
Chapter 11

Shared Reading

by
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Introduction

Developing reading skills is of crucial importance to all children. Reading is one of the main sources through which children can discover and interact with the world around them. Cromwell (1997) states that the ability to read is vital since children who do not succeed at reading are unlikely to do well at school. That is why teachers and administrators place much emphasis on developing the reading skills of their learners. Children in Egyptian schools are further challenged with learning to read in both their native language and in English. EFL teachers at the primary level are constantly searching for techniques that will engage their young learners and produce effective results.

They ask, "Which approach to teaching reading is best for my students?" Researchers suggest many strategies and techniques to be used in class. But the question is not only related to the strategy itself; it is also connected with the reader with whom the technique will be used. For example, in the primary stage, we tend to use interesting reading materials, including pictures and stories that might help teachers engage their students. One of the techniques that lends itself to this atmosphere is what educators call Shared Reading.

Shared Reading in an Egyptian Classroom: Mr. Atta's Description

Mr. Saleh is an English teacher in a primary school in Sohag. He is fond of teaching stories to his pupils, but there were many obstacles in the way of fulfilling this task. First, he observed that his pupils were bored by the "listen-to-the-story" technique. In such activities Mr. Saleh was very active, but the students were just passive receivers. There was no interaction in the class.

I recommended that Mr. Saleh try using the Shared Reading technique that I had learned about during an institute I attended (McCloskey, 1999). I explained to him how to use this technique: to introduce a large-sized text

to the class, read it aloud, read it repeatedly together with the pupils, and use the text in a variety of skill-building and follow-up tasks. At the beginning, he was afraid of the idea and thought that this technique would not work in our context. I encouraged him to try. After a short time, he became one of the advocates of the Shared Reading technique. This technique helped him get his students motivated and interested.

Soon a second problem came up - how could we find appropriate materials for shared reading? Generally speaking, suitable EFL children's large-sized texts are not easily available in the market in Egypt. Even when there are materials, they are too expensive. Mr. Saleh came to me asking about what to do. I suggested using teacher-made stories because they are less expensive and more relevant to his situation. I showed him *The Hungry Cat*, a big book that I had made.

I met with Mr. Saleh a month after our discussion, and I found that he was now excited by the idea of Shared Reading. He found his pupils ready to make their own books and use the Shared Reading technique inside and outside the classroom. Now he is proud of being able to use this technique successfully and of seeing his pupils' reading skills develop dramatically!

What is Shared Reading?

This technique was developed by Don Holdaway in 1979. It is defined by Wynn and Laframboise (1996) as "a reading experience in which a teacher models expressive, fluent reading while students follow the text, and then join in repeated choral readings." Also, the Montgomery County Public Schools Early Literary Guide (1999) defines Shared Reading as an interactive experience that takes place when children participate in the reading of a big book or other enlarged text as guided by a teacher or other experienced reader. It is clear now that in the Shared Reading session children are more than just receivers. They are actively involved and participating. Also, the session depends on some reading materials, a story or a song, included in a large format - a big book, a chart, on the blackboard, or on a transparency on the overhead projector. These large texts are designed so that all the class can see the pictures as well as the words. Texts for early readers become even more engaging when they contain language with rhyme, rhythm and repetition. These characteristics make the story and the language memorable, catchy and interesting. Familiar, attractive pictures that are closely related to the text also help keep the children's attention.

The Benefits of Shared Reading

Using the Shared Reading technique with primary students can be very useful for them. The benefits of Shared Reading include:

Motivation for reading and language learning. The dominant atmosphere in the Shared Reading session is a motivating one because it helps the students to interact, to participate and to have a role in the learning process. Experiences with stories from everyday life provide opportunities for students to follow-up with engaging, hands-on experiences with familiar objects (Wynn and Laframboise, 1996). It allows less confident students to share stories in a non-threatening situation as they relate them back to their own situations (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998). Shared Reading permits students at different language levels to participate in different ways - some can recite along with reading the few words they know, others can memorize the selection, still others can read along in the text. Shared Reading can motivate all students to establish a reading habit and move on to reading extensively.

