

INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

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When read-alouds are enhanced for linguistically diverse students, teachers create a community of learners who use and practice language in meaningful ways, working together to make deeper connections with text.

As students gather on the rug to begin the read-aloud, you hear many voices anticipating what the new story will be about. They see the book *Ruby Bridges* and point and whisper about what looks familiar.

Ms. Alma begins the conversation by asking the students to think about a time when they experienced something unfair. Students anxiously wait for their teacher to give the signal to share these personal experiences with their partners.

The room fills with chatter, sometimes laughter, as partners tell their stories. When time is up, Ms. Alma asks for a few students to share with the class. You hear stories about older siblings who are allowed to stay up later, about kids who didn't let others play tag at recess, and about the time one class was assigned homework and another class wasn't. These interactions set the stage for students' purpose in reading *Ruby Bridges*—to learn,

use, and practice new language through meaningful interactions around text.

Among the many benefits of read-alouds for English learners (ELs) are the meaningful ways

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that language structures and vocabulary are contextualized to support deep understanding of new linguistic concepts. Read-alouds that infuse interactive, text-based discussions provide an authentic context that makes academic language accessible and meaningful to ELs (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). Further, when teachers take a linguistically and culturally informed approach to read-alouds, learners are challenged to use and practice new language by making meaningful text-to-self and text-to-world connections, allowing for deeper processing of the new language and deeper understanding of the ideas connected to that language.

As part of a research and demonstration project focused on optimizing instruction for ELs, we work with K–3 teachers at three elementary schools to implement a read-aloud routine to enhance vocabulary and comprehension during core reading instruction. The routine extends the read-aloud activities that Hickman et al. (2004) proposed, including further linguistic supports for ELs and principles of culturally responsive pedagogy. In this article, we describe key applications of second-language acquisition to literacy instruction, describe the read-aloud routine implemented, and summarize

successes and challenges to its implementation in K–3 classrooms.

Meeting the Needs of English Learners Through Read-Alouds

The research base on instructing linguistically diverse students continues to grow, and evidence-based practices are increasingly prevalent in elementary-grade classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers struggle with the delivery and design of systematic instruction that meets the language needs of their students. Enhancing and refining read-aloud practices for ELs supports young learners as they develop a second language and acquire academic registers (i.e., specific ways of speaking and writing in academic contexts). Further, an interactive read-aloud routine provides a practical and systematic mechanism for teachers to scaffold language development and to promote language acquisition by infusing key strategies shown to be effective for ELs. These strategies include teaching vocabulary in context, facilitating negotiated interaction around text, and sustaining linguistically and culturally relevant learning environments. We describe these instructional principles, all of which can be merged with literacy instruction through interactive read-alouds, in the following sections.

Teaching Vocabulary in Context

Sociocultural perspectives on second-language learning recognize that social context is a critical mediating force in language acquisition and that the learning environment offers scaffolds as students engage with new language (Lantolf & Becket, 2009). When learners encounter new language *in context*, they are afforded a range of contextual elements that support deeper connections between form (language) and meaning.

“Interactive, text-based discussions provide an authentic context that makes academic language accessible and meaningful.”

Contextual supports for language development can be as basic as visuals, verbal intonation, physical gestures, and use of the first language, all of which can mediate a connection between structure and meaning. Or they can be more complex, such as a situated event or interaction (e.g., talking about the thunderstorm outside) to build on students’ perception-in-action and to “expand and deepen language skills” (Dutro & Moran, 2003, p. 4).

Specific to literacy instruction, read-alouds provide contextual support for ELs, as new language is taught within the context of its use (i.e., in a narrative or expository text). Presenting new language structures in a meaningful context, such as through reading texts, aligns with research-supported approaches to vocabulary, a component of literacy that has been repeatedly stressed in research on ELs (Baker et al., 2014). Making connections between vocabulary concepts and their contextual usage is emphasized in instructional applications for ELs, who need structured support not only in vocabulary breadth but also in depth (Baker et al., 2014; Carlo et al., 2004). Research has shown benefits to contextualizing vocabulary instruction, as opposed to teaching vocabulary concepts through isolated, decontextualized activities (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).

