

Audiobooks: Assisting Struggling Readers with the Cognitive
Load

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Abstract

As the high school dropout rate continues to be unacceptably high, especially among African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans who are first or second generation immigrants, recovery efforts to reverse this trend are varied and with mixed results. Of these students, those with the poorest reading levels and lowest socio-economic backgrounds have the highest dropouts' rates. Because literacy is believed by many to be one the most important academic skills affecting high school success, assisting students in their ability to read at a more age-appropriate level in the shortest time possible should be of paramount importance to all stakeholders involved in public education. The use of audiobooks as a means to support and ensure remediation among reluctant readers at a continuation high school was the focus of this study.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction--Statement of Problem and Purpose

Much research has been devoted to studying how to best help struggling readers. Some in the research community have called for the public education community to unite in its efforts, and proposes implementing research-based, fundamentally sound interventions (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). According to Alliance For Excellent Education (2009), only 58% of Hispanic-American students graduate from our nation's high schools; 86 % of Hispanic eighth graders read below grade level compared to 62 % of White eighth graders; and Latinos and Blacks were still far behind their White peers in reading scores in 2005. Young men who can barely read cannot compete for good jobs and may turn elsewhere for income. In a study on the reading level of inmates in Canada, it was reported to be as low as 6th grade on average with some being even lower (Taylor & McAtee, 2003). These data alone should prompt unified action from our legislatures to aid schools in whatever interventions are necessary to focus more moneys to the remediation of students who for behind in reading. Yet, it is the teachers in the classrooms throughout the United States and English-speaking world that bear the responsibility of equipping students with academic literacy. Not only do Language Arts teachers have to help build the skills of students to graduate from high school with such additional requirements, as: higher GPAs, additional credits, and in most cases exit exams, teachers must also help prepare today's students to succeed in college or the work force. Therefore the demands on teachers of Language Arts can be said to be unreasonable at best and unreachable at worst. If stakeholders are serious about closing the achievement gap and more simply put, dramatically increasing the number of public school students

who graduate with the academic skills necessary to be productive members of this society, assisting educators to better prepare these students is of the utmost importance.

The need to find activities or methods for classroom teachers to quickly remediate the struggling readers in their classrooms, without using up time needed for instruction or assisting other students, is an all important task. How can teachers help adolescent, reluctant students re-engage and motivate themselves in the difficult task of improving their reading skills?

Teachers should do all they can to teach a child how to read, improve existing reading skills, or transition English Language Learners, (Ells) from their first language to at-age or grade level reading in English. Furthermore this intervention is of the highest priority when reviewing what continues to be a high percentage of high-school-drop-out-rates. Teachers need to teachers assist students moving forward from where the students are in skills and in their deficits. To meet students' needs and extend what skills they might have, schools must provide student-centered classrooms as one way to give special attention to those who have struggled or failed in other modalities. A society who fails to educate its youth is sure to incarcerate its adults.

Along with the literacy crisis among middle and high school students, particularly for low-socioeconomic households of Hispanics and African-Americans, districts find themselves in a budget crisis of their own. Finding ways to raise students' reading success may be costly in time and money, yet necessary. A concerted effort is needed by all stakeholders to raise student motivation and engagement through the improvement of their reading comprehension. One can also say the reverse: the improvement of students' reading comprehension skills will raise their motivation and engagement, hopefully to complete their secondary/preparatory schooling for life and or higher education!

"...Seventy percent of 8th graders and 65 percent of 12th graders do not read at grade level", according to

the National Assessment of Education progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, n.p.).

Statement of the Purpose

However improvements in reading cannot be achieved by demanding more from teachers and students alone. The transformation of how society goes about educating its youth to one of greater success for a higher percentage of students involved will require more assistance from the students' parent(s) or their household. Parents can be helped to take a greater role in the involvement of their student's work at the school and the home. Administrators who serve the struggling students could shift to a more staff development focus by being experts in instruction and by supporting the efforts made by the teachers, students, and parents instead of an adversarial/punitive role. Adding additional work to one group alone (administrators, teachers, students, or parents) will only burden them to a breaking point. Educators and researchers need to find ways for struggling readers to exponentially gain reading strategies that will guarantee their success in schools. The idea or design of best practices aims at this very goal. The research does point to studies which look into the benefits and or deficits of audiobooks as an aid in reading comprehension and or reading motivation and engagement. The use of audiobooks as a tool to assist struggling readers increase reading comprehension and increase their motivation or desire to read more is a young yet promising field and merits a more in-depth, thorough analysis.

Casbergue & Harris (1996) stated the following:

As they listen to a variety of books read aloud, youngsters' understanding of story structure, written language conventions, vocabulary, and aspects of their own and exotic cultures increases. As this knowledge base grows, more challenging stories become comprehensible to them, leading in turn to higher levels of understanding of structure, conventions, vocabulary and general

information.

Perhaps the most important insight children gain from listening to literature, however is that reading is an intensely pleasurable pursuit.

Listening to books read by competent, enthusiastic readers begins the process of becoming a lifelong reader (p. 51).

The question may arise as to whether or not true reading cannot be done when assisted by audiobooks; this may imply that the hearing of books is an easier cognition load and therefore may be seen as inferior or cheating (Newman, 2007). Yet, this is precisely the benefits a struggling reader gains with audiobooks. The audio reading aloud of the text assists struggling readers follow and the more basic metacognition required at the early stages of reading. Those who are blind, homebound or ill and simply wish to be read to have been served well by recorded books. Struggling students can greatly enjoy listening to a book being read to them too. They can experience the pleasure of stories and develop reading stamina and reading capacity when any text, fiction or non-fiction, poetry or song, textbook or newspaper is read to them. Both listening and reading along with the text will benefit disengaged adolescents and their respective homes (Boyle, Washburn, & Rosenberg, 2002, Boyle, et al., 2003). Teachers can affect a child in a positive way as they seek-out meaning from a text and can empower parents to help their students in learning by rereading a favorite book. This newly motivated child may share their reading enthusiasm with siblings in the home.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the effects that audiobooks can have on reading comprehension, reading motivation and engagement among struggling adolescent readers at a continuation high school. The following is a definition of terms used throughout the report.

