



Combining Cooperative Learning with Reading Aloud by Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article begins with a section that describes cooperative learning and explains eight cooperative learning principles. The second section discusses the interface between cooperative learning and language pedagogy. Next is a section about the why and how of reading aloud by teachers. The heart of the article resides in the last and longest section which describes techniques for integrating cooperative learning with reading aloud by teachers. These techniques include ones that can be used before, while and after the teacher has read aloud to the class.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative learning, language learning, language teaching, methods, language pedagogy, reading, reading aloud

INTRODUCTION

Literacy provides perhaps the most essential tool needed by students. Educators seek to promote literacy by encouraging within students a life-long facility with and desire to employ the written word. These efforts begin early on in preschool and continue throughout the formal education process, for there are no areas nor levels of learning for which the written word does not constitute a powerful tool. This article describes two means of promoting literacy and other desired educational outcomes —cooperative learning (CL) among students and reading aloud by teachers— and suggests ways in which these two routes towards literacy can converge.

The first section of the article introduces CL, a pedagogy for enlisting the power of peers for promoting learning. After this introduction to the history, research findings, theoretical underpinnings and principles of CL, the article's second section explains some of the roles that

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CL can play in language learning. Section 3 moves on to the other main element of the convergence suggested in the article, i.e., teachers reading aloud to their students. With these three sections as background, in Section 4 the article then provides practical suggestions for combining CL and reading aloud by teachers. If we conceive of a read aloud session as having three parts — before the teacher reads aloud, during the reading and after the reading session has finished — the article suggests techniques for all three parts. This article does not consider the topic of reading aloud by students, although CL certainly has insights to offer here as well (MAACIE, 1998; Taylor, 2000).

I. COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning (CL) is by no means a new idea. For thousands of years, humans have recognised the value of cooperation in a broad range of endeavours, including education. However, the term *cooperative learning* seems to date back to the 1970s when a great deal of research and practical work began on discovering how best to harness peer power for the benefit of learning. This work continues to this day. Thus, CL has a strong foundation in research. Many hundreds of studies — by now 1000s — across a wide range of subject areas and age groups have been conducted (for reviews, see Cohen, 1994b; Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2001; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1995).

The overall findings of these studies suggest that, when compared to other instructional approaches, group activities structured along CL lines are associated with gains on a host of key variables: achievement, higher level thinking, self-esteem, liking for the subject matter and for school and inter-group (e.g., inter-ethnic) relations. Indeed, Johnson (1997) claims that CL is one of the, if not the, best-researched approaches in education, and that when the public asks educators what we know that works in education, CL is one of our surest answers. In an earlier interview (Brandt, 1987: 12), he stated:

If there's any one educational technique that has firm empirical support, it's cooperative learning. The research in this area is the oldest research tradition in American social psychology. The first study was done in 1897; we've had 90 years of research, hundreds of studies. There is probably more evidence validating the use of cooperative learning than there is for any other aspect of education.

What is CL? Cooperative learning, also known as collaborative learning, is a body of concepts and techniques for helping to maximize the benefits of cooperation among students. There exists no one generally accepted version of CL. Indeed, disparate theoretical perspectives on learning — including behaviourism, sociocultural theory, humanist psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology and Piagetian developmental psychology have informed the development of different approaches to CL. Against this background of heterogeneity, various principles have been put forward in the CL literature (e.g., Baloché, 1998, Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002, Johnson & Johnson, 1999, Kagan, 1994 and Slavin, 1995). In the current section of this article, we discuss eight CL principles and how they can inform teaching practice.

I.1. Heterogeneous Grouping

This principle means that the groups in which students do CL tasks are mixed on one or more of a number of variables including sex, ethnicity, social class, religion, personality, age, language

proficiency and diligence. Heterogeneous grouping is believed to have a number of benefits, such as encouraging peer tutoring, providing a variety of perspectives, helping students come to know and like others different from themselves and fostering appreciation of the value of diversity.

In CL, groups often stay together for five weeks or more. To achieve heterogeneous groups for listening to reading aloud by teachers and other activities, teachers might want to look at their class and make conscious decisions about which students should work together, rather than leaving the matter to chance or to students' choice. The latter option often results in groups with low levels of heterogeneity. Furthermore, when we opt for heterogeneous groups, we may want to spend some time on ice breaking (also known as teambuilding) activities, because as Slavin (1995) notes, the combination of students that results from teacher-selected groups is likely to be one that would never have been created had it not been for our intervention.

I.2. Collaborative Skills

Collaborative skills are those needed to work with others. Students may lack these skills, the language involved in using the skills or the inclination to apply the skills during a reading aloud session. Most books and websites on cooperative learning urge that collaborative skills be explicitly taught one at a time. Which collaborative skill to teach will depend on the particular students and the particular task they are undertaking. Just a few of the many skills important to successful collaboration are: checking that others understand, asking for and giving reasons; disagreeing politely and responding politely to disagreement and encouraging others to participate and responding to encouragement to participate. Collaborative skills often overlap with thinking skills.

I.3. Group Autonomy

This principle encourages students to look to themselves for resources rather than relying solely on the teacher. When student groups are having difficulty, it is very tempting for teachers to intervene either in a particular group or with the entire class. We may sometimes want to resist this temptation, because as Roger Johnson writes, "Teachers must trust the peer interaction to do many of the things they have felt responsible for themselves" (<http://www.clcrc.com/pages/qanda.html>).

I.4. Simultaneous Interaction (Kagan, 1994)

In classrooms in which group activities are not used, including in the typical reading aloud by teachers session, the normal interaction pattern is that of sequential interaction, in which one person at a time — usually the teacher — speaks. For example, the teacher stops at some point while reading aloud, asks a question to check students' comprehension, calls on a student to answer the question and evaluates that student's response.

