

PERCEPTIONS OF READING ALOUD IN  
INTERMEDIATE AND SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

by

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of reading aloud to students in intermediate and secondary classrooms. It was anticipated that teachers who read aloud and students who are read to would identify a number of positive outcomes of the practice. The key informants, eight British Columbia English or Language Arts teachers of Grades Five to 12, were interviewed using a series of probe questions. The interviews were tape recorded and then written notes were made. The students in the teachers' classes were asked for their thoughts about being read to; 178 written responses were received. The thoughts of the teachers and the students were analysed and discussed. Comparisons were made between the views of the teachers, the students and the professional literature. Similar categories emerged from all three sources.

Among the values of reading aloud most mentioned by teachers were pleasure, motivation to read, exposure to books and authors, use as a springboard to instruction, and increased comprehension. Students most frequently mentioned the development of imagination, the quality of the reader's performance, that reading aloud makes text easier to

understand, and that listening is calming and relaxing. The most important outcome of reading aloud mentioned by teachers was pleasure and by students was relaxation and calm. The materials chosen to read aloud were almost entirely various forms of literature.

The study concluded that reading aloud to older students is perceived to enhance comprehension and develop imagination, provides exposure to books and authors, is a useful link to instructional strategies, plays an important role in classroom management, provides pleasure to readers and listeners, and is enhanced by the oral reading skill of the teacher.

It was recommended that teachers read aloud to intermediate and secondary students and that teachers increase their awareness and utilization of the variety of benefits which can result from the practice.

There are many recommendations for further related research, such as long-term studies, investigation of teacher and student perceptions of specific areas such as the development of imagination, and the investigation of the value of reading aloud to ESL students.

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For my parents,  
who first read aloud to me

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

There is an adage that tells us, "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does". (Wolf and Heath, 1992, p.6)

Teachers who read aloud to their students know what they do. This study goes beyond the observation and recording of what teachers do to examine their thinking about why they read aloud to students and what it does. It also examines the thoughts of the students of these teachers to see if they share the same perceptions.

### Background

Reading aloud to children has been commonly acknowledged to be a worthwhile activity. It is held to be especially important in the pre-school years when it is usually part of parents' responsibilities. It continues to be considered a good thing to do in the primary grades. There is considerable support to be found in the literature written over the past thirty years for reading aloud to youngsters in the pre-school and primary years .

Beyond the primary grades the practice of reading aloud to school students appears to be less common. Although most

intermediate and secondary teachers would not oppose the idea of reading aloud to their classes, personal observation suggests that relatively few do so on a daily basis; a greater number do so occasionally. Some of the reasons why teachers do not read aloud to older students may include more pressing priorities, time constraints, the assumption that students do not like to be read to, and a lack of knowledge of appropriate reading materials.

#### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions related to reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students. By eliciting the views of those teachers who are committed to reading aloud, along with the views of the students who are read to, I will demonstrate that reading aloud in classrooms results in a variety of outcomes. The views of these teachers and students will be of interest to other teachers, parents, administrators, student teachers and teacher educators. It is expected that this study will help to deepen their understanding of the contribution reading aloud makes to learning and literacy. The study seeks to obtain information in response to the following question:

What are the perceptions of reading aloud to students in the intermediate and secondary classroom setting?

The two parts of the above question are:

Part A: How do teachers of English and Language Arts perceive reading aloud to intermediate and secondary classes?

Part B: How do students in intermediate and secondary classes perceive being read to?

#### Rationale and Importance of the study

This study is based on the assumptions that reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students is a worthwhile activity and that teachers and students will be able to provide a number of reasons why this is so.

Current literature indicates a number of areas in which reading aloud is perceived to have a positive effect. These areas range from improving reading comprehension to increasing students' interest in reading. This study seeks to determine whether such perceptions are shared by the teachers and students who are involved in the practice, and

whether their perceptions may extend beyond those found in current literature.

The information gathered in this study may influence educators to view reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students as being of greater importance than they presently believe. It is expected to provide evidence that teachers see the practice of reading aloud to have a number of positive benefits. The information provided by students is expected to support much of what the teachers say. Reading aloud to others is a complex process. This study may enhance our understanding of its complexity.

#### Delineation of the research problem

This study began with the gathering of information from teachers and their students. The interviews and written responses focussed on their perceptions of reading aloud or being read to. From the information gathered a number of areas in which reading aloud is perceived to play a role are identified.

### Scope of the study

The study is based on information obtained from eight British Columbia teachers of grades five to twelve. The secondary teachers were English teachers; the intermediate teachers were classroom teachers who taught Language Arts as well as other subjects. The students of six of the eight teachers (in the case of the secondary teachers, the students of specific classes) were also surveyed. The teachers were interviewed by using a series of questions designed to act as probes to elicit as much thinking as possible. In some instances, the interview was followed by further oral or written communication. The students were asked for a written statement of their thoughts.

### Limitations of the study

It is not intended that the thoughts of eight teachers be seen as representative of the thoughts of all teachers who are committed to reading aloud to students. It is expected that there will be sufficient variety and scope in the ideas of 8 teachers and 178 students that the resulting findings will meet the goals of the study:

To examine the perceptions of reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students.

To demonstrate that reading aloud results in a variety of outcomes.

To enhance the understanding of the contribution reading aloud makes to learning and literacy.

In the following chapters, the professional literature pertaining to reading aloud to older students will be reviewed. The views of eight teachers who read to their students will be reported, analysed and discussed. The thoughts of 178 students who were read to will also be discussed and analysed. The views of the three sources - teachers, students and professional literature - will be compared. Recommendations for professional practice and further research will be made.

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## CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The professional literature related to reading aloud to older students played a twofold role in the development of this study. It showed that reading aloud to older students is seen to result in a variety of positive outcomes, and it confirmed that few studies of reading aloud have examined the views of teachers in depth.

A review of the related literature identified a number of areas to which reading aloud is thought to contribute. Some of the topics most frequently discussed were the roles which reading aloud plays in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, listening skills, critical thinking skills, writing skills, language development, general pleasure and motivating students to read.

The literature related to the topic of reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students comes from two general sources. One is the body of educational research conducted by faculty and students of numerous universities. The other is the reflections of practising teachers sharing their experiences and observations. Most of the research studies are based on relatively short-term "treatments" while the journal articles tend to be more reflective of longer

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practice. It should be noted that the literature deemed to be relevant to this study was related to reading aloud to older students, students in fourth grade or above, although some studies covering youngsters of this age also included younger children. In most cases the professional literature describes the reading aloud of imaginative literature. Although no count was made, it is evident that there has been less published about reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students than there has been about reading aloud to pre-schoolers and primary students.

The professional literature has been analysed and organized according to the topics under discussion in the articles. The topics became evident as the various articles were read. Although it was anticipated that some topics would be found in the literature, no preconceived notions were imposed in identifying the topics. The topics have been arranged to correspond with the order in which they appear in later sections of the study.

It was anticipated that many, but not necessarily all, of the areas under discussion in the literature would also be present in what the key informants and students in this study had to say. It was also anticipated that the key informants and students might discuss aspects of reading

aloud that were not found in current literature. The literature considered together with what was said by the informants revealed areas which warrant further research.

### Reading comprehension

Reading aloud is thought to play a role in developing reading comprehension. Briechle (1984) found that reading stories, poems and articles to sixth grade students three times weekly for eight weeks resulted in significant gains in reading comprehension scores. Cosgrove (1987) reported that listening to oral reading by teachers (three times weekly over a period of twelve weeks) had a significant effect on the comprehension levels of fourth and sixth graders.

Porter (1969) conducted a study in which high school students read aloud to fourth, fifth and sixth grade students two times a week for twenty weeks. Reading comprehension test scores increased, especially at the fourth grade level.

Fearn (1971) found that using taped narrations with fourth graders resulted in gains in comprehension scores, especially for those scoring at the lower extreme. Similar

results were obtained by Weidner (1976), who discovered that fourth grade students who were initially at or below grade level made the greatest gains when read to for three months. In this study the group given the greatest amount and frequency of exposure (ten minutes daily) made the most significant gains.

One study done by Bryant (1982) reported that seventh graders who were read to daily for ten to fifteen minutes for one semester did not make statistically significant gains in reading comprehension scores. He concluded that reading aloud was more beneficial for lower level ability students.

Durkin (1981) makes a strong case for reading aloud.

In the light of current work with comprehension, reading to children emerges not only as a means for bridging the gap between spoken and written language but also as a way to a) develop a schema for "story", b) expand vocabularies, and c) add to children's knowledge of the world. (p. 31)

Du Bois and McIntosh (1986) claim improved comprehension of content as one of the benefits of reading aloud to high school history students. The improvement in comprehension

comes from better developed concepts of history and increased vocabulary.

Hennings (1992) states that listening is similar to reading in that both demand the active construction of meaning from all signals. She says that listeners acquire all of the same basic thought processes, such as predicting and inferring, which are necessary for reading. "The read aloud is the keystone of a literature program that puts a high premium on student involvement" (p.20).

#### Vocabulary Development

Just as was found for comprehension, Bryant's study (1982) saw no change in vocabulary development as a result of a semester-long treatment of grade seven students. Others, however, have found statistically significant effect. In two studies conducted on seven and eight-year olds in New Zealand, Elley (1989) found that reading stories aloud resulted in significant vocabulary gains, especially if accompanied by teacher explanation of unfamiliar words. The amount of gain was affected by the type of story read, and there were some predictors that were more significant than others, such as the frequency of the word's appearance in the text.

Maher (1991) also incorporated teacher explanation of vocabulary into his study. Working with Grade Fives, he found that the group which had stories read aloud with the vocabulary discussed and explained acquired twice as much vocabulary as the group which learned the vocabulary by looking up words in a dictionary and then reading the stories independently.

McCormick (1977) cites several studies which support reading aloud as a means of increasing vocabulary and suggests that greater effect is to be found upon economically disadvantaged children. She also points out that the frequency of reading aloud as well as the length of the study appears to be an important factor in the studies which found significant positive change.

Stahl (1990) found significant gains in sixth graders' vocabulary scores after they had heard two stories read aloud and then were tested on the vocabulary heard in the stories. Stahl also found the improvement was greater for lower-achieving readers.

Several others make claims for reading aloud as a means of developing vocabulary. Fisher and Elleman (1984) and Frick

(1986) list vocabulary development among the numerous benefits of reading aloud to middle grade students. Du Bois (1986) discusses reading aloud to secondary Social Studies students, saying that it is one way to familiarize students with the vocabulary they will need. Durkin (1981), quoted earlier, lists vocabulary expansion as a benefit of reading aloud.

### Writing Skills

The relationship between reading aloud and children's writing has been another subject of interest. Dressel (1990) had Grade Five students listen to and discuss literature daily for eight weeks. The quality of the mystery stories read aloud was purposely varied between two groups. Each session was followed by a writing session. When the student writing was analyzed, the students exposed to higher quality literature rated higher on literary quality and genre development. It was concluded that high-quality literature positively affects writing and should be read aloud in classrooms.

Michener (1989) conducted two related studies to see if teachers could enhance the written composition skills of their students by reading aloud to them. The most

significant improvement was found in the development of syntax. Michener urged further research and the development of more advanced assessment measures such as computer sorting of the vocabulary used in student writing.

Jaggar, Carrara and Weiss (1986) were interested in the influence of the reading of literature on children's narrative writing, and vice versa. Their early findings indicate that reading plays an important role in learning to write, and that practice in writing (as opposed to reading alone) is necessary in order to master different forms of discourse.

Pitts (1986) investigated whether a program of reading aloud to adult basic skills students would have a positive effect on reading ability and written language production. It was found that the greatest gains were made at the discourse and paragraph levels rather than at the grammar and mechanics levels. It was speculated that this was the result of the students' exposure to a wide variety of styles during the thirteen weeks of the project.

O'Rourke's (1990) survey of teachers found that a frequently stated reason for reading aloud was to improve children's oral and written language. Frick (1986) says that students

who have listened to oral reading are more fluent writers. Watson (1986) claims that "...constant exposure to the written word is a necessary component of learning to write, and one of the ways in which this should be done is by regular reading aloud by the teacher" (p. 48). He supports this by describing the classroom experiences of four Australian teachers.