Definition of Terms

- Continuation schools- These schools are atypical due to their open enrollment and various intervention programs. A student can enter the school at any point year-round; these schools offer lower student-to-teacher and counselor ratios, as well as individualized instruction, and consolidation of credits if a student enrolls in junior college courses. Some schools may offer a home studies program, GED, or high school diploma. For a pregnant minor, they may offer nursery or child care with parenting classes. Still, other schools may offer specialized diplomas such as: R.O.P. or culinary arts, etc.
- Books on tapes & audiobooks- These are quite similar in that they are books read by the author or a professional reader, and they are simply the reading aloud of the book. These are the most popular forms. Yet there are also audio readings of books, smaller texts or abridged books/novels, and school textbooks which are interactive. The reader can stop the tape or CD-ROM and pay close attention to a part of the reading or answer questions at the end of the reading.

Rational for the Study

The use of audiobooks, listening while reading/following along with text/book, by students who have pushed away assigned and or independent pleasure reading, seems to show promise in supporting the cognitive load, leading to a more gratifying reading experience and possibly retaining more of what is read by the struggling reader.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction: Struggling Adolescent Readers

Struggling adolescent readers resist reading for various reasons. Some of these reasons could be the sheer difficulty in decoding complex texts. To assist these readers, audiobooks can act as vehicle to aid students in understanding content of the basic plot and characterization. More importantly, professionally read texts have been found to help carry the cognitive load/burden of fluency and pronunciation, decoding, and inferring for weak readers (Casbergue & Harris, 1996). Can audiobooks help a struggling reader be less afraid to reading independent of adults, which can lead to voluntary volume reading as Allington, (2006) has lauded as necessary to help gain reading effectiveness (Cunningham, 2006). It is an obvious association that students who read two to three grade levels below their peers struggle to understand and complete classroom assignments and homework compared to their better equipped peers. Can hearing an expert recording of a text, fiction or non-fiction, for which an assignment is due, help or assist those struggling students in the completion of the task?

The Role of Motivation and Interest in Reading

Like so much in life, reading is a learned skill. But being able to read seems not enough to qualify a reader to be considered motivated. Those who can read can afford a joke or be teased if they made a mistake in pronunciation or misunderstanding a portion of what they read. However, any teasing must be burdensome and any ridicule oppressive for students who have failed at reading as they see themselves as unsuccessful at this most arduous task. If the role of motivation or engagement as it is often called, or the intrinsic desire which generates an interest in reading can be identified and developed in student populations, then children will take more ownership of their pursuit of literacy. Sweet and Guthrie (1996) found student's motivation to read varied. Some students reported enjoying

getting lost in the book by trying to solve a mystery or complex plot; desiring to learn more about a favorite topic; liking the sharing of books; and wanting to get all of the points possible on a reading assignment, or winning a competition with other classmates. Therefore, there seems to be more than just a simple ingredient to engagement in reading.

There are, as well, valid reasons for disengagement, other than simplistic poor choices made by reluctant readers. Pitcher and colleagues (2007) stated the following:

When some students judge reading and literacy activities to be unrewarding, too difficult, or not worth the effort because they are peripheral to their interests and needs, they can become *nonreaders* (Strommen & Mates, 2004) or *alliterate adolescents* (Alvermann, 2003) who are capable of reading but choose not to do so (p. 379).

In particular, Pitcher's study attempted to promote the choice of books to be read in class and independently. In addition, the study looked at if audio-recorded texts as part of their choice along with increasing instruction of specific reading strategies could promote increased independent reading (motivation) and reading comprehension.

Continuation Schools

Continuation schools are atypical due to their open enrollment and various intervention programs. A student can enter the school at any point year-round. These schools offer lower student-to-teacher and counselor ratios, as well as more individualized instruction compared to regular schools. Unfortunately, the graduation rates from alternative/continuation sites, including the school where the present study was conducted, compare poorly against the school district's other schools and statewide populations. This large, urban continuation school has dropout rates of 53.8% for Latinos, 80% for African-Americans, school total drop-out rate of 54%. Compared the district drop-out rate of 9.2% and a statewide drop-out of 15%, this atypical/continuation school's 54% is not a very flattering number.

Yet the 46% of students who do graduate from these school sites represent transfers or those kicked-out from others schools or other interventional programs, (California Department of Education, 2009).

The Use of Audiobooks to Motivate Struggling Adolescent Readers

Audio recordings have been available since the 1930's (Wolfson, 2008). Recordings of written texts have been used by the blind, the infirmed, elderly, and shut-ins such as inmates or those who can not leave their homes. Many U.S. public radio stations read local newspapers over the airways for listeners all over the world to hear news from home. Much academic and social benefit is gained by children who are read to in infancy (Casbergue & Harris, 1996). This shared reading and other similar exchanges can engender positive feeling in the listener/reader of audiobooks. There seems to be a small negative data associated with the use of audiobooks, or books on tape. Any serious attempt to aid students in their acquisition of literacy, demands a complete curriculum and methodology of instruction. The use of audiotapes to assist struggling readers in their metacognition as they read a book at their appropriate reading level can only be small part of a larger literacy rich curriculum. In the literature, there was only one primary comment or warning to teachers to not rely on recorded books as the primary source of language input, instruction, or interaction for their students. When working to aid a struggling reader to develop reading strategies, recorded text can not be the sole intervention. The warning seems to stem from the fear of making the recording the teachers. Language acquisition and or language development requires the interaction and guidance from an expert, a language arts teacher. The researcher recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach of multiple inputs of language instruction to facilitate the literary in young learners yet how much more so in struggling learners and students of English as second language who have the highest drop-out rates.

In 2000, 44% of Hispanic immigrants dropped out of high school and in 2005, only 55% of African Americans graduated high school on time, (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2009).

Reading skills deficits can be considered as a component for the drop out rate, (AEE, 2009). Therefore, assisting students to increase their reading competence, with the use of audiobooks could help create self efficacy and motivation a student could use to not drop-out.

The use of audio and visual technologies from computers programs, the Internet, iPods, MP3s, and CD-ROMs to improve classroom instruction is no longer a privilege but a necessity. Christian, Pufahl and Rhodes (2004) found the following:

These tools [technology] can improve classroom instruction by providing access to authentic uses of the target language, increasing students' motivation to use the language, reducing students' anxiety about their performance in the language, and providing individual students with more practice in using the language than in a traditional classroom setting might allow (p. 27-28).

