Bringing back Wonder: Read alouds for more than skill development

presented at the 70th anniversary conference
18th Nordic Conference on Literacy
21st European Conference on Literacy

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High quality children’s literature can provide a window into other worlds as well as a mirror of our own experiences (Bishop, 1990)

**Read alouds**
- Develop empathy
- Help us understand ourselves and others
- Build community
  (Britt, Wilkins, Davis, & Bowlin, 2016; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Gibbs & Earley, 1994)

- Develop reading skills
  (e.g. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Lewis, 2001; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002; Strong, Amendum & Smith, 2018)
The current educational climate in the US has almost eliminated opportunities for marginalized and below grade level students access to engaging texts that may be above their reading levels.

**Why?**

- High stakes testing
- Rigid curricular standards
- Ideologies
  - Foundational skills
  - Leveled groups according to reading ability
Hannah felt her class needed something...
They were experiencing a lack of
  joy
  engagement
  motivation to read
  community

• What would happen if Hannah conducted a read aloud of an engaging, high level text over time?
• How can the read aloud foster enjoyment and reading skills as well as build community and promote socioemotional health in their class?
• Qualitative study with Hannah (classroom teacher)
  • Lesson plans, student responses & journals, fieldnotes, student and teacher interviews

• 2nd grade classroom
  • Large, urban city
  • Title I
  • 22 students (Black and Latinx)
  • General education, ESL, and Special Education
  • Many students reading below grade level
Hannah

- Literacy instruction is not just about teaching students to read words; it is offering them a window on the world and the role that language plays in generating and perpetuating power along with shared community (Freire, 1970).

- Hannah’s views read-alouds as a classroom ritual that can be used to foster culture, community bonds, shared history, safe place.
From our analysis we identified three themes:

1. **importance of the read aloud for enjoyment and pleasure,**
2. **increased sense of self-efficacy,** and
3. **community building**
• **Pleasure and joy**

• Ritual, every day around the same time
  • Students expressed looking forward to that part of the day
  • No pressure, students had choice (lay down, sit, etc)
  • Everyone was included, no matter their reading level
  • Students were able to respond to the book in various ways
  • “The best reader EVER was reading to us, it was fun!” (Monty)
- Increased sense of self-efficacy
• Increased self-efficacy

• Students increased their on-their own reading
  • Checked out books related to Wonder from the library
  • Asked for books for gifts, for classroom library
  • Expressed desire to read
  • Expressed a sense of pride in their reading achievement

• “I’m a good reader. But I wasn’t a good reader until 2nd grade. I just didn’t really like it... but I’m a good reader now.” (Isaiah)
• Community building
  • The read aloud was an equitable reading opportunity for all students.
    • Everyone was included, no matter their reading level
    • They all became part of the “literacy club” (Smith, 1987)
    • Shared experience built camaraderie
    • “Don’t judge a boy by his face. You don’t have to mean to hurt someone to be mean.” (Sherrod)
• Community building
[Focus group 3 years later]

- What do you remember about 2nd grade?
  - We read Wonder!
  - That was the biggest book ever!
  - It was the first time I liked to read.

- “I got pretty emotional reading it [Wonder]. Like when it first started and no one wanted to be his friend because he was disabled, not disabled, he was deformed...but he’s a real person, right? That made me really sad.” (Isaiah)
“So there was this girl, Jessica, and I would help her during reading and math...”

Hannah – do you remember there was a time last year there was someone who said they didn’t want to work with her and she got really upset

“yes, and I worked with her and I was her friend. And then she wasn’t upset anymore.” (Monty)
Are we doing what we think are doing?

What if “Just Right” is Just Wrong? The unintended consequences of leveling readers (Hoffman, 2017)

Instead, can we create a community of learners who are “intimately connected to the web of life” (Sipe, 2008)
Questions? Comments?

Want more?