

“Eating through Books”: Reading Aloud Practice in Middle Grades Literacy

“Alimentarse de libros”: Prácticas de lectura en voz alta en la alfabetización del ciclo superior de Primaria

“Alimentar-se de llibres”: Pràctiques de lectura en veu alta en l’alfabetització del cicle superior de Primària

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Abstract

This article examines the virtual teaching practices of a middle grades (grade 6) language arts/English teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Data were collected through co-written responses and an interview process, followed by narrative analysis. The study focused on the practices of the teacher and, as such, did not include student responses and student data. This article presents the teacher’s seminal steps in literacy, their choices in selecting and sharing texts, and the challenges they faced in their pivot to online instruction in the context of the pandemic. The analysis considers building experiences of communal activity, and creating and establishing emotional connections, as well as educational ones as the key results of the practices of the teacher, highly linked to the selection process of the texts for the classroom. The study fits into the wider perspective on digital literacy, virtual instruction, and middle grades literacy.

Keywords: virtual teaching, literacy, narrative analysis, reading out loud

Resumen

Este artículo examina las prácticas de enseñanza virtual de una maestra de lengua de primaria (grado 6) durante el período de la pandemia del COVID 19. Los datos se recopilaron a través de respuestas coescritas y un proceso de entrevista, seguido de un análisis narrativo. El estudio se centró en las prácticas de la profesora y, como tal, no incluyó las respuestas y los datos del alumnado. Este artículo presenta los pasos cruciales de la maestra hacia la educación literaria, sus decisiones al seleccionar y compartir textos, y los retos que se encontraron al trasladarse la enseñanza al modelo remoto en el contexto de la pandemia. El

análisis presenta la construcción de experiencias de actividad comunitaria y la creación y el desarrollo de conexiones emocionales a la vez que educativas como los resultados más relevantes de las prácticas educativas de la maestra, estando estas relacionadas con la selección de textos para el aula. El estudio se suma a una perspectiva más amplia de la alfabetización digital, la instrucción virtual y la educación literaria en los últimos años de primaria.

Keywords: enseñanza virtual, alfabetización, análisis narrativo, lectura en voz alta

Resum

Aquest article examina les pràctiques d'ensenyament virtual d'una mestra de llengua de primària (grau 6) durant el període de la pandèmia del COVID 19. Les dades es van recopilar a través de respostes coescrites i un procés d'entrevista, seguit d'una anàlisi narrativa. L'estudi es va centrar en les pràctiques de la professora i, com a tal, no va incloure les respostes i les dades de l'alumnat. Aquest article presenta els passos crucials de la mestra cap a l'educació literària, les seues decisions en seleccionar i compartir textos i els reptes que es van trobar en traslladar-se l'ensenyament al model remot en el context de la pandèmia. L'anàlisi presenta la construcció d'experiències d'activitat comunitària i la creació i el desenvolupament de connexions emocionals al mateix temps que educatives com els resultats més rellevants de les pràctiques educatives de la mestra, profusament relacionades amb la selecció de textos per a l'aula. L'estudi se suma a una perspectiva més àmplia de l'alfabetització digital, la instrucció virtual i l'educació literària en els últims anys de primària.

Paraules clau: ensenyament virtual, alfabetització, anàlisi narrativa, lectura en veu alta.

1. Introduction

This manuscript highlights the work of a 6th grade teacher, Kassie, who engages in the practice of reading aloud regularly. In order to present this work as co-authored research, we utilize the methodology of narrative inquiry and, in so doing, present the story of this teacher as a foregrounded component of the process. This article is the collaboration and co-construction among two researchers and a teacher, organized according to the teacher's seminal steps in literacy, their choices in selecting and sharing texts, and the challenges they faced in their pivot to online instruction in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on the practices of the teacher and, as such, did not include student responses and student data

The teacher's work as a primary voice speaks to the details and ramifications of the account presented here, arranged as a series of findings drawn from the words of the teacher. We present these words collected in tables alongside our collective notes, connections, and wondering. Additional implications are included as we have moved to a conclusion. In particular, we focused our attention on the process

of modeling and thinking aloud about text and the ways in which this practice might be worth retaining at all levels of literacy instruction, including the middle level.

