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Voices at the Table: Collaboration and Intertextuality

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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

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.

Intertextuality means that we are always drawing on other texts when we use language. We may explicitly recruit another text through a quotation, or by reading aloud from another text. Discourse analysts are also interested in more implicit forms of intertextuality, or the ways we use language to signal our membership in particular groups such as a profession, social class, or geographic group. In our ways of talking and writing, we create an identity for ourselves as a particular type of person and as a part of a particular community. When we listen or read other texts, we make meanings from them based on our history and relationship with that community, in part because we have texts in common.

Intertextuality provides a kind of shorthand within a community. For example, in teacher planning, curriculum goals were often spoken of as numbers. When Dianna, a teacher asks, "Does that cover two point five?" the other teachers from her grade level knew that she meant the second grade science objective related to the water cycle. A teacher from another grade level would recognize that she was referencing a curriculum goal but would likely not know which one. An outsider would probably have little clue regarding what she was talking about. As the school librarian, I generally brought a copy of the curriculum goals to planning; this provided me with the insider information to take part in the conversation. Intertextuality, or the referencing of other texts is thus a way to establish a community of understanding that may be very opaque to an outsider.

Collaboration

I was the school librarian, not a second grade teacher. My work to understand the talk of second grade teachers involved learning on my part about their curriculum, about their textbooks, and even about their classroom practices. At the same time, as the school librarian, I brought my own texts literally and figuratively to the table in the form of library resources and Twenty-first Century literacy standards (American Association of School Librarians, 2007). The focus on collaboration in the school library profession often seems to be about issues of trust and common goals (Brown, 2004; Grover, 1996), yet there are authors who point to difference (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005) and even dissensus (Snow-Gerono, 2005) to promote effective collaboration. Dunne and Honts (1998) suggest that the inclusion of an outside consultant may be important for the group's learning. An outsider brings new ideas and resources to collaboration but may also be met with resistance (Carlone & Webb, 2006). Straddling an inside-outside role (Van Deusen, 1996), the school librarian may provide both the resources of an outsider and an insider's familiarity and trust. Intertextuality, or the insertion of other texts into teacher planning, is one way the school librarian establishes this difference, and thus serves to interject new texts, new ideas, and learning into teacher planning.

Reading Aloud in Collaboration

In my analysis of the discourse of planning across a school year with a team of second grade teachers, I was looking for examples of intertextuality and was interested to find the explicit interjection of other texts as the teachers and I again and again picked up texts from the table and read them aloud to each other. Dianna, Areyanna, and Brittany were the three second-grade teachers at Obama Elementary School (pseudonyms have been used for the school and the teachers) during the year of this study. Once a month, we had a block of time during an afternoon when their classes were covered by teaching assistants for long-range planning. This planning took place in the school library in order to be close to the resources of the library and for the school librarian to be present

at each meeting. Each meeting was recorded and transcribed for this analysis. I generally asked the grade level ahead of time what unit they were planning and was often told in the shorthand of the curriculum something like "Social studies, goal three." In preparation, I would look up and print out copies of the goal for myself and for the teachers. Then I would pull books and other materials from the collection in support of that goal. These materials were also at the table during planning and these were the items that teachers and I picked up and read aloud as a part of collaborative planning.

Trelease has popularized the practice of reading aloud in families and classrooms with his handbook now in a sixth edition (2006). Using research to build his case for the importance of reading aloud in student achievement, Trelease suggests starting early and continuing to read into the teenage years. Reading aloud, he says is important to learning because it will:

- Condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure.
- Create background knowledge.
- Build vocabulary.
- Provide a reading role model (p. 4).

As professional educators in this study collaborated to plan lessons for students, reading aloud provided an intriguing parallel to the findings cited by Trelease (2006). Texts that were shared aloud during planning provided or refreshed background content knowledge, introduced specialized vocabulary, provided a model for classroom reading, and were a pleasurable activity. Additionally, texts that were read aloud provoked conversations about the meaning of curriculum and became common texts that were referenced months later in further examples of intertextuality. Each of these elements is addressed with examples below.