#### Acquisition of knowledge

Several writers suggest that reading aloud to students can be a means of their acquiring knowledge. Frick (1986) and Durkin (1981) both state that reading aloud adds to children's knowledge of the world. Two other articles refer to the role of reading aloud in specific subject areas. Du Bois (1986) cites reading aloud to secondary history classes as adding to their knowledge, and Carter and Abrahamson (1991) advance the use of non-fiction in general in read-aloud programs, although the acquisition of knowledge is only one of their reasons for doing so.

#### Modelling of oral language and performance

In an instance of modelling for the modellers, Andrews, Moss and Stansell (1985) read aloud to their undergraduate

reading methods class, primarily to demonstrate oral reading and encourage their students to read to their future classes. After comparing these students with a group which had not been read to, they found that students who have been read to "seem to develop a considerably surer sense of how reading aloud to children in the elementary classroom can sustain and enhance a teacher's interest in and enthusiasm for reading instruction" (p. 319).

Similarly, Cameron (1981) believes that English teachers must place much more emphasis on the oral expression of literature. He states that "...effective oral performance is probably the surest method of awakening audience response...." (p. 4). From his viewpoint as a professor of secondary teacher education, reading aloud well is a crucial skill for an English teacher.

There are few claims that reading aloud to students improves their oral language skills, and none that support such claims with an actual study. O'Rourke's (1990) survey found that teachers frequently stated that they read aloud in order to improve children's oral and written language. Du Bois (1986) mentions several ways in which reading aloud can aid in oral language development but gives no evidence,

personal or otherwise, that such development has actually been observed.

#### Development of "esprit de corps"

Part of the pleasure of being read to in a class is the sense of "esprit de corps" that develops. This is pointed out by Hillman (1975) who refers to the commonality of experience provided to listeners from diverse backgrounds. Watson, quoted in Evans (1992), says "Reading to students - everyday without fail - sets a tone of sharing and a comfortable rhythm for students and teachers alike...." (p. 47).

#### Motivation to read

The aspect of reading aloud most widely discussed in the professional literature is that of motivation. Numerous studies and articles claim that reading aloud to students increases their interest in reading for themselves or results in an improved attitude toward reading.

Typical of many journal articles are those of Ecroyd (1991), Frick (1986), and Casteel (1989) who cite personal experience as well as other authorities to support reading

aloud to secondary and middle school students as a motivational strategy. Du Bois (1986) also gives motivation as a reason to read aloud to secondary history students. Sanacore (1989) states that Social Studies teachers should read aloud as one way of promoting lifetime reading habits. Giermak (1980) relates her personal success in improving the attitude toward books of her tenth grade students by reading aloud to them. Carter and Abrahamson (1991) urge the reading of nonfiction to secondary students as a means of responding to and promoting student interests.

Evans' (1992) experience was with seventh grade reluctant readers. Reading aloud coupled with the use of response journals resulted in increased enthusiasm for reading. Rasinski (1989) says that reading aloud is a means of overcoming what he calls "reading inertia," the inability to get successfully started on a book. Boothroy and Donham (1981) describe a school-wide read aloud program which has motivated children to read more and better books.

A number of research studies have also found reading aloud to be a motivational factor. Bruckerhoff (1977) surveyed high school students about experiences that helped to create their feelings about reading. Being read to was cited as positive factor. Manna and Misheff (1987) asked teachers

and preteachers for reading autobiographies, and found praise for the adults (parents and teachers) who had read aloud to them.

Cope (1990) also used reading autobiographies with twelfth-graders, who identified being read to as a positive school reading experience. Cosgrove (1987) measured the effects of reading aloud to fourth and sixth graders. The experimental subjects were read to for three twenty minute sessions weekly for twelve. Both quantitative and qualitative data resulted in significant differences between the two groups in attitude toward reading and in the amount of recreational reading done.

Herrold, Stanchfield and Serabian (1989) conducted a study in which middle school students were read to daily for six months. It was found that attitudes toward reading, especially in boys, were improved by having been read to. Porter's (1969) study had similar findings. Students in grades four to six were read to by high school students, with the greatest effects on reading interest noted in boys, and in students at the fourth grade level. Blatt (1981) found that reading aloud by teachers was a factor in fostering the reading interests of children in grades three to six.

Beck (1990) reports that reading aloud was one of the three basic strategies which were part of a successful program developed to improve the attitudes of fourth grade students toward leisure reading. Boodt (1984) found that direct instruction and practice in critical listening to quality literature improved both reading attitudes and abilities in grade four, five and six students.

#### Motivation by example

Students are also motivated to read by exposure to the examples provided by others. Perez (1986) sees teachers as probably the most important agents in motivating children to read, and urges reading aloud as one way of modelling their enthusiasm for books.

Ecroyd (1991) views the teacher's example as essential. "Students at risk in reading will not value reading per se unless they believe their teachers value reading" (p.77). Reading aloud offers one way to do this.

Porter (1969) carried out a study in which high school students read aloud to middle grade students. It was found that the high school students provided a positive model that

encouraged inner city children to read. There was a greater influence on younger children (grade four) and a greater influence by male readers.

For over 30 years Carlsen and Sherrill (1988) collected personal anecdotes from young people who are readers, and note that "having teachers read aloud" as "one of the experiences likely to produce readers" is true for people of ages six right through eighteen and over (p.152). Trelease (1989), best known for his message to parents about reading aloud to their children, not surprisingly also advocates that teachers do this. "Reading aloud is the most effective advertisement for the pleasures of reading" (p. 210).

It should also be noted that there are several studies which found that reading aloud has no effect on changing attitudes toward reading. Bryant (1982) found that reading aloud to seventh graders ten to fifteen minutes daily for one semester did not result in a statistically significant difference in attitude toward reading. Bartlett (1980), following fifteen minutes daily reading aloud to fourth graders for twelve weeks, concluded that this did not make a difference in general reading attitudes of boys or girls. Robertson (1989) found that eighth graders who had had a book read aloud to them for ten minutes a day were not any

more disposed to use a ten minute free choice time for reading than were those students who had not been read to. At the conclusion of Hampton's study (1972) both the control and the experimental groups (sixth graders) had scores which indicated a loss of attitude toward reading. The experimental group which had been read to thirty minutes daily for four weeks did show a significantly more positive attitude than the control group.

#### Exposure to books and authors

Boothroy and Donham (1981), in describing an all-school listening to literature program, relate that the read aloud program has increased the familiarity of both staff and students with children's literature.

Children often come to the library asking for more books by authors with whom they became familiar in an oral literature unit. Frequently, children ask for books they heard one or two years ago and now want to read independently. (p. 774)

McCormick (1977) also cites the widening of children's reading interests as one of the reasons for reading aloud to them.

O'Rourke (1990) found that teachers who read aloud had attended more workshops and courses in children's

literature. They also frequently compared read-aloud materials with other books and discussed authors' styles of writing. All this would point to a greater familiarity of these teachers with authors and books.

### Pleasure

Students like being read to. This view finds considerable support in the literature. Beers' study (1990) examined types of aliterate (dormant, uncommitted and unmotivated) seventh grade readers . One finding of her study was that listening to the teacher read an entire book aloud was a motivational activity for these students.

Mendoza (1985) surveyed 520 children aged five to thirteen and received an overwhelmingly positive response to the question "Do you like to be read to?". Ayers (1991) replicated Mendoza's study, obtaining the same response to the question. He recommended that teachers and parents should not presume that intermediate grade children prefer to read to themselves. Jenkins (1991), after observing in an elementary school for five months, concluded that most students preferred having literature read aloud to them rather than reading independently. In this school, reading aloud to others was the most routinely implemented

literature activity. Cope's (1990) twelfth graders' reading autobiographies identified being read to as a positive school reading experience.

Other writers' work is grounded in their classroom experience. Spencer (1991) finds that high school students like to be read aloud to and to read aloud themselves. Mathews (1987) urges that teens be read to, and offers advice to teachers who would do so.

Frick (1986) concludes her list of reasons for reading aloud to older students with this: "...it's an absolutely pleasurable and relaxing experience for all - no matter what the variance in intelligence in your classroom" (p.302). Fisher and Elleman (1984) echo this, pointing out that for some children, reading aloud may provide one of the few pleasurable, stress-free times of the day.

Carlson and Sherrill (1988), in the chapter in Voices of Readers devoted to memories of being read to, state: "Over and over again the protocols indicate how pleasurable the respondents found the teacher's reading to be" (p. 46).

### ESL and less able readers

Santos (1987) found that reading aloud to Hispanic ESL learners in a middle school improved their reading comprehension. Santos also learned that the quality of the teacher's reading aloud was a crucial factor in influencing the results.

May (1986) notes little available research linking reading aloud and bilingualism. Her results, although not statistically significant, support the use of reading aloud in the ESL classroom. Teacher observations indicated increased verbal and nonverbal student interactions during the read aloud sessions.

Hough, Nurss, and Enright (1986) urge reading aloud as a powerful language development tool for LES (Limited English Speaking) students. Hillman (1975) also lists the modelling of language as one of the reasons why reading aloud is helpful when working with children who speak nonstandard dialects. Richek (1987) advocates the use of DLTA (Directed Listening Thinking Activity) with ESL students, stating that the active listening helps them learn how to deal with difficult narrative even though the text may be above their instructional level.

The absence of much literature linking ESL instruction with reading to children certainly indicates an area to which attention could be given. The role played by reading aloud to ESL students is particularly relevant to the needs of many B.C. classrooms, especially those in the Lower Mainland.

There are more frequent references to the role played by reading aloud to disabled and lower ability readers. Egger (1992) found that reading aloud to and by high school students helped learning disabled readers succeed. Fielding and Roller (1992) state that reading aloud to students increases the access of challenged readers to difficult material. By demonstrating that easy books are valued by an adult who reads them to the whole class, reading aloud provides a means of making accessible material acceptable.

Robb (1993) describes a year of working with at-risk seventh and eighth graders who gradually came to accept and enjoy being read to. Bryant (1982) states that reading aloud was found to be more beneficial for lower level ability students.

Schierloh (1992), in working with Adult Basic Education students, found that little was published for mature adults whose reading ability is at the third to fifth grade level. This is the same dilemma which faces teachers of teenagers reading well below grade level. For Schierloh, reading aloud was a successful way to enrich the abridged and simplified material offered to the ABE students.

Finally, Rosow (1988, p. 122), in interviewing adult illiterates, found that none of them could recall ever hearing stories or being read to at home or in the elementary school.

### Listening Skills

Journal articles and research studies claim that being read to develops students' listening skills. Du Bois (1986) says that reading aloud to secondary history classes provides a purpose for listening carefully. Frick (1986) thinks that reading aloud nurtures listening skills and that these improved skills transfer into other listening areas such as following directions. Hillman (1975) claims that reading aloud develops listening skills and increases the listening attention span. She bases this claim on "linguistic and psychological research" and "folklore and intuition" (p. 1).

Boodt (1984) reports on a program in which listening to literature was used as the basis for development of six critical listening skills. The 18 week study showed that the gains made in specific listening skills also resulted in improved reading abilities and attitudes.

Craddock and Halpern (1988) also describe a classroom developmental listening program which goes beyond reading aloud in its structured components: pre-listening, focussed listening, and post-listening. Whole literary texts are used. She claims that improved listening comprehension leads to improved reading comprehension.

Craddock and Halpern's claim is supported by the work of Weidner (1976) who found with Grade Fours that the amount and frequency of exposure to reading aloud affected their scores in listening and comprehension tests.

### Thinking Skills

Closely related to critical listening skills are critical thinking skills, and claims are made for the role that reading aloud plays in developing these as well. Franson (1985) conducted a study of what teachers know about reading

aloud to students. From this emerged her recommendation that additional study is needed to define the role reading aloud plays in the development of higher order thinking skills so that the method can be adapted to be an efficient and effective teaching method in all areas of the curriculum.

Others have attempted to define the role played by reading aloud as a method of developing thinking skills. Boodt's (1984) program, described earlier, focussed on developing critical listening and thinking skills. Hennings (1992) says that listening gives the listener all of the basic thought processes required for reading, including "extending by thinking critically" (p.17). Bosma's study (1981) had teachers reading folktales aloud and modelling a critical thinking process with sixth graders. The greatest gains were made with low achieving readers.