In contrast, when group activities are used, one student per group is, hopefully, speaking. In a class of 40 divided into groups of four, ten students are speaking simultaneously, i.e., 40 students divided by 4 students per group = 10 students (1 per group) speaking at the same time. Thus, this CL principal is called *simultaneous interaction*. If the same class is working in groups of two (pairs are also groups), we may have 20 students speaking simultaneously.

Even when teachers use groups, it is common at the end of a group activity for each group, one at a time, to report to the class and the teacher. When this takes place, we are back to sequential interaction. In order to maintain the *simultaneous interaction* that existed during the

group activity, many alternatives exist to this one-at-a-time reporting. For instance, one person from each group can go to another group. These representatives explain (not just show or tell) their group's ideas. Of course, simultaneous and sequential interaction may be usefully combined.

I.5. Equal Participation (Kagan, 1994)

A frequent problem in groups is that one or two group members dominate the group and, for whatever reason, impede the participation of others. CL offers many ways of promoting equal participation in groups. Two of these are the use of rotating roles in a group, such as facilitator, understanding checker, questioner, praiser, encourager and paraphraser, and the use of multiple ability tasks (Cohen, 1994; Gardner, 1999), i.e., tasks that require a range of abilities, such as drawing, singing, acting and categorizing, rather than only language abilities.

I.6. Individual Accountability

Individual accountability is, in some ways, the flip side of *equal participation*. When we encourage equal participation in groups, we want everyone to feel they have opportunities to take part in the group. When we try to encourage *individual accountability* in groups, we hope that no one will attempt to avoid using those opportunities. Techniques for encouraging *individual accountability* seek to avoid the problem of groups known variously as social loafing, sleeping partners or free riding.

These techniques, not surprisingly, overlap with those for encouraging *equal participation*. They include giving each group member a designated turn to participate, keeping group size small, calling on students at random to share their group's ideas and having a task to be done individually after the group activity is finished.

I.7. Positive Interdependence

This principle lies at the heart of CL. When *positive interdependence* exists among members of a group, they feel that what helps one member of the group helps the other members and that what hurts one member of the group hurts the other members. It is the "All for one, one for all" feeling that leads group members to want to help each other, to see that they share a common goal.

Johnson & Johnson (1999) describe nine ways to promote *positive interdependence*. Six of these are discussed below.

Goal positive interdependence: The group has a common goal that they work together to achieve.

Environmental positive interdependence: Group members sit close together so that they can easily see each other's work and hear each other without using loud voices. This may seem trivial, but it can be important.

Role positive interdependence: In addition to the roles mentioned above, there are also housekeeping types of roles, such as timekeeper who reminds the group of time limits and 'sound hound' who tells the group if they are being too loud in their deliberations.

Resource positive interdependence: Each group member has unique resources. These resources can be information or equipment, such as paper or a particular color marker.

External Challenge positive interdependence: When the same group stays together over a period of time — this is recommended by most books and websites on cooperative learning partly as a means of allowing groups to work to improve their group dynamics — students can aim to improve on past performance.

Reward positive interdependence: If groups meet a pre-set goal, they receive some kind of reward. Rewards

can take many forms: grades, sweets, certificates, praise, the choice of a future activity the class does, the chance to do their team cheer or handshake or just a feeling of satisfaction. If extrinsic rewards are used, Lynda Baloche (personal communication, May 14, 2001) recommends that teachers never begin an extrinsic reward program without having a plan for how to end it.

I.8. Cooperation as a Value

This principle means that rather than cooperation being only a way to learn, i.e., the *how* of learning, cooperation also becomes part of the content to be learned, i.e., the *what* of learning. This flows naturally from the most crucial CL principle, *positive interdependence*. Cooperation as a value involves taking the feeling of “All for one, one for all” and expanding it beyond the small classroom group to encompass the whole class, the whole school, on and on, bringing in increasingly greater numbers of people and other beings into students’ circle of ones with whom to cooperate.

One way of expanding the scope of the *positive interdependence* felt by students is to read aloud books and other materials on the themes related to cooperation and global issues. Global issues include such areas of education as peace education, environmental education, human rights education, multicultural education, and development education (Smallwood, 1991; TESOLers for Social Responsibility www.tesolers4sr.org; Wood, Roser & Martinez, 2001).

This concludes the introduction to CL as an overall approach to teaching that can be used with any subject area. The next section of the article looks more specifically at CL in regard to language pedagogy.

II. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

As stated earlier, a great deal of research has been done on cooperative learning (CL). However, first language pedagogy is probably not the subject area in which the most CL research has been done, with even less having been done in the area of second language instruction. Nonetheless, these areas have not been neglected. A great deal of practical and theoretical work of relevance to the interface between CL and language learning has been done, and group activities are certainly a prominent feature of language teaching in many classrooms (Jacobs, Crookall & Thiyaragarajali, 1997). This second section of the article briefly examines eight hypotheses, theories and perspectives on language pedagogy in terms of their overlap with CL.

II.1. The input hypothesis

The input hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) states that we acquire a language as we comprehend meaning in that language in the form of written or spoken words. Thus, reading and listening provide input which our brains utilise to build language competence. Our knowledge advances as we understand input at the $i+1$ level, i.e., input that is slightly above our current level of competence.

Three ways that CL helps increase the quantity of comprehensible input are:

- a) peers can provide each other with comprehensible input
- b) input from fellow learners is likely to be comprehensible
- c) peer groups may provide a more motivating, less anxiety-producing environment for language use, thus, increasing the chances that students will take in more input.

