



# JOURNAL

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## Using Journal Writing with Young English Language Learners

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### Abstract

*Goodman (1996) states that reading is a dynamic and constructive process of making sense from print. No two readers will ever produce the same meaning for a given text and the way they respond to the reading would be various. There are many types of reading activities; one of them is read aloud that is going to be discussed in this paper. According to Justice and Pullen (2003), read aloud activity is one powerful means to be taken into consideration in assisting the development of children's emergent literacy. Further, Jim Trelease (the author of "The New Read-Aloud Handbook) argues that read aloud establishes good connection with journal writing as a response to it. That is why the writer uses response journal writing to make connection with read aloud activity. The objective of this paper is to analyze how children create journal writing as a response to read aloud activity. The writer collected data by conducting observation and going through a series of read aloud activity with a bilingual Indonesian child, named Piay. Finally, after analyzing the data and highlighting the theory of textual connections and emergent literacy development, the writer would like to present three findings on how Piay creates her journal writing as a response to read aloud activity: (1) by developing the alphabet writing, (2) by making intertextual as well as intratextual connections, and (3) by making autobiographical connections toward the story.*

**Keywords:** *read aloud activity, response journal writing, young English language learners*

### A. INTRODUCTION

The idea of choosing this topic comes from the writer's personal concern on children's literacy development in her home country, Indonesia. Based on the writer's experience, many parents in the place where she grew up often have assumption that their children are ready to be exposed with reading and writing when they first enter elementary school. So, when children open a book and "read" it or write something in a piece of paper after being read a story, parents will not consider it as a real action of reading and writing. Writing, in their perception, should be in the form of letters and how those letters are sequenced into words and sentences. So, when children draw a line and letter-like, parents seldom respond to it. This is what Peregoy describes in Reading Readiness Perspective. According to this perspective,

"children will be developmentally ready to read when they reach a mental age of 6.6 years" (Peregoy & Owen, 2005, p.5). That is also one of the reasons why home literacy is not introduced and emphasized as early as possible.

Having an opportunity to interact with many parents and children in a different cultural background changes the writer's previous concept of children literacy development. In this new place, children begin their literacy experience from the time they are introduced with reading and writing at home. Parents become the proponents of emergent literacy perspective who adhere to the belief that "literacy development should begin at the very young age at home amid day-to-day family and community activities" (Peregoy & Owen, 2005, p.6). Story books, road signs, product's name in supermarkets,

and other environmental prints become the media of children's reading. At home, parents also read a lot of story books. Children are encouraged to respond and comment on the story more than merely doing comprehension question activity. Besides, any forms of children's writing products are also valued, including a very rough drawing, wavy lines, letter-like, and other forms of writing. The good environment of literacy development, as a result, provides good effects on children's academic readiness and performance.

Realizing its importance, the writer is encouraged to analyze a good activity to help children to develop their literacy as Goodman (1996) argues that introduction to literacy must be meaningful. Many studies have shown that read aloud activity to children has been encouraged both at home and at schools for many years since it is a highly recommended activity to assist children's language and literacy (Adams, 1990). In line with the importance explained, the writer formulates one problem in this study, "How do children create their journal writing as a response to read aloud activity?"

### B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In order to provide good perspectives of theories that will support this paper, the writer would like to review some related literatures which consist of three key topics: (1) Read aloud activity, (2) Response journal writing, and (3) Young English language learners.

#### 1. Read Aloud Activity

According to Morrow, Rand, and Smith (1995), read aloud activity is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading" (p.23). It is an activity where the adults, parents, or teachers read a book for children. Besides reading, during the activity, the reader also helps the children to participate actively by asking questions, responding to the story or pictures in the story, and making connection with the personal experience.

Peregoy and Owen add the definition by making connection with writing. They state that listening to read aloud by adults and/or peers introduces children to the conventions of written English (2005: 408). It goes in line with Fountas & Pinnell (1996) who share similar thought of the connection of read aloud and written language:

*Reading aloud is the foundation of the early literacy framework. By being immersed in a variety of well-chosen texts children not only learn to love stories and reading but they also learn about written language. Children assimilate a sense of structure of written language and can produce it in a way that sounds like reading and approximates text. It allows the teacher to demonstrate ways to make personal connections and comparisons with books that children use for interactions in literature circles and forms a foundation for other reading and writing activities.*

Talking about the benefits of read aloud, the writer will underline some good points from Morrow and Smith (1990). They state that read aloud can benefit children in: (1) Building vocabulary, (2) developing oral language, (3) developing written language, (4) developing social skill, (5) developing phonological skill, (6) being able to make connections between the text and their own life experience, (7) Being able to think critically. In addition, Trelease (2001) states the importance of read aloud to children. Some of them can be noted as follows:

- a. Read aloud activity helps children to know and value books. When they can value books, they will be motivated to read their own books later on.
- b. Read aloud helps children develop their vocabulary since it guides them to make connection and sense of what they hear and see.
- c. Read aloud gives children opportunity to explore places, people, and events with their imagination.

