

Say Something

Kathy G. Short & Jerome Harste (1996). Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Introduction

Language did not develop because of the presence of one person but because two people wished to communicate. Language and language learning are inherently social events. Say Something highlights the social nature of language and demonstrates that understanding develops and evolves from our interactions with others. Participants are able to see that partnership enhances meaning, and that as constraints normally operating in reading are altered, so are involvement and the kind of thinking that becomes possible.

Say Something is designed to help readers develop a more functional view of reading. Participants learn to respond in terms of what the passage meant to them and how it does or does not relate to their own experiences, rather than in terms of what they think the teacher wants. This engagement is particularly supportive for students who are having difficulty knowing what to talk about in a Literature Circle.

Say Something also supports readers who view the reading process as an inactive process where they either race or plow slowly through the reading and then decide what the text meant. These readers view comprehension as an act that is completed once the text is finished. As readers engage in Say Something, they are involved in the same active process of chunking a text, asking questions, finding connections, and making predictions that characterize the processes of proficient readers. Readers thus become aware of alternative reading

strategies they can use as they read independently without the support of another reader.

Materials/Procedures

- 1 Multiple copies of a reading selection
 1. Students are asked to choose a partner, and each pair is given a single copy of a reading selection.
 2. Before reading, each pair of participants is asked to decide whether they will read the selection aloud or silently. If reading orally, the two share one text and take turns reading aloud the sections of text.
 3. Students are informed that as they read the selection, they will discuss what they have read with their partner. After they read the first several paragraphs, they are to stop to "say something" to each other about what they have read. After each exchange of this sort, the partnership reads the next several paragraphs and again each "says something" to the other before going on to the next paragraph, and so on through the text. Students can comment on what was just read, make predictions about what will happen next, share connections and experiences related to the selection, or ask a question about something that is confusing them.

Establishing the Learning Context

Teachers demonstrate that successful language users engage in Say Something by choosing a partner and participating in this activity with students. Throughout the group discussion, the teacher works at establishing a context in which students feel that their interpretations are accepted and that there is no one "right" answer. Any interpretation is accepted as long as the student can support it. "Why" should be a frequent response.

After the first several times that Say Something is used with a group, the teacher should engage the students in a group discussion aimed at helping them become aware of how they can use this strategy in their own reading. The students can discuss what reading strategies were used to make sense of this reading, and how and under what conditions students might find Say Something a helpful strategy

for them to use as readers in the future. They can also talk about how successful readers use procedures similar to Say Something when encountering difficulty in reading texts and that if they experience difficulty reading any of the materials for the class, Say Something is an alternative reading strategy they can use to solve their problem.

Variations

1. A group Say Something can be used with a small group of students. Each student has a copy of the text. They look through the entire text as a group and decide where they will stop reading to "say something" to one another. These stopping points are marked with a pencil. Each person then begins reading silently. When a reader comes to a stopping point, the reader stops and waits until the others in the group are also ready. Group members then each say something about the section they just read before going on to read the next section silently.

2. Say Something can be used with a read-aloud book. The teacher reads aloud, stopping at particular points. Students are encouraged to "say something" and after several comments, the teacher begins reading again. Instead of responding as a whole group, the students can instead turn and say something to a partner every time the teacher stops reading aloud. This variation works well with young children and to introduce the engagement to the class.

3. Written Conversations can be substituted for oral conversations during Say Something. Writing, however, is more constrained. We have found that it is not wise to introduce this alternative until after students feel free to respond to text at a more personal "what it meant to me" level.

4. Instead of making a group web, each pair of students can write a brief summary/response after reading and discussing the selection. These summaries can then be shared with other pairs who have read the same selection and written their own summaries. Students could also do sketches that are then shared with other pairs.

5. A variation of Say Something used to give responses to writing is **Writing in the Round**. Writers attach a blank sheet of paper to a

draft, asking for responses to their writing. The draft is circulated to three or four different readers. Each reader reads the draft and previous readers' comments and then makes suggestions for revisions of meaning. This same activity can be used to get responses to artwork projects and oral reports.

6. A similar procedure, Reading in the Round, involves a student writing a response to a reading selection. This response is circulated among other students who write their own comments about the reading selection and about the reactions already written on the sheet by other readers. Instead of beginning with a response, the sheet could have on it several key statements selected from the reading material. As the sheet is passed around, readers respond to one another and to the key statements.

7. Students should be encouraged to use Say Something whenever they say they are having difficulty understanding what they are reading. This procedure should be continued until students naturally engage in this strategy on their own. Say Something can be used with informational books as well as fiction. If students are reading science or social studies textbooks, it helps them process the different sections instead of being overwhelmed by the number of concepts covered in most textbook chapters. Students also often choose to use Say Something when beginning a chapter book for a Literature Circle. Reading the first chapter or two with Say Something gets them into the book and they then finish the reading on their own.

References

Say Something was developed by Jerome Harste, Carolyn Burke, and Dorothy Watson. Writing in the Round was developed by Jeff Ducer and Paul Crowley.