II.2. The interaction hypothesis

A second hypothesis about language learning that overlaps with CL is the Interaction Hypothesis which states that language learners increase the quantity of comprehensible input they receive by interacting with their interlocutors (the people with whom they are speaking). This interaction is called negotiating for meaning. Pica (1994: 494) defines negotiation for meaning as “the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility.” Students negotiate for meaning by requesting repetition, explanation and clarification. Reid (1993) states that negotiating for meaning can also take place during peer feedback on student writing.

Two ways that CL may promote interaction are:

- a) Group activities, especially those in which members feel *positively interdependent* and *individually accountable*, provide a context in which students may be more likely to interact than in a whole class setting.
- b) Long (1996) proposes that group activities can encourage students to interact with each other in a way that promotes a *focus on form*, i.e., “to attend to language as object during a generally meaning-oriented activity” (p. 429).

II.3. The output hypothesis

The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) proposes that in order for learners to increase their language proficiency, they need to generate output, i.e., produce language via speech or writing and receive feedback on the comprehensibility of their output. Input is necessary, but not sufficient for language learning. Output is seen to be essential as it promotes fluency; pushes students to engage in syntactic processing of language, rather than only attending to meaning; gives students opportunities to test their hypotheses about what works and is acceptable in a particular language and affords students opportunities to receive feedback from others.

The main way that CL overlaps with the Output Hypothesis is illustrated in the CL principle *simultaneous interaction*, because CL greatly increases students’ opportunities to create output, as many students are talking simultaneously, instead of one person, normally the teacher, doing all the talking (Long & Porter, 1985). The CL principle *equal participation* attempts to balance the opportunities that each student has for creating output.

II.4. Sociocultural theory

The ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and related scholars have found many applications in language pedagogy. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory views humans as culturally and historically situated — not as isolated individuals. A key emphasis lies in the ways that we help each other learn, rather than learning on our own. By helping students work towards groups in which the members care about each other, have the skills to help one another (see the CL principle *collaborative skills*) and are involved in tasks they find meaningful (see the CL principal *cooperation as a value*).

CL overlaps with Sociocultural Theory by attempting to build an environment that fosters mutual aid. As Newman and Holtzman (1993: 77) note:

Vygotsky’s strategy was essentially a cooperative learning strategy. He created heterogeneous groups of ... children (he called them a collective), providing them not only with the opportunity but the need for cooperation and joint activity by giving them tasks that were beyond the developmental level of some, if not all, of them.

II.5. Content-based instruction

The key concept underlying content-based instruction is that language is best learned while focusing on meaning rather than focusing on the form of language. Thus, an overall inductive approach is followed in which students learn content from anywhere in the curriculum, e.g., science or social studies, but at the same time, they are learning grammar and vocabulary as they receive input and produce output while learning that content.

Content-based language instruction fits well with CL (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) as:

- a) the research suggests that CL promotes learning regardless of the subject area
- b) the CL principle *cooperation as a value* provides content, such as studying about how insects cooperate among each other or how people throughout history have collaborated, that may enhance students' understanding of the benefits of cooperation.

II.6. Individual differences

In the past, there was a tendency in education towards an assembly line model of education in which all students were to learn in the same way. Today, the pendulum has swung somewhat, and there is a great appreciation of the many differences that exist between students and a belief that teaching needs to take these differences into account. Kagan and Kagan (1998) capture this new perspective in the slogan "The more ways we teach, the more pupils we reach" (ch. 2, p. 6).

The individual differences perspective on learning fits well with CL as:

- a) group activities provide a different mode of learning rather than a steady diet of teacher-fronted instruction
- b) within groups, students can develop more fully as they can play a wider range of roles than are normally available via teacher-fronted instruction
- c) the CL principle *heterogeneous grouping* encourages students to interact with peers different from themselves, providing students opportunities to benefit from this diversity and to learn to work with people different from themselves
- d) when groups are working on their own (see the CL principle *group autonomy*), teachers have more time to spend with students who may need individual attention.

II.7. Learner autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy implies that students should take an important role in choosing what and how they learn and in monitoring their own learning. This fits with the belief that education should be a self-directed, life-long process. Learner autonomy does not necessarily mean that students are learning alone, rather it is a matter of moving away from a situation in which control rests solely in the hands of teachers and, instead, of moving towards students playing the greatest possible role given the learning context.

Learner autonomy fits well with CL as:

- a) groupmates can learn to depend on each other rather than always on the teacher
- b) in line with the CL principle *group autonomy*, teachers seek to devolve authority to the groups, while still playing a guiding role
- c) students provide feedback to and receive feedback from each other, thereby developing their evaluation ability (which can then be used for self-assessment) and the proclivity to look beyond authority figures for feedback.

II.8. Affective factors

Success in learning depends not just on cognitive factors, such as the way that information is presented, but also on the environment in which instruction takes place and students' own perception of the educational context they find themselves in. Therefore, affective factors, such as anxiety, motivation and attitudes, demand attention in any approach to pedagogy.

Two examples of how CL might improve the affective climate and, thus, promote language learning are:

- a) when working in supportive CL groups, students may feel less anxious and more willing to take risks
- b) when students feel that groupmates are relying on them (see CL principle *positive interdependence*), they may feel more motivated to make the effort needed to maximise learning (Dornyei, 1997).

This concludes the first two sections of the article which have provided background on CL, in particular CL principles and the link between CL and language pedagogy. We now turn to the topic of reading aloud by teachers, the second component of the combination which is the focus of this article. Section 3 discusses why teachers should read aloud to their students and provides some ideas about how this reading aloud can be done.