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Second grade teachers are generalists and usually do not have any special training in science or social studies. Trade science or social studies books provided a quick review of basic concepts such as wind or states of matter. When passages from these books were read aloud, they provided everyone at the table with a type of "just in time" professional development as they refreshed participant's understanding of the science concept in a way that we could make sense not only for ourselves, but for the students. The big ideas that were often difficult to tease out of the succinct curricular goals were bolded through the words of published authors.

Areyanna: Who likes the wind? Who likes the wind? I do. I do. I like the wind because it pushes my boat. I wonder why the wind blows. The wind blows because air is moving. Air by the ground is warmed by the sun. When air is warm, it rises. Cool air moves to take its place near the ground. (reading aloud from Kaner).

In another example, reading aloud from the trade book about states of matter allows us to make a connection with the weather outside which has actually cancelled school for students that day.

Sue: Because the way it ends, it talks about states of matter. But the way it ends is "All matter, everything on earth is either solid, liquid, or gas. Water changes its state easily as it gets warmer, colder. But most things stay in one state or the other. Solids stay solid. Liquids stay liquid. Gases stay gases." So they show the snowman. Just to review. (reading from Zoehfeld).

Areyanna: Like a review.

Sue: Plus it would be like, "Oh yeah it snowed." And it's a good thing they do that. Most things stay the same. Can you imagine a world

where your toys melt, where the walls get too hot and turn into hazy gas, and animals just walk in as they please.

Specialized Vocabulary

Scientists often use common vocabulary in uncommon ways. One of the second grade science objectives related to matter and mixtures is about materials. In the following passage, a piece of text read aloud helps to emphasize this for teachers.

Areyanna: Materials...
Sue: This is a good book for that last objective about materials. It defines the word material. "Scientists use the word differently. To scientists the word means anything that objects are made of." So then it says, "A bicycle is made of more than one material. Some things are made of one main material." (reading aloud from: Royston, 2002).

Model for Classroom Reading Aloud

In each of the examples of reading from a trade book, the books also became reading aloud choices for the teacher's lessons. In this sense, the practice of reading out loud to each other served as a test-run and a rehearsal for the classroom lesson. Dianna makes this quite explicit in the following example where she reads selectively from a book by Gail Gibbons ignoring parts of the text in the speech bubbles.

Dianna: Rain forms inside of rain clouds. The water vapor that evaporates from below forms tiny rain droplets. The tiny droplets join together and become bigger droplets. When they are heavy enough, they fall. Rain

comes in different ways: drizzle, shower, normal rain, thunderstorm, and sometimes there are floods. You see how I read that but I didn't really read everything on the page and you couldn't tell the difference? (Reading aloud from: Gibbons 1990).
Areyanna: I sure couldn't.
Dianna: I told you how to read.
Areyanna: You sure did.

Pleasurable Activity

Written for a young audience, trade books provided an authoritative voice for understanding content or vocabulary that was succinct and understandable. Occasionally, these books were also fun to read and to listen to. In the following example the teachers have discovered a new book in the library's collection that describes the water cycle using the form of "This is the House that Jack Built."

Areyanna: "That warms the ocean that holds the rain. This is the vapor." I like this book. "This is the sunshine hot and white that warms the vapor that forms the raindrop." I love this book! I want to do this book.
Sue: ((laugh)). It ends with the sun, too, doesn't it?
Dianna: We hope so.
Areyanna: The water cycle. It ends with, "That brings the rain somewhere every day. This is the sunshine hot and bright that makes the vapor moist and white that fills the clouds low and grey that brings rain somewhere every day." (Reading aloud from Schaefer, 2002).
Dianna: Does that cover two point oh five? ((laughter))
Areyanna: I don't know. What's two oh five? I was enjoying the story.

