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USING ACTION RESEARCH IN A GRADUATE LITERACY CLASS TO CONNECT THEORY TO PRACTICE: A REPLICATION STUDY

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Abstract Herein, we use action research as a means for graduate students to develop and grow in their professional expertise as literacy teachers/coaches/specialists. In short, this manuscript aims to document Ernie Stringer's Look, Think, Act routines of seven students as they inquire about one particular situation in their own settings, to improve their own practices, and the outcomes of their students. This process allowed students and the faculty leading this effort to become active participants and thoughtful as they considered the educational theories they were learning in class.

Keywords: teacher action research, connecting theory to practice, reading education, look-think-act cycle

Introduction

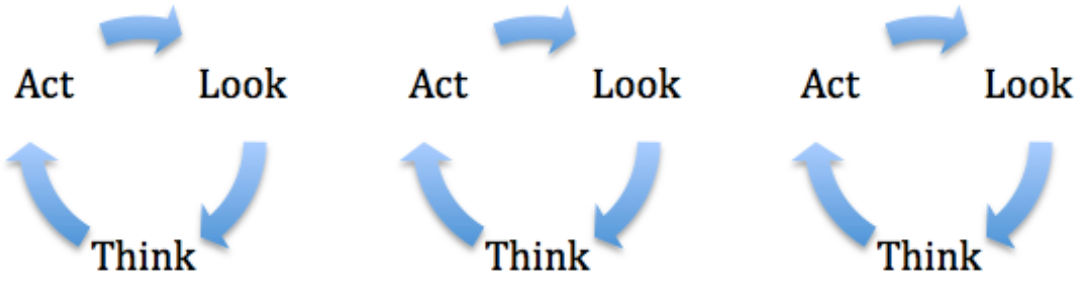
> There I always felt like a trapeze artist performing without a net when I first stepped in front of an audience…Luckily, I managed to mask my trepidation in front of an audience as a classroom teacher... (Gruwell, 2007, p. 248)

In spring 2017, a doctoral class embarked on a project to put into action what they were learning about literacy and its instruction. Together we decided to put all fear and trepidation aside and instead teach with our hearts (Gruwell, 2007). As doctoral students engaged with the anchor text *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading, Sixth Edition* (Alvermann, Unrau, & Ruddell, 2013) one of their charges was to put these ideas in practice in their professional settings as elementary classroom teachers, instructional specialists, instructional supervisors, campus English language arts coordinators, and school counselors using Ernie Stringer's Look, Think, Act model (Patterson et al, 2010; Stringer, 1996; Stringer, 2007; Stringer et al, 2009) linking theory and practice. Together, the students and faculty read, spoke about, and documented what they were learning from the text. The conversations led the students and faculty to come to an agreement to document and report their individual experiences using action research as their primary methodological approach.

Literature Review

Action Research. Action Research (Lewin, 1946) is a methodological approach used by teachers and other practitioners to look within, collect data about a particular inquiry, organize and analyze the data, develop a plan to address a particular question, implement a particular plan, evaluate the results of the inquiry, and continue to repeat the process until satisfactory results are met. As teachers and school administrators seek for answers to their inquiry questions they often find that more questions emerge that lead to subsequent research cycles similar to Ernie Stringer's look, think, act cycles as seen in Figure 1 (Mertler, 2009, p. 13).

Figure 1: Stringer's Look Think Act Cycle



In Stringer's model, teachers/action researchers continuously "Look, Think, and Act" on a particular area on interest in search of the improvement of their own teaching, or finding solutions to a question they are facing, or trying to address their students' needs. Mertler (2009) suggests that one action leads to other "Look, Think, Act" cycles as seen in Figure 1 (p. 13). This "simple, yet powerful framework (Stringer, 2007, p. 8)" invites teachers to see, think, and do something to address a particular inquiry. In this study, the faculty and the students chose to use this approach because it allowed for students to monitor a current practice they were concerned about, collect and analyze the appropriate data, and then consider/put in practice a plan of action to address their inquiry.

Professional Development. Diane Ravitch (2010) suggests that what makes some districts and independent school districts successful is a:

> "…relentless focus on instruction and professional development; its cultivation of teacher and principal support; its experimentation with new approaches; and the conscious of "collegiality, caring and respect" among all staff members. Improvement relied on professionals who were willing to take the initiative to take risks, and to take responsibility for themselves, for their students, and for each other (p. 43)."