Oral language development. Discussion before, during and after the reading provides meaningful language learning experience and helps develop and expand oral language competencies (Wynn and Laframboise, 1996; Pillai, 1991). Teachers can use the shared visuals and text to develop language around authentic topics of interest to students.

Developing concepts of print. The engagement in the Shared Reading session can help the students to develop some critical concepts about print (Button and Johnson, 1997), including speech-print connections, letters, and sounds, conventions of print such as left-to-right progression, punctuation, spacing and paragraphs (Enright & McCloskey, 1988).

Developing sight vocabulary and decoding skills. Through repetition and tracking of the words as they are read, students develop sight vocabulary. Through discussion of word patterns and sounds, they also develop the ability to decode words phonetically while attending to meaning (Pillai, 1991). For example, after reading a passage, a teacher could ask students to find in that passage all the words beginning with the letter b making the sound /b/.

Developing reading strategies and comprehension. Children may notice features of language such as alliteration, similes and metaphors; types of words such as verbs, adjectives and nouns, and phonemic groups that help make parts of the text interesting and memorable (Mooney, 1994). Teachers using this technique can help children develop prediction strategies as they try to tell what will happen next in the story and how different characters will respond. Shared Reading allows the teacher to demonstrate and the reader to practice reading processes in a successful environment. Teachers can help learners to use sampling (looking at selected text to get a sense of the whole),

predicting (guessing what will happen next in a story), and *confirming* (checking with the text to see if their hypotheses are correct) (Manning, 1997). During the Shared Reading session, the children are able to act and be seen as readers as they participate. In other words, the children can perceive themselves as true readers.

Integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Children use all the language arts in Shared Reading. They listen to the reading, discuss many aspects of the story and the language in it, have many opportunities to read all and parts of the text, and write their own adaptations of the text in the follow up to the story.

A Suggested Sequence for Shared Reading

De Vera, Billker, and Schneier (1994) suggest an excellent teaching sequence for Shared Reading consisting of the following steps:

1. Decide on the focus. State your objectives for the Shared Reading session. Identify the language focus that you will deal with in the lesson. For example, you might address the present simple tense or the present continuous tense as a language focus for a Shared Reading session.
2. Select an appropriate text. The text selected for a Shared Reading should lend itself to Shared Reading. For young learners, Shared Reading texts often have the "three R's" of rhyme, rhythm and repetition, which make the language more memorable and comprehensible (Manning, 1997). The text should be suitable for the students' level and related to their background knowledge and it should take into account the language focus you would like to present for your class. Finally, you must present the text in a format that all the students can see: as a big book, a chart on the wall (use the backs of wrapping paper or boxes), writing on the blackboard, or writing on a transparency to be shown on the overhead projector.
3. Set the scene. Next, introduce the book to your class. Introduce the main idea of the story, the title, the characters, the writer, the cover illustrations, etc. You might like to have students look at the pictures during this introduction. Work to attract your children's attention and pave the way to the following step in which you do the first reading.
4. Read the text aloud. After giving a brief introduction to the story, read it aloud with enjoyment and expression. Always point to each word as it is read. (Many teachers use a ruler or pointer to track the words during Shared Reading). Make sure that students follow along with their eyes. You might stop occasionally to ask the students to predict a word or a

phrase that will come next or to make predictions about the story (The MPC Literary Guide, 1999). Buchoff (1998) offers suggestions for effective Shared Reading:

