

Kucan, L., & Beck, I. L. (2003). Inviting students to talk about expository texts: A comparison of two discourse environments and their effects on comprehension. *Reading Research and Instruction, 42*, 1-29.

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Summary: The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of talk on students' comprehension of expository text through a focus on three questions: 1. Does talking about text with peers influence individual thinking about text? 2. Does the context in which students talk about text during reading affect their comprehension? and 3. Do experiences talking about the text influence individual thinking about the text? Students participated in pretest, intervention, and posttest sessions that included reading and talking about expository texts. During the pretests and posttests students thought aloud as they read. In the intervention, students were assigned to one of two discourse environments: one for individuals and another for small groups. Students responded to reading prompts as they read. In all sessions students were asked to read and answer questions about what they read. The study also analyzed the kind of talk that occurred in each of the two discourse environments and the effects of talking on students' thinking about the text ideas when they were not in the environment.

Assumptions:

- Talk during reading provides a means for researchers to examine readers' interactions with text (Waern, 1980).
- Students who ask questions, identify information that is unclear, summarize, and predict while reading demonstrate improved performance in comprehension. Improvement could be related to engaging students in talking about the text (Miester, 1994; Palinscar & Brown, 1984).
- Students who orally explain what they read are better able to answer literal and inferential questions than students who reread a text twice without discussing it (Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu & La Vancher, 1994).
- Talking during reading supports comprehension (Chi, et. al., 1994; Loxterman, et. al., 1994; Palinscar & Brown, 1984).
- Students who participate in peer-led discussions talked more and provided more elaborate connected responses than those who were in teacher-led groups (Almasi, 1995).
- Questioning the author creates a discourse environment where students collaborate to construct meaning from text. Students who questioned the author began to initiate more questions, integrate information from other sources, and respond to comments from others (Beck, 1997).
- In explaining ideas to other people, the individual builds understanding for her/himself (Dewey, 1916).
- Thinking is conversation with oneself in which two voices engage in deliberation to reach a decision (Plato).
- Students who participate in talk dyads create more solutions to problems than students who participate in no-talk situations (Teasley, 1995).

- Students who work with partners engage in higher-level processes than those who work independently (Chan, 1997).
- Talk during reading supports comprehension (Chi, et al., 1994).

#### Results:

- All students showed improvement from pretest to posttest.
- No significant differences in comprehension measures existed between individual and group conditions.
- Discourse around text helps students gain deeper understanding and appreciate text ideas.
- Presence of responsive others led group members to exert more effort to engage in taking an active role in reacting to text than individuals who did not participate in group discussion situations.

#### Conclusions:

- Inviting students to communicate their understanding of text ideas as they construct it supports their comprehension regardless of the response of others.
- Learning occurs in talk so students need opportunities to talk about their ideas and respond to others' ideas.
- The context in which questions are posed makes a difference in thinking.
- Independent reading without the student discussing their understanding of what they read is not as effective in building higher-order thinking skills as reading and discussing the text.

#### Suggestions for Teachers:

- Provide ample opportunities for students to talk about text and respond to other students' comments.

#### Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Recognize that talk about text promotes understanding.
- Support teachers' effective inclusion of student talk in instruction.
- Help change notions of the quiet classroom as an effective learning environment.