strategies will be related here to what has been termed "dialogic teaching," where the "function" of language and dialogue taps into a socio-constructivist model of teaching and learning (Boyd & Markarian, 2015, p. 274), and text-centered language activates cognitive processes (Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, dialogic reading strategies at the secondary level are closely related to dialogic teaching in that the student engages in dialogue related to a text; the student intentionally or unintentionally applies language or dialogue to assist in comprehending a text. Boyd and Markarian (2015) describe how instructors can support comprehension by taking a "dialogic stance" (p. 273), which would provide an overall classroom culture encouraging and valuing student talk as a vehicle promoting learning through a socio-constructivist lens.

Dialogue as function may be one way to initiate students' use of dialogue as reading strategy. However, strategic behavior can be enhanced when dialogue becomes part of classroom routines. Teachers who focus on the use of questioning techniques that encourage critical thinking, such as asking questions to elicit additional dialogue closely related to higher-order and critical thinking, have shown to aid in students' engagement with texts through dialogue. For example, a study conducted in the United Kingdom studied teachers' use of Talk Prompts to support students' active engagement in strategic dialogue (Maine & Hofmann, 2016). These Talk Prompts included question stems that focused on higher-order questioning. It was found that when teachers used Talk Prompts and followed them with probing questions to elicit dialogue that would provide more nuanced responses, students become more actively engaged with texts as compared with instructional models that did not provide the teacher eliciting deeper dialogue. Even without a teacher as a guide, students have been found to utilize higher-order thinking and reasoning when provided with opportunities for collaboration and dialogue. Maine and colleagues (2020) found that without a teacher present to guide reading and discussion, students engaged in high-level discussions while integrating their fellow classmates' ideas related to the text. Peer-to-peer dialogue, when used as a strategic resource, is useful in helping students in co-constructing meaning from texts. Liu and colleagues (2021) found that peer-to-peer strategic dialogue may support comprehension in the following ways:

1. Provides an outlet for students to discuss individual understanding of a text,
2. Clears up challenging concepts, and
3. Provides opportunities for the peer group to generate a collective summary of materials. (p. 11-16)

Aside from reading, writing has been shown to benefit from dialogic strategic behavior as well. In a study conducted with secondary students (Spence et al., 2021), those students found peer dialogue important for aiding them with an increase in personal reflection present in their writing as compared with students who did not engage in peer dialogue. Dialogue as a

strategic comprehension tool has been shown to support students in a variety of ways, particularly when in concert with student collaboration.

Methodology

The focal participant in this study, Robert (a pseudonym), was a seventh-grade student attending an urban middle school in south central Texas. A participant from a larger study, this student had been identified as requiring reading intervention based on his performance on the sixth-grade state reading assessment as well as performance on a campus-wide reading screener. The student was attending a reading intervention class, utilizing a computer-assisted intervention program, Achieve 3000.

This case study occurred across an 11-week period. The investigator collected data between two and four times each week. This case study included data from 12 computer screen recordings. See Table 1 for a description of the timeframe of student recording data. Over the course of the study, the student's behavior and voice were recorded while he engaged in the online reading program using Krut screen recorder (Östby & Berggren, 2004).

Table 1

Time frame of student recordings

Recording number	Timeframe	Video ID
1	Week 3, Day 1	W3D1
2	Week 3, Day 2	W3D2
3	Week 5, Day 1	W5D1
4	Week 5, Day 4	W5D4
5	Week 6, Day 2	W6D2
6	Week 6, Day 3	W6D3
7	Week 7, Day 2	W7D2
8	Week 8, Day 1	W8D1
9	Week 8, Day 2	W8D2
10	Week 10, Day 2	W10D2
11	Week 10, Day 3	W10D3
12	Week 11, Day 2	W11D2

All verbal behaviors on the twelve recordings that were observed were coded for analysis. A verbal behavior is defined here as any use of language during the recording session. Using an open coding procedure (Saldaña, 2016), the student's verbal behaviors were coded throughout each screen and audio recording. As new verbal behaviors occurred, new behaviors (codes) were added. These behaviors were then quantified for each screen and audio recording, and simultaneously coded when more than one verbal behavior was evident in the same

recording (Saldaña, 2016). When a behavior was observed during the student's interaction with a text, the behavior was marked one time; if the student attempted more than one text within the same recording, the behavior was marked again if it was observed during the interaction with the additional text. See Table 2 for the behaviors that were identified for each video.

Table 2

Instances of Verbal Behaviors

	Verbal Behaviors						
Video ID	Read aloud	Think-aloud	Textual discussion	Read question/answers	Verbal self-redirection	Requesting help	Off-task behaviors
W3D1	X						X
W3D2	X	X	X			X	XX
W5D1		X		X			XXX
W5D4	X					X	X
W6D2	X	X	X	X			X
W6D3	X	X	X	X			X
W7D2		X					X
W8D1	X	X					X
W8D2	XX	X	XX	XX	X		X
W10D2	XX	X		X			XX
W10D3	XX	XX	X	XX			
W11D2	XXXX	XXX		XXX			

Findings

Over the course of the study, twelve screen recordings were closely analyzed to identify text-centered dialogue that took place during the student's screen recordings. The quantified behaviors were then analyzed and compared with the student's success with reading passages associated with each day's recordings. The analysis provided an answer to the question: What is the relationship between text-centered dialogue and reading comprehension?

Text-centered Dialogue as Reading Comprehension Strategies

"Text-centered dialogue" will be used to describe verbal behaviors that related to the text; while a verbal behavior was any use of language during each recording, text-centered dialogue referred to language as it was connected with a text or topic within a text. Once the verbal behaviors were coded and collapsed, the themes that emerged were read aloud text, think-aloud, textual discussion, read aloud question/ answers, self-redirection, and off-task

behaviors. All but one of the behaviors were associated with the text. Table 3 shows detailed verbal behaviors that occurred across the eleven weeks. Behaviors were observed between zero and four times per recording. Table 3 summarizes these behaviors, along with the number of successful text quiz completions during that recording period. Success was defined as a successful completion of the quiz associated with a passage, scoring 75% or better. The table shows that not only did verbal behaviors increase, but the number of successful passage completions began to increase as well.

Table 3

Detailed Verbal Behaviors

	Progressive Student Screen Recordings											
Verbal Behaviors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Read text aloud	1	1		1	1	1		1	2	2	2	4
Think-aloud		1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Textual discussion/ questioning		1			1	1			2		1	
Read question/ answers aloud			1		1	1			2	1	2	3
Verbal self-redirection									1			
Requesting help		1		1								
Off-task behavior	1	2	3	3	1	1		1	1	2		
Successful Passage Completions	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	3

Read Text Aloud

Robert's most commonly utilized text-centered dialogue was reading the text aloud to himself. This was evident in ten of the recordings, and these increased as the weeks and the recordings progressed. Reading the texts aloud appeared to help Robert work through difficult texts, or to concentrate and engage with the text despite any distractions that may have been occurring in the classroom. In recording one, for example, Robert did not begin work on his reading passage until 13'9" into the recording. What Robert was able to accomplish by the end of this first recording, however, was reading article titles aloud to himself to consider which article was of most interest. On recording two, Robert spent some of recording time in off-task behaviors with classmates, discussing matters unrelated to class or to the text. In this recording Robert shares: "I'm wearing this hoodie because it's too loud, and this year it [the hoodie] is not working." Later, he was able to begin reading a text and realized that he was having difficulty with vocabulary. This is where Robert, at 10' into the second recording, began to read aloud in an effort to pronounce the words, ultimately asking one of his teachers for help. Later, in recording 12, Robert more regularly reads the text aloud to aid in comprehension and help with

classroom distractions. In fact, beginning with recording 9 Robert was utilizing reading aloud with each text, and this strategy almost matched with successful passage completions.

Think-Alouds

Robert also engaged in think-alouds, which were evident in ten of the recording. Robert would utilize the think-aloud strategy while reading the text and making textual hypotheses with peers or self, and while reading and thinking through the questions and answer choices at the end of the texts. For example, in recording 5 Robert reads through answer choices and reasons his way through if answers choices do or not fit the text content. This is a behavior that was observed beginning with this recording and continuing throughout the remainder of the screen recordings. While he did not complete the quiz during this particular recording, he began to have more consistent success beginning with recording 6. By the 11th recording, Robert regularly thought through questions and text by thinking aloud. During recording 11, he successfully completed two quizzes, each time utilizing the think-aloud strategy, at one point telling the researcher, “Okay miss, I want to talk this out.” This was followed by Robert talking through each question and answer eventually successfully completing the text quiz.

Textual Discussion and Questioning

While Robert did engage in talk that was unrelated to the assigned readings (as shown in Table 2 as “off task behaviors”), other discussions were related directly to the text or to the topic addressed in the text. When this occurred, the behavior was marked as “textual discussion/questioning.” While this was not always simultaneously coded as a think-aloud, Robert was observed engaging in this behavior with peers and with teachers. This occurred during five of the eleven recordings.

Reading Questions & Stems Aloud

Robert also read questions and answers aloud to himself to aid in comprehension and to problem-solve. This was often simultaneously coded as a think-aloud technique, particularly if Robert was rationalizing between multiple-choice items. For example, in recording 9, Robert began answering questions associated with a story about UFOs by simply reading the questions an answer stems aloud; this may have been an effort to aid in text engagement and counter noise in the classroom. As the questions became more complex, however, he called a teacher to his desk to allow him to talk and reason through the answer choices, eliminating choices that did not make sense. While the teacher did not assist him with the answer choices, the act of talking through these questions supported his comprehension, helping him earn 88% success on that particular article.

Verbal Self-direction & Seeking Help

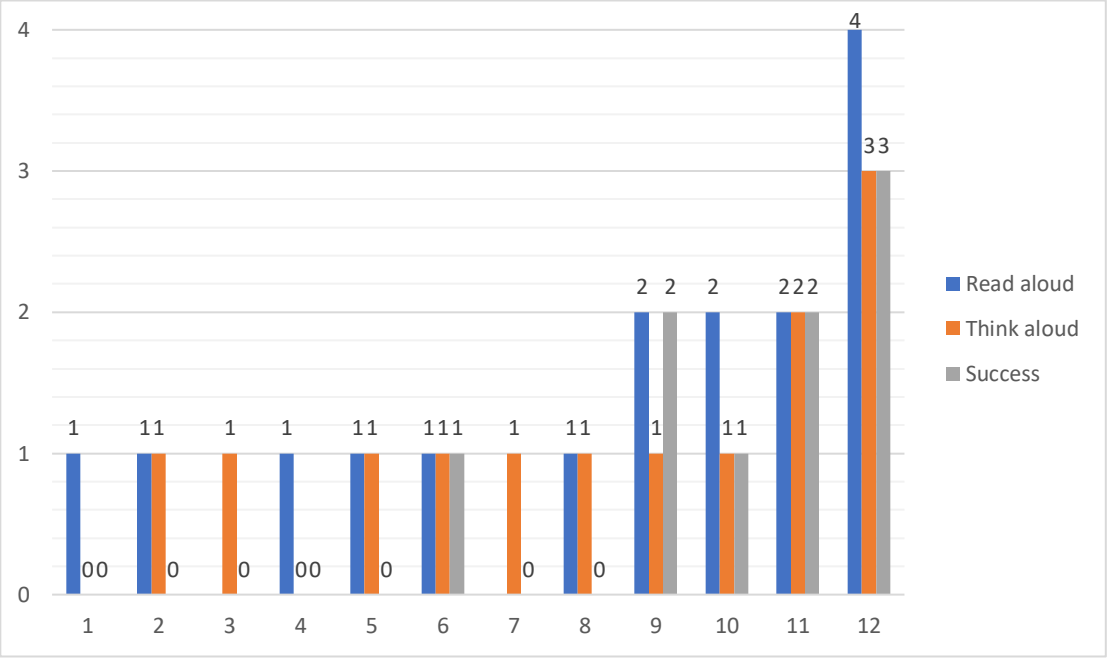
Other verbal behaviors that were seen less often in the screen recordings were verbal self-direction and asking teachers for help. On one occasion, in recording 9, Robert verbally self-directed himself: "This story does not make sense…." He later verbally prompted himself to focus and keep a steady pace through the text. During two screen recordings, Robert requested help from a teacher. This occurred when he had a difficult time understanding a topic in a new text, and was helpful in clarifying vocabulary.