The researchers first became aware of the teacher's work through a separate publication that examined the use of reading aloud as a literacy practice in middle school instruction. Data were collected in the 2020-2021 school year through virtual interviews and shared documents with the teacher.

The research question which guided the project was, "In what ways do educators engage in reading aloud practices in middle school English/language arts classrooms?"

2. Literature Review

In a recent review of the literature, researchers indicated that reading aloud to students is a form of literacy practice that is given little attention consistently in middle and high school settings (Ward, Warren, & Gabriel, 2019). This paucity led to further questions of how much reading aloud occurs in grades 6-12. The benefits of the practice have been documented, but are often focused on early elementary literacy. Reading aloud in class has served as a space for promoting lexical and orthographic knowledge development (Coltheart et al., 1993; Coltheart et al., 2001; Glushko, 1979), facilitating access to sophisticated texts and ideas (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ariail & Albright, 2006; Warner et al., 2015), and fostering overall literacy and language development (Duursma et al., 2008).

It has been suggested that reading aloud is a practice that typically drops off in late elementary school and is scarce in secondary instruction, especially in subjects other than English Language Arts or Social Studies (Cunningham & Allington, 2016; Warner et al., 2015). The assumption seems to be that by the time students reach middle school and high school, reading aloud is a practice that is less needed; instruction then moves toward independent silent reading practices (Reed et al., 2014). Yet, despite

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the paucity of research on reading aloud as a practice with students beyond the elementary years, potential benefits in terms of students' perceptions of reading and reading motivation and engagement at all grade levels have emerged (Lyman, 2010; Richardson, 2000). Studies noted the positive impacts of reading aloud on developing student vocabulary and conceptual knowledge for middle school students, with students with reading challenges

reaping the most benefits (Braun, 2010; Mims et al., 2012; Schmitt et al., 2011).

Additionally, Dreher (2003) has pointed to the power of read-alouds in high school courses for presenting texts in more dramatic ways, and for generating dialogue. While Dreher (2003) suggested that titles as complex as Camus can be read aloud, Giorgis (1999) has also noted the affordances of picture books with high school students, with potential improvement in active listening skills and exploring new perspectives. Pointing to the varied use of materials that teachers in middle grades can employ for read-aloud, Lesene (2006) argued that “[t]eachers across the country should be reading aloud to their classes on a regular basis (daily is best)” (p. 50). Furthermore, the existing work on using reading aloud with middle and high school students collectively points to the key role educators can play in demonstrating ways of navigating a range of texts through oral reading activities (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Ariail & Albright, 2006; Reed et al., 2014). The process of modeling and thinking aloud as part of reading aloud is an especially rich context for understanding the delicate work on meaning making and engagement with texts and ideas. As a foundation for this study, we focused on the role of the teacher. The educator’s first-hand knowledge is a considerable source of data that is sometimes overlooked.

3. Narrative Inquiry

We draw on the narrative inquiry as particularly helpful for capturing stories and accounts of the lived experiences of people, holding the notion of co-authorship as central to our work (Clandenin and Connelly, 2000). The identity and interaction of the person involved in this study is valued as a part of narrative inquiry, and is invited to the work as an embodiment of “lived stories” (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). As an additional source of data, Kassie shared recordings of her read alouds during the project, which demonstrated a consistency between her described and enacted teaching practices.

As a narrative project, Kassie’s words are central, they are named as a co-author, and their storytelling practice continues from the classroom to the journal page. Bhattacharya (2017) united the concepts of research and story in their description of narrative inquiry. In this story, we begin with an exposition of where Kassie is from, as well as early influences on the teacher’s experience. We then examine a central tension together, as one would encounter in a narrative. Finally, we allow for the climax of the story to occur as this teacher shares about classroom practices, and we discuss the effects that Kassie has witnessed in the context of the classroom. We end with what we hope will be an intriguing hook to a potential new chapter in this teacher’s story, as well as an indication of the types of steps in research that may be needed moving forward with examinations of read aloud practices in grades 6-12. We co-present four vignettes in the teacher’s experience, which align their history as a reader with their on-going classroom practices, and which speak to their work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“New Pronunciations”

Kassie noted that they are probably in the minority among their friends, in that they still read aloud to their middle school-aged children at home, as well as in their classroom practice. While this educator focuses reading aloud on particular lesson objectives, they also indicated that they sometimes share books for the sake of student enjoyment and “pleasure reading.” These ideas about what counts as quality reading stem from some place in their life.

