

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT)

Discussion, reflection and next steps

for Adult Learners and Adult Education Teachers

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT) is a two-year project researching whether, what, where, how and why adults read aloud. Findings so far tell us that most adults read something out loud (and listen to others reading) at least sometimes. Very few people never do this. What we read aloud is diverse, including newspapers, social media, books, religious texts, graffiti, recipes, poems, instructions, posters, children's books and crossword clues. Our reasons are equally diverse, including to share, entertain, inform, help, be together, worship, enjoy, memorize, learn, understand and write. Some people read to other adults, some to children, some to pets and some people read aloud when completely alone. Some of this reading we notice; some we may do regularly but rarely notice. Some people read out loud in different languages, including languages we may not use in conversation with others. Forms of reading aloud are important in many workplaces, as well as within family and community relationships, for learning and as part of religious practice.

Points for reflection and action based on a discussion with adult learners and teachers at the Pontypool Community Education Centre, Wales in December 2018

Reading aloud, alone or with others can

- build our confidence as readers.
- help us understand complex or difficult text, whether difficult words, difficult sentence structure or complex ideas.
- support our writing processes, helping us write different kinds of texts. It can help to read our writing aloud to ourselves (or others) to hear how it sounds and think about any changes needed.
- help us remember, learn or to 'take in' the full meaning of a text, possibly because it slows us down and makes us think about every word, saying it and hearing it.

Some more thoughts

Understanding

- Some felt that reading a text for the first time out loud can make it harder to understand, especially if we are reading it to an audience or in a pressurized situation. At the same time, we felt that reading something aloud slowly when alone, or for the second or third time, can actually help us understand what we are reading. This suggests that it might be a good idea to have time to read something silently

before reading it aloud, and/or to be able to read something alone before reading it to others.

- We also spoke about how reading something in a group (silently or aloud) can help us understand it better, particularly if there is plenty of time for discussion. Discussing what we have read with others definitely helps us to feel more confident in our understandings and to see other ways of interpreting or seeing a text.

Punctuation

- Members of the group noted that in order to read aloud in a way that makes sense to those listening, we have to understand the punctuation and know when to pause or what to stress. Others pointed out that in order to write using correct punctuation, it is useful to read our writing aloud. It can help to understand how punctuation works in order to read aloud and it can also help to read aloud in order to make choices about punctuation.
- The ways we use our voices to emphasise meaning when reading aloud and the ways we use punctuation in order to write are linked. Both are about clarity.

Confidence

- Reading aloud can develop our confidence as readers. And yet, we need confidence to read aloud effectively. Without confidence, we may rush and others may have trouble understanding us.
- Being asked to read aloud can also make us nervous or anxious. This seemed to be another potential paradox. Members of the group suggested that one way around this is to practice reading aloud in a friendly, supportive environment where reading aloud is always optional and never forced.
- Gaining confidence in reading aloud in front of other people can also be the first step in becoming confident enough to give a talk, speech or presentation in front of others.

What do you think?

Thank you very much to everyone at the Pontypool Community Education Centre

Sam Duncan, April 2019