

2022

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### Recommended Citation

DeJulio, Samuel; Martinez, Miriam; Harmon, Janis; Wilburn, Marcy; and Stavinoha, Megan (2022) "Read Aloud Across Grade Levels: A Closer Look," *Literacy Practice and Research*: Vol. 47: No. 2, Article 6. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/lpr/vol47/iss2/6>

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## **Read Alouds Across Grade Levels: A Closer Look**

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Over a quarter century ago, the National Academy of Education Commission on Reading, the National Institute of Education, and the Center for the Study of Reading issued a landmark report stating, “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (Anderson et al., 1985). Sixty years of research provides support for this assertion, revealing a positive relationship between being read to and reading achievement (e.g., Reese et al., 2010; Teale, 2003). We extend this research by examining teachers’ beliefs, understandings, and practices about read alouds.

### **Theoretical Frame**

Read alouds, as socially and culturally based activities, can provide a systematic format for allowing children to interact with each other, the teacher, and the text. Therefore, we drew upon a socioconstructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) on language and literacy, which emphasizes the need to approach literacy in the moment of interaction with the context. These moments are rooted in complex historical, social, and cultural processes involving literacy (de la Piedra et al., 2018). Teachers generally model how to use language during read alouds (Kesler et al., 2020) as they address the importance of delivering instruction in advance of the child’s current level of skill (Vygotsky, 1978). In the case of read alouds, teachers may need to provide a

range of support strategies to meet the unique needs of all the children (Pentimonti & Justice, 2009).

We also drew upon the view of literacy as situated practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to investigate the potential of teacher/student interactions during read alouds. Lennox (2013) points out that during dialogic discourse, teachers genuinely share authority with children by promoting reciprocal, conversational exchanges generating new perspectives, active listening, and collaborative thinking with the text. These perspectives of learning assume the learning process involved in read aloud interactions may be multifaceted and involve the need for a more knowledgeable other to guide and support learners, while learners may, in turn, be active participants in their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wenger, 2000). Barton and Hamilton (2000) also note the importance of social relationships in literacy practices. Further, examining literacy as situated practice requires consideration of the tools involved in literacy events, in this case, books used in read alouds (Hamilton, 2000).

Research shows that read alouds foster a variety of facets of literacy development including concepts about print, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and fluency (Schick & Melzi, 2016; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Read alouds also foster comprehension (Duke et al., 2021; Santoro et al., 2008), build background knowledge (Dewitz & Jones, 2013), develop visual literacy (Stortz et al., 2019), and promote a love of reading (Hall, 2008). In addition, read alouds contribute to vocabulary development by offering opportunities for enhancing both breadth (volume of words known) and depth (how well words are known) of development (Lennox, 2013; Sénéchal et al., 2008).

The use of read alouds as an instructional tool tends to be more closely associated with younger children (Hoffman et al., 1993). Hence, some of the benefits of read alouds mentioned previously are most relevant for this age group (e.g., concepts of print, phonemic awareness). On the other hand, there is limited research about the value of read alouds for older students. Yet, existing scholarly work points to the potential benefits of conducting reading alouds with older students. For example, Marchessault and Larwin (2014) found that a structured read-aloud format served as a reading intervention and proved to have a positive impact on middle school students' vocabulary and comprehension. In addition, Ariail and Albright (2005) documented the occurrence of read alouds in middle school classrooms in different content areas used to enhance comprehension and promote reading enjoyment. Read alouds also serve as a "curriculum bridge" useful for delving deeper into a topic, establishing disciplinary contexts for understanding and building background knowledge (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006, as cited in Slay & Morton, 2020, p.66), and promoting interest and motivation for content learning (Albright, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). In effect, read alouds have the potential to contribute to facets of language and literacy development important for all students (National Institute for Literacy, 2008).

More recent research also supports the potential of read alouds to provide important windows into other worlds as well as offering mirrors of students' own experiences (López & Friedman, 2019). Such mirrors represent students' cultural identities and experiences and can also serve as windows into other cultural circumstances through the analysis of characters' perspectives (Botelho, 2020). Reading aloud children's literature representative of students

present in the classroom can help students develop empathy and build a sense of community and inclusivity.