Meaning of Curriculum

In the passage above, the teachers reference a curriculum objective by the number "two point oh five." Quite often the teacher's reference of curriculum goals by numbers – "One point three" became a substitute for an actual reading or discussion of the meaning of the goal. In this way, some meanings became lost. In October when second grade was planning a social studies unit about government, an objective is not read completely and the shortcut leads to a narrow understanding of the objective. In this example, Jean who was the curriculum coordinator contributes to the discussion:

Dianna: Two, oh, four is about rules and laws.
Jean: Rules and laws and the consequences for non-compliance. You've been doing that since the beginning of the year.
Areyanna: Yeah.
Jean: Identify and discuss rules in the classroom. List appropriate good and bad consequences. Discuss and describe how a person can be a responsible citizen. I would think you could.
Areyanna: It won't hurt them because it's about to be that time of year.
Jean: That's true. They do need a booster.

The actual objective states "*Evaluate* rules and laws and the consequences for non-compliance." In this case, an implicit text about classroom management and schools and schooling as about following school and classroom rules was clearly in play. As the school librarian, I recognized the importance of the verb "evaluate" and offered, "You know when it comes to laws. Another take on it is laws that aren't fair. Rules and laws that aren't fair. We could do Rosa Parks." A few minutes later, Areyanna asks, "What was that one about the bus ride?" and I read aloud an illustrative passage, "This is a law forbidding black people to sit next to white people on buses." And I comment, "See right there it fits the curriculum," and go on to read further, "Which was overturned because one woman was brave" (reading aloud from: Edwards, 2005). In this episode, reading aloud from a trade book provided a more nuanced understanding of the curriculum.

In the passage below, Areyanna and I struggle together to tease out the meaning of a curriculum objective:

Areyanna: Mixtures "investigate and observe how mixtures can be made by combining solids, liquids, or gases and how they can be separated." Now you can't really separate.
Sue: That's what got me too.
Areyanna: The liquids and the gases.
Sue: When I read that, I kind of went, "huh?" Although it does say "or."
Areyanna: Yeah.

Common Texts

The Rosa Parks discussion took place a month after the introduction of *This Is the Rain* (Schaefer, 2001) that used the format of *The House That Jack Built* to introduce the water cycle. In a clear example of intertextuality, where participants reference another text that they have in common even though it is not present, this discussion follows:

Sue: What? Oh The Bus Ride that Changed History: The Story of Rosa Parks and it follows the… you know, we had that one This is the Rain, right? And, there are lots of books that follow that pattern.
Areyanna: They loved that story.

Areyanna's comment also makes it clear that that title became a class read-aloud and favorite. The practice in children's books of taking a familiar form or theme and creating variants is another example of intertextuality. As adults, most of us recognize the format of "This is the house that Jack built…" and so the sentence, "there are a lot of books that follow that pattern" has a clear and taken for granted meaning.

DISCUSSION

As is evident from the examples provided, the trade books that were read aloud were predominately science with some social studies. The second grade teachers were integrating these content areas in their literacy blocks and relied on the school librarian to suggest texts for this purpose. While they relied heavily on a new social studies textbook, they did not have a true science textbook. Planning for science drew extensively from materials housed in the library including big books and guided reading sets. Teachers frequently asked for a book to read aloud to introduce a science lesson during their teacher-directed reading time. While many teachers think of narratives for reading aloud and research has noted a lack of non-fiction choices (Duke, 2000), several authors have promoted non-fiction or expository texts for reading aloud (Albright, L. K., 2002, Greenawalt, L., 2010, Press, Henenbers & Getman, 2011, Smolkin & Donovan, 2001) particularly in science (Braun, 2010, Heisey, N. & Kucan, L., 2010, McCormick, M. K. & McTigue, E. M., 2011). Among the reasons teachers may choose not to read aloud non-fiction are that they don't know how to select non-fiction texts (Duke 2000). These examples of the school librarian at Obama Elementary collaborating with second grade teachers demonstrates how the school librarian served as a resource for teachers to identify books that were appropriate for the curriculum, the grade level, and the purpose of reading aloud. The practice modeled here of looking at the curriculum and matching books from the collection and then bringing the curriculum and the books to the table allowed for this practice of using non-fiction read alouds to flourish in these classrooms. The books were present on the table and so they were picked up and read out loud so that everyone present could have the shared experience of the content, the method, and the enjoyment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The practice of reading aloud during collaborative planning described here did not happen intentionally, but the findings suggest that it was an important part of collaboration that added value both to the knowledge base of participants regarding content and pedagogy and to the common language and enjoyment of the participants. The work of the school librarian ahead of time to print out copies of the curriculum and to pull potential instructional materials related to the curriculum and bring those resources to the table was critical (Kimmel, 2012b). If an item was not on the table during planning, it could not be read aloud and the presence of items on the table allowed the practice to emerge. School librarians interested in promoting the practice of reading aloud should begin by doing the reconnaissance ahead of time to determine what teachers will be planning and then finding the curricular goals and the materials to support those goals. A school librarian could take the lead during collaboration to lift a text from the table and read a relevant passage aloud.