Dialogic Self-Talk

Many of the codes were simultaneous (Saldaña, 2016), such as times when Robert was observed using the think-aloud strategy as well as reading answer choices aloud. Overall, the two most commonly identified verbal behaviors that related to a dialogic reading strategy were reading texts aloud and think-alouds, which are described here as "dialogic self-talk". Figure 1 compares the progressive screen recording data for these two strategies alongside the number of successful text quiz completions. Robert was making little to no progress on passage completions up to recording 6 (week 7) but began to have much greater success with completing his reading assignments beginning with recording 9 (week 8) through recording 12 (week 11). The figure illustrates how as Robert increased his utilization of these two strategies, his text completion rate become more consistent.

Figure 1

Successful Assignment Completion using Read Aloud Strategy and Think-Aloud Strategy



Conclusion

Robert became increasingly successful at completing the assigned text quizzes at the end of each recorded session, as are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. By engaging in text-centered dialogue, and utilizing verbal reading strategies, Robert went from having completed three text quiz assignments in between October and February of the academic year, to a total of 31 by mid-May (Table 3).

Table 3
Robert's performance across eleven weeks

	Successful Text Completions
Beginning of study in February	3
End of study in May	31
Increased performance	28

Limitations

Because this analysis focused on the verbal behaviors of one early adolescent student, the findings from the study are not generalizable. Additionally, the data covered 11 weeks, and only for those days when the investigator and student were in the classroom. Therefore, the twelve snapshot videos did not reflect all of the students' behaviors over the course of the academic year. The presence of the investigator in the classroom may have unintentionally been a motivating factor for the student's behavior during data collection days as well.

Discussion

Teachers need to identify ways to help students become more actively engaged in reading in order to help support comprehension. One-way teachers can do this is to provide opportunities to engage in authentic talk about texts. Because a student is not using a particular set of visible reading comprehension strategies, this does not mean that the student is not successfully interacting with the text; and the use of visible, curricularized reading comprehension strategies does not guarantee that the active text engagement and comprehension will happen (Aukerman, 2008; Daley et al., 2020).

There are likely other metacognitive reading comprehension strategies that are used by students yet are far more difficult for the student or teacher to observe. Dialogic strategies such as think-alouds, comprehension monitoring, collaboration, and text-based discussions are far more difficult to report by a student and are much less likely to be measurable by the teacher. This does not mean that these important and powerful comprehension monitoring and

cognitive strategies should be disregarded.

Comprehension as sense-making takes into consideration a students' genuine engagement with texts, providing a space for students to work through problems, hypothesize, and collaborate (Aukerman, 2008; Boardman et al., 2017). While it can be a challenge to view student talk as a strategic, teachers can be encouraged to recognize certain verbal behaviors that assist students in comprehending challenging texts, and provide encouragement to students who may otherwise not identify themselves as strategic readers. By focusing on students' strengths, we can help many more adolescents see themselves as engaged, successful readers.

Schools have been challenged with providing the necessary human resources to support instruction in the classroom (Lopez, 2022; Marshall et al., 2022; Steiner & Woo, 2021), particularly in light of recent state requirements for student interventions (TEA, 2021). There are, however, some ways that teachers can help students in the classroom. Provide students the opportunity to engage in authentic reading, based on their personal interests.

Student Choice and Voice

Student choice for reading and writing in the classroom may not always be possible. However, providing students with a variety of modes for reading and writing, such as small group reciprocal teaching (Lazarus, 2021; Palincsar & Brown, 1984), and collaborative fanfiction and popular-media inspired story writing can support all students regardless of perceived reading and writing strengths and challenges (Bippert, 2017; Bippert, 2021). Modes of reading and writing such as these lend themselves to collaborative and strategic dialogue, and can enhance student learning and performance on reading and writing tasks.

Teaching Students to Use Think-Alouds

Teachers can also model think-alouds and allow students to try and integrate these into their existing strategy toolbox (Bannert & Mengelkamp, 2008). Utilizing questioning techniques, similar to the Talk Prompts used in the study by Maine and Hofmann (2021), teachers can guide students into reflective thinking and dialogue, and can help students recognize when comprehension needs repair.

Focus on Assets Rather than Deficits

Just as important, teachers can discover which reading and writing strategies students are already employing. This can be done through observations, during small group instruction, or by providing students with a metacognitive survey such as the Revised Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002; Mokhtari et al., 2018). This will provide students with the understanding that they are in fact strategic readers, who can then build upon their existing strategy toolbox.

Conclusions

Texas educators have increased responsibility for supporting students who did not perform proficiently on the STAAR Reading exam. When considering the types of materials used with students, schools and teachers need to become aware of the unique needs of adolescent readers. Providing a socially constructive environment will allow students to engage with texts in meaningful ways, and help students hone dialogic strategies that can serve as powerful reading comprehension tools.

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Social Presence and Online Learning Communities

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Abstract

Online learning continues to grow rapidly in higher education. As institutions of higher education develop online courses and students participate in those courses, various issues arise: retention rates, feelings of isolation, and a decrease in feelings of success. By assisting students in establishing both a social presence as well as a learning community through various digital literacies, teachers can help combat these issues. The broader phenomenological study consisted of three in-depth interviews with each of the 12 study participants, all undergraduate, pre-service teachers, regarding their experiences with online courses.

Keywords: online learning, pre-service teachers, undergraduate, social presence

Introduction

"Enhancing student's perception of social presence increases instructional effectiveness and learning in an online learning environment" (Amundson, 2021, p.13). When instructors establish learning systems that possess characteristics of social presence, they are able to enhance learner experience. Social presence theory is "the degree to which a person is perceived as a real person in mediated communication" (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151). Social presence can be defined as connecting and interacting with others and being seen as 'real people' through the communication medium is in use. (Garcia-O'Neill, 2016). Through this communication and interaction with others using digital literacies, learning communities can form.

According to the American Library Association's digital-literacy task force, digital literacies can be defined as, "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (ALAIR, 2011, p. 1). Additionally, within institutions of higher education, digital literacy is comprised of three buckets: "1) finding and consuming digital content; 2) creating digital content; and 3) communicating or sharing it" (Loewus, 2016, para. 5). In understanding digital literacies in this manner, educators are able to rely on these various tools to assist in building learning communities and support students in building social presence in their online courses.

Research indicates that community is foundational to learning (Black et al., 2008; Chapman et al., 2005; Cherrstrom et al., 2018; Cleugh, 2013; Lear et al,, 2010; Rovai, 2002; Tu & Corry, 2001; Vlachopoulos & Cowan, 2010). As learning and teaching drastically changed in 2020, administrators, educators, students, and parents were met with new, challenging circumstances. Educators were thrust into teaching within online learning spaces. As students engage in online learning environments, the tools available to them through an online learning management system (LMS) are digital in nature. These technologies and digital literacies afford

students new modes to communicate and learn. While it can be difficult to establish community in an online space, it is not impossible. By developing learning communities in online courses, educators are better able to assist students in cultivating relationships and establishing a social presence in their courses. These connections and notions of social presence through learning communities may combat issues regarding retention rates, feelings of isolation, and a decrease in the feelings of success. Community stems from collaboration within a group while including features of trust, connectedness, and common goals. When learning communities are successfully generated, there is an increase in the effectiveness of the learning environment (Kucuk & Sahin, 2013). Not only do learning communities provide spaces in which learning can occur, but they also afford students with a means to engage and explore with one another in a socially appropriate manner by relying on various digital literacies to do so.

Methodology

To better understand experiences of learning community within online courses, the author conducted a phenomenological study using in-depth interviews. Participants for the broader study were chosen using a snowball effect, where prior students of the author provided potential participant contact information. The data derived from the broader study identified three main findings in which participants perceived learning community within their online courses: learning communities are relationship-based, learning communities are generated by communication, and learning communities are technologically bound. For this article, the focus will be on the finding that participants experienced learning communities to be technologically bound by exploring how different technological tools impacted social presence. By implementing these digital literacies, participants experienced increased participation and social presence.

The following tools can be used to assist in establishing a social presence within online learning communities: synchronous chats, video-conferences, various collaborative tools, images, and audio recordings. Each of these tools offered a method for finding and consuming digital content, creating digital content, and communicating and/or sharing with classmates and instructors, which again, directly ties into the Loewus definition of digital literacies.

Synchronous Chat

Utilizing synchronous chats was one-way participants in the author's study experienced a sense of learning community and helped establish social presence. Synchronous discussions happen in real time, while asynchronous discussions do not (Evans et al., 2014). Yuan and Kim (2014) developed the subsequent when, who, where, and how guidelines to be cultivated to help build community in an online learning space. The third guideline (where), stated the importance of using both synchronous and asynchronous technologies to create a shared space in which students and instructor are able to interact.

Heath, Lilly, and Cathy (all pseudonyms, as are all names that follow), who were participants in the author's study, discussed the idea of a chat room, drawn to the idea of a chat room to communicate with classmates in a "non-school" setting. They believed these types of

communications helped establish learning communities and build social presence, while also providing a space for students to share ideas and resources. Cathy liked the idea of a synchronous chat room, which students could use to type questions into in real-time, perhaps even while an instructor was logged into the course. She thought this type of chat room could act as virtual office hours, too, assisting in growing learning community among members of the course and the instructor.

Cathy additionally offered the idea of interactive, synchronous chats, which would allow classmates to talk with one another in real time. She felt this tool would provide a space in which classmates could participate in discussions similar to those they experienced in a seated course. Cathy proposed that these chats could help build a stronger sense of learning communities in an online learning environment.

By incorporating a synchronous chat option, instructors can better respond to questions immediately, clarify any misunderstandings, and simply engage in conversations with students. This accessibility could positively impact students' perceptions of community while completing an online course.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing, a type of synchronous communication using audio, video, and data between two or more different locations, can be implemented in various ways within an online course (Simonson et al., 2012). Resources like YouTube have the capability to send and watch videos; Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, and others can be used to communicate using both video and audio. Wagner et al. (2016) found that video conferences assisted in building rapport between instructors and students. In online courses, video conferencing can be applied to facilitate personal relationships and create familiarity among group members (Wagner et al., 2016). According to Saw et al. (2008), the features of video-conferencing enhanced interactions between learners and the instructor as well as providing tools to communicate and collaborate, which can positively impact social presence in online courses.

In addition to the live chat, Cathy, Sonya, Lucy, Steph, and Lilly thought using video-conferencing more often would be extremely beneficial for students as they built learning communities. Their ideas drifted from using Skype to record a group project and submit it as an assignment, creating videos as introductory posts at the beginning of the semester, and using FaceTime to simply communicate face-to-face with one another. They believed implementing video-conferencing would enhance students' social presence through communication.

Beth, Lucy, Sonya, and Steph all voiced their desire for more video-conferencing opportunities. Beth and Sonya specifically suggested Skype; Sonya wondered if there was a way to record a group Skype conversation over a topic and then submit it to an instructor for grading. She and Beth both contemplated how Skype could provide a way for classmates to get to know one another better while collaborating on assignments, which would positively influence the formation of learning communities within an online course.

Collaborative Tools

Another facet of online learning which participants found to be helpful in developing social presence was being able to effectively collaborate using technological tools within their online courses. While most participants agreed discussion boards allowed for small amounts of collaboration, they disclosed using Google Drive or email was more efficient and afforded more opportunities for growth regarding learning communities. Participants were drawn to Google Drive for multiple reasons. One of the main reasons being all their work saved automatically within the document, which created a sense of security. Secondly, all students working on an item within Google Drive could access and work on the document at the same time. This synchronous work was valuable to participants because they felt a sense of accountability and learning community within the group while working together. Lastly, participants appreciated the various ways in which they could use two components of Google Drive to establish learning communities: Google Docs and Google Slides. Google Docs allowed participants to create and edit different text documents, and Google Slides allowed participants to create and edit online presentations which are similar to PowerPoint, a presentation software available through Microsoft Office. Heath shared his appreciation for Google Slides, while Steph and Lucy shared their experiences with Google Docs. All three participants found Google Drive to be beneficial to their learning, as it created a space for them to collaborate with ease, which aided in building social presence and learning communities.

Email was another tool mentioned by participants used to build learning community. Sarah and Lucy expressed that to email another student, they needed to feel comfortable with that student, which positively correlated with feelings of learning community. Sarah explained that while at times getting an email response from someone could take longer than she desired, it was still an effective collaborative tool and a simple way to build learning communities. Lucy found herself emailing instructors more than classmates. She articulated how email allowed her to communicate with her online instructors in a timely manner and she felt a greater sense of learning community with them by communicating in that way.