### **Instructional Approaches to Read Alouds**

Given the many benefits of read alouds, it is important to consider how different instructional practices may be linked to different positive outcomes. Research in early childhood classrooms provides some insight into this (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). For example, the procedures associated with *shared reading* promote print awareness (Holdaway, 1979), while procedures used in *dialogic reading* have positive effects on young children's oral language development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). However, these instructional approaches are largely adult directed and may not address other important facets of literacy, such as comprehension, response, visual literacy, and motivation. The *interactive read aloud* is an approach with the potential to promote these other important facets of literacy development.

As described by Lennox (2013), interactive read alouds “engage children in reciprocal, conversational exchanges with participants sharing ideas with each other and listening to alternative perspectives” (p. 382). Smolkin and Donovan (2003) have described the interactive read aloud as a process in which the teacher genuinely shares, not abandons, authority with the students during the reading of the book. This goes beyond teachers asking questions and waiting for student responses and includes acknowledging students as they freely ask questions and make meaning of new information or share connections to the text. Pantaleo's (2007) research with first graders also supports the value of teacher and children working together to think collectively about stories during read alouds. In addition, in a series of studies, Sipe (e.g., 2000, 2008)

investigated kindergarten through second grade children's discussions during read alouds and found that his participants worked together toward greater literary understandings.

As previously noted, there is ample evidence of the benefits of read alouds for supporting many facets of literacy development. Yet Lennox (2013) notes that the quality of read alouds can vary greatly from class to class. High quality read alouds are most likely to occur when teachers use instructional strategies for promoting collaborative meaning-making. Wiseman (2011) identified some of these strategies in her ethnographic investigation in an urban kindergarten class. She found that interactive reading provided opportunities for the teacher to confirm students' contributions during read alouds, model ways of thinking about and analyzing stories, and extend students' insights with the goal of taking the children to deeper meanings. Likewise, in a study of how one first-grade teacher helped children navigate their first experience in a read aloud focused on a chapter book, Roser and her colleagues (2005) found that the teacher used a variety of supportive moves including the following: encouraging a speculative stance, inviting participants into the story world, modeling responsive reading, emphasizing important content, and threading thinking across content. Such practices have also been found to work well with older students (Elliott-Johns & Puig, 2015; Fisher et al., 2004).

Read alouds are clearly a valuable tool for promoting diverse facets of literacy and content learning across grade levels, and outcomes appear to be linked to instructional approaches. Yet, we know relatively little about teachers' perspectives on read aloud practices. Nor do we know how read aloud practices may differ across grade levels. This investigation focused on teachers' beliefs, understandings, and practices related to read alouds. The following questions guided the study:

- What do teachers believe about the purposes of read alouds?
- What types of texts do teachers value for conducting read alouds?
- How do teachers prepare for read alouds?
- What instructional practices do teachers report using in conducting read alouds?

### **Methodology**

For this investigation, we felt that survey research was the most appropriate method for acquiring the information we were seeking. While the pandemic created obstacles for us to interact with each other, through the distribution of a survey the participants in this study were able to share their experiences with using read alouds in the classroom. Since our participants teach at widely varying levels in academia, survey research was the best way to effectively reach our population.

### **Our Positionality**

Three of us were university faculty members who teach literacy courses across different programs, including early childhood to sixth grade, middle level grades, and secondary grades. The other two were doctoral students pursuing a degree in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching with a cognate in Literacy. One has teaching experience at the elementary and middle school level, and the other at the secondary level.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

The participants in this investigation were early childhood through secondary teachers enrolled in graduate education courses at a university in South Central Texas. We conducted two rounds of data collection using a survey instrument. We administered the first round in person in 2015 with 86 respondents. We conducted a second round in 2020 with 43 respondents. This second round was conducted online due to restrictions resulting from the pandemic. This time span enabled us to capture any interesting changes that may have occurred in teachers'

perspectives and understandings about read alouds. The survey focused on the following: frequency of read alouds, purposes, book selections, preparation, and implementation strategies.

### **Data Analysis**

We conducted two rounds of data analysis. The first round included an initial examination and a comparison of responses of the 2015 and 2020 data. The second round of analysis focused only on the 2020 data and involved an in-depth analysis of individual participants' responses across survey items.

