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SOPHIA

8-2022

The Impact of Read Aloud Summarizing Practice for English High School Students at an Online School

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Submitted on March 16th, 2022

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

This action research contains interventions relating to reading comprehension skills for high school students who are not reading at grade level, specifically ninth grade. Interventions include think aloud (Smith, 2006), re-reading (Hedin et al, 2010), and immediate summarizing (What Works Clearinghouse, 2020). It is also important to note that simply adding additional reading interventions can be useful in itself (Kidron et al, 2014). Students who have choice in their reading (Marchand-Martella et al, 2013) and the intrinsic motivation to use these strategies (Lepper et al, 2005) can raise their reading levels in general. This paper will exhibit the intervention strategies that will be used to raise student reading levels in ninth grade.

Keywords Read Aloud. Summarizing. Reading comprehension. High school students.

Throughout early grade reading lessons, there are many methods at a teacher's fingertips to strengthen reading skills. By late elementary and middle school grades, those lessons have tapered off and students are expected to be at grade level reading. What if they are not? As a high school teacher, I have found a lack of emphasis on basic reading skills. There are students who are not at grade level reading, but do not qualify for special education services.

There are many methods to reinforce basic reading skills. One method that is accessible to all students is a Read Aloud practice and summarizing aloud. Summarizing emcompasses many aspects of literacy – main points, objective voice, and paraphrasing. Literacy typically encompasses both writing and reading skills. In order to fully practice reading skills, it is prudent to take writing skills out of the practice when focusing on reading skills. Read Aloud practices allow for the reading skills to truly be practiced.

What Works Clearinghouse (2020) outlines the skills students who read below grade level struggle with as being the same skills that are sometimes needed to practice reading skills. This includes grade level writing skills to summarize. By taking out the step of writing a summary and having students verbally tell the summary, students are able to truly focus on the reading skills. In addition to Read Alouds and summarizing verbally, gamifying practice can allow for students to break down complicated skills like summarizing into more manageable pieces (Kapp, 2013). When these interventions are put together, students can truly focus on becoming better readers.

The STAR reading test is taken by each student three times a year. At this point, there are not specific interventions for students who do not test at grade level for

reading but do not qualify for special education services. It is important to know how to

support these students as the high school level curriculum does not specifically address

reading difficulties for students. The students included in the research group are ninth

graders who have elected to learn at an online high school. All students live in

Minnesota and have technology access. This research will address interventions for

students who are not at grade level for reading but do not qualify for special education

services.

Theoretical Framework

In high school, it is common to have a missing piece of the curriculum. Writing

and critical thinking skills are practiced throughout the year with homework and in-class

assignments. Reading practice is a skill that is usually missing. Often it is assumed that

students who struggle with reading are placed in appropriate special education or basic

level classes. I have found this is not always the case.

Bloom's Taxonomy is a framework developed in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom and

several associates (Armstrong, 2010). They felt that educators from pre-kindergarten to

post-secondary needed a common language of gauging the level of comprehension of

students (Armstrong, 2010). The keywords developed are used by educators to follow a

common and organized continuum of presenting skills and information to students.

There were revisions in 2001 by a group of cognitive psychologists to change the

keywords in the framework from nouns to verbs (Armstrong, 2010). This change

provided educators with more of an action oriented framework to direct their teaching

(Armstrong, 2010). I use the verbs from the 2001 version in my theoretical themework.

(See appendix A).

Basic reading skills fit into Bloom's Taxonomy by giving students the skills to get to at least the second level of Bloom's Taxonomy of understanding. This means students have surpassed the first level of Bloom's Taxonomy of remembering data covering the keywords of "define", "list", "memorize", among others. Students who are in high school should at least be able to "describe", "explain", "report" as described by the second level of Bloom's, which is understanding. Read Aloud and summarizing aloud give students who are struggling with reading the opportunity to gain the skills of the second level of Bloom's. High school students really should be doing higher levels of Bloom's such as applying and analyzing. High school is the time to practice higher level thinking such as applying and analyzing but without the foundation of level one, remember, and level two, understand, students would not have the skills to move forward. The higher levels of Bloom's such as level five, evaluate, require students to "argue", "support" among others. These lower level skills are required to continue up the taxonomy.