#### Influence on attitudes toward others

Another notion advanced by several writers is that reading aloud influences students' attitudes toward other people. Darigan (1992) attempted to determine the effects of reading aloud about African Americans on third to fifth grade students' attitudes toward African Americans. On the few

students who did show bias, the reading appeared to have a positive effect.

Du Bois (1986) provides examples such as reading about the black experience to support the claim that reading aloud is a means for affecting students' social attitudes. Giermak (1980) also found that reading aloud to her secondary students led to a change in their attitudes toward blacks.

Smith, Greenlaw and Scott (1987) assume that reading aloud "is probably socializing the listeners through the messages the books present" (p.401). They asked 254 elementary teachers to list their favorite read-aloud book choices and after analysing these lists, expressed their concern that teachers' read-aloud choices are biased toward male protagonists, and that minority racial groups and other groups such as the elderly are missing at all levels.

Sullivan (1987) reports on the use of reading aloud as a simplified form of bibliotherapy with a fourth grade class. The book choice was important, of course, but the key difference between this and reading aloud for entertainment lay in the focus of the discussions which followed the reading. From a related point of view, Pillar (1979) argues that children's literature can be used to develop moral

judgment provided that responses are listened to and that discussions are aimed at developing higher level reasoning.

#### Links to instruction

Some also see reading aloud as a "springboard" from which to begin various forms of instruction. Chadwick (1982) describes the discussion in his secondary English class and reflects that "...the catalyst...seemed to be the shared act of hearing the story read. Hearing reinforced its effect so that we had to react" (p. 28). Evans (1992) used reading aloud as the focus of year-long work in writing response journals with grade sevens.

Ecroyd (1991), mainly because of the time constraints felt at the secondary level, ties everything into the curriculum and provides an extensive list of examples of how she accomplishes this. Hennings' book Beyond the Read Aloud (1992) is intended to demonstrate various ways in which reading aloud can be integrated with the instructional program. Extensive examples of instructional strategies with various genre and grade levels are provided.

### Awareness of Story Components

Several writers suggest that reading aloud helps to develop a youngster's sense of story. Nistler (1987) says that when children listen to a story they recognize story components such as plot, character and theme. This is echoed by Frick (1986) and Fisher and Elleman (1984). Durkin (1981) is another who sees reading aloud as a way of developing story schema.

### Similar studies

The preceding literature has been discussed in terms of the various areas of knowledge related to reading aloud. Two further studies are of interest because their purpose or design is similar to this study. Manning, Manning and Cody (1988) investigated the perspectives of parents who read aloud to their pre-school children. (The authors state that they found little research which described the views of parents who read aloud to their children.) One hundred ninety parents, identified through public library questionnaires, participated in semi-structured telephone interviews. The study found that parents who have developed the habit of reading aloud to their children are aware of its many values. The study also confirmed that many parents

read to their children as a result of outside information about the value of that process.

Franson (1985) wished to learn what teachers know about reading aloud and how this knowledge was acquired; what teachers believe about reading aloud and how these beliefs were shaped; and what teachers actually do when they read aloud to their students. Various instruments, including key informant interviews, were used to collect information. Teachers who do not read aloud were surveyed as well as those who do. Among the findings were that teachers not already reading aloud could be influenced to do so if presented with documented research as well as strategic suggestions. Franson recommends further research into the role that reading aloud plays in the development of higher order thinking skills.

Of the many studies and articles reviewed, these two are most similar to the one presently undertaken. Manning sought to learn from parents of young children what their perceptions of reading aloud were and Franson asked teachers who do or do not read aloud about their knowledge of the practice.

It would seem, however, that the perceptions of teachers who are committed to reading aloud to post-primary students have not been the subject of direct investigation. Certainly many such teachers have shared their beliefs and practices by writing articles. Researchers have investigated specific and general questions with respect to reading aloud. The preceding review of professional literature demonstrates that there are many areas in which reading aloud to youngsters is perceived to have an effect. This study was designed to find out whether teachers who read aloud and students who are read to share the perceptions found in the professional literature.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The professional literature provided insight into the views of others and information on the findings of earlier research. These views and findings offered some idea of the values of reading aloud which might be anticipated in the responses of teachers and students. The literature also provided knowledge of the design of previous studies. This information contributed to the decisions which next had to be made with regard to the most effective methodology to use in seeking the views of teachers and students on reading aloud.

#### Description of methodology

Information was gathered by means of interviews with selected teachers. From the students of these teachers, information was gathered by using a written free response to a general question.

The information from teachers was analysed and sorted into general categories, many but not all of which corresponded with the categories identified in the preceding literature review. The information from the students was analysed in the same way.

The information is presented in the form of descriptive-analytical interpretation. This type of study "contributes to knowledge by providing an understanding of the phenomena studied. This type of study also enables others to anticipate, but not predict, what may occur in similar situations" (McMillan, 1989, p. 421). In this case, the reader will gain an understanding of what teachers and students think happens when reading aloud is practised by those teachers. The reader may anticipate that similar results could be expected when other teachers read aloud to intermediate and secondary students.

#### Research Design

This is designed as a qualitative, descriptive study using interviews and written responses.

#### Selection of informants

The informants were selected by using the strategy of purposeful sampling. This strategy increases the usefulness of information obtained from relatively small samples. The samples, or key informants, are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the topic under investigation.

Key-informant interviews are in-depth interviews of individuals who have special knowledge, status, or communication skills who are willing to share that knowledge and skill with the researcher. They are usually chosen because they have access to observations unavailable to the ethnographer. They are often atypical individuals and must be selected carefully from among possible key informants. (McMillan, 1989, p. 406)

Spradley (1979, p. 46) identifies five requirements for selecting a good key informant. It was possible to meet some but not all of these requirements in this study.

The first requirement is thorough enculturation of the informant. "Good informants know their culture so well they no longer think about it. They do things automatically from years and years of practice" (p.47). For this study, informants were sought who had much experience of reading aloud to students. The eight informants averaged over nineteen years of teaching experience. Two have taught in other countries; two have taught in B.C. school districts other than the one in which they presently teach. The eight teachers work in five B.C. school districts: two districts in the suburban Vancouver area, one in the Southern B.C. interior, and two in the West Kootenay region.

The second requirement is current involvement. "The ethnographer wants to interview people who have expert

knowledge, informants who have a first-hand, current involvement in the cultural scene" (p. 49). This requirement was amply met by all eight informants.

Spradley's third requirement is that the informant be from an unfamiliar cultural scene, that is, unfamiliar to the researcher. Obviously this was an impossibility in this study. One of the difficulties with researching a culture with which one is already familiar is that too much can be taken for granted because it is already part of the researcher's cultural knowledge. If the researcher is gathering information about what he already knows, the informants may feel that they are being tested in some way. This, although certainly a possibility, did not emerge as a problem during the interviews. The prevailing atmosphere might best be described as collegial: a sharing of thoughts and ideas with an interested teaching colleague.

The fourth requirement is adequate time. Spradley notes that an interested subject will often make time for the research. During the initial approach to each informant, the length of time estimated required for the main interview (one hour) was discussed. All were very willing to volunteer that amount of time. All interviews were conducted in locations most convenient to the informants:

their homes, schools, or in two cases a mutually convenient location.

The fifth requirement is that the analytic informant be avoided. Spradley is referring to the informants who for some reason (often their education) are able to take a meta-cognitive view of the information they are offering and tend to classify and pre-organize it. It was anticipated that this could well be true of the informants for this study, but that it would not likely be a major detriment. In fact, all eight informants, although thoughtful and introspective as they responded to the probe questions, showed little evidence that they had pre-organized their information. They talked as teachers, using the vocabulary of the profession, but often approached an answer in an explorative fashion and offered tentative ideas.

The following specific criteria were used to select the eight key informants for this study:

1. The person must be a teacher of Grade Five or higher.
2. The person must read aloud to students by doing so on a daily (or every class) basis, barring the typical school interruptions to routine.

3. The person must be interested in talking about their thoughts on reading aloud and prepared to spend one or more hours doing so.
4. Informants would be selected from teachers of both genders and a variety of grade levels.

#### The informants

Two of the selected informants were former colleagues who were known to be teachers who read aloud to their classes. Two others were fellow graduate students in summer classes at UBC. The other four informants were obtained by recommendations from their principals or in one case by a parent of one of their students (who was also one of the informants). The eight key informants individually and collectively have an impressive breadth and length of experience.

The first has taught part and full time for the equivalent of over 20 years in two interior B.C. districts. She has worked at all grade levels, kindergarten to Grade 13, and taught all subjects except Mathematics. Her experience includes a stint as a teacher-librarian. Most of her experience, including her current assignment, is at the Grade Seven to Nine level.

The second informant has taught in a Lower Mainland district for 27 years. She began at the Grade Three-Four level and over the next 11 years moved through the grades to Grade Seven. She then spent the next 11 years teaching at the junior secondary level and five years ago moved to senior secondary where she currently teaches Grades 11 and 12.

The third informant also teaches in a Lower Mainland district, where he has spent his 13 year career. Most of his assignments have been at the Grade Five, Six, and Seven level, most often in classes combining two or three grades. Presently he is working in an open area team teaching situation with a group of Grade Three, Four and Five students.

The fourth informant has 10 years' experience accumulated in part and full-time work in four B.C. districts representing the North, the Okanagan and the Kootenays. She has taught Physical Education, Special Education and Home Economics at the secondary level, and Special Education and intermediate grades at the elementary level. Her current assignment is a Grade Five class.

The next informant has 17 years experience, all in a West Kootenay school district. Within that district she has taught in both rural and urban schools, mostly at the Grade Three, Four and Five levels. Currently she is teaching a Grade Five class.

Sharing a very similar teaching history, the next informant has also taught 17 years in a West Kootenay district. Her current assignment is with a Grade Six class in a city school; her teaching experience includes Grades Three to Six.

The seventh informant began his teaching career in Australia 34 years ago. After seven years of teaching there, he took some time to travel the world and then came "for two years" to the West Kootenay district where he has remained ever since. His work has been at the secondary level, mostly Grade Nine and higher, and his present assignment covers English 10, 11 and 12.

The last informant has taught in the same West Kootenay district for 15 years. In that time he has worked with Grades Four to Six in several schools. Two years ago he spent a year teaching on exchange in England, and this year is working with a Grade Six class in a middle school.

### The students

The students who provided responses represent four secondary English classes and four elementary classes. There were 178 student responses in total: 83 from secondary students aged 13 to 19 years and 95 from elementary students aged 10 to 12 years. Eighty-nine girls and 89 boys responded.

These numbers represent the students of six of the eight teachers who were key informants in this study. Responses from the students of one secondary teacher and one elementary teacher were not obtained because permission was not obtained in time to survey the students in those classes.

### Instrumentation

The interview format used was the unstructured schedule interview (Denzin, 1978, p. 115). In this type of interview, certain types of information are desired from all respondents but the particular phrasing of questions and their order are redefined to fit the characteristics of each respondent.

In the actual interviews, it was not necessary to make any changes to the questions or their order. Nor did it seem necessary to ask any new or rephrased questions during or following each interview. Asking for examples proved, as anticipated, to be a useful probe.

The following questions were used as probes in each interview:

1. Please tell about reading aloud to your students. Do you read every day? At what times? For about how long?
2. Please describe the classroom scene when you are reading aloud. Where are you? Where are the students and what are they doing? Do you vary this? Why?
3. What are some of the materials that you've read aloud successfully / unsuccessfully? Please comment on any that you wish to. What are you planning to read next? How do you plan?
4. How do you go about deciding what to read aloud?
5. Please describe how you read aloud. What are you striving for? Do you use gestures? Change voice? Edit? How do you prepare?
6. What do you feel you've gained as a teacher as you read?
7. What do you think happens to the students?

8. Do you ever share the role of listener? Please describe. Do you ever listen to others read aloud? In what situations?

9. What do you see as outcomes of reading aloud? Please tell me of anecdotes and examples that help to explain what you mean.

10. Have you always read aloud? How did you come to this practice? What influenced you in deciding to do this?

The students were asked to respond to the following question:

Please take about five minutes to share in writing any thoughts you have about being read aloud to.

Students were asked to identify themselves only by age and gender, not by name. Most of these handwritten responses were less than half a page in length.