Pause and Ponder

- How do I get to know my students individually?
- What are the primary languages and cultural backgrounds of my students? What are my students interested in?
- As I build relationships with my students and get to know them, how can I apply that knowledge when choosing texts to read?

To optimize benefits for ELs during read-alouds, teachers preteach key vocabulary for text comprehension (Dutro & Moran, 2003) and tie explicit instruction of those words with contextual supports, such as using visuals and/or gestures or providing a meaning-based context. Then, by extending vocabulary instruction to content-rich narratives or informational texts, such as during read-alouds, teachers increase opportunities for students to engage with the new words in meaningful contexts, further refining students' understanding (Baker et al., 2014). Explicit vocabulary instruction along with meaningful text-based interactions, specifically those that allow for multiple exposures to words in numerous contexts, can accelerate vocabulary learning for ELs (Carlo et al., 2004).

Facilitating Negotiated Interaction Around Text

Just as receiving “comprehensible input” has been emphasized in the process of second-language acquisition, other theories have emphasized the roles of “output”—spoken and written language—and “interaction” in the language development process. Swain (1985) proposed that *output* is an entirely different psycholinguistic process than *input* and identified key functions of interaction in second-language acquisition. For example, when learners interact in their second language, they not only create more opportunities for receiving input but also move from meaning-based knowledge to syntactic-based knowledge. When learners use and practice language with others, they acquire the relationship between form and meaning, increasing their fluency and accuracy in their second language. Further, when learners collaborate on a learning task, they scaffold one another's language development (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000).

Other perspectives emphasize the importance of meaningful interactions to ELs' conceptual and linguistic development, as these types of learning opportunities are largely absent in linguistically diverse classrooms in which teachers assume most of the talking and provide limited opportunities that challenge students to produce and practice complex language (Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). Even in monolingual classrooms, evidence suggests that text-based interactions, particularly in the early grades, focus on constrained responses and lack opportunities for students to meaningfully participate in constructing meaning from text (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Explicit instructional models such as Goldenberg's (1991) framework for instructional conversations redresses this imbalance through a systematic approach to text-based interaction. This framework promotes the use of complex thought and linguistic expression through a variety of elicitation techniques to scaffold students in meaningfully interacting with new language and concepts encountered in text.

Drawing from these theoretical perspectives, we argue that literacy instruction should include well-designed, meaningful activities in which ELs use and practice language through negotiated interaction. Such interactions are further optimized when anchored in text and provide structured opportunities for students to use new academic vocabulary in meaningful ways (Baker

et al., 2014; Dutro & Moran, 2003), so that students are supported in developing academic identities. Teachers assume the role of a facilitator, rather than a “transmitter,” by designing opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development through meaningful discussion (Goldenberg, 1991). A read-aloud routine that incorporates structured and meaningful interactive activities allows teachers to provide the necessary scaffolding for student comprehension of text and prompts students to refine and reinterpret their understanding of new language—and ideas connected to that language—through negotiating meaning with others (Hickman et al., 2004).

Sustaining Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Learning Environments

Teachers who understand the role of culture and language in learning better meet the needs of ELs by pursuing culturally relevant connections to text content and building on students' prior knowledge, experiences, interests, and home language, rather than viewing those as obstacles to learning (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Scholars who have identified successful approaches to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students highlight key teacher practices, such as (1) using culturally relevant texts to develop literacy skills (e.g., Bell & Clark, 1998, Jiménez, 1997), (2) using students' native language to support development in the second language (Jiménez, 1997;

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Jiménez & Rose, 2010), and (3) promoting diverse interpretations of texts within a framework of high expectations and intellectual accountability (Delpit, 1988; Gersten, 1996).