- Introduce the name of book, the author, and the illustrator
 - Provide background information about the story and an explanation about why you selected the book
 - Make eye contact with your audience
 - Hold the text so everyone can see the book cover and the illustrations
 - Follow along on the text with your pointer, pointing to words as you say them
 - Be creative: use props, music, etc., to make the book memorable
 - Use appropriate body movements and facial expressions to generate enthusiasm and show meaning
5. Reread the text with the learners. The objective of the rereading stage is to help students be exposed as much as possible to the story content, vocabulary items and new structures. Reread the story many times with your pupils, always tracking each word with your pointer as you read. Encourage them to take part in the reading. Ask them questions and encourage comments about the story. Ask students to attempt to recall some vocabulary or events in the story. Use teaching points to focus on aspects of language that are repeated in the text. For example, you might talk about a "word family" or word pattern or sequence that appears in the text. When you teach "The Hungry Cat," (found at the end of this chapter), you might focus on the days of the week, names of foods, or on the repeated phrase, "*but he was still hungry.*"
6. Help children respond to the text. De Vera, Billker, and Schneier (1994) suggest different ways of responding to the text. Some of them include:
- a. *Independent reading* - learners read the text on their own or in pairs
 - b. *Discussion* - teacher and learners discuss the text.
 - c. *Writing* - teacher and/or learners adapt the text into a story of their own
 - d. *Retelling* - learners retell the story in their own words.
 - e. *Drawing* - pupils draw pictures that go with the events in the story and write captions for the pictures.
 - f. *Making big books*. Learners make their own big books on their own topics, often adapting the patterns of the story.
7. Share responses. Provide a chance for pupils to practice and develop their oral skills by discussing their responses. Children will also learn from hearing about what others have done.

The Teacher's Role

In the Shared Reading session, teachers are facilitators of learning. They should not dominate the activity, but should rather give the children opportunities to participate, share and predict. Learners should be given sufficient time to speak and discuss because the classroom is one of the few contexts in which EFL students can practice using the English language and develop their oral skills. Teachers should guide children to the correct answer when their predictions do not follow the story line. They should assist pupils in what Pillai (1991) calls *meaning retrieval* through helping them use the orthographic (sound and spelling), syntactic (grammatical/sentence structure) and semantic (meaning) cues in the reading text.

Adapting Shared Reading for the Egyptian Context

Many people might think that Shared Reading is not applicable to the Egyptian context. But the dilemma is not in the technique itself; it is in how to use this technique and how to localize it according to one's own facilities and the context.

The choice of the story itself might present a problem to many teachers. One reason is the lack of children's literature suitable for the EFL context in Egypt. Another is that English language reading materials for children that can be found are often designed for the first language (L1) context. Even if there are appropriate EFL reading materials, they often contain only uninteresting repeated patterns. Ghosen (1997) stressed this idea as she thinks that the content of these materials is limited and structured around vocabulary and grammar exercises – even when the objective is to address communicative practices. Ghosen also observed that these materials assume that students have a global cultural perspective that Egyptian students might not have. So, we must find ways of increasing access to excellent children's literature that is both linguistically and culturally appropriate for our Egyptian pupils. The *Hello!* texts include a number of songs, chants, and readings that can be used as the basis of shared reading lessons, for example, the Goha stories. One such story is included at the end of this chapter.

The second problem is that schools may not have sufficient funding to buy books that are available. That is why we recommend teacher-made stories for Shared Reading. Teachers can learn how to make their own books from stories they know and stories they find.

Bookmaking

Making books is simple and enjoyable and once you have made a book, you can use it over and over again.

When you try to write the text of the book, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1- What is the book about? Who is depicted and how? (Content and story).
- 2- How is the content expressed? (Language).
- 3- What is the appropriate difficulty level of the text? (Ease of reading).
- 4- How can I make the book attractive? (Attractiveness). (Stenhouse Publishers, 1997).

(See Chapter 18: *Making and Using Low-Tech Visual Aids* for more about how to make a book.)

General Considerations When Making a Book

The following are some suggestions that can help you when you make a book:

1. **Stories.** Choose some characters and stories from the Egyptian folklore that will be interesting and familiar to the students. Children will have an idea in Arabic about the different situations in these stories. This might help them understand the whole story and learn the new English vocabulary and structures easily. This does not mean that you must neglect stories from other contexts. Provide your students with many stories from different cultures and contexts. (See the story samples given at the end of this chapter).
2. **Materials.** Make use of the simple local materials that will not cost much money, such as scrap paper, used cardboard, colored pens...etc.
3. **Student-made books.** Get your students to make their own books. Encourage competition among different classes to help students be involved in Shared Reading projects. At the end of the semester, hold an exhibition in your school when pupils demonstrate their products and share their experiences.
4. **Help from parents.** Encourage parents to help your pupils with bookmaking activities at home. Truscott (1997) believes that parents are important to literacy development of their children. We have found many parents who were really willing to help their children at home. Some of those parents even began to think about improving their own English in order to be able to provide this help to their children!