III. READING ALOUD BY TEACHERS

Reading aloud by parents and other in-home caregivers (Bus, Ijzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Fox, 2001; Trelease, 2001) and by teachers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Barton & Booth, 1990; Blok, 1999; Elley, 1998) is a well-known practice for enhancing literacy. Many benefits have been proposed for reading aloud to students. Some of these are discussed below. Furthermore, the sole role of reading aloud is not as the predecessor to silent reading. Indeed, teachers of upper primary, intermediate, and secondary school students who are already reading on their own also find reading aloud to be a useful practice (Jacobs & Loh, 2001; Trelease, 2001).

III.1. Benefits of reading aloud

The list below contains some of the purported benefits of reading aloud divided into two groups: benefits for students who are learning to read and benefits for all students.

Benefits of reading aloud to students who are learning to read

- a. Reading aloud helps students see the link between print and language, i.e., those black marks on the page represent sounds and words, and students see the direction in which words and letters flow in the language of the book being read to them.
- b. Teachers demonstrate how to hold a book, to open a book, and to turn the pages.
- c. Students build their memories as they seek to recall earlier parts of a book and previously read books.
- d. Hearing books read to them inspires students to want to learn to read.

Benefits of reading aloud to students at any level of reading proficiency

- a. Students can learn new language items, such as vocabulary and grammar, and their

- understanding of previously learned language is deepened and broadened by new and repeated encounters.
- b. Students' listening skills increase.
 - c. A bond of shared experience is built between the reader and the listeners.
 - d. Reading aloud can be used to launch a discussion about life, topics currently being studied, and language.
 - e. Students build their knowledge of the world and its inhabitants.
 - f. Teachers share their enthusiasm for reading, encouraging students to read the same book, books by the same author or of the same type, or any sort of reading matter on their own.

III.2. How to read aloud

By way of review, as reading aloud forms part of many language teacher education programmes, certain general pointers on how teachers can read aloud to students are listed below. However, how to read aloud will differ according to the specific students being read to, teachers' instructional objectives and teachers' personalities and skills.

- i) Choose stories that will appeal to students and, hopefully, to you (the reader) as well.
- ii) Consider whether to modify, summarize, or even omit sections of the book which may be less interesting or overly difficult. In other words, there is no need to read the book exactly as it is written.
- iii) Consider places in the book where you might wish to vary your reading style, e.g., when a small or large animal is speaking. At certain places, for instance, you may wish to speak louder or softer, faster or slower than normal. This, however, does not mean that teachers must be professional actors to read aloud.
- iv) Stop to ask questions, seek comments, etc. Reading aloud should be two-way interaction, with students not just listening to their teachers' output; students should also be providing input to their teachers and peers. In this way, teachers are reading aloud with students, not reading aloud to students (Blok, 1999).
- v) Practice reading aloud beforehand in order to accomplish points b, c and d.

Traditionally, teachers read aloud to a group or class of students. Any discussion that takes place before, during or after the read aloud is conducted in a teacher-fronted manner, with students directing their input, if any, towards the teacher. However, research and theory in language education and in other areas of education suggest that students can benefit from peer interaction in addition to the input they receive from teachers and the interaction they have with teachers.

Sections I-III of this article have provided a rather lengthy prologue to the main section of the article. Section IV suggests 12 activities to accompany reading aloud by teachers. In 11 of these activities, reading aloud is augmented by peer power provided by CL.

IV. COMBINING COOPERATIVE LEARNING WITH READING ALOUD BY TEACHERS

CL can be used with any age of learner and in any subject area. Furthermore, it can be usefully combined with almost any instructional strategy (for examples, see Jacobs & Gallo, 2002, for

how CL can be combined with extensive reading and Jacobs & Small, 2003, for how CL can be combined with dictogloss, a technique for teaching writing). This section presents 12 activities, 11 of which involve CL, to accompany reading aloud by teachers. Included are activities that can be used with fiction and non-fiction, that last for a variety of lengths of time and that can be used with various ages of students. The presentation of each of the activities has two parts. After a brief introduction, first, the *Steps* are presented, followed by *Discussion*.

Three of the twelve activities are for before reading aloud, five are for while reading aloud and four are for after reading aloud. However, some of the activities span overlap from one of the three phases of reading aloud to another or may well be useful during more than one phase of a read aloud session. Furthermore, these activities, as with CL techniques generally, can be modified in many ways (Kagan & Kagan, 1992).

Before reading aloud by the teacher

Before reading, teachers often attempt to increase student interest and promote understanding by generating discussion related to the upcoming reading. Here are three CL activities for doing that. The first is a CL technique; the second is a well-known reading technique that has been slightly modified based on CL principles; and the third combines CL with graphic organisers.

1. **Circle of Speakers** (Jacobs, Power & Loh, 2002)

This is a very versatile and brief CL technique.

Steps

- a) One at a time, students in pairs, trios or foursomes take a turn to speak on a topic related to the book that the teacher is going to read aloud.
- b) After each group member has had a turn to speak, students can take turns for another round or hold a general discussion.
- c) The teacher calls a number and a group, and the student with that number shares with the class what they heard from their groupmate(s).

Discussion

Circle of Speakers is a quick technique, potentially taking as little as 2 minutes. *Positive interdependence* is encouraged because the group cannot do Circle of Speakers unless everyone takes their turn. Additionally, Step C, in which a two or three students report to the class what they heard from their groupmate(s), encourages everyone to listen carefully to each other and to help those who are having trouble generating ideas. *Individual accountability* is promoted because each group member needs to give an individual public performance (Kagan, 1994) when it is their turn to speak and in case they are called on by the teacher. Every group member has a turn to speak, thus promoting *equal participation*. *Heterogeneous grouping* makes it more likely that each group member will have unique knowledge and experiences to share on the topic of the reading they are about to hear. All the discussion builds students' interest in and knowledge about the topic of the book they are about to hear being read.