Alanís (2007) defines culturally relevant texts as “texts where mention is made of events or information that is within children’s experience and which draws on their background and culture,” cautioning that texts must also have authentic connections to students’ lived experiences, “not just their cultural heritage” (p. 29). Thus, getting to know students individually is a critical step in choosing and using appropriate texts. Although this practice is key, the selection of culturally responsive texts does not define a culturally responsive pedagogy. In a wider view of cultural responsiveness, teachers take a specific approach to all of the texts students encounter by making connections from the texts to students’ experiences and languages; teaching students to identify different worldviews and cultural codes in texts; and holding high expectations for students to intellectually support their predictions, inferences, and conclusions from different types of texts.

In sum, these three organizing principles—teaching vocabulary in context, facilitating interaction around text, and sustaining culturally relevant learning environments—when infused with a read-aloud routine, can support a model for learning and language acquisition for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The teaching of new vocabulary is enhanced when extended to narratives or informational texts so that more formal forms of language are facilitated through meaningful, communicative activities around culturally relevant, text-based topics. Additionally, when read-alouds infuse structured, high-quality interactions as well as linguistically and culturally informed

approaches to academic language, students understand, use, and build on their second language in ways that make sense and are meaningful to them.

Elements of an Interactive Read-Aloud Routine

The interactive read-aloud routine implemented for this project (see Appendix for project overview) extends the work of Hickman et al. (2004), who designed a strategy for storybook reading that builds the vocabulary and comprehension of young ELs. The routine includes key instructional features to deepen instruction in both of those skills. The major steps of the 30-minute daily cycle are illustrated in Figure 1.

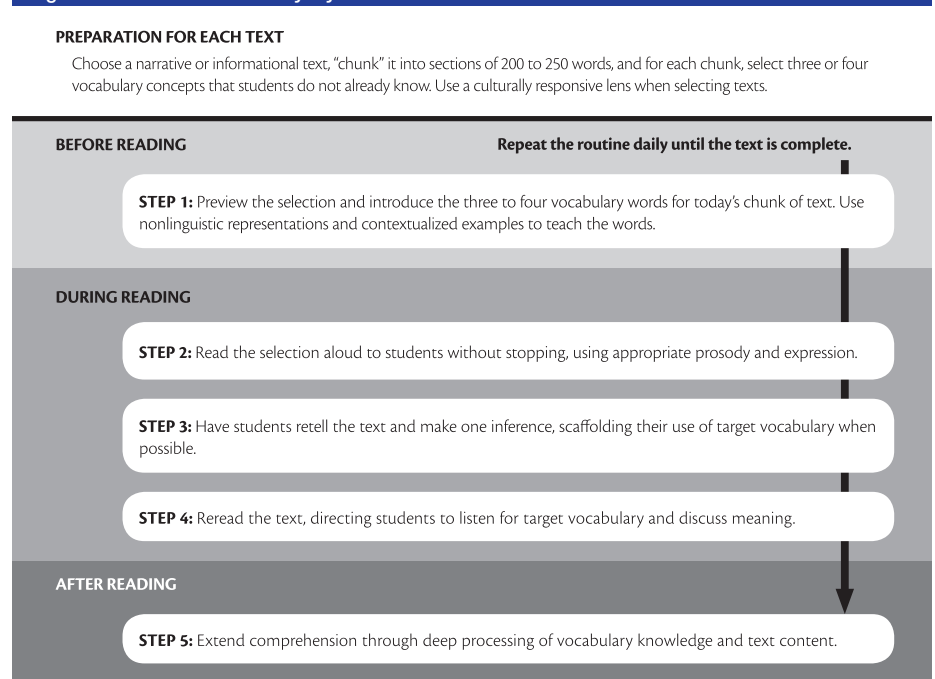
Before Reading

First, teachers choose a story or expository text that is of interest to their

students and, when appropriate, that is culturally relevant. Participating teachers used the read-aloud routine during their daily instruction with both mainstream texts that were part of the district-adopted curriculum and with narrative and expository texts that teachers integrated into the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. Some teachers successfully used the read-aloud routine with texts in other content areas (e.g., mathematics, social studies).