During my research, I did not require students to write their summary. I did not want writing skills to hamper the true essence of the skills required in lower levels of Bloom's. By having students give verbal summaries, I am able to focus on the actual skills of the second level of Bloom's. I heard their thought process of summarizing as they provided a verbal summary instead of having writing skills be another potential difficulty writing their thoughts.

Review of Literature

Reading is a lifelong skill which lacks direct instruction past a certain grade level. Marchand-Marella et al. (2013) assure educators that low reading levels most likely do not stem from a lack of literacy instruction in elementary grades but instead a lack of direct instruction in upper grades when texts get more complex. This means that educators in upper grades should be prepared to provide this direct instruction. What are the best interventions for struggling readers in high school? There are many options and it is important to not feel overwhelmed with adding something else to the agenda. This literature review contains interventions relating to reading skills for high school students who are not reading at grade level, specifically 9th grade. Interventions include re-reading (Hedin et al, 2010), think aloud (Smith, 2006), and immediate summarizing (What Works Clearinghouse, 2020). It is also important to note that simply adding additional reading interventions can be useful in itself (Kidron et al, 2014). Students who have choice in their reading (Marchand-Martella et al, 2013) and the intrinsic motivation to use these strategies (Lepper et al, 2005) can raise their reading levels in general. This paper will exhibit the intervention strategies that will be used to raise student reading levels in ninth grade.

In order to intervene with struggling readers, it is important to address the whole student from reading skills to their motivation to address their struggles in reading. Kidron and Lindsay (2014) outline that simply providing direct instruction can be an intervention in itself. This means that no matter the choice made in which specific interventions to use, a teacher providing direct instruction to a struggling reader will be beneficial to their reading ability.

Low stakes interventions

       The literature discusses three essential low stakes interventions: verbal summarizing, re-read, and think-aloud. When a student is struggling with a skill, it is important to create low stakes opportunities for intervention. What Works Clearinghouse (2020) outlines immediate recall of a summary as a low stakes strategy for practicing verbal summarizing after reading. Okrainetz (2017) observes the sheer amount of skills required of higher level readers, linguistic skills, cognitive skills, specific topic knowledge, and broader world knowledge. This can be truly daunting to put all of these skills together to be an effective reader if a student is not reading at grade level. There are other skills that readers who read at grade level use frequently.

       When good readers are not clear about what they have just read, they re-read. This is not something that struggling readers are known to do. Hedin (2010) observes that grade level readers tend to re-read to build deeper comprehension or recognize context clues. Hedin (2010) also observes that even when struggling readers do re-read, they are re-reading for the purpose of decoding unfamiliar words -- not searching for deeper comprehension. By practicing the skill of re-reading for deeper comprehension, struggling readers are better prepared to answer comprehension questions and provide detailed summaries. Butler et al. (2010) observe that by simple re-reading texts students had deeper comprehension and needed to decode fewer words. Students who are reading at grade level need to have multiple barriers removed in order to fully comprehend their reading.

       One type of intervention removes another barrier for students who are struggling with reading comprehension. This type is the think-aloud intervention. Think-aloud

interventions provide this low stakes intervention as outlined by Smith (2006). Smith outlines this strategy by simply pointing out that struggling readers should only focus on the act of reading as a skill. By adding writing skills into interventions, students can get overwhelmed by writing effectively. It can be easier for a struggling reader to recall facts, make connections, and summarize in general through verbal answers rather than writing them.