Images

Implementing audio and visual recordings in online courses was another way in which participants experienced learning community through the implementation of technological tools. Whether these recordings were made by the instructor, the students, or an expert outside the course, participants enjoyed learning and connecting to the course through the use of recorded videos, lectures, and webinars. Sonya recalled a webinar she watched in one of her online courses, and she still remembered the in-depth conversations she and her classmates engaged in after its viewing. She reflected on her enjoyment surrounding those conversations and her classmates seemed to be just as engaged as she was in the content and conversations. These conversations, based on the webinar, established learning community as classmates engaged in conversations with one another. Cathy, Heath, and Lucy discussed their experiences with recorded lectures. Heath shared that while he worried the lectures would not engage him, he

ended up enjoying most of the lectures because they were significant learning tools within the course itself. He explained that,

> The instructor recorded lectures; it was new and different. You would get most of the information you needed from that lecture. There would be directions about the assignments in the lectures, so it...uh, forced us to watch them. The ones that didn't [contain assignment information] were dry, but it also could've been the material. (Heath, interview 3, December 30).

Participants enjoyed when instructors implemented videos, as it was different than reading and typing a response to a chapter out of the textbook, which is what they disclosed was typically encountered in their online courses. They especially appreciated when the instructors were in the videos, as it added a layer of learning community and connectedness to the course.

Phone

Lastly, Sonya proposed using a phone to communicate. She offered you did not necessarily need FaceTime to communicate; sometimes it would just be nice to speak to someone else. Sonya compared the conversations you might have to our interviews. She said, "It would be hard to get my thoughts on some of your questions across to you in writing, but since I'm able to say them to you…it's just easier to talk about" (Sonya, interview 2, January 11). The desire for constant and effective communication was a constant theme throughout the interview process.

Wish List

While participants shared their experiences of social presence and community through various modes in their online courses, they also discussed things they wished had occurred in their courses. These conversations turned into Wish Lists and are helpful for educators as these ideas can easily be implemented into online courses.

Heath confessed he liked staying "in-the-know" (Heath, interview 3, December 30). He suggested online courses adopt a notification system more like social media sites. He appreciated being notified on Facebook or Instagram of people commenting on his posts, and he thought receiving those same notifications for an online course could be helpful as well. Heath proposed that notifications in online courses resembling notifications on social media could potentially make students more involved in their online courses. This increased involvement could also lead to improved experiences of learning communities.

Lastly, Lilly thought if instructors merely explained the tools available to students in an online course she might be more willing to explore those offered. Lilly clarified that she noticed different tools available to her in Blackboard, but had never clicked on them because no one ever referred to them. Lilly disclosed her instructors relied on the same few tools, and it seemed like there were more available to people in online courses. She considered how the implementation of

different tools might cultivate learning communities and create more opportunities for knowledge and collaboration.

Implications for Educators

As digital literacies continue to evolve, in order to better help students navigate these technologies, educators must be able to draw from a wide variety tools. Digital literacies contain more of a social component than traditional literacies. In understanding this, instructors may want to provide opportunities where students are able to engage in dialogue, especially as learning communities rely on social interactions to build relationships.

Additionally, digital literacies are multimodal, and participation through communicative technologies is important for literacy within a global community. Given that communication is not one directional, access and understanding of a variety of digital technologies is a way to increase student success in an online learning environment. By exposing students to a multitude of digital literacies, educators can help their students feel more comfortable in using these new tools.

Conclusion

Generally, participants shared positive experiences concerning their online courses. While a few participants shared difficulties they encountered while learning in an online setting, most participants recalled positive experiences and worked to establish their own social presence using various digital literacies. Participants discussed how their sense of joy and motivation was often impacted by the sense of learning community within online courses. Participants also collectively discussed their desire to establish personalities online. In developing these online personalities, participants sensed they were learning alongside a real person rather than a robot on the other side of a computer screen. While feelings of disconnect within their online courses led to frustrations among participants, the ability to collaborate in an effective way appeared to combat those negative feelings. Almost all participants stated that developing a social presence and a strong sense of learning community were beneficial for pre-service teachers.

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Assessing The Scope: Examining How Primary Teachers Use Multicultural Texts For Classroom Read Alouds

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Abstract

As diversity grows in schools, educators must consider how to create environments where students develop respect and empathy toward others. Integrating high quality multicultural literature provides meaningful experiences for students to investigate society and acknowledge and interrogate their own beliefs and biases. While many teachers acknowledge the importance of incorporating literature that reflects the diverse populations of schools, effectively implementing multicultural literature into the learning environment is both a complex and analytical task. This phenomenological research design examines how primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural literature, diversity, read alouds

Introduction

As schools begin to accurately reflect our nation's demographics, educators must be prepared to equip students to be contributing members of our multicultural society by providing an education that values and promotes all perspectives. (Suh & Samuels, 2011; Vittrup, 2016). To develop this belief and respect, educators must cultivate multiculturalism and create equal opportunities for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion or exceptionality to experience educational equality (Banks, 1993; Günay & Aydin, 2015). Multicultural education "is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally" (Gorski, 2001, p.1). It assists students in developing morally and becoming citizens who respect, embrace and understand others regardless of differences in an effort to help students develop positive attitudes and empathy toward other cultures (Banks & Banks, 2005; Howlett & Young, 2019). Varied environmental experiences shape individuals' perspectives, emotions, and behaviors, and these behaviors impact their sense of self in the world. To nurture this development, teachers must "cultivate cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and between students and teachers" (Gay, 2010, p. 45) and "integrate students' culture and language in the teaching and learning process, respect their culture, reinforce their cultural identity, and use instructional strategies that meet students' cultural and linguistic needs" (Lindo & Lim, 2020, p. 34). In addition to shaping our perspective, our experiences and sense of self impact how we communicate and receive information, therefore classrooms need access to

materials to support application of new learning in context.

Multicultural literature has been identified as one of the most powerful components of multicultural curriculum (Bishop, 1990b). Literature is a social agent, serving as a catalyst in students discovering various cultures and its values, which behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and how one must function to be a contributing member of society (Bishop, 1990; Ebarvia et al., 2020). By providing students with high quality multicultural literature and meaningful experiences to investigate society, students learn to question, inquire, and be active participants in the learning process. While many teachers acknowledge the importance of incorporating literature that reflects the diverse populations of the school environment, effectively implementing multicultural literature into the preschool through high school (PK-12) learning environment is both a complex and analytical task. This implementation involves the educator feeling competent in effectively selecting high quality multicultural literature for classroom use and purposefully integrating it into the curriculum. When teachers feel competent integrating multicultural literature, it "create[s] an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy" (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2016, para. 5). This paper uses a phenomenological research design to examine how primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Literature Review

Developing Definition of Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature has been defined in terms of the degree or phases of multiculturalism. Its purpose was to help individuals explore diverse cultures and perspectives differing from the mainstream. When beginning to define multicultural literature, Cai and Bishop (1994), first explained that multicultural literature "challenges the existing canon by expanding the curriculum to include literature from a variety of cultural groups" (p. 59). It was during the 1980s that the term multicultural literature was commonly used to refer to books with characters of color (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). Bishop (1997) then extended the definition to embody the diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that existed in society. Multicultural literature validates all sociocultural experiences and develops the readers' social and cultural consciousness (Gopalakrishnan, 2011; San Antonio, 2018). The purpose of defining this literature was to ensure that students were exposed to various perspectives and cultures that were authentic to both their lives and the lives of others.

Instructional Integration of Multicultural Literature

Access to high quality literature is one of the most essential elements of any school curriculum or resource for educators to increase student achievement and motivation (Ciercierski & Bintz, 2015; Trelease, 2013; Van Kleeck et al., 2003). Literature, such as children's books, not only provides essential foundational knowledge and skills to students, but also provides a critical lens into the world in which they live.

Multicultural education originated in the 1970s and was identified as a reason for

minority achievement gaps. In 1973, the focus shifted to teacher development. This focus continued into the 1990s when Bishop (1990a) referred to literature as a social agent. When community, cultural, and family factors are utilized to help students find their sense of self, funds of identity are born. As outlined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), funds of identity refer to "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression and self-understanding" (p. 31). When children see their lives and perspectives in the curriculum and literature used in the classroom, it heightens engagement and awareness in the learning environment.

In addition to access, students need meaningful opportunities to explore various cultures and perspectives, examine and question their assumptions and beliefs, and develop acceptance and respect for all members of society (Harper & Brand, 2010; Muhammad, 2020; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016). When environmental conditions recognize which elements of cultural surroundings are conducive to growth, it impacts motivation, recollection, and self-perception (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). When opportunities to reflect, engage in discourse (Cangia & Pagani, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) and evaluate our own culture are included, it supports the development of cultural competence (Feize & Gonzalez, 2018). The incorporation of multicultural literature creates opportunities for students to explore other cultures and perspectives that are different from their own. This knowledge and appreciation for others can combat prejudice and bias while promoting acceptance and empathy (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). By creating an environment for students to critically examine and explore various cultures and perspectives, their understanding and awareness of diversity increases and their capacity to act against social injustice expands.

Multicultural Literature and its Impact on Students

High quality multicultural literature can increase students' awareness of others in the world like them. This encourages students to share their own stories and perspectives with others which builds connections with their own individuality and school community (Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). When children feel a personal connection to the culture portrayed in the literature, a child's self-esteem increases (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). This leads to students feeling valued both in the classroom and the pluralistic society of which they are part.

The use of multicultural literature can also result in more culturally and socially conscious individuals. For students to mature in understanding and acceptance of others, they need to explore concepts or topics from multiple perspectives to understand the various viewpoints that surround it. By immersing students in a variety of literature that reflects diverse cultures and perspectives present in both the classroom and society, students' understanding. and acceptance of various cultural groups is enhanced (Morgan & York, 2009). Analysis and exploration of a variety of cultures and perspectives can also create opportunities for students to examine their own understanding, beliefs, and biases through a different lens. This can harvest other perspectives and transform students' beliefs and actions. (Szecsi et al., 2010). Multicultural literature can extend or enlighten a students' understanding, which can combat prejudice or encourage a student to take action to obtain social justice or equity.

Teacher Perceptions towards Multicultural Literature

To meet the needs of students in the classroom, educators should understand the framework and goals of multicultural education, specifically multicultural literature, and be sensitive to the diverse perspectives in the classroom and adjust instruction or content to ensure that the titles selected for classroom use offer divergent and counter narrative perspectives. Teacher attitudes and perceptions toward the use of multicultural literature has a profound impact on students (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). Teachers' beliefs and behaviors can shape students' interactions, awareness of diverse perspectives and cultures, and their acceptance and empathy of others (Irwin, 1999).

The National Association for Multicultural Education (2016) produced standards of multicultural education and educators demanding that, School staff that is culturally competent, and to the greatest extent possible racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff must be multi-culturally literate and capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy (para. 5).

Teachers are a critical factor in the implementation of multicultural education and the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. For teachers to be responsive to the diverse cultures and backgrounds present in the learning environment, teachers must equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and disposition to explore concepts from various viewpoints. With the goal being to have culturally competent teachers in schools, teachers need to have opportunities to interrogate their own beliefs, biases and perspectives and consider how this might impact or influence their instructional decisions as teachers. They must consider what factors influence their thinking and how their experiences translate into the classroom environment and resources they use. Questioning one's bias and the barriers these create in honoring all students is an important step in implementing an inclusive approach in teaching students. When analyzing bodies of research that explore teachers' perceptions and attitudes, the results indicate that while teachers along with their administrators and colleagues value multicultural education and specifically multicultural literature, they do not effectively implement multicultural components to promote diversity and students' understanding of various cultures (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014; Vargas 2020).

Studies have found that though teachers believe that literature should reflect diverse populations, some teachers do not use multicultural literature in their classroom often due to the lack of diversity of the school or classroom population (Tucker, 2014). Other teachers reported not using multicultural literature because they were uncomfortable using books to explore cultures or perspectives unfamiliar to them or that they had little knowledge about (Holland & Mongillo, 2016).

Another study showed that while teachers understood what it meant to be culturally responsive educators, they did not actually engage in culturally responsive teaching practices due to lack of time and resources. The results imply that teachers perceive multicultural literature as stand-alone content and separate from the curriculum and content they teach (Vargas, 2020).

These findings display that a teacher's attitude and perception toward multicultural

education impacted teachers' actions regarding their integration of multicultural literature and critical exploration of diversity in the classroom and society. The failure to create opportunities to explore diverse cultures and perspectives reinforces a "Euro-dominate culture" which keeps students from diverse cultures marginalized both in the classroom and in society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014).