- d. Read aloud introduces the book language which is, most of the time, different from the daily language they use every day.
- e. Read aloud helps children develop their written knowledge as it facilitates them to have written response to what they have been read.

## 2. Response Journal Writing

Journal, in this study, refers to a form of notebook or collection of writing in which daily writing is recorded in order to clarify the writer's thought. According to Madeline Kovarik (2006, p.179), there are five effective types of journals for responding the literature: (1) diary, which facilitates children to have personal reaction and it is usually secret, (2) response journal writing, which allows children to reflect and react to what they have read, (3) dialogue journal, which allows children to communicate their thought to the teacher, parents, adults, and/or peer then the others will respond, (4) double entry journal, which facilitates children to write the idea of a text on the half page and reaction on the other half page, and (5) learning log, which allows children to record what they have learned throughout the story. Of those five types, the one which is the most suitable to be the follow up of read aloud is response journal writing.

As it has been stated before that response journal writing has connection with read aloud in the way it facilitates children to respond to what they have listened from the reading in the form of writing. Noe & Johnson (1999) state that response journal writing encourage children to think critically toward the books being read and to relate the story to their prior knowledge and experience. In relation with making connection with the children's personal experience, Smolkin & Donovan (2001a) cited by Burgess & Tracey (2006, p.7) mention that there are a number of ways for children to make textual connections as a response to read aloud. The first one is intertextual connections which

refer to connections that are made from one text to another text. Second, intratextual connections that refer to connections made within the same text (Pantaleo, 2004). The last is autobiographical connections that refer to connections that relate the text to life and life to text.

The above types of connections will be considered in analyzing how children create response journal writing after read aloud activity in this paper. Besides, the writer will refer to Peregoy and Owen's concept in viewing how children in young age create journal writing. They state that children who are in the emergent literacy period will develop their writing through some categories, namely: (1) writing via drawing, (2). Writing via scribbling, (3). Writing via letter-like forms, (4). Writing via reproducing well-learned units or letter strings, (5) letter via invented spelling, and (6) writing via conventional spelling. In the early development they will mostly develop the alphabet writing through drawing, scribbling, and letter-like forms (2005, p.169). It is indeed amazing to know how children of young age try to make sense of their response toward the story being read to them.

## 3. Young English Language Learners

In this study, the writer defines young English language learners using Peregoy and Owen's definition. They are "children who speak English as a non-native language and who live in all parts of the United States. Besides, many of these children are the daughters and the sons of immigrants who come to the United States to work for better future. In short, English becomes those children's second language" (Peregoy & Owen, 2005, p.3). Since they come from countries other than the United States, they bring different culture background. As a result, learning English especially in the young age is not easy for them. Moreover, according to the 1990 U.S. census, over 6.3 million children between the ages of 5 and 17

spoke a language other than English at home (Crawford, 2001). This, therefore, increases the number of limited-English-proficient students at schools. Therefore, introducing literacy both reading and writing should be emphasized and should be in a meaningful way so that they can really develop it well.

### C. METHODOLOGY

#### a. Subject

The subject is Piay, a 4-year-old bilingual child since her first language is Indonesian and her second language is English. She was born in Illinois and has been living in the U.S. since then. In her daily communication, she uses both English and Indonesian to talk to her community. She often speaks Indonesian only to her mother's friends because her mother is Indonesian. The only time she speaks English is when she is with her father and her friends at school. The reason the writer chooses her departs from her admiration to this girl's ability to speak both languages well. Besides, the writer found out that she likes to read many story books, both Indonesian stories and the English ones. That is why the writer wants to analyze how Piay will react and create response to the read aloud in the form of writing.

Based on the early observation, the writer notices that Piay has strong family's literacy behaviors. According to Peregoy (2005:179), family literacy's behaviors are activities done by home family to support the development of children's literacy. At home, Piay and her mother always have reading aloud time before going to bed. Besides, she is provided with many good English story books and English movies to watch.

