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Alternatives to Round Robin Reading

BY JILLIAN GRIFHORST, JENNIFER LESSWAY, & MELANIE ZAMBOROWSKI

Combat reading; it wasn't a term we were familiar with before we began our research. However, it made us think about students reading orally, and unfortunately, we can see how appropriate "combat reading" is when referring to round robin reading. One of the authors of this article, Melanie, witnessed combat reading during a science lesson. At first, students were calmly taking turns calling on one another to read aloud. They were engaged in the class discussion and eagerly raised their hands to read next. However, as the lesson progressed, the classroom climate quickly changed. Students became aggressive and turned the lesson into a hostile game of "Who can I call on that isn't paying attention?" Melanie was quite sad to witness students completely off task and unengaged in the reading. Students had a difficult time with comprehending the reading and understanding the new science concepts because they were more focused on trying to catch someone off guard than they were focused on the actual reading itself. This made the lesson completely unsuccessful. Unfortunately, this scenario is all too common in classrooms across the United States, as round robin reading is still widely used by many teachers.

What is Round Robin Reading?

Through round robin or oral reading students are typically called on by the teacher or they may volunteer to read a text selection for a classroom audience. Students are not usually prepared and often feel performance anxiety (Goering, 2007). These kinds of oral reading activities limit teacher-guided opportunities for guided reading where students could learn reading strategies (Frager, 2010). Round robin reading may also be referred to as "popcorn reading," "combat reading," or "popsicle reading," which are student-initiated turn-taking variants of the same method. Teachers feel these alternatives are more acceptable, even though they may be aware of the research that shows these methods are not effective (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009).

What Are The Problems with Using Round Robin Reading?

In their article, "All Oral Reading practice Is Not Equal or How Can I integrate Fluency into My Classroom," Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2006) frame round robin reading as the outmoded practice of having students read aloud in succession small sections of text (p. 3). According to the authors, the reason this outdated method is now considered unproductive is that it does not foster quality reading behaviors but rather creates an environment that potentially sustains poor reading behaviors. From this perspective, as readers are called upon throughout the course of a lesson, several things are going on. The reading continuum is constantly being interrupted by the changing of readers; this disconnect in reading fluency interferes with

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students' comprehension. In addition, there is little or no meaningful discussion about the text being read, it is very teacher-directed, and students don't take much ownership over their learning through this practice (Socol, 2007). This is evident by the insufficient amount of time that readers are actually engaged in the reading task. Inattentive or off-task behavior can occur in the students who are not currently reading aloud, even though they are expected to be following along; more self-conscious readers may be scanning ahead trying to determine which section of text they will be assigned to read orally and begin practicing. Each of these behaviors takes away from students' ability to formulate a concrete understanding of what is being read (Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2006).

The overall meaning of a text is disregarded as a student's decoding ability is put on display while he or she reads aloud. One of the most common practices while implementing round robin reading is the automatic correction of student miscues during reading. When a reader makes a mistake, either the teacher or another student supplies the correction immediately, leaving no room for the student to apply any kind of fix-up strategy or to monitor his own reading. The problem with this process is the clear message it sends: that reading is not about making meaning; it is being able to say all the words correctly. How this is dealt with in the classroom is critical. As Gill (2002) states, "How teachers respond to readers will affect their understanding of what reading is and their motivation toward reading and may be one of the most important ways in which teachers can scaffold students' development of reading strategies" (p. 119).

Why Is Round Robin Reading Still Used in the Classroom?

Monroe, Gali, Swope, & Perreira (2007) conducted a study that indicated new teachers are more likely to teach as they were taught, rather than using research-based instructional practices that they learned within their teaching courses. Action research was used to examine the practices and beliefs of two pre-service teachers regarding oral reading in the classroom. Both teachers were using round robin reading in their classrooms and reported doing so for various reasons: they had seen their cooperating teachers using it; it was easy to plan; it was a part of the school's scripted reading program;

and/or it was something that they remembered doing themselves when they were in school. The two teachers both realized problems with round robin reading, but they had not yet learned how to implement alternative teaching practices.

Despite research that implicates round robin reading as an ineffective practice, it is still widely used in classrooms. Ash, Kuhn, and Walpole (2009) surveyed 80 teachers and 27 literacy coaches to determine educators' stance on the use of round robin reading in the classroom. Of the teachers surveyed, 59% indicated that they use some form of round robin reading during instruction, and one-third of the literacy coaches revealed that teachers with whom they worked implemented some form of round robin reading in the classroom. Common reasons that were given for the use of round robin reading included (a) covering content, (b) easy assessment, (c) helping struggling readers, and (d) improving overall student literacy development. The teachers who implement round robin reading also reported disadvantages to using this method, which included: (a) off task behavior or inattentiveness while other students are reading, (b) time-consuming, (c) poor readers experience shyness, stress, or embarrassment, and (d) proficient readers get frustrated with the slower readers and volunteer to read often so they can get the task done. The study also showed that 30% of the teachers who admitted to using some form of round robin reading were aware of the research implicating the ineffectiveness of this strategy, yet used it anyway. This fact supports the argument that knowledge about research alone is not enough to change teaching practices. Teachers need to be exposed to, and have support in, applying research knowledge in their classroom through professional development where they are introduced to and trained in alternative instructional approaches that are proven to be effective.

