



The Reading Matrix
Vol. 8, No. 2, September 2008

A READ-ALOUD CROSS-AGE SERVICE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP USING MULTICULTURAL STORIES

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Abstract

This study describes the effectiveness of a read-aloud cross-age partnership in service learning among students of various age groups (pre K-college sophomore) attending the different schools located on a university campus. Research-based theories of read-aloud to children were used to train the reading volunteers. Multicultural story books aided the participants towards embracing cultural diversity and understanding on campus. Following two pre-program questions, all adult readers received training and reading guides related to read-aloud techniques, style, and poise. A post-reading analysis included focus group classroom-teacher dialogues; a twelve-item reader survey; and field observations of reading attributes. The results of the read-aloud showed tangible and noteworthy benefits to readers and children. Read-aloud promoted growth in textual comprehension by the children as well as critical thinking skills of the readers. Cultural awareness and cross-age communication was also noticed. The enthusiasm shown by the participants has generated a continuation of this partnership.

Keywords: service learning, read-aloud, multicultural texts, cross-age partnerships

Introduction

Community engagement within the broader context of service learning has been used to promote a cross-age culture of collaboration among educators and students (Kreuger & Braun, 1999; Topping, 1996). Institutions of higher education have responded to community engagement on campuses by embracing, nurturing and valuing linguistic communities and the cultural diversity of students on campuses (Billig and Eyler, 2003; Cone and Harris, 1996). This study describes a read-aloud cross-age partnership between readers from high school and college and pre-K listeners. With a diverse ethnic mix of pre-K children, this experiment integrated multicultural literature within the story-book choices (Perini, 2002). This was done to focus on recognizing and valuing children's home culture, and appreciating the continuity between children's home life and their school literacy experiences (Cai, 2002; Neuman, 1999).

Cross-Age Partnerships and Service Learning

A cross-age partnership in reading is as inherent as sibling bonding and occurs whenever a more accomplished student assists a lower achieving peer, or when an older student instructs a younger one (Rekrut, 1994). When adolescents read to young children, they not only see themselves mirrored within similarities, but also envision and experience them from the eyes of

young children through textual dialogue and reading. Children, in turn, can benefit from the effects of the read-aloud sessions. Researchers find read-aloud as a very powerful way to increase children's vocabulary, listening comprehension, syntactic development, and word-recognition skills related to emergent literacy (Teale, 1986; Lane and Wright, 2007).

The study attempted to fulfill three aspects of what is classified as service learning. First, the readers were students who learned and developed through active participation in a thoughtfully organized service experience that met actual community needs and was coordinated in collaboration with the school and community. Second, the activity was integrated into students' academic curriculum and provided structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what they did and saw during the actual service activity. Third, it enhanced what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom into the community, thereby helping to foster the development of a sense of caring for others". (The Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform in 1995; p. 1).

Read-Aloud with Culturally Responsive Learning

Trelease (1995) in a seminal handbook on read-aloud asks "How can something as simple as reading to a child be so effective?" (Chapter 1) He continues with the following answer: "We read to children for all the same reasons you talk to children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond; to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire. But in reading aloud, you also:

- Condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure;
- Create background knowledge;
- Build vocabulary;
- Provide a reading role model."

Reading to a child may be deemed "*simple*"; but it can become a powerful, yet subtle, learning tool when placed within a structured setting (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Most read-aloud styles fall within the broader context of the Preview-Predict-Confirm (PPC) model as explained by Yopp & Yopp (2004). The model is designed to enhance comprehension skills among children from the stories read during the read-aloud sessions. Student participation increases when they are given the opportunity to preview a book before it is read to them. They generate words and organize their thoughts to make oral responses before the read-aloud. When students are asked to predict during the story sequence they engage in thinking and oral communication

Fraizer (1997) notes that when college students do read-aloud activities with children both groups benefit from the service. Better and older readers can be taught concepts or strategies for cross-age read-aloud, and they, in turn, can teach others, especially the younger children. He also finds that when the stories emphasize multicultural themes, college students can better appreciate classroom discussions of cultural diversity, and children get the message that reading is fun, important, and can tell them something about themselves.

In recent years there has been an increase in the publication of children's books that tell the stories of marginalized and diverse cultures through pictures and text (Cai, 2002; Fraizer, 1997; Richardson, 1995). Well-selected multicultural literature is often publicized as a tool that "helps children identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding other diversity" (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p.24).