For the first round of analysis of both the 2015 and 2020 data, we used constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes related to purpose, preparation, and implementation strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We grouped participants by the grade levels they were currently teaching for purposes of analysis. We grouped the grade levels in the following manner: PreK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

To describe the books participants identified as ones working well for read alouds, we identified the format and genre of each selection, and for works of contemporary realistic and historical fiction we also identified the diversity of characters portrayed. To analyze the quality of books participants mentioned, we asked three children's literature experts to first identify books listed by participants with which they were familiar and to then identify the familiar books they viewed as high quality books.

In order to get a deeper and more robust understanding of teachers' perspectives about read alouds, we conducted a second round of analysis, which entailed looking across individual participants' responses to survey items. For this portion of the analysis, we looked at responses from the survey data collected in 2020, given that the data were more current. For this detailed analysis of individual respondents, we eliminated participants who were not currently teaching,



who were teaching classes in other disciplines in which read alouds were not used, and those who did not complete the entire survey. We ended with a total of 27 participants for this more in-depth analysis. This second round of data analysis occurred in three phases.

### ***Phase 1***

We divided the participants into two equal groups based upon grade levels—EC-3 and 4-12. We assigned ourselves to different groups. After using an inductive approach to code emerging trends, we came back together as a whole group to share what we noticed in the participants' responses. The EC-3 group identified three descriptors that differentiated among participants: purpose, role, and clarity. Based upon the ensuing discussion about these descriptors, we decided to also apply this approach to the data for grades 4-12.

### ***Phase 2***

Through careful screening of how the data were now configured, we next identified two prominent areas from the descriptors in Phase 1 holding the potential to represent a range of responses. These areas included roles (ranging from teacher-centered to student-centered) and purpose (ranging from skills-focused to social, emotional, cultural, and experiential focused). However, after much discussion, we found this analysis was too limiting because it did not take into account those teachers who saw multiple purposes for read alouds.

### ***Phase 3***

In this final phase of data analysis, we reexamined the data with role and purpose in mind. We conducted a close analysis that revealed two important dimensions of read alouds: valuing of student participation, and thoughtfulness.

We then went through the data and ranked the participants on each dimension. In terms of student participation, we considered evidence of teachers valuing shared responsibility for

discussion. For thoughtfulness, we identified three aspects: (1) knowledge of possibilities, (2) consideration of students' background, and (3) intentionality of books and procedures aligned with stated purposes. For *knowledge of possibilities*, the focus was on a range of different purposes the participants mentioned for read alouds. We then carefully examined the data looking for evidence that teachers *considered students' background and experiences* when conducting read alouds. Finally, for the aspect of *intentionality of procedures and books aligned with stated purposes*, we determined the degree of alignment between identified books and procedures as related to teachers' stated purposes.

After we completed our ratings of the two dimensions of each participant's responses, we represented these findings on a scatterplot. The scatterplot revealed the patterns we report as findings.

### **Limitations**

While administering a survey offers a rapid turnaround in data collection, we acknowledge there are limitations. These include a greater risk of representation and measurement error and varied interpretations. The number of participants gave us the opportunity to closely examine each participant's responses, but a larger population of survey participants might have yielded additional data for this study. We are also aware of the small number of responses collected from secondary teachers. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest important considerations for teachers when using read alouds with their students.

### **Findings**

We first present findings from the analysis of participants' responses to individual survey questions. This is followed by a more in-depth look emerging from the cross-response analysis of individual participants.

## **Comparative Analysis of 2015 and 2020 Data**

In this section, we present the findings of the survey data. We organized the findings in the following way: purposes for read alouds, preparation for read alouds, implementation of read alouds, and the texts used for read alouds.

### ***Purposes for Read Alouds***

In 2015 and 2020, teachers identified a variety of purposes for engaging students in read alouds. These purposes included promoting comprehension strategies, fluency, metacognition, vocabulary development, and interest and engagement in reading (see Appendix A). In addition, some teachers also viewed read alouds as vehicles for teaching content knowledge.

The participants frequently named promoting comprehension as an important purpose. In fact, in 2015, this was the most frequently named purpose by preK-2, 3-5, and 6-8 teachers. In 2020, it was the most frequently named purpose by 3-5 and 6-8 teachers. Promoting fluency was also a frequently named purpose for reading aloud. In both 2015 and 2020, we noted that fluency was identified as an important purpose for reading aloud by at least some teachers at all grade levels with the exception of 3-5 teachers in 2020 (see Table 1). While teaching content was named less frequently as a purpose for read alouds, it was of note that in 2015 teachers in grades 9-12 identified this purpose, and in 2020, teachers in 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 indicated that read alouds served this purpose in their classrooms.