Intrinsic motivation

The literature shows that when students want to read for enjoyment, they are more likely to read more. This intervention may not be new but there is still work to be done in instilling an intrinsic motivation to read. The benefits are still true for today's struggling readers. Lepper et al. (2005) observe that it is easier to instill intrinsic motivation in younger students than older students. It seems that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can co-exist, according to Leper et al. (2005). When students have choice in topics, this raises their intrinsic motivation to participate in the intervention. Marzano (2004) speaks to student choice as an important part of vocabulary building and reading topics in general.

Gamification of learning provides student choice. The choice gets students excited about the topic then the intervention gets students the additional instructional time centered on reading as observed by Kapp (2013). When content is delivered in the style of gamification, the learning process is able to be broken down into smaller pieces. This allows students to revisit skills they may need additional practice with (Kapp, 2013). The visible progress of their learning gets students excited to continue participating in the intervention.

Gaps in the literature

Much of the literature centers on early readers in younger grades. This goes back to Marchand-Marella et al. (2013)'s observation that reading skills in early grades are not necessarily lacking. Butler et al. describes repetition in vocabulary building for kindergarten students as a specific intervention with fifth grade being the oldest grade mentioned in studies.

Conclusions and future study

It is essential to look to the future with reading interventions with ninth grade students who struggle in reading comprehension. The need for further study at this upper grade level is immediate. The literature provides many forms of intervention; re-reading (Hedin et al, 2010), think aloud (Smith, 2006), and immediate summarizing (What Works Clearinghouse, 2020) as well as considering choice in reading (Marchand-Martella et al, 2013) and the intrinsic motivation to use these strategies (Lepper et al, 2005) can raise their reading levels in general. By continuing to provide specific reading comprehension interventions to upper grade level students, there is a chance to determine which interventions work best for this population.

Methodology

This action research project used standardized tests, artifacts, and participant questionnaires to gather data. The standardized test was the STAR reading test that the school used for grades 7-12 for reading assessment. Artifacts included student recorded Read Alouds and summaries. Participant questionnaires were completed within a week of students completing their read alouds.

The participants for this research study included students from an online high school in Minnesota. There were eleven male students and five female students. They were all in ninth grade. Students were all enrolled in school from the beginning of the school year during the 2021-2022 school year which included time during the Covid pandemic. Table 1 depicts the gender and ethnicity information for the students who participated in the study. Read aloud practices were completed asynchronously. The gamified reviews were complete synchronously during weekly one hour live sessions.

Table 1
Student Demographics

Gender	Ethinicity
M	White
M	White
F	Middle Eastern
M	White
F	White
M	Indiginous
F	Multi-racial
M	White
F	Latina
F	White
M	White
M	White
M	White
M	White
M	White
M	White

Read aloud and verbal summarizing were introduced as homework assignments for ninth grade English students to do asynchronously. There was a choice provided in topics for the read aloud passages. Students recorded themselves in their home settings in the learning management system (LMS) they are familiar with. In between the read aloud practices, students played summarizing practice games to reinforce the requirements of summarizing effectively. The STAR Reading Test was used to measure the beginning and ending literacy skills. This measured if students who had these additional summarizing practices have gained reading skills throughout their practice.

The passages covered a range of topics all were non-fiction. Students were given a choice of two topics for each read aloud and passages were not repeated. The passages were similar lengths and levels of reading. These activities were completed as homework. Students received personal feedback and encouragement from me. The points were simply for participation not for skill. The gamified practices were various online quizzes students participated in together during live sessions. The platform allowed students to see each other on the leaderboard. This is a tool students have used in the past and were comfortable with. In eight weeks, students completed four read aloud practices and three gamified practices.