2. **K-W-L** (Ogle, 1986)

The K-W-L technique is normally used with non-fiction. K stands for what students Know about the topic. W stands for what they Want to know, and L stands for what they Learned from the

reading. Although this technique is typically used with silent reading and done by students working alone and then discussing as a class, it can easily be used with reading aloud by teachers, and a group element can easily be added to the individual work and whole-class discussion, as illustrated below.

Steps

- a) In the K step, students work alone to list what they know on the topic of the book the teacher is going to read. If students cannot yet write, they draw or think about what is on their list. Group members take turns to share their knowledge and then compile it into one list. During this compilation, students can ask groupmates for the source of their knowledge, as well as asking for explanations if something isn't clear. A graphic organizer with K, W, and L columns can be used, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: K-W-L Table

What I KNOW	What I WANT to know	What I LEARNED	Remaining and New questions

- b) In the W step, students work alone to list what they want to know about the topic (the second column in the table). Next, they collate their individual lists of questions. While collating, perhaps one group member can answer another's question or perhaps one group member's question sparks another question from a groupmate. Thus, the whole is better than the sum of its parts.
- c) After the teacher has finished reading, the group can list what they have learned in the L column. Most likely, not all their questions from the W column will have been answered; plus, the reading and discussion may generate new questions. A fourth column can be formed in the table for these remaining and new questions, and group members can volunteer to search for the answers.

Discussion

Please note that although the version of K-W-L presented here includes CL, the activity, nonetheless, retains individual elements. At the beginning of the K and W steps, students work alone, and after the L step, students can volunteer to work alone to do research on unanswered questions. In this way, *individual accountability* is promoted. To promote *positive interdependence*, the group produces just one K-W-L graphic organizer. Producing this table is their group goal. The fact that there is only one graphic organizer per group encourages students to combine their efforts. *Collaborative skills* will be important so that everyone's ideas are represented in the K-W-L table.

3. Brainstorming/Semantic Mapping in Groups (Mohammed Abdullah Zaid, 1995)

Discussing relevant vocabulary before reading helps students access and build background knowledge that will aid comprehension.

Steps

- a) The teacher tells students the title of the book that will be read aloud and a little bit about the book. In small groups, students individually brainstorm relevant words and topics.
- b) Students take turns to read a word or topic from the list that they brainstormed individually. Groups create a combined list and transfer their words and topics into a semantic map (also known as a word web or a mind map) which groups the words into categories. Group members take turns writing parts of the map.
- c) One representative per group takes their map to another group and explains what their group has done.
- d) After the read aloud session, the maps and vocabulary can be expanded and used for various purposes, including retelling key events or points from the book or responding to the information, ideas, characters and events in book.

Figure 2 shows a semantic map that students might make about hunting before reading *Lafcadio: The lion that shot back* by Shel Silverstein.

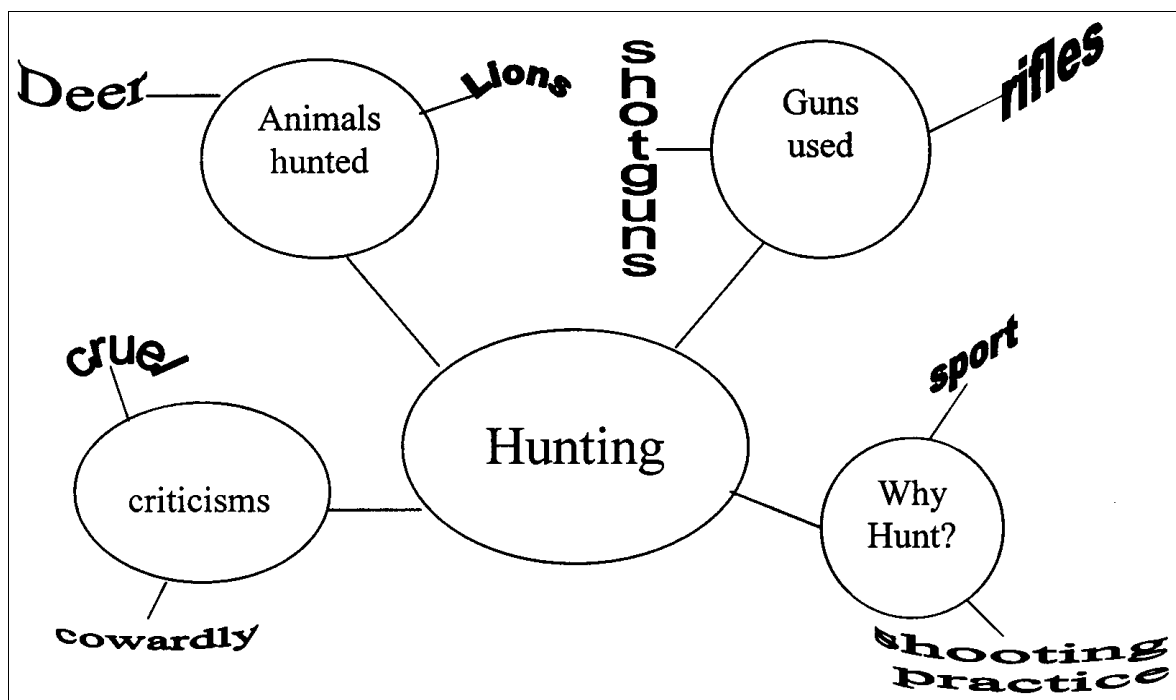


Figure 2: Sample semantic map about hunting

Discussion

Individual accountability is promoted in Step A by asking students to brainstorm individually before combining their words. *Simultaneous interaction* is possible in Step C when, instead of reporting to the whole class, group representatives report to other groups. At various points in

the activity, students can generate new words and ideas for mapping based on what they hear from groupmates and from other groups. This helps students see that “two (or more) heads are better than one”. Students use some *collaborative skills* to map their findings. The maps can be used in an after-reading extension activity involving process writing. If writing is done in a group, or individually, students can alternate the roles of writers and editors.