Suggestions for Using Books

Following are additional general suggestions that can help teachers in adapting this technique to the Egyptian context:

Use an overhead projector. If there is an overhead projector in your school, you can make use of it for your Shared Reading sessions. Write your story on transparencies and use the overhead projector to show the large pictures on the screen or classroom wall. You can even say and write the words as students watch, giving them a chance to make connections between speech and print.

Use a chart. Write and draw your story on a chart, and fix it in so the whole class can see it. If the class is too large to use one chart, make different copies for different parts of the room. Have a student stand next to the chart and point to the words as the story is read.

Use a pocket chart. You can also use a pocket chart for Shared Reading in your class. A pocket chart is a large chart with places to put word cards, picture cards, or sentence strips. (See Chapter 18: *Making and Using Low-Tech Visual Aids* for how to make a pocket chart.) The pocket chart can serve different purposes. You can use it to present a new story with cards on which the story scenes are written. You can use it for activities to use after the rereading of the story. For example, you could write the main events of the story on sentence strips and ask your pupils to arrange them in order. You could also have students draw their own Shared Reading stories on sentence strips or word cards for the pocket chart. Pupils can share their responses at the end of the Shared Reading session.

Use reading journals. Have your pupils write about stories they have read in a journal. Pupils can then read their journals to one another once a week. To help children keep reading and writing even when school is out, encourage them to use these journals on their holidays with friends who live nearby.

Use shared reading with small groups. With smaller texts that can't be seen at the back of the class, you must have smaller groups of pupils take turns with you in shared reading. Other groups can work with children taking turns playing the "teacher" role.

Use masking devices. A masking device is something which can be used to hide part of the text. Masking devices can help students remember new vocabulary and structures or to focus on particular terms or aspects. Make a frame or a window that forces students to look at one word or structure at a time. Point out key features so that pupils will remember them.



at school

Masking device focuses learners' attention on a selected important vocabulary item.

Use a self-assessment rubric. Rita Buchoff's (1998) *Self-Assessment Rubric for Shared Reading*, included at the end of the chapter, is an excellent way to check yourself on how well you are implementing Shared Reading.

Conclusion

Shared Reading is a technique that can really work in Egyptian classes. If you try to use it with your students, you will find many advantages. The Shared Reading technique helps make the classroom atmosphere conducive to learning as well as teaching because it lends itself to many interesting and interactive activities. If you have any difficulties using it in your class, try to adapt the activity as much as possible according to your own context. Also, you might consult an experienced person or a book or article. (See the resources at the end of this chapter.)

We have tried to show you the advantages of Shared Reading and many ways to use this technique. We have also tried to cover some areas that might present problems for those who are new to this technique. We hope that you will find this chapter useful for your own situation. The whole experience will add much to your students' literacy development.

still singing, "B-I N-G-O".

The next day Mrs. Amal wanted to check on how well the children remembered the letters. She asked her students to hold up letters of the alphabet they had made on small pieces of scrap paper as she called the letters out, and everyone got B - I - N - G and O right. Mrs. Amal also reported that her students had a much easier time with "there was" after learning the song.

voices from the field

SHARED READING

Hamdy Youssef Ali, Mansoura/MoE

My voice is about "Shared Reading" technique. The lesson was about "A Cat and a Mouse Story" (Hello! 2, p. 54). To get ready to use the shared reading technique, I prepared some low-tech teaching aids: a big book of six pages and some picture cards of the new words in the story (cat, mice, gun and bell).

