In a world of increasing teacher accountability, content area teachers are now responsible for teaching literacy inside their classrooms. What can a content area teacher do to teach reading comprehension? One method is to have students participate in think alouds. A think aloud is a metacognitive strategy that “can be used across the curriculum, in science, math, history, and other areas” (Kane, 2011, p. 126). This strategy requires a student to state “out loud what they are thinking about when reading” (“Think Aloud Strategy”, n.d.).

One purpose of think alouds is to teach students the process of reading. A teacher often models the process for the students, so the students understand what they should be doing as they read. Students often think that as long as they looked at each of the words in the text, they are reading. Part of reading however, is comprehension. Students need to become engaged in the text. A think aloud teaches students how to do that. As students become more comfortable in participating in think alouds, they will begin to use the strategy on their own to “monitor their reading” (Kane, 2011, p. 126). The goal is for the students to be able to think about “the actual process of reading and monitoring comprehension” (Kane, 2011, p. 127) on their own.

Last week, I participated in a think aloud with the passage, “A Berserk Computer” from the e-book, Mathematics: Powerful Patterns in Nature and Society (Henderson, 2007, p. 77). This assignment was designed to help prepare me for modeling think alouds in front of my students. When I first began to read my article, I tried to make predictions about what the passage would be. I found it rather difficult to ascertain how a berserk computer could relate to mathematical patterns. The first sentence immediately triggered my curiosity. A name of a mold reminded me of a medicine. It sounded as though the discovery involving this mold was common knowledge, so I wanted to know more about said event. Shortly after, a confusing passage made me pause and go back. After re-reading it more slowly, I was able to pick out the meaning of the
passage. I predicted that the berserk computer would occur shortly. Sure enough, the next paragraph had me visualizing a computer printing out rolls and rolls of perforated paper. I was able to connect my personal experience when the reason for this occurrence was explained – rounding off decimals too soon. Words such as “linear” and “variable” connected the passage to mathematics graphs. I ended the think aloud connecting the given metaphor of butterflies causing tornados to the passage.

The overall feedback from my think aloud was positive, although there is room for improvement. I believe the way I handled the confusing passage helped clarify the meaning of the paragraph. The fact that I recalled my first prediction when I thought the topic was approaching and confirmed the prediction after the berserk computer appeared showed that I was getting engaged in the text. There were quite a few words that I was able to connect to some other area of knowledge. I did not spend any time stating my understanding, which would be useful in aiding comprehension. I also need to work on reflecting on the reading immediately after finishing. This often helps retention of the text. I believe that if I had not been able to prepare this think aloud ahead of time, I would have found it hard to remember to speak my thoughts out loud because it is not something I am used to doing while reading. I may need to practice this strategy more before implementing it into my classroom (Henderson, 2007, pp. 77-78).

This experience in modeling a think aloud taught me a lot about my own reading process. Before, I was fairly unaware of what went on inside my head when I read. While preparing the think aloud, I became aware of just how much my brain is working to help comprehend even short passages like the one I used in the think aloud. I also have become increasingly aware of when I am failing to understand texts. While reading a textbook for another class, I began
picking out vocabulary with which I was unfamiliar and looking them up. I believe before this experience I would have ignored those words and some of the meaning of the text would have been lost on me.

I definitely plan on putting this strategy into my future classroom, and not just for reading purposes. I believe a think aloud will allow students to internalize both the text and the reading process. When I have my students read math related articles, I will be sure to model thinking aloud. I may have each student prepare a think aloud for couple of paragraphs of the article, so each student can apply this strategy. With some practice, I believe my students will become aware of their reading process, just as I did. I will also use this strategy when trying to help my students think like a mathematician. I can model for them how to work through complicated math problems to help them better understand the problem and steps. This is a strategy I often find myself using when solving difficult homework problems.

In conclusion, think alouds are a an important tool that should be used in every classroom because this strategy does more than just help students comprehend the text you give them. It also develops their metacognition. Think alouds can not only help students with literacy, but can also help students with math. After using this strategy last week, I realized how beneficial these connections, predictions, and visuals are to the thinking process. I plan to develop my modeling of this strategy so it can better benefit my future students.
Works Cited


