

Considerations for Facilitating the Read-aloud Lesson in Making Meaning Part 1 of 3

By Kathy King-Dickman | Categories: Reading

Read-aloud

In a *Making Meaning* collaborative read-aloud lesson, the teacher is responsible for reading the text while guiding the students to think about the text through the lens of various comprehension strategies. The teacher does this by asking rich questions that are scripted in the lessons. Much thought and real-classroom practice went into the scripting of these powerful questions, which lead students to use all of the main comprehension strategies that research shows good readers use (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997). It is the students' job to share their thinking with partners and large groups while listening, responding to, and learning from others' thinking.

The reason we at Collaborative Classroom ask the teacher to do the reading in these lessons is to ensure that all students have access to the text. When an adult or other fluent reader reads the text, all students can be taught to think and comprehend regardless of reading level. During my 32 years in the classroom, I was often astounded at the strategic thinking of my learners when I took over the reading. In many cases, the inability to decode well does not correlate to the ability to understand text at deep levels. Reading to the students also allows us to partner up diverse learners. It was a delight to watch Justin, who had a Special Education Individual Learning Plan for auditory and visual processing issues, challenge the thinking of Kristen, who had a label as well—that of a gifted learner.

Cooperative Structures

During and after the reading of the text, five cooperative structures are used to encourage collaboration:

1. **Turn to Your Partner:** Ask one of the rich, open-ended questions in the *Teacher's Manual*, then have partners discuss the question.
2. **Think, Pair, Share:** Ask a question, give 15-30 seconds of think time, then have partners discuss the question.
3. **Think, Pair, Write:** Ask a question, give think time, have partners discuss ideas, then give a few minutes for them to jot down their thoughts. The up-front discussion time helps students to be more thoughtful in their writing.
4. **Heads Together:** Have groups of four students discuss an idea.
5. **Group Brainstorming:** Have groups of four generate as many ideas as possible, with one member recording the ideas.

Often our lesson plans ask students to share their thinking with partners first, followed by the teacher calling on two or three at the most to share their thinking with the entire class. Part Two of this blog series will suggest some prompts to stir conversations during the large group discussion.

If the plan suggests we share in large group and not as partners, but no one raises their hand, we have the students turn to their partners. Sometimes it seems there are no thoughts in the room, but this is rarely the case. More often, students just need time to think and process. Sharing with their partners gives them this chance. It is such fun to watch what happens when I am modeling

lesson study in classrooms and ask a question that seems to have no response from the learners. Many of the teachers observing these lessons are uncomfortable with the silence and want to rescue the students by giving them suggestions or thoughts of their own. My Collaborative Classroom colleague Gina Fugnitto once said, "Silence doesn't scare me." I always think of that in these moments! Collaborative Classroom teachers will sit with that silence a bit and then simply say, "Turn to your partner." Then we wait. It delights me to see the observing teachers' amazed looks as the silence slowly turns into a sea of talk. After sharing with partners, there are often many thoughts in the room.

On the other hand, when we have posed a question for the large group and many are begging to share, we once again say, "Turn to your partner." This gives *all* students a chance to share and listen closely before we once again turn it back over to the large group. Rarely, if ever, do we call on all hands raised. This can kill the pace of the lesson; students learn in the earliest grades that in Collaborative Classrooms there will be numerous opportunities to talk and if they don't get a turn on this question, they trust the teacher will allow them to share on another question or another day.

Permanent Partners for Each Unit

It is important for many reasons that these student partnerships remain the same for an entire unit and that they be chosen randomly. This gives students a chance to work with diverse partners and learn skills such as encouraging a shy partner to speak more and a verbal partner to work on listening. As suggested earlier, this also allows students of all reading levels to interact with one another. These partners get comfortable with one another and often fuss when it is time for a new unit and a new partner. It is also important socially and emotionally for children to work with those that they don't like as much as others.

We at the Collaborative Classroom envision a world where students learn to discuss in the following manner:

Student one: I think the theme of our novel is poverty because ...

Student two: I disagree with you. I think it is more about racism because ...

Student one: I never thought about it like that.

We also envision that this way of discussing different points of view will be carried into adulthood. Jennifer Serravallo, author of *The Reading Strategies Book*, said in a webinar once that a true conversation is one in which both parties leave with different ideas than they came with.

Watch for Part Two of this series, which gives specific lesson facilitation techniques that spur great conversations and develop strategic thinkers and readers.

To learn more about the *Making Meaning* lessons, read the blog post, "What a Gem! The Unique Approach to the Daily Lessons in Making Meaning."

Reference

Keene, E. & Zimmerman, S. 1997. *Mosaic of Thought*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.