Teachers have three major goals to address before reading: to select and “chunk” a text, to choose key vocabulary terms, and to introduce the text and new vocabulary to students. Teachers select narrative or informational texts that can be sectioned into 200- to 250-word chunks to be read over four to five days, then examine each chunk for three to four key vocabulary terms to teach.

Figure 1 Read-Aloud Daily Cycle



LAST DAY FOR EACH TEXT

Choose four to five vocabulary words from previous days that were particularly challenging and in need of further study. Reread or retell the entire story.

Adapted from Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn (2004)

“Teachers elicit language from students and build on that language.”

Dividing the text over several days allows for more in-depth examination of key vocabulary with multiple opportunities to use and practice that vocabulary during the consecutive interactions with pieces of the same story. Focusing on shorter pieces of text also deepens comprehension, as students have to maintain knowledge of events and details over time (Hickman et al., 2004).

Selecting Vocabulary. Selecting vocabulary is an important step in teachers’ planning, with the overall goal of targeting language concepts that accelerate acquisition of academic language skills. Teachers in the study took a tiered approach when deciding what words to teach, focusing on high-frequency, high-utility words that are used across academic content areas—what are generally thought of as Tier II words (Beck et al., 2013). Teachers optimize vocabulary instruction when concepts are not too basic and conversational (Tier I), such as *table*, *eat*, or *very*, nor are too content-specific or limited in use (Tier III), such as *larva*, *homophone*, or *numeral*. Tier II words, such as *provide*, *conversation*, or *unfortunate*, are neither too basic nor too subject-specific, but instead are of high utility and are necessary for comprehension and communication of ideas across academic subjects.

To support ELs, Baker et al. (2014) recommended that practitioners consider words that are central to the meaning of the text, are applicable across content areas, have multiple

meanings across different contexts, contain cross-linguistic connections, and contain affixes that influence the words’ meaning. For example, the word *investigation* has multiple meanings across content areas, cross-linguistic connections (*investigación*), and morphological derivations (*investigator*, *investigate*). Teachers can promote students’ second-language knowledge and awareness by enhancing the connections among the selected words, their semantic values, their associated affixes, and their relation to words in other languages.

Previewing the Story and Introducing Selected Vocabulary Words. In this step, teachers prime students to construct meaning from new language and content, building the initial contextual supports needed to make new language and content accessible to students whose first language is not English. First, teachers preview the story and activate students’ prior knowledge related to the content. Teachers show important visual features of the text, reading the title and author’s name.

Teachers then question students about a topic that is central to the content to gauge students’ level of background knowledge. Finally, teachers have students make predictions. Figure 2 shows an excerpt from Ms. Alma’s lesson plan for *Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (1995), illustrating how she selected vocabulary and planned for this first step.

To optimize these prereading interactions with ELs, teachers elicit language from students and build on that language to make further connections to the vocabulary and topics of the text. Consider this additional example, in which a second-grade teacher introduces the story *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle (1991) from the district-adopted curriculum:

Teacher	What do you know about seeds?
Student 1	[raises hand] Seeds grow fruits and vegetables.
Teacher	You know that seeds grow fruits and vegetables. You have a great <i>schema</i> about seeds. Maya, what do you know about seeds?

Figure 2 Excerpt 1, *Ruby Bridges* Second-Grade Lesson Plan
Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles

Read-aloud Planning Template	
Step 1: Introduce/Preview the story and pre-teach 3-4 vocabulary words First Chunk; pp. 1-3	
Select vocabulary words to teach: <i>Focus on high-utility words that can be used across contexts</i>	Selected words to teach: Crops, separate, ordered, courage
Preview story and vocabulary: <i>Highlight text features/visuals and activate students’ prior knowledge and experiences; make predictions</i> <i>Introduce vocabulary words; present words in written form</i>	Plan for previewing read-aloud text (questioning; making predictions): 1. Show front and back of book 2. Turn and Talk- Talk about a time when you felt like something that happened wasn't fair. 3. Have students make a prediction (Stem: "I predict that ____") 4. Job for students: Pay attention to what happens to Ruby today, and listen for the new words we have learned Student friendly definitions for vocabulary words: 1. <u>crops</u> - a plant that is grown by farmers and used as food (show picture) 2. <u>separate</u> - not together with something else (show visual, use kinesthetic) *cognate/cross-linguistic connection: separado *morphological derivations: separation 3. <u>ordered</u> - when someone in charge tells someone that they must do something (show visual; use real-life example) *cognate/cross-linguistic connection: ordenar 4. <u>courage</u> - being brave when you are in danger, pain, or a difficult situation (show visual; use real-life example)