Several conditions existed that allowed this practice to emerge and flourish. The school library's collection must include materials that meet the appropriate content, ability, and interest levels for each grade level. The school librarian needs to have a thorough knowledge both of the collection and the content, ability and interest levels in order to make the match for teachers. These conditions are necessary in order for the school librarian to lift the right book at the right time from the table during collaboration. By tuning in carefully to what teachers are saying about what they hope to accomplish with their instruction and what resources they need, the school librarian will be in a position to find a passage to read aloud that might help to address those needs. The school librarian in this study also had a thorough knowledge of what literacy instruction looked like

in this school and for this grade level. Reading aloud to model reading technique, as well as to introduce content was considered a best practice and so teachers were looking for appropriate texts for this purpose.

Also, at the time of this study there was a protected space provided by an unscripted afternoon once a month for planning. In the last year that the author was the librarian at this school, other people and other demands were placed upon this time as accountability and scripted reading programs encroached on the teacher's planning period. One has to wonder if school librarians will need to find increasingly creative ways to find time to plan collaboratively with teachers. Are there some parts of these meetings that could occur electronically? Will we skype or otherwise meet in online spaces? Could the school librarian send quick book trailers or other book introductions to teachers to view and consider as time allows? Or perhaps we will move toward a more embedded model of librarianship where we join planning meetings and classrooms as needed, participating in real time? (Cordell, 2012).

What might reading aloud look like in an increasingly digital environment. Other authors have addressed the issues of the ways reading is changing and the resulting impact on our thinking and indeed our physical brains (Wolf, 2007). Clearly an ability to move between formats, to transnavigate (Jenkins et al, 2006) will increasingly occur. What would it look like if instead of books on the table, the teachers and the librarian were working from tablets with the texts downloaded ahead of time? The written texts could still be read aloud. But participants could also view videos together, cruise Websites, or listen to audio together. These texts could serve similar functions as read-alouds to build background knowledge, reinforce vocabulary, provide models for use with students, build fluency in other technologies, and even lead to new enjoyment and shared experiences. Take for example the following passages from the transcripts of these collaborative meetings

and consider how they might have been different if we had been able to view a Youtube video of sound entering an ear, listen to a symphony playing Beethoven, or experience a simulation of a science experiment as part of planning.

Sue: *Have you looked at United Streaming to see if there's a video?*

Areyanna: *That's what I was going to ask you.*

Sue: *If there's some way to see all of that in movement, you know. The still diagram doesn't do it for me. I look at it, and I'm like, okay, how does it work? But if they had something that actually showed the sound coming in and what moves. I bet there is.*

Dianna: *Do you have Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on CD or at least that one track?*

Sue: *No I don't think I do. We might be able to find it on the Internet. Let me double check though I have some classical music that hasn't been catalogued. Is that the dum dum dum dum?*