The above quote precisely articulates our aim for engaging in this professional development activity—to form a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), to take risks, and to be there for one another as we attempt to implement these practices to our classroom routines.

Methodology

Purpose. This research is the product of those experiences as students and their professor engaged in a semester long action research project to address the question: What happens when seven doctoral students take an action research stance to put into practice what they are learning in a graduate literacy class?

In sum, the seven doctoral students: 1) studied and thought about their classroom practices, 2) developed a burning question connected to a literacy topic they were studying, 3) conducted research pertaining to their inquiry, 4) planned and implemented possible solutions, and 5) reported those inquiries in a case study format.

This study focused on the ways seven graduate students followed through Stringer's entire action research cycle as they put into practice what they were learning in a graduate literacy class to solve a pressing issue they were encountering in their particular settings.

Case Study. We use case studies to synthesize and report the "Look, Think, Act" cycles of the participants because this methodology helps to answer the question that are targeted to a limited number of events, ten or less, and how they relate to each other. Yin (1994) says "case study design is effective when it is used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundary between the phenomenon being studied and the context are not clearly defined, and when multiples sources of evidence are used to study the phenomenon at hand (p. 84)."

Setting. The university is located in the rural southwest of the United States. It enrolls 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and is considered a higher research activity doctoral granting university by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013).

The purpose of the course was for graduate students pursuing a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in reading to engage in an in-depth analysis of varied definitions and theories of reading including the examination of implications for reading instruction. During the semester the graduate students identified and analyzed historical changes in the conception of reading and literacy; they identified, analyzed, and compared various processes of reading; they identified, analyzed, and compared various theoretical models of reading; and finally, they became independent researchers as they put into action, the "Look, Think, Act" research cycle for one of the topics they learned about in the course in their professional settings (i.e., classroom, teacher professional development, training sessions, or reading specialist). This "simple" yet complex framework seemed methodologically appropriate given the purpose of the assignment, the desired outcomes, and time constraints.

Participants. There were seven students and one faculty member in this study. Two students were at the beginning of their doctoral coursework, one student was at the end of her coursework, and four students were in the middle of their program. All seven students intended to earn a doctor of education with a concentration in reading education. The faculty member was in his tenth year of university teaching. Six students taught or worked for urban schools, and one student taught in a small-town rural school.

Data Collection. As these students transacted with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978) they spoke about the different challenges they were facing with their students, teachers, and colleagues. Multiple sources of data were collected to study the "Look, Think, Act" cycle. The sources collected included class notes, class lectures, class discussion, informal conversations, lesson plans, and other instructional artifacts. They looked within to identify a literacy topic that needed immediate attention.

Data Analysis. Halfway through the semester the students began to develop and implement a plan of action using the multiple sources of data with input from their critical friends (Pine,

2009) including other students and faculty in addition to the multiple sources of data they had collected along the way. From that point forward, the group spent some time at the beginning of each class discussing the challenges they faced as they implemented their plan paying close attention and making connections to the literature they were reading.

The seven students then used journaling to document their actions as they plan, and delivered instruction. Sharing and communicating the results was a challenge at first because for many of the students this was the first time they were tasked to look within, report their findings to other students, and write it up their experience for publication. Individually, we coded the emerging notes, then we set aside time in class to discuss our codes as a class because our cohort was small, after coding we divided our findings into three groups (i.e., look, think, act). Each author then crafted a draft of their narrative and brought it with them the next class. Luckily, the possibility of dissemination to a larger audience through a national presentation, or a possible publication made the task appealing. Toward the end of the semester, the group presented their data to each other in an open forum, they discussed their findings, and then worked together using a writing workshop approach to provide constructive feedback as they wrote their "Look, Think, Act" cycles which follow.

Results

Seven Cases. The following seven cases aim to demonstrate how teachers/literacy leaders/literacy administrators use the look, think, act cycle in their particular situations to put in practice what they are learning in graduate reading class.