#### Field procedures

One interview, averaging about an hour in length, was conducted with each key informant. The interviews took place in locations most convenient for the informants:

their classrooms or homes, or in two cases, other places mutually convenient to both. The interviews were conducted between August 1993 and January 1994. One informant also contributed further thoughts in several letters sent after the interview. No further return to informants for elaboration or clarification was necessary.

The student responses were obtained between February and May, 1994. It was planned that these responses not be requested until at least January so that the students would have had at least four months' experience of being read aloud to by the teachers who were informants in this study. As it turned out, the students had all spent at least five months with the teachers.

#### Data collection and recording

Each interview with a key informant was tape recorded. Following this, detailed notes were made from each recording. Numerous parts were transcribed verbatim so that the key informant's thinking might later be presented in his/her own words. All written information (letters from one teacher and the written responses from students) was simply collected as received.

### Data processing and analysis

The approach made to the information was that of inductive analysis, in which the themes and categories emerge from the data rather than being imposed on it prior to collection (McMillan, 1989, p. 415). This is the same approach used to classify and organize the information and ideas found in the literature. Just as significant categories emerged from the literature, so did they also emerge from the thinking of the teachers and the students. Many of the major categories were eventually to be found in all three sources, but not because the categories of one had been arbitrarily applied to the other two. In all three analyses, the categories emerged from the information collected.

As various types of information appeared, they were classified into various topic categories such as "Vocabulary Development." As analysis proceeded it was sometimes discovered that too-similar categories had been created and these were then consolidated. Sometimes the terminology used by teachers or students led to the creation of a category which later proved to be the same as another of a different name. These became evident once the information from both teachers and students was analyzed. The deciding question used to refine the categories was whether or not

the same phenomenon was being discussed, regardless of the name given to it. For example, students spoke of the importance of the teacher reading with expression whereas teachers referred to modelling good oral reading, but both were discussing the same aspect of reading aloud - performance.

Some categories were to be found in the teacher responses but not in the literature, just as there were categories in the teacher information that did not emerge from the student responses. The following chart, Chart #1, shows the categories which were identified in each of the three sources. The findings emerging from the teacher and student responses, organized as listed on the chart, will be reported and discussed in the following chapter.

Chart 1: Topics related to reading aloud referred to by teachers, students and the professional literature

Topic	Lit.	Tchrs.	Stdts.
Reading Comprehension	✓	✓	✓
Vocabulary Development	✓	✓	✓
Writing skills	✓	✓	✓
Acquisition of knowledge	✓	✓	✓
Development of imagination		✓	✓
Modelling of oral language and performance	✓	✓	✓
Development of "esprit de corps"	✓	✓	✓
Calming effect		✓	✓
Motivation to read	✓	✓	✓
Exposure to books & authors	✓	✓	✓
Pleasure	✓	✓	✓
ESL and less able readers	✓	✓	
Listening skills	✓	✓	
Thinking skills	✓	✓	
Influence on attitudes toward others	✓	✓	
Links to instruction	✓	✓	
Awareness of story components	✓		
Easier than reading to self			✓
Provides a rest			✓

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FindingsPart A: Teachers' Perceptions of Reading AloudIntroduction

The first part of the question "What is the perception of reading aloud in the intermediate and secondary classroom setting?" asks "How do teachers perceive reading aloud to intermediate and secondary classes?"

Eight teachers were selected as key informants. All are currently working in five different B.C. school districts. Three are secondary teachers of English, and five are teachers of Grades Five or Six. There are three male and five female teachers. The average teaching experience of the teachers in this group is over 19 years.

The eight teachers, after being asked and agreeing to participate as key informants, were interviewed. Each interview lasted about an hour and was tape recorded. One informant also sent additional thoughts in two letters. The teachers were asked to respond to 10 prepared probes and

were encouraged to speak freely about whatever thoughts occurred to them. No additional prompts were made other than the general probe questions. For example, if a teacher did not mention "vocabulary development" as one of the benefits of reading aloud, no prompt was made to elicit a specific comment on the topic.

From each recorded interview, detailed notes were made. Many of the informants' statements were transcribed verbatim, but not the entire interview. In reporting the thoughts of the informants, frequent use of the informants' actual statements has been made. These are reported anonymously but can be verified by interview notes.

The information obtained from the teachers was then subjected to inductive analysis, in which the topics and categories emerge from the data collected. These categories correspond in most cases to the categories found in the professional literature, although some categories exist in the literature which did not emerge from the data, and vice versa.

### Teachers reading aloud: Background, setting, materials

The first section of the following material reports what the teachers said about their practice of reading aloud. They were asked about the classroom setting when they read aloud and about the books and materials they choose to read to students. They were also asked what influenced them to read aloud to their students and what support or opposition they may have received from administrators, colleagues and parents of students. Their stories help to provide a framework for their thoughts about reading aloud which will follow the first section.

### Typical practices related to reading aloud

All eight teachers aim to read aloud every day and most are successful in doing so. The secondary teachers do not read to every class in a day, but usually to several. The most popular times for reading aloud (when there is a choice, as in the elementary school) seem to be after breaks such as recess and lunch. Several reasons for choosing this time were cited; for example, the calming effect of listening after a rowdy recess, and the opportunity to extend the reading time if desired. One teacher mentioned that in England, where he had been on exchange the previous year,

the time just before dismissal is a popular choice. The length of the reading time varies from 15 or 20 minutes to 30 minutes or sometimes longer.

In most cases the students sit at their desks while the teacher reads from a desk or stool at the front of the class. One teacher has the class gathered around at his feet. Another moves around the room. Several allow doodling either regularly or occasionally, but the majority ask the class to simply listen or permit them to follow in a copy of the book if they wish.

The nature of the read aloud performance varies from person to person. One secondary teacher - "Secretly, I'm Sarah Bernhardt" - takes parts, gestures and changes her voice. Most seem to depend on voice and expression as keys to bringing a story to life, although gestures are used to some extent by all but two. Another secondary teacher is deliberately subdued, stating that his goal is to draw the class in to the story rather than use a big voice and big gestures. Several said that they occasionally edit, sometimes for brevity and sometimes for content, such as omitting words that may cause embarrassment to the listeners.

Books and materials chosen to read aloud

The secondary teachers choose materials related to the needs of the secondary English curriculum. The selections include articles, short stories, poetry and novels. Although the reading choices relate to the curriculum, the secondary teachers stated that they were able to choose what they liked. Short stories are often read; there are "lots of stories the grade twelves like me to read." Novels or parts of novels make up a large part of the choice: All Quiet on the Western Front, To Kill a Mockingbird, Lord of the Flies, Of Mice and Men, some Dickens, parts of Jane Eyre and Pride and Prejudice. One of the secondary teachers said that all poetry is read aloud as a matter of course. As a criterion for selection, the same teacher asks himself, "Do I like it? If I like it, then as a teacher I can put it over well enough for them to like it too."

The elementary teachers choose whatever they wish to read to their students. Their criteria for choosing are quite varied. One tries for books within the reading ability range of the class, such as The teacher fried my brains by Coville. Another stays away from "popular" books and tries to choose books she doesn't think students would necessarily choose for themselves. Several others echo this criterion:

that the students be exposed to books they might not hear or read otherwise. Among the titles which were mentioned by more than one teacher are The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle, Goodnight Mister Tom, Smith, Where the Red Fern Grows, The Hobbit, Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird, Bridge to Terabithia and Carrie's War.

Whether chosen because of curricular needs or for other reasons, almost all the material selected is literature of various genre. Imaginative fiction was most frequently mentioned. There are some exceptions: a secondary teacher chooses whatever interests her, including newspaper articles, and an elementary teacher was planning to read from Brother, Can You Spare a Dime? as part of a unit on the Depression.

It is clear that all eight teachers give thought to their choices. "If you pick the book carefully enough you can't really screw it up too much." One teacher said that she may be guided by the mood of the class. If the students are under pressure or not getting along well, she will try to choose something "frothy." Another said that humour always works, and that serious melodrama (such as Goodnight Mister Tom) "holds them." A teacher who said that his Grade Sixes "think they are teenagers" finds that this group enjoys

"books about kids facing a dilemma, books that get them inside other kids' heads."

Influences on teachers who read aloud

Every one of these teachers has always read aloud, through teaching careers averaging longer than 19 years. Their reasons for beginning the practice are interesting. One began out of a very pragmatic need to cope with a class of 34 which included two youngsters wont to scream and yell at intervals. "It was half an hour I didn't have to prep for, and I'd retain my sanity. Then all kinds of benefits came out of it so I kept on with it." Another said that "Probably at one time it was solely because it put me in the centre of attention but I don't think that's part of it now."

Many but not all of these teachers were influenced by the memory of adults who had read aloud to them: Mothers, teachers, an older sister, a woman Cub leader who "entertained and enthralled." One recounted a Grade Nine teacher who read Edgar Allan Poe for the last 10 minutes of every English period. "And it was so great just to sit there and be in the House of Usher," she recalled.

Teachers mentioned the change and growth that have taken place over the course of their careers. One began by reading Dickens - heavily edited - to elementary students until one day a colleague asked, "Haven't you heard of Leon Garfield?" "That was my introduction to children's literature and what wonderful things there were for children that didn't have to be edited." A workshop given by "a really keen woman" led another into a deeper type of novel than before. Another was pleased when her deep-seated love of reading aloud was reinforced and validated by university courses in children's literature.

Some share the role of listener with their students. Two of the secondary teachers are pleased to invite their students to read aloud if they feel comfortable doing so. An elementary teacher noted that he and his partner teacher always listen, willingly, when it is the other's turn to read aloud. Another has stories on tape for the car: "Loving to be read to doesn't go away."

None of these teachers has ever encountered opposition from administrators or colleagues. Some colleagues have commented on not having the time to read aloud. There were several accounts of parent opposition to a particular title, usually for religious reasons. The teachers related various

experiences in which a particular book had not been a success with a class. Usually another choice was made. The teacher recently on an English exchange reported that a Canadian book with a camping setting fell flat in England, speculating that it may have been because his English pupils had no camping experience.

#### Parents' responses to reading aloud

The majority of the teachers reported that they had received appreciation from parents for reading aloud. One said that a number of parents noticed a real change in their child's enthusiasm for reading that year, and reported their youngsters asking for books and going to the library together. They "usually couple that with thanks for the new knowledge of present good books."

Other informants were pleased that parents had mentioned how happy they were about the amount of reading done in the class, and how much their child was enjoying reading. This praise was not limited to the elementary level; a secondary teacher said that it is rewarding when a parent says how much a student enjoys being read to.

Teachers' perceptions of the outcomes of reading aloud  
to intermediate and secondary classes

The key informants, individually and collectively, perceive a number of outcomes of reading aloud. Some perceptions are shared by all the informants, others by only a few. The thoughts of the informants have been analysed and classified. The topics are presented in the same order as in the preceding review of the professional literature.

Reading Comprehension

The effect of reading aloud on reading comprehension was noted most by secondary teachers. One quoted a student talking about To Kill a Mockingbird. "I read that chapter the night before but until you read it I really didn't understand people could be so mean to each other." Another secondary teacher thinks that students absorb what is read aloud more easily than just silently reading to themselves. When a teacher reads in a meaningful way, students have a better grasp of the whole picture, he thinks. "The reader creates an atmosphere by reading aloud that silent reading can't achieve."

A sixth grade teacher feels that there is less emphasis on direct comprehension in current reading instruction. Listening to reading, he feels, gives children more opportunity to show that they understand inferences, and provides the teacher a better chance to see "just where they're at."

#### Vocabulary development

Three teachers noted vocabulary development as a result of reading aloud. One thinks that youngsters can picture scenes in their heads because of the vocabulary used in good stories. Another says that children are exposed to vocabulary that they may never have heard before.

#### Writing skills

None of the three who mentioned vocabulary development as an effect of reading aloud offered evidence of this in their students' writing. A secondary teacher, however, noted that she sometimes sees words and phrases repeated in the journals written after listening to reading.

More frequently mentioned, however, was the effect of reading aloud on student writing style. This was seen in

two forms: a developing sense of the elements of story and the use of rising action. "Many emulate the style they hear." One teacher has seen evidence that direct teaching about style and motifs is rewarded by students incorporating these elements into their own work. A secondary teacher felt that the reading aloud helps students to see other ways of approaching things; helps expose them to different styles and techniques.

The oral responses made in class often provide models for what will later be written in response journals. The reading aloud and ensuing discussion also provide stimulation. "After being read aloud to they have lots to say. I get pages" (in the response journals).