A report on demographics of audiobook users indicates audiobooks are becoming more and more popular and nearly one quarter of U.S. citizens have read a book recorded on tape or digitally (Anonymous, 2007). Creating high quality audio books is taken seriously by publishers who can see great revenue from sales of their recorded books. The reading of a book is an interpretation or sometimes a reinterpretation of the story. As Shakespeare gave his elaborate stories to the masses, audiobooks rekindle or give birth to the images and the feelings reading literature gives readers. In time, audiobooks can aid reluctant students to grow to love learning. For those who think listening to tapes is cheating the reading process, they must take into account that the reading aloud of any text is more of an aid to struggling readers. It is not cheating if an illiterate native English speaker or immigrant non-English speaker wishes to hear the language as they follow along with a book of interest. It may not be the same effort or metacognitive load to read a text alone than with audio assistance, yet it is not meant to be. Audiobooks are an addition to the educational/reading pleasures an educated society has available

for its citizens. Reading books with the help of audiobooks can cause the reader to take in more information than reading alone. Audiobooks can help readers become more quickly informed about a culture or genre (Newman, 2007).

Use and accessibility of technology which assists readers is increasing (Anonymous, 2007). Society's constant development of new modalities of communication and interaction is an important reason to assist all students to use iPods, websites, webcams, eBooks, MP3s, and similar devices. The trend seems to be going toward more high quality recordings and at lower prices (Wyatt, 2009). The increased accessibility of technology-assisted-text has generated more choices for individuals who wish to increase their literacy. Choice, accessibility, and support are three key components in how the free markets will help educate any voluntary learner. The time has come for compulsory education to emulate or at least move toward a more open choice of learning modalities (Avins, 2006). As these technologies increase their dominance in commerce, not only will they be used to aid in reading literacy, but more importantly they will be a must to be socially literate.

Audiobooks: Help or Hindrance?

While the literature that has been adapted to audiobooks is somewhat limited, the majority of the data indicates that audiobooks are beneficial to readers (Casbergue & Harris, 1996). The only cautionary note previously mentioned is that listening to books on tape should not become the sole source of reading instruction. Recorded texts can be used to increase focus and emphasize the acquisition of reading strategies, including increasing volume reading of reluctant/struggling readers. When recorded books are used as the sole source of reading instruction, the audio books become the teacher. Wolfson (2008) sees audiobooks as assisting in the improvement of oral and reading fluency. Grover and Hannegan (2008) agree and further promote the use of audiobooks to assist reluctant readers with fluency, vocabulary, prior knowledge and comprehension. They also indicate that audiobooks can

develop motivation to interact with books. Both of these researchers indicated that recorded books help reading instruction by making it easier to demonstrate specific skills, such as: understanding sequence, making predictions, drawing conclusions, making inferences, and retelling.

However, just listening to audiobooks independently as the only form of instruction may not produce the gains desired for our school's struggling readers. It is unknown if audiobooks without accompanying classroom instruction can aid readers in an individual's goal or purpose to gain literacy skills. Long hours of audio tape listening to non-instructional recordings by a well intended student might produce some metacognitive gains, yet if there is such occurrence, these were not found in the data. For the purposes of this study, that of helping students in reading recovery in a classroom setting, the idea of adding books read to students as they follow a recorded narrator and to measure its affects on the student's comprehension of the text and motivation to read is the focal point of this intervention. The view is taken that audiobooks are only an addition to classroom instruction and activities, such: answering student's questions, clarifying meaning of texts, explain English specific idioms, or fill-in background information, etc.

Furthermore, as with all students, individuals have a specific set of strengths in learning such as: audio-intelligence, spatial or visual-intelligence. The opposite is also true; one can have audio or processing deficits. In these cases it is of utmost importance to the astute teacher, literacy specialist or special education teacher to assist the struggling student to find the right intervention, personalizing a program to maximize gains in reading skills acquisition.

Use of Audiobooks in Instruction

Whether learning about chromosomes in biology class or hearing for the third time the elements on the periodic table, students who use audiobooks or audio-texts will be empowered by the ability to repeat the instructions, listen to audio-dictionaries, or access rhyme zones websites for example, as often

as needed. Garcia (2008, p. 12) believes, “oral language is the foundation for all expression.” If this is true, then it is of special necessity to increase the amount of targeted language students hear.

Audiobooks are the logical choice for making-up for lost time by reluctant readers, English learners, and those behind in reading skill level.

Researchers point to how audio texts can help students with mild disabilities to read more effectively and to become more independent learners in content areas (Boyle, Washburn, & Rosenberg, 2002, Boyle et al., 2003). Boyle and colleagues (2002, 2003) developed an effective reading program for students with mild disabilities using audio texts, “to direct the reader’s attention to important parts of the text, cue active listening, and synthesize and integrate the new information with the student’s existing knowledge” (Boyle et al., 2003, p. 204).

Another example of research on the use of audiobooks in instruction comes from (Wolfson, 2008). Wolfson asserted that a problem in comprehending any text is the lack of fluency by the reader and the use of audiobooks can support the improvement of fluency. Audiobooks provide a professional reader for the students to follow. This research also provided practical steps for the use of audiobooks: books used should be preferably at the reading level of the student, they should pertain to the student’s interest, and they should be available for the student’s convenience.

Research Question: Conclusion

There are varied approaches in the existing literature describing ways to improve the literacy of younger reluctant readers including immersion, sheltering, student-centered classrooms, mainstreaming, and others. The research has explored how audiobooks may help in motivating such students. However, there is a critical need to investigate the effects of audiobooks on students’ reading comprehension, motivation as a part of a larger remedial plan for high-risk ‘high school drop-outs’. The

research question for the present study is: What effect does the use of audiobooks have on the reading levels, motivation, and engagement of students in a mainstream class at a Continuation High School?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Background

This study was designed to examine the effects that audiobooks have on the comprehension and motivation to read of students in a continuation high school. Low-volume-at-home reading can be one of the many possible underlying causes as to why continuation school students fall behind academically. Additionally immigrant students do not usually have parents who can read with them in English. Therefore, the use of audiobooks was explored in this study as a positive means of supporting students' motivation to read, and their reading performance.