The data collected through the methodology listed above provides data about student reading skills after practicing read alouds. Read aloud practices are not usually used in the high school classroom. This is a practice that allows for students to truly focus on their reading skills. Written summaries can muddy data by splitting focus with both writing and reading skills. Knowing that reading skills are truly the center of the

practice allows the study to truly focus on reading test scores from the beginning to the end of the study.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this action research was to assess the effectiveness of read aloud practices paired with summarizing texts out loud. The tools used by students were tools they were familiar with throughout previous assignments. The quantitative data collected reflected standardized test scores, along with their reflections regarding the interventions. The reflection was a Google Form that I created with only two questions. (see Appendix C)

Student choice was integrated into the research by allowing students to choose which texts they read. The passages themselves were all the same length with a difference of about 100 words or less. They were a variety of topics – all non-fiction related. Students were given a choice of two topics to read for each practice. They could choose their own topic.

The research was done at an online high school. Students used tools that are familiar to them through the learning management system, Moodle. The recording tool was within Moodle for students to record themselves. There was no need for students to learn a new tool or even leave the Moodle site. The standardized STAR reading test scores that were collected were test scores collected for all students at the school.

Students completed an asynchronous homework activity each week that included a choice of nonfiction passages to read out loud. Students were expected to follow up their read aloud with a summary out loud through the Moodle recording system. Each week students also competed in synchronous gamified summarizing practice. These

practices occurred during required live sessions. Students completed reflections about their comfort level during the read alouds twice during the study.

Findings

The students included in this study chose to attend an online charter school. There were sixteen students included in the study. They were enrolled in ninth grade English. Students lived within the state of Minnesota. The data was collected during the fall semester from September, 2021 - December, 2021. Student data was collected from asynchronous activities completed by the students through Moodle – the learning management system (LMS) that is used in their daily lessons. These activities are completed as homework assignments, even the STAR Reading Test. The recording tool used to record their read aloud and summaries is a tool that students have previously used for other assignments. This was located within the Moodle assignment (see Appendix B). The assignment was familiar to the students and did not require an external tool to complete the assignments.The assignments were presented to students as a typical homework assignment.

The STAR Reading Test is administered within the student's first two weeks of school (September, 2021) with a follow up test score collected in December, 2021. Figure 1 depicts the first and second STAR Reading test scores In that time, students participated in four reading and summarizing read alouds.

Figure 1

Student Testing Data

Participant number	Gender	Ethinicity	First STAR	Second STAR	Raised score?
1	M	White	1117	1043	☐
2	M	White	1124	1099	☐
3	F	Middle Eastern	1183	1192	☑
4	M	White	1127	1095	☐
5	F	White	1061	1169	☑
6	M	Indiginous	1110	1089	☐
7	F	Multi-racial	1084	1076	☐
8	M	White	1084	1076	☐
9	F	Latina	1130	1133	☑
10	F	White	1141	1156	☑
11	M	White	1106	1126	☑
12	M	White	1153	1125	☐
13	M	White	1093	1118	☑
14	M	White	1021	1106	☐
15	M	White	1090	1085	☐
16	M	White	1094	1148	☑

Seven students raised their STAR reading test scores. Four of the seven students identified as female. Three of the seven students identified as male. This research showed that female students scored higher after this practice. This practice also showed that there were two students who had home languages other than English. They also raised their test score. This data provided quantitative data pinpointing the positive change in reading level in students who practiced the read alouds and summarizing. In the end, the data showed that about half of the students who completed read alouds and summarizing practices raised their reading test score. There was a range of opinions shared by students regarding how comfortable they were with this type of reading practice which can be found in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Reading Practice Data

Participant number	Gender	Ethinicity	First reading practice	Second reading practice	Third reading practice	Fourth reading practice	I felt comfortable reading the passage	I felt comfortable summarizing the passage
1	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Agree	Agree
2	M	White	☐	☑	☑	☑	Agree	Agree
3	F	Middle Eastern	☑	☑	☑	☑	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
4	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Strongly agree	Agree
5	F	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Agree	Agree
6	M	Indiginous	☑	☑	☑	☑	Neutral	Disagree
7	F	Multi-racial	☑	☑	☑	☑	Neutral	Neutral
8	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Strongly agree	Agree
9	F	Latina	☑	☑	☑	☑	Agree	Neutral
10	F	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Strongly agree	Neutral
11	M	White	☑	☑	☐	☐	Agree	Neutral
12	M	White	☑	☐	☑	☑	Neutral	Strongly disagree
13	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Neutral	Neutral
14	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☐	Strongly disagre	Strongly disagree
15	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Strongly agree	Neutral
16	M	White	☑	☑	☑	☑	Agree	Neutral