As noted earlier, one teacher sees particular value in the use of what has been read aloud to generate opinions. The students' writing is much more persuasive because they have convictions; they bring background knowledge to the argument; there isn't a "right" answer; and the situation seems real. "They have an opinion about this. They aren't just being called upon to generate one."

### Acquisition of knowledge

A few teachers mentioned that reading aloud can provide knowledge such as historical, geographical and cultural information. For one teacher this was an important observation. She was contemplating reading The Monument by Gary Paulsen because the class "hasn't a clue about war." The Dark is Rising by Susan Cooper had provided her class with new notions of Christmas customs, as well as ideas of good and bad which were not necessarily the same as Christian ideas of good and bad.

She also noted the value of acquiring vicarious experience through being read to. Reading aloud offers "a great way to learn about things in a less personal way, instead of having to experience it yourself. Bad things can be exposed to you without the pain of going through it yourself. For some kids that's really important."

### Development of imagination

Both elementary and secondary teachers say that listening to stories read aloud helps students to visualize. A secondary teacher quotes a student: "I can imagine it now." An elementary teacher commented that reading aloud takes her

students beyond television and helps them to develop imagination and the ability to visualize. Another said it helps them to make a movie in their minds.

#### Modelling of oral language and performance

The development of language in general and oral language in particular was mentioned by nearly all of the informants. In general terms, they thought that reading aloud offered students the opportunity to hear English as it should be spoken. Two referred to "exposure to descriptive language."

Referring specifically to oral language, one teacher thought that reading aloud "is a great way to stimulate kids whose parents don't speak well or often."

For another teacher, the sound of reading aloud provides joy to both him and his students. "I like the way a word sounds. Words have beautiful sounds." Saying a word like "phosphorescence" out loud adds to our experience of it. Poetry, in particular, requires reading aloud. Everything in poetry is read aloud: "They read to me, I read to them."

The effect of such modelling on students' reading aloud has been noted. A grade five teacher said that after watching

her, her students are now trying to read with more expression. They can get themselves into role. This was echoed by another grade five teacher, who has seen some students trying to mimic her in their own oral reading.

#### Development of "esprit de corps"

Another factor, noted specifically by two teachers, was the sense that reading aloud helps to develop an "esprit de corps" in the class. "There's a real sense that everybody belongs because everybody shares the same joke," said one secondary teacher. An elementary teacher thinks of this as bonding. "A bonding can go on, if you pick good books and if they are books you feel strongly about." He said that talking about different situations may help students to realize that they may not be the only one who's felt that way. The girl who said, "This is what's happening to me" about Mama's Going to buy you a Mockingbird was able to feel closer to her classmates as a result of their "sharing" her experience.

#### Calming effect

One teacher referred directly to the calming effect that reading aloud appears to have on the class. Another noted

that it seems to be a factor in decreasing the senior secondary absentee rate; fewer students cut classes on Friday afternoons.

#### Motivation to read

Several teachers feel that they are modelling and influencing attitudes toward reading. "I enjoy the selections that we do, and that's obvious. Most of them buy into that. They'll give it at least a try. If reading in high school is pleasurable maybe they will become life long readers."

Another teacher said that his students bring books to show him that they are reading. "Because they think that I am a reader, and that a reader is an okay thing to be, they'll bring me books they really like ... and say 'You'll probably like this.'"

A third teacher sees herself as sharing stories that she really likes and sees this extended when her students share those books with their families.

Most of the informants find that what they read to students has an effect on what some students choose to read

independently. More than one has had students "come clamouring to borrow the book when I'm finished." "I've read a book to kids, put it down and next thing you know, some kid's reading it again." One sees, when signing out a particular book to read to the next class, that a lot of former students have also taken the book out. Former students will pass her in the hall, waving a copy of a book, and ask "Remember this?" A secondary teacher finds that some students will get McCullers' novels after having been read some of her short stories. This teacher thinks he has "a little success" in getting students to read more. One teacher has noted that at school book sales, his students are "over there like a shot" buying books by authors he has read aloud.

#### Exposure to books and authors

Seven of the eight teachers said that reading aloud provides the opportunity to expand the reading experiences of their students. For several this is because of the exposure to books which the students would not otherwise have chosen or come across. In most cases this is because the book would not be well known to many students. For one teacher, this also meant exposure to more challenging books than those that would ordinarily be chosen by the students. "I like

books that really challenge kids; where they have to be jumping to catch hold of what's going on." Two teachers mentioned the introduction to authors previously unknown by the students, and the strong interest that developed as a result of one of an author's books such as Susan Cooper's The Dark is Rising having been read aloud.

Two other teachers feel that reading aloud provides the fundamental basis of their students' reading experience, as well as expanding it. Because of TV and other competitors for children's time, "the only way they are going to find out about books is if someone reads to them." Another noted the value of author visits as a means of expanding the reading experience. His community had been visited by W.P. Kinsella and L.R. Wright, both well received by secondary students.

### Pleasure

The first response from almost all the teachers to the question, "What do you feel you've gained as a teacher by reading aloud?" was "pleasure." Not only did they state this but also the sincerity of the feeling was reflected in their voices. The pleasure was explained in various ways. A secondary teacher mentioned the wonderful tone which

reading aloud creates in her classroom. She also thinks that today's overstressed kids need the calming, soothing effect created.

Others mentioned the pleasure they get from providing pleasure to their students. "For some kids, the giving of pleasure is a big change in their lives." A secondary teacher wants his students to get the same pleasure which he did from being read aloud to. This teacher also enjoys the long-term outcomes manifest in the reminiscences of former students who remember the stories and say, "I wish you'd read more." This is echoed by an elementary teacher who savours the fond memories of former students. He notes that reading aloud is one of the things that students have talked about to parents. Nor should we overlook the statements from several teachers that reading aloud is fun, for both themselves and their classes.

Several made the observation that older students, like young children, like to hear favorite stories over and over. "If it's pleasurable the first time, it's pleasurable each time after."

An elementary teacher can't get her class to miss the story, whatever else is going on. Nor can she always stop at the

end of a chapter: "Oh please, you can't leave us at this point in the story, we have to know!"

#### ESL and less able readers

"My low level reader couldn't handle reading herself...but she was an awfully good listener." Half the teachers volunteered observations about the value of reading aloud as an equalizer of the range of reading abilities that exists in every class. A secondary teacher spoke of the great chasm between ability groups and said, "It's not our job to frustrate kids."

A fifth grade teacher feels that reading aloud accommodates the various learning levels. Poor readers can understand with no trouble. Two teachers commented that they have noticed that less able readers seem to be the most likely to re-read a book that has been read aloud, usually with a measure of success.

Only one teacher offered an observation related to ESL students. In her experience, ESL students love to listen to reading aloud, possibly because it may be easier, she thinks. "It shows that they've not had much reading aloud."

### Listening skills

Only two informants actually referred to the improvement of listening ability. One observed that "most kids seldom talk to parents and they don't talk much to each other, either." Some teachers observed changes in the active listening responses that youngsters make to literature read aloud: "anticipation, sudden quietness, righteous indignation and a lack of self-consciousness."

### Thinking skills

One of the informants sees reading aloud as a means by which students "start to think." Another referred repeatedly to the exposure to new ideas, to ideas "they may never have heard before." A secondary teacher found evidence of this in the level of involvement in discussions surrounding the book being read aloud. An elementary teacher observed that the students ask lots of questions when the book is a challenging one. She sees it as a tremendous way to get youngsters who are not communicating to begin to do so.

One teacher noted that reading aloud helps her students to think for themselves. "During story, I'm not telling and

providing and asking and cajoling. They're picking up stuff on their own; it's a very subtle way of giving them things."

A secondary teacher said students develop the ability to recognize themselves in book characters, such as those in Golding's Lord of the Flies. In this respect, another teacher said that a lot of the youngsters' abilities to draw analogies between story and real life seem to him to depend on how much of that sort of discussion they have had with their parents.

#### Influence on attitudes toward others

One teacher reads a lot of contemporary realism which he noted has led to many very worthwhile discussions about how people should be treated. His elementary students exhibit a strong sense of justice.

Another elementary teacher used The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson as an opportunity to talk with her class about a classmate in foster care who was having a hard time. The class's behaviour modified and she sensed a greater empathy for the foster child's home situation.

One teacher noted the opportunity for children to relate themselves and their own experiences to the books being read to them. When he first read Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird by Jean Little a student came up to him and said, "This is what's happening to me."

#### Links to instruction

Almost all the teachers mentioned the use of reading aloud as a springboard to later instruction. One secondary teacher thinks that reading aloud prompts better discussion than does silent reading. It enables her to model thinking in questions and discussion and thus helps remove some of the "has to be the right answer" syndrome.

Several teachers said they use the books previously read aloud to the class as points of reference later. One may use it to introduce some aspect of a novel study, so that he can model what he expects the students to do next. Another makes a direct link to strategies she wishes to teach, often using primary books to illustrate predicting and story-mapping. Another is able to invoke the latest story instead of creating fictitious situations for discussion and persuasive writing topics. Rather than attempting to stir interest in a trumped-up topic, he is provided with instant,

pertinent debate topics from situations in the read aloud novel. In some cases reading aloud is used as part of the actual instruction. For example, the teacher reads half a chapter and then the rest is assigned for independent reading.

#### Modelling of responses to reading

Along with seeing the deepening of listeners' responses to reading, four teachers commented on the opportunity which reading aloud provides for them to demonstrate a genuine emotional response to what they are reading. Several related that they cried while reading books such as Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson or Charlotte's Web by E.B. White. Another talked about having had to put a book down and that he felt it was good for children to know that he felt strongly about it: "that we - and especially a male teacher - can be moved by a book too."

#### Effects upon the teacher

One of the probes asked, "What do you feel you've gained as a teacher by reading aloud?" In addition to the unanimous response of "pleasure" there were other personal benefits mentioned by various informants. One said that she often

gained new personal insights into literature. Another commented that reading aloud has made her aware of what literature is available and has extended her range of knowledge of books.

An elementary teacher said that she feels good that she's not just sticking to the basal reader stories or the few novels available in the school. The same teacher said that she always gets something new and enjoyable out of the stories. A secondary teacher said that reading aloud has helped him grow. Another secondary teacher said that she judges from the oral and written responses and is left with "the satisfied feeling that you got to them."

#### General comments of teachers

All eight teachers were clearly certain that reading aloud is a worthwhile practice. Many urge that other teachers do this as well. "Reading aloud has to be made a priority. Why do we neglect the easiest thing?" A secondary teacher feels we should encourage student teachers and beginning teachers to read aloud, and that we should put less emphasis on USSR. He says to student teachers, "You're here to teach them to appreciate reading."

Several summed up their thoughts with statements of personal feeling. "I can't imagine not reading ... it would be very sad for me and the students ... it's just so important to me and I enjoy it so much." Another said, "I think it's a crime to have students in your room and nobody reads to them. Something's lacking in a person's life if they don't have somebody to read to them."

Part B: Intermediate and secondary students' perceptions of  
being read to

The second part of the thesis question "What is the perception of reading aloud in the intermediate and secondary classroom setting?" asks "How do students in intermediate and secondary classes perceive being read to?" The students of the teachers interviewed were asked to take about five minutes to share in writing any thoughts they have about being read aloud to.

The elementary teachers asked their regular classes to respond to the question, and the secondary teachers selected one of their English classes to do the same thing.

All of the student responses were done after the teachers had been interviewed. Although, as has been seen in their

remarks, many of the teachers had some notion of how their students felt about being read to, none had ever asked them to write about it. In notes enclosed with the student responses, several commented that they had found them interesting to read.

One hundred seventy-eight student responses were received, most about one paragraph in length. Of these, 83 were from secondary students aged 13 to 19 years, and 95 were from elementary students aged 10 to 12 years. Eighty-nine responses were written by boys and 89 by girls.

Each student response was read and analysed, first according to whether or not the student liked or disliked being read to and second according to specific aspects of reading aloud which were mentioned.

Of the 178 students, 17 disliked being read to. Twelve of these are boys, equally divided between elementary and secondary students. The other five are teenage girls. One of the boys said, "I don't like to be read out loud to because I find it boring." He then qualified this by saying "Sometimes I don't mind it if it's a very interesting book." A 15 year old boy said, "Sometimes it is sort of childish because it makes you feel like you are a baby and you can do

it yourself," and a 15 year old girl said, "It's something meant for kids in elementary school." A 13 year old girl thought "older kids should read to themselves more because it is more educational and they are going to have to do it sooner or later."