Population: Participants

Subjects for this study were recruited from an urban Continuation High School. Most come to school credit deficient. The school is located in the downtown area of the second largest district in the southwestern United States. The high school campus is situated immediately behind a community college and the high school students have access to the college via various alternative programs including: High School Diploma, Joint Diploma, Center Middle College, home studies, pregnant minor, nursery care, and small in-class direct instruction. Like other urban continuation schools, the high school offers individualized attention and open enrollment. The school has four counselors for the 500 students enrolled, making it a 1:125 counselor to student ratio.

Over 95% of the student population comes from the district's other high schools because they have failed the ninth grade, become credit deficient, or become pregnant or a parent. Most students come from low social-economic backgrounds and qualify for free lunches. There are a few transfer students from other districts, often, transferring in at different times during the year.

The cultural profile of these students is 70-72% Hispanic, 10-12% African-American, 8-10% white, and 4-6% non-White or Asian. The figures change slightly because there are 4 to 6 intake enrollment periods during the school year. On average there are 60% males and 40% females and ages range from 16 to 20 years of age.

The average student is two to three years behind their assigned age/grade reading level, as assessed by computer in the STAR reading test, Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading, Renaissance Learning (2010). The most common reason given by students as to why they fell behind in credits is skipping classes and failing classes due to not completing assignments. The reasons most often given for skipping classes are: boring classes, peer pressure, a rebellious nature, family needs (including financial needs, thus taking a job, child care of sibling, family problems, lack of transportation, and marriage), or time away from school due to incarceration. Most of these reasons coincide with the report Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2009).

Twelve students from three similar English 1-4 classes volunteered to participate. These students had reading levels ranging from 2.3 to 9.3 grade equivalent, and were similar in percentages of socio-economic status, and age. The group had an almost equal number of males to females represented, similar patterns of attendance, and credit deficiency. Students were asked to volunteer for the study, and their parents provided their consent. The students gave their assent to participate knowing they could leave the study at any time and their work with this project would not affect their grade in class.

Instruments

Reading History & Motivation to Read Profile

Students were surveyed for reading history, interests, habits, reading motivation, and efficacy. In order to assess the student's self-concept as a reader and their value of reading, and to encourage open-ended and free responses of their interest in narrative, informational, and general reading, a modified version of Gambell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni's, Motivation to Read Profile (1996) for elementary students, was used. The Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) was developed to assess the reading motivation middle and high school students (Pitcher, et al., 2007). There are two parts to this survey. The first part is an instrument which has 20 multiple-choice questions. Each question has a 4 point rubric to assess the student's self-concept as a reader and their value of reading. This instrument can be taken by the class as a group all at once. To ascertain student's interests in reading, the second portion of this survey is a conversational interview with 23 scripted items/questions which can be extended by the interviewer. This interview focuses on how a student spends his or her time and how a student might spend his or time at school, including instructional activities.

Treatment: Design of Study

Subjects read a first novel without the assistance of an audiobook and were interviewed as to their progress in at-home reading with audiobooks. Students were asked to read 10 to 30 minutes per day, five days a weeks. The parent of each participating student volunteered to encourage and supervise their child if the student needed time at home to complete their daily reading. All subjects were pre- and post-assessed with the STAR reading test, Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading, Renaissance Learning (2010). All twelve students received the same curriculum and instruction. The twelve students read books/novels mostly in the classroom, and at home if necessary and were taught reading strategies to aid understanding and retention of the book read. Students had a directed purpose for their reading, both in the classroom and at their home. Students were given time in class to complete reading their texts and parents agreed to help with observing students finish reading at home if necessary. The

parents also agreed to provide a set time and a quiet place for the students to read 10 to 30 minutes everyday, 6 days a week, for a four or six week period. If desired by the student, they could keep reading logs while they read their books. Students read during class 30 minutes per day for the first week and 45 minutes to an hour the remaining five weeks. The parent of each student participating was contacted and 63 – 65 % is a non-English speaker. To insure each student completed reading their text, extra time was made available during class time, before and after school, during lunch, and at home as described above.

To assess the validity of questions in the tests, some the students who were not participants in this study, completed a small survey of the different questions used on the tests. “Did you feel the test is too long too short?” Are the questions on this quiz worded in a manner easy to understand or do any of these needs to be rewritten? What type of questions would you asked of a friend who had read the same book? The students’ responses yielded insightful modifications of these tests. The font was made bigger in some cases; the spacing was made larger. Some questions were thrown-out due to lack of clarity; some questions were edited to ensure comprehension, and most others were found to be important in the acquisition of the desired response. The students were then allowed to look at the modified test questions. All in all, students reported that these revised test questions mirror the content of the book they read. The questions ranged from explicit to implicit questions, true or false, multiple choices, and more open-ended questions which require students to demonstrate understanding of themes, morals taught, lessons learned, character coming of age, and the like. When finished with their texts, the students in this study were given a test with 30-35 of the above-mentioned-questions on the book they read.

This same group of students read a second book, at their independent level and of their choice. The students received the same support and guidance while reading their second book. The students

were issued the book, the book on audiocassette, and audiocassette players where necessary. Students read their books everyday in-class and if at-home. Both the classroom and school library have an extensive list of high-interest, low-level reading books/novels in Audiobooks. Again students were given a quiz/exam with 30-35 of the above-mentioned-questions on the book they read.

Chapter 4

Results

Restatement of Question Results of Study

What effect do audiobooks have on the reading comprehension levels and the motivation to read of students in a mainstream class at a Continuation High School? In the eight week study there was improvement in both reading comprehension and motivation to read by the students as measured by a pre and post standardized reading assessment test, comprehension of the two books read by each student, and a survey taken before and after the intervention. Sixty-seven percent of the students who read a book on tape improved their STAR reading grade equivalent scores. The t-test scores from these students had a 1.61 positive difference than when they first started the intervention. The mean score for the group initially was 5.6 grade equivalent and their mean score after the intervention was 6.3. In four weeks their averaged reading abilities increased close to seven months in reading comprehension level. Students without the intervention showed a decrease in reading comprehension scores.