- Student 2 If you want a plant to grow, you have to take care of it.
- Teacher Take care of it.
- Student 2 Like, give it water and put it in something.
- Teacher Interesting. So, you know about some *needs* of plants as they grow from seeds.

In this interaction, the teacher not only elicits students' ideas but also strategically builds on their language to make meaningful connections to academic vocabulary and concepts. She uses the students' language as meaningful context for introducing more precise and formal vocabulary, such as *schema* and *needs*. Also, through this process, the teacher primes students for the topic, drawing on their current knowledge and making connections to create a rich, contextualized frame within which students can better access the new language and concepts they will encounter in the text.

Next, teachers introduce the three to four key vocabulary terms by saying each word, having students repeat the word, and providing a "student-friendly" definition. To support ELs, teachers integrate nonlinguistic elements, such as a visual, gesture, or expression that relates to the core features of the word. (See Figure 2 for an example of how Ms. Alma planned for this step.) During each prereading activity, teachers may use appropriate first-language supports, emphasize affixes, or provide a brief example of the word within a meaningful context related to students' prior knowledge and experiences. Teachers also target phonological features of the word that may be particularly challenging for ELs (e.g., teaching pronunciations of the *-ed* affix for past-tense verbs to primary Spanish speakers).

During Reading

As part of the daily cycle, teachers complete two full readings of that day's chunk of text. For the first reading, students engage with the text without interruption. Before reading, teachers give students a purpose or goal for reading, one to which students will be held accountable. For example, a teacher might say, "As I read the story, listen closely for our vocabulary words and for the details of the story. I will ask you some questions about the story after I finish reading."

Following the prompt, teachers read the entire day's chunk of text without stopping. This first read is important for ELs, who carry the double cognitive task of making meaning from the second language while comprehending the details and concepts of the text (Hickman et al., 2004). Because the story is chunked into shorter pieces, teachers have time to read each chunk once without interruption, allowing students to build context and make deeper connections between new language and meaning. Teachers provide ELs with contextual support structures during the first read by doing the following:

- adequately priming students' background knowledge in the previous steps
- drawing on multimodal elements of the text (e.g., visuals, text organization)

"To support ELs, teachers integrate nonlinguistic elements, such as a visual, gesture, or expression."

- using prosody and expression while reading to emphasize key ideas, events, and new vocabulary

After the First Read: Guided Comprehension Discussion. Teachers first ask students to retell the main events or ideas of the story through two *literal* probes. These literal probes focus on the *who*, *what*, *when*, or *why* details of the text, with questions about plot, setting, and characters reserved for narrative texts only. Next, teachers ask an *inferential* question, prompting students to make a judgment about the details or content based on information not directly evident in the text. During these activities, teachers encourage and facilitate students' use of the key vocabulary terms introduced that day, promoting multiple exposures to the words. Figure 3 shows a second excerpt from Ms. Alma's second-grade lesson plan for *Ruby Bridges*, illustrating how she planned for these interactive activities.

Figure 3 Excerpt 2, <i>Ruby Bridges</i> Second-Grade Lesson Plan	
Step 2 & 3: Read the passage out loud, focusing on literal and inferential comprehension	
First Chunk: pp. 1 - 7	
After reading, guide students in discussion of the content of the passage.	Stems for guided discussion questioning:
Encourage students to use new vocabulary in discussing the text	#1 probe for literal comprehension: Who are the main characters of the story?
Use sentence stems to scaffold academic language use.	#2 probe for literal comprehension: What was the big thing that happened to Ruby today? I challenge you to use vocabulary while you are retelling it to a friend. How do you know it was that's the big thing?
	#3 probe for inferential comprehension: How might Ruby be feeling about this? Why do you think she might feel that way? Show Sentence Stem: "I think Ruby was feeling _____ because _____."

