

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



THINK-ALOUDS
December 2005



(Developed by Glass, C. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2005)

Rationale:

The most powerful thing we can teach is strategic knowledge, a knowledge of the procedures people use to learn, to think, to read, and to write (Wilhelm, 2001). The most effective means of demonstrating these tools to students is through teacher modeling in the context of meaningful tasks and then assisting students in their own use of these strategies. Reviews of American education show that we spend most of our time teaching students information, filling them with declarative knowledge - *the what*, instead of assisting them to enact new and more proficient ways of reading, problem solving, and making meaning - *the how* (Wilhelm). In the late 70's, Durkin conducted her research on comprehension instruction. She observed "reading instruction" in fourth grade classrooms for 4,469 minutes. In that time, she only observed 20 minutes of comprehension instruction. Her observations revealed that there was little comprehension instruction occurring. Teachers spent a great deal of assigning and testing students' comprehension. In another study conducted by Pressley (1998), the results were strikingly similar. *If the same study were conducted today would the results be any different?*

Research clearly shows that when students are asked to learn information without actively using procedures to construct understanding, they usually forget the what – the content. Never having learned the how, many students fall behind and do not know how to comprehend on their own. We know that highly skilled readers use thought processes before, during, and after reading. Skilled readers adjust their reading goal according to their level of prior knowledge, think strategically, follow their intentions to the end of a passage, monitor their comprehension, monitor use of fix-up strategies, reflect on a particular genre, and their own reading objective (Block & Israel, 2004). Awareness of one's thinking is necessary for students to be able to monitor their comprehension (Pressley, 2002). Many less able readers, however, are unaware of these processes, so reading is just calling words on the page. In order to help these students, teachers must demonstrate the comprehension processes and the strategies used to make sense of text. A think-aloud is a metacognitive technique or strategy in which the teacher models the strategic decision-making and interpretive processes that a reader uses. The teacher makes explicit these processes through talk and action. The word explicit is frequently used to describe the kind of comprehension instruction that focuses on the direct teaching of strategies and on making visible the covert processes of effective readers. Teachers can help students learn to be thoughtful and purposeful readers by demonstrating, through think-alouds, their own comprehension strategies and then allowing students to practice using the strategies and thinking aloud themselves (Israel & Massey, 2005).

Explicit Instruction (Wilhelm, 2001)

1. **Teacher explains what the strategy consist of.**
2. **Teacher explains why this strategy is important.**
3. **Teacher explains when to use the strategy in actual reading.**
4. **Teacher models, using a think-aloud, how to perform the strategy in the actual context of reading.**
5. **Teacher provides guided practice. Teacher gradually releases responsibility to the students. Students practice what they are capable of doing on their own and teacher intervens when support is needed.**
6. **Students independently use the strategy in their own reading.**

How to Use the Strategy:

"When teachers make the invisible mental processes visible, they arm readers with powerful weapons. I stop often to think out loud for my students. I describe what is going on in my mind as I read. When I get stuck, I demonstrate out loud the comprehension strategies I use to construction meaning." (Tovani, 2000, p. 27)

Below are steps you should consider when using think-alouds with your students.

1. Chose a short section of text (or a short text). The text should be interesting to students and reflect the content of your classroom. The text should also be challenging and present some difficulty to most of your students. Keep in mind the mental processes you will be modeling for your students. Consider what about the text might cause students problems and select which strategies you will model. Give each student a copy of the text. You might also consider projecting a

transparency of the text.

2. Introduce the text by explaining that you will be modeling a reading strategy, explain why the strategy is important, and when the strategy should be used.
3. Read the text out loud and stop often to share your thinking. Think-aloud the connections you are making, the images you are creating, the problems you are having with understanding, and the ways you are fixing those problems. Tell your students *explicitly* what you are doing. You might establish some kind of signal that identifies for your students when you are reading and when you thinking aloud the processes that are occurring in your head. Record your thinking on an overhead.

Think-Aloud Examples

- "Good readers use their background knowledge when they read. They think about what they know before they begin reading." (Tovani, 2000, p. 28)
- "I'm confused when I read [word from text], so I am going to [specify the strategy you are using to clear up the confusion] to get unstuck. Good readers recognize confusion and know how to repair meaning when confusion sets in." (Tovani, 2000, p. 28)
- "I can picture these three little pigs in my mind because I went to a state fair and saw three pigs that looked just like the ones described in this sentence. I can remember exactly how they smelled, felt, and sounded. I have activated my prior knowledge, and it will assist me in understanding the most important points in the next sentence." (Block & Israel, 2004, p. 158)
- "When I have read two pages of a book, I pause to ask myself where I think the author is going. In this way I begin to feel that I am on the same train of thought as the author. Then, I turn to the next page and see if I was correct in identifying what was important to the author. I continue reading. I relate the things I read to the big idea, moral, or theme that the author is conveying. Usually, after I have read three or four pages, I can figure out why the author wrote this particular book. The way I figure out the author's big idea is by seeing how all main ideas in each paragraph connect together. For example, the main idea in one paragraph may connect to the next paragraph. If I'm reading nonfiction, another way I Connect to the Author's Big Idea is to keep the title of the book in mind as I read. The title of nonfictional books usually names the author's big ideas." (Block & Isreal, 2004, p. 158)
- "When I read I think, 'Is this making sense?' I might...ask questions about the story and reread or retell the story...I was asking myself, 'Is this making sense?' and I was asking if what would happen next without reading the next page." (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessell, 1993, p. 187)

4. After modeling think-alouds a few times, allow students to become more involved in the process. Ask students to classify your thoughts using a tally sheet like the one shown below. Using the sheet below, you are then able to assess if they can distinguish one strategy from another. This sheet also engages students in the think-aloud you are modeling.