While the teacher is reading aloud

A read aloud session is meant to be interactive. The four CL activities in this sub-section provide ways to involve students during read aloud session. In these four activities, students retell, predict, transfer information to a graphic organizer and take responsibility for one part of what they hear as the teacher reads aloud.

4. **Tell/Check** (Mid-Atlantic Association for Cooperation in Education [MAACIE], 1998)

It is important that students can follow the story or other text their teacher is reading aloud. One way to aid and check comprehension is for teachers to periodically stop reading and ask students to recap what they have heard so far.

Steps

- a) The teacher pauses at various points in the text being read aloud.
- b) Students are in pairs. At each pause, one member of the pair takes a turn to tell their version of what they have heard thus far. This group member is the Teller.
- c) Their partner checks the recount for anything that has been left out or recalled incorrectly. This group member is the Checker.
- d) The teacher calls on a couple of the Checkers to recount what their Teller said, incorporating any improvements made by the Checker.
- e) The roles of Teller and Checker rotate after each pause by the teacher.

Discussion

The act of telling the main points of what the teacher has read helps students focus on the big picture of what is happening in the story or in the non-fiction text. Focusing on the big picture aids recall and develops summarizing skills. Tell/Check is just one of many related pair activities. Other possibilities are Tell/Question (in which the second partner asks a question about what the first partner has said), Tell/Elaborate and Tell/Disagree. The fact that students rotate roles promotes *equal participation*.

5. **Write-Pair-Switch** (Jacobs, Power & Loh 2002)

Prediction fits well with reading aloud of fiction. Teachers stop the story at certain points—as early as after reading the title and as late as just before the ending or even after the ending—and ask students to predict what will take place next or even to change the story.

- a) The teacher stops reading aloud at one or more points in the story. This place where the teacher pauses is known as a prediction point.
- b) The Write Step: Each student works alone to write (or draw or think about) their prediction about what will happen next in the story and their reasons for making that prediction. Clues that students can base their predictions on include
 - i. the book’s title

- ii. illustrations
 - iii. knowledge of the world, e.g., how rice is cooked
 - iv. information from earlier parts of the book
 - v. knowledge of the book's author, similar books, books of the same genre
 - vi. the types of books that a particular teacher likes to read to the class
- c) The Pair Step: Students share their predictions and the reasons for them with a groupmate. Partners ask each other questions and give suggestions.
 - d) The Switch Step: Students switch partners and share their first partner's prediction and rationale with another member of their foursome.

Discussion

It is important to remind students that the quality of a prediction flows from the reasoning behind it and not from what actually happens next in the story. After all, stories are the creations of authors who can twist the plot in a myriad of different directions. The reasoning that goes into a well-supported prediction promotes thinking skills. Notice, please, how Write-Pair-Switch encourages *simultaneous interaction*, as after working alone in the Write step, students are in pairs in the Pair step and again in the Switch step. This demonstrates one of the benefits of groups of four, i.e., students can first work in a pair, and then, students can find a new partner among their foursome, or the two pairs can work together as a group of four.

6. Flow Chart

Graphic organizers are tools that students can use to arrange and extend their thoughts. The K-W-L table in Activity 2 and the Semantic Map in Activity 3 are examples of graphic organizers. The Flow Chart, also known as a Story Map, described below is yet another.

Steps

- a) The teacher stops reading at selected points in the book.
- b) Students work alone to write down in words or drawings (or a combination of the two) all the key events they remember up to the point where the teacher stopped reading. Group members then take turns to compare what they have written. Class discussion can follow
- c) When the reading is finished, groups create a flow chart by placing the events in the correct order.
- d) The teacher calls a number and the person in each group with that number uses their flow chart to retell the story to another groups.

Figure 3 shows a sample flow chart for *The Empty Pot* by Demi (1990).