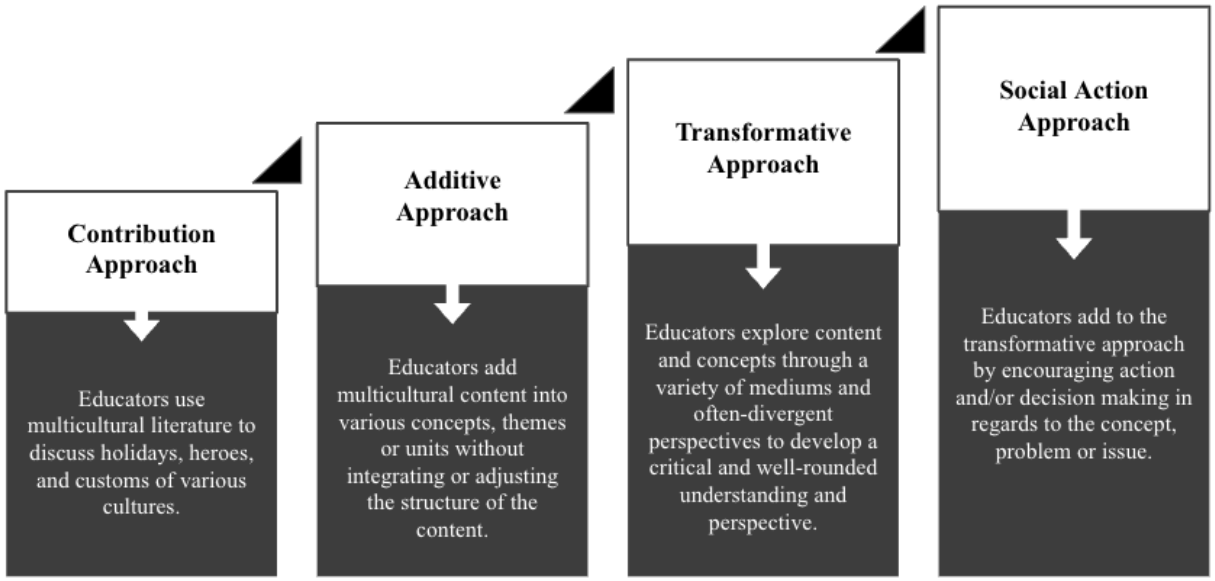
Theoretical Framework

Educators must not only cater to students' academic needs but incorporate instructional procedures and materials that are inclusive to all students' perspectives and cultures. In consistency with the four phases of multiculturalism, Banks (1989) outlined a four-tier approach to assist educators in the inclusion of multicultural content: contribution, additive, transformative, and social action. While the approach was not specific to literature, this approach is applicable to the implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom (Banks, 1989; Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). See figure 1.

Figure 1

Bank's Four-Tier Approach to Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989. Used with permission.)

Figure 2
Bank's Four-Tier Approach to Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989. Recreated with permission.)



The *Contribution Approach* refers to educators using multicultural literature to discuss

holidays, heroes, and customs of various cultures. With this approach, cultures and ethnicities are explored primarily related to specific holidays, events, or celebrations with little exploration of the culture that is unrelated to the event or occasion (Tucker, 2014). For example, teachers might celebrate Martin Luther King Day without mentioning the history or relevance behind the day. While this might be the easiest approach for educators, it does not present a global view for students of the various cultural and ethnic perspectives that exist globally. This level of integration does not give students a robust view of the pluralistic nature of American society and instead promotes students seeing ethnic and cultural groups as outsiders who are given acknowledgement (Carter et al., 2007). This approach also tends to gloss over the true issues of oppression or victimization of the cultural or ethnic group (Banks, 1989).

The *Additive Approach* refers to educator's addition of multicultural content into various concepts, themes, or units without integrating or adjusting the structure of the content. This is accomplished through the integration of multicultural literature without changing the focus or content of the unit substantially (Banks, 1989). For example, books written by authors of color might be added to the existing school reading list, without examining how this might impact the program (Ramsey et. al., 2003). If teachers are not comfortable with the content or lack confidence in varied cultural context, they choose not to integrate or alter the unit's structure.

The *Transformative Approach* refers to how educators infuse curriculum and resources that explore the concept critically and from multiple points of views giving students a lens for examining the status quo and engaging in transformative dialogue (Gibson & Parks, 2014). This approach explores content and concepts through a variety of mediums and often divergent perspectives to develop a critical and well-rounded understanding and perspective. Teachers and school administrators examine the whole curriculum and expand or reshape the content to represent multiple points of view, with the issues of power and oppression that might influence what content is considered most valuable and of the greatest use to children living within a particular society (Ramsey et al., 2003). It is suggested that through this transactional learning that individuals construe, validate, or potentially reformulate their beliefs and values to guide future decision making and actions (Szecsi et al., 2010). This infusion creates frames of reference that will extend students' understandings of the landscape, development, and intricacies of society (Tucker, 2014).

The *Social Action* approach, like the Transformative approach, infuses multicultural literature that encourages students to think critically from multiple perspectives, but adds elements that require students to take action and/or make decisions in regard to the concept, problem, or issue (Tucker, 2014). A major goal of the Social Action approach is "to teach students thinking and decision-making skills, to empower them, and to help them acquire a sense of political efficacy" (Banks, 1989, p. 18). These goals are all encompassing and accomplished through students approaching the text and world around them with a critical lens. This goal can be accomplished through critical literacy. Critical literacy is defined by Gopalakrishnan (2011) as the process of becoming literate about a society or group through questioning, through seeing things from various viewpoints, through uncovering biases and reading "between the lines," and through critically analyzing the workings of a society historically and culturally, in order to thrive in it. (p. 9)

Instead of simply reading the text, students are engaged to question the beliefs and assumptions of others, and use the knowledge acquired through experiences to act or become change agents. When teachers select high quality multicultural literature to assist students in investigating society, our students learn to question, inquire, and be active participants in the learning process. Through exploring text and topics from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, students gain a viewpoint to understand and make sense of the world around them (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). These critical approaches lead to students embracing their own culture as well as developing empathy and acceptance for other cultures and perspectives. Therefore, the research question this study seeks to answer is: How do primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds?

Methodology

The design of this qualitative research approach was phenomenography. This methodological approach allowed the researcher to uncover the differences that exist between human understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Phenomenography is varied from other forms of qualitative research in that it is interested in related meanings vs. independent awareness over beliefs, and the approach is interpretative focused vs. explanatory (Tight, 2014). Therefore, this design illuminates teachers' purpose in selecting multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Data Collection

Data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed multicultural texts used for classroom read alouds and the purpose of their use. An open-ended or free response questionnaire lets participants answer a set of questions with their own words, thoughts and feelings (Manning and Kunkel, 2013). This method allowed the participants time to reflect and consider their answers and an opportunity to revise and reflect if they chose to do so before sharing their thoughts and perspective with the researcher (Manning and Kunkel, 2013).

The web-based questionnaire was composed of two sections. The first section asked the participants for demographic information about their years of experience, level of education, ethnicity and grade level. The second section asked participants to identify five multicultural titles used for classroom read alouds and the factors that influenced their selection process and purpose. For each multicultural text identified, participants shared the purpose or how the text was implemented for classroom use.

Validation process

Data collection ensured credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) through the validation process. Initially an expert panel was constructed consisting of university professors and certified teachers to develop the protocol used to answer the central research question. This process helped to ensure content validity. After the construction of the protocol, a pilot test was administered prior to the data collection process. Creswell (2013) discusses that field testing is beneficial in identifying and addressing any weaknesses or limitations within the instrument before final implementation (Kvale, 2007).

The pilot test was administered to three certified primary teachers in various suburban school districts. Each participant was asked to share basic demographic information and multicultural titles for classroom read aloud use. After the questionnaire was completed by the three participants, Author A conducted a thematic analysis to determine emerging themes in the data. After conducting this analysis, the researcher asked for feedback regarding clarity, relevancy and usability from the participants and university faculty. This process allowed the researcher to refine the tool and information collected in the open-ended questionnaire and ensure construct validity. To account for the variance in participant's background knowledge and to build common understanding, multicultural literature and read alouds were defined on the open-ended questionnaire given to study participants (Banks, 1997; Hoffman 2011).

Role of the Researchers

Both researchers are white, middle-class females who grew up in a Midwestern suburb. Growing up, most of their peers looked like them, celebrated similar traditions and holidays and had family structures like their own. When reflecting on how diversity was celebrated and discussed in their childhood classrooms, it lies primarily at the Contributions Approach level in that they only talked about or read books with people of color during Black history month. The researchers continue to be surprised by teachers' hesitancy to immerse multicultural literature into their curriculum and the lack of foundational knowledge teachers have in selecting multicultural literature that honors diversity versus perpetuates stereotypes and biases. While they believe that teachers know honoring diversity is important, they do believe that teacher preparation programs and school districts need to provide teachers with more training in selecting multicultural titles that will provide authentically diverse experiences and perspectives for students.

Participants

The site of this study was a Midwestern, suburban school district that at the time of the study included four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. This rapidly growing school district serves over 3,200 students and about eighty-seven percent of the student population is white. Of the remaining student population, approximately four percent of students are Hispanic, four percent are two or more races, two percent are African American and less than one percent of students identify as American Indian or Pacific Islander. Nearly ten percent of students receive free or reduced lunch (Nebraska Department of Education, 2018).

Participants were selected using the comprehensive sampling strategy. The sampling of participants was also homogenous in that the selected participants are the same or similar in nature (Patton, 1990). This strategy was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to "achieve representativeness of the context" and capture varied experiences of the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pg. 314). All full time certified primary teachers in the selected suburban school district were invited to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire. The research focused on primary grades, specifically grades Kindergarten through second grade, where teacher-facilitated read alouds and interactive text interpretations are the most prevalent instructional methods (Vasquez, 2010, Crafton et al., 2007). This approach to participant

sampling allowed the researcher to gain a collective understanding of the phenomenon as it relates to the central research question (Patton, 1990).

Twenty-one certified kindergartens through second grade teachers participated in the open-ended questionnaire. Collectively, participants averaged twelve years of teaching experience, and all were white females. See Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Characteristics	Percent of Participants (n = 21)	Years of Experience
Kindergarten	43%	14 years
First grade	43%	11 years
Second grade	14%	13 years

Nine were kindergarten teachers who averaged a total of fourteen years teaching experience. Nine, first grade teachers participated with an average of eleven years teaching experience and three, second grade teachers participated with an average of thirteen years teaching experience. All but three participants had obtained a master's degree.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to interpret the data collected through the open-ended questionnaires. Author A, the only author active in the data collection and analysis process, first read through all responses to familiarize themself with the data. Inductive coding was utilized to identify common semantic descriptors in the first round of analysis. Some responses contained multiple purposes and were coded with multiple themes within a single response. Data was examined a second time by Author A using deductive coding to determine patterns and identify codes that aligned with themes from Bank's Four Tiers of Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989).

Results

The following themes emerged from the responses to teachers' use of multicultural texts. See Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher's Purpose in Selecting Multicultural Text

Purpose	Codes	Number of times referenced
Contribution Approach	Holidays Heroes	31
Additive	District curriculum Curriculum supplement Social emotional learning	21
Transformative	Divergent perspectives	0
Social Action	Divergent perspectives Social action Social change	0

Contributions Approach

Using multicultural texts to support various holidays and heroes was referenced thirty-one times in participants' responses. Many texts, like *Martin's Big Words,* were selected by participants to engage students in conversations about Martin Luther King (MLK) and the civil rights movement. One participant discussed the use of *Martin's Big Words* to go, "more in depth into MLK's life helping the kids understand how he wasn't so different from them as kids" while another participant discussed that this title "teaches children about segregation, equality, fair and equal."

To support conversations about the Chinese New Year, participants identified nine texts. One text selected by participants was *My First Chinese New Year.* When discussing the purpose of this text, one participant stated, "I chose this book because I have used it in my classroom each year to introduce the Chinese New Year. It gives my first graders background knowledge on the culture and how the holiday is celebrated." Another text selected by participants was *Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon*. The participant selecting this text discussed the purpose of using this book was to highlight common symbols of the holiday and culture. She stated, "I read this story during the Chinese New Year because it specifically talks about the dragon or the dragon kite."

Participants also identified seven texts to discuss aspects of Thanksgiving such as Pilgrims and American Indians. *Duck for Turkey Day* was one text identified by a participant to support conversations around Thanksgiving. This participant selected this text to discuss the

diverse traditions of families. She stated, “This book represents how families celebrate Thanksgiving in different ways. I have many different cultures in my room and wanted to make sure they all felt represented.” Another participant wanted students to explore American Indian culture through the lens of the title *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. She stated, “This picture book explains the importance of nature to Native American tribes.”

Additive Approach

Participants identified twenty-one texts that supported themes or content taught in the classroom. These texts were used to supplement or enhance the curriculum being taught. One participant shared that they used the book *I Love My Hair* because, “The class was doing writing lessons on things they love about themselves” and this text served as a mentor text through the writing curriculum. Another participant discussed choosing the text *Rosie Revere Engineer* because “... it is about a kid thinking outside the box. It goes great with STEAM lessons.”