I used the technique about six times. I used the big book and picture cards to have students retell the story in their own words. Later on, when they became comfortable with telling the story, they acted it out. Indeed, it had a very strong effect on most of the students. It created a relaxed atmosphere in which most students were motivated to express themselves in English.

I was quite happy to notice this positive effect of the technique on my students and I'm sure I'm going to use it again.

Key Terminology

Shared Reading

A reading strategy in which the teacher first models reading from a large text that the whole class can see, then encourages the pupils to read along. The teacher uses the shared text to introduce many teaching points about language and reading. The children follow-up the reading activity with tasks that help them put the language they have learned to use.

Choral reading

Choral reading is when pupils all read a text in unison. They may read from a shared text or from their own copies.

Tracking

Teachers track the text during Shared Reading - they use a pointer to follow along with the words as they are spoken. This focuses students' eyes on the text and helps them to develop speech-print connections.

Sampling

Before reading a text, children sample, or preview the whole text, including the front and back cover, to get an idea about what it will be like. This strategy helps children with reading comprehension.

Predicting

Teachers often stop during Shared Reading and ask children to predict what is coming next. Teachers want children to begin to analyze how stories are put together and know what part should come next. They also want children to make good guesses based on the language patterns and meaning of the text.

Confirming

During Shared Reading, teachers encourage learners to confirm their guesses and predictions by checking back with the text. This teaches them to use the context of the reading to create meaning.

Orthographic Cues

One part of reading is the connection between sounds and the letters and letter patterns that represent them. During Shared Reading, teachers point out sound-letter connections and common word families (such as the *-at* family or the *-in* family) to help children learn to use orthographic cues when they read.

Semantic Cues

Semantic, or meaning cues are also an important part of learning to read. During Shared Reading, teachers help children to figure out the meanings of words using the context. They also introduce and develop new vocabulary through the stories. Teachers attend to meaning at the story level as well as they help children learn to understand what they read.

Syntactic Cues

Another kind of cue that readers use is the syntactic cue - a cue from the grammatical structure of the text. Teachers help children learn what kinds of language to expect when certain sentence patterns are used. For example,

if the sentence reads, "*Salah is a _____*," and the children don't know what the next word is, they can come to understand that the word will probably be a noun.

Extensive Reading

Reading beyond what is required in the classroom setting, often reading for pleasure.

Oral Language Competencies

The abilities of the pupils when using English in speech. This may also include the oral language abilities in their native language.

Alliteration

The repetition of the same initial sound in a phrase or sentence, "the big bad wolf."

Simile

Two unlike things are compared in a phrase with "like" or "as". "*He's as strong as a bull.*"

Metaphor

Transfer a term from an object it normally designates to another, implicit comparison or analogy, "*The children are hungry for new books.*"

Meaning Retrieval

The reader creates meaning from a text.

Understanding Check

1. What is Shared Reading?
2. What are the benefits of Shared Reading?
3. What are the steps that can be used in a Shared Reading session?
4. What are the criteria for choosing a book to read with your children in a Shared Reading activity?
5. How might you adapt the Shared Reading technique to the Egyptian context?
6. Could you suggest some folklore stories to be used for Shared Reading sessions?

Resources

Bird, J. (Not dated). *Shared Reading: Bridging the Gap to Independent Reading*. Available online at: www.basic-skills.co.uk/magz/shared.html.
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Truscott, D. (1997). Parents and Children Focusing on Main Ideas. *The New England Reading Association Journal*, V. 33, 3. 11-14.