Areyanna: *Suggest that one student hold the cup while one student stretches the rubber and secures it with a rubber band. After the students have succeeded in attaching the rubber square to the cup suggest that they all pull the edges of the rubber square so it stretches as tightly as possible. Then demonstrate how the noise maker works. (reading aloud from Science and Technology for Children, 2002).*

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Varelas and Pappas (2006) studied the use of reading aloud in a first and second-grade classroom looking particularly at intertextuality as a means of thinking about student learning in science. For their purposes the read-alouds were trade science books read aloud "dialogically" meaning that student listeners were encouraged to interact with the read aloud sharing their own experiences, ideas, and other comments. Texts and intertextuality were defined broadly to include these "event" texts

where speakers shared stories from their past or projected scenarios into the future. These researchers looked at intertextuality and in particular, this "hybridization" of children's stories with the more paradigmatic scientific language found in the read aloud texts as evidence of students bringing their own resources to an understanding of scientific concepts. Their work was distinctly different from this current study both in its classroom focus and their working definition of intertextuality, yet has intriguing implications for future research related to this study.

An important question for school librarians who collaborate with classroom teachers is an understanding of what happens to that collaboration in the classroom. Ultimately this becomes a question of how school librarians impact student learning. The practice of collaborative teacher planning examined for this study included co-planning lessons that would occur in the library that were integrated with classroom content, but also co-planning lessons that the teachers would deliver in their classrooms. Following the model of Varelas and Pappas (2006), intertextuality could become a tool of inquiry into the effects of a school librarian on classroom practice. Would it be possible, for example, to follow an analysis of planning discourse into the classroom discourse to look for examples of intertextuality in how teachers taught a lesson that had been collaboratively planned with the school librarian. What resources introduced by the school librarian are used by the teacher and how? Is there a residue of the school librarian in the teaching? In particular, as we seek to interject not only resources, but also 21st century literacies into instruction, could we look for these more subtle kinds of influences on teacher classroom practice? Since we are ultimately interested in student learning, could we look at what students say and do for examples of intertexutality related to the resources provided by the librarian? Finally, we take it for granted that the lessons delivered in the library by the librarian are best planned collaboratively with teachers in order to integrate our instruction with classroom content and instruction. But how do we know this? Again, intertextuality might serve as a lens to look for traces of library lessons in classroom discourse. Do students make references to texts they encountered in the library when they return to the classroom? Varelas and Pappas (2006) and other authors (e.g. Lewis & Ketter, 2004) have examined intertextuality as a tool for examining learning and the tool has potential for research critically needed by the library profession today in order to assess and understand our contribution to student learning and the importance of our collaboration with other educators.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Collaboration: Working with others toward a shared purpose.

Curriculum: In this chapter, curriculum refers to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (2008).

Discourse Analysis: Studying the ways language is used on-the-spot to build identities, activities, and other meanings. Assumes that language is social and dynamic.

Intertextuality: The practice of drawing upon other texts, either explicitly or implicitly in speaking, writing, listening, and reading in order to build meanings.

Reading Aloud: The practice of reading out loud the words from a printed text for an audience.

Texts: Generally refers to printed texts but used in this article to include any form of communication including speech, video, digital, or other formats.

Trade Books: Books published for the trade market and generally purchased for library collections. As distinct from textbooks.

APPENDIX: TEXTS READ ALOUD IN THE TRANSCRIPTS

Edwards, P. D. (2005). *The bus ride that changed history: The story of Rosa Parks.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Gibbons, G. (1990). *Weather words and what they mean.* New York: Holiday House.

Kaner, E. (2006). *Who likes the wind?.* Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press.

Royston, A. (2002). *Materials.* Chicago: Heinemann Library.

Schaefer, L. M. (2001). *This is the rain.* New York: Greenwillow.

Science and Technology for Children. (2002). *Sound teacher's guide.* Burlington, NC: Carolina Biological Supply.

Zoehefeld, K. W. (1998). *What is the world made of? All about solids, liquids, and gases.* New York: HarperCollins.