

Cognitive Transfer of a Reading Strategy: From Oral Participation to Silent Reading

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This article explains a viable, researched, teaching activity that I call Treasure Hunt. Treasure Hunt is an oral participation, vocabulary lesson that facilitates the transfer of reading comprehension to silent reading. I designed and used this activity with adolescent, challenged readers. The readers had scored below the 70th percentile on a state exam. This activity became a research project for the purpose of testing its reliability. Students actually thought of the activity as a vocabulary game; however, their ability to comprehend texts was enhanced after they participated. Comprehension was fostered through locating words in texts, reading orally, listening to themselves and others give meanings of words, and writing word meanings. After students participated orally, they were better able to make meaning when they read silently.

There is a plethora of research about how to teach reading, but when students fail to read after having been taught, they are usually placed into a program and given a label such as illiterate, struggling reader, non-proficient reader, or remedial reader. Then if these students make it to junior high and high school, their academic problems become twofold. First, they are behind with making meaning from texts. Second, they have the added frustration of socialization, under a label, in a new environment.

The dilemma for reading teachers who teach challenged readers is how to teach so as not to insult their interest and how to meet their chronological age reading level. For example, a middle school student in a teenager's body with an adolescent mindset and weak reading interests can pose multiple concerns for curriculum writers, teachers, counselors and administrators. However, the teachers have the greater burden. This may be the last chance that these adolescent students will have to recover from reading difficulties and catch up with their peers who have not been labeled disable readers. If these students are sent to a reading teacher, it is the reading teacher's job to teach in such a way that reading levels will be raised, self-esteem will be heightened, bonds will be formed, thinking will be enhanced, and the readers will begin to make meaning.

While it is a fact that how to teach reading has been researched extensively, the role of oral participation in the remedial classroom and its affect on comprehension has not. Oral participation in the ELL (English Language Learners) classroom, however, is a well-studied

field. Since the objective of ELL classes is to teach students to speak and write another language, the best practices for such are studied. The goal of my reading class is to raise reading levels by at least two grade levels during the year that the students spend with me. Therefore, I am studying a particular oral participation strategy that I use regularly. I would like to know if the oral work that is done with this strategy transfers to silent reading, causing the students to make meaning within the context, which they read.

Review of the Literature

Johnston and Allington (1991) reported that remediation for reading comprehension for adolescents has not been very effective in improving student reading performance. Another study by Kibby (2000) supports the prior study. Klenk and Kibby (2000) go so far as to call for an end to the “remedy” metaphor. They propose the meditational process for both teachers and students. Klenk and Kibby base this approach on the Vygotskian notion of recursive zones of proximal development and Moll’s funds of knowledge that working class, Mexican-American students bring to school. Klenk and Kibby also embrace the work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) who referred to how funds of knowledge helped African-American students to see the power of literacy in their lives. Even more alarming is the findings of Stahl and Kuhn (1995) that teaching reading to accommodate learning styles has no effect on learning to read. Horton and Oakland (1997) studied learning styles and reading instruction of 417 seventh graders and also found no support for the practice of adapting instruction to learning styles because teaching is certainly a multidimensional activity.

One of the most powerful of these dimensions is that of teacher as researcher. With the following action research, I engage in the investigation of whether oral participation in the *remedial* reading classroom makes a difference in the comprehension of struggling readers when they read silently. I pose the question: How does student oral participation in a vocabulary and meaning-making reading strategy affect a reader’s reading?

I implement reading strategies that demand student oral participation and engagement with texts. I hope that readers whose independent reading levels and instructional reading levels are lower than reading materials designed for their chronological age will benefit from motivational strategies that emphasize reading and making meaning from texts written for their age span. Even though the student is in a reading class where the assignments are modified, the

other classes are still taught on grade level. Therefore, this action research will focus on the analyzation of class participation and how it transfers to silent reading of texts.

Since oral participation is widely supported and researched in the ELL classroom, but very little has been researched about its validity in the reading classroom, my research aimed to discover the effectiveness and the relationship between oral participation and proficiency while reading silently. Oral participation is a primary component of several of the teaching strategies in my reading classroom. The search for equitable class participation is a concern. There are many reasons for participation; however, my reason is to foster more meaning-making while reading.

Weak meaning-making readers need a depository of strategies that they can apply to their silent reading. Pressley, (1999) wrote that reading strategies are effective tools for comprehending. They represent procedural, not declarative knowledge, and they teach “how” more than they teach “what.” He further stated that strategies help readers to engage with the text they are reading; they help readers to monitor their comprehension and to apply metacognition skills.

Scaffolding is the teacher strategy that labels my research. The word scaffold is a Vygotskian metaphor meaning that teachers support a learner through dialogue, questioning, conversation, and nonverbal modeling while the learner attempts reading tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Roehler and Cantlon (1997) identify five types of scaffolding: 1. offering explanations, 2. inviting student participation, 3. verifying and clarifying student understandings, 4. modeling of desired behaviors, and 5. inviting students to contribute clues for reasoning through an issue or problem. My research falls under category number two.

Procedures

Step 1: A class of fifteen adolescent students demonstrated knowledge of seven words (Appendix A) before reading chapter XVII of *Where the Red Fern Grows*. To demonstrate word knowledge, all fifteen of the students wrote the meanings of the words by using prior knowledge. The objective for writing the definitions was to see how many students already knew the meanings of the words.

Step 2: Two of the fifteen students orally recorded the meaning they made from two paragraphs in chapter XVII. The recording was done after class and not in the whole class

setting. The objectives for recording the meanings the two students made of the reading of paragraphs was to see what meaning the two interpreters made from the paragraphs before they participated in the oral participation.

Step 3: An oral participation activity that I call Treasure Hunt was explained. An oral participation activity worksheet (Table 1) was issued to each student.

Table 1: Treasure Hunt Oral Participation Activity Worksheet

Treasure Hunt Oral Participation Activity Worksheet					
Points for Reading	Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb	Points for Meanings
↓					↓
Write meanings →					
Write meanings →					

This worksheet is designed so that the students can give themselves points for reading and points for knowing meanings of words. The columns of the oral participation worksheet are actually duplicated seven times for the seven words. The students do not give themselves points for placing the words under the correct part of speech. The teacher gives that credit after grading the rubric. The students' recognition of parts of speech is a stepping stone for teaching the parts of speech.

I kept an oral participation rubric (Table 2). The rubric qualifies the points that can be earned during the activity. Dependent upon the age of the student, the teacher uses this rubric, not the student. The rubric is designed so that the students may earn more than one point for each criterion. The total number of points that can be earned is thirty, and it is not coincidental that thirty points can be earned from the questions. However, the student gives himself one point for reading and one point for knowing the meanings of the words. The points on the oral participation activity worksheet are the same points that are on the oral activity participation rubric.

If a student earned the points for reading and defining, he/she automatically got the points for raising his hand and waiting to be called upon by the teacher. The student’s name was not called unless his/her hand was raised. The criterion of waiting for the teacher to call names was mainly to prevent everyone from talking at once or blurting out the definitions prematurely. Sometimes the students actually were holding their mouths in order to wait until they were called upon.

Table 2: Oral Activity Participation Rubric

	Criteria				Points
	1	2	3	4	
Reading for Meaning of a Word in Context	Raise your hand	Wait for the teacher to call your name	Read the sentence with the word in it		—
Define a Word via Context	Raise your hand	Wait for the teacher to call your name		Give the definition of the word	—
Part of Speech				Place word under correct part of speech	—
Reading for Meaning	Raise your hand	Wait for the teacher to call your name	Read the designated paragraph		—
Making Meaning from Paragraph	Raise your hand	Wait for the teacher to call your name		Restate the paragraph in your own words	—

			Total---->	—
			Total Points Possible	<u>30</u>

Implementation with Students

Step 4: I pronounced a word, and the students placed the target word on the oral activity worksheet under what they determined to be the correct part of speech. Then I instructed the students to locate the word in the text. When they found the word, they raised their hands. I called each person whose hand was raised to read the sentence that housed the word. All who read gave themselves points for reading.

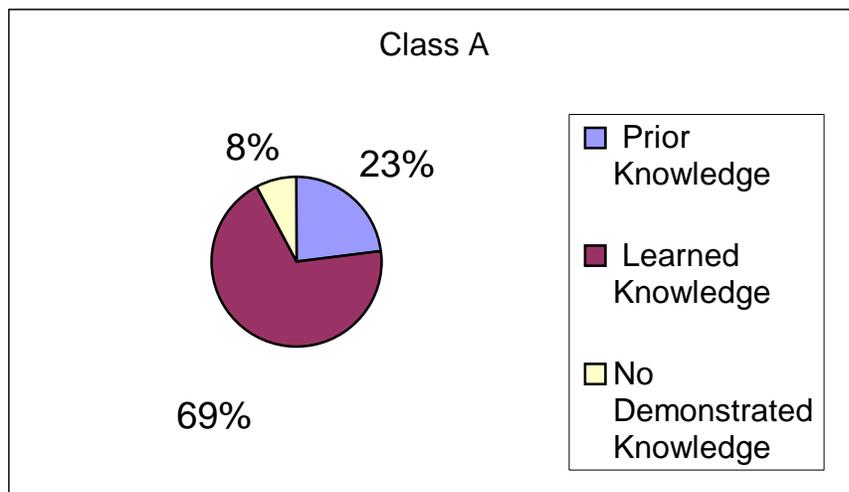
Step 5: After all seven words were pronounced and found, I asked the students to raise their hands if they knew the meaning of each word. I called each student whose hand was raised to give his or her meaning of each word. After each person whose hand was raised gave his or her meaning for the word, I gave a meaning for the word. If the students' meanings were synonymous to my meanings, I told them to give themselves a point for knowing the meaning of the word. Then they wrote the meanings in the space provided for the meanings on the oral participation worksheet.

Step 6: After class, the two students who recorded their meanings of the two paragraphs in chapter XVII *Where the Red Fern Grows* again recorded their meanings of the same paragraph. The comparison of the two recordings, which is not diagramed, determined that after the oral activity, the students sounded more confident when speaking; they spoke at a more rapid rate, and there was more meaning in the retelling.

Analyzing the Data

The pie graph (Table 3) shows that the oral activity produced participation and learning. This was determined by the number of points each earned during the activity and compared to the number of words each student knew the meaning of on the prior knowledge vocabulary check up. The "No Knowledge Demonstrated" elements are the students who earned zero to three points during the oral participation activity and zero to three word meanings on the prior knowledge check up.

Table 3: Vocabulary Results



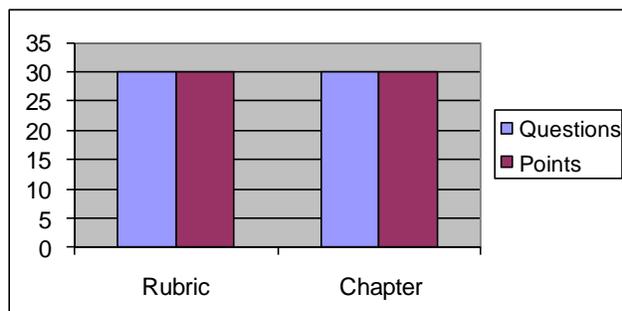
But, learning is the expected outcome of teaching. Therefore, more research was done to find out if those who earned fewer points comprehended less of the chapter. The element of silent reading was added to the next phase of the research. Silent reading could compensate for any gaps in the procedures.

Analyzing the vocabulary results and the interpretation posed a dilemma. It seems obvious that after instruction students perform better than before instruction. Therefore, other questions were raised:

- Does the level of participation determine the level of comprehension?
- Did those who earned more points understand the chapter better than those who earned fewer points?