The discussion activities that are part of this step are especially important for ELs, as the activities provide opportunities to engage in extended discourse in the second language, increasing their exposure to and experiences with new vocabulary while scaffolding their comprehension of content (Baker et al., 2014; Goldenberg, 1991). Further, this step includes critical discussion of the text that goes beyond a superficial reading, as students revise their understanding while making inferences and drawing conclusions (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Teachers can optimize the benefits of these interactions for ELs by providing pair and group activities that include teacher feedback. Pairing or grouping students can be an efficient way to enable speaking opportunities for all students while allowing ELs time to practice new language structures in a context that is less threatening than speaking to the whole class. When pairing students, teachers consider levels of language proficiency, pairing advanced ELs with less advanced ELs to provide a language model. Teachers also use the first language to support second-language development.

During this step, teachers employ strategies that validate and build on the ideas that students of all language levels generate during speaking activities. For example, ELs in the emergent stage can use their first language to articulate and clarify ideas from the text before answering in English. Further, emergent ELs may be hesitant to report to the whole class, so the teacher may rotate among pairs throughout the five-day cycle, focusing on one or two students' responses, clarifying and building on those responses, and then quoting students directly during the "sharing out" portion of the activity. Teachers may have advanced ELs report to the whole class

Table Optimizing Classroom Interactions for ELs

- Empower your students to initiate talk, not just respond to your talk.
- Use open-ended prompts that encourage extended discourse.
- Build on students' language when you clarify or extend their ideas.
- Focus your feedback on meaning rather than correcting minor grammar or pronunciation mistakes.
- Provide, and allow peers to provide, first-language support to emergent ELs.
- Promote students' diverse ideas, asking for evidence that supports their ideas.

or write key points during pair discussions. Table summarizes general strategies for optimizing read-aloud interactions for ELs.

Second Read: Focus on Vocabulary. During the second reading of the text, teachers extend vocabulary understanding, making further connections to the words' uses in the text and how they relate to contexts outside of the text, including students' personal experiences. First, teachers briefly review the vocabulary, repeating the words and student-friendly definitions. Students then listen for the vocabulary words and use a sign (e.g., thumbs-up, ear tug) when they hear the words in the text. When students give the sign, the teacher stops reading to engage in oral activities to deepen word knowledge.

Students then return to their pairs or small groups, and teachers prompt students to explain the meaning of the vocabulary in their own words. Teachers compare the student-friendly definition with the way the word is used in the text. If the word is further nuanced by its text usage, teachers guide students in understanding the more nuanced meaning. Then, students create their own sentences that use the words, allowing for more exposure to and practice with the words and usage in different contexts. Teachers use sentence stems to scaffold ELs' responses. During the *Ruby Bridges* lesson, when Ms. Alma saw her students' signal for the word *courage*, she guided them in discussing the word further:

Ms. Alma Do you know someone who has shown courage? Or have you shown courage? When? Turn and tell your partner about it. For example, say, "I showed courage when _____," or "My mom showed courage when _____."

After Reading

The goal of this last part of the routine is to deepen comprehension of new language and content through extended discourse about the text. Teachers give an open-ended prompt to students for discussing a topic from the text in relation to their own experiences. For example, for this last step in the *Ruby Bridges* lesson, the teacher might prompt, "Ruby was ordered to do something that took a lot of courage. Have you ever been ordered to do something that took a lot of courage? How did you feel afterward?"

As in the other interactive activities, teachers take a student-centered approach to the discussion by maximizing opportunities for students to use and practice new vocabulary, allowing students to generalize meaning to multiple contexts outside of the story, and prompting students to make connections to their lives. Teachers facilitate the discussion, providing feedback that targets students' use of new vocabulary and the quality of their ideas rather than focusing on minor linguistic errors.

