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Dialogic Reading Aloud To Promote Extensive Reading

How can teachers motivate students to read extensively in a second language? One strategy is for teachers to read aloud to students to promote the joys of reading generally, to build students' language skills and to introduce students to specific authors, book series, genres, websites, etc. This article begins by discussing why teachers might want to read aloud to their students. Next, guidelines are given for reading aloud. These guidelines include insights from the literature on dialogic reading (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994).

**Why Read Aloud to Students**

Many benefits have been proposed for teachers reading aloud to their students (Trelease, 2013). Below some of these proposed benefits are discussed.

1. **Introduces students to a wide range of available reading materials.** Many lists of reading materials are available, e.g., Extensive Reading Foundation (2016). When teachers read aloud, they allow students to sample prospective reading materials. This is a step beyond just seeing a title in a list of materials.

2. **Models pronunciation.** Part of knowing a word is knowing how to pronounce the word. Too often, students can recognize a word in print, but they do not know how to pronounce it. Of course, every language has multiple varieties, including non-native varieties, and pronunciation differs across varieties.

3. **Develops vocabulary.** Vocabulary is best learned in context (Nation, 1982). Reading provides such contextualized reading, and reading aloud supplements this, as teachers and peers can provide assist students when context alone proves insufficient for comprehension.

4. **Teaches knowledge of the world and of books.** Schema, i.e., background knowledge, provides an essential foundation for comprehension. While reading aloud to students, teachers can build students' schema on particular topics, thereby facilitating students' future reading on those topics.

5. **Teaches language elements and reading strategies.** The term language elements refers to grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting. These can, at least in part, be learned inductively (Krashen, 2004). Reading strategies include guessing word meaning from context, rereading to increase comprehension and using visuals.

6. **Builds bonds between the readers and listeners and among listeners.** Reading materials provide a shared experience, one to which teachers and students can later refer. Also, as will be explained later, read aloud sessions contrast with more stressful instruction activities.

7. **Offers a model of the joy of reading.** Reading materials, including non-fiction, have the potential to provoke a wide range of emotions, thereby making life more colourful (Trelease, 2013). Indeed, a key function of reading aloud is to counter the belief that some students may have that reading equals boredom and drudgery. As teachers read aloud, they can share their own joy and encourage theirs. Furthermore, when discussion is added, reading can become even more enjoyable.

8. **Encourages a love for reading silently/aloud.** Perhaps the key goal of reading aloud lies in motivating students to read on their own, and most of that reading will be silent reading, although now and then students might read aloud. The more students read, the more they have to discuss with others.

9. **Builds thinking and communication skills.** As will be explained below, adding a dialogic element to reading aloud encourages students to think more deeply (Lane & Wright, 2007) and engage with others, as everyone seeks to communicate their reactions to what has been read.

10. **Models expressing emotions.** Too often, classroom focus only on cognition, neglecting affect. By skillfully facilitating dialogue about what they have read aloud, teachers provide students a safe place to reflect on and express their emotions.

11. **Promotes discussion of values.** Similarly, reading materials often link to values, and teachers can utilize the teachable moments that reading materials provide in order for students to recognize the values authors may consciously or unconsciously be expressing (Bailey, 2014). More importantly, sparked by what they have read aloud, teachers can enable students to clarify their own values.

12. **Encourages reflection on life and actions.** Closely related to values are the actions that people take. Students can compare their life experiences and plans with the ideas in the readings and the actions and plans of the people in the texts they read (Commeyras, 1993).

### Guidelines for Reading Aloud

Two important points bear keeping in mind by teachers who read aloud (Trelease, 2013). Firstly, the benefits, listed above, of being read to apply to all students, regardless of their age and reading level. Thus, no students' language level or cognitive level is too low or too high for reading aloud; similarly, no students are too young or too old. Secondly, reading aloud is a journey, not a race. In fact, the text teachers read aloud to students is perhaps best seen not as the goal of the read aloud session. Instead, the text is secondary, serving more as a tool for the discussion it can provoke and the future reading that it can encourage.

The following general guidelines may prove useful in helping teachers read aloud more effectively. Guidelines #6 and #7, in particular, connect to dialogic reading.

1. **Choose good texts.** Qualities of a good text might include:

   a. being within students' comprehension range (perhaps with assistance from teachers and peers)
   b. encompassing areas of interest to students and/or connecting with their experiences

   **c.** containing potential discussion points that can stimulate dialogue and reflection

   d. connecting to the curriculum that has been designed for students

2. **Set the scene.** Provide background information that aids students' comprehension and sparks their interest.

