

# On the Nature of the Interactive Reading: A Culinary Metaphor

**Michael P. French**

Interactive reading has been described by Lipson and Wixson (1997) as a view that entails a variety of factors in which attributes of the reader, the text, and context intersect. Reader factors include general prior knowledge, knowledge of the reading process, and for reading. Texts factors include the discourse to be constructed whether narrative, informative, or poetic. Context factors include the how and where reading takes place—the purpose for reading, the author stance of the text, and the physical space in which the actual act of reading takes place.

In teaching the interactive view of reading to students in various university classes at Bowling Green State University (Fundamentals of Reading, Phonics, Content Reading) I have used an analogy such as driving a car to illustrate the interactive nature of personal knowledge (one's ability to drive), the text (the vehicle being driven), and the context (how and where the vehicle is driven). Students come to see how the process (in this case driving) can be impacted by elements of experience (Who has driven in Boston?), expertise (Who can drive a manual transmission), and attitude (Who has experienced road rage?). Reading works the same way.

I have been attending the ARF conference since 1999. In reflecting on these several trips to Florida, I have come to realize that cooking shrimp can also stand as an apt metaphor for reading. Cooking requires knowledge of ingredients and tools as well as procedural knowledge of planning the various types of food (shrimp, chicken, rice). Cooking requires knowing differences and similarities between recipes, e.g., knowing what base to use for what sauce. It also requires knowing how to adapt to different stoves, different pans, and different sizes of shrimp.

Cooking shrimp, like reading, requires successful prior experiences: Prior experiences in which others of significance have communicated satisfaction and respect, as well as constructive criticism, back to the chef. Each successful prior experience leads to new understandings and constructive risk-taking (such as don't undercook the shrimp). Commenting on this point Murnen (2002, [personal communication](#)) adds that there is a social construction of knowledge—"We know we have done something correctly within a particular social context because we receive validation from that discourse community of mentors and peers." For example, the second year I helped in the kitchen I rolled shrimp in Old Bay spice to create a different variety of shrimp. It seemed that people liked it. This allowed me to take a risk and try to present the shrimp in new ways—as in the third year when I presented a New Orleans Bar-B-Q dish. ([Appendix A](#)). I received lots of positive comments about this style of shrimp—to the point that in the fourth year, I brought my own oversized frying pan to be able to prepare more shrimp more efficiently. I also tried another style – Garlic/Butter/Chardonnay Shrimp ([Appendix B](#)).

Again, many complements were received. These positive acclamations make one want to cook again to relive the positive feelings, to take calculated risks, while staying grounded in the basics (bring the water to a boil—add shrimp—set the time for 12 minutes, drain and serve over ice.)

How often do we praise readers like we praise cooks? And, when do we pay the ultimate compliment and call the cook a chef? When does a learner become a reader or a writer an author? Reading requires constructive problem solving, as does cooking. This last year was the first time I have ever cooked on a solid-top range. I wasn't sure how to work the electronic oven, and the microwave was a devil to program; Books can be like that too. But I had help. Tim set the clock, and thanks to Marty, the over-boils got cleaned up quickly. As teachers, we sometimes need to help readers get started when the clock needs setting, and we need to clean up the mess when the words boil over the top of the page.

Cooking for sixty people is a rush. But I must share, in the last few years, I have prepared for the ARF shrimp extravaganza by practicing – I help out at Church dinners and functions. I have learned a great deal from the dedicated women who serve funeral lunches. I also practice recipes before I try them out on “real people.” The two chicken dishes this year were the result of trial and error at cooking wings. (The garlic chicken recipe ([Appendix C](#)) came from Lori Williams, one of the BGSU grad students, and the other Cajun style in [Appendix D](#) was my own.) We need different recipes because some will like shrimp while others will prefer chicken. As with cooking, we have to understand that not all readers have the same tastes. Both recipes (texts) will nourish the body and soul—and provide for a memorable feast.

As teachers we too need to help our young and old students become comfortable “performing” for groups. Whether reading aloud in a fifth grade classroom, or giving one's first national presentation, we need to prepare our young readers for these large group experiences. And we need to help readers use what others know and to adapt it. This point, based on Bakhtin's notion of dialogic semantics, was emphasized in Murnen's presentation (2002). Growth and learning occurs, in part, only when another's words (or in this case, recipe) becomes one's own—for the learner to use to explore new understandings of the old concept by the application and construction of new semantic understandings. As teachers of reading, we can assess this growth only in metacognitive dialogue with the reader (or the chef) asking, “What did you intend for this to be?” And the response of the learner (or the cook) will help to define the personal representation or translanguistic meaning of reader or chef. Bahktin further reflects on this translanguistic quality by stating that the word interacts with the metalinguistic environment both as utterance and variable in dialogue, leading to the total accumulation of meaning—the heteroglossia ([2000/1981](#)).

Thus, for me to use and to own the word, I must come to think of myself, and I have, as ARF's executive chef. At least, in my own mind, I see myself as very able to fulfill this role to the organization, to fulfill a service to those who value the fellowship of the feast, and to accept and take responsibility for the entertainment and nourishment of

others. As teachers, when we help readers to become poets, published authors, dramatists, singers, or even new teachers of reading, we help them to assume these same roles in identities they will define for themselves. Murnen adds, “children stake out identities—or I would say they experience ideological becoming...that is, they stake out some kind of personal intellectual space from which they can lay claim to authorship, readership, “chefship” etc.” (personal communication). Therefore, a child becomes a reader when he or she says, “I am a reader.” When a child proclaims this to the world, we must accept it and celebrate in the accomplishment with the child.

Teachers create lessons like I plan new dishes. They search the libraries and book clubs for new titles that will entertain and nourish the minds of their students. I have become a food channel addict; I seek out new recipes, and already I have begun to think of what the menu in 2003 will include.

Finally, without positive attitudes, our students will not become readers. As cited in Lipson and Wixson (p. 45), Adelman and Taylor (1977) assert that whether children perform or learn in a particular situation depends on whether they can do what needs to be done and whether they choose to do it. This makes a lot of sense to me now. Going to Florida next year will mean meeting new friends again, learning and discussing new concepts, and reacting to new ideas. It will also mean cooking shrimp for more than sixty of my closest friends and making the choice to do it to the best of my ability, just like reading.

### References

- Adelman, H., & Taylor, L. (1977). Two steps toward improving learning for students with (and without) “learning problems.” *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 10, 455-461.  
[Back](#)
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2000/1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by M. Holquist, Translated by C. Emerson & M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
[Back](#)
- Lipson, M. Y. & Wixson, K.K. (1997). *Assessment & Instruction of Reading and Writing Disability*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Longman.  
[Back](#)
- Murnen, T. (2002). *Teaching & Learning with Digital Video: Literacy as Ideological Becoming*. Paper presented to the American Reading Forum, Sanibel, Florida, December 9, 2002.  
[Back](#)

Note: The personal conversations with Tim Murnen came from his interlinear notes on the draft of this paper.

Appendix A: Shrimp BBQ – New Orleans Style (as prepared at ARF)  
(Insert name)

**Ingredients**

Two sticks salted butter

½ cup Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce (I have found the higher the quality the sauce, the better the taste and thickness of the sauce.

Merlot wine (use any brand—not too inexpensive or the sauce will have a bitter aftertaste)

Cajon spices (any brand will do)

River Road Barbequed Shrimp Seasoning (purchased at the French Market in New Orleans)

Shrimp (1 to 1.5 #)

**Directions**

1. Melt two sticks of butter in a large fry pan. Melt slowly over low heat.
2. Add Worcestershire sauce and slowly blend
3. If the sauce gets too thick, add a little wine but not too much
4. Before adding the shrimp, add spices to make a small mound in the middle of the pan (I don't measure, but there should be enough spice as to keep the sauce away.) The more Cajun you use, the hotter the sauce will be.
5. Slowly swirl the pan until the mound separates and is blended. **DO NOT STIR THE SPICES ROUGHLY.**
6. Add the shrimp and bring to medium heat. Turn shrimp a few times until all the skins are pink. At ARF, this took about 20 minutes.
7. Remove from heat and place shrimp in a deep bowl or dish.
8. Serve with the sauce. (Sauce can be used as gravy for rice, or it can be used with French bread.)

We made two servings this year.

For my family, I use one stick of butter, about ¼ cup of Lea and Perrins, and a bit of wine, and a whole lot more Cajun spice; that is, I like it hot!

[BACK](#)

Appendix B: Garlic-Butter Shrimp in Chardonnay  
(Insert name)

**Ingredients**

Two sticks salted butter

Olive oil

½ jar of minced garlic

Chardonnay wine (use any brand—not too inexpensive or the sauce will have a bitter aftertaste)

Two whole lemons

Shrimp (¾ to 1# shrimp)

**Directions**

1. Melt two sticks of butter in a large fry pan that has a cover. Melt slowly over low heat.
2. Add minced garlic and slowly stir to blend. Do not let butter burn. If it starts to get brown, thin with a little bit of olive oil.
3. Add about a glass-full of wine. Cover for about a minute and let the garlic permeate the sauce.
4. Add the shrimp and cover.
6. Let the shrimp steam in the butter/wine mixture until all the skins are pink. At ARF, this took about 15 minutes.
7. Remove from heat and place shrimp in a deep bowl or dish. Squeeze juice of lemon over the bowl and drizzle a little sauce. (Or serve over ice—at ARF we did both.)

We made two servings this year, but smaller than the BBQ style.

(As of this writing, I have only made this recipe at ARF.)

[BACK](#)

Appendix C: Garlic-Butter Chicken in Chardonnay  
(Insert name – from Lori Williams)

**Ingredients**

Two sticks salted butter  
Olive oil  
1 jar of minced garlic  
Chardonnay wine (just a splash for taste)  
Italian bread crumbs  
Chicken wings (3-4 packages)

**Directions**

1. Melt two sticks of butter in a large fry pan. Melt slowly over low heat.
2. Add minced garlic and slowly stir to blend. Do not let butter burn. If it starts to get brown, thin with a little bit of olive oil or wine.
3. Add about a splash of wine.
4. Add the chicken and slowly stir fry until all the chicken begins to brown. Add more wine if the sauce gets too dry.
6. After the chicken is lightly browned, place in a cooking dish and place in preheated oven at 350 degrees. Turn chicken as it bakes. Remove in about 30 minutes to drain off fat. Continue to bake until meat begins to pull from the bone. At ARF this took another 20 minutes.
7. Turn up the oven to about 450-475 and place chicken back in oven to crisp the skin.
8. With about three-five minutes left, sprinkle with bread crumbs.
9. Serve hot (or cover for later service as we did at ARF)

[BACK](#)

Appendix D: Cajun chicken marinade  
(Insert name)

**Ingredients**

Marinade:

One jar sauce of choice: At ARF, I used Ragin Cajun Fixin's "All Meat Marinade" (see [www.purecajun.com/marinade.htm](http://www.purecajun.com/marinade.htm)).

About two cups of Merlot wine

Extra Cajun spice as desired

Olive oil

Chicken wings (3-4 packages)

Merlot wine (as needed)

Hot sauce (if you dare)

More Cajun spice (

**Directions**

1. About five hours before you will cook the chicken, mix up all the marinade ingredients and cover over chicken. Keep about a ¼ cup of Ragin Cajun for later.
2. Seal in dish with cover or zip-lock bag and place in fridge. Turn every hour or so (this is why I missed Monday's sessions...☹)
2. When ready to cook, place in fry pan with a bit of olive oil. You won't need much since the chicken will be coated with marinade.
3. Add more hot sauce and spice if you want (I do when I make this for me!)
4. Add the chicken and slowly stir fry until all the chicken begins to brown. Add a little wine if the sauce starts to burn.
6. After the chicken is lightly browned, place in a cooking dish and place in preheated oven at 350 degrees. Turn chicken as it bakes. Remove in about 30 minutes to drain off fat. Continue to bake until meat begins to pull from the bone. At ARF this took another 20 minutes.
7. Turn up the oven to about 450-475 and place chicken back in oven to crisp the skin.
8. Drizzle some Ragin Cajun over the chicken so it won't get too dry.
9. Serve hot (or cover for later service as we did at ARF)

[BACK](#)