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PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS ON READ-ALoud PRACTICES  
IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE ELEMENTARY SETTING

By  
Kimberly Jean Perry

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2021

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Kimberly Jean Perry under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Abstract**

PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS ON READ-ALoud PRACTICES  
IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE ELEMENTARY SETTING. Perry, Kimberly Jean,  
2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

A problematic imbalance of academic discrepancies continues to exist within our schools today, leading to school failure for many of our students. Teachers must be prepared to provide effective instructional methods that increase the reading outcomes for all students. The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. This dissertation analyzed and compared how elementary classroom teachers described their read-aloud practices to the tangible practices implemented in their classrooms, in order to determine a relationship between perception and contextual data. Data were collected through a survey instrument, classroom observations, and a focus group for gathering both quantitative and qualitative results, in order to triangulate the data for a thorough analysis. The findings from the study revealed that teachers enjoyed reading to their students and they read to their students on a regular basis. The findings from this study further revealed that teachers implemented prosodic cues while reading to their students, which lead to actively engaged listeners, and always included questions and discussions as a part of their read-aloud practices. Based on the results of this study, the perceptions of the teachers indicated that they felt their read-aloud practices were effective in building literacy skills through class discussions and teacher-initiated inquiry.

*Keywords:* literacy education, oral reading, reading aloud to others, reading

instruction, reading motivations

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

The Children's Rights to Read campaign – an initiative launched by the International Literacy Association (ILA, 2019) – had a driving force that focused on ensuring every child had access to educational opportunities and resources that were essential for reading. At the heart of the campaign were 10 rights ILA contended all children deserve and must be protected in order to reach full personal, social, and educational potential. These rights include the right to read for pleasure and the right to supportive reading environments with knowledgeable literacy partners (ILA, 2019). With regard to this campaign, literacy has become one of the most well researched foundational frameworks as the premise for all learning (Trelease, 2013). According to Anderson et al. (1985), research studies in building and strengthening literacy in our children through educational platforms and family engagement projects have gained widespread national attention since the 1985 *Becoming a Nation of Readers* national report. In addition, studies link the implementation of reading support of young children to academic success and increased learning outcomes in all content areas (Whitehurst et al., 1994). For this reason, a substantial amount of emphasis now focuses on improving instruction and educational outcomes for readers who are considered at risk (Hickman et al., 2004). Toward that end, the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) identified parenting activities, interventions, and instructional practices that promote the development of children's early literacy skills.

Meanwhile, national policies, statements, and educational reports have emerged to support quality learning opportunities that develop preliteracy, emergent, language,

vocabulary, and comprehension reading skills in children of all ages. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) initiated a standards-based education reform by setting high standards and establishing measurable goals in order to improve individual outcomes in education. Then, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) updated and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act with a continued emphasis on the provision of significant opportunities through fair, equitable, and high-quality education for all students and to close educational achievement gaps.

Likewise, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998) made a joint position statement with the International Reading Association (IRA) that notably contributed to the need for both improvement in practices and development of supportive educational policies. Subsequently, 11 years later, the Council of Chief State School Officers (2009) created a policy statement focused on eliminating disparities in learning environments by enhancing healthy development of high-quality learning opportunities and school success for all young children. Unfortunately, studies reveal that achievement gaps existing between disadvantaged children and their peers can be noted as early as nine months of age (Halle et al., 2009). In response to this research, the Council of Chief State School Officers maintained that our nation can invest in creating and sustaining quality learning opportunities in its move toward enacting educational reform, which is inclusive of early childhood, by building a system of learning bottom-up.

Indeed, research links adult-child read-aloud practices in supporting children's learning to academic success (Mol & Bus, 2011). Mol and Bus (2011) contended that shared reading experiences make a crucial difference in a child's life to the extent of

promoting the knowledge and skills needed in order to learn to read and, furthermore, will stimulate a positive attitude toward reading. So then, a parent's involvement in their child's process of learning to read can begin as early as infancy (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012). On the whole, when combining elements of good parenting, teaching, and schooling with children's experiences, "the greater the likelihood that they will achieve their potential as readers" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 117).

### **Background of the Problem**

Achievement disparities fester in our nation today, characterized by families defined as "at risk," who are challenged by life's situations that threaten the cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic development of their children (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Furthermore, achievement gaps link to other life challenges such as dropping out of school, unemployment, and teen pregnancy (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Statistics relating to these at-risk children indicate that (a) within the first six years of their life, 40% will live in homes that fall below twice the poverty level (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009); (b) they will enter kindergarten 12-14 months below national averages in preliteracy skills (Reach Out & Read, 2014); and (c) 83% of them will be labeled as nonproficient in reading as early as the end of third grade (Reach Out & Read, 2014).

These social class differences have a direct link to a child's oral and vocabulary development. Hart and Risley (1995) revealed that by age three, children from educated and professional families heard approximately 2,153 words per hour, compared to 1,251 words from working class families and 616 words in low-income families. Thus, the children in these same families were observed with a cumulative vocabulary of 1,100

words in professional families, 750 words in working class families, and 500 words in low-income families (Hart & Risley, 1995). Furthermore, a study conducted by researchers at Stanford University showed that children as young as 18 months old from different socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated dramatic differences in their vocabulary development (Fernald et al., 2013). Fernald et al. (2013) further stated that by the age of two, the disparity in children's vocabulary development grew significantly with less-advantaged children being on average at least six months behind their more advantageous peers.

One way to eradicate these frightening disparities is to plunge ahead to the root of tackling inequalities and underachievement in order to discover what is at the heart of education – reading (Trelease, 2013). Trelease (2013) proclaimed, “The knowledge of almost every subject in school flows from reading” (p. xxv). However, the development of literacy skills begins long before a child goes to school (Anderson et al., 1985). According to ZERO TO THREE (2014), critical learning takes place within the first five years of life, with 90% of brain development occurring at this time. Therefore, based on the research, the impact of family engagement and the development of a home literacy environment that targets early language and preliteracy skills and is inclusive of print-rich exposures are crucial to establishing reading success in school (Anderson et al., 1985; Reach Out & Read, 2014).

When one accepts that the cultural phenomena of today revolves around the development of reading, thinking, and comprehension with language and the printed word, one recognizes that the extent of that development can be affected significantly by the home and family connection to learning (Anderson et al., 1985). Since the

acquisitions of language and literacy skills are critical milestones in a child's development (Snow et al., 1998), early literacy theory maintains that a more natural evolving of those skills should unfold, such as the enjoyment of books through positive interactions between young children and adults (ZERO TO THREE, 2003). In addition, Snow (1991) maintained that adult-child shared reading experiences impact these emerging literacy and language skills that are needed to support reading by helping children to use and understand decontextualized language. Therefore, parents can play a significant role in helping to prepare their child for the literacy skills needed upon entering school while still in their preschool years (Reach Out & Read, 2014). In short, one simply cannot discount the power families have on their child's education when comparing the 700 hours that a 6-year-old child has been in school to the 52,000 hours they have spent *outside* of school (Trelease, 2001).

Snow (1991) further discussed that considerable research suggests that skilled reading requires more generalized oral language competencies, especially in the use of decontextualized language. This leads to increased vocabulary and comprehension abilities in children during their academic years (Snow, 1991). With language development being considered a critical factor in building reading success among school-aged children, the value and benefit of the adult-child shared reading experience with preschool-aged children, especially among low-income families, helps develop those early literacy and language skills (NAEYC, 1998). Furthermore, potential benefits of this study into the effects of joint reading opportunities may additionally help to provide guidance for teachers of young children (NAEYC, 1998). The joint position statement by the NAEYC (1998) and IRA encouraged the use of interactive read-aloud opportunities

among any adults who are in a position to impact a child's learning and reading development.

In trying to become this nation of readers instead of a nation at risk, we battle statistics reporting that less than half (48%) of parents in the nation actually engage in daily shared reading time with their young children (Russ et al., 2007); meaning 52% of parents do not read with their young children on a daily basis. Moreover, Adams (1990) stated that a typical first grader of a middle-class family averaged between 1,000 to 1,700 hours of parent-child shared reading experiences, compared to a child from a low socioeconomic status (SES) family averaging only 25 hours of one-on-one reading contact. Indeed, the connection of having books at home with parents reading aloud to their young children and developing those early language skills are critical precursors needed to support success in learning to read (Reach Out & Read, 2014).

Unfortunately, families living in poverty have many setbacks to literacy learning: They lack money to purchase books for their children, have limited access to libraries, do not see the value of reading to their children based on their own lack of parent-child read-aloud experiences when they were children, and may not have the needed skills themselves to read to their own children (Reach Out & Read, 2014). Regrettably, Hart and Risley (2003) revealed that by age three, these same children have been exposed to approximately 30 million fewer words than children from middle- to upper-income homes. In addition, Reach Out & Read (2014) further reported that oftentimes, families struggle with the lack of time available to read with their children due to the demands of work, extracurricular activities, community involvement, and recent pulls toward social media and other technological interferences, adding even more to the deficit of literacy

competencies.

When delving into a deeper understanding of children and how they learn, one finds that instilled within them is a sense of discovery and exploration that teeters on the brink of excitement (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009; Trelease, 2013). Engaging children in active learning through adult-child shared reading experiences taps into that excitement and encourages them to be responsive and reciprocal, thus resulting in a stronger and more enriched relationship (Koralek, 2003; Trelease, 2013). This social interaction to printed text sets the model for an instructional strategy that influences language development, vocabulary, and comprehension (Morrow et al., 1990). According to Bus et al. (1995), a child's initial interest in reading becomes aroused by a feeling of pleasure evoked during the shared reading experience with an adult, thus placing it at the core of a child's language development. In truth, believing in the value of reading aloud to young children dates back as far as 1908 when E.B. Huey wrote, "The secret of it all lies in parents reading aloud to and with the child" (p. 332).

Given the awareness of this overwhelming research, it is interesting that only 48% of families engage in read-aloud opportunities with their children (Russ et al., 2007). Conclusively, one cannot ignore the lingering shadow of studies that link children who were read stories to at home with children who experience reading success at school (Chomsky, 1972; Wells, 1982). Therefore, when children from different social classes enter formalized schooling with discrepancies in their language acquisition and vocabulary development while also lacking critical adult-child reading experiences, it is the responsibility of the school to close the educational gaps. The gap continues to exist throughout the educational years of a child, validating the "Matthew Effect" of an

accumulated advantage that highlights the phrase, “the rich get richer” (Stanovich, 1986, p. 381). In essence, Stanovich (1986) declared that those children who read well, having good vocabularies, will inevitably read more, gain more word meanings, and therefore will read even better. Conversely, those children who read slowly, having inadequate vocabularies and experiencing a lack of enjoyment, will read less, resulting in a weaker vocabulary knowledge that will inhibit further growth in reading abilities (Stanovich, 1986). Consequently, in 2017, the National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed in The Nation’s Report Card that only 37% of the nation’s fourth graders performed at or above proficiency in reading, which was only 1% higher than in 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Shockingly, when looking at the flip side of this, one finds that 63% did *not* perform at proficiency in reading. Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 32% of the nation’s fourth graders failed to even achieve *basic* levels of reading achievement, with a higher percentage in low-income families and English-language learners (NCES, 2017).

As a further result, our nation’s domestic achievement gap directly aligns with an international achievement gap, which has the negative potential of leading to the decline of economic vitality in our nation (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).

According to research by Hanushek and Woessmann (2015), evidence supports that the quality of a nation’s educational system is a key determinant for future growth in that nation’s economy. Hanushek and Woessmann (2009) further stated, “differences in cognitive skills lead to economically significant differences in economic growth” (p. 26). The causality of domestic and international gaps will have a negative impact on society and economic competitiveness (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Sadly,



children with multiple risks, such as poor health, economic insecurity, and lack of quality early learning opportunities, have little chance of reaching their full potential and competing in a globally economically diverse world (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Even typical American children who have strong academic promise do not compete adequately with their international peers (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (2009), if there is a continual lag in the educational abilities of our future generations, “our ability to compete in a global marketplace and to lead the world with innovation will be radically diminished” (p. 5).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the wake of the 1985 national report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985) by the Commission on Reading, our nation has been inundated with considerable amounts of research focusing on reading development in children – how children learn to read, what areas are the most critical, what strategies/interventions are most effective, and how critical is a parent’s involvement to their child’s reading success. Fast forward 30 years later and one sees that the current educational law of our nation today, ESSA (2015), continues the mission of seeking evidence-based reading strategies that prove to be effective in increasing student achievement.

In a determined effort to build literacy skills, the report by the Commission on Reading boldly stated, “The single most important activity for building knowledge for their eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 23). The NAEYC (1998) and IRA made a joint position statement, which stipulated, “The single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for

reading success appears to be reading aloud to children” (p. 3). Furthermore, the 1998 report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998), given by the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, listed interactive parent-child shared reading experiences as a key practice that supports language and literacy development. Crossing over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) presented its findings in the report, *Developing Early Literacy*, echoing shared reading experiences as interventions that produced “statistically significant and moderate-sized effects on children’s print knowledge and oral language skills” (p. ix). More recently, the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study reported that students who were engaged in home shared reading experiences had higher reading achievement scores than those who were not (Mullis et al., 2017).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (2009) declared that in light of a substantive and increasing amount of research, the learning success of our children can be enhanced by providing quality rich, research-based learning opportunities and experiences. Early preliterate skills that are developed from birth to age five are key to preparing young children for the academic rigor they will face upon entering conventional schooling (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). As a response, ESSA (2015) includes provisionary actions that sustain and expand the nation’s investment in increasing access to high quality preschool.

However, each year a considerable number of children enter kindergarten excited about meeting new friends, having new experiences, and the prospects of learning to read, while unaware of the fact that they are lacking crucial skills in language and vocabulary development that are necessary for their overall academic success (Reach Out

& Read, 2014). Indeed, the 1991 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report, *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation*, revealed that 35% of children entering kindergarten in the U.S. lacked vocabulary and sentence structure critical to their school success (Boyer, 1991). In 2015, The Children's Reading Foundation (2015) reported that 40% of children start out in kindergarten 1-3 years behind. Unfortunately, these children who enter kindergarten behind rarely catch up, with discrepancies trailing with them throughout school and life (Reach Out & Read, 2014). Contrary to the perceptions of parents and families, without an intensive amount of interventions, approximately 75% of children who enter kindergarten below national standards will never catch up to their peers (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2015). The National Assessment for Educational Progress reported that in 2017, only 37% of our nation's fourth graders performed at or above reading proficiency, which was not measurably different from 2015 at 36% (McFarland et al., 2019). This leaves a trail of 63% who scored below reading proficiency. As a fallout from the challenges children face in reading, NCES (2019) and the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE, 2020) reported that 21% of our nation's adults still lack basic literacy skills. That's 43 million American adults who fall into the illiterate/functioning illiterate category (COABE, 2020; NCES, 2019). Unfortunately, reading difficulties in young children lead to school failure, causing a child to never reach their full educational potential (Reach Out & Read, 2014).

Although it is true that critical language and vocabulary differences exist among children entering kindergarten (Hart & Risley, 1995), the vocabulary gaps continue to widen during the elementary years based on the existing teaching practices (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Research studies continue to support the manner in which adults can

expand children's vocabulary knowledge, but such effective techniques are less practiced (Hindman et al., 2016). Children of a different SES will exhibit differences in their vocabulary growth that can be related to the differences in the process of learning new words (University of Texas at Dallas, 2017). Unfortunately, schools cannot change existing circumstances prior to a child entering formalized education. However, when children enter elementary school behind in their language and vocabulary development and continue to acquire an inadequate amount of vocabulary skills, it becomes less likely that they will close those preexisting achievement gaps (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; University of Texas at Dallas, 2017). Therefore, in becoming a nation of readers, one raises the question of how schools, more specifically teachers, can attempt to close the educational gap that exists between the social class categories.

Since undeniable research has shown that vocabulary growth is linked to academic progress and success (Penno et al., 2002), the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) specifically reported establishing research-based teaching methods that address vocabulary in the primary grades. In fact, the nation's current educational law, ESSA (2015), requires schools to implement evidence-based instruction that is effective in producing improved learning outcomes. Notably, the level at which children continue to acquire new words after the initial language acquisition years can be exponential during the elementary school years (Robbins & Ehri, 1994). Robbins and Ehri (1994) clarified that the acquisition of new words during the primary grades has the potential to grow by thousands per year. Unfortunately, those children with limited vocabulary will have to learn words at a much faster rate with three to four new root words per day to catch up within five to six years (Biemiller, 2003). Hence, the correlation of vocabulary size is

anchored to a child's overall academic achievement (Bromley, 2007; Graves, 2007). It is imperative that efforts be made to translate research on vocabulary development into practice within the classroom setting, so the odds for children at risk can be changed (Hindman et al., 2016).

In addition, research studies (Bromley, 2007; Graves, 2007) found that the vocabulary knowledge of a student accounts for much of their verbal aptitude. Biemiller and Boote (2006) stated that there is a relationship between a child's vocabulary size and their level of reading comprehension, with Bromley (2007) noting that 70-80% of comprehension comes directly from a child's vocabulary knowledge. Unfortunately, when reading instruction of early grades involves little challenging vocabulary development, it can result in problems among middle elementary children's reading comprehension (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Therefore, schools must be prepared to emphasize vocabulary development during these elementary years, or those less advantaged children will continue to be crippled in their academic success even if they have mastered structured reading of written words (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

In regard to vocabulary growth and reading comprehension, reading aloud to children can provide a powerful context for building word knowledge (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Koralek (2003) stipulated, "The more adults read aloud to children, the larger their vocabularies will grow and the more they will know about the world and their place in it" (p. 1). Consequently, the level of vocabulary knowledge a child acquires is a strong predictor of their individual reading ability in terms of fluency and comprehension as well (Hickman et al., 2004). While aiding and supporting a child's vocabulary acquisition, read-aloud opportunities can also increase their cognitive comprehension

abilities by providing experiences that allow them to use abstract thinking methods to make predictions, to analyze and connect to text, to evaluate the complexity of plot-related situations, and to understand story structure and organization (Adams, 1990). According to research from the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (2017), teachers recognized the impact of reading aloud to their students on advanced reading comprehension skills that related to developing their own opinions regarding a story, making curricular connections, and digging into a story's central message.

Given the significance that connects language and literacy skills to reading success, exploring methods for enhancing language and literacy development has drawn the attention of educators, government agencies, and researchers (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Language development is the process by which children come to understand and communicate language during early childhood (Lennox, 2013). In particular, Lennox (2013) clarified that it is through language that children express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings; communicate with others; and understand and identify with their world. Since the foundational root of reading, writing, speaking, and listening is language, it is imperative that high-quality literacy instruction in schools be implemented in order to support children's language development for thinking and understanding and to improve literacy outcomes for all children (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Lennox, 2013). The avenue to which this endeavor is achieved is through teachers providing read-aloud opportunities as a vital part of the literacy instruction in their classrooms (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008). Read-alouds draw children from all age groups into a community of learners who are unified through texts and topics that

enhance the literacy instruction and broaden the knowledge band (Varlas, 2018). In truth, a prolific amount of research supports adult-child shared reading experiences as a key element in developing literacy and language skills (Anderson et al., 1985; Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research, 2017; NAEYC, 1998). These findings are a direct pipeline to achieving academic success (Hindman et al., 2016; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Conclusively, research reveals that all children can benefit from early learning opportunities that foster a shared reading time, allowing for exploration and discovery of responsive language and reciprocal interactions (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Koralek (2003) stated that shared reading experiences introduce children to a whole new level of language that is different than the language they hear in daily conversations, in movies, and on television. It is the language of books that allows for more descriptive literary elements, exposure to rich and unusual words, and formalized grammatical structures (Kindle, 2009; Koralek, 2003). As part of the classroom culture, teachers can fully utilize read-aloud experiences in creating a bonded class community that is immersed in literary themes and text structures, having the ability to connect texts with one another, while providing a rich context for the genres of writing (Varlas, 2018). When teachers implement shared reading time with their students, they model effective reading practices and promote a love of reading with lasting benefits (Varlas, 2018). Unfortunately, as children get older and move through the grades in school, they are less likely to participate in read-aloud experiences within the classroom and at home (Varlas, 2018).

How do these research findings and reading statistics connect with teachers and

classrooms in our nation? Wadsworth (2008) stated that while the educational focus intensifies on raising assessment scores, pressures continue in the classroom for teachers to maintain a focus on a balanced reading program. Research supports that teachers who implement direct instruction from a balanced reading approach, providing ample opportunities for children to be engaged in reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities, have the most productive and effective learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 1985; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). However, one component of a balanced reading program is the time-honored practice of reading aloud to students, which is unfortunately getting lost in many classrooms (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008). Researchers recognize that the integration of teacher read-alouds in classroom settings is critically important to building linguistic processing, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension skills, all of which support language development (Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research, 2017; Lennox, 2013). It is through interactive classroom read-alouds that children build background knowledge, stimulate interest in high-quality literature, foster critical thinking, increase comprehension skills, make connections to their world, learn new concepts, extend vocabulary knowledge, and increase overall language competencies (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008). “The read aloud is like the Swiss Army knife of literacy; It has multiple uses at every age and in every content area” (Varlas, 2018, p. 2).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. The study obtained data



through digital surveys, classroom read-aloud observations, and an in-depth discussion group consisting of elementary teachers. Meller et al. (2009) described teacher read-aloud experiences as those opportunities where teachers implement planned oral readings of children's literature.

Achievement gaps are well established before children enter formal school and are likely to continue to grow without the implementation of intensive high-quality instruction, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and English-language learners (Lennox, 2013). According to Lennox (2013), the research demonstrates that a meaningful and intentional way to improve outcomes is through interactive shared reading opportunities. When read-alouds are utilized properly within the classroom setting, they can build the necessary skills needed to learn how to read (Adams, 1990) and to develop vocabulary and comprehension abilities (McKeown & Beck, 2004). Read-aloud experiences between teachers and students provide an opportunity to support learning by stimulating positive attitudes toward reading, providing models for fluent reading, and scaffolding a child's transition to independent reading (Morrow et al., 1990; Wadsworth, 2008). In fact, teachers acting on the opportunity to read aloud to their students has been one of the major motivators for getting children to read (Cunningham, 2005). Furthermore, shared reading opportunities teachers integrate encompass practices that are intended to enhance language and literacy skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These skills in a child's reading development are key milestones that can further lead to competent development in other areas of life (Snow et al., 1998).

Oczkus (2012) stated that teachers who read aloud to their students each day implement research-based strategies that motivate their students to read on their own by

modeling good reading practices, while promoting critical thinking skills. Moreover, teachers who read aloud to their students create a sense of community within their classroom (Oczkus, 2012). By examining teacher perceptions through the findings of this study, I was able to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students.

Although a large amount of research tells us how children develop vocabulary skills and the conditions that support that growth, less is known about how teachers actually go about the implementation of instructional strategies that teach new words during read-aloud opportunities (Kindle, 2009). The method in which teachers carry out read-aloud practices is somewhat vague in the complexity of the pedagogical decisions that have to be made regarding selection of texts, identifying new words, and choosing appropriate strategies that facilitate effective learning (Kindle, 2009). However, in many classrooms, it is still prevalent to see teaching practices that are associated with outdated views and learning theories on language and literacy development that include extensive whole-group instruction emphasizing ineffective drill and practice on isolated skills (NAEYC, 1998). For this reason, it is crucial that children be interactively engaged in the literacy experiences that make academic content more meaningful and that effective teachers capitalize on every opportunity to enhance children's language and literacy development, inclusive of read-aloud experiences (NAEYC, 1998).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom?
2. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data

regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms?

3. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms?

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Swanson (2013), theories are conceived for the purpose of explaining, predicting, and understanding a particular occurrence or phenomenon. In looking at a theoretical structure that supports a study of read-aloud practices in elementary classrooms, a social learning theory provides a useful framework upon which to build. Because the concept of learning is multifaceted and complex, many different psychological and educational theories have emerged over the past century to explain how and why people learn (Cherry, 2019). Behavioral theories of learning propose that one learns as a result of formulated conditioning and reinforcing, whereas cognitive theories of learning are founded on psychological influences involving thought processes (Cherry, 2019). Bandura (1977) proposed a social learning theory that suggests people learn new concepts, information, and behaviors through the observation of other people's actions. Bandura further stressed the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors of others as well as their attitudes and emotional reactions as the central foundation of his social learning theory. In fact, Bandura concluded that "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are preformed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22).