Many participants referenced selecting texts that center around themes of acceptance, community and kindness. These responses referenced the moral or theme of the text and the development of students’ social awareness and relationship skills. One participant selected the text, *What If We Were All the Same?* to highlight the value of diversity within the school community. She stated, “I love that it teaches students we are all different and that is okay.” When referring to the theme of community another teacher referenced the text, *Is There Really A Human Race?* The participant discussed that, “this book shows the different meanings of the word race. The main idea is more about loving, helping, and caring for one another will make the world a better place.” Another participant selected the text *All Are Welcome* to build a classroom community. When discussing the text, she stated, “My purpose was to reiterate the fact that all are welcome in my classroom. No one student is better or worse than any other.”

Transformative Approach

Transformative approach refers to teachers selecting materials that offer a divergent perspective and viewpoint for students to consider. These titles are selected to expand or reshape the content to represent multiple points of view that are often missing or underrepresented in the district curriculum. There was no evidence in participants’ responses that texts were selected for this purpose.

Social Action Approach

Social Action approach aligns with the transformative approach in that teachers are choosing titles that expand or reshape the content to provide varying viewpoints or perspectives, but then students are encouraged to engage in social action or change to address the issue or problem being discussed. There was also no evidence in participants’ responses that texts selected were used to over divergent perspectives that would engage students in social action or change.

Discussion

The findings from this study show that participants most often used multicultural literature to discuss various cultures and perspectives through the exploration of holidays which is reflective of the Contributions approach. While this approach can be most comfortable for teachers to implement, it sheds light on the potential dangers of a single story. During her 2009 TED Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discussed the danger of the single story and how when we consistently display people or events as one thing repeatedly, it trains us to view individuals or cultures in one way. This way of thinking becomes the only way in which we think about that culture or perspective. This narrowing and limiting window into a culture does not help students understand that "diversity is a way to honor both the distinctiveness of our identities and our participation in the human experience" (Enriquez, 2019, p. 30) and not something we acknowledge only on holidays. Teachers must recognize this need and be intentional in implementing a wide range of texts to generate a wide range of perspectives to disrupt and dismantle the single story.

There is also evidence of the Additive approach in which teachers infused multicultural literature into the curriculum to enhance but did not alter the concept or curriculum being taught (Banks, 1989). Many participants discussed using multicultural texts that were part of the district curriculum or using literature that supports concepts taught in the classroom. Though these approaches are foundational in developing respect and empathy in students, these approaches can often limit the opportunity for students to view society from diverse perspectives and cultures because the curriculum remains unchanged or altered to explore various points of view (Agirdag et al., 2016). Teachers must "assess the scope of multicultural learning in the classroom" (Enriquez, 2021, p. 105) so students understand underrepresented cultures are an integral part of society. Teachers must interrogate the curriculum to determine if it contains global perspectives and addresses world cultures, or if they need to consider supplementing or replacing core texts to provide a more current and global narrative for students.

Lastly, the results indicate that texts to provide divergent perspectives or engage students in social action or change were not intentionally selected for classroom use by any participants. With the desire for teachers to create environments that provide diverse perspectives and opportunities for students to engage in social action, we must consider what barriers are keeping teachers from integrating multicultural literature at both the transformative and social action approaches. Is it that teachers need more training and professional development to build individual cultural competence and comfortability leading cultural discussions in the classroom? Or do teachers need more support in selecting high quality multicultural materials and facilitating social justice conversations?

Implications

When preparing to teach content, teachers are often provided with a guide that includes step by step instructions to deliver content, and questions to facilitate discussions that lead students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the academic standards. Teachers don't fear not having a strong grasp of the content because the curriculum provides the language, tools and strategies needed to support implementation. The same playbook is not provided to strengthen cultural competence nor are teachers provided with strategies to navigate difficult

conversations in the classroom. The lack of resources and confidence in leading discussions grounded in culture and social inequities often results in teacher fear and disinterest in facilitating these opportunities in the classroom. To support teacher in integrating multicultural literature at the transformative and social action approaches, we must maximize spaces for them to enhance their own cultural competence and provides teachers with language to lead critical conversations in the classroom.

Maximizing Spaces

Schools need to create spaces for professional development to increase teacher's competence and comfort with using multicultural literature to engage in cultural conversations. With the goal being to have culturally competent teachers in schools, teachers must feel secure enough to ask questions to learn from the lived experiences of others. They also need to have opportunities to interrogate their own beliefs and perspectives. With our current social and political climate, this is a challenging task for teachers. The fear of saying the wrong thing or asking questions that may appear ignorant or offensive impairs the ability to build cultural competence. Creating teacher assistance teams (TATs) composed of teachers, administrators, and community members (i.e. students, parents, or community stakeholders) that provide knowledge and support in navigating what role culture plays in content and classroom environments will assist teachers in identifying strategies and structures that will foster inclusive practices. This collaboration works to break down biases, increase cultural authenticity in titles selected for classroom use, and foster conversations to build students' cultural consciousness.

Language

Designing experiences that create opportunities for students to be engaged speakers and listeners allows them to share their experiences, while considering the experiences of others. These rich discussions promote social awareness, perspective taking ability, and position students as meaning makers (San Antonio, 2018). Fear minimizes the experiences created for teachers and students to develop their cultural lens and institute social change in school settings. Using guiding questions, like the ones shared below, help facilitate discussions and foster critical thinking while highlighting the contrasting viewpoints and perspectives that exist in the classroom:

- Why do you think that?
- What does/does not make sense to you?
- Can someone share a different perspective?
- What are you questioning that you heard/read?
- Do you agree or disagree with what was shared?
- What connections can you make to the experiences heard/read about?

To prepare teachers to foster an environment that encourages students to question their own beliefs and be willing to learn from the experiences and perspectives of others, teachers must be provided with tools and language to facilitate a dialogic process that promotes respect and social action.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although the results of this study provide insight into the use of multicultural texts in kindergarten through second grade classrooms, they must be interpreted within the limitations of the study. The first limitation is that all participants in this study are limited to kindergarten through second grade teachers in one Midwestern, suburban school district. Participants in this study were all white females. We recognize that these limitations in our sample do not represent the scope of teachers across the country but believe that the results provide worthwhile insights and align with previous findings in the literature (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014; Vargas 2020). Future studies including participants across numerous states and classrooms would allow for more diverse experiences and perspectives to be represented.

Conclusion

When teachers effectively help students explore society through high quality multicultural literature, students inquire and engage in the learning process. This provides multiple perspectives for students to embrace their own culture, develop empathy, and identify how they fit within the world. The absence of these texts for this purpose in this study call on researchers to examine further why these texts and transformative approaches are underutilized or non-existent when integrating multicultural literature into classroom read alouds. Further examining the gaps identified in this study will assist teacher preparation programs and school districts in training teachers to engage students at both the transformative and social action tiers

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Exploring the Relationship Between Teacher Demographics and the Frequency of Read-Aloud Practices in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between teachers' (N = 168) demographic factors (gender, grade level, content area, age, and educational level) and the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms. Data analysis revealed significant relationships between the frequency of read-alouds and gender, grade level, and content area. Female teachers and those teaching primary or elementary grades, as well as English Language Arts teachers, were more likely to use read-alouds daily. The significance of read-alouds in secondary classrooms is emphasized, as read-alouds have the potential to expand adolescents' vocabulary, improve comprehension, develop critical thinking and listening skills, and foster a sense of community and social-emotional growth. However, no significant differences were found in relation to teacher age or educational level. The study underscores the importance of recognizing and implementing read-alouds across various content areas and grade levels to support students' literacy development and create a positive, engaging learning environment.

Keywords: read-alouds, teacher demographics, literacy development, classroom practices, secondary education

Introduction

Reading aloud to children has long been a common and highly encouraged practice in the elementary school classroom. Visit any primary or elementary-level classroom during the literacy block, and at some point, you will very likely witness the teacher and students gathered as a classroom community to enjoy a read-aloud experience together. Excitement will fill the air as the teacher models fluent, prosodic reading, asks questions to draw out students' thinking and promote discussion, and thinks out loud to solve challenges as they arise in the text. Students will be engaged and attentive, nearly all of them captivated by the read-aloud experience.

For most elementary students, the read-aloud experience is as inviting and familiar as reading on a family member's lap would be. But something happens in the middle grades, as many teachers abandon the read-aloud experience in favor of more independent reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Short, 2019). Similarly, in many content area classrooms, non-English Language Arts (ELA) teachers underutilize the read-aloud experience as well (Stead, 2014; Whitin & Wilde, 1992). Essentially, in certain classroom settings, the read-aloud becomes an neglected strategy, often disappearing from the repertoire of many teachers' instructional strategies toolboxes.

Read-alouds hold immense potential for secondary and non-ELA classrooms, as they can help students expand their vocabulary, improve comprehension, and develop critical thinking

and listening skills (Albright, 2002; Fisher et al., 2012; Szabo & Riley, 2020). These shared reading experiences create opportunities for discussion and collaboration, fostering a sense of community and social-emotional growth (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McClure & Fullerton, 2017). Building on Rudine Sims-Bishop's (1990) notion of literature as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (p. ix), read-alouds can serve as powerful tools to reflect students' diverse backgrounds, provide glimpses into the lives of others, and even create dynamic interactions between different cultural worlds. By exposing students to diverse texts and perspectives, read-alouds contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment. For striving readers and multilingual learners, read-alouds provide valuable support by allowing them to understand the material better, develop listening skills, and enhance pronunciation and intonation (Kelly, 2022; Moussa & Koester, 2022). Teachers who model fluency and expression during read-alouds offer students the chance to hone their own reading proficiency, ultimately nurturing lifelong readers. Incorporating read-alouds into secondary classrooms not only supports students' literacy development but also furthers community building by acknowledging and celebrating the rich tapestry of identities present in the classroom (Trelease & Ciorgis, 2019). By recognizing the importance of read-alouds and implementing them across various content areas and grade levels, educators can help students become well-rounded, critical thinkers with a lifelong appreciation for reading.

Given the substantial impact of read-alouds on fostering literacy development and nurturing a love for reading, it is crucial to investigate the factors that influence teachers' decisions to integrate this strategy into their classrooms. Understanding the relationship between teachers' demographic factors and their frequency of employing read-alouds can offer valuable insights to inform professional development and promote the broader implementation of this effective instructional approach. By focusing on the frequency of read-alouds, we can establish a foundational understanding of current practices, identify potential disparities or trends, and lay the groundwork for future research on the underlying reasons and specific contexts that influence the implementation of read-alouds. Consequently, this study aims to explore the following research question: What is the relationship between teachers' demographic factors (gender, grade level, content area, age, and educational level) and the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms?

This paper is organized into six main sections to offer a comprehensive examination of our research question. Following this introduction, we present a literature review that covers the benefits of read-alouds and examines the existing research on teacher demographics influencing read-aloud practices. The Method section details the participants, instrumentation, and procedures used in the study. Our Findings section provides the data collected. The subsequent Discussion section explores the significance of these findings, outlines the study's limitations, and suggests avenues for future research. Finally, the Conclusion encapsulates the study's contributions to the broader understanding of read-aloud practices in diverse classroom settings.

Literature Review

The foundations of the read-aloud process can be traced back to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the social and interactive dimensions of learning. In the

context of interactive read-alouds, the teacher and students collaboratively navigate texts, thus constructing knowledge and meaning through social interaction. Read-alouds are widely acknowledged for fostering literacy development, particularly in younger children, through enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking skills by introducing diverse literary and informational texts, all while cultivating a love for reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Pinkerton, 2018). Despite these benefits, read-alouds are often underutilized in secondary classrooms. This literature review aims to investigate the current research on read-aloud practices in secondary grades, focusing specifically on the relationship between teachers' demographic factors—such as gender, grade level, content area, age, and educational level—and their frequency of using read-alouds in the classroom. This literature review seeks to provide insights into potential barriers and facilitators of read-aloud implementation and identify areas for further research.

The review will initially discuss the benefits of read-alouds in promoting literacy development and student engagement, followed by an examination of current read-aloud practices across various grade levels and content areas. It will then delve into existing research on the connection between teacher demographics and read-aloud usage in the classroom. Through this brief analysis, the review aims to highlight the importance of read-alouds in secondary education and encourage further investigation into the factors influencing their implementation.

