

Importance of Think-Aloud Modeling in Teaching Comprehension Processes

Think-alouds play a key role in the *Comprehension Blueprint* lessons. Many struggling readers cannot figure out how to image, infer, synthesize, etc., just by hearing a definition of it and getting an assignment to do it. They need to see it; yet comprehension processes happen in the mind and are difficult to make visible. Think-alouds are used to provide explicit modeling of what proficient readers do, with the goal that students will learn to apply these processes themselves as they read. In the words of Keene and Zimmermann (2007, p. 119), “Thinking aloud helps children peer into the mind of a proficient reader or writer.” By thinking aloud, students can listen to the teacher’s mind at work asking questions, forming images, or inferring. Students become more aware of their own use of key comprehension processes. “Humans, after all, have a capacity no other animals have—we can think about our thinking. We can stand back and reflect upon our own thought processes, and if necessary alter them.” Thinking aloud is the way teachers make their metacognition visible to students. Metacognition is often described as thinking about thinking.

As Keene and Zimmermann (2007, p. 146) explain:

“Thinking aloud is the single most important teaching tactic at our disposal. It is different from modeling or demonstrating. Thinking aloud provides direct access to the reader’s (or writer’s) mind, allowing children to observe how understanding comes about. The best think-alouds are clear, concise, and explicit illustrations of what we think when we read.”

Think-alouds are a means to an end. The end is for students to be able to use the process while reading. The scaffolded approach of a teacher modeling during an I Do, then guiding students during the We Do, and letting students apply the process to text during the You Do, is a way to remove scaffolding gradually.

Model your use of the strategy with a think-aloud during the first reading of the text because that’s what good readers do—they make sense of the text as they read it the first time. Try to complete the I Do without inviting students to join you. Explain to students that they will have a chance to try it with you, and then do it alone, later.

Jeffrey Wilhelm (2001, p. 34) talks about some of the benefits of think-alouds, including that they help students to “understand that reading should make sense, move beyond literal decoding to comprehending the global meaning of text, learn how to read by using many different strategies, and use particular strategies when reading particular types of text.” This first one is critically important for struggling readers who don’t always self-monitor when what they’ve just read isn’t making sense.