Bonnie

As a fifth grade ELAR teacher, I found it important to understand the most productive ways to approach vocabulary instruction. I knew my students were lacking in rich vocabulary and felt that putting into practice the "Look, Think, Act" cycle would be the perfect opportunity to work toward building those skills. Nagy and Scott (2013) say, "Vocabulary knowledge strongly influences reading comprehension" (p. 458), so as a reading teacher this idea is very important to me. My guiding question was, "What can I change or add to my vocabulary instruction to create an atmosphere rich in vocabulary where students are engaged in the process of enhancing vocabulary knowledge and skills?"

Look. After reading about vocabulary processes in our text, I began to understand the importance of teaching vocabulary in different ways, offering multiple opportunities, and involving students in the process. Nagy and Scott (2013) say, "there should be an emphasis on instruction that is authentic, meaningful, and integrated" (p. 458). With this in mind, I made the decision to involve students more by having them search out and identify unfamiliar words to discuss and research in class as well as offer choices of different games and activities to help them become more acquainted and comfortable with the words they had chosen.

Think. Giving students multiple opportunities to make instructional decisions gave them ownership of the new vocabulary words and activities because they felt a deep sense of ownership. Fostering their involvement in the planning, lesson delivery, and instruction enhanced the students' interests, so when the activities took place they felt more eager to engage with them. Students showed more excitement during class discussions, group activities, and games.

Act. Nagy and Scott (2013) say that vocabulary instruction should provide multiple and varied encounters, lead to the ability to explain meaning, and promote the use of the word (p. 462-463). Once students had each chosen a word to contribute to the list, they discussed their words and possible meanings with one another after reading aloud the portion of the text in which they had found them. Next, students were given choices of how to explain and present their word and its true meaning to the class such as different formats of Frayer models, flipcharts, or posters. For example, one student chose to create a poster board displaying her word, definition, examples, and illustrations. This student was so excited to share her project with the class she finished it early. The poster was informative, descriptive, and visually appealing. After the presentation, I observed other students changing and adding improvements to their work before sharing. Students were also given choices of games to give them further practice with the words. Some examples from their choice list were concentration cards, board games, and dice games. However, their favorite was vocabulary musical chairs.

Throughout this process, what I found most encouraging for me was that students found this work enjoyable and it showed during the learning process and in the comments they made to me and to each other as they were engaging with the words. Students began making their own flashcards to become more familiar with the words, finding them in different settings outside of the classroom and reporting it to the class, and many did extra activities rather than just picking one of the choices provided. The atmosphere is so much more inviting and exciting when students actively take part in the instruction. I feel confident the class will excel on their upcoming vocabulary assessment due to involvement, engagement, and elevated interest levels. These lessons and activities have changed my practice and overall outlook on instruction. My future practices will involve students in planning, instruction, and offer students choices.

<u>Angela</u>

I am an Elementary English Language Arts Specialist and Dyslexia expert at a regional service center in north Texas. I am charged with supporting teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grades in 106 schools.

Look. A campus administrator contacted me at the middle of the year about helping classroom teachers utilize running records as a means of determining literacy levels (i.e., frustration,

independent, instructional levels) and then helping them identify and develop strategies to target those needs during small group instruction. The administrator reported that the teachers met with students in small-guided reading groups, but they were not making significant progress in the reading abilities of the students and wondered if there was anything I could do to help. The administrator wanted to make sure that they knew how to take running records, but most importantly, analyze running records so that they could plan targeted instruction. After speaking with the campus administrator, we decided to schedule a campus staff development about running records and their use for planning literacy instruction.

Think. In thinking about this challenge and the planning of this professional development, I wanted to address the needs that had been expressed to me by the campus administrator. I thought back to when I was in the classroom, and what made the difference for me as a primary teacher. My campus emphasized guided reading as the foundation for reading instruction, and the use of running records to guide my decisions about when to modify the guided reading groups. The impact of these two instructional components made a world of difference for me as a teacher so I knew it would be an asset for those teachers as well. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) state that there is an important difference between implementing parts of a guided reading lesson and using guided reading to bring readers from where they are, to as far as the teaching can take them in a given school year. If teachers are only going through the motions of guided reading, they are truly missing out on the intended purpose. Grounded in foundational research from Marie Clay (1982), guided reading is only effective when the teacher knows how to direct students' in their reading development. During guided reading, the teacher's role is to know when and how to teach, prompt, and reinforce the processing strategies for their students in increasingly challenging texts. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) state that teachers are learning that accurate word reading is not the only goal; efficient, independent self-monitoring behavior and the ability to search for and use a variety of sources of information in the text is key to proficiency. This proficiency can only become a reality when teachers utilize guided reading the way that it was truly meant to be used in the classroom, as a supportive framework as students become more proficient with continuous text.