### ***Preparation for Read Alouds***

When asked how they prepared for read alouds, teachers across both years most frequently reported preparation including steps such as reading the selected book, planning stopping points, and creating questions. Some of the teachers in preK-2 in both years and the 3-5 teachers in 2015 indicated they also targeted vocabulary in their preparations.

### ***Implementation of Read Alouds***

When asked about conducting read alouds, many of the teachers described the physical arrangement for the read aloud (e.g., bringing the whole class to the carpet area for the read aloud). This particular survey question elicited relatively few responses about actual strategies used when conducting read alouds. However, some teachers in preK-2 and 3-5 mentioned using picture walks and engaging students in discussion.

While this question gave minimal insight into how teachers actually conducted read alouds, the survey question focusing on the effectiveness of read alouds yielded somewhat more information about what was occurring in the read alouds. Some responses to this question mentioned the importance of the teacher reading with expression and posing questions. Other responses focused on student involvement as indicators of effectiveness. In particular, teachers mentioned engagement, discussion, and making connections.

### ***Texts for Read Alouds***

When asked about the types of text they would use for a read aloud, preK-2 and 3-5 teachers across both years mentioned the following factors in order of frequency:

- instructional opportunity offered by text with content connections
- genre with fiction and nonfiction
- engagement factors with high interest and age appropriateness

Teachers in grades 6-8 and 9-12 mentioned only genre and format in selecting books for read alouds. Frequently mentioned genres included fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and the main format mentioned was picturebooks.

We also asked teachers to provide titles of three books they believed worked well as read alouds. We looked at both the format and genre of these titles. For both years, teachers from

preK-grade 8 largely identified titles of picturebooks. Teachers in grades 9-12 identified picturebooks and chapter books with almost equal frequency. In terms of genre, we found that titles named by teachers were overwhelmingly fantasy or realistic fiction.

We also looked at representations of diversity in the realistic fiction teachers identified as working well for read alouds. There was a distinct difference in representations of diversity in 2015 compared to 2020. In 2015 19.2% of the realistic fiction titles featured characters from diverse cultures with the majority being from Latinx and African American cultures. By contrast, in 2020 54.5% of the realistic fiction titles centered around characters from diverse cultures with the majority again being from Latinx and African American cultures.

Three experts in children's literature also evaluated the *quality* of the three titles participants named as ones working well in read alouds. Three experts judged 61.6% of the titles as being of high quality while two of the three experts judged 85.5% as being of high quality.

Survey participants in 2015 also identified any book they had read the day the survey was administered. The experts also evaluated the quality of these books. Of these titles, 7.5% were judged to be of high quality by all three experts while 28.8% were judged of high quality by two of the experts.

### **Cross-Response Analysis of 2020 Data**

In the second phase of analysis, we looked across the responses of individual participants in the 2020 survey to gain deeper insight into their beliefs, understandings, and approaches to read alouds.

We ranked five of the 27 participants in the 2020 survey as high on both read aloud dimensions: (1) thoughtfulness and (2) valuing of student participation. For those ranked high on thoughtfulness, we found clear evidence in their responses of at least two of the three elements of

thoughtfulness--(1) knowledge of possibilities, (2) consideration of student background, and (3) intentionality of books and procedures aligned with stated purposes. Teachers ranked high on the first element—knowledge of possibilities—appeared to be cognizant that read alouds can potentially serve a range of different purposes. Those ranked high on the second element of thoughtfulness—consideration of students—shared statements revealing a recognition of the importance of aligning the read aloud to the lived experiences of their students. Teachers ranked high on the third element of thoughtfulness described procedures they used in read alouds and identified high quality books for read alouds judged to be clearly aligned with the purposes they described for read alouds. For example, one third grade teacher ranked high on both read aloud dimensions, and in Appendix B, we present the survey responses for this teacher revealing her thoughtfulness on the three elements of this dimension, as well responses that indicated the value she placed on student participation. This teacher envisioned many possibilities for what read alouds offered students. She made mention of read alouds as opportunities to engage in deeper thinking, to participate in discussions with peers, and to visit new places. This same teacher also appeared to be aware of who her students were as indicated by her statement of wanting to share books that encouraged her students to think “about their community, life, or mind set.” And the books this teacher identified as good ones to use for read alouds, books like *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015), certainly had the potential to ignite the kind of deep thinking she appeared to value.

Other teachers ranked high on thoughtfulness wrote about still other possibilities for read alouds. One fourth grade teacher viewed read alouds as holding the potential to promote facets of basic literacy such as fluency and prosody while simultaneously nurturing a love of reading and

making students “curious enough to continue reading on their own.” This teacher also described how she prepared for read alouds with an eye toward promoting student engagement after the read aloud: “I read ahead of time to find my stopping points and develop some questions for students to continue engaging with the text after the read aloud.” Toward this end (engaging with text after the read aloud), she described how she liked to stop read alouds to give her students the opportunity to talk with one another which, in turn, gave them “something to take back to their desks to journal about, and also provide unanswered questions.”

A seventh grade ELAR teacher ranked high on thoughtfulness and participation appeared to be especially attuned to linking read alouds to her students’ backgrounds: “I look for my students [in the books]. I look for diversity in color, SES, and language. I have a broad spectrum of students and many of them have not seen characters matching their color.” Not surprisingly, in naming good titles for read alouds, this teacher named diverse (and high quality) titles such as *Sulwe* (Nyong’o, 2019) and *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000).

In contrast to the five teachers ranked high on both thoughtfulness and valuing of participation, we ranked 13 teachers low on these dimensions. In some instances, these low-ranking teachers provided only minimal responses to survey questions. For example, the possibilities for read alouds one third grade teacher named were “encouraging them to enjoy reading” and “reading strategies,” responses similar to stock answers rather than a reflective consideration of the possibilities offered by read alouds. This teacher did not elaborate on either stated purpose; nor did the teacher name any books for read alouds. Finally, in response to the question about what makes an effective read aloud, the following statement was this teacher’s only hint of an instructional strategy or student participation: “When students are able to be

interactive and answer the questions.” This response, with its focus on students answering questions, suggests that the teacher’s read alouds might be more teacher-centered than student-centered.

While some teachers ranked low because of very limited responses, others were low based on the content of their responses. For example, in response to the question about why she conducted read alouds, one preK teacher responded by offering a variety of reasons: “To model fluency, exposure to vocabulary, expression, connection to text, my wondering, and an opportunity to model my thinking as well.” While this teacher identified a number of potential purposes for reading aloud, she did not elaborate on any of them. Nor was there any indication in any of her written responses where she took into consideration the backgrounds, cultures or instructional needs of her students. Further, we did not find evidence that she valued student participation during read alouds. In fact, the only mention of her students was to comment about her children “having access to fidgets” during read alouds, a “strategy” suggesting the teacher likely valued quiet students more than participatory students.

While we have highlighted participants at the high end and low end of the thoughtfulness/participation spectrum, it is important to recognize the nine participants in the middle who did not rank high in either dimension. Of these nine, we rated four as moderate in their degree of thoughtfulness but low in their valuing of student participation. For example, one participant described focusing on modeling expressive oral reading and previewing the text for the students, including providing background on the author. Even though the participant’s responses indicated moderate thoughtfulness, the teacher described a read aloud in which the



students were passive observers, rather than active participants in the read aloud. This was a clear example of the way the two dimensions appeared to diverge at times.

### **Discussion**

In this investigation, we analyzed teachers' beliefs about read alouds in two ways, each revealing different insights and each offering different implications. We first analyzed responses to individual survey items, an analysis yielding insight into the frequency of occurrence of responses to each item in the survey. Then, to better understand the differences among respondents, we looked across the responses of individual respondents. In this section we first discuss findings from the initial analysis of data before moving on to discuss the findings from the cross-item analysis.

Previous research has shown the positive impact of read alouds on many facets of literacy including comprehension (Lennox, 2013; Elliott-Johns & Puig, 2015), and our findings revealed that many of the participants were cognizant of the potential of read alouds to promote students' comprehension. In particular, the elementary and middle school teachers frequently identified promoting comprehension strategies as an important reason for reading aloud to students. These participants also noted the positive impact of read alouds on other facets of literacy development directly related to comprehension including vocabulary and literary elements.