The reading comprehension scores of the intervention group are shown below in table 1.

Table 1
STAR scores: Intervention Group

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | | Difference |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|------------|
| I-1 | 4.3 | 4.5 | | +0.2 |
| I-2 | 4.3 | 3.6 | | -0.7 |
| I-3 | 4.5 | 8.4 | | +3.9 |
| I-4 | 2.3 | 3.6 | | +1.3 |
| I-5 | 9.4 | 9.7 | | +0.3 |
| I-6 | 4.6 | 3.5 | | -1.1 |
| I-7 | 5.3 | 5.7 | | +0.4 |
| I-8 | 8.5 | 10.8 | | +2.3 |
| I-9 | 9.3 | 8.6 | | -0.7 |

| | | | | |
|------|-----|-----|--|------------------|
| I-10 | 6.3 | 7.7 | | +1.4 |
| I-11 | 5.8 | 5.4 | | -0.4 |
| I-12 | 2.6 | 3.8 | | +1.2 |
| | | | | A gain of +0.675 |

Compared to the intervention group, the control group lost ground in reading levels. The control group scores are given in table 2.

Table 2

STAR scores: Control Group

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | | Difference |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|-------------|
| C1 | 7.2 | 6.3 | | -0.9 |
| C2 | 6.6 | 4.2 | | -2.4 |
| C3 | 5.3 | 2.2 | | -3.1 |
| C4 | 3.2 | 6.4 | | +3.2 |
| C5 | 3.2 | 3.2 | | 0.0 |
| C6 | 9.1 | 8.4 | | -0.7 |
| C7 | 2.8 | 3.0 | | +0.2 |
| C8 | 5.2 | 3.1 | | -2.1 |
| C9 | 5.0 | 2.8 | | -2.2 |
| C10 | 4.4 | 3.5 | | -0.9 |
| C11 | 6.3 | 4.3 | | +2.6 |
| C12 | 4.1 | 4.6 | | +1.2 |
| | | | | A -.42 loss |

While the average book content test scores increased from the first book to the second, only 50% of students in this experiment had higher comprehension scores in the second *audio-assisted* book read. Quizzes were given to the intervention group after each student read a book of their choice and at their reading level. Their first book was read without the assistance of an audio recording. Their second book was read with the help of the unabridged version of the book in their hands. As they read they were to follow the narrator and the print on the book implementing a reading strategy they had learned in their language art classroom.

The reading book comprehension/content scores of the intervention group are shown below in table 3.

Table 3
Comprehension Book scores

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | | Difference |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------|
| I-1 | 91 | 80 | | -11 |
| I-2 | 91 | 86 | | -5 |
| I-3 | 91 | 84 | | -7 |
| I-4 | 65 | 55 | | -10 |
| I-5 | 64 | 62 | | -2 |
| I-6 | 31 | 75 | | +44 |
| I-7 | 78 | 72 | | -6 |
| I-8 | 87 | 95 | | +8 |
| I-9 | 59 | 77 | | +18 |
| I-10 | 48 | 60 | | +12 |
| I-11 | 64 | 72 | | +8 |
| I-12 | 50 | 88 | | +38 |
| | | | | A +7.25 gained |

Significant improvement was noted in the self-concept portion of the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) survey. All intervention students but one increased in their *self-concept* and value of reading; thus 91.7% of the students grew in their self perception as readers and in their value for reading. Of significant importance was the 100% increase in scores by all students in the intervention group on the overall *full-survey* of the motivation toward reading books and self-concept. Of special interest to this study were the comments made by students regarding comprehension and their self-confidence, self-efficacy and enjoyment in reading.

The self-concept and reading value of the intervention group are shown below in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
Self-Concept scores

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | | Difference |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|------------|
| I-1 | 22 | 28 | | +6 |
| I-2 | 26 | 26 | | 0.0 |
| I-3 | 26 | 28 | | +2 |
| I-4 | 24 | 27 | | +3 |

| | | | | |
|------|----|----|--|-------------|
| I-5 | 19 | 24 | | +5 |
| I-6 | 25 | 30 | | +5 |
| I-7 | 27 | 24 | | +7 |
| I-8 | 24 | 32 | | +8 |
| I-9 | 40 | 33 | | -7 |
| I-10 | 30 | 34 | | +4 |
| I-11 | 29 | 30 | | +1 |
| I-12 | 22 | 26 | | +4 |
| | | | | A+3.17 gain |

Table 5
Reading Value

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | | Difference |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|--------------|
| I-1 | 27 | 26 | | -1 |
| I-2 | 26 | 27 | | +1 |
| I-3 | 23 | 24 | | +1 |
| I-4 | 30 | 33 | | +3 |
| I-5 | 15 | 19 | | +4 |
| I-6 | 22 | 29 | | +7 |
| I-7 | 26 | 29 | | +3 |
| I-8 | 26 | 29 | | +5 |
| I-9 | 37 | 35 | | -2 |
| I-10 | 30 | 32 | | +2 |
| I-11 | 28 | 28 | | +0.0 |
| I-12 | 29 | 32 | | +3 |
| | | | | A +2.17 gain |

Eighty-four percent of students reported enjoying the use of audiobooks and stated the audio helped them in comprehension, reading pace, pronunciation, and increasing word knowledge. Fifty percent of students in this study were English Language Learners, (Ells) and all perceived the audiobooks as improving their conversational English and felt they were better able to approximate Standard English pronunciation. These students read aloud with the recorded tape to emulate the narrator. One student noted feeling a connection with the person reading, as if the narrator was there with the expressed purpose to aid him in, “bettering my English,” as he put it. Another participant, a shy, young man who only gives one or two word answers in the classroom, explained he heard many

sentences and phrases that appealed to him. He confessed having played some of these passages several times and practiced pronouncing the words and annunciating the phrases and sentences until he had approximated the narrator to his satisfaction. This student admitted, in our one-on-one interview, he does not want to, “talk perfect English or lose my accent! I just want everyone to understand me.”