The vast majority of the students, though, shared the feelings of the boy who said, "Even though I am a 16 year old male I still enjoy having stories read aloud." An 11 year old boy said, "My teacher reads to our class every day. I think it is rad when she reads to us."

Not only do the students say that they like to be read to, but they are also able to offer a number of reasons why they think reading aloud is a good thing to do. As might be expected, some things were mentioned by only a few students whereas other topics appeared repeatedly in the student responses. The student responses have been analysed and will be discussed in the same order of topics as were the teachers' views. As may be seen in Chart 1, page 49, many of the values of reading aloud have been pointed out by students, teachers and the professional literature.

Reading comprehension

That listening to a story helped them to understand it better was mentioned by at least as many secondary as elementary students. An 11 year old boy said, "I like when someone reads complicated books out loud to me so I understand each part." Another said that listening "makes me understand the book more than me reading it." An 11 year old girl said that listening allowed her to concentrate on what the story is about.

Some students simply said that being read to helped them to become better readers. An 11 year old boy said, "It's good to read to our class every day because it helps us read better." Another said, "I think it makes me want to read more and is making me a better reader." A 16 year old girl said, "...I see the words in the book as I follow along. At the same time hear it and I seem to remember it a bit better than silent reading."

The teenagers had even more to say about this. "If I read by myself I don't get as much details and it is harder to understand." Another 13 year old boy said, "If the book is hard to understand it's nice to hear it from someone else because you don't have to worry about hard words, etc."

A 15 year old said, "If there's a part you don't understand the teacher will more than likely explain it before you ever ask." The appreciation of teacher explanation was echoed by an 18 year old boy who said, "I feel when teachers read aloud to me I pick things up quicker because they are explained." Another 15 year old boy said, "I think being read to aloud allows us to fully absorb what the teachers and the story are trying to get across to us. I feel it should be introduced into more classrooms." An 18 year old boy said, "I guess it's better because it sticks more." Another said, "I might pick up something I missed or even get a different idea of what is trying to be said."

It should be noted that some students, the majority of them teenage girls, thought that their understanding of a story was better when they read it independently rather than having it read aloud to them. One 16 year old boy said that when he reads to himself he can put emphasis and voices into characters and see it in his mind, but that he does not get the same effect from being read to. Several said that they do not concentrate as well when someone is reading to them as they do when they are reading to themselves. A 17 year old girl said, "I find that when I am read to by a teacher I don't comprehend as much as I would silently reading to

myself. When the teacher reads it gives me the opportunity to let my mind drift; when I read I make myself process the words."

#### Vocabulary development

Some were aware that being read to aided their vocabulary development. A 13 year old girl said, speaking of the person doing the reading aloud, "Normally it is someone older or more advanced in reading skill so when I come across a word I don't know the person would know." A 15 year old girl noted that the "teacher always explains meanings of words to you." An 11 year old girl said, "It also helps me with learning new vocabulary." Another said, "It helps me learn harder words and understand them." A 10 year old boy also noted that reading aloud "teaches us pronunciation."

#### Writing Skills

Only one student, a 12 year old girl, noted that being read to had an influence on writing. "...I get a lot of benefit in learning different styles of writing that I can put into my own work."

### Acquisition of knowledge

A few mentioned that they learn things from being read to. A 12 year old girl said, "I think that reading aloud to students is a fun way to sneak in lessons without their knowing." An 11 year old girl said, "Sometimes the book ties in with a project or topic we are studying."

### Development of imagination

Another topic mentioned by a large number of students is imagination. Listening to a story allows them to imagine more freely and to create mental pictures of what is happening in the story. This too was mentioned by students at all grade levels, but more frequently by girls than by boys.

A 12 year old girl said, "...when you read by yourself you are concentrating so hard on what you're reading that you can't think of a picture of what the story is about. When you get read to...you can think of a picture and you can absorb the material." Many referred to imagining pictures: "You can really imagine what the picture is;" "...gives me time to see the picture in my head;" "When she reads I like to see the pictures in my head." The preceding comments are

all from 10 and 11 year olds, but older students made similar comments. A 15 year old boy said, "You can sit there and imagine what the speaker is reading."

Some said that they imagine themselves in a role in the story. "I can get away from school and off into another world." "When (teacher) reads to us sometimes I imagine myself in that place having that adventure," said an 11 year old girl. "Like in the Black Cauldron I felt brave and a bit sad." Another girl the same age said, "When people read to me I pretend I am that character." A 10 year old said that "it makes me feel like those people or animals in the book are talking to me."

#### Modelling of oral language and performance

There were many indications that the dramatic quality of the reading aloud is important to these student listeners. For several teenagers it is the qualifying factor in liking or not liking to be read to. A boy, fifteen, said that he liked listening "as long as the reader is expressive." A girl, also fifteen, said that reading aloud is good if the teacher is a good reader and can make the story come alive. An 11 year old said that the reason she liked Carrie's War by Nina Bawden was that the teacher read it with expression.

Some of the teenagers attached particular value to the reading aloud of specific genre. A 17 year old boy said that he learns better "especially with plays where the teacher reads with the emphasis needed to get the point across." A 19 year old male cited the reading of Romeo and Juliet, saying that teachers "must be able to keep things emotional in order for myself to be interested. They must make a mood as though on stage as an actor." Value in terms of specific genre was also noted by an 18 year old male who said that reading aloud is "good for poetry because for people that are not poetic it is hard to find a rhythm but with the teacher reading you can get a feel for it."

An 11 year old commented that "They might even act it out sometimes which is really neat." Another 11 year old girl likes lots of expression, change of voice, and "when they make it sound like they're reading to you and ... not to themselves." "She reads like it's really happening; that makes it more exciting." Timing was also noted: "Everytime she reads she leaves us hanging so we want her to read more."

### Development of "esprit de corps"

A few students mentioned the feeling which develops when a whole class hears the same story. A 12 year old boy said, "and everybody will know what the book is about." Another boy, age 10, remarked "...then you can share your feelings with others." An 11 year old boy said, "I like being read to aloud because it's better and everyone can tell what might happen next or what their predictions are."

### Calming effect

The calming effect produced by reading aloud to a group was the students' most frequently mentioned point, made by all age levels and equally by girls and boys. A 13 year old boy said, "...I can totally relax and enjoy what I'm hearing." A 10 year old boy said, "I feel very relaxed and very calm."

An 11 year old girl noted the calming effect on the class: "...it's really relaxing and it's fun. If kids are wound up it's a really good way to calm down." This was repeated by a 12 year old girl: "I feel that reading aloud has a very positive effect on me and the rest of the class, it gives us time to relax." The final word must go to a 15 year old boy, who wrote, "I like it because it soothes the soul...."

### Motivation to read

Some students reflected on the effect that reading aloud has on the amount of independent reading that they do. A 10 year old boy said, "I think I read more since my teacher started reading to our class." An 11 year old girl said, "It helps me read more because I want to get the book out again." A 10 year old girl said, "The stories the teacher read get me more interested in books."

### Exposure to books and authors

A number of students commented, usually approvingly, on the teachers' choices of books to read aloud. They also recognized the influence that those choices have on their own subsequent book selection.

The book selected by the teacher to read aloud is important to many. As an 11 year old girl put it, "I better like the story or watch out world." Several, such as this 15 year old girl, qualified their approval of reading aloud by saying things such as "...but it also depends on what the person is reading." A 10 year old girl said, "If it's a good book I could listen for hours."

The students expressed confidence in their teachers to choose well, at least most of the time. An 11 year old girl said, "...she usually picks very interesting books or stories." They provided examples of titles which they had enjoyed listening to. Some of the books mentioned were Carrie's War, Bristleface, The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle, Where the Red Fern Grows, and The Hobbit.

The effect of being exposed to good books is not wasted on the students. An 11 year old girl said, "...there might be a really good book that you might not have heard about or read." A 12 year old girl said that reading aloud exposes her to new literature and new authors. Another referred to hearing The Dark is Rising read aloud and said, "because of that I have started reading books by Susan Cooper." An 11 year old boy said of his teacher, "When she reads I feel like getting the same book because she always gets the best books." An 11 year old girl echoed this: "And the books are so good I take them out and read them too."

### Pleasure

The vast majority of students stated that they like to be read to. Most went on to give one or more reasons why they

enjoy being read to, but the overall sense of pleasure remains fundamental in many of the student responses.

For some, the pleasure comes, at least in part, from being able to "escape" the real world. A 13 year old boy said, "I think about nice things, it gets my mind off all the problems that I have." A 10 year old girl said, "It's comforting to hear someone read out loud to you."

Many simply expressed their pleasure. "I like being read to out loud because it is fun to hear people read other than your mom or dad," said an 11 year old girl. An 11 year old boy said, "I really like it when we get read to in class." A 15 year old girl began, "I love being read to," and continued, "it just brings me to another place when I am being read to.... It just flows through."

#### Easier to do

A number of students stated that being read to was easier for them than having to read on their own. Three of these were 11 year old boys. "I don't like reading and for me it's better to get read to than to read it myself." "I don't like reading but I like when people read to me." "I would rather listen than read. Listening is easier ...."

Another boy, 13, said, "If the book is hard to understand it's nice to hear it from someone else because you don't have to worry about hard words, etc."

#### A rest from work

Students also noted that reading aloud provided the listeners with a break from work. A 10 year old boy said, "I like it because it gives us a break from work", and another was equally clear: "I like it because it takes up time that we could be working." From an 11 year old boy: "I like it and it wastes school time." A 12 year old boy said, "...you can rest from eye-straining work in school." An 11 year old girl was more eloquent. "Also it's not really school work unless we read about something we are studying. Even if we are reading about something we are studying, it still can be fun."

### Discussion

In asking, "What is the perception of reading aloud in the intermediate and secondary classroom setting?" the thoughts of teachers and students were sought. These perceptions were reported in the preceding section, as findings. As Chart 1, page 49, shows, some of the perceptions are unique to either teachers or students, and some are held in common by both groups.

#### Perceptions held in common by both teachers and students

There are many areas which were mentioned by both students and teachers. It is quite evident that the thoughts of each group are mutually supportive. The teachers' perceptions are corroborated by what the students had to say. The two groups, teachers as readers and students as listeners, share many common beliefs about the outcomes of reading aloud to students.

#### Reading Comprehension

Although it was mentioned at all levels, the role played by reading aloud in improving reading comprehension was given greater importance by both secondary teachers and secondary

students than it was by their elementary counterparts. This is quite possibly a reflection of the fact that all the secondary teachers choose their read-aloud material to fulfil the needs of the curriculum, whereas elementary teachers appear to select material closely suited to the needs, interests and comprehension levels of the class. (It should be noted that such selection does not indicate a deviation from "curriculum" at the elementary level, as many options are available to teachers at this level.)

It would appear likely that both students and teachers at the secondary level view some of the materials as difficult, and hence are more aware of the value of reading aloud in helping to overcome comprehension problems. For some students the reading aloud itself provides the time and understanding they need; for others, the teacher's explanation of various parts was mentioned as useful.

#### Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development as a result of reading aloud was not mentioned by many students or teachers. A teacher commented on the exposure that students are given to previously unknown words. Students more commonly mentioned the explanations offered by the teacher in the course of reading

aloud. Although not mentioned frequently by either group, vocabulary development was noted more often by students than by their teachers.

One reason why teachers do not see vocabulary development as an outcome of reading aloud may be because there is little if any formal assessment of vocabulary carried out by teachers. Informal observations of vocabulary used in students' speech or writing provide unreliable data at best. Of interest in this respect are the several studies which have been conducted on the relationship between reading aloud and vocabulary development. Both Elley (1989) and Maher (1991) incorporated teacher explanation of vocabulary as part of the read-aloud treatment, and both found significant gains. Stahl, Richek and Vandevier (1990) found gains resulting from reading aloud even without vocabulary explanation, especially for lower achieving readers. The results of these studies support the views of the students and teachers who think that reading aloud, especially when coupled with explanations of word meanings, contributes to vocabulary development.