The labels were chosen by the students at the end of the practices before the second standardized test in Figure 2. The tool used to gather this information was a Google Form (see Appendix C). Fifteen students chose "strongly agree", "agree", or "neutral" to describe how they felt about reading the passage out loud. Thirteen students chose "strongly agree", "agree", or "neutral" to describe how they felt about summarizing the passage.

Four students missed completing the read aloud assignments. This did not affect that way in which they identified their feelings about the practice. The reading practices were self-contained assignments that students were able to choose passage topics. The topics ranged from a short biography of Ida B. Wells to a short text on ligers. The texts were all similar in length. They were able to choose from two unique informational texts provided to them. The texts were varied and provided within the lesson.

In the end, student data showed that students who felt comfortable with the read aloud and summarizing practices raised their reading test scores. Students were asked to identify their comfort level with the practices. The students who indicated that they were comfortable with the practice did raise their test scores. This is a consideration for implementing this practice. Some students may not feel comfortable with this practice. The tools that were used in this practice were all familiar to the students, so the fact that their reading test scores did not go up may have been due to the fact that reading aloud was too much of an uncomfortable practice for them.

Conclusion

High school students typically do not receive direct reading practice and instruction in most grade level English classes. Yet there are many students in these classes who do not have grade level reading test scores. It is necessary to find tools to provide students with effective reading practice.

Summarizing is a skill that combines many literacy skills. Most summarizing practices are written. Writing skills are separate from reading skills. This means read aloud practices need to be performed by students to actually focus on summarizing and reading skills. It is also important to provide student choice in reading topics to gain student interest in these practices. By studying the effects of Read Aloud and summarizing practices, there can be insight into how to best provide reading practice to high school students in grade level English classes.

After analyzing the data collected, it is clear that most students feel comfortable with practicing reading skills outloud with self identified descriptors. When students felt comfortable with the read aloud practice, their reading test scores were raised.

In order to use this practice effectively, it is important to have the tools be familiar to the students. If students have used a recording tool in the past, that recording tool should be used again. Student choice was also a part of this practice. This seemed to get students invested in completing the practice.

It is important for reading struggles to be addressed at any age. Even if a high school student is in a grade level English class, it is necessary to address any skills they may struggle with. The benefits of these practices include raised reading test scores and the ability for students to have student choice in topics of readings. I find that if students have choice in some areas of the course they will be more invested as a whole in the course. As a teacher, I see the great benefits of student choice in practice.

This practice uses tools that are already found in the course. This is another way for students who struggle with reading to build confidence. They are able to access tools they are already familiar with to practice a skill they struggle with. Mixing skills such as reading and writing skills seemed to dilute the effectiveness of the practice. If reading skills are truly what students need practice with then interventions should be as narrow as possible. This way students truly practice the skills they need to practice. This research shows read alouds and summarizing do have a positive effect on student reading test scores.

The fact that not all student reading test scores were raised does not discount this intervention. Individual practices with student choice included means students get invested in the practices. Most students reported they were comfortable with this practice and they all had student choice in topics. This practice could be continued throughout the year to enhance reading skills even longer. Since this practice

specifically addresses reading skills, the data can truly show how reading test scores are changed with this practice. High school readers need support and this practice can provide that support over time.

      In the future, it would be beneficial to have students get practice with a recording tool early on in the class. This Read Aloud practice has proven to be beneficial in raising student reading test scores, but it is important to have students familiar with the tools first. It is important to build that practice early on. Providing student choice is also key to student buy-in for success. Once these two elements are considered, the Read Aloud and summarizing practices prove to be effective in raising reading test scores.