3. **Give title and author.** The hope is that students will want to reread what is read to them, or perhaps teachers will leave a text unfinished, students will finish it on their own, via silently reading. Furthermore, we hope that students will be motivated to locate more texts by the same author.

4. **Read with feeling and variety. Use paralanguage.** Teachers need not be professional actors to read aloud, but they can learn from actors. For example, some voice variation can make read aloud sessions more enjoyable for readers and listeners, as well as boosting students' comprehension. For instance, teachers might want to change their tone to communicate surprise or happiness. Another tactic teachers can learn from actors is the use of paralanguage to aid communication, e.g., facial expression and gestures.

5. **Perhaps, summarize slow parts and paraphrase new words.** While some parts of a text have the power to increase students' engagement with a text, other parts may leave the students bored. Teachers need not read aloud the text word-for-word. Instead they can skip or summarise parts which might decrease student engagement. Another change teachers can make to read aloud texts involves paraphrasing words. In the case of low frequency words that students are unlikely to encounter again in the near future, it might be best to use higher frequency words to paraphrase their lower frequency counterparts.

6. **Stop at interesting places to invite student participation, e.g., responses, questions, connections to life, comments, reflections.** Read aloud sessions should not be teacher monologues. Instead, teachers should use all the tools they can find to draw students into dialogues about what is being read.

7. **Encourage collaboration and thinking.** Just as read aloud sessions should not be monologues, neither should they be a series of discussions between the teacher and individual students. In other words, the interaction pattern should not be this all-too-familiar three-part pattern:

   a. The teacher asks a question or proposes a task and calls an individual student

   b. That student responds

   c. The teacher evaluates the student's response.

The use of groups of two, three or four students offers one of the best ways to introduce a different interaction pattern. For example, in a group of two, the interaction pattern might look like this:

   a. The teacher asks a question or proposes a task

   b. Students take turns to discuss with their one groupmate, and this turn taking can continue over multiple rounds

   c. The teacher asks a student to share their partner's response or the response generated as a product of their interaction

d. The teacher asks the groups to discuss this response.

Student turns may be longer when thinking questions and tasks are used. To know whether or question/task involves thinking, teachers can ask themselves whether it goes beyond the information given in the text. For instance, if a question calls only for students to recall the answer in the text to which they have just listening, that is not a thinking question. In contrast, if students need to give opinions, consider values and beliefs, connect to their own lives, make predictions, or evaluate, thinking is likely to be provoked.

8. **Plan and practice first.** Obviously, in order to implement guidelines 2-7 above, teachers need to spend time planning and practicing.

## Specific Background on Dialogic Reading

The roots of dialogic reading can be traced in part to the theory of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). Three central concepts in social constructivism are:

1. Learning is social, i.e., we learn with and from others. Yes, everyone's knowledge is unique, but the social dimension, the similarity among people from the same background, is key. Adding dialoguing to reading enhances the social element of what can be a seemingly solitary pursuit.

2. Language facilitates learning, i.e., people use language as they learn with and from others. Adding dialogue to reading increases the quantity and the quality of the language that students receive and produce. The quantity increases because in addition to the language in the text being read aloud, students also receive language input during the discussion. Furthermore, students also produce language output in interaction with their teachers and peers. The quantity of student language production greatly increases when student-student interaction takes place via groups of two-four members. The quality of language expand with a wider range of topic and speech acts, e.g., students can talk about their values and their own actions relative to what was read.

3. Zone of Proximal Development is Vygotsky's (1978) term for the idea that tasks in which learners engage should be doable tasks. The use of dialogue allows teachers and peers to reduce or increase the difficulty level of tasks, e.g., teachers could read aloud a text for low proficiency readers to a class of students of advanced language proficiency, yet these students could be challenged by the language and cognitive demands of the dialogue provoked by the text.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has explained why and how teachers might include reading aloud as one way to enhance their students' extensive reading and why and how reading aloud should be accompanied by dialogue that flows from the texts being read. In the experience of the author of the present article, the most enjoyable aspect of conducting dialogic reading derives from students interacting with the text. However, the most difficult aspect of conducting dialogic reading also occurs here. How can teachers facilitate an atmosphere in which students are capable of

participating in the dialogue, feel a desire to participate and have an equal opportunity to participate (Jacobs & Kimura, 2013)? This deserves teachers' careful attention.

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