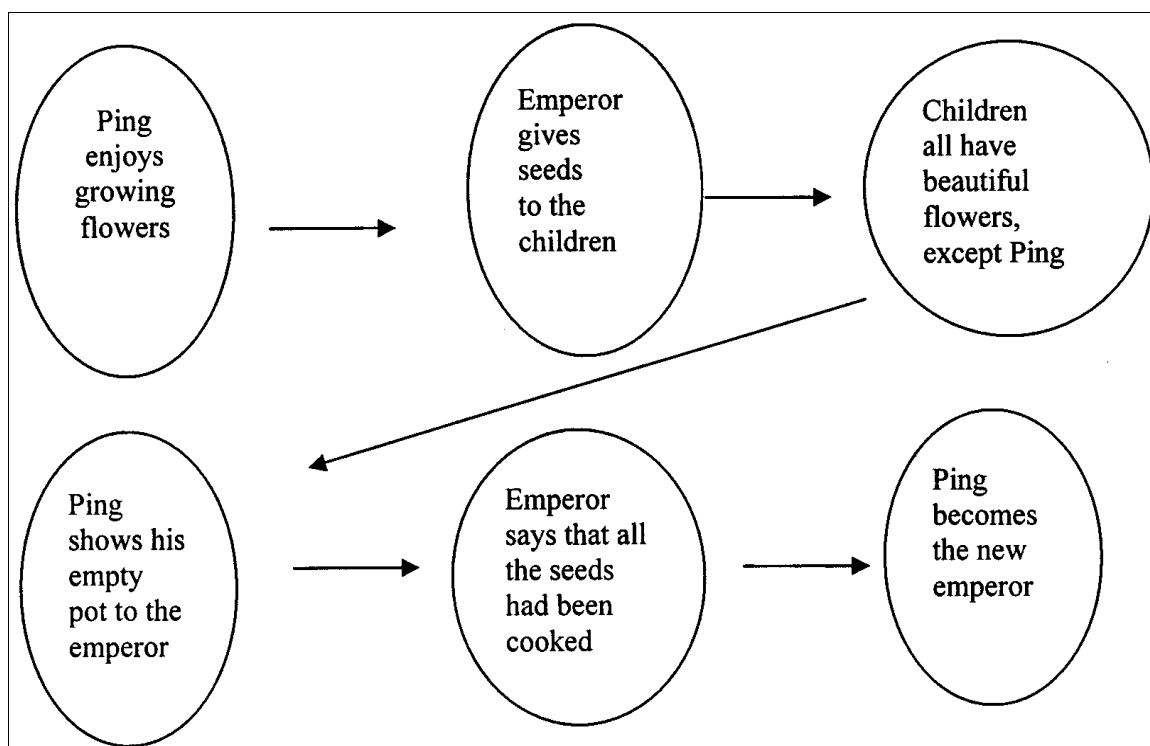


Figure 3: Sample flow chart for *The Empty Pot*

Discussion

Stopping the reading at selected points to discuss what is happening helps students comprehend the reading material. The group members make use of *collaborative skills* when putting the information pieces together into chart form. To encourage *equal participation* students can rotate the role of writer/illustrator and the role of reteller. As an extension activity, students can change the story by altering or rearranging the events or by altering or adding characters.

7. Jigsaw (Slavin, 1995)

Jigsaw is a well-known CL strategy. Normally, in Jigsaw, each group member silently reads a different portion of the same text. However, Jigsaw can also be used with listening, as it is below.

Steps

- a) Students are in their home teams, i.e., the students with whom they normally study. Each home team member will listen for and think about something different in the story. For example, if students are in groups of four and the teacher reads aloud *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, the listening and thinking responsibilities of the various group member could be:
 - i) Member A — Who is Goldilocks and how does she come to the bears' home? Did she do the right thing?
 - ii) Member B — What does Goldilocks do with the bears' porridge and what happens when the bears see their porridge? Did Goldilocks do the right thing? What would you do if you were the bears?

- iii) Member C — What does Goldilocks do with the bears' beds and what happens when the bears see their beds? Did Goldilocks do the right thing? What would you do if you were the bears?
 - iv) Member D — How does the story end? Is this a good ending? Why or why not?
- b) Students leave their home teams and form expert teams with no more than three other students who have the same letter — A, B, C or D. Students check that each member of their expert team is ready to provide answers to their team's questions — they can add questions of their own — when they return to their home team.
 - c) Students return to their home teams. Each home team member takes a turn to share their answers to the questions they discussed in their expert team.
 - d) The home teams discuss an overall task, such as "How would you change *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*? Please explain the reasons for your changes.
 - e) One member from the group is chosen at random to go to another group and report on the changes their group made to the story and the reasons for their changes.

Discussion

The use of expert teams encourages *individual accountability* while at the same time providing students with support from their fellow expert team members. All four Jigsaw pieces (the different questions for which each home team member is responsible) are important to the home team's task in Step D, thus promoting *positive interdependence*. The traditional version of Jigsaw, in which students read rather than listen, can be used as a before reading activity.

After the teacher has read aloud

The traditional time for activities is after the teacher has finished reading. Here are five suggestions. In the first, students create their own questions about the book. The second activity involves students in using their dramatic and musical talents. The third activity, Activity 10, asks students to find information related to the story, while the fourth activity involves sequencing frames from a cartoon version of the book that the teacher read aloud. The fifth activity is different from all the rest in this section, as it involves no group activity at all.

8. Question-and-Answer Pairs (Johnson & Johnson, 1991)

An important ingredient in a successful read aloud session is a large supply of questions. Too often, teachers are the main ones asking the questions. This CL technique provides one way of encouraging students to generate questions.

Steps

- a) After the teacher has finished reading — or at some earlier point — both members of a pair write questions related to what they have heard. These can be of many types, including review questions for which the answers can be retrieved directly from what the teacher has read aloud or questions that encourage going beyond what the teacher has read to do deeper thinking.
- b) Students write answers to their own questions.
- c) Students exchange questions — but not answers — with a partner and answer each other's questions.

- d) Students compare answers. Part of this comparison involves stating the evidence for their answers. The ideal is for the students to agree on an answer that is better than either of their initial answers — proving once again that two heads can be better than one.

Discussion

Often students are not very good at asking questions. Teachers need to model a variety of questions and help students unpack questions so as to understand their components. With a better understanding of how to write questions, students may also improve their ability to answer questions.

9. Role play, song, chant and rap (Kagan & Kagan, 1998)

Adding movement, music and rhythm helps to enliven classrooms and appeals especially to students who prefer learning through motion, songs, chants, raps and other less standard classroom activities.

Steps

- a) After the teacher has finished reading, groups meet to brainstorm ways of using movement (such as role play), music (such as songs) and/or rhythm (such as raps or chants) to portray all or part of what they heard.
- b) Groups synthesise their ideas to design a performance that they will do for others, making sure that each group member has an important role in it. They rehearse their performance.
- c) Groups do their performance for another group and receive feedback based on criteria developed by the class.