Suitably, social learning theory explains the human behavior as it relates to ongoing reciprocal interactions existing between one's cognitive, behavioral, and

environmental influences (Culatta, 2019). It was Bandura's intention to bridge behaviorism and cognitive learning theories through a social learning theory in order to explain how children learn in social environments (McLeod, 2016; Wheeler, 2017). Within this study, a social learning theory is the guiding framework in exploring the interaction between teacher and student during classroom read-aloud practices that involve observation and role modeling methods. When teachers read aloud to their students, they are role modeling etiquette reading habits that involve prosodic cues for expressive language (Wadsworth, 2008). Likewise, reading aloud to children provides an opportunity for them to hear language spoken in organized and complex structures. (Koralek, 2003; Trelease, 2013). As children hear language spoken correctly and expressively, they are able to apply this knowledge in their own learning contexts (Koralek, 2003; Wadsworth, 2008). It was Bandura's (1977) belief that people are active information processors and that by observing and then imitating the behavior of others, one could emulate new knowledge and skills. Therefore, a social learning theory grounds the methods utilized to teach children desirable behaviors that facilitate change in order to shape the things they know and the things they do (Cherry, 2019).

This study further considered an engaging, interactive form of read-aloud practices that stimulate cognitive processes through discussions and questions, while forming connections to provide meaningful experiences. In consideration of this, one cannot explore the interactive component of read-alouds without delving into Dewey's (1938) theory of social learning as it relates to interactive learning. Dewey was an American educational philosopher whose theory of social learning has become highly influential in the educational practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Williams, 2017). Dewey

(1938) described a social learning environment as one that conducts engaging experiences that are developmentally appropriate for children. In particular, Dewey theorized that for education to be effective, the school setting should be viewed as a social institution that promotes social interactions throughout the classroom environment (Flinders & Thornton, 2013). This setting allows students the opportunity to individually discover and develop as active, independent learners, enabling them to link current content to previous experiences and knowledge (Wheeler, 2016).

Therefore, within the constructs of Dewey's (1938) social learning theory, a framework emerges to support interactive read-alouds in classroom settings for young children. According to Doyle and Bramwell (2006), when children become active participants in the read-aloud experience, a meaningful experience takes place that stimulates learning. Indeed, the most effective read-aloud experiences are those in which children are actively involved (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). It is imperative for teachers to implement activities that engage students with read-aloud experiences where inferencing, drawing conclusions, retelling, dramatizing, and making connections are linked together (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). These engaging, interactive activities enhance a child's overall language development and reading skills (Snow, 1991). Although, it was Dewey's (2011) belief that it would be more prudent for children to become active participants in the process of their own learning instead of just passive recipients, he did not want to place too much emphasis on a child's abilities, rather trusting in a more balanced approach that emphasized equal importance be given to the teacher, the students, and the content.

## Setting

This study examined the responses of elementary school teachers in a public charter school (documented in this study as Test School PC) to analyze teacher perceptions of read-aloud practices within their classrooms and to compare those perceptions to data collected from observations.

Test School PC is located in the west central section of the state's mountain region with a population of approximately 90,000 residents. The region is a blend of urban, suburban, and rural settings, maintaining a diverse economy that is inclusive of industrial products ranging from technological, furniture, medical, chemical, machine components, and textiles. In addition, the region is home to a primary agricultural processing industry, making it one of the state's largest producers of forest products that include Christmas trees and ornamental plants. Known for its natural resources of lakes, rivers, forests, mountains, and protected parklands, the region contributes to a thriving tourism industry.

The test school is a K-8 public charter school that was established in 2001. It currently enrolls approximately 310 students and offers small class sizes, averaging from 14-17 students in elementary and 19-22 students in middle school. The test school is considered a school-wide Title I school according to the standards set by the U.S. Department of Education (2018). These are schools in which children from low socioeconomic families make up at least 40% of enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The test school has made overall academic growth over the past five years. The school employs approximately 22 classroom teachers who are considered highly qualified by the state's requirements, along with 19 teachers serving as support

staff.

Table 1 disaggregates the test school's performance averages data in reading based on the end-of-grade (EOG) assessments for Grades 3-8 for 2018 and 2019.

**Table 1**

*EOG Reading Performance Averages for Grades 3-8 From Test School*

EOG Year	2018	2019
Proficiency level	Percentage	Percentage
Levels 1 and 2	31.3%	30.9%
Level 3	8.2%	13.5%
Levels 4 and 5	60.5%	55.6%

Data for proficiency Levels 1 and 2 (limited/partial command of skills, needing significant support to succeed in skill area) are reported as 31.3% in 2018 with a decrease to 30.9% in 2019. Proficiency Level 3 data (meets sufficient command of skills but not standards for college/career readiness and may still need some targeted support to continue to succeed in skill area) reported 8.2% in 2018 with an increase to 13.5% in 2019. The data for proficiency Levels 4 and 5 (solid/superior command of skills, ready for next grade level, meeting standards for college/career readiness) are reported as 60.5% in 2018 with a decrease to 55.6% in 2019.

Table 2 displays the test school's EOG overall reading assessment outcomes for Grades 3-8 for 2017, 2018, and 2019.

**Table 2***EOG Overall Reading Assessment Outcomes for Grades 3-8 From Test School*

EOG Year	2017	2018	2019
Overall measures	Outcome	Outcome	Outcome
EOG reading grade	B	C	B
EOG reading grade score	74	68	71
Reading growth status	Met	Not met	Met
Read to Achieve promotions to fourth grade	95%	85%	75.5%

The school's overall EOG proficiency score in reading was 74 in 2017, with a cumulative grade of B; 68 in 2018, with a cumulative grade of C; and 71 in 2019, with a cumulative grade of B. Further statistics reveal that 95% of third graders were promoted to fourth grade as a result of meeting the Read to Achieve standards mandated by the state in 2017, and then decreasing to 85% in 2018 and 75.5% in 2019. In regard to the assessment data, the test school met growth status in reading in 2017 and 2019 but did not meet it in 2018 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019).

**Definition of Terms*****Expressive Vocabulary***

Defined as the “output” of language or how one expresses their wants or needs.

***Receptive Vocabulary***

The understanding, processing, and interpreting of verbal (spoken) and nonverbal (gestures, written) language.

***Interactive Read-Alouds***

An engaging form of reading where an adult (teacher, parent, etc.) stimulates a child's thinking about what is read through discussions, asking questions, making predictions, and supporting critical connections, thus providing a meaningful experience.



***SES***

A family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

***Language Development/Acquisition***

A process by which children acquire the capacity to understand and communicate language during early childhood.

***Decontextualized Language***

A somewhat abstract language that is removed from the "here and now."

***Preliteracy***

The range of skills that lay the foundation for conventional literacy that have been developed by a child who is preliterate.

***Literacy***

Having the ability, or competency, to read and write.

***Vocabulary Development***

The process by which people acquire words.

***Reading Comprehension***

The capability of understanding what is read.

***Achievement/Educational Gap***

A significant disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between the performances of specified groups of people.

***Summary***

Although research reveals that early preliterate skills are developed from birth to age five and are essential to preparing young children for the academic rigor they will

face upon entering conventional schooling (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008), studies show that 40% of children still enter kindergarten lacking in literacy skills needed to be successful in their academic endeavors (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2015). These academic discrepancies can lead to school failure, causing a child to never reach their full educational potential (Reach Out & Read, 2014). Teachers must be prepared to emphasize reading strategies that are effective in closing educational gaps during the elementary years, or those less advantaged children will continue to be crippled in their academic success (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Research has shown that vocabulary development is linked to academic progress; and teachers must establish research-based methods that address vocabulary growth in the elementary years, such as the implementation of read-aloud practices (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Penno et al., 2002). It is through the practice of implementing interactive classroom read-alouds that children can extend vocabulary knowledge, foster critical thinking, make connections, build comprehension skills, and increase overall language competencies (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Understanding that developing language and literacy skills are critical factors in reading and academic success, it is imperative that schools implement high-quality, research-based literacy instruction that supports building linguistic processing skills to vocabulary development and reading comprehension skills (Lennox, 2013). With the reality of achievement gaps existing among young children entering school as a problematic imbalance, our teachers are faced with the overwhelming task of providing effective instructional support that will close the existing gaps to ensure academic success for all children (Lennox, 2013).

Research supports adult-child read-aloud interactions as an intervention technique in helping to develop needed language skills among those children who lag behind their peers (Dale & Crain-Thoreson, 1996; Hickman et al., 2004). The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. By examining teacher perceptions through the findings of this study, I was able to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students. Bandura's social learning theory expresses the importance of observation and role modeling in an effort to teach a positive behavior (McLeod, 2016). Undoubtedly, shared reading opportunities provide this social context for observational learning where new knowledge and skills can be acquired (Cherry, 2019).

The following literature review explores the value of exposure to literature,

benefits of reading, and advantages to shared reading experiences, including its effect on social interactions as well as its impact on reading and vocabulary development and overall comprehension skills. In addition, the review addresses the impact of limited language acquisition skills among children living in low SES homes, and English-language learners on language development. In light of Dewey's theory of social learning, when students are encouraged to interact with the curriculum and take part in their own learning, they are able to advance their understanding far more effectively (Cole, 2016). Therefore, in the final review, the literature reveals the implications of interactive read-aloud experiences to reading growth.

### **The Value of Exposure to Literature**

Literature connects humans in a profound way by shaping the foundation of humanity's cultures, beliefs, and traditions (Lorenzo, 2014). Lorenzo (2014) stated that literature flourishes throughout time, cultivating wonders, inspiring generations, and feeding information to the world. In light of these statements, Bowker (2010), a global leader in bibliographic information, released statistics on U.S. book publishing, reporting that over one million books were published in the U.S. in 2009, which was more than triple the number of books published in 2005. At the 2015 Children's Book Summit in New York, Jonathan Nowell, president of Nielsen Books, stated that between January 2014 and September 2015, children's book sales were up 12.6% in the U.S., with 11 of the 20 best-selling books being children's titles (Gilmore, 2015). Accordingly, children's books average 34% of the print market internationally (Gilmore, 2015). At the 2016 ABC Children's Institute, Kristen McLean, director of new business development and resident children's specialist of Nielsen Book, stated that the total U.S. book market, both print

and digital, in terms of unit sales increased from 665 million in 2004 to 869 million in 2014, reporting that children's book sales grew from 136 million to 260 million (Jarrard, 2016). McLean further stated that the children's market trend would continue to flourish and grow, as families are investing in their children (Jarrard, 2016).

On the whole, it is through literature that children connect meaning to their life, which is ultimately the objective of all education (Trelease, 2001). Literature is an important component of a total language arts program that is integrated in the curriculum of all grade levels (Roe & Ross, 2006). Roe and Ross (2006) stated the benefits of literature as

1. evoking a sense of pleasure for both the listener and the reader,
2. broadening children's experiences and ideas,
3. providing a language model for sentence structure and word usage,
4. giving insight to children in dealing with their own personal problems,
5. developing visual literacy through picture books that enhance meaning,
6. improving reading ability and attitudes toward reading,
7. helping children value people of different ethnic groups and cultures,
8. developing thinking and reasoning skills, and
9. supplementing and enriching any part of a curriculum.

As human beings, we are pleasure-centered and will voluntarily do over and over again that which brings us enjoyment (Trelease, 2013). Trelease (2013) stated that a child will connect to the things they enjoy but will disconnect when they cease to enjoy it. If children only experience the mundane, tedious acts of instructional print with the purpose of evoking meaningless assessment-oriented outcomes, the natural reaction of those

children will be withdrawal (Trelease, 2013); however, exposure to rich, authentic literature can promote enthusiastic readers and lead to a lifetime of reading pleasure (Roe & Ross, 2006).

Not only are people pleasure-centered, but they are also inherently drawn to one another in a social capacity. Trelease (2001) stated, “Literature is considered such an important medium – more than television, more than films, more than art or overhead projectors – because literature brings us closest to the human heart” (p. 21). Indeed, literature can help foster children’s personality and social development by encouraging them to accept others and their differences as well as supporting positive relationships with people (Crippen, 2012). Likewise, multicultural literature helps to instill in children a value for those of culturally diverse backgrounds (Roe & Ross, 2006).

In developing cognitive and reasoning skills, literature can broaden children’s thoughts and opinions about a topic by providing opportunities for them to respond to ideas on a deeper level (Crippen, 2012). Crippen (2012) stated that literature encourages children to think deeper about their own feelings, situations, and problems. Roe and Ross (2006) explained that when we expand children’s experiences through literature, we allow them to visit new places, meet new people, and learn about the past and the present, while exposing them to correct sentence patterns, standard story structures, varied word usage, and new vocabulary knowledge.

Literature can also develop children’s visual literacy. According to Carry (n.d.), visual literacy is the ability to communicate using visual images that may or may not include words, in order to evaluate, create, decode, interpret, question, or challenge texts. Using picture books, children become aware of line, color, shape, space, and design

through the creative illustrations (Roe & Ross, 2006). The pictures can either compliment or extend the story to help convey meaning and open new interpretations that are creatively engaging and interactive in promoting a child's internal imaginations (Crippen, 2012; Roe & Ross, 2006). As a result, visually literate books allow a child to utilize critical skills that involve exploration, critique, and reflections in order to gain meaning from the images (Carry, n.d.).

Crippen (2012) stressed the importance of children having access to a varied genre of literature that can contribute to them being responsible, successful, and caring individuals. When students are engaged in reading different types of literature, they are practicing comprehension strategies and skills in meaningful situations as well as building a basis for creative dramatics (Roe & Ross, 2006). Roe and Ross (2006) added that young writers will model their own writing after various genres of literature. In other words, children in every grade level are able to respond to literature in a cognitive, emotional, and creative way that encourages social and personality development as well as building a cultural knowledge and literature history across generations (Crippen, 2012; Roe & Ross, 2006).

### **The Benefits of Reading**

“Reading is an interactive, problem-solving process of making meaning from texts” (Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario, 2004, p. 61). It is acted upon as a means of communication, language acquisition, and the sharing of information and ideas. Hughes (2007) stated that reading is a complex interaction between the reader and the text which is defined by the reader's experiences, knowledge, attitude, and language “community” that is culturally and socially influenced.

Leipzig (2001) explained reading as a multifaceted process that allows a reader to implement strategies involving word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and motivation in order to make meaning from print. In its fullest sense, one must weave together a process of identifying words and constructing understanding in an automatic and accurate manner. However, reading must also be an active process in which motivation is developed and maintained (Leipzig, 2001). Leipzig added that this can be accomplished when one appreciates the pleasure of reading; views it as a social act that is shared with others; sees it as an opportunity to explore interests; expands reading for multi-purposes, from enjoyment to gathering information; and becomes comfortable with varied written formats and genres. Therefore, Leipzig clarified reading to be a *motivated* process that involves the fluent coordination of identifying words and constructing comprehension.

In any given society, reading is a critical gateway to social, economic, and civic life, as well as to personal development (Holden, 2004). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003) noted, “People cannot be active or informed citizens unless they can read. Reading is a prerequisite for almost all cultural and social activities” (p. 8). A nation that does not read much is a nation that does not know much (Trelease, 2001). Consequently, reading provides a pathway to learning about other people and cultures, history and social studies, science and mathematics, language arts and fine arts, and other content subject areas that are imperative to mastering in school (Lyon, 1997). Lyon (1997) stated simply, “if you do not learn to read and you live in America, you do not make it in life” (p. 2).

According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), data presented



from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies reported one in five U.S. adults have low levels of English literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Literacy is defined by the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies as, “the ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013, p. 61). In other words, 21% (43 million) of U.S. adults possess literacy skills at a Level 1 or below (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). On the other hand, the report revealed that four in five U.S. adults (79%) have literacy skills that are sufficient for completing tasks relevant to Level 2 skills or above (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Therefore, contrary to what pessimists may believe, the United States of America is not a nation of illiterates – the average American can read (Trelease, 2013). Trelease (2013) stipulated that the problem, however, is the contrast between America at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the one from 60 or more years ago. There are more complex needs in this century that far exceed what little progress is being made by most of the American students, especially minorities and those of low SES (Moore et al., 1999; Trelease, 2013). It is an ever-changing world that battles unchanging reading patterns among American students who have to compete with students in other countries who are far surpassing in their educational improvements (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). The IRA stressed that being able to read and write has never been more crucial than it is today (Moore et al., 1999).

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of

literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read can be crucial. (Moore et al., 1999, p. 3)

To further emphasize the benefits, reading for pleasure has a positive impact on the future of children, young people, and adults and directly aligns with educational and personal development (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). OECD (2002) reported that reading for enjoyment is more important for the educational success of a child than their family's SES. Therefore, when we read for enjoyment, we increase our general knowledge as well as experience a wide range of cognitive abilities (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Holden, 2004). In other words, "the more you read, the more you know; and the more you know, the smarter you grow" (Trelease, 2013, p. 4).

In addition to being one of our most popular cultural activities, reading is also a vital skill that is utilized throughout society (Holden, 2004). During the course of life, people will change not just their jobs, but their careers and leisure activities as well (Holden, 2004). For this reason, Anderson et al. (1985) reported, "Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost" (p. 1). Holden (2004) stated that young people today need to be equipped with high levels of cognitive reading abilities in order to get the most out of their cultural and social lives, thus enabling them to meet the challenges incurred by the 21<sup>st</sup> century competitive job market. "High-level creative reading skills, coupled with an ability to navigate

information sources and to synthesize experience into learning, now form part of the toolkit that young people need in order to get the most out of their lives” (Holden, 2004, p. 19). In short, research validates that reading improves young people’s life chances (Holden, 2004).

In looking at a 21<sup>st</sup> century society that maintains a prolific amount of awareness on healthy living, we further find benefits of reading that correlate to leading healthier and happier lives (Gelman, n.d.). Reader’s Digest reported that recent studies showed that adults who engage in regular reading habits are less likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease, with a 32% slower cognitive decline later in life than those who did not engage in regular reading habits (Gelman, n.d.). Reading is like a workout to the brain, building memory and establishing habits that encourage it to think and concentrate (Gelman, n.d.). Furthermore, Reader’s Digest reported that a love of reading can reduce stress levels among individuals; encourage positive thinking, leave one feeling more connected; fortify friendships by expressing empathy for others; and boost one’s vocabulary (Gelman, n.d.).

As research suggests, “reading is a basic life skill” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 1) that is not only important for society, but for individuals as well (Anderson et al., 1985). “It is a cornerstone for a child’s success in school and, indeed, throughout life” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 1). With this in mind, research in economics establishes that investing in schooling forms human capital; that is, forming abilities in skill, knowledge, and problem-solving, which produces enduring value (Anderson et al., 1985). Clearly, reading skills are the major foundational skills for all school-based learning; and in its absence, chances for academic and even occupational success are very limited (Lyon,

1997).

When paying particular attention to the academic realm, we see that reading caters to five necessary components that build a balanced literacy program within our schools and educational curriculum: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and language (Anderson et al., 1985). In all these areas, research suggests that a rich vocabulary is significantly important to a child's development, in that larger vocabularies will equal not only reading achievement, but overall academic achievement as well (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Duke & Moses, 2003; Robbins & Ehri, 1994). As we read, our vocabulary knowledge becomes richer and is strengthened by the "rare" words that printed text exposes us to (Trelease, 2013). Indeed, printed text contains rarely used words that children will come in contact with, as compared to verbal conversation and oral communications, such as television (Kindle, 2009; Koralek, 2003). Finally, reading provides opportunities through verbal discussions for children to refine their listening skills and to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to ideas, plots, and themes found in printed texts (Roe & Ross, 2006).

### **The Advantages of Shared Reading Experiences**

Research tells us that children benefit significantly from exposure to books beginning at an early age (NAEYC, 1998; Neuman & Celano, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Additional studies on the effect of parent-child shared readings show a strong correlation between print exposure and reading success among preschoolers (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007; Mol & Bus, 2011). The result of these early interactions spills into our kindergarten classrooms with some children having thousands of hours of exposure to books and a wealth of rich, oral language experiences, while others will have

a very limited knowledge of language and word meanings (Coyne et al., 2004).

Right from the beginning, children should be provided with lots of opportunities to engage in books that spark their imagination and interest (U.K. Department for Education and Skills, 2007). The U.K. Department for Education and Skills (2007) suggested that children should be encouraged to freely choose books, leisurely peruse them, and share in the experience of having them read by an adult. Unfortunately, though, when children have limited access to books, especially those of low SES backgrounds and English-language learners, they miss out on stimulating adult-child shared interactions that would have provided them opportunities to learn about their world, to acquire sophisticated vocabulary, and to understand how decontextualized language works (Scholastic Family and Community Engagement, 2013). In fact, studies support adult-child joint readings as a path to instill prosodic sensitivity and auditory discipline for the development of expressive and receptive language skills (Lawson, 2012; Senechal, 1997). Within social learning contexts, Bandura theorized that it is through observation and role modeling, such as what is found in shared reading experiences, that one learns, acquiring new knowledge so the desired skills can be developed (Cherry, 2019).

In looking at literacy development, we see that it is about providing windows of opportunity that extend across early childhood to late childhood (Scholastic Family and Community Engagement, 2013). When children are encouraged to enjoy and share books, they see books as sources of pleasure and interest that motivate them to value reading (U.K. Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Gold and Gibson (2001) stated that the foundation for literacy development is reading aloud. The act of reading

aloud to children is considered by researchers to be a singularly important activity for inducing reading success (Anderson et al., 1985; NAEYC, 1998; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). In fact, when children participate in read-aloud opportunities, they begin to understand the relationship between printed words and meaning, thus helping them to internalize the concept that print tells a story or conveys information (Gold & Gibson, 2001). Trelease (2013) stated that, realistically, “we read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire” (p. 6).

In addition to conditioning the brain to associate reading with pleasure, reading aloud to a child can create background knowledge, build rich vocabulary, and provide a role model in reading (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008). Regarding a social learning theory, observation and role modeling are vital to the process of how a child learns (Cherry, 2019). For this reason, it is through the shared reading experience that teachers are able to provide opportunities to directly scaffold a child’s learning in order to build a background for deep understanding of topics that can evolve into more complex subject matter (Wadsworth, 2008). When teachers incorporate follow-up conversations to the read-aloud experiences, they help students develop a broad range of background knowledge that connect to learned concepts, thus clarifying their thinking for further discussions (Dorn & Soffos, 2005). It is through shared reading experiences that less able readers are exposed to the same vocabulary-rich, engaging books that fluent readers can read, while enticing them to become better readers (Gold & Gibson, 2001). Finally, when an adult reads to a child, they present themselves as a role model for etiquette reading habits that model prosodic cues in intonation and expressive language formats (Bus et al.,

1995; Koralek, 2003; Wadsworth, 2008). *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985) encouraged reading aloud to be a practice that continues throughout all grade levels, where students of any age could benefit from hearing a captivating book (Gold & Gibson, 2001).

Since listening comprehension precedes reading comprehension, children can listen on a much higher language level than they can read, thus allowing them to be more accessible to complex ideas and exposing them to vocabulary and language patterns that are not generally a part of everyday speech communications (Gold & Gibson, 2001). When a child enters school as a beginning reader, their vocabulary is very limited to words that are either decoded by letter-sound associations or by sight, yet they are not beginning *listeners*. Indeed, they are veteran listeners, in that they have been listening for the past five or six years of their life, validating that they “can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own” (Trelease, 2013, p. 39). However, vocabulary is not the only language context that shared reading experiences contribute to a child’s growing knowledge. Reading aloud to children models a structured, organized, spoken language, that we call “grammar.” Trelease (2013) pointed out that “grammar is more caught than taught, and the way you catch it is the same way you catch the flu: You’re exposed to it” (p. 40). For that reason, when adults read aloud to children, they provide an opportunity for them to hear language spoken correctly in cultivated sentences and complex speech structures (Kindle, 2009; Koralek, 2003).

Another key element to consider when utilizing shared book readings is how it relates to the socio-culturally meaningful inclusion of families (Kucirkova et al., 2012).

Parents become aware that their home environment – their culture, language, and everyday activities – is a valuable resource that can help their child develop early literacy skills (Scholastic Family and Community Engagement, 2013). The parent-child read-aloud experience can create a bonding relationship that the child will associate with warm, pleasant feelings, while seeing it as a fun, playful interaction (Koralek, 2003). Fortunately, within the context of shared book reading, there are multiple influences on children's language development, emergent literacy skills, and overall reading achievement, including promoting empowerment and ownership for parents concerning their involvement in their child's literacy development (Kucirkova et al., 2012; Scholastic Family and Community Engagement, 2013).