### Writing Skills

Teachers mentioned that they can see the effect of reading aloud on student writing style. Some observed students emulating the styles they hear in the literature which is read to them. Other teachers make use of reading aloud as part of direct teaching about style. Teachers are using discussion of reading aloud as modelling and stimulation for the subsequent writing of response journals. Reading aloud also plays a role in providing meaningful topics for persuasive writing.

It would appear that although teachers recognize that reading aloud does influence their students' writing, there is potential for more effective use to be made of it in this regard. The studies of Dressel (1990) and Jaggar, Carrara and Weiss (1986) both found that reading aloud had a positive effect on the literary quality of youngsters' writing. Michener's studies (1989) found the biggest improvement was in the development of syntax. The only student who referred to writing spoke of style and was very aware of learning different styles of writing which she can incorporate into her own work.

The potential for more effective use of reading aloud in teaching writing likely lies in teachers making more explicit use of reading aloud to provide examples of style. There might also be more attention paid to variety of styles when choosing books that will be read aloud. Certainly teachers recognize the usefulness of reading aloud in stimulating written responses and meaningful argument.

#### Acquisition of knowledge

The role played by reading aloud in imparting knowledge to students was noted by both teachers and students, although not widely by either group. That students mentioned it at all is interesting, given the number of sources of knowledge they are exposed to. It is also possible that they do not think of something that is enjoyable as a source of knowledge. The teacher who spoke most about this sees it as an important contribution of reading aloud. She uses it to provide knowledge of places, customs, events and experiences not necessarily desirable but important to know about (such as nuclear war). Although writers such as DuBois and McIntosh (1986) make claims that reading aloud plays a role in providing knowledge, no actual studies of this appear to exist and certainly there is scope for some to be undertaken.

That reading aloud is not commonly seen as a source of knowledge may also be a reflection of the type of material being read aloud. For the elementary students it is predominantly narrative fiction. None of the informants said that they made much use of non-fiction to read aloud, whether from books, magazines or newspapers. A student mentioned that the book sometimes ties in with a topic being studied, as it might in the case of an historical novel. Carter and Abrahamson (1991) urge that teachers make much greater use of non-fiction to read aloud to teenagers, citing a considerable variety of possible choices. There is also considerable value in selecting fiction from the ever-growing body of literature based in other cultures.

#### Development of Imagination

Both teachers and students talked about the role reading aloud plays in allowing listeners to picture what is happening in the story. Teachers know that students, at both the elementary and secondary levels, do this as they listen to reading. What they may not know is the extent to which this takes place and the importance it seems to have for listeners.

Students of all ages appear to be very aware of their ability to imagine what is going on in the story. They repeatedly referred to "pictures" and they also talked about putting themselves into the roles of characters in the story. Many were quite specific that they would not be able to do this as well if they were engaged in reading the story independently. Students even more than their teachers see imagining as an important outcome of reading aloud.

Most teachers would be very aware of the importance of imagining as part of the act of reading. What emerges from these findings, however, is that many students perceive reading aloud as the facilitating factor in permitting that imagination to function fully.

#### Modelling of oral language and performance

In this case teachers and students are looking at the same act but from two different points of view. Teachers talked of reading aloud providing opportunities for modelling correct and rich language. They also see it as providing an opportunity to model expression and role-playing as they read aloud to their classes.

The teachers' efforts are not in vain. There were repeated indications that the reader's performance was appreciated by and important to listeners of all ages. For some, particularly teens, it is a critical factor in whether or not they like to be read to. Expression, change of voice, gestures - all came in for favourable mention by students.

Some teachers could see the influence of the teacher's model in the students' oral reading. No students mentioned trying to emulate the teacher, although a number compared their oral reading ability unfavorably with the teacher's. What the students do make clear is that the performance value of reading aloud should not be underestimated, and that all efforts to make the performance as expressive as possible will be appreciated, adding to the enjoyment and understanding of the selection.

All the informants, when recounting the history of their reading aloud experience, said that they thought they had improved over time in their ability to read dramatically. They vary in the amount of use made of gestures, changes in voice and dramatization, but all feel that they are effective in making as much use of these as they are comfortable with. These perceptions are supported by what the students said.

No studies were found which claim that reading aloud contributes to students' oral language development. Several journal articles suggest that it may, and most of the informants thought so as well. None offered examples to support this. Most mentioned that the reading aloud exposed the listeners to correctly pronounced and descriptive language. Here is another area with enormous potential for future research, ranging from observing the development of pronunciation to investigating the effect of reading aloud on spoken language patterns.

#### Development of "esprit de corps"

Not widely mentioned by either group, but clearly articulated by some teachers in particular, was the role played by reading aloud in developing an "esprit de corps" within the class. A secondary teacher spoke of the sense of belonging which ensues because everyone shares the same joke. Some younger students like the fact that everyone knows what the book is about, and that they can share their feelings with others. One teacher referred to choosing something "light" if the class was not getting along with each other. The results, though not specified, presumably were successful.

### Calming effect

Only one teacher referred directly to the calming effect that reading aloud has on the class. On the other hand, this was the value most frequently mentioned by students. It is quite possible that the lack of mention by teachers means only that the calming effect is taken for granted by them. In contrast, it is certainly perceived as important by the students. They repeatedly noted its effect on themselves individually and the group as a whole. Words such as "relaxed" and "calm" appeared frequently. When a fifteen year old boy says that listening "soothes the soul," it is clear that a need is being met.

That the need for periods of calm in the school day is keenly appreciated by so many students raises many questions beyond the scope of this study. In terms of reading aloud as a practice, it provides an answer for those who worry that reading aloud will be boring to the students or a waste of time for teachers and students.

### Motivation to read

The role played by reading aloud in motivating students to read independently was noted by most teachers. They had no trouble citing evidence: students clamouring to borrow a book when it was finished; students looking for more books by the same author; students buying certain books at the book sales. The students, of course, spoke individually but made reference to reading more because the teacher reads to the class, and to wanting to get a book out of the library again.

These perceptions are also supported by several studies such as those done by Cosgrove (1987), Herrold, Stanchfield and Serabian (1989), Porter (1969), and Blatt (1981). All of these researchers found that reading aloud to students was a significant positive factor in improving students' reading attitudes. Beers' study (1990) of aliterate seventh graders found that listening to an entire book read aloud was a motivational factor.

Also significant here is that the above studies generally relied on attitudinal measures such as positive-negative scales to assess the level of motivation. Whether the students who reported feeling more positive about reading

were in fact doing any more reading than before is not reported. In this study both teachers and students appear to measure the increase in motivation to read by actual evidence that some students are reading more.

#### Exposure to books and authors

This is another area in which both students and teachers share common perceptions. Teachers value the opportunity to expand the reading experiences of their students, and in turn, the students value the exposure to new books and authors. "There might be a really good book that you might not have heard about or read."

Another point mentioned by teachers but not by students is that for some students the read-aloud provides the sole basis of their recreational reading experience. There is no reading in their daily lives other than that required of them in class.

Some teachers said that they look for challenging books. None of the students mentioned this as a noticeable quality, but a number of students did comment favourably on the teachers' choices. If the books are more challenging than

what the students might choose to read on their own, it does not appear to be obvious to the listeners.

The students acknowledged the influence of the teachers' selections on their own later choices. They referred to re-reading books and to getting started on particular authors. Teachers cited being introduced to books by colleagues who recommended previously unknown titles and authors. Again, both teachers and students are drawing upon actual practice to support what they say about the role of reading aloud in introducing them to books and authors.

#### Pleasure

If the responses of teachers and students were blended, "pleasure" would be the loudest chorus of all. That reading aloud is calming and relaxing was the point most frequently mentioned by students. It was, from almost every teacher, the first response to the question, "What have you gained as a teacher by reading aloud?" The sincerity of their voices, as they described the various ways in which reading aloud gave pleasure, was strongly evident.

Both teachers and students referred to the atmosphere of calmness and relaxation which prevails during reading aloud.

Teachers are also aware of how little pleasure exists in some students' lives and how good it feels to be able to provide this for them. Warm recollections of reading aloud have been made by former students, providing support for the teachers' beliefs that reading aloud is pleasurable for all involved.

How many other times in the school day are enjoyed as much by students and teachers? It is clear that both groups recognize the importance of doing something pleasurable in the classroom and that they both value reading aloud for this reason. Neither group makes any apology for the pleasure which they gain from reading or listening.

Their views are also supported by studies such as those done by Mendoza (1985) and Ayers (1991) in which children said, strongly, that they liked being read to. Jenkins (1991) found that elementary children preferred to be read to rather than to read independently.

#### Perceptions held only by the teachers

Some perceptions of reading aloud were articulated only by teachers. This may be in part because the students responded over a short period of time to a single question

whereas the teachers thought and talked for over an hour in response to a series of probe questions. It may also be that some of these points reflect teachers' concerns and viewpoints and that these are not as likely to be shared by students.

#### ESL and less able readers

It is not surprising that the role of reading aloud in aiding ESL and academically challenged readers was mentioned by teachers but not students. Teachers were as well speaking of the wide range of reading abilities which are to be found in any class, whether or not it includes ESL and academically challenged students. They all felt that reading aloud is a positive factor in helping less able students function more effectively in a "regular" class.

Neither the informants nor the literature have very much to say about the specific role played by reading aloud to ESL students. Santos (1987) found positive effects from reading aloud to Hispanic ESL students. Several articles relate personal successes. This is certainly an area with much potential for research.

The teachers' views that reading aloud helps to level the field for less able readers is supported by Egger (1992) and Fielding and Roller (1992), who found that reading aloud helped challenged readers to be more successful.

### Listening Skills

The role of reading aloud in improving listening ability was not noted as very important to the teachers interviewed. One mentioned the opportunity it provides for listening and observed that listening is not "encouraged these days."

That reading aloud does play a role in developing listening ability has been demonstrated by several researchers. Boott (1984) found reading aloud a factor in the improvement of specific listening skills. Craddock and Halpern (1988) made a link between improved listening comprehension and improved reading comprehension. Weidner (1976) found a connection between amount and frequency of reading aloud and youngsters' scores on listening tests.

It would seem that reading aloud has a role to play in any structured listening program. None of the eight informants mentioned any involvement with such a program in their classrooms. It does not appear that they view their reading

aloud as a structured listening program, although it is possible that many of the characteristics are the same. The difference would be that specific activities such as pre- and post-testing are usual components of a structured listening program whereas these are not necessarily part of reading aloud.

### Thinking Skills

Teachers perceive that reading aloud stimulates their students' thinking. They did not discuss this in terms of specific critical thinking skills but in the broader concept of thinking in general. They see it as exposing students to new ideas in books and discussions and find evidence of such thinking in the number of questions asked when the book being read is a challenging one. One teacher spoke of the role reading aloud plays in developing independent thinking, especially when the story is offered with little teacher intervention.

The professional literature offers similar views, mostly by teachers describing the outcomes of programs intended to enhance critical thinking. One problem is the difficulty there is in assessing and measuring critical thinking abilities. Franson (1985) recommended additional research

to define the role reading aloud plays in developing higher order thinking skills, and that recommendation is still valid. As suggested by one of the informants, using listeners' questions might be a means of assessing the levels of thinking that are going on. Response journals, frequently used in conjunction with reading aloud, offer another means of evaluating the levels of the listeners' thinking.

#### Influence on attitudes toward others

Two teachers made specific reference to situations in which the books being read aloud had played a part in changing the attitudes of the students. The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson was deliberately chosen to improve the level of empathy for a foster child in the class. The other case was coincidental, in which a student's father was dying of cancer, like the father in Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird by Jean Little. In both cases the reading aloud contributed to raising the level of empathy for the students in question. Otherwise, the teachers did not say that they selected material with a view to bibliotherapy or to changing attitudes toward a particular group.

Sullivan (1987) found that an important difference between reading aloud for entertainment and reading aloud for bibliotherapy lay in the teacher-led discussions which followed the reading in the case of the latter. This was a factor in the case of the teacher described above who was seeking greater empathy for the foster child. A third informant reported that his reading of contemporary realism has provided a starting point for many good discussions of how people should be treated.

Other studies such as Giermak (1980) and Darigan (1992) suggest that reading aloud can be a factor in influencing children's bias toward others. It is difficult to assess "bias" as statements often vary considerably from actions, especially in young people, and this is one reason why this is another largely unexplored topic for research. It is quite likely that the observations made by teachers such as those cited above can provide evidence of change that is at least as valid as a large scale student survey.