It is hoped that the selection of stories would allow listeners to culturally respond (Conrad, et. al. 2004) and reach the educational goals of read-aloud; i.e. to inform or explain; to

arouse curiosity; to inspire (Trelease, 1995). Additionally, (Glazer and Seo, 2005; Landt, 2006) posit read-aloud facilitates children's awareness of cultural diversity and literacy, especially when both readers and listeners are from a diverse population.

The Read-Aloud Experiment

Partners in the Cross-Age Study

The research was conducted within a university campus that included a Child Development Center (CDC) and a high school. It continued from March to June 2007. The readers were students attending college or high school on campus; and comprised of seven undergraduates enrolled in *LBS 200: Introduction to Liberal Studies* (LBS) class, and twelve high school juniors and seniors from the *California Academy of Math and Science* (CAMS). They were voluntarily selected based on: (a) their desire to be acquainted with young children and reading; and (b) their aspirations of becoming a teacher, a school counselor and/or a child psychologist. The LBS instructor provided the college students with a course assignment grade for participation in service learning, and the CAMS students received credit for their civic engagement. Three teachers and all 53 children (ages 2.9 - 5 years) at the CDC participated in the study.

The reading partners came from diverse ethnicities. They were 2 White, 3 Hispanic, and 2 Asian college readers; and 3 White, 5 Hispanic, 3 Asian, and 2 African American high school readers. The listening partners were mostly Hispanic and African American. The CDC children ethnic profile consisted of 49% Hispanic, 37% African American, 12% White, and 2% other ethnicities.

Responses to Two Pre-Training Questions

To provide a basic structure for this experiment, the researcher collected data on two pre-training questions from all readers. **Question 1: What do you know about reading?** The responses indicated a broad experience about reading among the readers. Most readers were aware that read-aloud required good articulation and an emphasis on certain words to keep the listener interested and engaged. They also knew that read-aloud was a social and fun activity. One student had been exposed to read-aloud while another often read to young kids.

Question 2: Why do you want to volunteer your time to read to young children? The responses indicated a focus on the social and civic engagement objective of readers. Some desired to interact and spend meaningful time reading to kids or to reduce boredom after school. Others wanted to experience how kids learn and interact. Some students connected the positive aspects of reading to younger siblings and extended family members at home and just wanted to extend the same after school. One student volunteered time to read to young kids to gain experience to pursue a career in child psychology while another considered the interaction helpful to communicate with people of all ages.

Research Design

The research design encompassed four factors that teachers should consider to make read-aloud as effective as possible. These are: (a) the amount of read-aloud time, (b) the choice of text for read-aloud activities, (c) the method of read-aloud, and (d) the fit of the read-aloud in the curriculum (Teale, 2003).

The Amount of Read-Aloud Time

The read-aloud sessions were conducted outdoors during afternoon recess time. Volunteers took turns, and there would be on average 2-3 readers on any given day of the week reading and engaging in oral comprehension with children. A read-aloud volunteer read for a total of six hours with each reading engagement not extending more than thirty to forty minutes. Working within the PPC model, approximate times were set for introducing the text and a preview-dialogue (10 minutes). A major segment of time was set for the actual reading with attention to expression, characterization, and feedback-dialogue (20 minutes). The remaining time was then used for concluding dialogue and confirmation of the story.

The Choice of Text

Text selection focused on enabling the listeners to make connection to real-life experiences and the awareness of similarities and differences among people (Perini, 2002). Glazier & Seo (2005) suggest using multicultural literature as a window to different cultures and a mirror reflecting that of the listener and the reader. For example, books that tell the stories of young people, their homes and activities provide young children with a view of a community, and how they fit within the community.

The researcher selected twenty-two story books for this study. Some books describe **contact with other cultures**. For example, *A Day's Work*, by E. Bunting told the story of a migrant grandfather as a day worker seeking employment with the support of his grandson's English speaking ability. *Apple Pie 4th of July*, by J. S. Wong narrates the acculturation of a young Chinese girl and her traditional parents who operate a small Chinese eatery. After a day of traditional American festivities, the girl is surprised to see mainstream folks walk in to have a delicious Chinese meal. In *Pepita Talks Twice* by O. D. Lachtman, the English and Spanish paragraphs illustrates how a little girl learned just how important it is to be able to speak two languages when she must save the family dog and communicate with neighbors. Other stories deal with **respect for individuals** and **self-concept**. For example, *The Rough-Face Girl* by R. Martin retells the popular story of Cinderella through the life of an Algonquin Indian child. Still other books **address stereotypes and injustices** that can exist at school. *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon*, by P. Lovell illustrates how the short and clumsy appearance of a girl subjects her to the bullying of other school children and in *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, by P. Polacco, narrates the careful and patient nurturing of a teacher helping a child succeed in reading while her peers poke fun at her.