I also chose running records because they complement guided reading. I asked myself, if teachers do not take running records on their students, how will they know what their students need? This campus was only taking running records three times a year, so therefore they did not know what their students needed on a more consistent basis. Ken and Yetta Goodman used the term miscue analysis in place of error: this was because of the negativity associated with the word error. According to Goodman & Goodman (2013), miscue refers to the unexpected responses that readers make during oral reading. These miscues can assist teachers as they are analyzing running records. Teachers must have an in depth understanding of the meaning (M), structure (S), and visual (V) cueing systems when they analyze the running records. Goodman & Goodman (2013) also state that miscue analysis provides evidence that readers integrate cueing systems from the earliest initial attempts at reading. A teacher can learn a lot from taking a running record, but only if he or she has been trained in how to search

and identify patterns within their students' reading because only then can action be applied to help direct the student as they progress in their reading development.

Act. When I went back to the campus, a few days later I was met by a teacher who said, "I have taken a running record on a few of my students." She analyzed the record, and was able to see the strengths and needs of the students. She noticed that one student was solely relying on visual information, namely the beginning sound of words. He was not attending to meaning; therefore, just calling a word that had the same beginning sound. As a result of the teacher noticing the pattern, she was able to target this weakness in her guided reading group. She provided a mini teach point at the beginning of the lesson that modeled for students how to look across a word to confirm what it is, while asking oneself, "Does it look right?" and "Does it make sense?" The students then went into the text and as the teacher listened in on them reading, she provided prompting and reinforcement. At the conclusion of the lesson, she questioned the students in the group about particular notes that she had taken in reference to them using the strategy and how it helped them. The students seemed to be more aware, but the teacher will continue to reinforce as they become more independent with this strategy.

The campus administrator is now performing walk through based on the training and holding all teachers to the same standards. Follow up is key in professional development. The next step for this campus is for me to provide similar trainings to new teachers.

Liza

I teach second graders in a rural community in North Texas. Many of the students in my classroom are transitional readers. To help them move to fluent readers I try to find creative ways to incorporate fluency activities throughout the day in my classroom. So, when one of the topics in the course addressed fluency, I was eager to research the topic. As I began to research my topic, I found that Rasinski (2010) conducted a lot of research on the topic. Teaching children to read is a complex undertaking. Reading involves various processes to become fluent readers (Rosenblatt, 1978; Alvermann, Unrau, & Rudell, 2013; Rummelhart, 1994) Fluency is when a reader has mastered the text with automaticity with word recognition and decoding skills, as well as reading with prosody (Rasinski, 2010). In order for a student to become fluent, they have to practice.

Look. I use music in my classroom to transition students from one activity to another. As the students were transitioning one day, I realized that the videos I was using on YouTube were closed-captioned. I decided to post the videos during transitions and encourage the students to read the lyrics to improve fluency. It was a simple activity that could be easily integrated throughout the day. I observed their reactions to the lyrics and how they interacted with the texts. It was interesting for me to see their engagement in reading. To understand more about this practice, I read articles and books written by Rasinski (2010; 2012). I also began to listen to several of Rasinski's podcasts and video clips on YouTube to learn more about his research.

While listening to one of his presentations on YouTube, he discussed the ways musical lyrics help students with fluency.

Think. I decided to introduce five songs during the first week. The songs were from the Kidz Bop collection. I knew I had to 'hook' the students with songs that they would enjoy. As students got more familiar with the lyrics, I would add a new song. It was interesting to see the students actively engaged when I would post the lyrics on the board. Many students would correct themselves when looking at the words. An administrator had observed the interaction the students had with the text. She stated, "I was surprised how the students would check to see if they had gotten the lyrics right when they weren't necessarily looking at the text." As the year progressed, I added more songs. I included songs that had lyrics and pertained to different content areas. Now, that the school year is almost over, I have noticed an increase in student's fluency than I have in previous years. For example, I have a student in my class that was working slightly below grade level. She struggled with fluency and comprehension. During our end of year assessments, the students showed gains in fluency and comprehension skills. She is now reading above grade.

