Language Arts Levels 3-8: Think Alouds

Given the fact that we know what good readers do as they read, can we teach struggling readers to emulate these behaviors as they read? Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest the following five components to an effective instructional model for comprehension:

- An explicit description of the strategy and when it should be used
- Teacher and student modeling of the strategy in action
- Collaborative use of the strategy in action
- Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility to the student
- Independent use of the strategy

The think-aloud is a form of teacher modeling and verbally demonstrating effective through process while reading, when to use certain strategies and when not to. A study conducted by Silven and Vauras (1992) demonstrated that students who were trained to use think-aloud as part of their comprehension training were better at summarizing information than students that did not have the training.

The Think-Aloud Sequences were developed to provide explicit instruction and modeling in the metacognitive process that good readers engage in as they read. The design of the three levels were uniquely designed to support and scaffold students, especially struggling readers, in the acquisition of these process strategies.

The five "process" strategies explicitly taught during the think-aloud sequences are:
1) Visualization, 2) Questioning, 3) Predicting, 4) Summarizing, and 5) Clarifying (Bruster, 2006). Students are taught to think and question as they read, through extensive modeling and examples within the various genres: Non-fiction, Fiction, and Poetry.

The most often used and scientifically based instructional practices involved teaching children how to ask questions when they read, how to monitor their comprehension, and how to provide summaries of text. Readers engaged in question generally ask themselves who, what, when, where, why, and how questions while reading. Readers engaged in comprehension monitoring keep track of their comprehension processes and take action when these processes break down.

The Think-Aloud sequences were designed to be used in order at each grade level, especially for struggling and below level readers. To provide ultimate success for students, the sequences Level I, Level II, Level III, provide struggling readers with the instruction and support needed to become active and engaged readers.

However, if students are on or above-level, Level I could be skipped and beginning at Level II would be appropriate. For advanced or gifted students, Level III would be an ideal place to start. The reading passages for all the comprehension sequences for grades 3-8 are appropriately leveled for each grade using the Dale Chall Readability Formula with lengths and varied genres that mirror the recommendations of NAEP, (2005).

Lanugage Arts Levels3 – 8: Think Alouds

Level 1: Full Scaffolding – Full modeling on every think aloud cue

- Interactive conversational interface engages the student in extensive scaffolded interactions throughout the story and guides the student through the comprehending process.
- Each literature selection is approximately 1.5 – 2.0 grade levels below the designated level of the activity. This feature was to provide literature that students could easily read and enjoy – allowing their mental processing to be free to take on comprehension process strategies.

Level 2: Partial Scaffolding – Responsibility of the think-aloud process is shifting to the student

- Engagement and support is still an integral part of the interaction, but the student is beginning to effectively use the think-aloud process while reading
- Each selection is 1.0 – 1.5 grade levels below the selected level. The students are becoming more independent and are beginning to actively use the process strategies and begin to move towards becoming an independent active reader.

Level 3: No Scaffolding – Independent think-aloud sequences allow students to incorporate the process strategies without support

- Requires students to use their metacognitive strategies, including all of the process skills independently. Another example to reinforce this process would be the State Simulation sequences.

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