Conclusively, when children engage in shared book readings at young ages, the experiences help them to develop early literacy skills, such as knowledge about print concepts, letter identification, vocabulary, comprehension, and language development (Bus et al., 1995). According to Koralek (2003), read-aloud experiences help develop children's overall language skills by enhancing their cognitive thinking abilities, using formal grammatical structures, learning the descriptive "language" of books, and expanding their imagination. Lane and Wright (2007) maintained that implementing a systematic approach to reading aloud to children and using research-designed methods to maximize the effectiveness of shared reading experiences will yield powerful academic benefits. As a final note, the research of Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) further supported that the shared book reading experiences enhance oral language skills and literacy knowledge, thus leading to improved student achievement.



## **Social Interaction**

In light of the growing number of books that are published, the astronomical unit of sales reported yearly, and the trending bookstore platforms, reading is now perceived as something more than just a passive, solitary pursuit; it has become a socially interactive activity involving mass reading opportunities through book clubs, reading groups, and reinvented public readings (Holden, 2004). Reading opportunities engage readers to talk about their shared experiences and their interpretations of particular books (Holden, 2004). In truth, one cannot ignore the cultural phenomenon of today that involves crossovers between various media formats, whereas television and film promote texts into bestsellers, screenplays are written into books, and books are produced into blockbuster hit movies (Holden, 2004).

The first social interaction with a book begins during early childhood when parents read aloud to their babies (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Koralek, 2003). Bus and van IJzendoorn (1997) indicated, “Mothers play an active role to evoke and support picturebook reading when infants are preverbal” (pp. 48-49). During this shared time, parents pour sounds and words into their child’s brain, while pointing to and naming pictures that help their baby understand that pictures represent objects (Koralek, 2003). As social learning theorists suggest, it is the nature of children to learn behaviors by observing the behavior of those around them (Sincero, 2011). Therefore, to encourage this shared reading interaction, book publishing companies market baby board books that are printed on heavy, laminated pages, making them durable and easy to clean for small fingers to touch and hold (Trelease, 2001). In fact, Jonathan Nowell stated at the 2015 Children’s Book Summit that board books had seen a 20% compound growth since 2012

(Gilmore, 2015).

Parent-child shared reading is a phrase that is often used interchangeably with the term *lapreading*, which is used to describe shared reading experiences that occur while a child is in close contact with their parent or caretaker (Klesius & Griffith, 1996). Klesius and Griffith (1996) stated that lapreading is considered to be a social interaction that prepares children for formal reading instruction and for the kinds of social behaviors that they will be expected to express in school.

From the beginning, when parents read aloud to their babies, the babies associate the reading time to pleasant feelings of joy and happiness. They draw near to their parents' voices and enjoy the positive attention they receive (Koralek, 2003). As babies become toddlers, they continue to enjoy the time and attention they receive from their parents during the shared reading and associate it as a fun activity (Koralek, 2003). From that shared reading time, Koralek (2003) reported that a child's thinking skills improve as opportunities for talking and discussing content from the text emerge. As a result, when a secure attachment relationship exists between a child and their parent, it can have a direct influence on a child's cognitive development, giving a child confidence to explore unknown aspects of their environment as they grow and develop (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1997).

When trying to understand how a child becomes literate, the examination of the parent-child relationship becomes relevant in the broader context, highlighting the early relationships that influence young children's experiences in literacy activities (Bus et al., 1997). There is a link in early attachment relationships of parent-child dyads and the engagement of quality shared book-reading activities to developing feelings of security

among children (Bus et al., 1997). Studies that investigate the frequencies of shared read-alouds in mother-child dyads suggests that the quality of the interaction is closely related to the mother's own feelings of security as a mother and may be important to the cognitive development and literacy instruction of the child (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1992). When parents establish and support a shared book reading routine with their child, the socio-emotional outgrowth of that routine produces a secure relationship, whereas Bus et al. (1997) suggested that the child develops mental representations of those experiences that illicit anticipations of future behaviors. However, Bus et al. (1997) stipulated that if the quality of the shared reading experience is less satisfying to the parent and child, it will occur less frequently and will adversely affect the benefits of the relationship.

Likewise, implementing story read-aloud experiences in classrooms plays a critical role in the curriculum for all children (Klesius & Griffith, 1996). When a teacher reads a book aloud, students are wrapped in a risk-free learning environment that exists without the pressure of achievement or the fear of failure, thus allowing the freedom to question, wonder, engage, and enjoy reading material that is beyond their reading abilities (Wadsworth, 2008). Wadsworth (2008) further reasoned that each time an adult reads aloud to a child or to a class, they present themselves as a role model for good reading habits and send an irresistible invitation welcoming the child to share in the experience with them. Teachers must not forget that read-alouds invite children into the exciting world of literacy, while serving many instructional purposes as well: motivating, encouraging, building background, enriching vocabulary, developing comprehension, making connections, and modeling fluent reading habits (Wadsworth, 2008). The report

of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985), declared that the benefits of reading aloud to children is greatest when children become active participants – engaging in discussions about stories, reflecting on story ideas, and making connections to characters and content. The foundation of this report’s statements regarding children as active learners is grounded in Dewey’s social learning theory of interactive learning, where Dewey advocated for school environments to allow children to be actively involved in their own learning and not be just passive recipients (Williams, 2017).

### **Reading Development**

Learning to read and to write are crucial elements in determining the success children will have in school, with the level to which they progress in these abilities having a direct link to how competently they will function both in school and in life (NAEYC, 1998). A child’s skill at decoding words must be developed to the point where it occurs automatically with little conscious effort, thus allowing their attention to be available to interpret and construct meaning from the text (Anderson et al., 1985). The opportunity for a reciprocal effect exists with the alignment of comprehension development as a result of exposure to books, in which book reading affects vocabulary acquisition that, in turn, is a key element necessary for text comprehension (Mol & Bus, 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Preliteracy skills in the form of early literacy development – print concepts, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, comprehension, and language development – are critical components needed for children to obtain success in their reading abilities (Justice & Ezell, 2002).

### ***Early Literacy Development***

Early literacy skills are the range of preliterate concepts that lay a foundation of transitioning children to more conventional levels of literacy (Justice & Ezell, 2002). It is essential to reading success for a child to learn these prerequisite skills or knowledge prior to learning conventional reading and writing formats that involve more developed vocabulary and comprehension growth (Duursma et al., 2008). Early literacy skills involve learning print concepts, story structure, phonological awareness, alphabet and phoneme relationships, comprehension development, and language development skills (Duursma et al., 2008; Justice & Ezell, 2002). These building blocks of literacy can shape skilled reading in elementary school children long before formal reading instruction begins (Scholastic Family and Community Engagement, 2013). Duursma et al.'s (2008) research supported reading aloud to children as a direct link to developing early literacy abilities in young children. Engaging in read-aloud opportunities helps young children learn to exhibit reading behaviors that include how to hold a book, identify front and back positions, and know the directionality of print, as well as understanding story structures, theme concepts, and literary conventions (Duursma et al., 2008).

### ***Print Concepts and Phonological Awareness***

Print concepts refer to the ability to know and recognize the different ways print works, especially in helping children understand it is the print that carries the meaning, not the pictures (NAEYC, 1998). Shared reading practices expose children to print concepts that help them understand the relationships between letters and words and spoken language and written language, as well as grammatical syntax and sentence structure (Duursma et al., 2008). In fact, Justice and Ezell (2002) expressed the need for

children to understand the rules of translating print into meaningful sounds and utterances and the sensitivity to manipulating sounds from spoken words. Because phonological awareness has a broad skill set that includes manipulation of units of oral language, sounds, rhymes, and syllables, it is an important precursor for learning to read (Duursma et al., 2008). Utilizing shared reading experiences provides opportunities for adults to emphasize rhyming words that help children learn variations to the sound patterns; therefore, when children are able to detect and manipulate the sounds and syllables of phonemes and words, they learn to read more quickly (Duursma et al., 2008).

### ***Language Acquisition and Development***

Language is the skill young children use to express their thoughts, their wants and needs, their ideas, and their emotions, enabling them to communicate with others and to establish their identity (Lennox, 2013). There are two types of vocabulary used in our language that children exhibit: expressive and receptive. Expressive vocabulary is the “output” of language, allowing one to verbally express one’s wants or needs. Receptive vocabulary is the way we understand and interpret verbal and nonverbal language (Senechal, 1997). Senechal (1997) stated that the receptive language of children is enhanced when they have multiple listening opportunities, allowing them to encode, associate, and store novel information. Kindle (2009) pointed out that the parent-child shared reading practices are not only a way to build early literacy skills, but also oral language development.

Indeed, children experience a rapid growth in word knowledge during their preschool years, with research indicating a child’s exposure to language-rich experiences as a primary factor for this growth (Senechal, 1997). Trelease (2013) stated that an adult

will use approximately nine rare words per 1,000 when speaking to a toddler, whereas that child will hear three times as many rare words when read to from a children's book. Therefore, shared reading experiences offer a rich opportunity for young children to learn language (Whitehurst et al., 1988). Whitehurst et al. (1988) suggested that parents approach shared reading experiences with the intent to teach language to their children, especially through the implementation of decontextualized language techniques. When young children are presented with opportunities to use language to convey novel information, such as engaging in conversations that induce higher-level thinking components, they are developing decontextualized language skills, which will enhance reading comprehension (Snow, 1991). Snow (1991) believed "that the language skills that support reading emerge as a result of a variety of interactive experiences during which children learn to use and understand decontextualized language" (pp. 7-8). Therefore, reading aloud stories to young children has a powerful influence on emergent literacy skills, language development, and reading achievement (Lawson, 2012). As a result, language development is critical for future success in developing reading skills in school (Lennox, 2013).

### ***Vocabulary and Comprehension***

Expanding a child's vocabulary is a significant part of the language learning process (Penno et al., 2002). Children experience a substantial and significant amount of vocabulary growth during their elementary school years, with as much as thousands of words per year, thus signifying that learning new words does not stop after the initial language acquisition years (Robbins & Ehri, 1994). One way children experience growth in their vocabulary is through the context in which words are encountered, contributing to

their understanding of word meanings (Penno et al., 2002). Biemiller and Boote's (2006) research supports reading aloud to children as a means of building a context for word development. Robbins and Ehri (1994) stated that listening to stories is an effective way in which children acquire new vocabulary words. Because children listen on a higher language level than they read, reading aloud to children makes complex ideas more accessible, while exposing them to vocabulary and linguistic patterns that are not part of normal, everyday speech (Gold & Gibson, 2001). Moreover, NAEYC (1998) and IRA concluded, "Children need to be exposed to vocabulary from a wide variety of genres, including informational texts as well as narratives" (p. 5). Conclusively, researchers note that vocabulary development directly aligns to reading comprehension (Anderson et al., 1985; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Without comprehension, reading is futile; it is a pointless, frustrating exercise in word recall (Texas Education Agency, 2002). Reading comprehension is a complex process that entails experience and knowledge about the world, including inferential and evaluative thinking (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). It depends on knowledge concerning language, print, and literal reproduction of words (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). The U.S. Department of Education (2003) reported that children need to be taught comprehension strategies to help them understand what they are reading so they can become purposeful, active readers. How well children develop their ability to gain meaning from what they read has a significant effect on their lives (Anderson et al., 1985). Therefore, through reading comprehension instruction, children develop the skills, experiences, and knowledge they need to become proficient, enthusiastic readers (Texas Education Agency, 2002).



As young children are exposed to print, they begin to internalize that print holds a meaningful message; and through discussions, they gain an understanding of the structure that stories carry (National Education Association, 2007). Research supports shared reading practices as an effective means in providing a powerful framework where children can build comprehension skills through developing new knowledge and new vocabulary acquisition (Bus et al., 1995; Kindle, 2009; Robbins & Ehri, 1994).

### **Impact of Language Acquisition Limitations**

Duursma et al. (2008) reported that children with well-developed language skills tend to have less trouble in school with reading, writing, and content areas of instruction. The extent to which a young child's language is developed critically influences their reading and overall academic success (Lennox, 2013). Socioeconomic differences play an important role in the developing of oral language skills and vocabulary development (Duursma et al., 2008). With the variances in socioeconomic conditions, there exists a difference in intergenerational transmission of literacy involvement that directly relates to language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement in young children (Bus et al., 1995). As a result, research documents a direct correlation exists between limited language acquisition skills and children with low socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as English Language Learners and children with language impairments (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007), thus establishing them as at-risk learners before they enter formal schooling (Dale & Crain-Thoreson, 1996; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Whitehurst et al., 1994). Lennox (2013) stated that these existing achievement gaps among children are likely to increase over time.

### ***Low SES***

The SES of a family defines its economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation (Duursma et al., 2008). According to research conducted by Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998), there is a strong correlation between SES and school success. Lonigan and Whitehurst reported that SES is considered to be one of the strongest predictors in school achievement. Justice and Ezell (2002) stated that there is a direct alignment between household income and preliteracy skills among young children. For example, educational measures taken on print awareness tasks (such as environmental print, book and print conventions, and alphabet knowledge) resulted in significantly higher levels in all tasks in children from middle-income households as compared to those from low-income homes (Justice & Ezell, 2002). Comparatively, the Council of Chief State School Officers (2009) stated that children living in economically and academically disadvantaged homes are among the highest at risk of entering kindergarten 12-14 months behind their average peers due to a deficit in their preliteracy skills and language development. In truth, when entering school, children in a lower socioeconomic class will be at a clear disadvantage (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012), maintaining a high risk of having educational problems in developing literacy skills (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

Socioeconomic differences in early literacy and language development skills may be associated with shared reading practices at home (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Contributing factors that establish a relationship between low SES to learning include the infrequency or nonexistence of book reading between parents and children as well as the lack of availability of printed materials in the home (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Mothers

with lower levels of education are less likely to read to their children than mothers with higher levels (Duursma et al., 2008). Knowing that differences in SES play an important role in the development of oral language skills and vocabulary development, it is evident that children living in low-income homes will struggle more in school due to a deficit in early literacy skills and language development (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). However, research suggests that interactive parent-child shared readings may produce positive changes in young children's language acquisition (Duursma et al., 2008; Klesius & Griffith, 1996; Whitehurst et al., 1994).

### ***English Language Learners***

One of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy development in our schools are the English language learners (Hickman et al., 2004). Second-language acquisition skills become increasingly challenging for children who live in homes where English is not the primary language spoken (Chow et al., 2010). These are often homes that have non-English speaking mothers with lower levels of education, making it even less likely for them to read to their children as compared to English speaking mothers of different races (Duursma et al., 2008). Children living in these homes need both cognitive and language development as well as social language skills (Hickman et al., 2004). English language learners are at risk for not building the necessary vocabulary skills that are essential for acquiring success in reading (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012). Trying to acquire second-language skills among young children whose first language is linguistically very different can be quite challenging and in critical need of consistent and ongoing support in order to have success in literacy and oral language growth, especially in the area of vocabulary and comprehension development (Hickman et al., 2004).

Research supports adult-child read-alouds as a strategy that can significantly enhance literacy skills of these children living in bilingual contexts (Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009).

### ***Language Impairment***

Children with oral language delays are at high risk for experiencing difficulty in literacy development. Children who have language impairments have difficulty with learning processes that involve understanding or using spoken as well as written language (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007). These children's language impairment negatively affects their ability to develop literacy skills that are critical to reading success in school (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007). Therefore, a symbiotic relationship exists between literacy socialization and language impairment in such a way that the language delay may negatively affect a child's meaningful engagement with print (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007). Bearing in mind that research continues to support shared book reading as a critical activity for developing early literacy skills, such as print concepts, letter/word knowledge, and vocabulary among young children (Bus et al., 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). As a result, Lovelace and Stewart (2007) reported that research suggests that young children with language delays receiving speech and language therapy may benefit from strategies that incorporate simple, non-evocative, explicit referencing which can be easily implemented into the context of a storybook read-aloud during language therapy sessions. Therefore, interactive shared book reading may be an important intervention strategy parents with children who have language impairments can utilize to help support literacy development (Dale & Crain-Thoreson, 1996; Hickman et al., 2004).

### **Interactive Shared Reading Experiences**

Teachers can have a significant impact on closing the achievement gap in a child's vocabulary knowledge by implementing research-based interventions and methods that support increasing vocabularies and building comprehension, such as reading aloud to them (Anderson et al., 1985; Duke & Moses, 2003; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Research further suggests that the most effective read-alouds are those in which children are actively involved with the experience (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Dewey placed ground breaking arguments in his social learning theory that education is indeed most effective when children are given learning opportunities that enable them to connect present knowledge to previous experiences, allowing them to be interactive learners (Wheeler, 2016). Interactive read-alouds are an engaging form of reading where a child stimulates their thinking about what is read through analytical talk (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). This involves making predictions or inferences, drawing conclusions, explaining character behaviors, retelling the story through dramatization, and making connections to the text (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Implementing activities or engaging interactively with a text during a read-aloud experience are excellent strategies for enhancing language and vocabulary development, because they provide opportunities for using decontextualized language (Snow, 1991).

Interactive read-alouds are an avenue that can put children on a positive trajectory that supports learning in all areas of development that directly aligns to literacy success (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Lennox, 2013; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Teachers are influential in the process of choosing rich, quality literature that contributes to the success of the read-aloud by appealing to children and providing exposure to a variety of

text genres (Lennox, 2013). Because the talk around books, the extra-textual talk, is a crucial element in optimum language development, a teacher must have the ability to draw children into a sustained discussion that can stretch and challenge their linguistic and conceptual abilities, explicitly reflecting on vocabulary that fosters conceptual growth (Lennox, 2013; Meller et al., 2009). When children become active participants in the read-aloud experience, a meaningful experience takes place that stimulates learning (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Although, a substantive amount of research has been devoted to evaluating the effects of read-alouds, three specific methods have emerged as particularly effective approaches to reading aloud: dialogic reading (Whitehurst et al., 1994), text talk (Beck & McKeown, 2001), and print referencing (Ezell & Justice, 2000).

### ***Dialogic Reading***

Dialogic reading is a form of interactive shared picture book reading that is designed to enhance young children's language and literacy skills, especially expressive vocabulary (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012). The goal of dialogic reading is for the parent and child to switch roles so the conversation becomes child-led instead of adult-led (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012; Whitehurst et al., 1994). The child learns to be the "storyteller," with the assistance of the parent, and the parent takes on a role of active listener and questioner (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1994). The technique is more commonly used with preschool-aged children but can be appropriate for older children as well and focuses on open-ended questions and expanding on children's expressive vocabulary (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012; Lane & Wright, 2007). The effectiveness of dialogic reading is contingent on three principles: (a) encouraging the child to become an active learner during the shared reading experience, (b) providing

feedback to the child that models a more sophisticated language, and (c) challenging the child's knowledge and abilities by increasing the complexity of the conversation to a level just above what is currently being discussed (Lane & Wright, 2007; Whitehurst et al., 1994).

### ***Text Talk***

Text Talk is another form of an interactive shared reading approach that is directed towards enhancing young children's abilities to make sense of ideas constructed in texts as well as enhancing the development of children's language acquisition (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Text Talk primarily focuses on vocabulary development and is typically used in primary grades (Lane & Wright, 2007). This gives children experiences with using decontextualized language – a somewhat abstract language that is removed from the “here and now” concepts with which most preschoolers are familiar (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Text Talk allows children to build mature vocabulary skills and background knowledge as they talk about the story ideas and themes that emerge from the text (Beck & McKeown, 2001). When parents use this type of interactive shared reading practice with their young child, it is more effective for building language acquisition than just having a child listen to a story with little to no shared interactions (Beck & McKeown, 2001). By engaging children in meaningful conversations about books, teachers can use this method in read-aloud opportunities to provide a context for teaching new words (Lane & Wright, 2007). Text Talk strategies are based on open questions the teacher addresses during the read-aloud that ask children to think about the ideas within the book, talk about them, and finally connect them as the story unfolds (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007).

### ***Print Referencing***

Print referencing applies to the interactive strategies that implement reading cues, such as tracking print or pointing to print in pictures (Lane & Wright, 2007). Teachers use this method to call children's attention to important aspects, features, and functions of the story, increasing the metalinguistic focus of reading aloud and the print interest as well (Lane & Wright, 2007). Print referencing cues can be verbal or nonverbal, explicit or implicit, and are embedded within the read-aloud experience (Justice & Ezell, 2002). Print referencing is significant in promoting children's development of print concepts, concept of a word, and alphabet knowledge as they become engaged in the shared reading experience (Justice & Ezell, 2002).

### **Summary**

Statistics show that the average first grader of a middle class family has 1,000-1,700 hours of parent-child shared reading experiences, whereas a first grader from a low-income family may only have 25 hours of one-on-one shared reading time with a parent (Adams, 1990). Furthermore, mothers of these children are less likely to engage in instructive behaviors during shared reading time than the middle class mothers (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Understanding that developing these missing links in language and literacy skills is a critical factor in reading and academic success, it is crucial that schools implement high-quality, research-based literacy methods that will support building linguistic processing skills to vocabulary development and comprehension skills (Lennox, 2013).

Teachers are faced with a problematic imbalance within schools that produces an overwhelming task of providing effective instructional methods that must close existing



achievement gaps so all children are ensured of academic success (Lennox, 2013). Read-aloud opportunities provide intervention methods and techniques that help develop needed language skills among those children who lag behind their peers (Dale & Crain-Thoreson, 1996; Hickman et al., 2004). Research suggests that in order to gain the most effective benefits from read-aloud opportunities, children need to be actively involved with the experience (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Duursma et al., 2008; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). This research is grounded upon social learning theories that support learning through observation and role modeling (Bandura, 1977) as well as implementing interactive learning environments (Dewey, 1938), in order to obtain desired knowledge and behaviors (Cherry, 2019). The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. By examining teacher perceptions through the findings of this study, I was able to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

With achievement gaps being well established before children enter formal school and likely to continue to increase without the implementation of intensive high-quality instruction (Lennox, 2013), research studies in strengthening literacy through educational platforms have moved to the forefront of educational reform (Anderson et al., 1985). These studies support a correlation between the implementation of reading support of young children to academic success with increased learning outcomes in all academic areas (Chow et al., 2010; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hickman et al., 2004). Since reading success is connected to a child's language and literacy skills, educators, government agencies, and researchers have focused their attention on exploring methods that enhance language and literacy development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). A prolific amount of research supports shared reading experiences as a key element in developing needed language and literacy skills (Anderson et al., 1985; NAEYC, 1998; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Furthermore, research indicates that a meaningful and intentional way to improve reading outcomes is through interactive shared reading opportunities (Lennox, 2013).

When teachers integrate shared reading opportunities, they encompass practices that are intended to enhance language and literacy skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). When these interactive read-aloud experiences are utilized properly within the classroom setting, they can build the necessary skills children need to increase their reading and comprehension abilities (Adams, 1990). The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable

data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. By examining teacher perceptions through the findings of this study, I was able to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students.

### **Research Design**

As part of an empirical study, I used a mixed-methods approach to answer the research questions that addressed teacher read-aloud practices in an elementary classroom setting. A mixed methods inquiry approach involves a framework of collecting and analyzing data from both quantitative and qualitative sources (Creswell, 2014). The rationale of this type of inquiry, according to Creswell (2014), is that the mixing of both quantitative and qualitative data can provide a more complete understanding of the designated research questions addressed within the study. The participants for this study included elementary classroom teachers from a public charter school. The structure of this study utilized a survey, teacher observations, and a focus group discussion to collect data.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom?
2. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms?
3. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms?

## **Instruments**

For the purpose of this study, I used a survey, teacher observations, and focus group discussions to gather data and information.

### ***Teacher Survey***

According to Creswell (2014), an appropriately designed survey can access a population's thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and trending behaviors, allowing inferences or generalizations about that population to be made. I presented the drafted survey items to the Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC), of which I was a member, to establish reliability of the instrument. The PLC group consisted of a representative from each elementary grade level, K-5, an EC teacher (Exceptional Children's program), a counselor, and a reading specialist. Within the group, four members had their National Board certification, three had advanced degrees in reading, and all members had over 15 years of experience in elementary education. I explained the purpose of the survey and the research questions that guided this study. The PLC gave suggestions on rewording a few questions and adding a few extra open-ended questions as well. The survey was designed in a web-based form to be administered electronically through the participants' email, making it convenient for the participants and allowing me to collect data in a more expedient manner.