Benefits of Read-Alouds

Read-alouds offer an array of benefits contributing to students' literacy and academic development. They enhance comprehension by allowing students to focus on text meaning and structure and by providing opportunities for teachers to model effective reading strategies (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Kaefer, 2020; Moussa & Koester, 2022). Additionally, read-alouds enrich vocabulary development through contextual exposure (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fox, 2013; Linder, 2007). They also foster critical thinking skills by encouraging active participation, questioning, and collaborative discussions (Fisher et al., 2004; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Read-alouds increase student engagement by creating suspense and fostering a positive classroom atmosphere (Barrentine, 1996; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Short, 2019; Szabo & Riley, 2020). Finally, they broaden students' exposure to diverse texts and perspectives, thereby enhancing cultural awareness and inclusivity (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Short, 2019; Trelease & Ciorgis, 2019; Varsalona, 2008). When secondary educators incorporate read-alouds into their teaching strategies, they effectively support students in honing essential reading skills, nurturing critical thinking abilities, and stimulating engagement in the learning process. As a result, read-alouds hold the potential to transform secondary education across grade levels and content areas, fostering well-rounded, empathetic, and academically successful students.

Read-Alouds Across Secondary Grade Levels and Content Areas

Read-alouds are versatile instructional practices that can be integrated into various grade levels and content areas. This section will discuss the implementation of read-alouds in secondary education across grade levels and academic content areas, focusing on the differences in approaches and the unique benefits offered by read-alouds in specific content areas.

Middle School

In middle school, read-alouds have been shown to be effectively incorporated into daily instructional routines, contributing to a vibrant classroom community and nurturing an appreciation for reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Carr et al., 2001; Giorgis, 1999; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Linder, 2007; Richardson, 1994; Short, 2019; Varsalona, 2008). By allocating a few minutes each day for read-alouds, teachers can introduce students to new authors, genres, and themes, as evidenced by Giorgis (1999) and Richardson (1994), who both asserted that read-alouds fostered engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking skills for students in the middle grades. Furthermore, middle school students can benefit from interactive read-alouds that encourage discussion, collaboration, and active participation, as highlighted in McClure and Fullerton's (2017) study, which concluded that engaging students in collaborative conversations during read-alouds led to improved listening and speaking skills. Combining these findings, it is clear that read-alouds have significant potential to enhance the middle school classroom experience.

High School

Despite being less frequently utilized in high school settings, read-alouds have been shown to provide considerable benefits for students at this level (Carr et al., 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Giorgis, 1999; Richardson, 1994; Warner et al., 2016). Read-alouds can serve as a tool to enhance high school students' comprehension of complex texts and foster critical thinking across a range of content areas (Warner et al., 2016). In their study, Warner and his colleagues demonstrated that high school teachers can use read-alouds effectively to support content learning, model effective reading strategies, and facilitate meaningful discussions around the text. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2004) found implementing read-alouds in high school classrooms contributed to students' improved understanding of challenging texts and their development of higher-order thinking skills. These findings indicate that read-alouds, when thoughtfully incorporated, can significantly benefit high school students' academic achievement and engagement with course material.

Content Areas

In ELA instruction, read-alouds serve as an essential tool to augment students' content knowledge, alongside broadening their exposure to various genres and deepening their

understanding of literary devices, themes, and the author's craft (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Grounded in research highlighting the symbiotic relationship between content knowledge and reading comprehension (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Connor et al., 2017), utilizing read-alouds in ELA can also equip students to engage with thematically and conceptually sophisticated texts. By selecting diverse and culturally relevant texts, teachers not only promote empathy, understanding, and civil discourse among students but also enrich their reading experiences (Bishop, 1990; Short, 2019). Similarly, in social studies instruction, read-alouds of informational texts can serve as vehicles for content-area literacy instruction, facilitating connections between historical events, concepts, and themes while enriching students' subject-specific knowledge (Connor et al., 2017; Stead, 2014;). These read-alouds, which could include primary sources, biographies, and historical fiction, allow for integrating content area literacy principles, further guiding students toward a more profound understanding of historical perspectives and stimulating critical thinking about past events and their significance.

In science instruction, read-alouds can effectively introduce new concepts, involve students in scientific inquiry, and foster a robust understanding of intricate ideas (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007;). These practices align with empirical findings that underscore the importance of building content knowledge to boost comprehension in science as well (Cabell & Hwang, 2020). By employing nonfiction texts, teachers can model how to read and analyze scientific information, bolstering students' abilities to navigate and comprehend scientific literature (Stead, 2014). While less common in mathematics, read-alouds can still provide substantial benefits, including an enhanced focus on content-area literacy, by introducing mathematical concepts through real-world contexts and engaging students in problem-solving activities (Barrentine, 1996; Connor et al., 2017; Whitin & Wilde, 1992). Incorporating math-related literature within a content area literacy framework can not only nurture students' mathematical thinking but also foster a positive attitude toward mathematics, further enhancing their learning experiences (Hong, 1996).

Read-aloud practices offer a versatile and powerful tool that can be seamlessly integrated across various grade levels and content areas in secondary education. By carefully tailoring read-alouds to the unique needs and interests of students in different disciplines, teachers can enhance student engagement, boost both content-area and reading comprehension, and foster critical thinking skills (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Connor et al., 2017). Furthermore, incorporating diverse texts and perspectives in read-aloud selections enables students to broaden their worldview, develop empathy, and appreciate the richness of human experiences, ultimately contributing to their holistic academic growth.

Teacher Demographics and Read-Aloud Practices

Examining the relationship between teacher demographics and the frequency of read-aloud practices in the classroom is crucial for understanding the factors that influence the use of read-alouds in secondary education. A thorough analysis of these relationships may inform professional development initiatives, policy decisions, and targeted support for educators to maximize the benefits of read-alouds for students. In this section, we will delve into existing

research on how various teacher demographics, such as gender, grade level, content area, age, and educational level, may influence the implementation and effectiveness of read-aloud practices in secondary classrooms.

Gender

The relationship between teacher gender and the frequency of read-aloud practices holds implications for targeted professional development and support for educators. Research in this area is limited, though Boyd (2014) found no significant relationship between teacher gender and time spent on read-alouds. Other evidence suggests female teachers may adopt distinct approaches to teaching reading (Lam et al., 2010), which could influence their read-aloud practices. These variations can highlight potential gaps in training or resources for different genders in the teaching profession. Furthermore, understanding any disparities in read-aloud practices based on teacher gender can offer important insights for creating more inclusive and equitable teaching strategies.

Grade Level

While studies have indicated that read-alouds are more prevalent in elementary classrooms than in secondary classrooms (Albright & Ariail, 2005), it is essential to delve deeper into the potential differences in read-aloud practices between middle and high school teachers. According to DeJulio et al. (2022), read-aloud practices vary across grade levels regarding purposes, preparation, and implementation. For instance, teachers in preK–2 most frequently emphasized promoting comprehension and vocabulary development in their read-alouds. Teachers in grades 3–5 and 6–8, however, more frequently highlighted fluency in 2020. Additionally, high school teachers in 2015 and teachers in grades 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 in 2020 saw read-alouds as a tool for teaching content knowledge. The variations may stem from differences in student needs, curriculum requirements, and pedagogical approaches across grade levels. Exploring these variations could help identify potential barriers to implementing read-alouds in secondary classrooms and offer valuable insights into how educators can adapt these practices to better suit the unique demands and expectations of middle and high school students. Furthermore, understanding the nuances in read-aloud practices across grade levels can contribute to developing tailored professional development and resources for educators, ultimately promoting more effective and engaging read-aloud experiences for students.

Content Area

Although the use of read-alouds has been documented across various content areas, such as ELA, social studies, science, and mathematics (Hong, 1996; Stead, 2014; Warner et al., 2016; Whitin & Wilde, 1992), the frequency and nature of read-aloud practices may vary depending on the content area. For instance, ELA teachers may use read-alouds to expose students to diverse texts, promote literary understanding, and facilitate discussions on themes and the author's craft.

In contrast, science teachers may utilize read-alouds to introduce new concepts, engage students in scientific inquiry, and model effective strategies for reading and analyzing scientific texts. Further research is needed to understand the unique challenges and opportunities for implementing read-alouds in various content areas, as well as to identify the most effective strategies for integrating read-alouds into different curricula. This knowledge could inform the development of discipline-specific professional development and resources, enabling educators to optimize their read-aloud practices and maximize the benefits for students across all disciplines (Albright & Ariail, 2005).

Age

Research on the relationship between teacher age and the frequency of read-aloud practices remains scarce, leaving a gap in understanding how different age groups may approach read-alouds in the classroom, though Morrison et al. (1998) and Jacobs et al. (2000) found significant differences among elementary teachers by teacher age regarding implementation of effective literacy practices, including read-alouds. Further investigation is needed to determine if younger or older teachers are more likely to implement read-alouds in their classrooms, and whether their approaches to read-aloud practices differ significantly. Potential factors that may contribute to variations in read-aloud practices across age groups could include teaching experience, familiarity with current educational research, or generational differences in pedagogical beliefs. Understanding these factors could help inform targeted professional development and support for teachers of different age groups, ensuring that all educators have the necessary tools and strategies to effectively implement read-alouds and maximize their benefits for students.

Educational Level

Teacher education level may influence the frequency of read-aloud practices in the classroom. Those with advanced degrees or specialized training may be more aware of the benefits of read-alouds and more likely to implement them. However, limited research exists on this relationship, although Connor et al. (2005) found students with warmer, more responsive, and higher-educated teachers showed improved vocabulary and decoding skills, with these teachers more likely to read aloud to their students. Further research is needed to confirm this relationship and investigate potential differences based on teacher education levels. Examining the impact of teachers' educational backgrounds on read-aloud practices can provide insights into barriers or facilitators and inform targeted professional development, ensuring all teachers effectively utilize read-alouds for enhanced student learning outcomes.

Investigating the relationship between teacher demographics and read-aloud practices can yield valuable insights into the factors that influence the use of read-alouds in secondary education. Understanding these relationships is crucial for optimizing the implementation and effectiveness of read-aloud practices in the classroom. Further research is needed to explore these connections and elucidate the potential impact of various demographic factors on read-aloud practices. In the following methodology section, we will outline the research design and

data collection methods used to examine these relationships, providing a foundation for a deeper analysis of the factors influencing read-aloud practices.

Method

Participants

A total of 860 eligible teachers from two southeastern school districts near our university were invited to participate in the study. Out of these, 279 accessed the survey link, resulting in a response rate of approximately 32%. Among the respondents, 189 participants completed the survey; however, imputation of missing values was not feasible as incomplete responses only contained demographic information. After excluding eight participants who did not consent to the study, the final sample size comprised 181 teachers. Of these, 13 were not teaching in PK–12 schools, leaving 168 participants for analysis. The majority of participants were female (82.7%), taught primary or elementary grades (66.7%), specialized in ELA (68.5%), held a master's degree or higher (68%), and had over a decade of teaching experience (60.1%). Participant demographics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographic Variable	Percentage	*n*
Gender		
Male	17.3%	29
Female	82.7%	139
Grade Level		
Primary and Elementary	66.7%	112
Middle School	14.9%	25
High School	18.5%	31
ELA Teacher Status		
Yes	68.5%	115
No	31.5%	53

Educational Level		
Bachelor's	31%	52
Master's or Doctorate	68%	116
Years of Teaching Experience		
0–10	39.3%	66
11–20	34.5%	58
Over 21	25%	42

Instrumentation

The survey used in this study was adapted from the Reading Teaching Efficacy Instrument (RTEI; Szabo & Mokhtari, 2004) to investigate the relationship between teachers' demographic factors and the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms. The original RTEI consists of two factors: teachers' self-efficacy in teaching reading and their ability to influence student reading development, with internal consistencies of .70 and .83, respectively. Our adapted survey focused on teacher demographics (6 items) and included a question regarding the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms. This question on the frequency of read-aloud implementation is the only question we analyzed for this study.

To ensure the survey's validity, it was reviewed by literacy content experts and pilot-tested with 22 graduate students enrolled in graduate-level literacy education classes at a comprehensive university in the southeastern U.S. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to the survey's wording and content. The survey's reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a value of .86. This adapted survey allowed us to examine the relationship between teachers' demographic factors and their frequency of implementing read-alouds in their classrooms.