All the selected stories covered one or more purposes such as increasing individual respect, acknowledging minority contribution, making contact with other cultures, enhancing students' self-concept, recognizing values and promoting equality, and detecting and eliminating prejudice (Campbell and Wittenberg, 1980). A detailed listing of the stories and their linkage to these purposes are shown in a grid in the research design section.

Multicultural Stories Categorized Within the Six-Purpose Model of Campbell and Wittenberg (1980)

No.	Story Book and Author	Individual Respect	Minority Contribution	Cultural Contact	Students' Self-Concept	Values & Equality	Prejudice
1	<i>A Day's Work</i> , Eve Bunting	X	X		X	X	
2	<i>Amazing Grace</i> , Mary Hoffman	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	<i>Apple Pie 4th of July</i> , Janet S. Wong	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	<i>Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)</i> , Elizabeth F. Howard		X			X	
5	<i>Bread, Bread, Bread</i> , Ann Morris			X			
6	<i>Click, Clack, Moo Cows That Type</i> , Doreen Cronin	X			X	X	
7	<i>Elmer</i> , David McKee	X			X	X	
8	<i>Everybody Bakes Bread</i> , Norah Dooley	X		X	X		
9	<i>Everybody Cooks Rice</i> , Norah Dooley	X		X	X		
10	<i>Feathers and Fools</i> , Mem Fox					X	X
11	<i>Fly Away Home</i> , Eve Bunting	X			X	X	X
12	<i>Ish</i> , Peter H. Reynolds	X			X	X	X
13	<i>Kate and the Beanstalk</i> , Mary Osborne				X		
14	<i>My Duck</i> , Tanya Linch	X			X		X
15	<i>Pepita Talks Twice Pepita Habla Dos Veces</i> , Ofelia D. Lachtman		X	X	X	X	
16	<i>Seven Blind Mice</i> , Ed Young				X	X	
17	<i>Smoky Night</i> , Eve Bunting		X		X	X	X
18	<i>Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon</i> , Patty Lovell	X			X	X	X
19	<i>Thank You Mr. Falker</i> , Patricia Polacco	X			X	X	
20	<i>The Rough-Face Girl</i> , Rafe, Martin	X	X	X	X	X	
21	<i>The Skin You Live In</i> , Michael Tyler	X			X	X	
22	<i>The Trip Back Home</i> , Janet S. Wong		X	X			

Note: The above categorization relates to the researcher's conclusions on each book and bears no reference to the authors' endeavors.

The Method of Read-Aloud

Dickinson and Tabors (2001) suggest that teachers and parents should involve children in both immediate and non-immediate talk. Immediate talk concentrates on answering factual details and labeling pictures. Non-immediate talk extends beyond the text. It includes word meanings, making predictions and inferences, and relating the text to personal experiences. It is important that individual children have numerous opportunities to engage in non-immediate talk before and during read-aloud.

The cross-age read-aloud volunteers received two hours training by the researcher on how to read and engage young children in oral comprehension skills. The readers' skills were further augmented through hands-on observations of how the three CDC teachers read to the children. One guide provided a clear understanding of their role during the read-aloud time with the children. It briefly explained that we read aloud to children because reading is fun and read-aloud from story books support emergent literacy (see Figure I below).

Figure 1 Why Do We Read-Aloud To Children?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading is fun; it tells stories of people, events, and things. ● Reading builds background knowledge (concepts, words, ideas, events, and images). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading helps one to read books, signs, cereal boxes, names and birthday cards. ● Reading makes one familiar with print. ● Reading makes children know that words are made up of sounds and they learn to write the words. ● Children like to read, and re-read books. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They like to chant, clap, count, and keep the beat, especially with repeated words (called alliterations). (“<i>Trip! Trap! Trip! Trap! Went the Trollop</i>”). 2. Reading is what older people do and younger children want to imitate (siblings, parents, other adults). 3. Children like to place pictures in sequence in retelling a story. 4. Children like to orally retell the story and act it out. 5. Children like to predict (before, during, and after).
Adapted from America Reads Program, 2007; Cunningham, et al. 2000; Teale, 2003.