In order to validate the survey instrument, I sent the survey to 17 of my current teacher colleagues who volunteered as a trial group to participate in the survey. The trial group consisted of regular elementary classroom teachers who represented all grade levels (Pre-K-5) within a selected school. The survey contained both close-ended and open-ended questions to allow for a mixed methods design, collecting both quantitative

and qualitative data. In addition, at the end of the survey, the trial group was asked to provide feedback pertaining to the clarity of the questions and the appropriateness of the answer choices as well as the time they invested in participating in the survey. A script of the email that was sent to the trial group is located in Appendix A. This method helped to determine which survey items provided the best data addressing the study's research questions and which survey items needed to be rewritten so the research questions and the survey items could be appropriately aligned. Furthermore, the trial group's feedback helped to eliminate ambiguity and bias as well as maintain an appropriate length to the survey, so as not to be time-consuming or overwhelming to the participants. Information from the trial group's survey responses was not included in any of the study's data collection or analysis.

After the trial group participated in the survey, their feedback was presented to the PLC to discuss the results. The survey did not present any bias or ambiguous items, and the answered results from the survey items aligned with the intended outcomes. Additionally, the length of the survey was appropriate for the content, allowing approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Therefore, the survey instrument was approved as a valid instrument in collecting data for the study and is located in Appendix B.

### ***Observation Protocol***

Using an observation protocol, observational data were collected from participants during their classroom read-aloud times. The framework for the observation protocol implemented a Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Checklist (Appendix C) that targeted information from the survey as a point of reference during the observations. The checklist offered a systematic way of collecting data concerning behaviors, attitudes, and

actions by stating specific criteria that was observed. This ensured consistency and completeness for each classroom observation. The checklist focused on key information taken from the survey regarding classroom read-aloud practices in order to align the collected data.

### ***Interview Protocol***

Finally, I hosted a focus discussion group for participants to discuss read-aloud practices within their classroom setting. By organizing a focus discussion group, I was able to supplement the data gained from the survey with more depth and insight. An Outline Script for Focus Discussion Group (Appendix D) was implemented utilizing items from the survey as a protocol framework to conduct discussions in order to determine participant thoughts, opinions, and ideas regarding the implementation of classroom shared reading opportunities. The questions were structured as open-ended questions that eliminated bias. This allowed me to remain focused on gathering relevant information that directly aligned to the research questions, while facilitating open-ended discussions in a neutral manner (Butin, 2010).

The triangulation of data garnered from all three pieces of qualitative/quantitative data (teacher surveys, classroom observations, and a focus group discussion session) was analyzed and evaluated to connect commonalities or themes related to the research questions.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2014) characterized a study that includes the collecting of qualitative data as an interpretive research that should define the role of the researcher, as a means to eliminate issues that may influence the participants and the researcher's interpretations

and to clarify the position of the researcher. For the purpose of this study, my role as the researcher was to collect and organize data, review and interpret the data into categories and themes, and then report the findings and outcomes of the data. While conducting observations, I acted as an objective viewer and observer of behaviors. During the focus group session, I acted as a facilitator to maintain a focus on learning participant insights and understanding of the study's topic. I probed questions and transcribed responses for analysis and alignment to the research questions. Since I currently work at the study site as a contracted instructional coach and have a working relationship with the participants, a conflict of interest may exist that could possibly impart bias to the research study.

### **Participants**

For this study, the population chosen was elementary teachers employed by a public charter school referred to as Test School PC, located within the west central section of the mountain region of my residing state. The region is a blend of urban, suburban, and rural settings, having a diverse economy that supports industrial products ranging from technological, furniture, medical, chemical, machine components, and textiles. It is also home to a significant agricultural processing industry, making it one of the state's largest producers of forest products that include Christmas trees and ornamental plants. The region where the test school is located maintains a thriving tourism industry due to its natural resources of lakes, rivers, forests, mountains, and protected parklands. Test School PC was established 20 years ago and is a tuition-free public charter school educating students in Grades K-8. It is considered a school-wide Title I school having approximately 310 students. Data from the state's 2018-2019 report card reported that the test school met the requirements for highly qualified teacher status.

The test school employs approximately 22 classroom teachers, with additional teachers for PE, music, art, technology, Spanish, Title I, AIG, and EC. Of the 22 classroom teachers, 18 are elementary, K-5. Table 3 displays data regarding the number of classes per grade level for elementary and the approximate average number of students per class.

**Table 3**

*Number of Classes Per Grade Level and Average Number of Students Per Class*

Grade level	Number of classes per grade level	Average number of students per class
Kindergarten	3	14
First grade	3	14
Second grade	3	15
Third grade	3	15
Fourth grade	3	16
Fifth grade	3	16

Kindergarten has three teachers with an average number of 14 students; first grade has three teachers with an average number of 14 students; second grade has three teachers with an average of 15 students; third grade has three teachers with an average of 15 students; fourth grade has three teachers with an average of 16 students; and fifth grade has three teachers with an average of 16 students.

I sent email correspondence to the test school asking permission to conduct the study within their school. During the recruitment process, I met with the director of the test school explaining the study's topic and data collection process as well as ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the school and its teachers. Permission to conduct this research using a teacher survey, classroom observations during read-aloud times, and hosting a focus group session was granted via email by the current director of the school.

Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The elementary teachers



within Test School PC were personally given an Informed Letter, along with a copy to keep, introducing the study and its purpose, inviting them to participate, and explaining that their participation was completely voluntary (Appendix E). Teachers who chose to participate, signed a Consent to Participate (Appendix F) giving permission for their responses to be collected and analyzed for this study. The participants were assured that no personal identifying markers were tied to the participant, only an alphanumeric code assigned by me, thus ensuring confidentiality of the participant.

Teachers who agreed to participate were sent a questionnaire for the study in the format of a Google survey form through their school email that was presented in a clear, systematic way enabling the participants to complete at their convenience. The email explained how participant responses would be graphed and recorded from the survey and downloaded into a statistical database for analysis. A script of the email regarding the survey is located in Appendix G. All participants who filled out the teacher survey were also invited to volunteer for the classroom read-aloud observations as well as for the focus discussion group. The Consent to Participate featured the purpose of the observation/focus group as well as the protocol in how data would be collected, stored, and used. I utilized the Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Checklist when collecting observation data from individual classrooms and an interview protocol, Outline Script for Focus Discussion Group, to facilitate the focus group, ensuring the discussions remained focused to the objective. Participant verbal responses during the focus group were recorded on a chart that was referenced and integrated into the collection of data as well as audio recorded for clarity purposes.

## **Data Collection**

As part of this mixed methods study, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data that were analyzed separately in order to describe the relationship between perception data and observed data (Creswell, 2014). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a teacher survey that was sent to all elementary classroom participants within the test school for the purpose of gaining a perspective on teacher perceptions of the read-aloud practices within their classrooms. The survey contained open-ended and close-ended items that addressed the research questions. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative data were collected through observations of the classroom read-aloud practices. Finally, qualitative data were collected from a focus discussion group of the study's participants to analyze and compare to all other collected data.

I presented the Informed Letter inviting the classroom teachers to participate, along with the Consent to Participate. As an added means of informing teachers of the study, the Informed Letter was also sent to the elementary teachers' school emails. I clarified to the participants my role in the study as an objective observer and collector of data. Furthermore, I reiterated that the data and findings of this study were only for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a dissertation study through my educational institution. Upon receiving permission from teachers to participate in the study, I implemented the delivery of the teacher survey through participant school emails, which included instructions regarding the process of completing the survey.

Survey research is a common instrument that researchers use to collect data among many respondents, especially if designed in a web-based format, because of its accessibility in distribution, collection, and analysis of collected data (Butin, 2010). An

electronic survey was created using a Google form that underwent a process to determine validity. In addition, I wrote a Participant's Email for the Survey explaining the directions for completing and submitting the Google form. The Participant's Email for the Survey reiterated to the participants that anonymity and confidentiality of responses would be maintained at all times, ensuring that their name and school would not be disclosed in any part of the study. In order to ensure equitable distribution, this established email was sent to each participant's school email address, along with the survey attached. An estimated time frame of one week was allowed for participants to complete and submit the survey. The survey was resubmitted after one week to only those participants who had not submitted the survey upon the initial contact, providing them with a second opportunity.

After approximately two weeks, survey administration concluded and I began sorting, organizing, and labeling the survey results from participants who submitted the survey. For collecting quantitative data, I utilized the Google survey form's feature in summarizing the data of the close-ended items by disaggregating percentages of the responses to each answer choice through pie charts and bar graphs. Each close-ended survey item was entered on a Google spreadsheet displaying the percentages for each answer choice, in order to get an overall, inclusive view of the raw data. Each participant of the survey was assigned an alphanumeric code that was created and maintained only by me, in order to further segregate and compare the data on a separate Google spreadsheet. Likewise, I sorted and organized the data for comparison by grade levels and displayed the data on a different Google spreadsheet. Each participant was identified by their respective alphanumeric code to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and a

summary of each individual's responses was organized by each survey item on a Google spreadsheet for the purposes of describing and analyzing perceptual survey data collected for this study. Finally, I aligned and labeled each survey item to the research question that it corresponded to by an identification code, such as RQ1 (Research Question 1) and so forth for Research Questions 2 and 3.

Qualitative data were collected from the open-ended survey items submitted by the participating teachers once the survey process was completed. The contextual data collected from the open-ended items of the survey were categorized and organized according to emerging themes and recurrences of words or phrases. Again, I utilized the Google survey form's feature in summarizing the data of each open-ended survey item by listing each participant's responses. Using the same assigned alphanumeric codes for the participants, the responses were entered into a Google spreadsheet, in the same manner as the close-ended survey items in order to get an overview of the raw data. I highlighted words and phrases that emerged from the responses, then recorded the highlighted words on sticky notes and sorted the notes on a concept board, grouping reoccurring words and phrases together to establish themes that might determine if a pattern existed and how that information was related to the study's research questions.

Following the survey implementation process of the study and based on teacher responses to the survey item regarding classroom read-aloud observations (18), I created a list of participants who consented for observations during their classroom read-aloud times. I spoke with the participants to schedule days that were convenient for them in order to collect observation data. I created an observation sign-up form, Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Sign-up Schedule, to personally give to the participating teachers.

This allowed them an opportunity to schedule an observation time/day that was convenient for them, within a specified range of weeks/days during which a shared reading experience was implemented. The Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Sign-up Schedule is included in Appendix H.

A Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Checklist was utilized to collect data from these observations. The same checklist was administered for each observation to ensure a fair and impartial observation among all participants. I conducted the classroom observations according to the participant's scheduled time within a one-week time frame approved by the test school. Once the classroom observations were completed, I began sorting, organizing, and labeling the checklist data from each participant for every item on the checklist. For the collected quantitative data, I used a Google spreadsheet to display the data by disaggregating percentages of the marked items on the checklists to get an overall, inclusive view of the raw data. Participants were previously assigned an alphanumeric code that was created upon submission of the survey, in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. A summary of each individual's observation was organized by each checklist item on a Google spreadsheet for the purposes of describing and analyzing observational data collected for this study. Likewise, I sorted and organized the data for comparison by grade levels and displayed the data on a different Google spreadsheet. Finally, I aligned and labeled each checklist item to the research question that it corresponded to by an identification code, such as RQ1 (Research Question 1) and so forth for subsequent research questions.

An afterschool focus discussion group was held at the conclusion of observations. A list of participants who consented to participate in a focus discussion group based on

their responses to the survey item regarding participation of an afterschool focus discussion group (19) was created. I spoke with the director of the test school regarding the scheduling of a day/time that was convenient for the participants and the school for the focus discussion group. A Notice of Scheduled Focus Discussion Group was created that informed the participants of the day and time approved by the director of the test school and was sent to the participating teachers' school email addresses. The notice reiterated that anonymity in the focus discussion group and confidentiality of participant responses would be maintained at all times, assuring them that identifiers would not be disclosed in any part of the study. The Notice of Scheduled Focus Discussion Group is included in Appendix I.

The focus discussion group was approved and conducted at the test school on the day and time arranged by the school's director, allowing for an estimated time of 30 minutes. To ensure a focused discussion free of bias, I utilized the Outline Script for Focus Discussion Group which consisted of questions aligned to the research questions and survey responses. Participants' verbal thoughts, comments, and ideas regarding the discussion questions were collected and transcribed on chart paper, serving as a log of information data that were described and analyzed for the purpose of the study. Each participant of the focus discussion group previously had been assigned an alphanumeric code that was created upon submission of the survey. I incorporated the codes in the transcriptions and notes. To help with transcription, the focus group session was audio recorded but not video recorded in order to maintain anonymity of the participants.

Once the focus discussion group was completed, I began sorting, organizing, and labeling the information from the focus group's notes and charts according to emerging

themes and perspectives gathered from each participant's responses. Similarly, the responses from the focus group were sorted and organized according to how each aligned to the study's research questions and then labeled with an identification code, such as RQ1 (Research Questions 1) and so forth for Research Questions 2 and 3. The collected data were displayed on a Google spreadsheet for the purposes of describing and analyzing the focus group data gathered for this study.

When the collection of all data was completed, sorted, and organized, I engaged an impartial, nonpartisan associate to review the coded themes and categories from the qualitative data for the purpose of providing a more thorough analysis of the data. By eliciting an external person to evaluate the accuracy of the qualitative data, I was able to ascertain the extent of the data's dependability and eliminate the potential of bias. Furthermore, the impartial associate inspected the process of examining all data to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the study. All collected data – survey results, checklists results, charts, graphs, and spreadsheets – were stored in a Google folder that is owned and accessible solely by me and will be maintained for the length of time deemed necessary by the institutional review board; and at such time, all data will then be permanently deleted. No individual data of students were collected for this study, only participating classroom teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

In a convergent parallel mixed methods design, the two types of data (quantitative and qualitative) are analyzed separately and then the researcher interprets the data, looking for connections, in order to provide a clear understanding of the outcomes (Creswell, 2014). Once data were collected and organized in the different Google

spreadsheets, I began to closely examine them, both individually and collectively, to align the results to each research question so the data were valid and reliable in answering the study's research questions.

For Research Question 1, "How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom," the contextual data collected from the open-ended survey items were examined in order to categorize and organize the emerging themes and recurrences of words and/or phrases. I utilized the Google survey form's feature in summarizing the data of each open-ended survey item by listing each participant's responses. I highlighted words and phrases that emerged from the responses and then recorded the highlighted words on sticky notes and sorted the notes on a concept board, grouping reoccurring words and phrases together to establish themes that might determine if a pattern existed between settings and how that information was related to the research question. The data were recorded in an electronic document, numbering the content in order according to frequency, with the most frequently occurring words/phrases first and then descending to the least frequent. I made comparisons between teachers and grade levels to determine similarities and differences. Additionally, the close-ended survey items that specifically addressed classroom read-aloud practices were examined. The data were disaggregated through the Google survey form's charts and graphs according to percentages of responses to each answer choice of the survey items.

Table 4 displays contextual data regarding the survey items that were analyzed for answering Research Question 1, and identification of each survey item as either open-ended or close-ended.



**Table 4***Survey Items for Answering Research Question 1*

Survey item	Contextual survey data	Open-ended (O) Close-ended (C)
1, 2	Amount of time teachers spend implementing read-aloud opportunities	C
3	Criteria of selecting read-aloud material	O
4	Different genres of books selected for read-aloud times	C
5, 6	Level of student engagement during read-aloud times	C
7	Level of student engagement after read-aloud times	C
8	Level of student engagement during/after read-aloud times	C
9	Limitations to implementing read-aloud opportunities	O
10, 11	Level of teacher comfort in implementing read-aloud times	C
12	Teacher perception of the effectiveness of their read-aloud times	C
13	Teacher perception of the value of read-aloud opportunities	O
14	Teacher perception in describing the nature and scope of interactive read-aloud practices	O
15	Teacher professional development on interactive read-aloud	C
16	Teacher description of interactive read-aloud practices	O

Survey Items 1 and 2 were examined in order to determine the amount of time teachers spend in classroom read-aloud opportunities. The data gathered from Survey Items 3 and 4 addressed the various types of selections of text teachers incorporated. Survey Items 5, 6, 7, and 8 were analyzed to discover the level of teacher-student

engagement during and after read-aloud times. The data collected from Survey Item 9 were investigated to deduce any limitations the teacher had in implementing read-aloud opportunities in their classroom. Survey Items 10, 11, 12, and 13 were further evaluated to establish the level of comfort and enjoyment experienced by the teacher upon the implementation of classroom read-aloud practices and the teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the read-aloud time as a teaching/learning tool. Finally, Survey Items 14, 15, and 16 were analyzed in order to gain an understanding of the nature and scope of interactive shared reading experiences within the classroom setting.

For Research Question 2, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms,” the data collected from Survey Items 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 and the corresponding items on the observation checklists were examined and compared. Table 5 displays the contextual data collected and analyzed from the observations for answering Research Question 2, regarding the survey items that directly corresponded to items on the observation checklist.

**Table 5**

*Observed Survey Items for Answering Research Question 2*

Observed survey item	Observation data
2	Amount of time teachers spend implementing read-aloud opportunities
3, 4	Different genres of books selected for read-aloud times
5	Student behaviors during read-aloud times
6	Level of teacher directed student engagement during read-aloud times
8	Level of student-initiated engagement during/after read-aloud times

An examination of the data gathered from Survey Item 2 addressed the time teachers invested in read-aloud opportunities within their instructional day. I reviewed the data gathered from Survey Items 3 and 4 to address the various types of selections of text

teachers selected. The data gathered from Survey Item 5 on student behaviors during the read-aloud time that reflected a level of attentiveness were examined. Survey Items 6 and 8 were viewed to discover the level of teacher-student engagement during and after read-aloud times. I compared the disaggregated data contained within the Google survey form's charts and graphs of these items to the observation data collected on the Google spreadsheet for each corresponding item on the checklist in order to describe the perceptual data with the observed data.

Finally, I described the data collected from Survey Items 12 and 13 on teacher perceptions of how effective their current read-aloud practices were to building comprehension and vocabulary skills. Survey Item 12 was measured using a Likert scale with the data being displayed through the Google survey form as a chart format. The chart represented the total percentage of each selected rating presented on the Likert scale. Survey Item 13 allowed for a yes/no response with an added statement of clarifying "why" to the response. This item was sorted and coded according to patterns of thoughts that emerged from the item and then displayed in a digital spreadsheet. I examined the data from these two survey items in regard to how they aligned with Research Question 2.

Focus group data were examined as well for emerging themes and patterns. Participant responses were color coded as they related to topics and ideas aligning with Research Question 2. The color coded responses provided a visual schematic representation, thus making it easier to organize and examine. Once the coding was complete, a digital spreadsheet was created to organize and display the information as it aligned to the research question.

For Research Question 3, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms,” the data collected from Survey Items 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, and 16 and the corresponding items on the observation checklists were analyzed. Table 6 displays the contextual data collected and analyzed for answering Research Question 3 regarding the survey items that directly corresponded to items on the observation checklist.

**Table 6**

*Observed Survey Items for Answering Research Question 3*

Observed survey item	Observation data
5	Student behaviors during read-aloud times
6	Level of student engagement during read-aloud times
7	Level of student engagement after read-aloud times
8	Level of student engagement during/after read-aloud times

I analyzed the data gathered from Survey Item 5 on student behaviors during the read-aloud time that reflected a level of attentiveness. Survey Items 6, 7, and 8 were analyzed to discover the level of teacher-student engagement during and after the read-aloud time as well as post extended learning. The disaggregated data contained within the Google survey form’s charts and graphs of these items were analyzed and compared to the observation data collected on the Google spreadsheet for each corresponding item on the checklist in order to describe the perceptual data as they relate to the observable data.

Finally, I analyzed and described the data collected from Survey Items 14, 15, and 16 in order to gain an understanding of the nature and scope of interactive shared reading experiences within the classroom setting. These items were sorted and coded according to patterns of thoughts that emerged from each item and then displayed in a digital spreadsheet. The data from these survey items were analyzed in regard to how they

aligned with Research Question 3.

Focus group data were analyzed as well for emerging themes and patterns. Participant responses were color coded as they related to topics and ideas aligning with Research Question 3. The color coded responses provided a visual schematic representation, thus making it easier to organize and analyze. Once the coding was completed, a digital spreadsheet was created to organize and display the information as it aligned to the research question.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A threat was presented to the internal validity of this study because of the limitation of the study's geographical area. The population that was used for this study represented one public charter school. Therefore, the results of this study were exclusive to this setting only and cannot be generalized to represent other areas and schools within the state or considered universal to national or global populations. A second limitation that could have influenced the study's results was the test school's number of beginning teachers. Of the 18 elementary classroom teachers at the test school, nine were considered initially certified teachers having 3 years or less experience.

Additionally, the significance of the survey as a main source of data for this study presented another limitation to consider. There is a level of susceptibility to error that is sometimes associated with survey data (Butin, 2010). Participant responses are sometimes affected by the wording of a question, the specific order of the response choices, or the inability to understand the content of a question.

Finally, the study was implemented during the 2020/2021 school year in which schools were experiencing restrictions in their educational settings that created

instructional challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to schools implementing alternative ‘classroom’ options, where students attended either solely in virtual settings or a blended model consisting of both online and in-person settings. Due to the pandemic restrictions placed within the Test School, limitations may exist to the internal validity of the study.

I imposed a delimitation within the study in choosing not to pursue implementing a professional development component to the study regarding the subject matter. Considering the school-wide restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 virus, I felt that the response would not be favorable and wanted to limit additional interactions between the participants in order to maintain safe and healthy precautions.

### **Summary**

This study implemented a mixed methods approach to answering the designated research questions by collecting data from both quantitative and qualitative sources. The structure of this chapter outlined the key components incorporated in the methodology of this study, highlighting how the data were collected and analyzed. The chapter further described the participants chosen for the study as well as the three instruments used to collect data: a survey, teacher observations, and a focus discussion group. In addition, the chapter established what the role of the researcher was throughout the implementation of the study.

The theoretical framework that grounded this study was the social learning theory of Bandura (1977) that supports learning through role modeling and observation as well as Dewey’s (1938) social learning theory that supports interactive learning environments. When interactive read-aloud experiences are employed properly within the classroom

setting, they can build vital skills children need to increase their reading and comprehension abilities (Adams, 1990). Therefore, the methodology of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. By examining teacher perceptions through the findings of this study, I was able to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. A prolific amount of research supports shared reading experiences as a key element in developing needed language and literacy skills (Anderson et al., 1985; NAEYC, 1998; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Furthermore, research reveals that a meaningful and intentional way to improve reading outcomes is through interactive shared reading opportunities (Lennox, 2013).

The following data were collected from a teacher survey, classroom observations, and a focus group in order to compare and analyze to determine if commonalities exist between teacher perceptions and observable data regarding read-aloud practices within the classroom environment. The data were disaggregated on digital spreadsheets in order to triangulate both quantitative and qualitative results. This study focused on a group of elementary teachers ranging from kindergarten to third-grade classrooms, consisting of a total of 11 participants. The findings of this study have been organized according to the study's research questions that include tables with complementing summaries to describe the results.

### **Findings**

Data for Research Question 1, "How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom," are organized into two sections that reflect the open-ended and close-ended



responses collected from the teacher survey addressing teacher perceptions regarding their classroom read-aloud practices. Tables 7-11 display the perceptual data collected on open-ended responses from the teacher survey and are organized according to each correlating survey item.

Table 7 displays data taken from Survey Item 3, “Describe the criteria you use in selecting books to read aloud to your class (i.e., vocabulary-rich text, simplistic text, themes, subject, author studies, novels, picture books, etc.).”

**Table 7**

*Criteria Teachers Used When Selecting Books for Classroom Read-Aloud Opportunities*

Reoccurring contextual phrases (descending order by frequency)	Frequency (number of occurrences)
Themes/holidays/seasons	7
Units of study	3
Novel studies	3
Author studies	2
Curriculum content/subject	2
Character building	2
Articles (nonfiction texts)	1
Availability	1

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to this item on the teacher survey describing the criteria they used when selecting books to implement during their classroom read-aloud time. Table 7 displays the data in descending order according to the frequency of reoccurring contextual phrases that emerged from teacher responses. Themes/holidays/seasons occurred the most, noted seven different times in the responses; unit studies and novel studies both occurred three different times; author studies, curriculum content, and character building occurred twice for each phrase; nonfiction texts, like articles, and the availability of texts as a criterion for selecting read-aloud

books each occurred once.