As a child, Kassie enjoyed being read to and recounted the story of moving to France as they were beginning to develop as a young reader. Because of this change in their literacy history, Kassie encountered “new pronunciations” and felt they had to go “back to the basics” of reading. Even though both of this teacher’s parents were engaged in literacy work at home and as part of their profession, there were still challenges that Kassie faced. In effect, reading became an experience at school that was not enjoyable for Kassie, and they were pulled out for more individualized instruction.

In situating their practices, this teacher returns to their early experiences with childhood literacy, and notes the unique role that their family played in demonstrating such practices through their recreation and work. The teacher also reflects on a reluctance to read, echoing a challenge that literacy educators face when working with adolescent readers (Tovani, 2021; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). The teacher notes a trend in their experiences, an avocation for being read to, which informs their current practices.

<p>I come from a family of teachers as well as a family of avid readers. One might think that since both of my parents taught English (my dad was a teacher at Tufts University and my mom taught English at the private high school my sisters and I went to) and read to my sisters and me regularly, that I would naturally be as interested in reading and as good at it as they were.</p>	<p>We note the immediate turn to origins as part of the teacher’s account of themselves, rooting their practices and beliefs in early experiences and note the tension/dissonance of being a reluctant reader in a family of avid readers.</p>
<p>However, in my early life, this was not the case at all. I did love being read to and I especially enjoyed when my parents told me stories about our family, but I could have thought of a thousand things I would have rather done than pick up a book to read for pleasure. I could never understand how my big sister seemed to actually want to read! When I was seven years old, my family moved to Rennes, France, for a year so that my parents (who at the time taught at Philips Exeter Academy) could teach abroad. My sister and I went</p>	<p>Here, we note that the teacher solidifies her early stance in reluctance, and note that reading aloud was a practice she enjoyed in her childhood. The dissonance with reading/family members who enjoy reading continues through this quote.</p>

to the local French public schools where I quickly became fluent in French and relearned how to read.	
Since I was learning a new language, my parents had me do first grade again in France as a way to help me be successful. When we returned home a year later, my parents assumed that I would be able to enter school as a third grader, but very quickly realized that I was completely lost academically--especially in reading--and decided to have me move to second grade.	New problems arise as the teacher/then child navigated different language practices and spaces – and we note the differences in grade levels and reading work that the teacher encountered as a child. The feel of being lost is clear here.
The next year we moved outside of Boston and I started in the school at which I would remain through 12th grade. I continued to be behind my peers in reading fluency and comprehension, so I took supplementary English classes in very small groups to give me extra help. I did this from fourth grade through 7th and finally caught up to my peers.	The continued work toward reading/reader who is striving identity is evident here as the teacher recounts continuing through the school experience, and the teacher notes supplementary experiences for additional help throughout their school experience.

Table 1. Narrative Entry 1

In this account, the teacher notes their awareness of what it means and feels like to be behind, highlighting a sense of empathy. At the same time, they note the importance of linking one language to another, and point to the difficulty that can sometimes arise as children move from one language to the next and move from one place to another. The affection for reading that this teacher would build is evident in this account of early literacy, and their note that they were a reluctant reader early on suggests further that both empathy for students with striving reading behaviors and knowledge of multiple strands of reading engagement would be part of this teacher's conceptual framing of classroom practice.

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In middle school, Kassie discovered Judy Blume, and this experience with a book created a more positive foundation for reading later in life. This experience with the powerful nature of encountering an engaging text continues to inform Kassie's teaching.