A few students reported a feeling such as, ‘*a loss of track of time,*’ including a sense of pleasure while reading along with the audiobook. These students said it was highly pleasurable making pictures in their minds and lost track of how long they had been reading. They also engaged in listening to the audiobook again without following the text to add to the initial images made from their first reading. Of special interest were the comments made by two subjects. The first subject mentioned in the past that she was too nervous reading due to her, “working hard [at] what I’m reading to understand and remember for the test.” She said, “Reading was never fun, only when you read to us or the tape or past teachers read and there was no test!” Reading for pleasure somehow did not become part of this student’s repertoire during her elementary or middle school years. It seems that she has needed help with the cognitive load for many years now and it has been hard for her to enjoy the required reading in her current classes. She said, “Reading is fun with tapes.” When asked if there was one thing that she can think of that make audiotapes fun to listen to, she replied, “The reader reads better, a little faster than me, that way I can make pictures in my head.”

The scores of student’s self-concept and in their value of reading did have significant change. Table 6 shows the control group scores of the full survey of the adolescent motivation to read profile.

Table 6

Full Survey

| | 1 st score | 2 nd score | Difference | |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----|
| I-1 | 49 | 54 | | +5 |
| I-2 | 52 | 53 | | +1 |
| I-3 | 49 | 52 | | +3 |
| I-4 | 54 | 60 | | +6 |
| I-5 | 34 | 43 | | +9 |
| I-6 | 47 | 59 | | +12 |

| | | | | |
|------|----|----|--|--------------|
| I-7 | 53 | 63 | | +10 |
| I-8 | 50 | 63 | | +13 |
| I-9 | 77 | 68 | | -9 |
| I-10 | 60 | 66 | | +6 |
| I-11 | 57 | 58 | | +1 |
| I-12 | 51 | 58 | | +7 |
| | | | | A +5.33 gain |

Twenty-five percent of the study population did not see following a book with the assistance of an audiobook as helpful. These students had higher original reading levels and were bothered by the linear nature of the audio tapes, making it difficult to stop the tape and rewind to hear again portions of the book which needed clarification. These students expressed frustration at times reading faster than the narrator and at times wanting to slow the reading as if putting the current reading on pause to recollect or summarize events, dig for clues or remember a character that is being reintroduced. They said they were bothered by having to stop the recorder to do their thinking. “I felt sometimes I was reading but couldn’t or was not allowed to stop to think,” said one of them. When both redirected to take as long as they want to read the book and not worry about stopping to catch-up to the story, they both agreed they liked the narrator when it matched their ‘reading’ pace, yet they disliked the feeling of ‘being monitored by a machine.’ Emergent readers may not always want the assistance provided by audiobooks. It may be that some students will be irritated by the feeling of ‘riding with training wheels’ which can happen when a book on tape is given to readers who have begun to read a little more independently.

Sixty-seven percent of participants were frustrated by the recorded tapes themselves. These students expressed annoyance in trying to find the right place/page in the book after turning the cassettes over. Also some were bothered by the use of headphones when reading at home; they were directed to hear the tapes without headphones if they were able to do so without interruptions, such as in their

bedrooms or any quiet place at home. It was necessary for a small number of participants to borrow a tape recorder due to them not owning one. One of these students complained of having to carry a tape recorder to and from school due to the absence of a recorder at their home and added how much less complicated it would be if he could download the audiobook onto his iPod. While the technology was there to record from tapes to audio CDs and thus from these CDs to MP3s or iPods, the site-technician found the process long, tedious and the quality of the sound was poor. In addition, copy right infringements were a concern. Also, the recordings only held one chapter per section, and it would have taken many more hours of recording and copying to modify this. As more and more books are recorded in the 'computer language format,' school districts will be able to purchase and share these customer-friendly technologies with their students. If text is added to the software, such Kindle and EBooks, students will be able read audiobooks from their phones, iPods and the like.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Interpretation

This study was designed to examine the effects that audiobooks had on the comprehension and motivation to read of students who struggled academically and needed an intervention. Any positive movement in the scores of reading levels and in reading motivation would be noteworthy and of practical significance. The benefit to students, three to six years behind their age/grade appropriate reading level, is well supported by this study's findings.

Of the twenty-four students who took a pre/post STAR reading assessment test, 12 were part of the intervention using audio books. As a group, these students improved their reading grade equivalent (GE) level by 0.675, meaning that their reading averages increased by almost seven months. The other twelve students in this study were the control group. These students' averaged a -.42 GE. While the intervention was implemented over only a two-month period, the results indicated that the assisted reading intervention helped to improve reading comprehension levels. The data analyses yielded a t-test score of -.74 for the control group and a +1.62 t-test score for intervention group. While + 1.62 does not meet the 0.05 significance level, it in of itself is a valuable improvement to be considered. Due to the STAR's heavy reliance on vocabulary, it is unclear if an increase in word acquisition helped improve the scores or if the students actually grew in their understanding of sentences, passages, story-lines and the like. While the growth is measurable and encouraging, it is difficult to say which of all subsections of this intervention or if the combination of them aided/produced these gains.

In addition to the formal components of the intervention, there were other factors that may have affected the students' motivation. For example, there was a tremendous amount of attention and energy given to each student by the teacher. Much encouragement was given to each participant in an informal

manner and the students were informed that that they would be helped with any problems that may arise. Positive phone calls were made by the researcher to the parents to inform them of the student's good progress in class and in the study. Many students had not received a positive phone call from school in a long time, if ever. A positive environment was maintained for all of the classes involved this study, but the intervention students' attitudes seemed to be one of belonging to a privileged group, a 'we are getting the best education we can get,' type of attitude.

Furthermore, the intervention group became a book club of sorts, talking among themselves about which book the others had read and which was the most recommended. The subjects would stop by the classroom to share their progress in their reading and as 50% declared, with some variation, "This is the first book I have read cover to cover!" The classroom became the lunch area for several of the students in this study. It is believed the students' attitudes toward reading changed because of the many good things that happened to them within the context of this study and within the environment of the language arts classroom, in addition the to activity of having read a book on tape. It seems as if the students who had the greatest growth in reading levels, broke out of a, '*I don't read because it makes me feel dumb!*' or, '*I read it but I don't get it!*' type of mold or shackles which kept them from truly trying at reading. The group's opportunity to read along with an audiobook read fluently by an expert and to discuss the book was encouraging to each other and definitely supported their fluency and comprehension growth. This was coupled with the differentiated instructional support which occurred in the classroom as the researcher addressed the student's specific needs as a learner, and was scaffolded by the lessons and activities to support their individual needs, while providing explicit instruction of reading strategies. This focused, personalized instruction supported the students having a greater understanding of texts. It is likely this combination of practice and attention which comprised the total

package that led to growth for each student. Audiobooks were but one component of this instructional package.