Table 8 displays data taken from Survey Item 9, “What problems, or restrictions, if any, limit you from reading aloud to your students (time, available resources, content, etc.)?”

**Table 8**

*Problems/Restrictions That Limit Classroom Read-Aloud Experiences*

Reoccurring contextual phrases (descending order by frequency)	Frequency (number of occurrences)
Time	7
Virtual teaching	2
Access to resources/books	1
Lack of student interest	1
No problems/restrictions	1

Of the 11 classroom teacher participants, 10 responded to this item on the teacher survey describing problems, or restrictions, that limit their implementation of classroom read-alouds. One participant chose to skip this survey item. Table 8 displays the data in descending order according to the frequency of reoccurring contextual phrases that emerged from teacher responses. Time was the restriction that occurred most in teacher responses, noted seven different times; virtual teaching occurred two different times as a problem with classroom read-aloud practices; access to resources/books and the lack of student interest each occurred once. Notably, one response indicated that the participant had no problems that restricted their classroom read-aloud opportunities.

Table 9 displays data taken from Survey Item 13, “As a teacher, do you feel that reading aloud to your students is a valuable teaching/learning tool? Why?”

**Table 9***Valuable Teaching/Learning Opportunities From Classroom Read-Aloud Experiences*

Reoccurring contextual phrases (descending order by frequency)	Frequency (number of occurrences)
Enjoyment/fun/imaginative	5
Modeling prosody	4
Vocabulary development	4
Fluency	3
Critical thinking/reflections	2
Engagement/connections	2
Comprehension	2
Author imprints	1

Of the 11 classroom teacher participants, 10 responded to this item on the teacher survey describing classroom read-aloud practices as a valuable teaching/learning tool. One participant chose to skip this survey item. Table 9 displays the data in descending order according to the frequency of reoccurring contextual phrases that emerged from teacher responses. The responses for implementing classroom read-alouds for enjoyment, fun, and imaginative expression occurred the most having five different occurrences; both modeling prosody and vocabulary development occurred four different times; fluency occurred three different times; critical thinking/reflections, engagement/connections, and comprehension occurred two different times for each phrase; and author imprints occurred once as a valuable teaching/learning opportunity utilized by classroom read-aloud practices.

Table 10 displays data taken from Survey Item 14, “How do you define interactive read-aloud experiences?”

**Table 10***Characteristics Teachers Define as Interactive Read-Aloud Experiences*

Reoccurring contextual phrases (descending order by frequency)	Frequency (number of occurrences)
Discussion/questions	5
Actively engaged/responsive	2
Making predictions	1
Vocabulary instruction	1
Post-reading activities	1
Text search for answers	1

Of the 11 classroom teacher participants, eight responded to this item on the teacher survey describing how they define interactive read-aloud experiences. Three participants chose to skip this survey item. Table 10 displays the data in descending order according to the frequency of reoccurring contextual phrases that emerged from teacher responses. In defining interactive read-aloud experiences, discussion/questions occurred the most with five different occurrences; actively engaged/responsive occurred two different times; making predictions and vocabulary instruction both occurred once; implementing post-reading activities occurred once; and using text to search for answers occurred once for defining interactive read-aloud experiences.

Table 11 displays data taken from Survey Item 16, “Describe any strategies or practices that you implement during your classroom read-aloud times that allow your students to interact with the text.”

**Table 11**

*Strategies Implemented by Teachers for Classroom Interactive Read-Aloud Experiences*

Reoccurring contextual phrases (descending order by frequency)	Frequency (number of occurrences)
Discussion/questions	5
Making connections	3
Making predictions	2
Vocabulary instruction	2
Comprehension strategies	2
Actively engaged/responsive	1
Written responses	1

Of the 11 classroom teacher participants, eight responded to this item on the teacher survey describing strategies that the participants implemented during their classroom read-aloud times that allowed their students to be interactive with the text. Three participants chose to skip this survey item. Table 11 displays the data in descending order according to the frequency of reoccurring contextual phrases that emerged from teacher responses. Of the strategies described, discussion/questions occurred the most, noted five different times; making connections occurred three different times; both making predictions and vocabulary instruction occurred two different times; comprehension strategies also occurred two different times; actively engaged/responsive and written responses as strategies implemented for interactive classroom read-aloud experiences each occurred once.

Tables 12-17 and the figure display the contextual data collected on close-ended responses from the teacher survey and are organized according to each correlating survey item.

Table 12 displays data taken from Survey Item 1, “As a classroom teacher, how many days per week do you read aloud to your class,” and Survey Item 2,

“Approximately how many minutes per day total do you spend in read-aloud opportunities with your students?”

**Table 12**

*Time Spent Implementing Classroom Read-Aloud Opportunities*

Weekly	Percentage implemented	Daily	Percentage implemented
Every day	63.6%	Less than 5 minutes	9.1%
3-4 days/week	18.2%	5-10 minutes	0
Less than 3 days	18.2%	10-20 minutes	45.5%
Never	0	20-30 minutes	27.3%
		More than 30 minutes	18.2%

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to these items on the teacher survey describing how many days per week and minutes per day each participant spent reading aloud to their students. Table 12 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as indicated from teacher survey responses. In examining the data for days per week, 63.6% of the teachers indicated they read aloud to their students every day; 18.2% indicated that they read aloud to their students 3-4 days each week; 18.2% indicated that they read aloud to their students less than three days per week; and no teachers indicated that they never read aloud to their students. In examining the data for minutes per day, 9.1% indicated that they read aloud to their students less than five minutes each day; no teachers indicated 5-10 minutes each day for read-aloud time; 45.5% indicated that they read aloud to their students 10-20 minutes each day; 27.3% indicated that they read aloud to their students 20-30 minutes each day; and 18.2% indicated that they read aloud to their students more than 30 minutes each day.

Table 13 displays data taken from Survey Item 4, “What type of genres do you typically select as a classroom read-aloud?”

**Table 13***Book Genres Selected by Teachers for Classroom Read-Aloud Experiences*

Book genres	Percentage implemented
Mostly fiction	27.3%
Mostly nonfiction	27.3%
Fiction and nonfiction mix	36.4%
Mix of all genres	9.1%

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to this item on the teacher survey describing the types of genres each teacher selects for their classroom read-aloud experiences. Table 13 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as indicated from teacher survey responses: 27.3% indicated that they chose mostly fiction for their read-aloud times; 27.3% indicated that they chose mostly nonfiction for their read-aloud times; 36.4% indicated that they chose a mix of both fiction and nonfiction for their read-aloud times; and 9.1% indicated that they chose a mix of a variety of all genres for their read-aloud times.

Table 14 displays data taken from Survey Item 5, “What are the overall student behaviors that you observe while you are reading aloud to your students,” and Survey Item 8, “Do you observe your students engaging in discussions, with you or other students, that connect to the text either during/post reading of a classroom read-aloud?”

**Table 14***Student Behaviors Related to Classroom Read-Aloud Practices*

Read-aloud behaviors	Percentage implemented	Student initiated discussions	Percentage implemented
Actively listening	72.7%	Yes – most of the time	27.3%
Inattentive	0	Sometimes	63.6%
Uninterested	9.1%	Never	9.1%
Interactive	18.2%		

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to these items on the teacher survey describing student behaviors during their read-aloud practices and the level of engagement in student-initiated discussions that connect to the text. Table 14 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as indicated from teacher survey responses. In examining the data related to student behaviors during the read-aloud practices, 72.7% indicated that their students are actively listening during the read-aloud times; no participants indicated that their students are inattentive during the read-aloud times; 9.1% indicated that their students are uninterested during the read-aloud times; and 18.2% indicated that their students are interactive during the read-aloud times. In examining the data related to student-initiated discussions, 27.3% indicated that most of the time their students initiated discussions with the teacher or their peers that connected to the read-aloud text; 63.6% indicated that sometimes their students initiated discussions with the teacher or their peers that connected to the read-aloud text; and 9.1% indicated that their students never initiated discussions with the teacher or their peers regarding the read-aloud text.

Table 15 displays data taken from Survey Item 6, “Do you incorporate class discussions during the read-aloud time that connect to the text or elicit critical thinking skills,” and Survey Item 7, “Do you integrate a post enrichment extension to the text?”

**Table 15**

*Teacher Directed Classroom Interactive Read-Aloud Practices*

Teacher directed class discussions	Percentage implemented	Integrated extension activities	Percentage implemented
Always	63.6%	Always	9.1%
Occasionally	36.4%	Occasionally	81.8%
Never	0	Never	9.1%

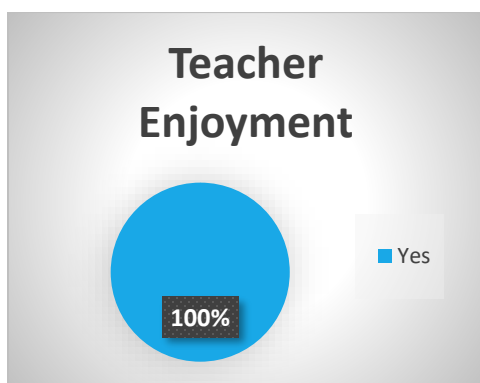


All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to these items on the teacher survey describing their teacher-directed classroom interactive read-aloud practices that connect to the text. Table 15 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as indicated from teacher survey responses. In examining the data related to teacher-directed class discussions, 63.6% indicated that they always incorporate class discussions connected to the text as a part of their read-aloud practices; 36.4% indicated that they occasionally incorporate class discussions connected to the text as a part of their read-aloud practices; and no participant indicated that they never incorporate class discussions during their read-aloud times. In examining the data related to integrating post enrichment activities, 9.1% indicated that they always integrate extension activities connected to the text; 81.8% indicated that they occasionally integrate extension activities connected to the text; and 9.1% indicated that they never integrate extension activities connected to the text.

The figure displays data taken from Survey Item 10, “As a teacher, do you enjoy reading aloud to your students?”

### Figure

*Teacher Enjoyment of Classroom Read-Aloud Experiences*



All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to this item on the teacher survey describing how well they enjoy reading aloud to their students. The figure displays the data according to percentages indicated from teacher survey responses, with 100% of the participants stating that they enjoy reading aloud to their students.

Table 16 displays data taken from Survey Item 11, “On the scale below, rate your level of comfort in implementing read-aloud times in your instructional day to its most educational value,” and Survey Item 12, “On the scale below, rate your overall perception of the effectiveness of your read-aloud practices to building comprehension and vocabulary skills in your students.”

**Table 16**

*Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Classroom Read-Aloud Practices*

Comfort level for implementing to most educational value		Effectiveness for building literacy skills	
Rating from least to most comfortable	Percentage	Rating from least to most effective	Percentage
1	0	1	0
2	0	2	9.1%
3	0	3	9.1%
4	36.4%	4	54.5%
5	63.6%	5	27.3%

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to these items on the teacher survey by rating their overall perceptions of the effectiveness of implementing their classroom read-aloud practices to its most educational value in building literacy skills. Table 16 displays the data according to percentages of the ratings as indicated from teacher survey responses. In examining how teachers rated themselves, from least to most, according to their comfort level in implementing effective read-aloud practices; no

participant rated themselves a comfort level of 1, 2, or 3; 36.4% rated themselves a comfort level of 4; and 63.6% rated themselves a comfort level of 5 for implementing read-aloud practices to its most educational value. In examining how teachers rated themselves, from least to most, in their overall perception of the effectiveness of their read-aloud practices to building literacy skills, no participant rated themselves a Level 1; 9.1% rated themselves a Level 2; 9.1% rated themselves a Level 3; 54.5% rated themselves a Level 4; and 27.3% rated themselves a Level 5 for the effectiveness of their read-aloud practices in building literacy skills.

Table 17 displays data taken from Survey Item 15, “Have you had any professional development or workshops/trainings on incorporating interactive read-alouds in your classroom?”

**Table 17**

*Professional Development in Interactive Read-Aloud Practices*

Interactive read-aloud training	Percentage
Yes	18.2%
No	81.8%

All 11 classroom teacher participants responded to this item on the teacher survey indicating professional development or training they have had in implementing interactive read-aloud practices in their classrooms. Table 17 displays the data according to percentages indicated from teacher survey responses: 18.2% indicated that they have had professional development or training in incorporating interactive read-aloud practices in their classrooms, and 81.8% indicated that they have not had any training.

Research Question 2, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms,” is organized

according to the data gathered from the items listed on the Observation Checklist. Each item on the checklist correlates to an item from the teacher survey in order to compare observable data with perceptual data. Of the 11 teachers who participated in the teacher survey, eight participated in the Classroom Read-Aloud Observations. Tables 18-21 display the observed data collected and are organized according to each correlating survey item.

Table 18 displays data taken from Items 1 and 2 of the observation checklist and correspond with Survey Item 3, “Describe the criteria you use in selecting books to read aloud to your class,” and Survey Item 4, “What type of genres do you typically select as a classroom read-aloud?”

**Table 18**

*Teacher Selected Book Genre and Type for Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Book genre	Percentage implemented	Book type	Percentage implemented
Fiction	75%	Picture book	62.5%
Nonfiction	12.5%	Chapter book/novel	37.5%
Other	12.5%		

Table 18 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding the selection of book genres and types. In examining the data gathered from the read-aloud observations pertaining to teacher selections of book genres, 75% of the teachers selected a fiction book; 12.5% selected a nonfiction book; and 12.5% selected a different genre (specifically folklore and myth). In examining the data gathered from the read-aloud observations pertaining to the selection of book types, 62.5% of the teachers selected a picture book, and 37.5% selected a chapter book or novel to read aloud to their students.

Regarding the selection of book genres by the teachers for their read-aloud practices, a comparison was made between the observed data and the data on teacher perceptions from Survey Item 4. As indicated on the teacher survey, teachers felt that they selected either fiction or nonfiction books an equal percent of the time. However, observation data indicated that fiction books were selected for the majority of the observations. To gain a better understanding of teacher selection of books for the classroom read-aloud times, I looked closely at the criteria that teachers indicated they used when selecting books for the classroom read-aloud time (Survey Item 3) and made a comparison of the data. The survey data indicated that themes/holidays/seasons were the most common occurring responses, with novels being next. Observation data indicated that picture books were selected in the majority of the classroom observations.

In order to gain further insight into teacher selection of books for the classroom read-aloud practices, I asked the participants during a focus group to describe the types of books and genres they chose for reading to students, describing the reasons or criteria behind their selections. Per participant responses, monthly themes/units, holidays, and seasonal content were the common themes that emerged across grade levels, as well as a consistency with both fiction and nonfiction books. Teachers of lower grade elementary students indicated selecting authors who were a favorite among their students and choosing beginning chapter books, such as the Junie B. Jones series, in order to develop listening sustainability. The third-grade teachers indicated that novels were selected more often than picture books to help build vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Table 19 displays data taken from Item 3 of the observation checklist and corresponds with Survey Item 2, “Approximately how many minutes per day total do you

spend in read-aloud opportunities with your students?”

**Table 19**

*Time Frame for Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Observed time frame data	Percentage implemented
10-20 minutes	75%
More than 30 minutes	25%

Table 19 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding the classroom read-aloud time frame: 75% of the teachers read to their students between 10-20 minutes, and 25% of the teachers read more than 30 minutes during the read-aloud observation.

A comparison was made between the perceptual data and the observed data concerning the time implemented in read-aloud practices (Survey Item 2). As indicated on the teacher survey, the majority of the teachers read to their students 10-20 minutes per day. These data aligned with the observation data that recorded 10-20 minutes of read-aloud time from the majority of the teachers. During the classroom read-aloud observation of those teachers who read more than 30 minutes to their students, I noted on the checklist that each student had a copy of the novel in order to follow along while listening to the book. These were third-grade classrooms, and it was during a time set aside specifically for a novel study.

In order to clarify the time frame implemented by teachers for their read-aloud practices, I asked the participants during the focus group to discuss how much time they spend for read-aloud opportunities in their classrooms for each week/day. The common response that emerged from the participants was every day. However, the third-grade teachers indicated that for them, it was usually 2-3 times weekly for their novel reading

study, due to the implementation of third-grade requirements for incorporating reading passages to meet Read to Achieve state mandates. The teacher survey data aligned with the focus group data indicating that the majority of the teachers read to their students every day. Regarding the amount of time per day allotted to classroom read-aloud opportunities, the common response that emerged from the participants during the focus group was 10-15 minutes per day, several times a day, or during transitional times. This daily allotted time frame aligned with the classroom observation time frame as well. One participant indicated that she incorporated read-aloud opportunities for both her whole group and small group times.

Table 20 displays data taken from Item 4 of the observation checklist and corresponds with Survey Item 5, “What are the overall student behaviors that you observe while you are reading aloud to your students?”

**Table 20**

*Student Behaviors During Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Observed student behaviors	Percentage implemented
Actively listening	100%
Inattentive	0
Uninterested	0
Interactive	100%
Other	25%

Table 20 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding overall student behaviors during the read-aloud times: 100% of the students were actively listening while the teacher was reading aloud to them, with no students being inattentive or uninterested; and 100% of the students were interactive, or responsive, during the read-aloud time.

Another noted student behavior was that 25% of the students followed along in their own copy of the book that was being read aloud by the teacher.

Regarding student behaviors during the classroom read-aloud time, a comparison was made between the observed data and the perceptual data. As indicated on the teacher survey (Survey Item 5), the majority of the teachers described their students as actively listening during the read-aloud opportunities, with no students being inattentive.

However, there was a small percentage of teachers who felt that their students were uninterested during the read-aloud times. Observation data indicated that 100% of the students were actively listening during the observed read-aloud times, with no inattentive or uninterested behaviors exhibited by the students.

I examined this item further during the focus group by asking the participants to describe the overall student behaviors they observe while reading aloud to their students. The overall common response that emerged from the participants during the focus group was that their students listened very well while they were reading aloud and seemed to be very engaged with the story. A second response pattern that emerged from the focus group discussion related to teacher attitudes, behaviors, and interests in the content or book they selected. Teachers stated that the level of student engagement and interest in the book depended largely on the book's content and the effort the teacher put into the read-aloud to make it interesting and enjoyable. One teacher noted that student interest levels sometimes change from year to year. In addition, the third-grade teachers felt that their students enjoyed the novel read-aloud more when they were able to follow along in their own copy of the book.

Table 21 displays data taken from Item 6 of the observation checklist and



establishes a correlation to Survey Item 10, “As a teacher, do you enjoy reading aloud to your students?”

**Table 21**

*Reading Prosody Patterns During Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Prosody patterns	Percentage implemented
Inflections	100%
Dramatic pauses	100%
Change of voice	62.5%
Other (voice intensity)	13%

Table 21 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding the prosodic cues implemented by teachers while they were reading aloud to their students. During the classroom read-aloud observations, I observed that 100% of the teachers implemented inflections in their voice while reading to the students; 100% of the teachers integrated dramatic pauses; 62.5% implemented periodic changes in the pitch of their voice to represent different characters; and 13% of the teachers exhibited a mesmerizing intensity in their voice as they were reading aloud to their students.

A comparison was made between the observed data regarding teachers implementing prosodic cues and the survey data relating to the level of enjoyment teachers experience when reading to their students (Survey Item 10). I examined the data to determine if a correlation existed between how much effort teachers put into incorporating prosodic cues in their read-aloud practices and how much they enjoy reading to their students. As indicated on the teacher survey, 100% of the teachers enjoyed reading aloud to students. Observation data indicated 100% of the teachers implemented prosodic cues that included inflections and dramatic pauses while they read

to their students.

As I reviewed the discussions from the focus group that pertained to student behaviors during read-aloud times, one pattern emerged from teacher discussions related to teacher attitudes and behaviors while reading a book. Teachers stated that the level of student engagement and interest in the book selected for read-aloud time depended largely on how much effort the teacher put into the read-aloud to make it interesting and enjoyable. To gain insight into teacher attitudes and enjoyment from reading to their students, I also asked the teachers to discuss their own personal shared reading experiences as a child in school or at home. Common themes that emerged were sound effects and funny voices integrated into the story that the teachers remember the most. One teacher stated that when her teacher read to her, she knew it was going to be a good book just because of the way the teacher read it. Several teachers stated that they remembered their mother reading novels and fairy tales to them and how much they loved the stories because of the dramatics and tone their mothers used. One teacher said that she looks forward to reading to her three children every night, each one choosing their own book, and how much they love it.

Research Question 3, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms,” is organized according to the data gathered from the items listed on the Observation Checklist. Each item on the checklist correlates to an item from the teacher survey in order to compare observed data with perceptual data in reference to interactive read-aloud practices. Of the 11 teachers who participated in the teacher survey, eight participated in the Classroom Read-Aloud Observations. Tables 22-24 display the observed data and are

organized according to each correlating survey item.

Table 22 displays data taken from Item 5 of the observation checklist and corresponds with Survey Item 6, “Do you incorporate class discussions during the read-aloud time that connect to the text or elicit critical thinking skills?”

**Table 22**

*Class Discussions During Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Class discussions incorporated	Percentage implemented
Before reading	100%
During reading	100%
After reading	75%

Table 22 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding the incorporation of class discussions that connect to the text during the read-aloud time. I observed that during the classroom read-aloud observations, 100% of the teachers discussed the book before beginning to read; 100% of the teachers implemented discussion during the reading of the book; and 75% of the teachers discussed the book when they finished reading it to the students.

Regarding the incorporation of class discussions as part of the classroom read-aloud practices, a comparison was made between the observed data and the perceptual data. Per teacher responses on the teacher survey (Survey Item 6), the majority of the teachers indicated that they always incorporate class discussion during their read-aloud time. Observation data indicated 100% of the teachers incorporated discussions before and during the read-aloud, with most of them having follow-up discussions after they finished reading the book. Notably, I recorded that students were interactive during the

read-aloud times, exhibiting responsive behaviors in 100% of the observations. In addition, I reviewed the data from the teacher survey (Survey Item 16) that asked teachers to describe any strategies or practices that they implemented during their classroom read-aloud times that allowed their students to interact with the text. Of the strategies the teachers described, discussions and questions were the most occurring theme that emerged. Ironically, actively engaged/responsive only occurred one time from the teacher survey responses.

I further explored Survey Item 6 during the focus group by asking the participants to describe their class discussion practices during the read-aloud time. Teacher descriptions of the types of questions they asked their students related to predictions, summaries, main idea, problems and solutions, vocabulary, characters, settings, and plot. The common theme that emerged from the discussion was that teachers asked comprehension questions and students responded. However, one teacher stated that her students loved the open-ended conversations they had about the story more than the teacher directed question-answer responses. According to my notes from the observations, discussions that were implemented during the read-aloud time related to vocabulary, retelling of events, literary phrasing and imagery, multi-meaning words, summarizing, predictions, connections, punctuation, author and illustrator, and fiction versus nonfiction characteristics.

To obtain clarity on teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of their class discussions during read-aloud times, I asked the participants during the focus group to discuss how reading aloud to their students can be used as an effective strategy in building literacy skills. This question from the focus group aligned with Survey Item 13.

As the teachers discussed the focus group question, the common patterns that emerged related to vocabulary building, students making connections to the text, and developing critical thinking skills through class discussions. One teacher stated that the best thing to do was to get students thinking. I reviewed teacher survey responses to Survey Item 13 regarding their perceptions on the value of read-alouds as a teaching/learning tool. The survey data indicated that the majority of teacher responses related to creating enjoyment, fun, and imaginative expression. In addition, the next most common responses by the teachers pertained to modeling prosody and vocabulary development.

Table 23 displays data taken from Item 7 of the observation checklist and corresponds with Survey Item 7, “Do you integrate a post enrichment extension to the text?”

**Table 23**

*Extension Activity for Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Teacher implemented extension activity	Percentage implemented
Yes	37.5%
No	62.5%

Table 23 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding the integration of a post-enrichment extension activity that relates to the text. From the observations, I determined that 37.5% of the teachers implemented an extension activity and 62.5% of the teachers did not.