This moment, when I realized that I was reading a book and actually loving it was a brand new and surprising discovery for me. I think before this, I just hadn't been taught how to choose books that appealed to me and I thought that all books were boring and hard to follow. Once I found Judy Blume, I started reading all of her books and it changed how I saw reading.	The teacher continues their narrative of early experiences and notes the moment that connection to an author and text were found. The notion of being taught how to choose books later echoes in the teacher's discussion of their practices with students.
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<p>One of the things I spend time on in the first few conferences I have with my students is not only how they feel about reading, but what types of books they read or don't read, and how they choose their books. A few years ago, I realized that, like the younger me, many of my students thought they didn't like reading, but really it was just that they weren't choosing books that they enjoyed.</p>	<p>Here, the teacher shifts to present tense, and makes direct connections to their early experiences as a reader, noting an emphasis on choice and connecting current students to a vision and understanding of their younger self.</p>
<p>Since I try to give my students choice in their reading material as often as possible, I spend time giving direct instruction to some of them on how to choose a good book for themselves. One of the ways we do this, is by building up some practices that avid readers do: start finding people who share similar book tastes to trade recommendations with, start keeping track of books completed that include title, author, and star-rating to see what patterns we can find in helping them choose a good variety of books, and, when a book is nearing the end, be ready with what will be read next.</p>	<p>Moving from their belief in choice, the teacher talks through the steps in what this looks like, including a focus on reading practices and explicit, scaffolded steps in choosing books.</p>
<p>We use their book lists in our conferences, too, to help them set goals, decide if they're successfully picking good books, and to see how to incorporate variety in genres.</p>	<p>Next steps in teacher practice are evident in goal-setting, reflecting on the experience and noting progress, and reaching across genres to read more widely. This is reading advocacy or, as Harvey and Ward (2017) describe it, an intentional and active role in book-matching from reader to text on the part of the teacher.</p>

Table 2. Narrative Entry 2

This connection to finding materials that students can engage with speaks to the teacher's early experiences in reluctance with reading, as well as their notes about the importance of finding a book that connects with experiences. In their practice, this teacher notes the power that texts play in sharing

Reading aloud is generative for other aspects of literacy development.

characters, elements of mood and tone, and reliable and unreliable narrators, citing *The Wednesday Wars* by Gary D. Schmidt as an example of a book that encourages this range of work. Their work with students highlighted this connection in their own story between finding a powerful voice/author,

and locating texts that students could engage with.

They noted that choosing books and reading aloud is “intentional” on the part of the teacher and allows students to connect their knowledge to the text. They also noted that reading aloud occurs daily in their classroom, which in a typical academic year allows Kassie 150 minutes with students each day.

<p>When I'm thinking about what I want to read aloud to my students, I start with picking the genre that I'm</p>	<p>The teacher here begins to move through descriptions of their process in choosing books</p>
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<p>also teaching about in reading and writing. For me, that means that I start the year with fiction, then move into nonfiction, and then end with both or either. After I settle on the major genre, then I try to make sure that the books I choose within that genre are really varied. In our fiction unit, for example, I might start with historical fiction, then go into dystopian fiction, and then adventure, or realistic fiction.</p>	<p>by genre and matching these books to students, beginning with fiction. This movement through genres is also a schema for how they organize the year's instruction. The teacher then explores sub-genres of fiction that they use in instruction, expanding on the number of choices students have.</p>
<p>For nonfiction, I find that many of my students think they don't like it, so I often start with nonfiction that is written like fiction. I also love this opportunity to introduce articles, magazines, and other high-interest informational reading. One of the books I've used over the past couple of years is <i>Fast Food Nation</i> by Eric Schlosser. Overall, this book is written for adults and is too mature and complex for my 6th graders, but there are several wonderfully written parts, which are great for reading aloud and for modeling that nonfiction is often read differently than fiction.</p>	<p>The teacher then describes the move to incorporate nonfiction in the school year and reading diet. Just as with fiction, a multitude of types/sub-genres within the genre are described. A particular title is mentioned that has proved to be a go-to choice for the teacher, while they also note the complexity of the text and connect these difficult aspects directly to the scaffolding that can be accomplished for building comprehension and guiding readers in a read aloud routine. This is a direct explanation of the role of modeling afforded by the read aloud.</p>
<p>Even if I'm only reading for 10-15 minutes a day, our read alouds are infused in every part of our lessons as I am constantly referring back to them for modeling good writing that we can try to emulate, or trying to think more deeply about our ideas connected to them.</p>	<p>Here, the teacher notes the iterative nature of the read aloud not just as a classroom event, but a practice that is ongoing and becomes a referential point even at other times during the day. The teacher points to the potential for modeling writing through sharing these texts as an additional connection and possibility with next steps in instruction.</p>

Table 3. Narrative Entry 3

Evident in this account is a note of many factors which go beyond engagement to qualify what is included in a read aloud experience, including considerations of time, genre, and text complexity. Text choice can sometimes be an agonizing process. The constant referencing to books for connecting to writing experiences demonstrates the teacher's awareness of how reading aloud is generative for other aspects of literacy development.