Texts used for read alouds must offer good "fodder" for conversations (Hoffman et al., 2015), particularly when the goal is to promote comprehension. We found respondents appearing to be thoughtful in selecting texts, such as choosing texts for read alouds they considered instructional opportunities offered by texts. Further, most of the texts identified by respondents as good ones to use in read alouds were texts rated as high quality by children's literature experts. However, there was an apparent discrepancy in the quality of texts teachers named as

good ones for read alouds and the actual texts the 2015 respondents reported reading on the day of the survey. This suggests a possible disparity between practice and teachers' perceptions of quality text. Also, there was an intriguing difference in titles teachers named in 2015 and 2020 with respondents in 2020 named proportionately more titles featuring diverse characters and cultures than did teachers in 2015.

As noted previously, there was alignment between prior research and elementary and middle school respondents' beliefs about the use of read alouds to promote comprehension strategies. However, in other instances we found what can best be described as examples of misalignment. For example, only elementary teachers named metacognition, an important facet of literacy development, as a purpose for reading aloud. Metacognition was not one of the top purposes named by middle school or secondary teachers. Yet we know there are age-related differences in metacognitive knowledge with older students demonstrating a more sophisticated level of metacognition than younger ones (Myers & Paris, 1978). Hence, read alouds can perhaps be used as a vehicle to promote older learners' metacognitive knowledge.

There is a robust body of research supporting the use of read alouds to develop young children's concepts about print, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and fluency (Schick & Melzi, 2016; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Yet, these were not among the top purposes for read alouds identified by teachers of younger children. So again, there appeared to be something of a misalignment between research and teachers' beliefs about the purposes of read alouds. Only secondary teachers named fluency as a purpose for engaging students in read alouds—certainly an unanticipated finding. While our survey did not elicit information about *why* teachers identified particular purposes for read alouds, we suspect secondary teachers may view read alouds as a strategy most appropriate for younger children. In fact, the demographic information

we gathered suggests that the secondary participants may not regularly include read alouds as an instructional practice. When we asked 2015 participants if they had conducted a read aloud the day of the survey, only one secondary math teacher responded in the affirmative.

Another somewhat surprising finding was the infrequency with which teachers identified read alouds as a strategy to promote content learning. Only a few elementary teachers identified this as an important purpose for using reading alouds. While somewhat higher percentages of middle school and secondary teachers named supporting content instruction as a purpose for reading alouds, even these percentages were relatively low.

In some instances we found surprising purposes identified by teachers for engaging learners in read alouds. At other times we found equally surprising omissions of particular purposes. As a result, there may be a need for literacy leaders in schools to address read alouds through professional development. Such professional development can help to broaden teachers' perspectives on the ways in which read alouds can foster many different facets of literacy development and can serve as "curriculum bridges" to build background knowledge, establish disciplinary contexts, and promote interest for content learning (Albright, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Slay & Morton, 2020). This type of professional development could be particularly valuable at the secondary level.

Professional development might also target text selection for read alouds with a focus on selecting books appropriate for different read aloud goals. A focus on text selection for content area read alouds might be especially beneficial for middle school and secondary teachers. There is a rich array of high quality picturebooks for diverse ages related to different content area topics. Yet we found minimal evidence that secondary survey respondents were aware of such books. When asked to name high quality titles for read alouds, middle and high school

teachers—in almost all instances—did not respond to the question. Those who did respond noted the question was “not applicable,” or they identified titles appropriate for read alouds with young children (e.g., *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969/1981), *Junie B. Jones* (Park, 1992)).

The second round of our analysis in which we looked across the responses of individual participants resulted in more nuanced insights into teachers’ read aloud beliefs. Through this analysis we identified a number of respondents who were distinctly different from their peers in their valuing of student participation during read alouds and in their thoughtfulness.

Our investigation represents a beginning step in exploring teachers’ perceptions about read alouds. The use of survey methodology enabled us to obtain responses of a relatively large number of participants. Yet survey methodology is also somewhat limiting in that respondents often offer only limited responses. Other strategies for tapping thinking about read alouds such as interviews might offer richer data about teacher perceptions of read alouds. While further research is needed, our work does provide instructional insights.