Data Collection

Data was collected from in-service teachers in two southeastern U.S. school districts. The districts were selected due to their proximity to the researchers' university and existing partnerships. The survey, created using the Qualtrics platform, aimed to examine the relationship between teachers' demographic factors and the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms. The survey distribution process involved emailing the study introduction and survey link to ELA coordinators in both school districts, who then forwarded the email to all principals. Principals subsequently shared the email with teachers at their schools. The email outlined the study's purpose, assured anonymity, and clarified that participation was voluntary with no right

or wrong answers. Participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete and that they could contact the lead researcher with any questions. To encourage participation, the research team sent follow-up emails to potential participants several weeks after the initial distribution, reminding them about the study, resending the survey link, and emphasizing the research's importance and benefits of participating.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 27 was used for all data analyses. To answer the research question regarding the relationship between teacher demographic factors and the frequency of using read-alouds in their classrooms, a Pearson chi-square test of independence was performed (Pearson, 1900). The demographic variables included gender (male versus female), grade level (primary/elementary versus middle school/high school), ELA teacher status (yes versus no), teacher educational level (bachelor's versus master's/doctorate), and years of teaching experience (0–10 years versus 11–20 years). The frequency of read-alouds was categorized as weekly, daily, not often, or never. To ensure adequate sample sizes for analysis, the original grade level categories primary and elementary were combined, and the original degree categories master's and doctorate were combined. For the variables of gender, grade level, and ELA teacher status, post hoc analyses with the Bonferroni correction were employed to identify specific differences. The Bonferroni correction adjusts for multiple comparisons by dividing the *p*-value by the number of tests (Snijders & Bosker, 2011).

Findings

As shown in Tables 2 and 3 below, results demonstrated a significant relationship between gender and the frequency of read-aloud usage, χ^2 (4, 168) = 16.643, p = .002. Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction revealed that the number of female teachers using read-alouds daily (n = 68) was significantly higher than expected (n = 58.7), while the number of females using read-alouds infrequently or never (n = 34) was significantly lower than expected (n = 41.4). Conversely, the number of male teachers utilizing read-alouds daily (n = 3) was significantly lower than expected (n = 9.7), and the number using them infrequently or never (n = 14) was significantly higher than expected (n = 6.8). No significant difference was found between weekly read-aloud usage and gender.

A significant relationship was also found between grade level and read-aloud frequency, χ^2 (4, 168) = 44.102, p < .001. Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction showed that middle school teachers using read-alouds daily (n = 2) were significantly fewer than expected (n = 10.6), and those using them infrequently or never (n = 15) were significantly more than expected (n = 7.4). Primary and elementary teachers using read-alouds daily (n = 65) were significantly more than expected (n = 47.3), and those using them infrequently or never (n = 17) were significantly fewer than expected (n = 33.7). High school teachers implementing read-alouds daily (n = 4) were significantly fewer than expected (n = 13.1), and those using them infrequently or never (n = 18) were significantly more than expected (n = 9.2). No significant differences were found between weekly read-aloud usage and grade level.

Table 2

Frequency of Read-Aloud Practices Across Teacher Demographics

	Weekly	Daily	Not Often	Total	*p*-value
Gender					.002*
Females	38 (27.3%)	67 (48.2%)	34 (24.4%)	139	
Males	6 (26%)	3 (13%)	14 (60.9%)	23	
Grade Level					.000*
Primary and Elementary	30 (26.8%)	65 (58%)	17 (15.2%)	112	
Middle School	8 (32%)	2 (8%)	15 (60%)	25	
High School	9 (29%)	4 (12.9%)	18 (58%)	31	
ELA Teacher					.000*
No	13 (24.5%)	6 (11.3%)	34 (64.2%)	53	
Yes	34 (29.6%)	65 (56.5%)	16 (14%)	115	
Age					.386
0–10	19 (28.8%)	33 (50%)	14 (21.2%)	66	
11–20	17 (28.9%)	21 (35.6%)	21 (35.6%)	59	
Over 21	11 (26.2%)	17 (40.5%)	14 (33.3%)	42	
Educational Level					.649
Masters or higher	32 (27.6%)	47 (40.5%)	37 (31.9%)	116	
Bachelors	15 (28.8%)	24 (46.2%)	13 (25%)	52	

Table 3

Post Hoc Analysis Results Using Bonferroni Correction

		Weekly	Daily	Not Often	Total
Gender					
Females	Observed	38	67	34	139
	Expected	38.9	58.7	41.4	139
	p-value	.687	.000*	.001*	
Males	Observed	6	3	14	23
	Expected	6.4	9.7	6.8	23
	p-value	.828	.002*	.000*	
Grade Level					
Primary and Elementary	Observed	30	65	17	112
	Expected	31.3	47.3	33.3	112
	p-value	.627	.000*	.000*	
Middle School	Observed	8	2	15	25
	Expected	7.0	10.6	7.4	25
	p-value	.627	.000*	.000*	
High School	Observed	9	4	18	31
	Expected	8.7	13.1	9.2	31
	p-value	.885	.000*	.000*	
ELA Teacher					
No	Observed	13	6	34	53
	Expected	14.8	22.4	15.8	53
	p-value	.499	.000*	.000*	
Yes	Observed	34	65	16	115

Expected	32.2	48.6	34.2	115
p-value	.499	.000*	.000*	

A significant relationship was found between ELA teachers and read-aloud frequency, χ^2 (2, 168) = 48.634, $p < .001$. Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction indicated ELA teachers using read-alouds daily (n = 65) were significantly more than expected (n = 48.6), and those using them infrequently or never (n = 16) were significantly fewer than expected (n = 34.2). For non-ELA teachers, the number using read-alouds daily (n = 6) was significantly lower than expected (n = 22.4), and those using them infrequently or never (n = 34) were significantly more than expected (n = 15.8). No significant differences were found between weekly read-aloud usage and ELA teacher status. Additionally, no significant differences were found between age and read-aloud frequency, χ^2 (2, 167) = 4.152, p = .386, or educational level and read-aloud frequency, χ^2 (2, 168) = .864, p = .649.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the frequency of read-aloud implementation as a literacy practice. Read-alouds have been shown to be an effective strategy for improving students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and engagement with text (e.g., Kaefer, 2020; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Moussa & Koester, 2022; Szabo & Riley, 2020); however, their use in secondary classrooms appears to be underutilized (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Short, 2019). In this section, we will discuss the findings of our research, which revealed significant relationships between the use of read-alouds and teacher gender, grade level, and content matter (ELA vs. non-ELA teachers), while no significant relationships were found regarding age or educational level. We will interpret these findings, connect them to previous literature, explore their implications for practice and policy, address limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

Significant Relationships

Gender and Read-Alouds

Our findings revealed a significant relationship between gender and the use of read-alouds. Female teachers were found to use read-alouds daily more frequently than their male counterparts, while male teachers were more likely to report using read-alouds less often or never. It's important to note that most of our participants were female (82.7%), which could potentially influence these findings, though the statistical tests we employed took this discrepancy into consideration. This disparity may be attributed to differences in teaching styles, beliefs about the effectiveness of read-alouds, or even the socialization of gender roles, where female teachers might be more inclined to adopt nurturing and supportive approaches to teaching (Lam et al., 2010), which read-alouds can exemplify. Moreover, multiple studies have shown

that reading is frequently considered a feminine activity (e.g., Espinoza & Strasser, 2020; Nootens et al., 2019; Nowicki & Lopata, 2017), which could potentially influence male teachers' perceptions and practices. The significant relationship between gender and read-aloud usage found in our study adds a new dimension to the literature. While there is limited research exploring gender differences in read-aloud practices (e.g., Boyd, 2014), this overrepresentation of female participants might emphasize the need for additional studies with a more balanced gender distribution. Further investigation could lead to a better understanding of the underlying factors contributing to these differences and inform targeted professional development opportunities to support all educators in integrating read-alouds into their instruction.

Grade Level and Read-Alouds

We also found a significant relationship between grade level and the use of read-alouds. Primary and elementary teachers reported using read-alouds daily more frequently than middle school and high school teachers. It should be noted that most participants in this study taught at the primary or elementary levels (66.7%), which could have influenced these findings, though the statistical tests we employed took this discrepancy into consideration. This finding is consistent with the common belief that read-alouds are more applicable to younger students, while older students are expected to rely more on independent reading (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). However, previous research has shown that read-alouds can be beneficial for students of all ages, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of complex texts (Barrentine, 1996; DeJulio et al., 2022; Trelease & Ciorgis, 2019). The overrepresentation of primary and elementary educators in our sample may underscore the need for future studies to include a more balanced distribution across grade levels. The underutilization of read-alouds in middle and high school classrooms may represent a missed opportunity for enhancing literacy instruction.

Content Area and Read-Alouds

Our results indicated a significant relationship between content area and the use of read-alouds, with ELA teachers using read-alouds daily more often than non-ELA teachers. This is not surprising given the direct connection between read-alouds and literacy development. However, the benefits of read-alouds are not limited to ELA classrooms; they can also support learning in other content areas by promoting critical thinking, building background knowledge, and engaging students with diverse perspectives (Stead, 2014; Warner et al., 2016; Whitin & Wilde, 1992). The relatively infrequent use of read-alouds among non-ELA teachers suggests there may be a need for greater awareness and professional development opportunities to help these educators integrate read-alouds into their instructional practices (Albright & Ariail, 2005). This finding also underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches to literacy instruction and the integration of read-alouds in non-ELA classrooms to foster cross-curricular connections and promote critical thinking (Hong, 1996).

Non-Significant Relationships

Teacher Age and Educational Level

This study did not find significant relationships between the use of read-alouds and the age or educational level of the teachers surveyed. While these non-significant findings could point to other influencing factors such as experience, professional development, or personal beliefs about teaching and learning (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2018), they may also suggest the presence of a fixed mindset toward the utility of read-alouds (Dweck, 2006). Such a mindset could be resistant to change irrespective of age or educational background, thereby influencing the use—or lack thereof—of this instructional strategy. These findings underscore the importance of ongoing professional development aimed not only at imparting evidence-based literacy practices like read-alouds but also at addressing underlying mindsets that may hinder their adoption. Further research is warranted to explore these factors in more depth to better understand the influences shaping educators' decisions to utilize read-alouds in their classrooms.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have important implications for educators, schools, and policymakers in the field of literacy and reading education. The underutilization of read-alouds in secondary classrooms, particularly among male teachers, middle and high school teachers, and non-ELA teachers, highlights the need for targeted efforts to promote the use of this effective literacy practice. One underlying issue that may deter secondary, content-specific teachers from using read-alouds is their belief they are responsible for teaching only their specific subject matter rather than literacy. This suggests a need for a paradigm shift toward viewing all educators responsible for teaching discipline-appropriate literacy practices, irrespective of their content area (Gillis, 2014). Schools and districts should provide ongoing professional development opportunities focused on the benefits of read-alouds and best practices for implementing them in secondary classrooms (Albright & Ariail, 2005). These training sessions should emphasize the value of read-alouds for students of all ages and across all content areas and equip content-specific secondary educators to question and potentially reframe their existing beliefs about their role as disciplinary literacy teachers (Gillis, 2014; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Short, 2019; Warner et al., 2016).

Pre-service teacher education programs should incorporate read-aloud techniques and their benefits in their curriculum, ensuring that future educators are well-prepared to utilize this literacy practice in their classrooms (Savitz et al., 2019). Providing pre-service teachers with hands-on experience in using read-alouds across various grade levels and content areas can help foster their confidence and competence in implementing this practice. Furthermore, policymakers should consider the importance of read-alouds when developing and implementing literacy policies and curriculum guidelines (Gabriel, 2022). Encouraging the use of read-alouds as an integral part of literacy instruction can help create a culture that values and prioritizes this practice, leading to improved student outcomes.

Districts and schools should allocate resources to support the use of read-alouds in secondary classrooms. This may include purchasing diverse and engaging texts that appeal to students at different grade levels and in various content areas, as well as providing access to audio recordings and digital resources that facilitate read-alouds. Moreover, encouraging collaboration among educators, both within and across content areas, can help promote the sharing of effective read-aloud strategies and foster a supportive environment for implementing this practice (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013). Establishing mentorship programs where experienced teachers can model and provide guidance on read-aloud techniques can further enhance educators' skills and confidence in using read-alouds.

By addressing these implications, stakeholders in the field of literacy education can work together to promote the effective use of read-alouds in secondary and non-ELA classrooms. Shifting the educational paradigm to view all teachers as disciplinary literacy educators can significantly contribute to this effort. Prioritizing read-alouds as an essential component of literacy instruction will not only contribute to improved student outcomes but also help to cultivate a lifelong love of reading among students. Additionally, fostering a collaborative and supportive educational environment where all educators, regardless of content area or grade level, are encouraged to utilize read-alouds can lead to the development of well-rounded, critically thinking students who are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the world around them. By investing in these strategies, we can enhance literacy education and ensure that all students have access to the myriad benefits that read-alouds can offer.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of read-alouds in secondary classrooms, acknowledging its limitations and identifying areas for future research are essential. First, the study utilized a self-report survey to collect data on teachers' read-aloud practices. Self-report measures may be content to social desirability bias (Arnold & Feldman, 1981), where participants may over-report or under-report their use of read-alouds based on their perceptions of what is expected or desired. Future research could employ direct observations of classroom instruction or in-depth interviews to obtain a more accurate representation of read-aloud practices.