A second guide helped volunteers manage time, taught them how to read to young children, and made them aware of the emotions and other features present in a story. Eliciting awareness from the listeners was taught to the volunteers. Thus, the how, why, and what makes a story come to life was focused in this guide (see Figure II below).

Figure II How To Be A Successful Cross-age Reader To Young Children
<p>A. PREPARATION FOR EACH READING SESSION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan enough time in each session (15-20 minutes) to read aloud, and another (15-20 minutes) for discussion on the story. 2. Choose stories that children show expressed interest and experience. For emergent-readers/listeners choose books with vivid pictures and a strong story line. Humor and predictable books are good choices. 3. Preview the book yourself, so you can anticipate questions or reactions.

4. **Remember that for some children, listening to stories is a new experience**, and they need to develop that interest and ability. Start with short, interesting selections with strong pictures. Be responsive to facial expressions and body language, and if the book is not working, don't be afraid to stop, without being punitive. Next time you might find a better selection.

B. READING STYLE & POISE

1. **Introduce the book; cover illustration, title and author.** Invite some predictions or comments that help the listeners connect the book to their own experience or to some other books heard or read. Or give brief explanations about why you chose to read this book. *“This is a story of a boy who lives with his grandfather. I chose it because I also have my grandfather living with my family.”* Or *“This story is about a special friendship between a girl and her dog. I have read this many times. I wonder what you will think of it.”*
2. **Read with expression** that reflects the tone of the story or the characters.
3. **Vary the length of time you spend reading aloud.** Don't spoil a story by rushing to finish it. Vary your pace so you can pause for emphasis or allow time for the children to think what's happening or what might happen next. Children need to see that pleasurable reading involves time to savor language, ideas and pictures.
4. **Allow time for children to study the pictures** as you read, and to make comments and ask questions about the story.
5. **Encourage predictions**, and help children confirm or revise these needs as the story unfolds. Try to honor as many ideas and interpretations, not just the 'correct' ones. Instead of accepting or rejecting comments or ideas as right or wrong, use comments such as “that's a possibility, lets see what the author has in mind.” Or “well, that's an interesting idea. How did you think of that?”
6. **Watch the children's expressions and body language** and be sensitive to signs of boredom or confusion; you may need to change your reading plan, change the book or do more preparations.
7. **Save time at the end of the story to get reactions.** Ask open-ended questions that don't have a right or wrong answer, and that can be answered with a yes or no reply. For instance ask what the child liked or disliked about the book, and why? You may ask what s/he thought about the characters or how the problem was solved. Find out if the book made the listener think of any personal experience or other book heard or read.
8. **Encourage discussion and/or retelling about the story.** Sometimes you can use picture frames of the story for children to rearrange the pictures in sequence to retell the story.
9. **Most important of all: Have a Good Time!!!!**

Adapted from America Reads Program, 2007; Justice & Ezell, 2004.

Besides the introductory training, and the two guides, each reader was provided with a checklist to help them plan as well as reflect on their read-aloud experiences (see below). While the “fun” aspect and extra-curricular style (outdoors and recess-time activity) was projected, it was continually emphasized that the readers would receive service credit and they had a task to perform.

Reading Style and Poise Checklist

(Fill in **AFTER** the reading.)

Reader Name:

Date:

Book Title:

of Students in the group:

Reason for Book Selection:

Introduction before the Reading

Yes (/)

a. I began by introducing the title, cover illustrations, and the author.	
b. I gave the children time to study the book's illustration, if any.	

End-of-Story Actions

a. Time was given to let children express their feelings about the story and the characters.	
b. Some children mentioned they had similar experiences as in the story.	

My Personal Reading Style and Poise

Reading with Expression

a. I varied my expressions and tone to act the characters in the story.	
b. I used pauses for emphasis.	
c. I allowed time for children to react or predict the next stage of a story.	

Observations during the Reading

a. I noted children's' expressions and body language.	
b. I reacted to children's' boredom or confusion, if any.	

Note: Leave items blank if not used. You do not need to mark every item. Some may not be relevant

The Fit of the Read-Aloud in the Curriculum

Finally, the fit of the read-aloud program in the schools' reading curriculum is very important to reach the goals that read-aloud propounds. The CDC center reading curriculum is progressive in nature. The reading curriculum for children of 2.9 - 3.9 ages emphasizes on reading for enjoyment and listening skills by getting children familiar with text structures and story comprehension. Visuals, drawings, puppets, and animation are used to convey the themes represented in the books read. Teachers and students select books for reading. As part of emergent literacy children are provided the opportunity to retell, draw and act upon story segments to convey oral and visual comprehension. Children caption their drawings by engaging in invented spellings for phonemic awareness. Math concepts are also embedded within the reading curriculum. Music, singing and psychomotor skills focus on a comprehensive curriculum for child development.