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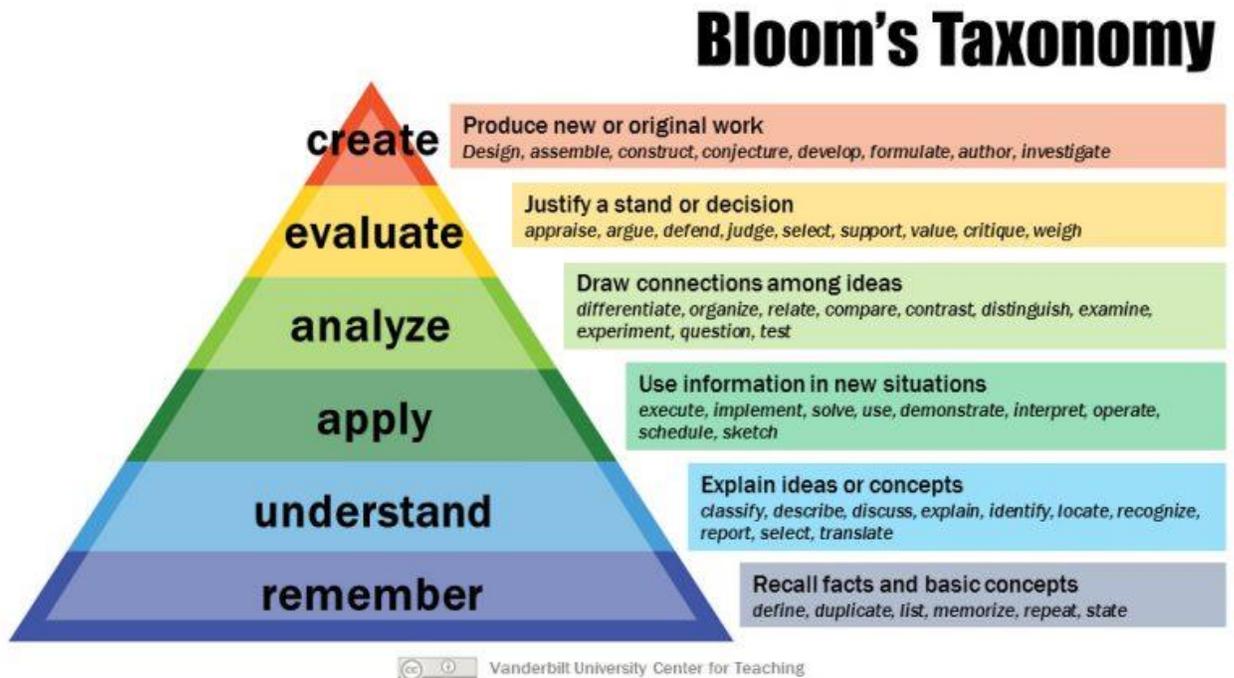
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Appendix A

Bloom's Taxonomy graphic

Bloom's Taxonomy

create — Produce new or original work
Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate

evaluate — Justify a stand or decision
appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh

analyze — Draw connections among ideas
differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

apply — Use information in new situations
execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch

understand — Explain ideas or concepts
classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate

remember — Recall facts and basic concepts
define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

Appendix B

Recording tool for read aloud and summarizing

Recorder

00:10:00

Record　　　　Play　　　　Save

File submissions　　　　　　　Maximum file size: 10MB, maximum number of files: 20

Files

You can drag and drop files here to add them.

Save changes　　Cancel
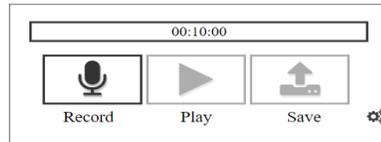
Appendix C

Google form used to gather how students felt about read aloud and summarizing

practices

I felt comfortable reading the passage. *

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

I felt comfortable summarizing the passage. *

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree