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Review of Think Big with Think Alouds: A Three-step Planning Process That Develops Strategic Readers

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Public education is tasked with teaching learners how to read and understand text. While multiple reading comprehension methods exist, Molly K. Ness highlights the role think-aloud procedures play on enhancing reading comprehension in her new book, *Think Big with Think Alouds*. The purpose of this book is to provide classroom teachers with the necessary tools for incorporating think alouds during literacy instruction, particularly classroom read alouds. First teachers learn how identify “juicy stopping points” that draw attention to specific comprehension strategies. Next, teachers are shown how to determine the most effective think aloud stopping points in narrative or expository text. Finally, Ness provides detailed examples of how to script think alouds for multiple grade levels. After reading *Think Big with Think Alouds*, teachers will develop a core understanding of why think alouds can develop student text comprehension and be equipped to incorporating think aloud routines into their daily classroom instruction.

*Think Big with Think Alouds* delineates two key comprehension practices. The first practice, outlined in chapter two, provides teachers with a tool kit of five impactful comprehension strategies. Based on think aloud research conducted by Jeffrey Wilhelm (2001), teachers learn about instructional moves that are, “easy to plan and implement, that generate meaningful conversations and interactions around the classroom, and that leave a lasting impact on student thinking” (p. 23). The strategies include asking questions, making inferences, synthesizing, understanding the author’s purpose, and monitoring/clarifying. Similar to the
Reciprocal Teaching model (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), these comprehension tools provide students with the necessary skills to interact with text and monitor for meaning. I particularly like how Ness provides illustrated strategy symbols on (p. 27) to demonstrate how she plans stopping points for specific skill instruction. These strategies are also taught to students, so they can monitor their thinking during independent reading.

After reviewing essential comprehension strategies and related strategy symbols, chapters three, four, and five outline the three-step process of how to plan, script, and implement think alouds during literacy instruction. As a teacher-researcher one of the biggest strengths of the book is how Ness provides multiple citations throughout her book which reference effective comprehension strategies. The examples are based on studies conducted with students across grade levels. Too often teacher-practitioner texts I review contain ideas about literacy instruction but provide little to no research-base for the stated beliefs. Ness explains theory and research in a concise and engaging manner, making the relevant research accessible to the reader. In particular, chapter two delves into related research on the benefits of think aloud procedures on student reading comprehension. Ness also provides research and examples related to the five key think aloud strategies.

A second strength of the book is the support Ness provides so that teachers can develop the necessary skills to incorporate think alouds during classroom instruction. Ness has developed numerous scripts as think aloud models for narrative, poetry, and expository text ranging from kindergarten to middle school. These scripts demonstrate how to plan impactful think alouds which push students to develop metacognitive awareness while reading. In addition to the
scripts, Ness also includes sentence starters which support students as they develop language to explain their thinking. Teachers can use these prompts to co-create anchor charts with students or incorporate them into book marks to be included with students’ independent reading books. The sentence starters also help teachers model accountable talk, anchoring language for students to model thinking. Finally, educators can access numerous resources such as reproducibles, planning templates, and sample think aloud scripts from over 20 children’s book such as *Miss Nelson is Missing* by Harvey Allard and *Doctor de Soto* by William Steig at

https://resources.corwin.com/ness-thinkalouds/student-resources/reproducibles. As an educator working with teacher candidates, I think a repository for teachers to upload videos of think alouds from actual classrooms would be a powerful addition to the Corwin resource site. I believe it would be beneficial for teachers to observe and evaluate think aloud procedures by observing actual students and teachers as they work on honing their own think aloud skills.

As with any text, *Think Big with Think Alouds* has a few areas of weakness. First the book does not address culturally and linguistically diverse students or provide curricular adaptations for students with specific language impairments or learning disabilities. It would be interesting to see what modifications could be made to the think aloud procedure to meet the learning needs of students with language or learning disabilities. I also wonder how teachers will find the time to implement these procedures in their classroom. Elementary teachers plan instruction for multiple content areas across the academic day and year. Setting aside time for an in-depth examination of think aloud procedures may be challenging, particularly in schools with regimented instructional block scheduling. School administration would have to support teachers
who want to implement think aloud instruction into their daily classroom routines. I wonder if this is possible in many of our public schools.

Think Big with Think Alouds is an excellent teacher resource for educators looking to enhance their classroom reading comprehension instruction. Using the gradual release of reasonability model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), Ness delivers an organized procedure by which to implement think aloud procedures. The conversational tone of the book will make readers feel as if Ness is standing beside them, coaching them along as they plan their instruction. Although time intensive, the benefits for modeling comprehension strategies and having students develop metacognition skills are worth all the effort and extensive planning. As teachers become comfortable with the language of thinking aloud, I believe they will notice gains in their students reading achievement and see their students develop into lifelong learners.
References


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