A comparison was made between the observed data and the perceptual data regarding the implementation of a post-enrichment or extension activity relating to the read-aloud text (Survey Item 7). As indicated on the teacher survey, a small percentage of

the teachers stated that either they always integrate extension activities or that they never did, while the majority indicated that they occasionally integrate post-enrichment or extension activities that connect to the read-aloud text. Observation data indicated that the majority of the teachers did not implement a post-extension activity. In examining the observation notes, I noted that three of the eight teachers included an extension activity that related to the read-aloud text. A first-grade teacher used a picture book as a springboard to model how the exclamation point was used in sentences and conversations. After the book was read, the students were assigned a writing activity where they were to model using the exclamation point in their writing/story. A second-grade teacher read a picture book pertaining to measurement that reinforced vocabulary terms relating to measurement. After the book was read, the teacher introduced the math lesson for the day on measurement. Another second-grade teacher read aloud the next section of a text that went along with the current social studies unit of study. This read-aloud was part of a larger module of read-alouds and contributed to the individual projects the students were assigned, entailing research, character role-play, and presentations.

To gain a better understanding of this survey item, I asked teachers during a focus group to describe any follow-up or extension activities they integrated into their read-aloud practices. From teacher discussions, references were made to arts and crafts (from the lower grades) and follow-up worksheets (from the upper grades). The only response that was common to all grade levels was the occasional integration of a movie based on the read-aloud text. I noted that during the focus group, the upper grade teachers stated that the follow-up worksheets did not work as well with their students as the follow-up

open-ended conversations did regarding the story. I reviewed survey data (Survey Item 16) that addressed strategies teachers implement as a part of their read-aloud practices that allow students to interact with the text. According to the data, post-enrichment or extension activities were not listed among the responses.

Table 24 displays data taken from Item 8 of the observation checklist and corresponds with Survey Item 8, “Do you observe your students engaging in discussions, with you or other students, that connect to the text either during/post reading of a classroom read-aloud?”

**Table 24**

*Student-Initiated Engagement With Text During Classroom Read-Aloud Observation*

Student-initiated engagement with text	Percentage implemented
Yes	75%
No	25%

Table 24 displays the data according to percentages of implementation as determined from the classroom read-aloud observations regarding student-initiated engagement with the text. In reviewing the data from the observations, I determined that students initiated responses to the text during the read-aloud time for 75% of the observations, and there were no student-initiated responses observed for 25% of the observations.

Regarding student-initiated engagement with the read-aloud text, a comparison was made between the observed data and the perceptual data. As indicated on the teacher survey (Survey Item 8), the majority of the teachers stated that they *sometimes* observe their students engaging in text-related discussions. Observation data indicated that student-initiated engagement was observed in 75% of the classroom observations. I

further reviewed the data from the observations and noted that during the read-aloud time, student responses included verbal utterances, such as “oohs” and “aahs,” and even giggles, to express delight and surprise at specific situations that emerged from the story. In addition, comments were made by the students while the teacher was reading and after the read-aloud to clarify thoughts and ideas that formulated along the way. The students would also ask the teacher questions during and after the read-aloud time in order to verify events from the story, understand vocabulary, and make connections.

During the focus group, I asked the teachers to discuss their observations of the students during or after read-aloud times as it related to student-initiated conversations. I noted that the teachers contributed very little discussion to this focus group question. The few responses made by the teachers were related to teacher-directed questions. One teacher did state that her students loved to have conversations about the story as a group. With limited conversation, I was not able to determine a common theme or pattern to this topic of discussion.

### **Summary**

In looking at the perceptions of classroom teachers when describing the read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom, 11 elementary classroom teachers responded to a teacher survey that included 16 items addressing their classroom read-aloud practices. Results from teacher responses to the items on the survey suggest that teachers read every day to their students for approximately 10-20 minutes. Furthermore, the results show that they choose classroom read-aloud books based on current themes, seasons, and relevant holidays, and they incorporate a mix of both fiction and nonfiction books. The findings on the survey imply that students are active listeners



during the classroom read-aloud time and sometimes initiate their own discussions with others regarding the selected read-aloud story. From responses on the survey regarding how teachers define interactive read-alouds, findings show that teachers define interactive read-alouds as opportunities to implement discussions and questions.

Therefore, when describing the strategies implemented during the read-aloud times, teachers indicated that they always include class discussions as the interactive strategy utilized for their classroom read-aloud experiences. Findings from the survey also suggest that sometimes teachers implement an extension activity as a follow-up to the read-aloud text. Teachers expressed on the survey that they enjoy reading to their students and feel very comfortable with implementing read-alouds to their most effective educational value. Even though the survey results suggest that teachers feel their read-alouds are most effective in building literacy skills, the majority of the teachers had no professional development or training in implementing effective interactive read-alouds.

When comparing perceptual data to observed data regarding classroom read-aloud practices, results show that the selection of a fiction book was used more often during the observations; but during a focus group, results of teacher perceptions continued to convey using a mix of both fiction and nonfiction books during classroom read-aloud times.

Results from observed data pertaining to the amount of time devoted to read-alouds were consistent with the perceptual data utilizing 10-20 minutes daily of read-aloud time.

Findings from the classroom read-aloud observations were consistent with teacher responses on the survey concerning students as actively listening while the teacher was reading aloud. However, one outcome from the focus group revealed that teachers feel their attitudes and interest levels were strong indicators of the level of student listening

behaviors. From both the observations and the focus group, the implementation of reading prosody aligned with an actively listening group of students.

When comparing perceptual data to observed data regarding interactive classroom read-aloud practices, results indicate that questions and discussions were implemented in all the observations. This finding was consistent with the perceptual data results collected from both the teacher survey and the focus group. The results from the observations also show that students were actively responsive to the discussions, generating initiative in the level of their conversation. Results from the data gathered on the implementation of post-extension activities suggest that teachers occasionally incorporate an extension activity that aligns with the read-aloud book.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers, as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. The study collected data from a teacher survey, classroom observations, and a focus group in order to compare and analyze perception data to observation data of classroom teachers regarding their read-aloud practices. The data were disaggregated on digital spreadsheets to triangulate both quantitative and qualitative results, highlighting commonalities, emerging themes, and patterns. Teachers read to their students every day for approximately 15 minutes, incorporating discussions before, during, and after their read-aloud time. Implementing comprehension questions and discussions as a part of the classroom read-aloud practices were the strategies conducted by teachers for interactive engagement of students. Although not having any training in the implementation of effective read-aloud practices, teachers indicated that their interactive strategies during the read-aloud time were effective in building literacy skills.

This chapter is organized according to the interpretation and implication of key findings related to the study's research questions.

1. How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom?
2. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms?
3. How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data

regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms?

In addition, the chapter embeds connections of Bandura's (1977) and Dewey's (1938) social learning theories to the study's findings. The limitations related to the study, with recommendations for areas that need further investigation, prompting future research are also included. The chapter concludes with the outlook of a brief summary capitalizing on the potential for future endeavors of the implementation of shared reading experiences.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This study sought to compare the perceptions of teachers regarding their read-aloud practices to observable data to determine commonalities and inconsistencies, citing data-related emerging themes and patterns. The results of this study supported the implementation of classroom read-alouds in that all the participants indicated that they read to their students on a regular basis. The study further supported read-aloud practices that highlighted times for discussion and inquiry to help children make predictions, connect to text, and build comprehension skills.

### ***Research Question 1***

Results of a teacher survey instrument assessed the perceptions of 11 elementary classroom teachers and were analyzed to answer Research Question 1, "How do classroom teachers in a public charter elementary school describe the teacher read-aloud opportunities implemented within their classroom?"

The Commission on Reading reported that when building literacy skills for academic success in reading, the single most important activity teachers can implement is reading aloud to their students (Anderson et al., 1985). While the educational focus intensifies on raising assessment scores, teachers still feel the pressure to maintain a focus

on a balanced reading program (Wadsworth, 2008). Unfortunately, one of the components of a balanced reading program, the time-honored practice of reading aloud to students, is getting lost in our classrooms (Meller et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2008).

Therefore, Survey Items 1 and 2 attempted to determine the time classroom teachers spend implementing classroom read-aloud opportunities. As shown from the survey data, the majority of the teachers completing the survey indicated that they spend between 10-20 minutes reading to their students every day. Some of the teachers even indicated that they read more than 20 minutes to their students. Interestingly, none of the participating teachers stipulated that they *never* read to their students. Indeed, 100% of the teachers responded to Survey Item 10 that they actually enjoyed reading aloud to their students. This data point aligns with Leipzig's (2001) statement that one must appreciate the pleasure of reading and view it as a social act that is shared with others. Reading, then, becomes an active process in which motivation is developed and maintained. Trelease (2013) stated that as pleasure-centered human beings, we will voluntarily do over and over again that which brings us enjoyment.

On the other hand, teachers were given an open-ended item (Survey Item 9) on the survey to discuss any problems or restrictions that limit the classroom read-aloud experiences. The contextual phrase that occurred most often by the teachers was time. However, in light of research that links read-aloud practices to academic success as a means to support children's learning (Mol & Bus 2011), the results are suggestive that teachers will take the opportunity to read aloud to their students as time allows in their daily schedules.

Teachers are highly influential in the selection process of choosing rich, quality

literature that contributes to the success of the read-aloud by appealing to children and providing exposure to a variety of text genres (Lennox, 2013). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are not lacking in the availability of children's literature, with children's book sales averaging 34% of the print market internationally (Gilmore, 2015) and having a continued flourishing market trend in the U.S., reporting millions of children's book sales each year (Jarrard, 2016). The teacher survey sought to determine the criteria teachers use when selecting books for their classroom read-aloud opportunities by including an open-ended response item on the survey (Survey Item 3). From the survey responses, several different contextual phrases reoccurred. Themes, holidays, and seasons were the criteria that occurred most often by teachers when selecting books for their read-aloud time, with units and novel studies being the second most reoccurring criteria utilized by teachers. Additionally, the majority of the teachers indicated that they chose a mix of fiction and nonfiction books for their classroom read-aloud times. Since themes, holidays, and seasons are relevant topics that are found in both fiction and nonfiction children's books, the data are indicative of the availability and relevancy of these topics, making them highly popular for elementary classroom settings. A mix of other book genres, such as poetry, folklore, myths, etc., were not implemented as often during the classroom read-aloud time. According to Crippen (2012), it is important for children to have access to a varied genre of literature, which contributes to their development as responsible, successful, and caring individuals.

In order to ascertain student behaviors as they relate to classroom read-aloud practices, teachers were asked to respond to Survey Items 5 and 8. Results from the survey show that the majority of the teachers indicated that their students were actively

listening during the classroom read-aloud times, but only 18% of the teachers observed their students being interactive with the text. To clarify student behaviors as interactive during the read-aloud time for this survey item, students are more than just actively listening and following along with the story line, answering questions, or discussing story events. This particular survey item addressed student behaviors, which are considered interactive when they join in with the reading of the text at appropriate times, such as repeating a chant or expression, giving the next word or line based on picture clues or rhyming words, or performing an action that allows them to participate and engage. Lane and Wright (2007) referred to this researched method as “print referencing,” where teachers call children’s attention to important aspects, features, and functions of the story, thus increasing the metalinguistic focus of reading aloud. According to Justice and Ezell (2002), print referencing cues can be verbal or nonverbal, explicit or implicit, and are embedded within the read-aloud experience. In addition, results further indicated that the majority of the teachers sometimes observed their students initiating their own discussions with their teacher or classmates, either during or after the read-aloud times.

These findings from the survey align with reading research that supports teachers providing opportunities for children to engage in text through verbal discussion as a means to refine their listening skills and to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to ideas, plots, and themes found in printed texts (Roe & Ross, 2006). Interacting with the text during a classroom read-aloud time allows the students to become a part of the reading experiences that stimulate learning and provide connections (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Furthermore, these findings are grounded in the social learning theory of Dewey (1938) where he described the social learning environment as one that conducts engaging

experiences where students discover and develop as active, independent learners (Wheeler, 2016).

Dorn and Soffos (2005) stated that when teachers incorporate follow-up conversations to the read-aloud experiences, they help students develop a broad range of background knowledge that connects to learned concepts. These connections assist students in clarifying their thinking and contribute to further discussions. Items 6 and 7 on the teacher survey aimed to determine teacher perceptions in integrating class discussions that connect to the text or elicit critical thinking skills, as well as integrating student post-engagements that extend the text. The majority of the teachers indicated on the survey that they *always* incorporate class discussion as a part of their read-aloud practices, with the rest indicating that *occasionally* they have class discussions. In fact, there was no teacher who indicated that they *never* integrated class discussions. When integrating extended student engagements related to the read-aloud text, there was a small percentage of teachers who indicated that they always or never integrated extension activities for read-alouds. Indeed, the majority of teachers (81%) indicated that they *occasionally* implement these types of read-aloud strategies. These results line up with research that supports teachers incorporating activities that engage their students with the read-aloud experiences, where inferencing, drawing conclusions, retellings, dramatizing, and making connections are linked together (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007).

Research supports shared reading practices as an effective means in providing a powerful framework where children can build comprehension skills through developing new knowledge and new vocabulary acquisition (Bus et al., 1995; Kindle, 2009; Robbins & Ehri, 1994). Survey Items 11 and 12 required teachers to rate themselves according to



their comfort level in implementing read-aloud opportunities to their most educational value and to rate the overall effectiveness of their read-aloud practices in regard to building comprehension and vocabulary skills. Results from the survey indicated that all the teachers felt very comfortable implementing read-aloud times in their instructional day, rating themselves between a Level 4 and 5, with the majority rating at a Level 5 for most comfortable. These findings connect to the ones from Survey Item 10, where all the teachers stated that they enjoyed reading aloud to their students.

In addition, almost 82% of the teachers rated the *effectiveness* of their read-aloud practices between a Level 4 and 5, with the majority rating at a Level 4 for most effective. Considering teacher ratings on the effectiveness of their read-alouds, Survey Item 13 provided an open-ended response that allowed teachers to elaborate on reading aloud to their students as a valuable teaching tool. Ironically, the contextual phrases that occurred the most from teachers when describing why read-aloud practices were a valuable teaching or learning opportunity was because of enjoyment, fun, and imagination. The next most common reoccurring phrases pertained to modeling prosody and vocabulary development. Interestingly, though, phrases that pertained to critical thinking, engagement/connections, and comprehension occurred less often. In the course of interpreting the data, these findings reflect inconsistencies in teacher perceptions based on their ratings of their read-aloud practices as effective tools for building literacy skills. For this particular group of participants, enjoyment and fun were perceived more often as reasons why read-alouds are a valuable teaching tool, while critical thinking, connections, and comprehension skills were perceived less. Research maintains that implementing a systematic approach to reading aloud to children and using research-designed methods to

maximize the effectiveness of shared reading experiences will yield powerful academic benefits (Lane & Wright, 2007). According to the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (2017), teachers recognized the impact of reading aloud to their students on advanced reading comprehension skills that related to developing connections and supporting critical thinking skills.

Additionally, research further suggests that the most effective read-alouds are those in which children are actively involved with the experience (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007); therefore, this study ventured to determine teacher perceptions regarding interactive read-alouds. Interactive read-alouds are an engaging form of reading where an adult stimulates a child's thinking about what is read through discussions, asking questions, making predictions, and supporting critical connections, as well as engaging students in additional opportunities that enhance a more meaningful experience. Survey Item 14 was an open-ended item that aimed to determine how teachers define interactive read-aloud experiences. Teachers listed characteristics they felt described interactive read-alouds. The contextual phrases that occurred most often from the teachers were discussion and questions. Oddly, the next reoccurring contextual phrase from the survey item was actively engaged/responsive, having only two responses. Finally, there was only one response for making predictions, vocabulary instruction, and post-extension activities. Teacher responses regarding interactive read-alouds being characterized by discussion and questions align with the findings of Survey Item 6 where the majority of teachers indicated that class discussions were always a part of their classroom read-aloud practices.

The survey further explored teacher perceptions of interactive read-alouds in

Survey Item 16, where teachers were asked to describe any strategies or practices they implement during their classroom read-aloud times that allowed students to interact with the text. Implementing activities or an interactive engagement of a book during read-aloud practices are excellent strategies for enhancing language and vocabulary development (Snow, 1991). Likewise, the most occurring contextual phrases were discussion and questions, with the next reoccurring phrase being making connections. Once more, predictions, vocabulary, comprehension, and actively engaged/responsive were less often occurring phrases, with only having one or two responses. These results line up with the data regarding teacher descriptions in defining interactive read-alouds. Based on the findings from these survey items, class discussions are the most popular form of interactive read-alouds. In addition, these results support interactive read-aloud methods described by researchers as an engaging form of reading where a child stimulates their thinking about what is read through analytical talk (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007).

The findings of these survey items regarding interactive read-alouds manifest consistencies among teacher perceptions by indicating a disregard for actively engaged/responsive strategies as a characteristic of interactive read-alouds, even though 82% of the teachers still indicated they occasionally integrated extension activities. Teacher responses from the survey clearly show that they do not see extension activities and engaging responsive behaviors as viable, effective strategies for interactive read-aloud practices. In addition, critical thinking/reflections, making connections, and comprehension strategies were disregarded as valuable teaching tools, as indicated by a low number of contextual teacher responses, even though discussion and questions were

highly integrated and perceived as effective interactive strategies. The purpose of implementing class discussions and questions is to build comprehension skills and should include critical thinking, making connections, prediction, and building vocabulary.

One final item from the survey (Survey Item 15) sought to determine if the teachers had any professional development or training in incorporating interactive classroom read-alouds. The findings revealed that the majority of the teachers (81.8%) indicated that they had not had any professional development or training relating to interactive read-alouds. In light of this finding as it relates to the results of the survey items pertaining to interactive classroom read-aloud practices, the lack of training could directly align with the scope of teacher perceptions regarding effective strategies for incorporating interactive read-aloud experiences with their students.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory is a guiding framework that grounds this study by exploring how read-aloud practices between teachers and students involve observations and role modeling methods for acquiring information and learned behaviors. In the same way, Bandura's social learning theory can be expanded to include the professional training of teachers on integrating interactive read-alouds within the classroom setting as a means of acquiring new concepts, information, and behaviors. Bandura concluded that "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are preformed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22).

### ***Research Question 2***

Results of an observation checklist assessed classroom read-aloud observation data gathered from eight participating classroom teachers and were compared to

perceptual data and analyzed to answer Research Question 2, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding read-aloud practices in their classrooms?”

The U.K. Department for Education and Skills (2007) stated that children should be provided with lots of opportunities to engage in books that spark their imagination and interest. Therefore, Items 1 and 2 from the observation checklist aligned with Survey Items 3 and 4 to gather observation data on the selection of book genres and types teachers used during the classroom observations. Of the teachers who participated in the classroom observations, the majority (75%) selected a fiction book, with the remainder of the teachers selecting a nonfiction book or a different genre (specifically folklore and myth). In addition, the majority of teachers (62%) chose a picture book over a novel. Since most of the teachers who participated in the observations taught between kindergarten and third grade, the data would be consistent for young elementary-aged children. However, one kindergarten teacher read from a chapter book to her students. The participating third-grade teachers read from an ongoing novel. NAEYC (1998) made a joint statement with the IRA, concluding, “Children need to be exposed to vocabulary from a wide variety of genres, including informational texts as well as narratives” (p. 5). When comparing these data with the survey data, teachers felt that they chose fiction and nonfiction books an equal amount of the time. Since the observations occurred only once per teacher, these data points were inconclusive to support how often fiction and nonfiction books were selected.

On the other hand, when comparing the criteria teachers use to select their read-aloud books, the survey data indicated that themes, holidays, and seasons emerged as a

favorite reoccurring phrases, with novels being the next frequently occurring phrase, and the third frequently occurring phrase being curriculum content. The data were consistent with the observation data, whereas three of the eight teachers chose a holiday book, three read ongoing novels, and two of the teachers read a book that went along with their curriculum content study. To gain further analysis on this information, data were collected from a focus group asking participants to describe the types of books and genres they chose for reading aloud to their students. The focus group findings were consistent with the survey findings with themes, holidays, and seasonal content being the common pattern that emerged, as well as a mix between fiction and nonfiction genres. Further analysis revealed that teachers of early elementary students (kindergarten) would sometimes choose authors that were a favorite among their students. This analysis supports the data collected from the open-ended Survey Item 3, where two teachers responded that author studies were sometimes used as criteria for selecting books for read-aloud times. Finally, third-grade teachers indicated during the focus group that novels were selected more often than picture books to help develop vocabulary and comprehension skills. This finding was consistent with the classroom observation where each of the third-grade teachers were observed reading an ongoing novel to their students during the read-aloud time.

When teachers implement read-aloud experiences for their students, they provide an opportunity to support learning by stimulating positive attitudes toward reading, provide models for fluent reading, and scaffold a child's transition to independent reading (Morrow et al., 1990; Wadsworth, 2008). To determine how much time the teachers implement classroom read-aloud opportunities into their schedule, Item 3 on the

observation checklist aligned with Survey Item 2. Findings from the classroom observations revealed that 75% of the teachers read to their students between 10-20 minutes, and 25% of them read for more than 30 minutes. The teachers who read longer than 30 minutes were the third-grade teachers. The observed read-aloud time frame was specifically allotted in their daily schedule as an extra time designated for reading, whether for read-aloud, small group, or remediation. The third-grade teachers chose to utilize the time for their novel studies at that particular time of the school year, thus providing them with a longer time frame for reading to their students. In addition, each student had a copy of the specific novel to follow along in while the teacher read. This provided a means to sustain student attention for the duration of the read-aloud time.

According to Cunningham (2005), teachers acting on the opportunity to read aloud to their students has been one of the major motivators for getting children to read. In comparing the observed time frame of the classroom read-alouds to the teacher survey data, the findings were consistent in regard to the majority of time allotted to read-alouds being 10-20 minutes per day. Furthermore, a small percentage of the teachers (18%) indicated on the survey that they read to their students for more than 30 minutes, which would support the allotted time frame implemented by the third-grade teachers for their novel read-aloud time. This information was further investigated during a focus group where the teachers discussed how much time they spent on classroom read-aloud opportunities per week/day. The results from the teacher survey were consistent with the findings of the focus group, whereas the majority of the teachers indicated that they read to their students 10-15 minutes every day. However, findings from the focus group revealed that the third-grade teachers incorporated their read-aloud practices 2-3 times

per week for their novel reading, thus supporting the survey data that a small percentage of teachers (18%) read to their students three days per week or less. Even though the third-grade teachers had an extra time slot designated for reading, they disclosed that they could not implement it every day due to the third-grade requirements for incorporating reading passages that meet Read to Achieve state mandates. These state requirements were also implemented during this “extra” time frame.

In recognizing the significance of student behaviors during the classroom read-aloud time, Item 4 on the observation checklist aligned with Survey Item 5 to observe overall student behaviors while the teacher was reading aloud. Results from the observation checklist revealed that in 100% of the classroom observations, students were actively listening to the story. The observations did not show any inattentive or uninterested behaviors exhibited by the students. These findings support teacher responses on the survey where almost 73% of the teachers felt that their students were active listeners and none of their students were inattentive. According to the teacher survey, only a small percentage of teachers (9%) felt that their students seemed uninterested during the read-aloud. The classroom observations, however, did not support these data, whereas this behavior was not exhibited by the students in any of the classrooms observed.

Teacher perceptions of their students’ behavior during the classroom read-aloud times were further investigated during the focus group. The overall common teacher response that emerged during the focus group was that their students listened very well and were attentively engaged with the story. This finding is consistent with both the data from the teacher survey and the classroom observations. Specifically, during the focus



group, the third-grade teachers shared that their students enjoyed the novels they read aloud to them more when they were able to follow along in their own copy of the book. Therefore, many times, these teachers chose books from a shared third-grade “library” of book sets that contains class-size quantities, thus allowing for sustained attention throughout the read-aloud time. This finding aligns with the data collected on the observation checklist for Item 4, where it was noted that 25% of the classroom observations revealed “other” behaviors from the students during the read-aloud time. When analyzing data collected from this study regarding student behaviors during classroom read-alouds, the results support research that states when teachers implement shared reading time with their students, they promote a love of reading with lasting benefits (Varlas, 2018).

From the focus group, teacher discussions on student behaviors during read-aloud time led to another emerging theme from the participants that related to the *teacher’s* overall attitude, behavior, and interest in the book selected. The teachers indicated that the level of student engagement and interest during the read-aloud time largely depended on the effort the teacher put into the read-aloud to make it interesting and enjoyable for the students. This finding brings foundational emphasis to Survey Item 10, which undertook to find out if teachers enjoyed reading aloud to their students, and aligns with research stating that children benefit from learning opportunities that foster a shared reading time, allowing for engagement of reciprocal interaction and responsive language (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). In regard to teacher responses on the survey, the data revealed that 100% of the teachers indicated that they enjoyed reading aloud to their students.

