

Chapter 5

Voices at the Table: Collaboration and Intertextuality

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ABSTRACT

While we often associate reading aloud with children and particularly younger children, the practice of reading aloud has historically been a way for a community to share texts for information and enjoyment. Findings from a year-long study of a school librarian collaborating with a team of second grade teachers demonstrates the value of reading aloud in building background knowledge and vocabulary, modeling, understanding curriculum, creating common texts, and reading for enjoyment. Reading aloud brought other voices to the table in a clear example of intertextuality. Implications are shared for school librarians interested in similar practices as well as future research related to the impact of the school librarian on classroom instruction and student learning.

INTRODUCTION

The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

This opening quote expresses a consensus from research, since promoted and quoted by Trelease (2006), that reading aloud with children is not only important but the “single most important activity” to build a child’s knowledge about the practice of making meaning from marks on a page and giving them voice in the present moment, or reading. By including this quotation in this current chapter, these words, written nearly three decades ago are

brought into the present moment for the author of this chapter and yet again, into the future for readers of this chapter. Speakers and authors are always drawing on the words of others; the written word allows us to pull up those words from the past and to project those words, as well as our own, into the future. Read aloud to a group of teachers, the opening quotation might provoke quiet reflection or perhaps a conversation about the practice of reading aloud. Listeners might ponder what kinds of knowledge we are building, or might ask how we are defining children, or what reading aloud choices we might make for a particular group of students. By reading aloud, the work, and perhaps the pleasure, of reading become public and social. Words read aloud give

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the author a voice in the present moment. This principle that “We are all constantly reading and listening to, writing and speaking, *this text* in the context of and against the background of *other* texts and other discourses” (Lemke, 1995, p. 10) is known by discourse analysts as intertextuality.

I was a school librarian, and for a year, I recorded each of eight monthly collaborative planning meetings with a team of three second-grade teachers and myself, as the school librarian. The transcripts of these eight meetings became a primary data source in research conducted for my dissertation (Kimmel, 2010). In the year following, I read and re-read the words from those transcripts and analyzed them for the roles of the school librarian (Kimmel, 2011), the kinds of activities in planning (Kimmel, 2012a), and the importance of pulling and having resources on the table for planning (Kimmel, 2012b). One finding, that I did not anticipate, was how often we read aloud to each other as a part of planning. Collaboration, it seemed was not just a matter of our four voices but included authors of various children’s books, state curricula, and notes we had written in past meetings. On at least one occasion, reading aloud was a way of modeling how to read, and another time, reading aloud was acknowledged as a fun part of planning. To return to the opening quote and give it new voice: reading aloud was an important activity in the knowledge building of professionals about content, about the practice of reading, and about the enjoyment of reading. In this chapter, I will share the findings about reading aloud as an important component of collaboration and as an example of intertextuality and discuss implications of these findings for the practice of collaboration and future research related to the impact of the school librarian on classroom instruction and student learning.

BACKGROUND

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud has historically been a means for small communities to share information and texts. Zboray and Zboray (2006) share research about literacy practices in Antebellum New England and document reading aloud as a social event and way to share the scarce resource of printed books and other materials. Trelease (2006) relates the history of cigar factories in the mid-1800s in Florida where a reader was paid to read aloud to the workers often from the newspaper, novels, and political thinkers. Most of the current research and literature about reading aloud focuses on children (e.g. Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011) with some about teenagers (Zehr, 2010), or those learning a second language (Cho & Choi, 2008). While some recent attention has been given to reading aloud when teaching adults (Freeman, Feeney & Moravcik, 2010), the value of reading aloud across the lifespan has been under-studied. Yet most of us can think of everyday kinds of reading aloud such as sharing a newspaper article or deciphering instructions with a partner for assembling a bicycle or piece of furniture. Reading aloud from important legal or sacred texts regularly occurs in courthouses and churches.

Intertextuality

This practice of drawing on other texts in our speech and writing is an example of what discourse analysts call “intertextuality.” Discourse analysis looks at language for the ways it “gets recruited ‘on site’ to enact specific social activities and social identities” (Gee, p. 1). Studies may be done of either written or spoken language.

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