Act. Providing students an opportunity to practice fluency with the use of musical lyrics can be engaging to students. Observing students trying to get the words accurately while singing allowed them to take ownership of their learning. They wanted to get the words right. By including songs with lyrics was a simple way to get students to practice their fluency with little planning on my part. I did not have to create special activities everyday to practice fluency. I used technology, students' interest, and an opportune time in my day to provide a fun way to practice their fluency. All it took was a little creativity!

Moving forward, I will incorporate videos with musical lyrics in other content areas more often, especially with math content. I did use lyrical music in science and social students, but I think more use in math will hopefully develop students' vocabulary skills. There are a variety of reasons this strategy can help students in the classroom.

Sandra

The desire to reach students with reading difficulties has been my goal since I started teaching 17 years ago. I have worked with under privileged students from all walks of life and stress to them the importance of reading and the knowledge it reveals when they open the pages of opportunity.

Look. For my action research project, I decided to work with students who were reading well below the national average for 4th graders. These students were unable to decode words, sound out words, or connect corresponding letter symbols to sounds. After reading the

Theoretical Models (Alvermann, Unrau, & Rudell, 2013) text I was interested in initiating a literacy framework that will allow them to analytically approach a word and make a letter-sound connection. According to Clay's (1982) literacy processing theory, she found "That the beginning, proficient reader uses language and visual and motor information so what on the surface looks like simple word-by-word reading, but involves children linking many things they know from different sources (visual, auditory, phonological, movement, speaking/articulating, and knowledge of the language (p. 28)."

Think. It was my initial assessment that these students had inadequate decoding skills and had missed the foundational skills needed to read texts. After looking at their cumulative folders I found that two of the students had been diagnosed with dyslexia, and one had been identified with a learning disability. All three students had good verbal communication skills. Initially, I had each student take a pre-assessment performed on the school adopted reading monitoring program (ISIP). This monitoring tool diagnosed the reading skills the students had mastered and those that needed further development. The findings from the assessment allowed me to adjust the phonics instruction I implemented with these students. I decided to go over sounds patterns, word patterns, and other phonemic awareness skills for 20 minutes daily. After direct explicit phonics instruction, students completed an independent assignment that focuses on a guided interactive lesson. When students mastered those skills, an advanced lesson provided additional instructions or other skills the student lack.

Act. Even though literacy encompasses many areas of development, mastering the foundational skills, allows the reader to gain the ability to cognitively process a word with little effort in a working system that connects the reader and the text (Clay, 2001). According to Singer (1994), "Readers who have acquired the necessary working systems are able to mobilize rapidly and flexibly a hierarchical organization of subsystems in which a minimum of mental energy and attention are devoted to the input systems." I plan to continue working with these students using the literacy processing theory in which visuals, phonological teaching, and word attack skills are the focus. Reading moving forward has become an achievable goal for them and print is more than an object on paper. I am sure that with continued explicit support and practice, reading will be a life-long skill that will open up many doors of opportunities for them.

Joel

I am an intermediate school counselor in rural district in the Southwest. As a teacher, I help students make sense of challenging word problems as they prepare to take standardized tests. Some of my coworkers say that my job includes helping students learn effective test taking strategies.

Look. For this project, I look at the work of Tanbe, a student who has difficulty applying background math knowledge to the passages she reads and therefore oftentimes has difficulty answering comprehension questions. In my experience, this difficulty causes students like

Tanbe to do not do well on state standardized tests because they rush causing misunderstandings between the text and the reader. Below in Figure 2, find an interaction between Tanbe and myself where she confuses a mathematical figure.

Figure 2: A Conversation with Tanbe

READING: *In 1999 people in the United States held about 1,755,000, $5,000 bills.*

Me	Tanbe
Okay as you read the different parts I'm going to stop you and ask you what you know about them.	
	In 1999 people in the United States held one hundred 755 thousand, $5.000 bills.
Okay, mark that first number	
	You mean the one hundred seventy five thousand dollars in $5,000 bills?
Okay what do you know about that first number?	
	It's one million, seven hundred and fifty-five thousand.
That is correct write millions above that number.	