"I Turned to Books"

In relating the story of their work in reading aloud, Kassie shared that they "turned to books," and sought a diverse classroom library that allowed students to experience stories that were not "stuck" in a particular "zone." For example, Kassie noted that many books in their classroom library that featured Jewish characters were set in the Holocaust, and many stories of African American characters were depicted in the Civil Rights Movement. This entry exists as a stand-alone response, in which the teacher describes the need to update the library and continue to ensure that a variety of identities/experiences are represented in texts, pointing to a critical literacy aspect of the work they do.

I wanted to include more stories of Jewish people and Black people that were not solely from those time periods and I wanted to also include books that my students recommended to me. Books can be expensive, so I visit a second-hand book store in our community and I use my Scholastic book points to get new and fresh stories in my library. I also try to pay attention to what my students are getting out of the school library or bringing in from home so that I can keep the choices varied. I really want every student in my classroom to feel connected to at least a few characters in my classroom library books either because they are so similar to those characters, or because they can relate to them despite being so different. (Kassie, Narrative Entry 4)

There was a continual sense of empathy in the work that Kassie sought to share in this unit, illuminated by their book choices. There was also a sense of expanding notions of how to select texts, including titles that expand awareness of cultural identities and intersections of experience. The teacher also pointed to material needs and considerations with attempting to create a living and diverse classroom library, that is both “fresh” and “new,” constantly updating to keep up with what is current. In particular, Kassie highlighted the text, *A Long Walk to Water*, a story focused on a refugee experience and noted that students thought the story “cannot possibly be real” when they first encounter it, but are often surprised when they reach the end of the narrative and discover that the book is based on a true story. In this way, Kassie opened up the text as a story first, and visited the reality of the narrative as a revealing aspect toward the end of the reading. The teacher was not developing these literacy events and encounters by accident, but reflected on a step-by-step process that took into account the power of the read aloud experience. Building on and framing this need for reaching out to a range of texts that offer diverse perspectives, the teacher notes the importance of reading aloud as a practice that can invite students to consider new ways of seeing the world.

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Reading aloud is such important work because it allows us as readers into a world that might differ from our own where we can make connections unexpectedly that help to improve our understanding of each other as human beings. When we make those connections at the same time that we’re sharing the experience with others, it just feels special. (Kassie, Narrative Entry 5)

Based on their framing of providing access to books, Kassie indicated that they likes to include lots of choice. They went on to say that the first trimester in the school year is devoted to fiction, the second trimester is devoted to informational text, and the final trimester is open to both.

<p>Usually, my students have a definite preference between fiction and nonfiction and often they do not like one of those genres at all, but I have found that they actually can learn to really appreciate each genre if they give it a chance. To do this, I tell them that while they can choose to read anything for homework (when I have them read for 30 minutes a night) or when they have free reading time during the school day, they must read fiction --any book of their choosing -- for their 30 minutes of daily independent reading time.</p>	<p>The teacher here notes preferences among students for genres, and points to the need to expose students to multiple types of texts to build appreciation. The focus on choice evident in earlier entries is still part of this process, with some time devoted to particular genres.</p>
<p>The read aloud is also fiction for this and so are the mentor texts I use, the small group work reading, and the writing we do. This way they have several opportunities to incorporate and practice the skills I'm teaching them in their chosen books.</p>	<p>Here, the teacher notes further the relationship of reading and writing in the classroom, building from the read aloud experience.</p>
<p>For their independent reading, I just let them read. I have found that if I give them work to do with their independent reading books, then they tend to resent that reading time, but if I just let them read, they actually seem to really get absorbed in their books and read for much longer periods of time.</p>	<p>At the same time, the teacher juxtaposes the need to allow students to read freely for the pleasure of reading and notes that this has positive results. In this classroom, what is striking is that reading occurs in multiple ways throughout the class period.</p>
<p>I use our small group time to practice the skills I'm teaching, and I mostly use our read aloud time for whole group discussions and for writing about reading. For me, this way of varying the work and pleasure has worked the best and I have found that all of my readers grow in their reading skills because of it. When I conference with my students about reading, I am listening for how they talk about books and how they are liking their books. We also use that time to think about what they're doing well already and to create goals for them.</p>	