When teachers find ways to show students how much they enjoy reading, doors open for students to see how enjoyable reading can be for them as well. One way teachers show their love of reading to students is through their behavior and the effort they put into the read-aloud experience. This can be manifested through prosodic cues integrated by teachers during the read-aloud times. According to Wadsworth (2008), when a teacher reads to a child, they present themselves as a role model for etiquette reading habits that model prosodic cues in intonation and expressive language formats. For that reason, Item 6 on the observation checklist sought to determine the prosodic cues implemented by teachers while they were reading aloud to their students. The findings from the classroom observations revealed that 100% of the teachers implemented inflections in their voice while reading to their students, as well as dramatic pauses. Furthermore, the results showed that 62.5% of the teachers exhibited periodic changes in the pitch of their voice to represent different characters within the story, and 13% maintained a mesmerizing intensity to their voice that captivated their students' attention. When comparing the data between the enjoyment teachers feel regarding reading aloud to their students to the effort teachers utilize in implementing prosodic cues during the read-aloud time, the results indicate an existing correlation.

To gain insight into teacher sentiments regarding reading to their students, an attempt was made to determine teacher backgrounds with personal read-aloud experiences to see if a pattern emerged. This finding was investigated during the focus group when teachers were asked to discuss their own personal shared reading experiences as a child either in school or at home. The most meaningful impact the teachers shared from their experiences was hearing their teacher or parent use sound effects and funny

voices while reading to them. One teacher stated that when her teacher read to her, she knew it was going to be a good book just because of the way her teacher would read. Several teachers stated that they remember their mother reading novels and fairy tales to them. They talked of how much they loved hearing the stories because of the dramatics and tone that their mothers used. Another teacher said she looks forward to reading to her own children every night, allowing each child to choose their own book and how much they love it.

Interestingly, these findings support teacher responses to Survey Item 13 pertaining to teacher descriptions of why reading aloud to their students is a valuable teaching tool. The findings reveal that the second most reoccurring contextual phrase by the teachers when describing read-alouds as a valuable teaching tool was modeling prosody; and the most reoccurring phrase was promoting enjoyment, fun, and imagination. Using prosodic cues when reading aloud to students is grounded by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory that suggests people learn new concepts and behaviors through the observation of other people's actions. In fact, Bandura believed that people are active information processors and that by observing and then imitating the behavior of others, one could emulate new knowledge. Reading aloud to children provides an opportunity for them to hear language spoken in organized and complex structures, correctly and expressively, and then apply this knowledge in their own learning contexts (Koralek, 2003; Trelease, 2013; Wadsworth, 2008). When teachers implement shared reading time with their students, they model effective reading practices (Varlas, 2018). These findings regarding teacher read-aloud practices and behaviors align with research studies that support read-aloud opportunities as a path to instill prosodic

sensitivity and auditory discipline for the development of expressive and receptive language skills (Lawson, 2012; Senechal, 1997).

### ***Research Question 3***

Results of an observation checklist assessed classroom read-aloud observation data gathered from eight participating classroom teachers and were compared to perceptual data and analyzed to answer Research Question 3, “How do the perceptions of these teachers compare to observable data regarding *interactive* read-aloud practices in their classrooms?”

According to NAEYC (1998), it is crucial that children be interactively engaged in the literacy experiences that make academic content more meaningful; and effective teachers capitalize on every opportunity to enhance children’s language and literacy development, inclusive of read-aloud experiences. Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 on the observation checklist endeavored to determine the level of interactive practices surrounding classroom read-alouds. As a part of the data collected from Item 4 on the checklist regarding student behaviors during the read-aloud times, the study reported that students were interactively engaged with responsive behaviors in *all* of the classroom observations. This finding is inconsistent with teacher responses on Survey Item 5, where only 18% of the teachers indicated that their students were interactive during the read-aloud time.

A further investigation on the interactive read-aloud practices within the classroom includes Item 5 on the observation checklist that aligns with Survey Item 6 to determine the implementation of class discussions surrounding the read-aloud time. The data collected from the observations revealed that teachers initiated class discussions both

before and during the read-aloud in 100% of the classrooms, and discussions were implemented after the read-aloud as well in 75% of the classrooms. These data are consistent with teacher responses on the survey where the majority of the teachers indicated that they always incorporate class discussions during their read-aloud time, and the rest of the teachers indicated that they occasionally incorporate class discussions.

In addition, Survey Item 6 was examined during the focus group asking teachers to describe their class discussion practices during the read-aloud time. The report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985), declared that the benefits of reading aloud to children is greatest when children become active participants – engaging in discussions about stories, reflecting on story ideas, and making connections to characters and content. This report is supported by research from the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (2017), where teachers saw the impact of their students being actively involved in classroom read-alouds on advanced reading comprehension skills. Teacher descriptions of class discussions focused on types of questions they asked their students and related to predictions, summaries, main idea, problems and solutions, vocabulary, characters, settings, and plot. Based on these descriptions, the common theme that emerged for the read-aloud class discussions was that teachers asked comprehension questions and students responded. However, one of the participants stated that her students loved the open-ended conversations they had about the story more than the teacher directed question-answer responses. The data were compared to the notes taken from the classroom observations revealing the types of questions asked for discussion during the observed read-aloud time: vocabulary, summarizing, predictions, connections,

sequencing of events; as well as attention to punctuation, author/illustrator, and fiction versus nonfiction characteristics. Both reports of the observations and focus group data were consistent with a teacher-directed comprehension question-answer forum.

The teachers were probed further in the focus group in order to obtain insight on teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of the discussions during the classroom read-aloud times. According to teacher responses on the survey, they felt very comfortable in implementing read-alouds to their most educational value and felt that their read-alouds were most effective. When asked to discuss how reading aloud to their students can be used as an effective strategy in building literacy skills, a common pattern emerged from teacher responses that related to vocabulary building, students making connections to the text, and developing critical thinking skills. One teacher stated that the best thing to do was to get students thinking. To clarify these findings, a comparison was made between the focus group responses to the data collected from Survey Item 13. Even though vocabulary was the second highest occurring contextual phrase from the survey, the results revealed inconsistencies in regard to making connections and developing critical thinking skills, as only having two reoccurrences from teacher survey responses.

Therefore, regarding the implementation of class discussions for read-aloud times, the findings reveal that teachers use a question-answer forum as their means of class discussions, utilizing mostly comprehension type questions, which does not allow for open conversation to elaborate or critical thinking of text content. These findings are inconsistent with research that tells us how a teacher must have the ability to draw children into a sustained discussion that can stretch and challenge their linguistic and conceptual abilities, explicitly reflecting on vocabulary that fosters conceptual growth.

The extra-textual talk around books is a pivotal element in optimum language development (Lennox, 2013; Meller et al., 2009).

Read-aloud experiences draw children from all age groups into a community of learners who are unified through texts (Varlas, 2018). The unified community becomes anchored in the read-aloud experience when students engage in discussions with other students. This study sought to determine student-initiated engagement with the read-aloud text through discussions and conversations. Item 8 from the observation checklist aligned with Survey Item 8 asking teachers if they observe their students engaging in discussions that connect to the read-aloud text either during or after the read-aloud time. The data collected from the classroom observations revealed that students initiated responses to the text in 75% of the observed classrooms. When comparing these data to teacher responses on the survey, the majority of the teachers indicated that sometimes their students engage in text-related discussions. To clarify the types of student responses from the observations, the data were reviewed from the checklist and noted that during the read-aloud time, responses given by the students included verbal utterances, such as “oohs” and “aahs,” and even giggles at situational surprises. In addition, comments were sometimes inserted by the students while the teacher was reading and after the read-aloud to clarify thoughts and ideas that formulated along the way. The students would also ask the teacher questions during or after the read-aloud time in order to verify events from the story, understand vocabulary, and make connections. However, data from the observations revealed that students did not initiate conversations related to the text with other students, only with the teacher, from all of the classrooms observed.

Although the students engaged with the text through verbal interactions with the

teacher, interactions with classmates were nonexistent. Growing research suggests that in order to gain the most effective benefits from read-aloud opportunities, children need to be actively involved with the experience (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Brannon & Dauksas, 2012; Duursma et al., 2008; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Varlas, 2018). This would include an interactive involvement with other students as a part of the read-aloud experience. To that end, the study sought to gain a better understanding of the role students play in the read-aloud experience. Therefore, during the focus group, teachers were asked to discuss their observations of their students during or after read-aloud times as it relates to student-initiated text-related conversations. Consequently, it was noted that the teachers contributed very little discussion to this focus group question. The few teacher responses that were given focused on teacher-directed questions. However, one teacher stated that her students loved to engage in open-ended conversations about the story as a group, but no other information was given. With limited conversation, the findings were inconclusive from the focus group in determining the level of student-initiated engagement with the read-aloud text.

Another aspect that characterizes interactive read-aloud experiences is the engagement of students in additional experiences that enhance their appreciation and/or interpretation of the text. These extended activities may include student writings, role-play, dramatization, art, and inquiry-based projects. Therefore, this study attempted to determine if teachers integrate additional experiences through post-extension activities that complement the read-aloud experience. Item 7 of the observation checklist focused on engaging students in post-extension activities that enhance the read-aloud experience and aligned with Survey Item 7. Data collected from the observations showed that the



majority of the teachers (62.5%) did not implement an enrichment activity as a follow-up of the read-aloud times.

In examining my comments from the observation checklist, it was noted that three of the eight teachers (37.5%) included an extension activity that related to the read-aloud text. A first-grade teacher read from a picture book for her read-aloud observation and used it as a springboard to model how the exclamation point was used in sentences and conversations, role modeling the emotion behind how it is read in text. Following the read-aloud, the students were assigned a writing activity where they would model the appropriate use of the exclamation point in writing. A second-grade teacher also read a picture book pertaining to measurement that reinforced vocabulary terms relating to measurement. Following the read-aloud, students worked on measurement-related activities as a part of their math assignment for the day. The third teacher was also a second-grade teacher who read aloud the next section of an ongoing text that went along with the current social studies curricular unit. This particular read-aloud was part of a larger module of read-alouds that contributed to students' assigned inquiry-based projects. These three extension activities implemented as a follow-up of the read-aloud experiences align with research that supports interactive shared reading opportunities as a means to improve outcomes in a meaningful and intentional way (Lennox, 2013).

When the observation data were compared to the survey data regarding the implementation of a post-enrichment/extension activity that related to the read-aloud text, almost 82% of the teachers responded that they occasionally integrate post-extension activities. To dig deeper into this finding, during the focus group, the teachers were asked to describe any follow-up or extension activities they integrated into their read-aloud

practices. In reviewing teacher discussions, early elementary grade teachers made references to implementing arts and crafts projects, while the older elementary teachers cited worksheets as a means to follow up with the read-aloud story; however, the older elementary teachers disclosed that the follow-up worksheets were not as popular as open-ended conversations were with the students. The only response that was common to all participants was the occasional integration of a movie based on the read-aloud text.

In order to have a collective overview of the findings between teacher perceptions and classroom observations that relate to interactive read-aloud practices, data collected from the survey, observations, and focus group were compared and summarized. A summary of the findings between teacher perceptions and classroom observations that relate to interactive read-aloud practices revealed that the majority of the teachers define interactive read-aloud experiences as a time for discussions and questions. Not surprisingly, the majority of the teachers also described the effective strategies that they implemented for interactive read-aloud experiences were discussions and questions. This finding aligned with the data collected from the classroom observations. Each teacher asked questions to the class as it related to the story for the students to answer and discuss. The questions were mostly teacher-directed and allowed for prompt responses from the students, while the discussions were teacher-initiated, conducted between teacher and students, with little to no interaction between students. Although discussions and questions were the popular means for incorporating interactive read-alouds, teachers did not see students being actively engaged/responsive, along with post-extension activities, as a viable means of implementing interactive read-alouds. Findings from the classroom observations were inconsistent with the data collected on teacher perceptions

regarding students being actively engaged. In 100% of the classroom observations, students were interactively responsive during the read-aloud time. However, only a couple of teachers actually listed students being actively engaged/responsive as a characteristic that defined interactive read-alouds on the teacher survey; and only one listed it as a strategy they implement for effective read-alouds. Incorporating post-reading extension activities was not even included in teacher responses as an effective strategy for implementing interactive read-aloud experiences, even though three of the eight classroom observations noted the integration of extended read-aloud activities.

When implementing interactive read-aloud experiences, teachers provide opportunities for students to expand their background knowledge, experience a rich variety of literature, use academic language to talk about an engaging text, and learn ways to think deeply and critically (Meller et al., 2009). Interactive read-alouds provide a means for students to think about, talk about, and respond to text. It creates a foundation for all classroom instruction (Hindman et al., 2016; Mol & Bus, 2011; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Trelease, 2013).

### **Implications**

This study sought to describe the read-aloud practices of elementary classroom teachers by comparing perceptual data to observable data and to establish how teachers perceive the importance and fidelity of implementing shared reading experiences with their students. Findings of this study supported the implementation of read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting, in that the participating teachers implemented read-alouds in their classrooms for at least 20 minutes per day and at least three days per week. Indeed, 63.6% of the participants read every day to their students. When read-

aloud opportunities are utilized properly within the classroom setting, they can provide the necessary skills needed to improve reading outcomes, build vocabulary, and develop comprehension abilities (Adams, 1990; McKeown & Beck, 2004). This idea aligns with the data collected from the study's classroom observations, revealing that in 100% of the classrooms, students were actively listening and were engaged in teacher-directed class discussions. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), shared reading opportunities teachers integrate encompass practices that are intended to enhance language and literacy skills. These skills in a child's reading development are key milestones that can further lead to competent development in other areas (Snow et al., 1998).

Knowing that developing language and literacy skills are pivotal factors in reading and academic success, it is crucial that teachers implement high-quality, research-based literacy instruction that supports building linguistic processing skills to vocabulary development and reading comprehension (Lennox, 2013). With the reality of achievement gaps existing among school-age children as a problematic imbalance, teachers are faced with the overwhelming responsibility of providing effective instructional support that will close the existing gaps to ensure academic success for all (Lennox, 2013). Indeed, the current educational law of our nation, ESSA (2015), mandates the implementation of evidence-based reading strategies that prove to be effective in increasing student outcome. Therefore, research supports read-aloud interactions as an intervention technique that aids in developing needed language skills and closes achievement gaps among those children who lag behind their peers (Dale & Crain-Thoreson, 1996; Hickman et al., 2004).

The 1985 national report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985), launched a trail that has led to a 30+ year campaign on reading research that focused on reading development in children. Because of widespread national attention, government agencies and national organizations have inundated the educational field over the past several decades with a plethora of research on how children read, what areas are the most critical, and what strategies/interventions are most effective in developing literacy skills. National organizations such as NAEYC (1998), National Early Literacy Panel (2008), Council of Chief State School Officers (2009), The Children's Reading Foundation (2015), and ILA (2019) support teachers implementing shared reading experiences in their classrooms in an effort to build literacy skills, close educational gaps, and maintain reading success for all students.

Since reading aloud to students is a socially interactive activity, a social learning theory provides the theoretical framework that supports this study on classroom read-aloud practices. The principles of two social learning theorists, Albert Bandura and John Dewey, ground the research that surrounds this study. Bandura (1977) proposed a social learning theory that suggests people learn new concepts, information, and behaviors through observations of other people's actions. Bandura stressed the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors of others, concluding that people learn new behaviors from observing others and then are able to model it on future occasions as needed. The interaction between teachers and students during classroom read-aloud practices involve observation and role modeling methods. When teachers read aloud to their students, they are role modeling etiquette reading habits that involve prosodic cues for expressive language (Wadsworth, 2008). Then, as children hear language spoken

correctly and expressively, they are able to apply this knowledge in their own learning contexts (Koralek, 2003; Wadsworth, 2008). In this study, data were collected on the prosodic cues teachers implemented while reading to their students during the classroom observations. In 100% of the observed classrooms, students were actively listening while their teacher read to them, using expressive language through inflections in their voice, dramatic pauses, and different tones for the characters and events in the story. Therefore, Bandura's social learning theory grounds these findings as methods utilized to teach children desirable behaviors that facilitate change in order to shape the things they know and the things they do.

This study emphasized the importance of engaging students in an interactive form of read-aloud practices that stimulate cognitive processes through discussions, inquiry, and post-extension activities that help to form connections and meaningful experiences. Therefore, this study delved into the principles of Dewey's (1938) social learning theory as it relates to interactive learning. Dewey (1938) described a social learning environment as one that conducts engaging experiences that are developmentally appropriate for children. In fact, for education to be effective, Dewey envisioned schools as a social setting that allowed students the opportunity to individually discover and develop as active, independent learners, enabling them to link current content to previous experiences and knowledge (Flinders & Thornton, 2013; Wheeler, 2016). When students become active participants in the read-aloud experience, a more meaningful experience will flourish. Indeed, research tells us that the most effective read-aloud experiences are those in which children are actively involved (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). In this study, data were collected on the interactive practices implemented during the read-aloud

time. In 100% of the observed classrooms, students were interactively responsive during the read-aloud time to the discussion and questions initiated by the teacher. Findings from the teacher survey regarding the implementation of interactive read-alouds revealed that all the participants implemented class discussions and inquiry. In addition, teacher responses indicated that discussions and questions were effective strategies they utilized during their read-aloud times. These results from the study are grounded by Dewey's social learning theory concerning interactive learning as methods that allow children to be actively involved in their own learning and not just passive recipients (Williams, 2017).

According to Snow (1991), engaging, interactive activities can enhance a child's overall language development and reading skills. This research aligns with Dewey's social learning theory by stressing that students be allowed to interact with the curriculum and take part in their own learning to advance their understanding far more effectively (Cole, 2016). The study presented findings that teachers will occasionally integrate an extension activity that provides an additional experience for students to connect to the read-aloud text. This finding correlated with the data collected from the classroom observations, where only three of the eight participants integrated a post-extension activity.

The cultural phenomena of today revolves around the development of reading, thinking, and comprehension. Reading is more than just a curricular skill implemented in an educational setting; it is a vital life skill that is essential for the growing and functioning of any society (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003). Indeed, it is the gateway to social, economic, and civic life, as well as to personal development.

According to Holden (2004), young people today need to be equipped with high levels of cognitive reading abilities in order to get the most out of their cultural and social lives, thus enabling them to meet the challenges incurred by the 21<sup>st</sup> century competitive job market, yet NCES (2019) and COABE (2020) reported that there were 43 million American adults who still lack basic literacy skills. These achievement disparities fester in our nation today. They are characterized by families who are defined as at risk and are challenged by life's situations that threaten the cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic development of their children. These achievement gaps link to other life's challenges, as well, such as dropping out of school, unemployment, and teen pregnancy (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). The causality of a domestic achievement gap directly aligns with an international gap that will have the potential of a negative impact leading to the decline of economic vitality in our nation. According to research by Hanushek and Woessmann (2015), evidence supports that the quality of a nation's educational system is a key determinant for future growth in that nation's economy.

Unfortunately, achievement gaps are well established before children enter formal school and are likely to continue to exist throughout the educational years of a child unless intensive, high-quality instruction is implemented (Lennox, 2013). In 2015, The Children's Reading Foundation reported that 40% of children start kindergarten 1-3 years behind. Sadly, these children rarely catch up, with discrepancies trailing with them throughout school and life (Reach Out & Read, 2014). Without an intensive amount of interventions, approximately 75% of children who enter kindergarten below national standards will never catch up to their peers (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2015). Consequently, in 2017, the National Assessment for Educational Progress reported in The



Nation's Report Card that only 37% of our nation's fourth graders performed at or above reading proficiency, leaving a trail of 63% who scored below reading proficiency (NCES, 2017).

The responsibility of closing these gaps fall to the schools, more specifically to the teachers. One way to eradicate these disparities is to tackle the root of achievement gaps which lies at the heart of education – reading. Trelease (2013) stated, “The knowledge of almost every subject in school flows from reading” (p. xxv). The Children's Rights to Read campaign had a driving force that focused on ensuring that every child had access to educational opportunities that were essential to reading. The campaign listed 10 rights that all children deserve and must be protected in order to reach their full personal and educational potential, inclusive of the right to supportive reading environments (ILA, 2019). When teachers place an emphasis on read-aloud opportunities for their students, they provide experiences that support reading growth by increasing cognitive comprehension abilities through abstract thinking methods. The findings of this study revealed that all the teacher participants specified that they read to their students on a regular basis, implementing discussion and inquiry to help children develop comprehension skills.

Historically speaking, stories have been an integral part of all cultures for thousands of years for an audience of all ages. The role and purpose of stories for all civilizations and cultures were to present an entertaining format in order to educate their people on societal morals, social norms, and cultural behaviors and bringing awareness to significant historical events. Stories continue to be an integral part of our world today in entertaining and educating. The findings from this study support the reading of stories to

children as a means of education in developing literacy, language, and comprehension skills, as well as for entertainment and fun, building creative imaginations.

However, the study revealed some inconsistencies in how teachers perceive interactive read-aloud experiences. Research supports children being actively involved with read-alouds as the most effective way to produce significantly higher outcomes (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). This aligns with Dewey's social learning theory that education is most effective when children are given learning opportunities that enable them to be interactive learners (Wheeler, 2016). Therefore, the study's findings could lead to improvements regarding the classroom read-alouds in order to achieve the most effective experiences for students. The majority of the teachers indicated that they had not participated in any professional development or training in how to incorporate effective interactive read-alouds. These findings suggest that teachers may benefit from participating in professional development training to improve their read-aloud practices on implementing effective strategies as well as developing a better understanding of the importance interactive read-alouds have on reading success.

The implications from this study benefit not only classroom teachers and their students, but the families of children as well. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) identified parenting activities as a pathway to cultivating children's early literacy skills. Many times, the first social interaction a child has with a book begins during early childhood when a parent reads aloud to them (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Koralek, 2003). When parents establish and support a shared book reading routine at home with their child, they help to develop language and build literacy skills that are critical to supporting their child's reading abilities (Reach Out & Read, 2014). However, statistics

report that less than half (48%) of parents in the nation actually engage in daily shared reading time with their young children, leaving a trail of 52% who do not (Russ et al., 2007). Many organizations like the National Education Association and Read to Them promote family engagement of reading through programs like Read Across America and One School, One Book. Therefore, findings from this study can lead to schools providing support and partnerships to families in implementing read-alouds in the home environment.

### **Recommendations**

The findings from this study appeal to audiences that include educational stakeholders invested in the education of children, inclusive of teachers, students, parents, administration, and policy makers, who want to utilize read-alouds to be most effective as a means for implementing quality instruction to improve reading outcomes for children. This study was grounded on an extensive amount of research and the social learning theories of Bandura (1977) and Dewey (1938). The methodology was structured to compare the perceptions of teachers to observed data to determine how read-aloud opportunities were incorporated in the classroom setting and how effectively this practice was utilized.

Findings that emerged from this study revealed that the majority of the teachers had not participated in any form of training in using interactive read-alouds in their classrooms. I imposed a delimitation within the study in choosing not to pursue implementing a professional development component to the study regarding the study's subject matter. Reflecting on the results of the study, a limitation unfolded that may have influenced the study's results as well: Four of the 11 participants were initially certified

teachers (beginning teachers), having three years of experience or less. In light of this finding and these incumbent limits to the study, conducting a professional development or training structured around implementing effective interactive strategies as a part of the classroom read-aloud practices may offer additional data that strengthen the current collected data.

In addition, this study only implemented one observation, therefore limiting the data on specific comparisons. For example, to determine how perceptual data compare to observed data regarding the incorporation of a variety of genres weighed heavily on perceptual data gathered from the survey and the focus group with little information from the observation, thus making the comparison inconclusive. The implementation of more than one observation for each participant over a designated period of time would add more validity to the study, thus building on its findings.

Considering the significance of the survey as a main source of data for this study, there is a level of susceptibility to error that is sometimes associated with survey data (Butin, 2010). A participant's responses are sometimes affected by the wording of a question, the specific order of the response choices, or the inability to understand the content of a question. For future action, presenting a pre and postsurvey to be used for comparison could reduce the level of susceptibility to error. Conclusively, a methodology that includes implementing a professional development training on effective read-aloud strategies into the current study, coupled with a multiple number of observations, and incorporating a pre and postsurvey for the beginning and end of the study, could widen the scope for more credible comparison data between pre-training and post-training outcomes.