Think. As a counselor, I believe that strategy instruction proposed by Palinesar and Brown (1984), and, will give students increased text comprehension and better performance on standardized tests by allowing them time to reread and build self-monitoring skills. So, in the case of Tanbe I suggested a strategy to address the miscues she encountered when she faced multiple syllable words. First, I told her to stop whenever she encounters difficult vocabulary. Second, I told her to write what she thinks the word means directly above the word. Third, I told her to see if the background word fit into the existing pattern. Paribakht and Wesche (1997) say that this strategy helps students determine possible word meaning from the context that can be applied to the text.

Act. This method allows students to use decoding skills and increase comprehension by examining and explaining the words using what they already know about the word as a scaffolding tool. Moving forward, I plan to ask students to write what they know about unfamiliar words directly above the difficult words they encounter then use their background knowledge as a temporary scaffolding tool.

Deborah

I am an instructional specialist manager (PK-2) for an urban district. My role is to help prepare specialists to support teachers' literacy practices. To do so, the specialists attend weekly trainings to stay abreast of best practices. During this semester, I have come to the realization that reading and its instruction is complex and requires a systematic approach to the way I prepare my reading specialists. In short, the question becomes, how do I create a structured support system to prepare literacy specialists to deliver high quality professional development to the teachers in their particular schools?

Look. This spring, I have reflected about the coaching cycle we use to train specialists and the support these specialists give to teachers. From my point of view, our specialists have to wear many hats and service an array of needs. Because of this, I conclude that my specialists need an extra layer of support and a narrower target of measurable objectives. It is my belief that making this change will enhance the preparedness of the specialists that will in turn aid in the delivery of professional development for teachers.

Think. So, this spring I began to add a layer of support with the creation of a document to aid in the tracking and monitoring of individual specialists training and the professional development they delivered based on this training. During the analysis, I realized that the learning happening for the literacy specialists was wide instead of deep. That is to say, they knew a little about many topics but only a few were experts in the particular topics they taught. In sum, after reading (Alvermann, Unrau, & Rudell, 2013) and consulting with my team members and specialists I decided to focus our trainings moving forward on the balanced literacy approach and assigned lead specialists to write the curriculum and design trainings for the specialists to meet those purposes.

Act. A common goal in our district is to have all students reading on grade level by third grade. Part of that can be accomplished by having highly trained instructional specialists who are knowledgeable of based balanced literacy approaches that incorporate whole language and phonics (Goodman & Goodman, 2013). In my view, specialists need a strong foundation of balanced literacy approaches along with a command of the coaching cycle. My role moving forward is to create a managed approach for leads and specialists so that they can better prepare teachers to improve the literacy skills of their students from grades K-12. For now, however I will charge my literacy specialists to focus their instruction of grades kindergarten through second grades as a way to remain small.

The layered support system along with targeted professional development will help specialists have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. The work moving forward will

equip the district with support systems that are structured around common literacy practices. In the future, other considerations will need to be made to ensure program fidelity.

Pearl

I am a kindergarten – second grade Instructional Specialist for a large urban district and work for Debbie. I work with teachers at 3 low performing elementary schools. My role as a specialist is to coach, mentor, and train the k-2 teachers at those campuses. I am a certified reading specialist but I also work with core subjects. I have been in education for 19 years and have taught special education and EC-5. I have been in my current role as an instructional specialist for 2 years.

Look. As an instructional specialist, I trained under professionals who were a part of the Reading First movement. As result of that training my love for the use of the read-aloud was revived. In my work with teachers, I have noticed that they seldom use the read-aloud, even for the simple enjoyment of reading. During this semester, I was reminded about the power of read aloud and its implications for future literacy success. I want to reintroduce the use of the read-aloud to teachers. As a classroom teacher, I used the read-aloud because it is a widely accepted as a means of developing vocabulary (Newton, Padak, & Rasinski, 2008). In this class, I have been reading and studying the work of Nagy and Scott (2013) and have also read Kindle's (2009) study on children's vocabulary growth to inform me on ways I can advocate for read aloud. In sum, I want to train teachers on vocabulary processes using read-aloud as a tool to introduce and model this very critical comprehension skill.

