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Sincerely,
Karen Haag

The Case Against Round Robin Reading

To maximize time students read in school

I observed 3 teachers in one day, all using round-robin reading with reading groups. Struggling students came together in groups of 4-5 with the teacher. Each read a section of the book without practice. It was painful for me to listen. I can't imagine what the students felt.



Despite our best educators preaching on the harm done by round-robin reading, the practice continues. At the post conference, one teacher began, "I know you don't like round-robin reading, but..."

What we do at school should not be about what any leader likes. It SHOULD be about best practices. It's NOT that I don't like round-robin reading; it IS that round-robin reading and its cousin, popcorn reading, are not supported as viable practices for teaching reading.

Consider the quotes in a quick search of the Internet and the books on my shelves.

Check the dates. We've known this fact for a l.o.n.g time.

- Round robin reading is defined as "the outmoded practice of calling on students to read orally one after the other." (Harris and Hodges, *The Literacy Dictionary*, 1995)
- In terms of listening and meaning making, this strategy is a disaster. (Sloan and Lotham, 1981)
- In the face of [round robin reading], it isn't surprising that struggling readers begin to read hesitantly. I describe the word-by-word behavior as 'checking the traffic' response. When struggling readers grow used to a steady stream of rapid, external interruptions, they begin to read with an anticipation of interruptions - word-by-word" (Richard Allington, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*, 2000).
- Clearly, although oral reading can be beneficial, round robin reading is not. It often prohibits rather than fosters the ability to read. (Opitz and Rasinski, *Good-bye Round Robin Reading*, 1998)
- Being forced to read orally, either in front of the class or in reading group seemed to be the practice that had the most negative impact on students' self-esteem and attitude toward reading. (Janet Allen, *It's Never Too Late*, 1995)
- Tangled readers listening to tangled readers is not beneficial. There are no good models for good reading. Rehearsal is a must for readers who will be reading aloud. Kids love round robin reading because they're used to it and they only are on the spot a short period of time. Maximize read aloud time by having all children read aloud or read silently at the same time. (Linda Hoyt, Charlotte Title I Conference, 2001).
- Elaine Garan, a leader in reading research and author of "Smart Answers to Tough Questions" (Scholastic 2007), writes "large federal studies show that round-robin reading is counterproductive, wastes time, and kids find it boring."

Then there's research:

- Authors Michael F. Opitz and Tim Rasinski maintain that when students are called on to read aloud without given a chance to prepare, the practice leads to:
 - Inaccurate view of reading
 - Faulty reading habits
 - Unnecessary subvocalizations
 - Inattentive behaviors
 - Decreased comprehension for all students
 - Losing valuable class time
 - Source of anxiety and embarrassment
- By ditching round robin reading, each student adds more minutes to her goal of reading 50 minutes each day - not all in one sitting, but a total of reading both inside and outside of class. Fifty minutes is the minimum students need to move out of the struggling reader range (Cecil Mercer, Florida State). That fact alone should convince teachers to find ways to boost the number of minutes every student reads in school.
- Eldredge, Reutzell, and Hollingsworth (1996) studied the reading growth of 78 second-grade children, some in classrooms with shared reading and some in classrooms with traditional round robin reading (where children take turns reading orally). They found that *shared reading typically moved average students from the 50th to the 80th percentile in word analysis, i.e., letter-sound correspondences, on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills*. They also found that average student in the shared reading group became 20 percent better in oral reading than the students in the round robin group and *the below average students in the shared reading group became 41 percent better than the students in the round robin group in oral reading*. (Margaret Moustafa, *Research on Effective Reading Instruction, K-4*)

If that is not enough, I conducted my own research.

I asked adults to tell me what they remember about being asked to read in front of the class. They told horror stories that convinced me that every teacher should know other read aloud alternatives. Adults tell of figuring out what page they would be asked to read by counting ahead, reading and rereading their page or paragraph, excusing themselves to go to the bathroom before their turn, and finally, if called on, stumbling through the reading. They talk of nerves, and embarrassment, and hatred of class. They didn't comprehend anything at all, not what they read and certainly not what others had.

Teachers tell me that students like round robin reading and popcorn reading. Students like other get-through-the-book strategies as well, but they must be aware of alternatives.

So, Teachers! Give your readers a gift; stop making them read unrehearsed text aloud in front of one another. To boost the time students read in class, ditch round robin reading. Add other oral reading strategies to your repertoire.

What follows is a list of my favorites. Notice that each reading suggestion pairs 2 students together; they are both actively engaged in reading most of the time. For a full explanation of 25 oral reading strategies and how teachers can use oral reading to improve comprehension for students, read *Good-bye Round Robin: 25 Effective Oral Reading Strategies* by Michael F. Opitz and Timothy V. Rasinski.

Silent Reading – Partners read silently, sitting near one another so that they can ask each other for help when they need it.



Stop and Think Reading or Say Something

Reading – Partners divide the reading into sections. They both read a section silently or aloud and then take turns saying something. Students say what they are thinking to their partner: a prediction, a question, something noticed, a connection to another book or movie... Say or ask something! Students can read this way in groups with a teacher, as well.

Taking Turns – One partner reads a sentence, paragraph or page. The other reads the next sentence, paragraph or page.

Part Reading – One partner reads the characters’ parts in voices. The other partner reads the narrator’s parts.

Whisper Reading – Each student in the group mouths the words of the passages independently if needed. They sit with a partner for support.

Rehearsal Reading – The teacher assigns an individual page or part to each child. Each child in the group (of 4-6) takes time to practice that reading independently – suggested 3 times – while teacher works with other children. The students must try using known strategies first and then ask the teacher. The idea is to come back to group and read the part fluently – even names. When each person reads his/her part, the whole story or article is read aloud expressively and each reader feels successful.

Coding – A text copy is available to each child. Students read paragraph by paragraph coding the text silently. Then, partners share their codes. For example, W = wonder about, I = very important, * = know that, L = learned something new, C = connection. Students begin by coding every sentence. Eventually students code naturally in their heads and mark places to discuss with sticky notes.

Choral Reading – Read together, side by side, the book placed between the partners, reading aloud together.

#1 “Right-now” activity that impacts student achievement

By Robert Marzano

Institute sustained silent reading the right way (consult Stephen Krashan)

- Let students select their own books to read.
- Provide time for students to get in groups to talk about what they read based on what they read – the whale group, the Harry Potter group, etc.
- Wait 2 years to see results.
- Go schoolwide.