Table 4. Narrative Entry 6

Kassie noted that reading aloud text helped students to see that the work they did in informational text was not separated from the moves readers make in fiction, and that this focus on informational text helps students see that they could enjoy this genre, as well. By using read alouds and a variety of writing experiences, Kassie works to “build up thinking in reading.” A central question that this teacher likes to ask students is, “Are you enjoying the books you’re picking?” If the answer is no, they advocate for new choices. Furthermore, they look for “suspenseful” and “action-packed” texts to create a sense of engagement and draw upon the interests of young readers. Kassie wrote:

<p>My own children (aged 12 and 14) are very different readers. My oldest loves to read as often as possible, whereas my younger son has only just started to enjoy</p>	<p>The teacher connects literacy practice first to their own childhood, and here connects their thinking to their role as a parent. This is a key section in that the</p>
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<p>reading independently since the pandemic started and he didn't have much else to do. I am a firm believer that to get better at reading you must read more, and he has proved this true in how much stronger of a reader he has become in the last 8 months.</p>	<p>teacher begins to think through the pandemic context, and the teacher again returns to a belief in reading volume.</p>
<p>When I am choosing books to share with my kids or my students, I'm thinking about the variety of people who will be listening. Sometimes I will read the first book in a series that I think some of my reluctant readers might like enough to continue on their own. I love Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key and Among the Hidden for this.</p>	<p>Metacognition takes focus in this section as the teacher describes their thinking in terms of texts and audience, with particular connections for readers who are reluctant. The teacher then points to specific texts which are go-to titles for their work.</p>
<p>Other times I will read a book that I think will teach a great deal about something important to me (building empathy for example) and that I don't think students would otherwise find on their own. The Wednesday Wars is a great example of this. I have not yet had a student who has even heard of this book, much less read it, but it's always one of our favorites by the end. It is one that appeals to avid readers and kids who don't like reading, boys and girls, and students who are at the highest academic level as well as those who struggle. It's one of those books that draws in the reader. Another thing I think about when I'm choosing a read aloud book is how to expose my listeners to experiences completely outside of their normal lives.</p>	<p>The teacher addresses another layer in text choice here in terms of thinking about topics that are important or issues that are relevant. The text, The Wednesday Wars, makes a second appearance in the narrative a key title. The teacher then describes the affordances of that text, as well as general affordances for the read aloud routine for exposing students to stories that are outside of their experience.</p>
<p>These books are the ones that tend to create the best conversations and the most heart-felt writing. I feel like I can practically see my students' hearts and minds growing. Some of the books that have really hit home for my listeners have been ones where they really care about a character--especially if that character is being treated unfairly or has something hard they're dealing with. I have seen this with Ghost by Jason Reynolds where the main character is trying to fit in, with Everything Will be Okay by James Howe where the main character feels very misunderstood in his own family, with One for the Murphy's by Lynda Mullaly Hunt where the main character deals with abuse and being a foster child, and with Al Capone Does My Shirts Gennifer Choldenko where the main character has a sister with severe autism.</p>	<p>Further expanding on this notion, the teacher points to additional texts that offer insights into empathy and social justice issues, with connections for the types of writing that they want students to encounter. The teacher notes the kind of response they receive as a kind of formative feedback experience. Connections to relevant experiences of belonging and being included, experiences of being misunderstood or even abused, are other threads of experience that the teacher is able to touch on through the use of appropriately and carefully-chosen texts.</p>

Table 5. Narrative Entry 7

“Like the Movies”

Kassie indicated that they were drawn to reading aloud because they saw it as a communal practice, much “like the movies.” They noted that reading aloud has the potential to pull in “kids who don't think they like reading,” and that the astonished looks on their students' faces were visible evidence of the power of the experience of hearing a story. This tie to popular culture and the role of media and

visualizing, as well as performing content with emotion and attention to performance, lined up with Jolly's (1998) suggestions about both the popularity and ubiquity of film, as well as Opitz and Rasinski's (2008) notion of the importance of oral reading activities for developing fluency and engagement with text.