A concern expressed in Smith, Greenlaw and Scott (1987) is that there may be bias related to gender, age and race in teachers' read-aloud choices. This question was not explored with the informants in this study, apart from asking what some of their book choices were based upon. It

too presents many possibilities for future research. How do teachers choose what they will read aloud? Are their choices influenced by bias of any form? Is a bias justifiable for other reasons?

#### Links to Instruction

It is not surprising that only the teachers saw the value of reading aloud as a "springboard" to instructional strategies. This was mentioned by nearly all the informants, and the range of examples was quite extensive. Books read aloud were used as discussion starters, points of reference, and sources of writing topics. Teachers used read-alouds to model predicting and story-mapping. There were at least as many examples of links to instruction provided by the informants in this study as there were noted in the literature. It should also be noted that the informants were describing actual experience, not brainstorming possibilities. It is very clear that these teachers perceive reading aloud as a useful link to instruction.

### Perceptions held only by the students

There were two areas which were mentioned only by students. As with the views which were exclusive to the teachers, it is not surprising that these were identified by students only. The following two perceptions are understandably unique to the student perspective.

#### Easier to do

A number of students said that it is easier to listen to reading than it is to read to themselves. This view seems to be most prevalent amongst those who said that they find reading difficult. There was corroboration of this in what some of the teachers said about reading aloud helping students who have difficulty with curriculum material, and of course the two perceptions - of reading aloud as easier and reading aloud as a leveller of abilities - probably only differ in the point of view attributable to the source: student or teacher.

There is another point which should not be overlooked, however. Teachers should not underestimate the power of the word "easy." It is clear that teachers have many perceptions of the roles which reading aloud can play, and

are taking advantage of them. If, in addition to doing all these things, reading aloud is viewed as easy - particularly by those for whom reading and other learning tasks are often difficult - then there is an advantage to be seized.

#### A rest from work

Only one teacher made direct reference to this, saying that the read-aloud time was thirty minutes that he did not have to plan for in his first year of survival as a teacher, but it is quite likely that teachers would share the feelings of the students who pointed out that reading aloud provided them with a break from work. It would be hard to identify another activity which carries with it so many educational values and yet can still be perceived as easy, relaxing and enjoyable by both teachers and students.

#### Summary

The information provided by teachers and students shows that there are many perceptions of the value of reading aloud that are shared by both groups. These perceptions include the improvement of reading comprehension, vocabulary development, improved writing skills, acquisition of knowledge, development of imagination, modelling of dramatic

skills by teachers, reading motivation, exposure to books and authors, calming effect, development of "esprit de corps", and the provision of pleasure. Almost all of these perceptions of the roles played by reading aloud are also found in the professional literature.

Teachers, but not students, saw that reading aloud also played a role in helping ESL and challenged readers in developing listening and speaking abilities, in developing critical thinking, in modifying attitudes to others and in providing links to instructional strategies. These too are almost all supported in journal articles and research studies.

Students had some perceptions of reading aloud which only they held: that it is easier than reading silently, and it provides them with a rest from schoolwork. Although these perceptions were not expressed by teachers or the literature, it is unlikely that they would be contradicted by either.

In the final chapter the conclusions which may be drawn from the previous findings will be presented. The implications for pedagogical practice will be stated and recommendations for related research will be offered.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study was undertaken in order to learn what the perceptions are of reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students. It was anticipated that teachers who do so would be able to articulate the outcomes they see resulting from reading aloud to their students. It was also anticipated that intermediate and secondary students who have been read to would be able to articulate their thoughts about the outcomes of this practice.

The professional literature related to the topic of reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students is less extensive than that related to reading to pre-school and primary school children. It consists of two main types: reports of actual studies undertaken to seek answers to specific questions, and articles written by teachers who are sharing ideas based on personal experience. Although many of the latter articles are reflective of long-term practice, most of the research studies are based on short-term treatments.

Many of the articles, particularly those reflecting personal practice, discuss more than one outcome or value of reading aloud to older students. Some are based on working with a particular subject area or a special needs group of students. The topics most frequently identified in the literature are: reading comprehension, vocabulary development, listening skills, critical thinking skills, writing skills, language development, motivation to read, and general pleasure.

Eight B.C. teachers were selected as key informants for this study. Each was interviewed using a series of probe questions designed to elicit as much thought and reflection as possible. The recorded interviews were then subjected to inductive analysis and the teachers' thoughts were organized into categories which evolved from the data and were in most cases similar to those found in the literature.

The students of the interviewed teachers were asked to contribute a brief written reflection of their thoughts on being read to. These responses were also analyzed and organized into categories which also evolved and in most cases, corresponded to those already identified in the literature and in the teachers' reflections.

It was found that the eight informants collectively identified and discussed an extensive number of areas which they perceive as outcomes of reading aloud. Many of these, such as the use of reading aloud as a springboard to instruction, oral language development, motivation, and exposure to books and authors were mentioned by the majority of informants. Other perceptions were less frequently mentioned. The single most important outcome of reading aloud, in the perceptions of the eight informants, appeared to be pleasure.

The student responses also identified a number of outcomes which they perceived to result from being read to. Many of these were the same as those perceived by the teachers. The four topics most frequently mentioned by students were: development of imagination, the quality of the reader's performance, reading aloud makes text easier to understand, and reading aloud is calming and relaxing.

Part A of the question asked "How do teachers perceive reading aloud to intermediate and secondary classes?" As hypothesized, the teacher informants in this study had a range of perceptions of the outcomes of reading aloud to students. Their students, asked to write about how they felt about being read to, shared many of the teachers'

perceptions and provided additional ones of their own. In no instance did the perceptions of either group contradict the other. Based on the findings of this study, a number of conclusions may be drawn.

### Major Conclusions

Reading aloud to students is perceived by the teacher and student informants to play an important role in enhancing reading comprehension. This applies to both intermediate and secondary grade levels and may be especially applicable to the comprehension of more difficult reading material.

Reading aloud to students provides an opportunity to develop imagination in the listeners. From what many students said, it appears that the act of reading silently is so mentally demanding that the opportunity to picture or imagine is denied. This may be even more true of school reading situations where the reader is under greater constraint to "finish" compared to the adult reader who is at liberty to pause, re-read, or let the mind wander.

Reading to students provides effective exposure to books and authors, and in turn an increased motivation to read. This conclusion is based on some of the other perceptions as

well, such as the modelling by the teacher of a love of books and reading.

Reading aloud to students is a useful link to a variety of instructional strategies. It can be incorporated into the introduction and implementation of a variety of activities such as story-mapping, journal writing, persuasive writing, and more. It can be highly effective as a means of modelling expectations.

Reading aloud is an activity which is perceived as pleasurable by listeners and readers. The pleasure appears to be both immediate (as in soothing and relaxing) and lasting, as demonstrated by remarks by former students, parents, and the statements of the informants.

Reading aloud has an important role to play in classroom management. It provides a period of calm, an atmosphere of attentiveness, and a unified focus for the group. It also provides all members of the group with a sense of belonging, an "esprit de corps."

The quality of the teacher's performance as a reader is important. Teachers should strive to improve their skill as

a dramatic reader. They should also expect that these skills will improve with practice.

The extent of the role played by reading aloud in some other areas is less clear. The importance of reading aloud in vocabulary development, acquisition of knowledge, improvement in writing ability, and improvement of listening skills should be given further investigation in both research and teaching practice.

### Recommendations

The findings of this study are especially important to five groups: teachers who do not currently read aloud to students; teachers who do read aloud but without realizing and thus capitalizing on the potential outcomes of the practice; administrators; educators of teachers; and researchers, including teacher-researchers .

#### Recommendations for Implementation

For the first group mentioned above, those not currently reading aloud to intermediate and secondary students, the recommendation is that they begin doing so. As with the implementation of any new practice, reading aloud should

begin in a way which is comfortable for the teacher. It is important, though, that there be a commitment to reading aloud on a regular or daily basis if outcomes such as those described in this study are to result.

For teachers who do read aloud to students, the findings of this study offer possible new insights into the value and outcomes of the practice. Many, for example, may be well versed in the role played by reading aloud in classroom management but may not have made much use of reading aloud as a springboard to instruction. Others may have isolated the reading aloud as a time of rest and relaxation but have overlooked its potential value as a means of developing comprehension. The predominance of literature and especially narrative fiction as a read-aloud choice leads to the recommendation that teachers consider reading other forms of discourse such as letters and editorials. The perceptions shared by the informants in this study may enable others to recognize the same outcomes or potential outcomes in their own situations and practice.

These findings are important to administrators and teacher-educators as well. Both groups are in positions to influence present and future classroom practice. The above findings support the importance and value of reading aloud

to intermediate and secondary students. Administrators should provide encouragement for teachers to begin and maintain the practice. Teacher educators should instill the expectation that reading aloud will be an integral part of classroom practice. They should also provide modelling and training in the art of reading aloud to students.

#### Recommendations for further research

The findings of this study point to numerous opportunities for further research. Specific areas and questions have been raised as they emerged in the discussion of the findings, but there are a number of additional areas.

One is that in almost all existing research of reading aloud to older students, the time span of the "treatment" was very short. Given that most of those studies demonstrated gains of one sort or another as a result of reading aloud, it would be very interesting to see what emerged from a long-term study of students who are read to throughout their school years.

Almost all of the perceptions held by the informants and students in this study invite further investigation. For example, the role played by reading aloud in developing

imagination could be probed. Do all students do this? Do better readers do this more than others? Is reading aloud the vital factor in allowing time for this? What changes with the age or skill level of the students? Some of the older students mentioned imagining as something that they felt they could do better when reading to themselves. Perhaps more able readers or more experienced readers are better at visualizing when reading independently.

Another example would be the role played by reading aloud in the language development of ESL students. Research in this area would be especially relevant to the needs of many British Columbia children.

Some direction for further research also emerges from the professional literature. There have been a few studies of the power of reading aloud to change the attitudes of a group. This was not perceived as a significant role by many of the informants in this study. It would bear investigation into whether or not reading aloud can influence the attitudes and behaviour of a group, and if so, into the methods and materials best used to effect this.

Another area which emerges from the literature is the role played by reading aloud in subject areas other than Language

Arts or English. This was not mentioned by many of the intermediate teachers in the study. The secondary teachers chosen as informants were English teachers, and so the role of reading aloud in other subject areas was not discussed. It would be interesting to extend the existing information, which is quite limited, to explore the role of reading aloud in subject areas such as Science or Social Studies. Do Science teachers read aloud to students? Do they read from the textbook or from other sources? Does this vary with grade levels?

The student responses gathered for this study yielded an impressive range of information, especially considering that they were written in response to a single question. A variation of the present study in which students were probed much more extensively would be useful. This could provide a deeper analysis and a comparison of the perceptions of teachers and students. For example, when teachers say that reading aloud increases comprehension and students say that listening is easier than reading to themselves, are they in fact describing the same phenomenon?

There is some need for counting. What percentage of intermediate and secondary teachers do read aloud regularly to their classes? On the "Attitudes" survey attached to the

May 1994 B.C. Provincial Reading Assessments given to Grades Four and Seven, there was only one statement related to reading aloud: "I like to listen to stories read to me," to which students were asked to choose a response ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Finally, there is great potential for the role of the teacher-researcher in relation to reading aloud. The perceptions of teachers and students which emerged from this study, in addition to providing information about the roles played by reading aloud, also demonstrate that the thoughts of those who are direct participants in educational activities are valid and valuable. Such research might range from a teacher gathering responses to a particular book to a year-long observation of the change in a group's ability to listen without interruption. It might involve designing a study in which reading aloud was used as a means of attempting to influence or change attitudes toward the elderly, for example, and evaluating the results.

This study has examined the perceptions held by teachers who read aloud to intermediate and secondary students. It has also examined the perceptions of the students who are read to. The perceptions of both groups demonstrate that reading aloud is seen to have many positive outcomes. Many of the

perceptions are held in common by both teachers and students, thus reinforcing the notion that reading aloud to older students is a worthwhile activity. The views of these informants have contributed to our present understanding of the role played by reading aloud in enhancing learning. As well, the perceptions reported in this study indicate many areas in which our understanding of the value of reading aloud would be enhanced by further research.

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