STUDENT THINK-ALoud OBSERVATION SHEET

Your teacher will be demonstrating a think-aloud for you. This means that he/she will be demonstrating for you what good readers do when they read. While watching your teacher demonstrate thinking aloud, tally how often you see him/her use the following reading strategies.

Strategy	How often did you see your teacher demonstrate this strategy?
Made a prediction	
Asked a question	
Clarified something that was confusing	
Made a comment about something that was <i>right</i>	
Made a connection to something they have read, experienced, or heard	
Reread because something was confusing or unclear	
Stopped and asked, "Do I understand what I have read?"	
Make mental pictures of what is being read	
Compared what is being read now to what was previously read or learned	



5. Allow students to try using the think-aloud strategy with a partner. One student should do all the reading and thinking-aloud while the other partner tallies or writes notes about the other student's use of the think-aloud. The teacher should circulate through the room and provide intervention and assistance as needed. Provide a time where students can discuss using the think-aloud strategy with their partner and as a whole class. Another option is to have students

reflect on how thinking-aloud has changed their reading habits, this can be done either orally or in writing.

- The end goal is for students to apply these strategies independently and think in their heads whenever they encounter a text.

Steps to Passing Strategic Expertise to Students (Wilhelm, 2005)

<p style="text-align: center;">TEACHER DOES / STUDENTS WATCH</p> <p>Step 1: Modeling the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher uses and talks about the strategy through use of think-aloud. Student observes. Teacher stresses what, why, and when of strategy use. 	<p style="text-align: center;">TEACHER DOES / STUDENTS HELP</p> <p>Step 2: Apprenticeship of Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher uses strategy. Student talks about and helps, identifying when and how strategy should be used.
<p style="text-align: center;">STUDENTS DO / TEACHER HELPS</p> <p>Step 3: Scaffolding Strategy Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students use and talk about the strategy with help of scaffolding technique like think-alouds, usually in small groups. Teacher observes, provides feedback, and helps as needed. 	<p style="text-align: center;">STUDENTS DO / TEACHER WATCHES</p> <p>Step 4: Independent Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student independently uses strategy demonstrating competence through techniques like think-alouds. Teacher observes and assesses; plans future instruction.

Assessment:

Teachers often view assessment as something that occurs after reading a text. Information about a student’s comprehension before and during reading are critical and alert the teacher to the need for intervening instruction. Therefore, think-alouds are a valuable assessment tool when evaluating student comprehension. They provide invaluable insights into the learner’s way of thinking, what strategies they actually use, and what strategies will help them become better readers.

Think-alouds provide a performance based assessment and offer an in-process look at readers engaged in comprehension (Wilhelm, 2001). Most classroom assessments and all standardized tests look at the end product of comprehension and don’t show the meaning-making processes that students use. Think-alouds, when used as assessments, provide specific information on students strengths and weaknesses as well as assess student improvement over time. Teachers can use think-alouds to plan instruction. For example, looking at student performance through a think-aloud, teachers can group students with similar needs for specific instruction.

Below is an example of a self-assessment that can be used by students after they read. Showing what students do over time with similar texts provides a timeline of reading improvement and progress. This can be powerful and positive for students, teachers, and parents to see.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: THINK-ALOUD STRATEGIES

Name _____ Date _____

While I was reading, how much did I use these "think-aloud" strategies?

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Make a prediction				
Ask a question				
Clarify something				
Make a comment				
Make a connection				
Figure out if I need to reread				
Ask myself if I understand what I've read				
Make mental pictures (visualize)				
Compare what is being learned now to what has been learned previously				

- Based on the above table, what do I do most often? _____
- Why do I think I do that the most? _____
- What think aloud strategy do I do the least? _____
- The next time I do a think-aloud, I will try to do more. _____
- Think-alouds help me because _____

(Adapted from Beers, p. 126)

Resources:

Guidelines and Student Handouts for Implementing Read-Aloud Strategies in Your Class - this site contains a collection of guidelines, checklists, and assessment tools to start think-aloud strategies with your students. All of the resources come from Jeff Wilhelms book *Improving Comprehension with Think-Aloud Strategies*.
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/comprehension/strategies.htm>

Building Math Skills Through Verbal Problem Solving - this article by Robyn Silbey discusses using think-alouds in math classrooms.
http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/Apr02_Silbey.htm

Think-Aloud Protocols - this article by Magaly Lavadenz discusses using think-alouds with bilingual students.
<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0314lavadenz.html>

Using Think-Alouds to Improve Reading Comprehension - this article by Roger Farr and Jenny Conner discusses using think-alouds with students to model reading strategies, providing coached practice to students, and having students use reflection as a means of helping them communicate the impact of the strategies on their own learning.
<http://www.readingrockets.org/articles/102>

Think-Alouds and Spelling Word Sorts - this article by Mary Jo Fresch discusses the use of think-alouds as a way to analyze how children arrived at categories during spelling word sorts. <http://www.readingonline.org/articles/fresch/>

Thinking-Aloud During Reading - All America Reads provides two lesson plans which show how to incorporate think-alouds. Also included are blackline masters for Think-Aloud Bookmarks, a tally-sheet, and teacher examples.
 Lesson 1 - <http://www.allamericareads.org/lessonplan/strategies/during/thinkaloud1.htm>
 Lesson 2 - <http://www.allamericareads.org/lessonplan/strategies/during/thinkaloud2.htm>

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