The intervention group participated in a survey which assessed their self-concept as a reader and their value of reading. Then this same group read a book of their choice without the assistance of an audio-recording device. After completing this book, a test for basic comprehension was administered and graded. They then read a book of their choice on tape and were to follow the book, (read-along-with-the-narrator) at their grade reading level. This group of students on the average tested higher on the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading STAR.

The English language students in this study felt they benefitted significantly from the audio input while reading their chosen book; they expressed increased pleasure in reading when accompanied by a well read (animated) audio text recording. Audiobooks can increase reading comprehension and reading motivation in some students who have been unmotivated to read in the past by introducing them to just the right books as part of a larger literacy rich curriculum. Audio recorded books can help motivate a reluctant reader when the reading is directed, purposeful, and monitored, when the students have their choice of which text to read and the books are at or below the student's reading level.

Implications

Language Art teachers can assign audiobook readings year round for willing students. As part of a well rounded curriculum, language teachers can have students spend half an hour a day reading of both fiction (for pleasure) and non-fiction (for content support.) Teachers must ensure the reading level of the book matches the student's level. This proved to be important in this study because if the book was out of reach, having too high of a reading level due to unknown vocabulary or a totally new topic, the student did not understand it. This made comprehension and enjoyment out of reach.

Equally significant was the topic and genre of the book. If the book was of high interest to the student it also had to have equal or lower level reading difficulty due to its vocabulary. A student's choice is very important, yet to be a good match or a *Just Right Book*, the book should be at their reading level and not be on a subject totally new to them because there will be too many new words. For example, both *The Giver* by Louis Lowry and *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer are between a grade reading level of 5.8 and 6.4. Yet the science fiction qualities of *The Giver*, used many uncommon words, and thus confused several of the students, prompting them to ask for a different book. The autobiographical narrative of *A Child Called It* suited readers in that reading level range. An anomaly that stood out in this study was that the lowest score achieved after the reading of the first book (without audiobook) came from a student reading *The Giver*. This being a very shy student he did not want to admit he was struggling. Then he read *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli (with audiobook), which has a very similar reading level range, 5.8 to 6.2. This student was able to more than double his score in the percentage of correct answers in the book quiz with this book. Topic and genre seem to be important to consider when finding the right audiobook for struggling readers.

The topic of finding the right page in the book on the cassette tape came up often in the interviews with the subjects. Due to the complication in stopping the tape recorder, a few students were slightly bothered when having to stop the recorder and think about what they had just read. As these students attempted to make meaning of a difficult or new word, they expressed irritation in stopping and starting the recording. Examples of this presented themselves with books in which the setting of the story was not current, such as in the 1930's, when words like, 'trousers, suspenders, and trestle' were used by the characters. These students had the initial lowest reading level scores. This group reported the feeling of getting great help from audiobooks and felt less inconvenienced by the stopping and

restarting of the cassettes as they compared this to the benefits they felt that they gained from following their chosen books-on-tape.

Other students, the ones with the highest initial reading levels, seemed to desire more independence from the assistance of audio books. Students whose reading skills were closer to their grade level or were at an age appropriate level, expressed a mixed experience, at times wanting to follow the book and enjoy the narration, and at times wanting to read the book on their own, enjoying their own pace, their own voicing of '*making-meaning-process.*' This is where the problems of the cumbersomeness of tape cassette players were larger than the help it provided to the reader.

Some of the subjects were bothered by the head phones. They were instructed to not use them if they could listen without interruption at home, school, or a choice place of reading. Some students pushed the wrong buttons and erased portions of their tapes and thus ruined tapes altogether. This brought unnecessary frustration to the activity. The unfamiliarity with and the size of a tape recorder were especially restrictive and limiting to about half of the students.

Research Limitations of the Study

The greatest limitation of any study done in a continuation school population may be the student's absenteeism and its transient population. Also, the intervention groups while content to read the books and take the quizzes simply did not always comply with the daily summaries which were asked of them. About 70% of those reading a book on tape asked to be given time to do so in class due to difficulties at home with finding a quiet space, jobs after school, taking care of siblings, their own children and/or house chores.

A casual observation of continuation school students can determine their lack of school skills. The tardiness, absenteeism, refusal to carry backpacks, often coming to school without having eaten breakfast, forgetting work at home or in another class, and many other habits exhibited by a large

portion of the population make it even more difficult for them to carry cassette recorders back and forth to and from home. To facilitate their reading at a faster pace, reading a half hour at school and another half hour at home, some students had two recorders, two books, and two sets of audio cassette tapes, one at home and one in the classroom. This too proved a burden to 30% of the students, who found it very intricate to find the correct spot on the book at school that they had left off at the night before when reading at home. The home, then, can be part of the target of any intervention. Helping the home support its student to follow through with an intervention will be crucial to the success of any future study.

Technology has not kept-up with the need for audio-text support. If publishers like American Guidance Service, AGS can have their low level high interest classroom textbooks on audio tapes, other publishers can begin to place the audio recording of their textbooks on the internet. These can be placed on school web-sites only for intellectual property reasons, yet the benefits could be significant as students of all ages will be able to have entire assignments reread to them via their home computers, cell phones, iPods, MP3s, or any audio device. Books on audio tapes have a limited comfort zone. When the tapes are not recorded well, the student is easily frustrated and thus becomes unmotivated to continue.

The new and more user friendly type of audiobooks will have to be able to find the exact page where students left their readings and/or any page where they wish to go. E-books like Kindle and technologies like iPods and the newly released iPads can overcome many of the cumbersome obstacles experienced by students, permitting quick and easy access to both the text and its audio recording. As state and local budgets continue to be cut, new technologies may seemed costly to school districts. However, even tight budgets can allocate monies for books and technology to purchase the rights of

recorded books both for the whole class and the individual students who need to carry with them a recording of a given assignment.