Discussion

This activity fits with the concept of *individual differences* discussed in Section 3. If we always rely on the written word in class, those students who prefer learning in this way are likely to always be the stars of their groups and always be the ones helping their groupmates. By varying the communication mode, teachers attempt to facilitate a shift in the power balance in groups. Perhaps, other students, e.g., those good at acting or composing raps, will have an opportunity to be the helpers, and the students who were always the helpers will have an opportunity to be the ones receiving help.

10. Scribing Activities (Interactive Story Telling)

In this activity, groups work together to collect and piece together information in order to complete a puzzle. This activity needs an illustration from a well-known story.

Steps

- a) Students are in groups of two, three or four. After the teacher finishes reading aloud, one group member is chosen at random to be the scribe, and others are reporters.
- b) The reporters move around the classroom finding information, placed by the teacher, that will retell the contents of the book or be useful in solving a puzzle related to the book. The reporters memorise the information and return to the stationary scribe.
- c) The scribe writes down everything they are told.
- d) When all of the information has been located, the group puts the sentences in order or solves

a puzzle.

- e) Groups can do an additional task, e.g., elaborating on the sentences, writing a moral to a story or drawing pictures to illustrate a process described in the book.

Discussion

Heterogeneous grouping in this activity encourages peer tutoring. For example, students with skills in writing can model their ability to other group members. The key is that students who are more able should try to enable their groupmates; they should not do tasks for their groupmates. Students, as with most people, often want to do tasks in the quickest way possible. However, the focus in classrooms is on learning, with the task as a means of promoting learning.

11. Cartoon versions

The issue of whether or not to use cartoons in literacy education is often a controversial one. However, many educators feel that cartoons do have a role to play as a bridge to other types of reading. Furthermore, more and more material, including non-fiction, now comes in cartoon form. In the activity below, groupmates collaborate to sequence frames from a cartoon.

Steps

- a) The teacher cuts a cartoon version of a story into individual frames. Each group receives one complete set of frames with the pictures face down.
- b) Group members distribute the cartoon frames face down in such a way that everyone has an equal number (or as equal as possible). Students look at what is shown in their frames without letting others see.
- c) The teacher reads aloud the story, stopping at various points. If students think they have a cartoon frame that fits with something the teacher has read thus far, they show that frame to their group and explain how it matches something read by the teacher.
- d) Groupmates agree or disagree and place the frames in the correct order.
- e) When the teacher has finished reading, groups try to agree on the order of the frames. The teacher calls a number, and students with that number go to another group and listen as the members of that group take turns to explain, not just tell, the order of their cartoon frames.

Discussion

The fact that students cannot see their groupmates' cartoon frames promotes *equal participation*. Imagine the situation if all the frames were visible to all the group members. In that case, one or two people in the group could more easily do all the thinking (and learning).

Two extensions of this activity are: i) Group members divide up the task of writing speech bubbles or sentences to accompany the cartoon frames. The resulting cartoons can be made into mini-books or posted on construction paper. ii) Students write and draw their own cartoon versions of books — fiction or non-fiction — that the teacher reads aloud. Copies of these, in turn, can be cut into frames and used with future classes.

12. Silent reading by students

Last, but maybe best, when the read aloud session is over, students can get their own books and read silently. Some teachers like to read just the first chapter or any particularly engrossing

section of a book and then let students finish the book silently on their own. After all, silent reading is the main form that reading takes, and one of the prime reasons for reading aloud to students is to excite them about reading so that they will spend more time reading silently on their own. Therefore, why take away students's reading time with more class activities, however valuable those activities might be, and, instead, why not give students the maximum possible amount of time for their own reading.

V. CONCLUSION

A long-raging debate in language pedagogy revolves around the terms teacher-centred and student/learner-centred instruction, with other terms, such as learning-centred having been thrown into the mix. This article argues for a felicitous combination of two forms of pedagogy from what would seem to be opposite ends of the student-centred — teacher-centred continuum. CL seems to be squarely in the student-centred camp, with students talking more (CL principle of *simultaneous interaction*) and depending on themselves more (CL principle of *group autonomy*). On the other hand, reading aloud by teachers appears to have both feet firmly planted in teacher-centred territory, with teachers talking and students listening.

However, closer examination finds that the demarcation lines are actually rather blurred. Teachers play important roles in CL. These roles include: co-organising the groups, helping students learn and utilise collaborative skills, making available the knowledge students will need to do their group tasks, monitoring the groups and assessing the groups' products and processes. Similarly, reading aloud by teachers is less one dimensional than it might appear to be. As explained in Section 3 of this article, a good reading aloud session will include a good deal of talking by students as they respond to the teacher's questions, ask their own, voice their opinions and relate their experiences. Furthermore, a key purpose of read aloud sessions is to encourage students to do more silent reading, a very student-centred activity, particularly when students choose their own reading material. In a similar vein, Section 4 of the article offered more suggestions as to how to reading aloud by teachers can take on student-centred dimensions.

In conclusion, this article began with two sections introducing CL. The first discussed some of the history, research support, theoretical foundations and principles of CL, while the second explored connections between CL and language pedagogy. The article's third section explained why teachers should read aloud to their students and gave suggestions on how this might be done. The key section of the article, Section 4, presented ways of combining these two powerful pedagogic ideas — CL and reading aloud by teachers — in order to promote language learning.

Moreover, CL and reading aloud by teachers both not only promote language learning. They also promote, albeit indirectly, active citizenship. This is why. CL encourages students to stand on their own, rather than always depending on an authority figure. Additionally, the CL principles *positive interdependence* and *cooperation as a value* encourage students to see others as allies rather than adversaries and to strive for win-win solutions. These two perspectives — taking responsibility rather than leaving everything to the authorities and seeking to collaborate with others — are essential elements of citizenship. Literacy, which reading aloud seeks to promote, provides people with the information they need to take wise actions in their roles as citizens of their country and planet.

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