Completing the Cycle to Extend Learning. Before closing the activity for the day, teachers summarize what was learned from the text, review the title and author, and review the vocabulary

“Teachers described students’ ‘ownership’ of new vocabulary and their ability to recognize and use in multiple contexts the words learned during read-alouds.”

words. Teachers foster language awareness by challenging students to listen for target vocabulary throughout the day, explaining that students may hear the words again as the class continues to read the text.

When continuing with the daily cycle on Days 2, 3, and 4, teachers begin by activating students’ background knowledge, reviewing the main ideas from the previous day, and previewing the current day’s text. Teachers prompt students to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences in relation to the text, encourage students to predict what will happen next, and highlight students’ use of key vocabulary. Teachers review vocabulary from previous days and ask students whether they heard or used the words since learning them, encouraging students to do so. Teachers then introduce three to four new vocabulary words from the current selection, following the same routine as Day 1 and continuing through the same daily cycle. Once the entire text is read, teachers focus the last day’s lesson on key vocabulary and text ideas (see Figure 1).

Implementing a Read-Aloud Routine for ELs: Successes and Challenges

Throughout implementation of the read-aloud routine, we collected qualitative data to describe the model development and to continuously inform job-embedded support for teachers (see Appendix for project description). The data sources included focus group

interviews with teachers during the pilot phase, focus group interviews with teacher-leaders from each grade level (K–3) during the implementation phase, anonymous teacher surveys on the usefulness and sustainability of the routine, formal and informal classroom observations, and teacher work collected during job-embedded professional development (JEPD). Interview responses and teachers’ reflections on their own practice collected during JEPD were coded for themes. Data analysis involved continuous comparison of data sources to identify salient themes and triangulation to corroborate findings from individual data sources.

Overall, data from two rounds of classroom observations and teacher interviews showed that students were highly engaged in the vocabulary, text, and interactive activities of the read-aloud routine. Approximately 98% ($N = 46$) of teachers who completed and returned the anonymous surveys rated the routine *Useful* to *Very Useful* to their students, and 96% ($N = 45$) rated the routine *Likely* to *Very Likely* to be sustainable at their campus. When asked to elaborate on the impact on student learning, the majority of teachers described a noticeable boost in students’ word awareness and curiosity. Teachers described students’

“ownership” of new vocabulary and their ability to recognize and use in multiple contexts words learned during the read-aloud. As one teacher reported, students were “really proud of themselves because they know how to use the word...they are more inquisitive than before, and we see them using [new vocabulary] more and more with their friends.”

Reflecting On and Refining Practice

The main project activities focused on supporting teachers’ practice through reflection and refinement of the routine. Focus teachers at each grade level achieved moderate to strong fidelity to the routine after JEPD (initial training, formal observation, coaching and feedback, and self-observation and reflection). During implementation, descriptive data collected pointed to two main areas of teacher growth.

Type and Quality of Interactions.

As teachers reflected on their practice over time, many became critical of the type and quality of their “teacher talk” as well as the type and quality of opportunities afforded to students—particularly ELs—for using and practicing new language. For example, many teachers initially struggled to follow the protocol of completing the first reading with students without interruption. Stopping to clarify and check for comprehension regularly was part of their usual instructional style and was challenging to curb during the first reading. Over time, teachers described the benefit of ELs hearing the day’s chunk without interruption and realized that it was

“As teachers reflected on their practice over time, many became critical of the type and quality of their ‘teacher talk.’”

“Teachers benefited from interactive, collaborative, job-embedded support that fostered teacher autonomy.”

“doable” because of the short pieces of text for each day. “I didn’t think that [reading without stopping to talk] would make any difference,” reported one teacher, “but...it did make a huge difference with [ELs].”

Teachers’ self-observations and reflections on their delivery of the routine were analyzed, and the area of growth reported with the most frequency pertained to type and quality of opportunities given to students to use and practice key language. Teachers realized how reliant they were on teacher talk throughout each step of the routine, and they noticed missed opportunities for meaningful student interactions. When planning next steps, teachers set goals to increase opportunities for meaningful interactions around new vocabulary and the text (e.g., through the turn-and-talk method) and to minimize teacher-centered talk.