The reading curriculum for 3.9 - 5.0 ages is embedded within a wider contextual framework on a daily basis. Reading selections are thematic encompassing math, science, and

language arts. Music, art, and physical activity for psychomotor development are also included within a given theme. Students engage in more systematic writing and drawing by captioning their work and using story frames to retell events. The teacher generally rewrites alongside student's writing to familiarize students with word sounds and structure.

The read aloud program goals were to provide an extension of the CDC formal academic curricular instruction in an informal setting. The two guides developed for this study addressed the theory of read aloud and the structure of how to read to children. The readers used the PPC model to help listeners to preview a text, author and illustrations leading to predictions and confirmations. The listening and oral comprehension was demonstrated through the retell of stories and drawings. The readers replicated the poise, style and disposition of read aloud within an enjoyable environment.

Post-Reading Analysis

School-Teachers Reflections

After the study ended in June 2007, the researcher at focus group discussions, solicited the views of the teachers about the read-aloud program and their observations. The following are the views expressed by the 3 teachers who teach at CDC and who also monitor the children during read-aloud and recess.

Teacher 1

- *The kids like the stories being read.*
- *Julia spoke of the story about bread making in class.*
- *One child brought her Amazing Grace book from home and her mother reads it to her.*

Teacher 2

- *Children like to see the older students come by to read to them.*
- *I have noticed that the children don't mind giving up game time to be read.*
- *They seem to be motivated in story time rather than playing during recess.*
- *They all want to be read to and continue read-aloud.*
- *I think next semester we can have more students come by to read to the children.*

Teacher 3

- *At times, many children want to sit at one table; and I know you like to limit 3-5 children at a table.*
- *Next semester can we have a few more student volunteers to read at the CDC?*
- *The read-aloud has helped children handle books more appropriately in the classroom.*

All three teachers' responses indicate a positive outcome. This shows children enjoyed being read to by read-aloud volunteers. The teachers asked for a continuation and expansion of the program. The researcher has continued the program with 6 CAMS students volunteering to read-aloud during spring 2008. With a change in the LBS professor, no college recruits were enlisted. It is hoped that contact with the new LBS professor will renew college participation in the future.

Volunteers' Responses to a 12-Item Survey

At the end of the reading assignments, all 19 volunteers responded to a Cross-Age Civic Engagement Survey (highlighted in segments below). The questionnaire was distributed during

the last day of read-aloud in June 2007 before the end of the academic year. Readers responded with a choice of “True”, “False” and “Not Sure”. This survey provides a range of information for the evaluation of the partners in read-aloud cross-age service learning.

Volunteering in Community Service-Learning

#	Survey Questions	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
1	I participated in my school’s volunteer reading activities as part of civic engagement.	19		
2	I volunteered because I just like to read.	18		1
3	I volunteered because through reading, I can improve my own critical thinking and comprehension skills.	19		

Volunteering in Community Service-Learning asked for personal affirmations in the desire to volunteer. Here all 19 readers responded in the “true” category for items 1 and 3, and only one reader was “not sure” for item 2.

Reading Skills

#	Survey Questions	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
4	I was comfortable in assisting young children to read on campus.	17		2
5	I was comfortable in communicating with young children.	19		

Reading Skills related to the reader’s comfort in reading to young children. Seventeen responded “True” and two were “Not Sure” for item 4, while all 19 readers were comfortable in communicating with young children.

Training Needs

#	Survey Questions	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
6	I am well aware of the academic and social needs of young children.	19		
7	I was supported adequately to be an efficient read-aloud partner.	19		
8	The reading comprehension techniques taught to me will assist me to read to other children.	19		

These sets of questions were directed towards the read-aloud training schema, and all nineteen readers responded in the “True” category for all three questions. They expressed an awareness of the young children’s needs, and were content with the support and training provided for this program. They also accepted that this training will help them in future endeavors, to read to other children.