### Instructional Implications

We believe our findings may offer a framework for helping teachers reflect on read aloud practices. The framework recognizes two dimensions related to read alouds: (1) thoughtfulness and (2) valuing of student participation. We identified three elements signaling thoughtfulness: (1) knowledge of possibilities, (2) consideration of students’ background, and (3) intentionality of books and procedures aligned with stated purposes. Implicit in the first element—knowledge of possibilities—is the recognition of read alouds being conducted for varying purposes, and identifying the purpose of a read aloud is an important first step. In addition to identifying purpose, teachers must be cognizant of students’ backgrounds as they select a text and develop a plan for the read aloud. The second dimension of the framework is the valuing of student

participation. This dimension is a critical one signaling the importance of shared responsibility for discussion in a read aloud.

Our framework and the particular elements within the framework are consistent with research on and scholarly thinking about read alouds. We believe the value of the framework is in offering teachers a way of thinking holistically about an instructional strategy that is widely recognized as a way to support students' literacy development as well as their learning in the content areas. As such, the framework can serve as a way of organizing professional development sessions focused on read alouds.

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### Appendix A

#### *Most Frequently Named Purposes for Conducting Read Alouds*

Grades	2015		2020	
PreK-2	Comprehension strategies	18.6%	Interest and engagement	25.3%
	Metacognition	12.2%	Comprehension	9.8%
	Vocabulary	11.1%	Fluency	8.4%
	Fluency	10.1%	Metacognition	8.4%
3-5	Comprehension strategies	20.8%	Comprehension	27.0%
	Interest and engagement	16.6%	Interest and engagement	24.3%
	Fluency	14.5%	Metacognition	13.0%
	Metacognition	11.4%	Content focus	5.4%
			Literary elements	5.4%
6-8	Comprehension strategies	20.5%	Comprehension strategies	18.1%
	Fluency	17.6%	Fluency	13.6%
	Literary elements	11.7%	Interest and engagement	11.3%
	Vocabulary	11.7%	Content focus	9.0%
9-12	Fluency	26.9%	Fluency	33.3%
	Content focus	15.3%	Comprehension strategies	18.1%
	Vocabulary	11.5%	Interest and engagement	16.6%
	Comprehension strategies	11.5%	Content focus	11.1%
	Interest and engagement	11.5%		

## Appendix B

### *Evidence of Third Grade Teacher's Thoughtfulness and Valuing of Student Participation*

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#### **Thoughtfulness**

##### Knowledge of Possibilities

- “...to get my kiddos thinking "deeper" about their community, life or mind set.”
- “It gives you and your students the opportunity to share literacy, through this shared literacy you can have many different types of discussions. It also gives your students a chance to see you as a reader.”
- · “It depends on what I am reading for, sometimes the read aloud is more based for a mentor text, if we are learning non-fiction text I will find one that hits most text-features. If we are learning about being kind I will find books that might have character changes or ways that a character might be unkind.”
- · “I want my students to learn many things through our read aloud experiences. Mostly that reading can be enjoyable, and that each text has meanings that can mean different things for different people.”
- · “I feel like purposeful reading and questioning, finding text that the readers/listeners can see their self or something/someplace familiar. I also think it is good to take readers to new places in their reading whether it is a fictional place or a real place.”

##### Consideration of Students

- · “...to get my kiddos thinking "deeper" about their community, life or mind set.”
- “...finding text that the readers/listeners can see their self or something/someplace familiar.”

##### Intentionality of Materials and Procedures Aligned with Stated Purposes

- “[I use] picture books, non-fiction, chapter books, books with diverse characters, books to get my kiddos thinking "deeper" about their community, life or mind set.”
- “*The One and Only Ivan, Last Stop on Market Street, Maybe Something Beautiful.*”  
[Each book has the potential to get the children “thinking deeper about their community, life, or mind set”—one of this teacher’s stated purposes.]
- “It depends on what I am reading for, sometimes the read aloud is more based for a mentor text, if we are learning non-fiction text I will find one that hits most text-features. If we are learning about being kind I will find books that might have character changes or ways that a character might be unkind.”
- “I feel like purposeful reading and questioning, finding text that the readers/listeners can see their self or something/someplace familiar.”

### **Valuing of Student Participation**

- “It gives you and your students the opportunity to share literacy, through this shared literacy you can have many different types of discussions.”
  - “I also want them to learn how to discuss with peers....”
-