When I taught 4th grade and Pre-K, I also read to my students daily and I also loved it, but reading to my middle school-aged kids and students is so much more satisfying and stimulating because the conversations we can have and what they can contribute to them is much more meaningful and mature. It's a lot less of me just sharing my thoughts and a lot more of them sharing their perspective on what's happening and how it affects them. I would imagine that that's even more true as kids get into high school. And it makes sense that this would be true since book clubs for adults are so popular; people love stories and people love connecting with each other about those stories. Reading aloud to older kids becomes less, perhaps, about showing good reading fluency or reading skills, and more about how to be a good person and how to coexist with others who are different from us. It teaches us that our ideas matter--and so do those of others--and that we must continue to help our ideas evolve by continuously reading and learning about all sorts of stories. (Kassie, Narrative Entry 8)

Table 6. Narrative Entry 8

They noted that this practice builds confidence for students and exists alongside a repertoire of other practices, including reading conferences, writing instruction, and attention to authentic literacy tasks. In all of their work, Kassie focuses on practices that encourage, rather than "kill" reading and writing:

Some of the best lessons for me about reading and how to incorporate the best practices for teaching reading came from my own children. My daughter loves reading so much, but every so often I would see the bright light in her eyes dim and it seemed to happen when she was made to do too many repetitive activities with her books that took the joy out of reading. That's why I decided to separate independent reading from small group work reading, so that during independent reading they're becoming better readers in general (without realizing they're actually working hard to build stamina) while small group work is spent building specific skills and applying them to the reading. And that leaves read aloud, which combines the two practices: during the actual read aloud they're just enjoying the story, contributing to the conversation and listening to things I point out to them to notice, but afterwards they're showing their individual thinking about it and developing those ideas more deeply and thoroughly through writing about reading. (Kassie, Narrative Entry 9)

Table 7. Narrative Entry 9

During the second trimester, teen activism forms a large part of this teacher's practice, and expands on the communal nature of the read aloud by exposing students to a variety of narratives, including the story of Malala Yousafzai in the young reader's edition of *I Am Malala*. In this use of the text, Kassie moves from stories that build empathy to stories of action and real consequences in the world.

4. Discussion, Further Analysis and Conclusions: “Eating through Books”

At the time of our first interview, Kassie was beginning to plan on transitioning to online learning and noted that, in the spring of 2020, they had to make alterations to their reading aloud plans as they went through their usual text choices more quickly than anticipated, and then had to find other books to share. They noted that her students were “eating through books.”

The work of this teacher, rendered largely in their own words as co-author, demonstrates the practice of engaging with literacy as a member of a classroom community. The face-to-face and online context of the work that the teacher has done echoes the relevance of building experiences of communal activity, centered around texts, to create and establish emotional connections, as well as educational ones. Kassie included intentional text choices based on their potential for developing areas of study and community-building within the classroom, regardless of the physical or virtual location of that community. What is more, Kassie traces their pedagogical choices and interests in avenues of literacy instruction to their individual and familial roots as a reader.

Next steps in this research process might entail finding other teachers who include read alouds as part

The face-to-face and online context of the work that the teacher has done echoes the relevance of building experiences of communal activity, centered around texts, to create and establish emotional connections, as well as educational ones

of their work with older students. Kassie was able to highlight specific texts that are notable for providing consistent engagement in classroom practice. Expanding the study of reading activities with middle school and high school students might afford further exploration of nuances in these teaching practices, as well as textual alignments with a wider community of educators. In terms of policy, administrators, stakeholders, and developers of curriculum

might expand some of the framing around literacy engagement practices for older readers.

Finally, Kassie’s work speaks to the need to retain some practices from early childhood/elementary literacy, albeit in a different context and perhaps with more complex texts. The possibility for comparative descriptions in a study on vertical alignment serves as yet another potential avenue for further work.

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