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations on this study that were created by the student's absenteeism-transient nature necessitate that a longitudinal study with a larger population from a continuation school be conducted to further explore this area of study. In addition, future studies should ensure to have leveled fiction and non-fiction books, *with standardized tests* for the gathering more accurate, richer, comprehensive data.

A second control group could have been added to this study, one which only read a book without audio cassettes and then tested for reading levels, reading growth and the effects of the new classroom instruction. A comparison to this type of control group in future studies could provide a minor yet important insight into how much audiobooks assist in reading comprehension and motivation.

Fiction and autobiographies were used for this study; however, there is a need for more non-fiction and classroom textbooks to be made available on audio-texts to be used in future studies. More importantly, these audiotexts are needed to support reading instruction in the classrooms for the development of reading skills such as comprehension and fluency and to increase motivation and engagement in struggling-reluctant readers, as well as for research.

It is also suggested that a list of difficult words be created and studied by students before the audio reading takes place. If the student likes the topic or story line and the book is at or below their reading level, than they can look at the word list and see if the book is suited for them. In this scenario, the student has even a higher form of ownership in selecting the reading. The student can decline the book or pre-study the words to ensure higher levels of comprehension and enjoyment.

Continuation schools can benefit from standardized-computer-assisted reading comprehension programs like the Accelerated Reader STAR test due to its easy access and self-contained nature. This

test can assist in measuring progress from semester to semester even if the students moves to other teachers or programs within the school as is often the case in continuation schools. The STAR test however could be improved by adding a more detailed comprehensive section to the test. It could use larger texts such short stories or articles for the students to read and answer multiple-choice questions about plot or informational content, theme, tone, voice, and so on.

Continuation school students can have a very difficult time coordinating their studies with their home life. Of great dismay was the large number of disconnected telephone numbers, family illnesses and emergencies, loss of forms, and the chronic absenteeism both by the student at school and the parent from the home. Fifty percent of the subjects were themselves parents, lived independently of their parents or lived outside the city, with more than a 1½ hour commute to school from home. These commute times could be used for reading and schoolwork more efficiently if students had access to affordable technology. However, the odds are stacked against students who come from these circumstances. A dual effort of supporting the family's needs along with the academic needs of students is a must.

Conclusion

This study suggests that audiobooks are a good support for struggling readers who enjoy audio texts and are seeking greater linguistic input. The support a student can receive by continuously reading books on tape will increase his or her exposure to language, both academic language and Standard English, and in many cases their personal literacy. Audiobooks seem to help or aid in the building of the linguistic foundation which will lead struggling readers to reading independence, in turn possibly to more oral and academic conversations and confidence. If seen as part of a rich curriculum, audiobooks can aid students moving toward greater comprehension and motivation, enhancing test taking skills, and

increasing the sharing, new joy, and ease of reading, which may tie their home and personal literacy to improved scholastic performance.

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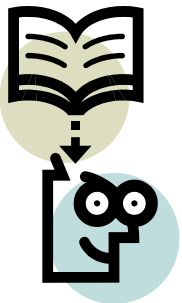
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Appendix A: Reading Logs

Name: _____ Class: _____

Homework Reading Log

Directions: Read for 30 minutes your first week, 45 minutes to an hour from then on. Be sure to indicate the date, time, pages, and entry choice in the space provided. Write the name of the book & author on Mondays *only & when starting a new book!* Write a paragraph in response to your reading using 5-7 complete sentences. Your paragraph should answer a prompt from the following list. Choose a different prompt each night 😊.



1. Explain a scene you have a connection to and describe the connection.
2. Write about something that strikes you about any of the characters.
3. Copy a quote from the book, and then use at least five sentences to comment on it.
4. Explain why you like/love/hate the book or a character.
5. Describe a scene where your character(s) acted some way. Discuss what you would do the same as/different from your character.
6. Make a prediction and explain why you think this will happen.
7. Offer your character advice about his/her problem.
8. Explain why a character acts/thinks/feels a certain way.
9. Pick one character and explain why you would /would not want him/her as a friend.
10. Explain your novel's setting and why you would/would not like to live in the same setting.

(Keep this page as a reference while in Mr. Hurtado's class)

In-class Reading & Writing Sample

Reading Goal/Question: _____ Rdg.Strategy: _____

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Title/Author: | |
| Date | |
| / / | |
| Time | |
| : - : | |
| Pages | |
| - | |
| Prompt # | |
| | |
| Parent Sig. | |
| x | |

It is the goal in our class to read a book of choice or an assigned book/text six days a week. The first week for a half hour every evening and then for 45 minutes to an hour (45:00 to 1:00hr.) for the rest of the time your student is enrolled in any English classes at Garfield. We are asking that you help us by

monitoring your child's reading every night to ensure his or her progress. Developing and using good reading strategies or skills is of the utmost importance for your student's success in high school, college, and in life.

Es la meta en nuestra clase de leer un libro de tu preferencia o asignado seis días a la semana. La primera semana por una media hora (:30) cada tarde y entonces por 45 minutos a una hora (:45 a 1:00 hr.) para el resto del tiempo que alista su estudiante en cualesquiera clases de inglés en Garfield. Estamos pidiendo que usted nos ayude a supervisar lectura de su niño cada noche para asegurar su progreso. Desarrollar y usar buenas estrategias o habilidades de la lectura es de suma importancia para el éxito de los estudiantes en la secundaria, universidad, y en vida. Su ayuda es necesaria para el éxito de su hijo o hija.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Per.: _____

Friday Reading Goal/Question: _____ Rdg. Strategy: _____

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| Title/Author: | |
| Date | |
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| Time | |
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| Prompt # | |
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| Parent Sig. | |
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Saturday Reading Goal/Question: _____ Rdg. Strategy: _____

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Monday Reading Goal/Question: _____ Rdg. Strategy: _____

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| Time | |
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| Prompt # | |
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| Parent Sig. | |
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Tuesday

Reading Goal/Question: _____ **Rdg. Strategy:** _____

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| Date | |
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| Time | |
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| Prompt # | |
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Wednesday

Reading Goal/Question: _____ **Rdg. Strategy:** _____

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| Time | |
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Thursday

Reading Goal/Question: _____ **Rdg. Strategy:** _____

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Appendix B: Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (Pitcher, et al., 2007).