In addition, the sample was limited to a specific region and may not be representative of the broader population of secondary-level teachers. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse sample of educators, considering factors such as geographic location, school type, and socioeconomic background of the student population, to better understand the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, this study primarily focused on the frequency of read-aloud usage, without examining the quality or effectiveness of read-aloud implementation. Future research should explore how various read-aloud strategies and techniques impact student learning and engagement. This could include investigating the effects of different text types, interactive elements, and teacher questioning techniques on student outcomes.

More robust studies will be necessary to probe the significant and non-significant relationships we found. For example, we detected a significant relationship between gender and the use of read-alouds, which warrants further investigation. Future research should delve deeper

into the factors contributing to this relationship, such as differences in teaching styles, beliefs about read-alouds, or gender role socialization. Longitudinal studies or experimental designs could be employed to explore the impact of targeted professional development or interventions aimed at addressing these gender differences in read-aloud practices.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into the prevalence and factors associated with the use of read-alouds as a literacy practice across grade levels and content areas. Our findings revealed significant relationships between the use of read-alouds and gender, grade level, and content matter, while no significant relationships were found regarding age or educational level. These results highlight the need for targeted efforts to promote the use of read-alouds, a proven effective literacy strategy, across secondary and non-ELA classrooms. The implications of our findings for educators, schools, and policymakers are substantial, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development, pre-service teacher education, resource allocation, and collaboration in fostering a supportive environment for the implementation of read-alouds. By prioritizing read-alouds as an essential component of literacy instruction, we can contribute to improved student outcomes and cultivate a lifelong love of reading among students.

Although our study has limitations, it has laid the groundwork for further research in this area. Future studies should aim to address these limitations and explore the factors contributing to the significant relationships identified, the quality and effectiveness of read-aloud implementation, and the impact of targeted interventions on read-aloud practices. A more comprehensive understanding of these aspects will enable educators and policymakers to make informed decisions and develop strategies to ensure all students have access to the myriad benefits read-alouds can offer.

Ultimately, this study underscores the potential of read-alouds as a powerful tool in enhancing literacy education and fostering well-rounded students who think critically about the world around them. By investing in the strategies outlined in this paper, stakeholders can work together to create an educational landscape that values and prioritizes read-alouds, thus paving the way for improved literacy outcomes for students in secondary and non-ELA classrooms.

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Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater: What Should Remain from Balanced Literacy

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Abstract

As teachers transition to more science-backed ways of teaching reading, many may be left wondering what should remain from their former practices. This article discusses lessons learned from a teacher working in the field for the last ten years and navigating the changing landscape of literacy teaching, specifically moving from a balanced literacy approach to structured literacy. After discussing tenets, strengths, and criticisms of both approaches, the article lays out three common, research-backed features of balanced literacy teaching worth incorporating into structured literacy teaching.

Keywords: balanced literacy, structured literacy; instructional strategies, Science of Teaching Reading

Introduction

Polarizing discussions around best literacy practices have existed for over a century. Where speech and language are innate, with hard-wired systems in our brains, reading is not (Wolf & Stoodley, 2008). Thus, the teaching of reading must be intentional and responsive. Still, the pendulum swings between whole-language and structured phonics approaches without mediation.

My teacher preparation program focused little on literacy ideologies, instead focusing on exposure to children's literature and offering management tools or cross curricular strategies. Consequently, most of my literacy education happened during my first few years of teaching. I worked for a district implementing The Units of Study out of the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, a now much debated curriculum using the Balanced Literacy approach (BL) (2022). I received hours and hours of free training and coaching, and much of the approach feels ingrained in my mind set around literacy and learning to read.

My perspective began to shift when I accepted a position as a dyslexia interventionist and started training. My eyes quickly opened to the extreme weaknesses of the program and the approach. Emily Hanford's podcast Sold a Story has gained attraction since its release in 2022, pointing out the disproven cueing model still utilized by many balanced literacy programs, including Units of Study (2006). This has shed new light on the failures of a whole language based on the Science of Teaching Reading (SOTR) backed Structured Literacy approach (SL).

While I have noticed that a phonics-based approach like SL has provided better outcomes for all students in my class, as a former practitioner of balanced literacy, I often question— what habits from my old teaching practice should remain? How does one blend the systematic and sequential approach of structured literacy with the meaning-driven and authentic methods of

balanced literacy? There are benefits to both approaches, and some features of balanced literacy deserve to remain.

Balanced Literacy and Structured Literacy

Balanced literacy is often defined in multi-bullet pointed lists, outlining core ideologies rather than a set of classroom methods, making it challenging to characterize briefly. The programs are designed to be responsive, using various materials and strategies. balanced literacy philosophy also emphasizes the importance of physical space, classroom culture and community, and book representation (Heydon & Iannacci, 2004; Parr & Campbell, 2012). Where balanced literacy can be ambiguous, Structured Literacy is definitive. It is rigid and systematic, emphasizing explicit instruction and direct student-teacher interactions. The SL approach prioritizes phonics instruction, teaching the logical codes of English. It is highly encouraged for students with dyslexia and has been proven to help remediate decoding disabilities (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019; Spear-Swearling, 2019).

Components of balanced literacy include a balanced literacy end of shared reading, read-aloud, partner reading, independent reading, and guided reading—all typical to a traditional reader's workshop model (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2009; O'Day, 2009; Spear-Swearling, 2019). The International Literacy Association states balanced literacy "mixes features of whole language and basic skills instruction." (ILA Literacy glossary, 2023). SL focuses primarily on "phonological awareness, word recognition, phonics and decoding, spelling, and syntax at the sentence and paragraph levels." (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019).

In contrast with SL, balanced literacy has shortened explicit instruction, with accentuated time on independent and partner practice (Calkins, 2006; Westerlund & Besser, 2021). Most polarizing is that balanced literacy is meaning-driven with a heavy focus on comprehension, in that teachers guide students towards context clues rather than decoding when participating in word solving (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2009; O'Day, 2009; Spear-Swearling, 2019).

Criticisms

As stated earlier, the definition of balanced literacy is neither consistent nor all that specific. This arbitrary implementation often leads to haphazard rather than sequential teaching (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019; O'Day, 2009). Teachers are also expected to differentiate during small group time but often do not possess the knowledge to fully individualize or tailor instruction without explicit or diagnostic curricular materials. For example, the Units of Study provide one small group idea per lesson to be taught during a lengthy independent reading block. This lesson typically teaches a comprehension skill using students' independent reading books (Calkins, 2006). These small groups are not sufficient to meet the needs of many readers and do not fill the gaps created by the often shortened explicit, whole group instruction. In fact, there is consensus that balanced literacy is not effective for all readers, specifically for readers with dyslexia or other word-reading difficulties, as well as English Learners (McCardle, Scarborough, & Catt, 2001; Spear-Swearling, 2019; Westerlund & Besser, 2021). The curricular materials do not spend adequate time on decoding skills for these students, who tend to respond best to

explicit and systematic instruction. The problem for dyslexic students is exacerbated by balanced literacy's focus on meaning, using predictable rather than decodable texts encouraging the use compensatory strategies over true word-reading (Spear-Swearling, 2019). Lastly, balanced literacy often utilizes reader's workshop methodologies, with considerable time allocated to independent reading. Studies showing links between volume reading and reading achievement have demonstrated a strictly correlational relationship (NRP, 2000). The use of independent reading during the language arts block may detract from more beneficial or intentional activities and instruction.

Many districts and teachers recognize the misgivings of a strictly balanced literacy approach, opting for a more systematic method instead. Balanced literacy is not adequate for all readers (McCardle, Scarborough, & Catts, 2001), but not all readers need repeated structured literacy practice. When describing this systematic approach, Lorimor-Easley & Reed state, "no assumptions are made about what students can do, no lessons are skipped or considered unimportant" (2019). This all-encompassing approach ensures fewer readers are left behind but also may provide proficient readers with unnecessary instruction by taking a lowest-common-denominator perspective. Additionally, there is concern that a purely phonics-based approach will minimize other critical areas of reading, such as comprehension and necessary vocabulary development for English learners (Ortiz & Lara, 2021).

Beneficial Components

Amid the growing movement against balanced literacy and resurfacing of information contradicting many of balanced literacy's core tenets, educators have found themselves ditching old practices to better serve students. After being in education for nearly a decade, I have felt like I am starting over, leaving everything Lucy Calkins' staff developers ever taught me behind. The fact is, Calkins and other proponents of the cueing model got a lot wrong, but educators do not have to treat this transition like a going-out-of-business sale (Spear-Swearling, 2019). This approach prevailed, and educators like me continued to see student growth for many reasons, despite its errors.

Read Aloud

The read aloud is a vital feature of a typical classroom using balanced literacy strategies, and a body of research supports its implementation (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2009; O'Day, 2009; Parr & Campbell, 2012; Spear-Swearling, 2019). A typical day in my upper elementary balanced literacy classroom began with this component. I read a chapter of engaging grade-level text, exposing students to stories they may not be able to decode independently. Students sat quietly and empty-handed, practicing their auditory comprehension skills and visualizing as I read. Throughout the chapter, I thought aloud, modeling my cognitive process, or invited students to discuss a comprehension question with an academic partner. Later in the day, when teaching a comprehension skill such as symbolism in a small group, the students and I all could practice with a shared, complex text.

The National Reading Panel found that students experiencing read aloud in class learned more vocabulary words through repeated exposures (2000). The read aloud also provides teachers additional opportunities to model comprehension skill work on a grade-level text. Explicit comprehension skill modeling, specifically modeling the teacher's cognitive processes, supports readers in understanding text. Students who receive cognitive strategy instruction are more likely to make gains on measures of reading comprehension (NRP, 2000). This research-backed and engaging feature deserves to remain a key element of a literacy block.

Motivational Considerations

The science of reading heavily supports structured literacy practices, but an Olympic swimming coach cannot teach someone who refuses to get in the water. Reading motivation, including positive self-efficacy and high value of reading and reading tasks, is associated with positive reading outcomes (Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016).

Exposure to high-quality literature is a tenet of balanced literacy and is emphasized by most programs (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019). Teachers are invited to have enormous libraries and rely on strategies like student book choice and volume reading to encourage reading achievement. Where SL approaches tend to rely more strictly on decodable text, balanced literacy uses a wider variety of texts for instruction. Student self-selection of texts increases autonomy, a proven factor in improving students' reading motivation (Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016). Decodable texts are limited by the word patterns previously taught, generally making their subjects less interesting or unrepresentative of the students' experiences. For example, if a student is practicing decoding closed syllables, the child will read names like Pam, Tim, or Jeff, which will not mirror their complete experience. This is not a dismissal of decodable readers, simply an admission to what they are lacking. Also, selecting engaging texts at the student's instructional level becomes increasingly important as the child enters adolescence. (Morris, 2014; Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016). A comprehensive literacy approach should include both authentic text and decodable readers.

Additionally, according to Ortiz and Lara (2021), SL approaches "do not acknowledge the tremendous within-group differences characteristic of the emergent bilingual population, across such factors as native language and English proficiency, racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, (dis)abilities, or the impact of the intersection of these identity markers on student achievement" (p. 154). When the focus is purely on the skill, the child's identity may be neglected in place of adherence to a protocol. Including culturally and linguistically responsive materials shows an acknowledgment of students' identities.

Classroom Talk

A strong relationship exists between students' speaking skills and their reading achievement (Goodwin et al., 2021). Yet, SL often does not consider or include oral language instruction or assessment (Ortiz & Lara, 2021). Where structured literacy programs prioritize direct teacher-student interactions, Balanced Literacy programs place heavier importance on partner and collaborative work through more flexible structures like partner reading, book clubs,

or conversational circles (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019; Spear-Swearling, 2019). These more flexible structures give students frequent opportunities to talk, a proven strategy for all students, but especially for English Learners (O'Day, 2009).

Looking Forward

A strictly balanced literacy approach leaves many students behind, discounting the necessary work of phonics instruction and sequential teaching. However, this does not mean experienced teachers should forgo all they have learned. Instead, the teacher may follow a strict sequential structure of lessons and use a read aloud to reinforce skills and vocabulary. Adherence to a program can coincide with selecting engaging and relevant materials, and intentional, guided practice can be supported by academic partners and opportunities for group work. With new learning, teachers can embrace a structured literacy approach while incorporating research-backed strategies highlighted in many balanced literacy programs.

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