A possible area for future investigations that would help to couple with this study's findings would be a study using a larger and more diverse population. The results from this study were limited to the perceptions of 11 classroom teachers, with only eight participating in the observations and focus group. In addition, all the participants were females teaching in classrooms ranging from kindergarten to third grade, which questions the equitability of establishing perceptions to encompass a broader demographic of participants. Findings from this study could initiate a deeper study that includes the perceptions of male teachers as well as upper elementary grades and even middle grades to establish differences in the read-aloud data as students get older. Since the study's geographical area was exclusive to only one public charter school, it may be relevant to further research a broader demographic of participants that could also extend to include other school settings. The context of the study could involve a more in-depth investigation that would include comparisons between traditional public schools and public charter schools.

One avenue for further study that is recommended would be to research the specific types of read-aloud questions classroom teachers integrate as part of their read-aloud practices as well as the depth of the class discussions regarding the text. Research supports the integration of questions that surround the read-aloud as a strategy that promotes higher level thinking skills. It is through the discussions that children develop critical thinking skills, make connections, understand story structure, and evaluate plot-related situations. Class discussions should be designed to stimulate thinking through analytical talk (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007) that increases the complexity of the conversation. Teachers who engage students in a sustained discussion can stretch and

challenge their comprehension abilities, encouraging open-ended questions that ask students to think about the ideas, talk about them, and connect to them. Questions and discussions implemented from read-aloud opportunities provide a safe, risk-free sharing of information that allows children to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. When gathering data for this study, the quality and depth of the read-aloud discussion and questions were not factors that were analyzed. If studied, the results could have indicated the impact of implementing higher level questions and discussion to interactive read-aloud experiences.

A final recommendation for further inquiry would require a study on the impact of classroom read-alouds over digital educational settings. While examining the findings of the teacher survey data regarding problems, or restrictions, that limited the classroom read-aloud experience, two of the teachers' responses pertained to the implementation of read-alouds through virtual learning formats. In 2020, a pandemic emerged around the world that elicited changes in how we function as a society and as a nation. The ramifications of these changes seeped into all aspects of day-to-day life, causing myriad problems. One issue that moved to the forefront was our educational settings. More specifically, the question of how schools would maintain the integrity of instruction for students during a stay-at-home order embarked creative solutions that challenged the way students would learn and the way teachers would teach. Suddenly, virtual learning exploded into a developing educational setting that was implemented in all schools across our nation. Therefore, a study on how the implementation of classroom read-alouds have been impacted through virtual learning environments and the expanded use of digital devices would present an opportunity for widening the scope of the effect of read-alouds

on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

### **Summary**

As a response to current research studies, educational platforms targeted at strengthening literacy have moved to the forefront of educational reform. At the center of educational reform are the practices teachers implement within their individual classrooms. Therefore, teachers must be prepared to emphasize reading strategies that are effective in closing these gaps during the elementary years, or those less advantaged children will continue to be crippled in their academic success (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Read-aloud opportunities provide intervention methods and techniques needed to help develop necessary language skills that are crucial to reading success. While teachers incorporate read-aloud opportunities as a part of their instructional routine, they embrace practices that are intended to boost literacy skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

This study sought to describe and analyze the perceptions of elementary teachers as compared to observable data, regarding the implementation of teacher read-aloud opportunities within the classroom setting. The results from the study suggest that the teachers read on a regular basis to their students, on an average of 20 minutes each day, and that they always include class discussion as a part of their read-aloud practices. Indeed, the findings revealed that the teachers actually love to read to their students and receive great enjoyment from it. Teachers even implement prosodic cues while reading to their students that entice avid and engaged listeners. The results from the study further revealed that the teachers felt that their read-aloud practices were effective in building literacy skills through class discussions and teacher-initiated inquiry.

Research suggests that in order to gain the most effective benefits from read-aloud

opportunities, children need to be actively involved with the experience (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Duursma et al., 2008; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). It is through the practice of implementing interactive classroom read-alouds that children can foster critical thinking and develop overall literacy skills. According to research, a meaningful and intentional way to improve reading outcomes is through interactive read-aloud opportunities (Lennox, 2013) that provide reading support to young children, thus increasing academic success in all academic areas (Chow et al., 2010; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hickman et al., 2004). When interactive read-aloud experiences are employed properly within the classroom setting, they can build vital skills children need to increase their reading and comprehension abilities (Adams, 1990).

The disparity of 43 million adults in our country categorized as illiterate/ functionally illiterate is horrific to imagine. Even more so is the disheartening statistic that 40% of children entering kindergarten trail behind them, lacking necessary literacy skills for reading success. How does a nation coined as the “land of opportunity” fight this disparity; a nation flying the banner that promises success to anyone, from any background? How does America live up to such an axiom?

America can no longer afford to claim these statistics that categorize our nation; to sit back contemplating what can be done, pouring through mounds of research that tells us exactly what to do, and then cast it aside to the low priority slush pile due to overshadowing pseudo-justifiable phrases that echo “not enough time”; “the need for focus on testing”; and “district-mandated curriculum takes precedence,” when all along we see the answer staring us straight in the face. It is as simple as picking up a book, turning the pages, and reading to a child. This simplistic, time-honored act addresses all



areas of literacy needs: from receptive and expressive language to building vocabulary; from critical thinking to evaluating multiple concepts and ideas; from developing comprehension to analyzing; and from feeding imaginations to creating the world of the future.

Imagine a world where shared reading opportunities are embedded across all settings in a child's life. Imagine a child who has been read to at home since infancy; parents pouring the language into their mind by pointing to words from a child's board book; reading repetitive and rhyming text to them as a toddler; and incorporating picture books and fairy tales, rich in vocabulary, sparking imagination as a preschooler. Imagine that child now in school, where a teacher continues reading to them using picture books connected to concepts and themes, and then on to beginning chapter books where characters are sustained throughout chapters, delving more into the plot. The child continues to receive read-aloud experiences from both home and school, invested in multiple hours per week. Then add in the books the child begins to read on their own, moving through the grades, learning thousands of new words a year, discovering how to evaluate and think critically, and so much more. Now extend that scenario to every child born in America. That is the utopian world that eradicates illiteracy through the simple act of reading to a child. This is how America becomes worthy of the epitaph, "land of opportunity," that has been endowed upon us.

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## Appendix A

### Script for Administering Survey for Volunteer Trial Group

### Script for Administering Survey for Volunteer Trial Group

Hello everyone,

As you know, I am working on my dissertation and one way I plan to collect data for the study is through a survey. I would like to thank you for volunteering to help me validate my survey that I will be using for this study. I have created the survey pertaining to my study in a Google form. By participating in this 'trial run' of the survey and then giving me feedback on the content, you will help me to see if it is understandable, clear, appropriate, etc.

**First, let me assure you that the answers you give on the survey are NOT USED AT ALL in my study - it is only for me to make sure that I am asking appropriate, 'good' questions and to get rid of, or fix, any potentially 'bad' questions. No one will see/know any of your answers but me.**

Instructions for taking the survey include:

1st - Answer the survey questions as if they were for you, some are multiple choice and some are open-ended. It can reflect this current year or last year - it doesn't matter. This will help me know if the questions are written in a way that will give me the actual data that I am seeking in my study.

2nd – At the end of the actual questions of the survey, I have provided an open-ended short answer section that gives you an opportunity to give me some feedback on the actual survey - such as, if you found any questions to be ambiguous or bias; or if there wasn't an answer choice that 'fit' for you; if a question was 'wordy' or not clear, etc. - just anything about the survey that seemed problematic. Also, there is a question about how much time it took you to take the survey part, so I will know if it is too lengthy of a survey (I'm hoping it fits within a 5-10 minute time frame); and your grade level (I don't need your name) to see if certain questions seem to target more upper vs. lower grade levels.

If you have any questions, just let me know. Again, thank you so much for your time.

## Appendix B

### Elementary Classroom Teacher Read-Aloud Survey

### Elementary Classroom Teacher Read-Aloud Survey

*The purpose of this survey is to examine read-aloud practices within elementary classroom settings. This survey is part of a study conducted by K. Perry as part of collecting data for a dissertation study.*

*Participation in this survey is totally voluntary. However, your participation and input would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact me at the provided email address contained with this survey. Thank you again, K. Perry*

1. As a classroom teacher, how many days per week do you read aloud to your class?

- ☐ Everyday
- ☐ 3-4 times a week
- ☐ Fewer than 3 days
- ☐ Never

2. Approximately how many minutes per day total do you spend in read-aloud opportunities with your students?

- ☐ Less than 5 minutes
- ☐ 5-10 minutes
- ☐ 10-20 minutes
- ☐ 20-30 minutes
- ☐ More than 30 minutes

3. Describe the criteria you use in selecting books to read aloud to your class (i.e. vocabulary-rich text, simplistic text, themes, subject, author studies, novels, picture books, etc.)

---

4. What type of genres do you select as a classroom read-aloud?

- ☐ Mostly fiction
- ☐ Mostly nonfiction
- ☐ A mix between fiction and nonfiction
- ☐ A variety of genres that include fiction, nonfiction, and poetry
- ☐ I do not incorporate read-alouds in my classroom

5. What are the overall student behaviors that you observe while you are reading aloud to your students?

- ☐ Actively listening
- ☐ Inattentive
- ☐ Uninterested
- ☐ Interactive

6. Do you incorporate class discussions during the read-aloud time that connect to the text or elicit critical thinking skills?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Never

7. Do you integrate a post enrichment extension to the text?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Never

8. Do you observe your students engaging in discussions, with you or other students, that connect to the text either during/post reading of a classroom read-aloud?

- ☐ Yes - most of the time
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

9. What problems/restrictions, if any, limit you from reading aloud to your students (time, available resources, content, etc.)?

---

10. As a teacher, do you enjoy reading aloud to your students?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ No

11. On the scale below, rate your level of comfort in implementing read-aloud times in your instructional day to its most educational value.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not comfortable at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very comfortable

12. Rate your overall perception of the effectiveness of your read-aloud practices to building comprehension and vocabulary skills in your students.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not very effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very effective

13. As a teacher, do you feel that reading aloud to your students is a valuable teaching/learning tool? Why?

---

14. How do you define interactive read-aloud experiences?

---

15. Have you had any professional development or workshops/trainings on incorporating interactive read-alouds in your classroom?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

16. Describe any strategies or practices that you implement during your classroom read-aloud times that allow your students to interact with the text.

---

17. What grade do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_

18. My research study includes an observation of the classroom read-aloud time. This is completely voluntary and would be conducted during a scheduled convenient time for you. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Please respond below if you are interested in participating in the classroom read-aloud observation part of my study.

- ☐ Yes  
 Insert email address: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ No



19. The final part of my research includes a discussion group that I will host one afternoon after school that will last for approximately 30 minutes. The purpose of this discussion group is to allow teachers to discuss the read-aloud practices implemented within their classrooms, in order to give more detailed information for my study. This is completely voluntary and would be scheduled for a convenient time according to the school's discretion. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Please respond below if you are interested in participating in the discussion group as part of my study.

☐ Yes

Insert email address: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No

## Appendix C

### Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Checklist

## **CLASSROOM READ-ALOUD OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

Participant's Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Book Genre: \_\_\_\_\_

Book Type: ☐ picture book  
☐ chapter book (chapter: \_\_\_\_\_)

Read Aloud Time frame: \_\_\_\_\_

Observable Student Behaviors: ☐ actively listening  
☐ inattentive  
☐ uninterested  
☐ interactive  
☐ other:

Class Discussions: ☐ before reading  
☐ during reading  
☐ after reading

Read Aloud Prosody: ☐ inflections  
☐ dramatic pauses  
☐ change of voices  
☐ other:

Post Enrichment Extension Activity:

Students' Interaction with Read-Aloud Text:

Additional Observation Notes:

## Appendix D

### Outline Script for Focus Discussion Group

### Outline Script for Focus Discussion Group

- I. Introduction of Facilitator: *Hello, my name is Kimberly Perry. I will be the facilitator for this focus discussion group. I will be using an audio recorder to record the responses and discussions. This will enable me to gather clear and concise data. There will not be any video recording in order to maintain your anonymity.*
- II. Purpose: *The purpose of this discussion group is to allow each of you to discuss the read-aloud practices implemented within your classroom. As we discuss focused topics/items, you will be able to give more detailed information, along with deeper understandings, thoughts, and ideas regarding the focused topics/questions. I will be transcribing responses, but there will be no names used in this study/discussion in order to protect your anonymity. The information gathered will serve as data for the research study I am conducting.*
- III. Selection of participants: *Those who participated in the survey and classroom observations was eligible and invited to participate in this focus discussion group.*
- IV. Guidelines: *There are no right or wrong answers, just friendly conversations with colleagues regarding a topic of interest, with possibly differing opinions. I will be respectful of your time and try to allow everyone the opportunity to speak. My role as the facilitator will be to guide the discussion and listen, with no personal input on the topics of discussion. My only input will be to direct the topic of discussion and possibly ask questions occasionally to clarify responses, if needed.*
- V. Icebreaker: *Before we begin, I would like for each of you to tell us a favorite children's book or novel that you remember someone reading to you when you were little OR one that your children loved to hear you read to them.*
- VI. Opening Question: *I would like to begin by asking you to discuss what types of books you choose to read aloud to your students and what criteria you use to select them, if any.*
- VII. 'Shifting Gears': *I would like for you to talk about your experiences as a child with regards shared reading experiences.*
- VIII. Focus Question Set A: *I would like for you to discuss the read-aloud practices implemented in your classroom. How often you read to your students? For appr. how long? Is it something you enjoy and feel comfortable with implementing?*
- IX. 'Shifting Gears': *I would like for you to share what books or types of books your students are most excited about hearing you read to them? Seem to enjoy the most?*

- X. Focus Question Set B: *I would like to know about the engagement of your students during or after you read to them. Do your students seem interested/attentive while you read to them? Do you ask questions about the story before/during/after reading? Is there a lot of discussion from your students? Do they talk about the story at other times during the day? Are there follow-up activities/extensions or other interactions with the story you would like to share? Ideas?*
- XI. 'Shifting Gears': *I would like to hear your thoughts about any problems you see or experience with the shared reading time with your students.*
- XII. Focus Question Set C: *In your opinion, do you feel that shared reading is an effective 'tool'/strategy for developing literacy skills? Such as comprehension, vocabulary, language, etc.? Do you feel that it is effective in your classroom? Can you share any specific examples that made you feel that the read aloud experience contributed to increased literacy development, or perhaps didn't?*
- XIII. Closing Remarks: *We have addressed all the questions I have. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share? Do you have any questions for me? I have enjoyed sharing this time with you and I appreciate the time you have given up for me and the professional expertise that you have brought and shared with us today. Your responses will help me tremendously with my study. Thank all of you so much for your participation and I hope you have a blessed day.*

## Appendix E

### Informed Letter for Participants Regarding Study and Consent

Informed Letter for Participants Regarding Study and Consent  
Inclusive of Participants' Consent

Hello, allow me to introduce myself - My name is Kimberly Perry. I am a doctoral student from Gardner-Webb University. I invite you to be a part of my research study that focuses on read-aloud practices in elementary classroom settings.

Attached is a description of how the data results will be recorded, stored and used in my study. Please be assured that I will not include any information that would identify you in any way in the reporting of the results in the dissertation process.

Your participation is completely voluntary and if you agree to be a part of the study, I will only ask you to a.) complete and submit a brief survey. The survey contains 19 items and should only take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time to complete.

b.) I will ask for your permission to observe your classroom read-aloud time at a time that is convenient for you. I will be using an Observation Checklist that basically has some items for me to check off regarding information such as time frame, the selection of book, engagement behaviors, etc.

c.) Lastly, I will ask you to be a part of a focus discussion that should only last approx. 30 minutes one afternoon afterschool at a convenient time. The discussion group will allow a time for your input regarding the read-aloud practices within your classroom, relating to the topics on the survey and observation checklist.

The results of all participants survey, observations, and focus discussion group responses will be a part of the dissertation process in analyzing and recording the data to gain an overview of read-aloud practices in elementary classrooms. Your privacy will be protected and confidentiality will be maintained at all times throughout the research process. The data will be stored in a Google folder that is solely owned by me for one year and then all data will be deleted.

My role in the study will only be as an objective observer and collector of data. The data and findings of this study is only for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a dissertation study through my educational institution.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or this study, my email contact information is contained in this correspondence. You may contact me at any time.

Your input is most appreciated. Thank you for your time and consideration, Kimberly Perry XXXXX



## Appendix F

### Consent to Participate in Research Study

Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study:

*Perceptions of Classroom Teachers on Read-Aloud Practices Implemented Within the Elementary Setting*

Researcher:

Kimberly Perry: EDCI Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

**Purpose**

The purpose of the research study is to look at the perceptions of teachers regarding read-aloud practices and opportunities within their elementary classrooms. The data collected as part of this study will be used in a dissertation paper written as part of the requirement for the doctorate educational program.

**Procedure**

In looking for effective literacy strategies, I would like to conduct a study to find out about the read-aloud practices implemented within the elementary classroom setting. I would like to invite you to be part of this research study regarding teacher implemented read-aloud practices. If you agree to be a part of the study, I will ask you to complete a brief survey that asks questions about the read-aloud practices within your classroom. The survey is completely voluntary and will only take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey will be administered digitally through a Google form, making it very user-friendly. You can skip any question on the survey that you are not comfortable answering and you can stop the survey at any time.

Once the surveys are completed, I will collect the data, keeping it secure in a Google folder that only I have access to. The second part of the study is the classroom read-aloud observation. I will ask your permission to allow me to observe during the read-aloud time in your classroom. The duration of the observation may vary (15-30 minutes) depending on how much time is designated to reading aloud to the students. The observation is strictly voluntary, as well, and you are not required to participate. As part of an observation protocol, I will use a simple checklist during the observation that corresponds to some of the items on the teacher survey.

Finally, you will also be invited to take part in a focus discussion group regarding the study and relevant topics. The discussion group will consist of your colleagues that will take place one day after school lasting for approximately 30 minutes. The discussion group will give you an opportunity to discuss information listed on the survey and any other relevant topics to the study that may arise. To help in the transcribing of data, the focus group session will be audio recorded, but not video recorded, in order to maintain your anonymity. The audio recorded will be permanently deleted when all the data is collected and analyzed. The focus group is not required and is again voluntary.

### **Time Required**

It is anticipated that the study will require approximately 5-10 minutes of your time for completing and submitting the teacher survey; approximately 15-30 minutes of the classroom observation read-aloud (depending on the reading material); and approximately 30 minutes for the focus discussion group. The total time for all three components of the study is approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason that you do not want to answer or respond to without penalty. In addition, you do not have to agree to participate in the read-aloud observation or focus discussion group. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed.

### **Confidentiality**

To protect your privacy, the information collected from the survey, observation, and focus discussion group will be handled in a confidential manner that includes anonymity. This means that there will be no specific, identifying personal information, such as name, school, district, etc. linked to you in the submitted dissertation paper. Once all the surveys, observations, and focus discussion group data has been completed, I will collect and analyze the results, placing them in a sealed envelope and storing it in a locked file in which only I have accessibility. In addition, all digital data will be stored in a Google folder that only I have access to, as well. The data will remain there for three years and then all the information will be shredded, deleted, and destroyed. Your information will be assigned an alphanumeric code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file that only I have access to. The audio recording created during the focus discussion group will be kept in the same locked file that only I have access to. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list and the audio recording will be destroyed immediately. The results of the study will be published in my dissertation paper as part of the dissertation process. However, your name will not be used in any of the reporting.

Please be aware that in some cases it may not be possible to guarantee confidentiality, such as from a focus discussion group. Because of the nature of the data collected from the focus discussion group, those within the group will know of the content of the discussions. However, confidentiality and anonymity will still be maintained in the report.

### **Risks**

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, however, your input is greatly appreciated.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. However, this study may help bring understanding to the perceptions of teachers concerning read-aloud practices in their classrooms and the impact of read-aloud on student literacy

achievement. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

### **Payment**

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

### **Right to Withdraw From the Study**

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

### **How to Withdraw From the Study**

- If you wish to withdraw from this study during any time, please let me know by contacting me from my contact information below. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after the data has been collected, please contact me from my contact information below.

### **Contact Information**

**If you have questions about the study or concerns that you wish to discuss, please feel free to contact me or the representative of Gardner-Webb University.**

Kimberly Perry  
EDCI Doctoral Candidate  
Gardner-Webb University  
110 S. Main Street  
Boiling Springs, NC 28017  
XXXXX  
XXXXX

Dr. Jennifer Putnam  
Associate Professor of Ed.; Assoc. Dean/Coord of EDCI Program-SOE  
Gardner-Webb University  
110 S. Main Street  
Boiling Springs, NC 28017  
[jputnam2@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:jputnam2@gardner-webb.edu)

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney K. Brown  
IRB Institutional Administrator  
Gardner-Webb University  
Telephone: 704-406-3019  
Email: [skbrown@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:skbrown@gardner-webb.edu)

**Voluntary Consent by Participant**

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in the study as explained above and that you have read the information and fully understand the contents of this form. I will give you a copy of this form and I will keep a copy with the study records, as well. Be sure that I have answered any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me if you think of a question later.

*I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the classroom read-aloud observation.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the classroom read-aloud observation.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the discussion group session. I understand that this session may be audio recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the discussion group session.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

## Appendix G

### Participants' Email for Survey

Hello Everyone,

As a fellow teacher, I understand how precious and valuable your time is and I want to first say thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and I will try to be mindful of your time. I would also like to assure you that all information/responses are confidential and your anonymity will be maintained at all times. Your name or school will not be identified at all in my study. I would never want your participation in this study to become a burden for you, so I want you to know that you can withdraw from the study at any time if you wish to. If at any time you have any questions or need something clarified, please feel free to ask.

I have attached a brief Google survey form for you to complete and submit. The survey contains 19 items and should only take approximately 5 minutes of your time to complete. The purpose of this survey is to examine read-aloud practices within the elementary classroom setting.

Your participation and input are greatly appreciated,  
Thank you so much,  
Kimberly Perry

## Appendix H

## Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Sign-up Schedule



### Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Sign-up Schedule

Hello Everyone,

I would like to observe during a time you are reading aloud time to your students in your classroom. I appreciate your time in allowing me to observe the shared reading time with your students. Below is the scheduled week that I will be at your school, giving you the opportunity to sign-up for a day/time that is convenient for you.

I will be using a Classroom Read-Aloud Observation Checklist that basically has some items for me to check off regarding information such as time frame, book selection, engagement behaviors, etc. It is very, very similar to the survey items contained in the Google form. The purpose of the observation is only to allow me to collect data from an observation perspective of the implementation of read-alouds within a classroom setting. Please understand that I do not wish to make you feel uncomfortable in any way and if you have any questions/concerns, please let me know.

I would also like to assure you that all information/responses are confidential and your anonymity will be maintained at all times. Your name or school will not be identified at all in my study, neither will any personal information regarding your students.

Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity.  
If you have any questions, please feel free to ask,  
Kimberly Perry

Scheduled Week at Your School\_\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_ Grade\_\_\_\_\_

Day\_\_\_\_\_ Time\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I

### Notice of Scheduled Focus Discussion Group

## Notice of Scheduled Focus Discussion Group

Hello Everyone,

I would like to invite you to be a part of a focus discussion group that should only last approximately 30 minutes after school. Below is the scheduled day and time for the discussion group, as well as the location at your school. The discussion group will allow a time for your input regarding the read-aloud practices within your classroom, relating to the topics from the survey and observation checklist.

The purpose of the discussion group is to allow a group discuss the read-aloud practices implemented within the classroom setting. I will have discussion topics/questions for the group to respond to, allowing for more detailed information, deeper understandings, and thoughts regarding read-aloud practices. There are no right or wrong responses, just friendly conversations with colleagues about classroom shared reading experiences.

My role is only as a facilitator, posing the discussion topics/questions, and transcribing responses. In addition, I will be using an audio recording device only for the purpose of enabling me to gather clear and concise data in my transcriptions. Let me assure you that there will be no video recording of the discussion group in order to protect your anonymity. No names will be used in the note-taking, either. The information gathered will serve only as data for my study.

I would like to assure you that all information/responses are confidential and your anonymity will be maintained at all times. Your name or school will not be identified at all in my study, neither will any personal information regarding your students.

I appreciate your participation and respect your time in this discussion group.

Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity.  
If you have any questions, please feel free to ask,  
Kimberly Perry

Focus Discussion Group Day and Time\_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_