Targeted Support for ELs. Teachers reported that they were able to provide effective support to ELs due to specific characteristics of the routine. First, the consistency of a regular daily routine made it easier for ELs to engage with the activities. The systematic approach helped ELs predict what would happen next and understand what was expected of them during the different interactive pieces of the read-aloud. Second, teachers described how choosing culturally responsive texts and planning for

meaningful interactions around topics that relate to students’ experiences helped ELs to connect with the vocabulary in deeper ways.

Interviewed teachers also described becoming more critical about the books they choose and the vocabulary words they selected. Teachers noted the potential of the read-aloud for introducing high-level words to students. And rather than teaching only the words the textbook designers chose, teachers described ways that grade-level teams were becoming more autonomous in their planning. For example, one second-grade teacher said, “What I notice in terms of *my* instructing is that I am more careful about books I choose...the whole second-grade team [is] more interested in books that have more higher-level [words], so we can share those with our students.”

Closing Thoughts

The focus of the current project is to systematically optimize vocabulary learning and comprehension for ELs through reading aloud and interacting around text. Through implementation, teachers refined and enhanced their practice, becoming more efficient with their delivery and more at ease with the multiple steps of the routine. Teachers encountered noticeable challenges, including time constraints within their daily schedules to plan and differentiate the routine for different grade levels and abilities. However, teachers were motivated by their impact on students’ language awareness, curiosity, and meaningful connections with texts. Further, our data on implementation suggests that teachers benefited from interactive, collaborative, job-embedded support that fostered teacher autonomy. One teacher summarized it in an eloquent comment: “This routine has helped to create a community of readers in my

classroom who work together to build meaningful relationships with text.”

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TAKE ACTION!

1. Select an appropriate text, chunk the text into 200- to 250-word sections, and select three to four key vocabulary words that students do not already know. Focus on high-utility words used across content areas. For example, ask yourself whether your students will encounter the words in science or math. Then, explore options for contextualizing vocabulary instruction, such as using a meaning-based scenario or a nonlinguistic representation that connects to students’ experiences.
2. Review your ELs’ language proficiency levels and consider ways to strategically group students so that interactions during the read-aloud routine are optimized for all learners.
3. Consider and plan for ways to encourage students to use the vocabulary words during speaking activities. Create sentence stems for students to use when they explain the meaning of the words to their partners. Plan open-ended questions that support students in making connections among the new words, the content of the text, and their own experiences.
4. Brainstorm with your colleagues on ways to share knowledge of culturally responsive texts that were used successfully. How can successful lesson plans be archived and shared among teachers?

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Appendix

Project Overview and Study Context

Project Overview

As part of a model demonstration research project, we collaborated with district leaders and educators to build, adapt, and refine a multitiered instructional model that optimizes outcomes for ELs with a particular focus on core reading instruction for ELs. The model extended

evidence-based practices supported in the literature, and we developed the practices through ongoing collaboration with district and campus stakeholders so that the practices aligned with district curriculum, assessment, and teacher and student needs. Because many teachers already read text aloud to students with guided comprehension activities as part of their instructional routine, we focused on refining the practice to optimize vocabulary and comprehension for ELs.

Study Context

We implemented the read-aloud routine at three campuses with high populations of ELs in a rural district near an urban area. We piloted the routine at one campus in the spring of 2013, and full implementation began at three campuses during the 2014–2015 school year. At the time, 31.9% of the students districtwide were identified as having limited English proficiency, and participating school percentages ranged from 50% to 57%. Of the K–3 teachers working with us, 87% reported wanting more knowledge of instructional strategies that support ELs, and 44% reported that the majority of students they taught (more than 80%) were ELs.

Main Project Activities

As part of implementation, 75 K–3 teachers received initial training on the routine and were supported through follow-up coaching to achieve fidelity. Data collected (see main article) informed the model and were used to assess the feasibility of the routine and the extent to which it was successfully implemented. Measuring student impact will be a focus of future research.