

Reading

ROGER FARR

Teaching Good Habits with Think-Alongs

In 1983 Beth Davey suggested an instructional process that she called *think-aloud* in which the teacher models the thinking strategies good readers use to construct meaning. Now often called *think-along*, the process has been adopted in a number of schools. In its recent reading textbook adoption, for example, the State of Virginia asked the reviewers to look for the process in the basals they were considering.

During the think-along process, the teacher reads a story, or an excerpt, aloud to students, who follow along in their copies. As the teacher reads, she *thinks-aloud* so the students can *think-along* with her, for instance, by:

- repeating or elaborating on details of how a scene or character looked,
- predicting what might happen next,
- admitting confusion over the meaning of a work or phrase,
- rereading portions to clarify meaning,
- verbalizing background knowledge that is being activated to help clarify meaning.

In brief, the teacher reads aloud and verbalizes the kind of things any good reader thinks about while trying to comprehend new material.

The Lettie Marshall Dent Elementary School in Mechanicsville, Maryland, has used the think-along approach for several years.¹ Teachers there, however, have expanded the process so that after students experience think-alongs with the teacher, they pair up and use think-alongs with each other, coaching each other after oral reading. Students also use checklists to record quickly and easily the think-along strategies demonstrated by the teacher and special bookmarks to remind them of strategies to use during silent reading.

Teachers at the school have collected data about the think-along method that indicate students' behaviors have changed in several important ways:

1. The students' view of the reader's role has shifted from that of passive receiver of knowledge to one of active participant in constructing knowledge.
2. As students discuss and expand on the texts they are reading—without the use of teacher or text questions—

As the teacher reads, she *thinks-aloud* so the students can *think-along* with her.

their verbal skills have increased, and they participate verbally in other classroom discussions with greater frequency and fluency.

3. As they monitor their comprehension through the think-along process, students are becoming more independent as readers.

The Lettie Marshall Dent School has also collected pilot test score data to determine the effectiveness of the process. The results suggest that students who are taught the think-along process score higher on standardized reading tests than comparable students who are not taught to "think along." Teachers in this school and in others across the country are also applying the think-along process to math, science, and social studies.

Certainly think-along is not a new teaching strategy. Good teachers have always employed comparable techniques. Think-along does, however, bring together some important current thinking about teaching as modeling, the use of metacognition, the emphasis on reading strategies rather than skills, and the application of previous knowledge to construct new meaning. □

¹For more information, contact Patricia Russavage, Principal, Lettie Marshall Dent Elementary School, Mechanicsville, MD 20659.

Reference

- Davey, B. (October 1983). "Think-Aloud—Modeling the Cognitive Process of Reading Comprehension." *Journal of Reading*, 44-47.

Roger Farr is Director, Center for Reading and Language Studies, and Associate Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (whose resources were used to locate background information for this article), Smith Research Center, Indiana University, School of Education, Bloomington, IN 47408.

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