To answer these two questions raised in this phase of the research, a set of thirty questions about chapter XVII *Where the Red Fern Grows* was given to each student after they silently read the chapter. The results of each student's scores were compared to their rubric points. I wanted to see if those who earned more points on the rubric had a comparable score on the end of chapter questions and vice versa. The number of points possible for both rubric and end of test questions was equal (Table 4). By keeping both equal, the possibility of confusion in counting was lessened.

Table 4: Possible Points per Questions

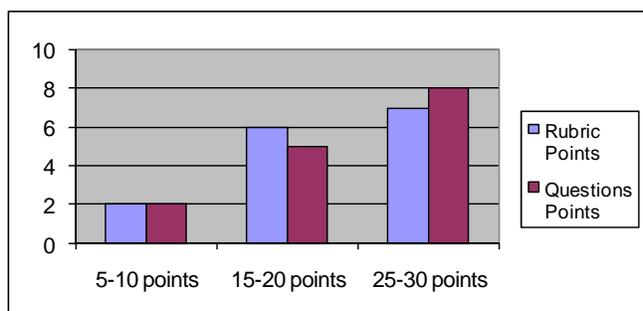


Findings

Oral participation is a powerful tool for promoting comprehension in a reading classroom. This researched activity, oral participation, has reached the majority of students in a class of fifteen. Table 5 shows that the students who got fewer points on the rubric also answered fewer questions correctly on the end of chapter questions. These are the same students who did not have meanings of the vocabulary words. All of the students, except one, who earned fifteen to twenty points on the rubric, also earned fifteen to twenty points on the end of chapter questions. However, one less student earned twenty-five to thirty points on the rubric as compared to the end of chapter questions. The level of oral participation proved to be an important factor in the renewal of struggling readers’ comprehension skills.

The findings, after adding the silent reading element, confirm that reading is in the mind, not in the mouth. Oral participation begins a stirring in the mind and is an asset to meaning-making, but silent reading grounds what oral participation stirs. Inter/intra-psychological processes enable students to become stirred and to build reading proficiency from their individual interests as well as from their cultural backgrounds (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Welch, 2007).

Table 5: Meaning-making Findings as a Result of Oral Participation



Conclusion

This study shows that students can become effective integrators with text, through engagement and motivational strategies. Modeling by the teacher is not enough. Readers need to contribute their own responses to reading. Readers who become engaged in oral participation become motivated to see just what else is in the context in which they are participating. However, to determine which strategies produce meaning-making and which do not, more research is needed using each strategy. This oral participation activity is one of many that can be implemented into reading lessons taught to readers who do not make meaning when reading texts written for their chronological age. To the student, this activity just seems to be a game to earn points towards a higher grade, but it is actually enhancing their meaning-making skill.

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Appendix A

Vocabulary Words for Chapter XVII *Where the Red Fern Grows*

1. stirs
2. leeward
3. lull
4. canebrake
5. plea
6. washout
7. snag

Appendix B

Questions from Chapter XVII *Where the Red Fern Grows*

1. Why did Billy say that the night was good for hunting?
2. What did the hunters ride in to get to the woods?
3. Who wanted to stop hunting first?
4. Who wanted to stay longer?
5. Why did the one who wanted to stay longer want to stay?
6. What was the danger of staying in the woods?
7. Who had the idea to split up?
8. What did the hunters do to get the dogs' attention?
9. Which dog showed up first?
10. What finally sheltered the hunters from the storm?
11. What was the name of the storm?
12. Where was Old Dan when he was found?
13. Who was the first to find Old Dan?
14. Who was lost in the storm after Old Dan was found?
15. Who found the lost hunter?
16. What place of safety did the hunters go?
17. What did they do to keep warm?
18. What part of the lost hunter's body was injured?
19. How did he injure himself?
20. How long did the hunters stay in the woods?
21. What time was it when they checked the watch?
22. How did the hunters get firewood?
23. Where had the coons been hiding?
24. What caused the dogs to run away?
25. What was unique about the dogs?
26. Who calmed Billy's fears about finding his dogs?
27. What did the hunters do to the dead coons?
28. Who found a remedy for the injured hunter?
29. What was the remedy?
30. How long did he keep up the remedy?