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Shared Reading Self-assessment Rubric for Teachers

By Rita Buchoff

Name _____

Points _____ (25)

Title of Book _____

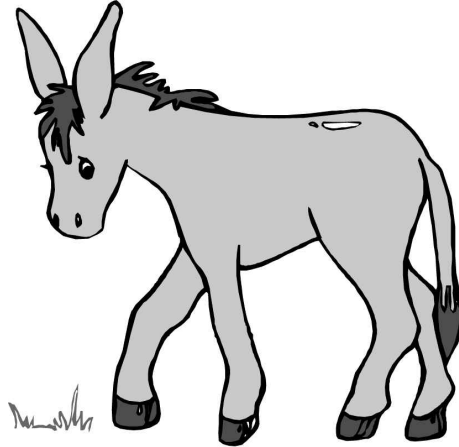
Author _____

Illustrator _____

- Introduced name of book, author, and illustrator
- Provided background information about the story and an explanation about why you selected the book
- Preparation: Smoothness of presentation
- Made eye contact with audience
- Held book so everyone could see the book cover and the illustrations.
- Creativity: Used props, music, etc. to make the book memorable
- Used appropriate body movements and facial expressions to generate enthusiasm and show meaning

Notes:

Sample Stories for Shared Reading



Goha's Donkey

Goha and his son were going to the market. They were riding their donkey.

Some people saw them and said: "Look! He is a bad man. He is riding the donkey with his son".

Then, he rode the donkey and made his son walk in front of him. But, some people said: "Look! He is a bad man. He is riding the donkey while his son is walking". After that, he made his son ride the donkey and he walked behind him. But, some people said: "Look! This boy made his father walk. He is a bad son".

They walked together and didn't ride the donkey. But some people said: "Look! They are silly people".

At last, they threw the donkey in the river and went to the market on foot!

The Hungry Cat

A Shared Reading Story Adapted by Atta Gebril from “The Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle.



There was a very hungry cat.



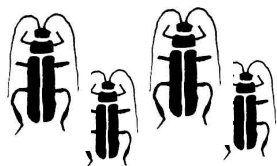
On Saturday, he drank a cup of milk.
But, he was still hungry.



On Sunday, he ate two mice.
But, he was still hungry.



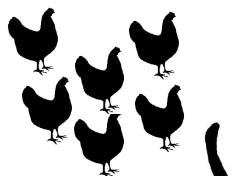
On Monday, he ate three fish.
But, he was still hungry.



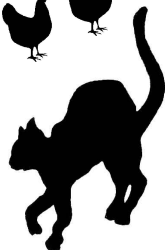
On Tuesday, he ate four beetles.
But, he was still hungry.



On Wednesday, he ate five eggs.
But, he was still hungry.



On Thursday, he ate six chickens.



On Friday, he ate seven helpings of kushari. He became a very big cat.

Food We Like

Sample lesson plans and teaching aids from *Hello! 1*, Second Term, Pages 12-13 (*Shared reading using a Pocket chart*)

Goals - Students will

1. Name and discuss foods and drinks pupils like and don't like.
2. Use present simple of the verb "to like" in positive and negative; in singular and plural.
3. Write chants and sentences about their likes and dislikes

Materials

1. Pocket chart
2. Word cards, picture cards from lesson.
3. Blank cards and markers
4. Sentence strips with lines of the Food Chant in large letters:

Food Chant	
Heba likes bread, Ali likes meats, Mustafa likes ice cream, We all like sweets! I like bread, I like meats, I like ice cream, We all like sweets!	Soheir likes coffee, Fatima likes tea, Mary likes milk, My friends like me! I like coffee, I like tea, I like milk, My friends like me!

Procedures:

1. Put food pictures and labels in the pocket chart. Have students help you match foods to labels and move them side-by-side.
2. Put the chant on the wall or pocket chart. Practice the chant, using shared reading steps.
3. Ask students to come up and choose a picture or word card of a food/drink they like.
4. Fix sentences in the pocket chart to describe what students like.

-
5. "Kamal likes ice cream. Aziz likes meat."
 6. Fit sentences with students' names and choices into the chant.
 7. Have everyone read the chant together using Shared Reading Steps.
 8. Practice the chant until everyone has learned it.

Variations:

1. Have students choose foods they don't like and change the chant to fit.
2. Have students copy the chant into their notebook, changing names to the students in their groups and foods to the ones they like.

Assessment:

Have groups of 4-6 read the chant together with a student leader.

Assess chants in student notebooks for handwriting, grammar, spelling, etc.