Socio-Cultural Experiences

#	Survey Questions	TRUE	FALSE	NOT SURE
9	I shared my ethnic beliefs, values and cultural experiences through the story books.	19		
10	I experienced the sharing of other ethnic beliefs, values and cultural experiences through reading.	16		3
11	Reading with and to young children was fun and enjoyable.	19		
12	I had fun and made friends with my cross-age peers during this read-aloud program.	19		

This last segment allowed the readers to respond to social and cultural queries. All nineteen readers fully shared their ethnic beliefs, values and cultural experiences. This program chose stories that would help increase cultural responsiveness. For question 10, sixteen readers experienced the sharing of other ethnic beliefs, values and cultural experiences. This augurs well in that the readers were aware of the importance of cultural responsive behavior. Having more of these programs will raise awareness even further. The last two questions had responses that showed the enjoyment and purpose of the 19 readers. They created a cheerful environment for the listeners and definitely found pleasure in the read-aloud sessions. All nineteen readers fully endorsed the fun and optimism they experienced.

Researcher Observations on Five Readers

In addition, the researcher discreetly observed many of the readers (in order to avoid distracting the children or the reader), and made notes during the reading session. These notes show that most readers followed the guidelines they were given. The second and fifth reader followed many of the 9 items listed, while reader one covered the least number of cues. It is desired that readers will follow more of these cues in the future. Being a voluntary and “fun” activity places this burden on the reader. The researcher concentrated on the learning experience and the experience of an enjoyable read-aloud session.

Reading Style and Poise: Observations of 5 Readers

READERS				
1	2	3	4	5

Introductory Actions

1. Introduced the book; asked questions about the cover.	X	X			X
2. Allowed time to study the pictures in the book.		X	X		

Observations during Reading

1. Read with expression.	X	X	X	X	
2. Encouraged reactions and predictions.		X	X	X	X
3. Responded to children's expressions.					X
4. Used varying lengths of time through the reading.		X		X	

End-of-Story Actions

1. Pointed out parts the reader and the children liked/disliked.					X
2. Requested reactions and personal experiences of the children.	X			X	X
3. Encouraged discussion/retelling the story.		X	X		
Number of Cues Followed	3	6	4	4	5

Final Thoughts

As a cross-age read-aloud partnership in service learning on a university campus, the results are promising. Although it was a limited amount of actual engagement time among students; the service provided tangible and noteworthy benefits to readers and the children. Readers communicated their excitement about a particular story to the children; and, also communicated the value of reading beyond the classroom. Children reinforced these ideas through their drawings and oral retelling of the story. Also reading was seen and valued as a fun thing to do outside class and during recess. During the reading sessions the children made predictions of the stories being read by looking at the cover, illustrations, and title of a book. The children enjoyed making predictions at various intervals of the reading-session. The PPC model was very effective in this experiment. Readers were also comfortable with the training they received; and the tools used to plan and reflect on their tasks.

This experience can be adapted across different content areas. As a first attempt, the cultural diversity of the listeners made selecting cultural themes a good place to begin. Now the listeners are interested in read-aloud sessions. And the curriculum reading objectives include new vocabulary, factual content, relevance to children, etc. Imagine using “*geography*” books as a separate exercise. Gregg and Sekeres (2006) show how geography learning can help develop children’s vocabulary and get exposure to the wonders of the world. They gave children opportunities to encounter words through exploration activities, read-aloud sessions, and in expository texts. Geography, social studies, science, nutrition, mathematics, etc. are all content areas that can be used. Brassell (2006) finds read-aloud with nonfiction trade books and storybooks to improve students’ comprehension, vocabulary and interest in science.

The initial commencement and outcomes of the study promises the transfer of read-aloud training into new themes of learning. Adding science, social-study, nutrition, and geography stories to coexist with multicultural stories is the future challenge. Only one theme will be added each semester; and a rotation of themes to the multicultural stories is planned. This experiment was successful in many areas. Service learning gets kudos from the participating readers and schoolteachers; readers become motivated storytellers and future teachers; listeners expand comprehension, learn content and develop new vocabulary; and all within an extra-curricular setting.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the principal of the California Academy of Math and Science (Dr. Janice Filer), the director (Dr. Chiquita Waters) and teachers of the Child Development Center, and the executive committee faculty (Dr. Shirley Lal, & Dr. Caron Mellblom) of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges at California State University, Dominguez Hills for the mini grant award and their support to conduct this study. Finally, this project could not be accomplished without the dedication and enthusiasm of the high school and college students and the happy and eager little children who participated in this study and helped me contribute to learning.

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