Think. I have created some mini lessons that I use to model ways that teachers can teach vocabulary skills to their students. I have also gathered resources like graphic organizers, anchor charts, and reading strategies guides that teachers can use to plan their own mini lesson using a book of their choice. I want to show them that there are various ways they can help students increase their word knowledge. I am doing practitioner research on the topic of using read-aloud to teach vocabulary acquisition. I understand that the processes that students need to recognize the complexity of word knowledge are important in their vocabulary acquisition so, what I want to do is work with my teachers to model and train them on ways they can maximize their use of the read-aloud as a best practice in reading instruction and vocabulary acquisition. I want to do a study that answers the question: "Does using the read-aloud to introduce, model, and teacher vocabulary help students increase word knowledge? I would like to use teachers that are willing and who are already using this practice and compare them to teachers who are not (for whatever reason). I believe that using the read-aloud will help students increase their word knowledge at a rate that is faster than the student whose teachers are not already using this practice.

Act. A part of my role of Instructional Specialist, I am responsible for creating and presenting professional development. I have already created a professional development session that

details ways that teachers can use the read-aloud to teach basic reading skills. I will create a professional development that trains teachers on explicit vocabulary instruction, which is so critical for the students we serve. "Students who need help most in the area of vocabulary — those whose home experience has not given them a substantial foundation in the vocabulary of literate and academic English — need to acquire words at a pace even faster than that of their peers" (Nagy & Scott 2013). I will also continue to coach, mentor, and plan with the teachers that I serve to implement the strategies and skills in vocabulary acquisition that I have trained them on throughout the next school year. The ultimate goal is reading comprehension which research demonstrates (Nagy & Scott, 2013) is strongly influenced by vocabulary knowledge.

Discussion

Bonnie, a fifth-grade teacher, reported that her students had limited vocabulary. Angela, a reading specialist, said that the teachers she was working with in her center needed help with informal reading inventories and guided reading. Liza, a second-grade teacher, reported that she wondered about increasing the fluency levels of her second graders. Sandra, an ELA coordinator, found that some of her fourth- grade students were unfamiliar with phonics and still struggled to make connections between letters and sounds. Joel, an elementary counselor, noticed that his students had trouble passing standardized tests. Debbie, an instructional supervisor, said that she wanted the reading specialists to be experts. Pearl, a kindergarten through second grade instructional specialist, found that her teachers needed more instruction about the benefits of read aloud. Altogether, these cycles suggest that we developed because we were able to put into practice what we learned about reading and its instruction and also to find ways to put what we are learning in the larger context of the literacy profession.

Moreover, this opportunity to develop as a community of scholars provided us with a better way to connect what we are learning in the graduate class to our personal, professional aspirations and work commitments with respect to literacy. That is to say, learning literacy theory during our course of study was an important aspect to what we did, but adapting the "Look, Think, Act" research cycle to our own individual situations allowed us to bring these abstract ideas into our *real* situations. Boyer (1990, pp. 77-78) aptly states, "The aim of education is not to only prepare students for productive (higher education) careers, but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends." Taking on a practitioner-scholar (2007) role was the difference that made the difference to how we saw our situation, the ways we thought about them, and what we did about it.

Conclusion

Our iteration of the "Look, Think, Act" cycle in our graduate class reminded us that teacher decisions are informed by a multitude of factors including: curricular mandates in their local

situations, political climate and affiliations of the time, students' and teachers' needs, and the professional development experiences of those who are engaged in the decisions (Araujo, 2011). That is to say, that the decisions teachers make about what we teach and how we teach it is a complex undertaking and require us to make it a habit to always look, think, and act to ensure that we are providing adequate instruction to our students that is sensitive to their immediate needs. Ultimately, the students reported that taking part in this action research cycle reinvigorated their beliefs about the ability to connect theory to practice and their pursuit of a doctorate in reading education.

William Bowen, said, scholarly research "reflects our pressing, irrepressible need as human beings to confront the unknown and to seek understanding for its own sake. It is tied inextricably to the freedom to think freshly, to see propositions of every kind in every changing light. And it celebrates the special exhilaration that comes from every new idea (Boyer, 1990, p. 17)." It was the intent to do just that with our "Look, Think, Act" cycles—we know our findings with these initial attempts will lead us to future work and discoveries.

As action researchers, we experienced first-hand that it is possible to innovate on the run—to parallel professional development & curriculum development as we tried to meet the needs of the students.

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