#### b. Data Collection

To collect the data, two steps were done. First, the writer interviewed Piay's parents to know her literacy and culture

background. Second, the writer, then, visited her 10 times and went through some read aloud activity and response journal writing. Of those 10 times, the writer could not start working with Piay for the first five meetings because she did not want to have read aloud activity with the writer. So, the writer decided to build a good relation with her first on those meetings. The writer began to work with her on the last five meetings.

In working on the read aloud activity with the subject, the writer used five children story books consisting of three English story books and two Indonesian story books. The titles of the story books are: 1. *Unhei* (English), 2. *Snow White* (English), 3. *Liong and Pau Pau* (English), 4. *Si Rakus* (Indonesian), and 5. *Perpustakaanku* (Indonesian)

### D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the writer would like to discuss the answer of the formulated problem "How do children create their journal writing as a response to read aloud activity?" Based on the observation and analysis of her recorded response journal writing after read aloud activity, the writer presents the finding which is related to how the subject creates her response journal writing after read aloud activity. The subject creates her response journal writing through some ways mentioned by Peregoy, Smolkin and Donovan, and Pantaleo:

- a. By developing the alphabet writing through drawing, scribbling, and letter-like forms (Peregoy & Owen, 2005, pp. 168-169).

In her first response journal writing after being read to the story of *Unhei*, she drew and combined some lines in which according to her those combined lines were Chinese characters which meant "I the king". She tried to write Chinese characters because the story was about a Chinese girl named *Unhei*. Therefore, it is clear that she

tries to develop her alphabet writing by drawing some pictures, creating

letter-like forms as it is in her "Chinese character", and scribbling forms.

Picture 1. Piay's Chinese characters "I the king"



- b. By making intratextual as well as intertextual connections

As it is stated by Smolkin and Donovan (2001), intratextual connections are connections made within the same text and/or story. She makes intratextual connections in the fourth story of *Snow White*. In her response journal, first, she drew Snow White picture by looking at the picture in the story. After that she wrote letter-like form "snow white cry she sad" because she saw in the book that Snow White did not smile. She shows her understanding of the reading aloud and tries to make connection between the story and her response journal. Besides, she also makes intertextual connection in which she tries to make connection from one text and/or story to another

text and/or story. This happened when she wrote her response journal to respond to the fifth reading. In the fifth reading the writer read an Indonesian story *Perpustakaanku*. In one of the pictures, there was a picture of a lion in front of the library. After looking at that picture, she directly took her book and wrote "Liong" several times in scribble writing form. Scribble writing form is "wavy lines that do not look like letters, but look like writing" (Peregoy & Owen, 2005, p. 169). It is clear that she makes connection of the story to the previous story "Liong and Pau Pau" in the third read aloud activity. Instead of writing "lion", she wrote "Liong" because in the story of "Liong and Pau Pau" the lion's name was Liong.

Picture 2. Third book being read "Liong and Pau Pau" and one page in *Perpustakaanku*





- c. By making autobiographical connections toward the story

According to Pantaleo (2004), autobiographical connections are connections that relate the text and/or the story to one's personal life and personal life to text and/or story. This connection appeared in the response of the story of "Unhei". In her response, she mentioned that her "Chinese character" meant "I the king". The reason why she mentioned "king" was because according to her "king" was identical with lion (from the movie "King of the Jungle") and lion was brave and great. She said that she was great because she did not ask her mother to change her name into American's name as other non-native students in her schools did. This personal connection proves the writer what Goodman has believed that personal connection to the text and/or story helps children make meaning.

### E. CONCLUSION

Clearly from the case of Piay, the writer could see that journal writing becomes a good response media toward "read aloud" activity because it can foster children to develop their writing. After they are read to a story, they try to respond it in the form of journal writing. It is very interesting to know the fact that children whom parents or teachers consider them in the early stage of writing development can really make good connection between the story and what they write in journal writing. However, as Justice & Pullen (2003) state that parents, adults, or teachers need to give the time that the children need so that they can really explore and express their response toward "read aloud" activity through journal writing better.

Another good point to consider is related to how parents or teachers choose good and appropriate books. In order to best

implement read aloud activity, it is suggested that parents or teachers choose books that are suitable with the children's age and interest. Besides, parents or teachers are also encouraged to choose books that can facilitate children to think critically and construct meaning making. Finally, books that provide some good moral values to children are also recommended.

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