The Role of Oral Reading in the Classroom

The majority of an adult's daily reading is done silently. Silent reading allows the reader to read at his or her own pace, and gives the opportunity to go back and reread if something does not make sense. You might ask yourself, why then is there so much focus and attention spent on teaching oral reading in the classroom? We use oral reading when sharing ideas and information with others. It is

necessary for teachers to hear students read aloud in order to get inside their head and see how they read, including what strategies the child uses, or what roadblocks he/she has. Other reasons for using oral reading in the classroom as stated by Opitz and Rasinski in *Good-bye Round Robin* (2008) include:

1. To encourage students to read and stimulate their appetite for reading.
2. To formally or informally share or act upon information in order to communicate with one another.
3. To help emergent readers by modeling what good reading looks like and linking reading to speaking, writing, and listening in order to see how all the different parts of language arts are connected.
4. To increase listening comprehension skills and develop vocabulary.
5. To support developing other reading skills such as fluency, expression, and attending to punctuation.
6. To assist English language learners.
7. To instill confidence and courage for students to perform in front of others.
8. To improve comprehension by using typographical cues such as punctuation, print size, print type, etc. to indicate deliberate meaning.
9. To show growth and progress in reading with others.
10. To offer time to practice and perfect important reading (e.g. preparing for readers' theater).

With a focus on fluency, round robin reading may seem like an appropriate approach, but there are various instructional approaches other than round robin reading that aim to improve fluency and comprehension that can be used within the classroom. These approaches can include: paired repeated reading, assisted reading, phrase reading, readers' theater, fluency development lesson (FDL), and scaffolded silent reading (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009). The following is a list of alternative activities with brief descriptions of how you can use oral and silent reading in the classroom without resorting to round robin reading.

Fluency Development Lesson (FDL)

The fluency development lesson uses relatively short reading passages that the teacher introduces to students by reading aloud while they follow along silently. These passages may include poems, passages, or book selections. After the teacher reads, both teacher and students discuss the content of the passage, quality of the teacher's reading, and how the readers comprehended the text. Teacher and students then read the passage chorally several times before the teacher divides the students into pairs or trios. In the pairs or trios, the students practice the passage three times while the partner listens and gives support. Individuals or groups will then perform their reading for the class or other audience. Students and teacher work together to select four to five interesting words from the passage to add to each student's word list and/or classroom word wall. Students are then engaged in word study activities for 5 to 10 minutes. Students take a copy of the passage home to continue practicing with various family members. The next day, students read the passage to the teacher or another classmate for fluency and accuracy. The selected words are also read, reread, sorted, and grouped by students or groups of students. The instructional routine of the fluency development lesson will then begin again with a new passage (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009).

Jigsaw

The jigsaw method is a collaborative grouping strategy that depends on students sharing the responsibility of a given reading task. The teacher begins by breaking a large reading selection into smaller sections. Students are then divided into teams of four or five students with each member taking responsibility for learning about one of the smaller sections. Students can read silently or orally, individually or as a group. Students with the same task from every team meet to become experts on their particular reading passage. Then they rejoin their original group to present their findings. Using this method in the classroom benefits students by keeping them actively engaged, holding them accountable and responsible for their learning, and teaching them to work cooperatively with less reliance on the teacher (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009).

Mentor Reading

Mentor reading is a strategy that allows students to read with a mentor such as a teacher, parent, classroom volunteer, older student, or even a peer (Opitz & Rasinski, 2008). The mentor's job is to provide support for the reader as he/she reads a challenging piece of text. Mentor reading allows the opportunity for oral reading to take place in a more comfortable setting where the mentor is the only audience member. Mentors should be encouraged to be patient, understanding, and to encourage the reader as he/she reads. Mentors need to offer only enough support for the reader to be successful. Both the mentor and the reader should be supplied with a short amount of time to discuss what they read together before moving on to a new activity. The goal would be for the mentor to support the reader in applying decoding and comprehension strategies, rather than simply supplying the reader with unknown words.

Oral Recitation Lessons (ORL)

This literacy approach is presented in three phases that last throughout the week. The first phase is the reading/presentation phase, in which the teacher presents the reading material, discussing story elements, and then reads the text aloud to the students. The teacher and students then develop a summary of the story, and the class discusses any new vocabulary words. The second phase is the rehearsal/practice phase, in which the teacher reviews the story with the students, encouraging them to summarize it, and then the teacher models the reading again. Afterward, the students take turns reading the passage aloud, receiving guided instruction from the teacher. If needed, the teacher models the reading again, giving attention to expression and fluency. Each student is assigned a portion to perform the following day and given time to practice. The teacher may provide extra help to students during this time. The third phase is the performance/recitation phase, in which the teacher begins reading the passage until he comes to a portion assigned to a student. At this point, the student performs his portion of the passage by reading orally for the rest of the class. Once finished, the teacher and other students provide feedback on the readers fluency and expression. This process is repeated until all students perform their assigned portions of the reading (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1993).

Paired Repeated Readings

Paired repeated readings are used to help students become more confident readers, develop fluency, and allow students to better understand the text. The teacher begins by pairing students with similar reading abilities who can both benefit from the instruction. Students should then be given relatively short passages at their independent or instructional level. Students read the passages silently and then decide who will read first. The pairs take turns as reader and listener during the practice session. The reader reads the passage to the listener three times, while the listener helps with meaning and pronunciation when needed. After finishing each reading, the pair works together to evaluate and discuss the text using a comprehension checklist. The role of the teacher is to circulate to provide assistance, encouragement, and modeling, and even conduct informal assessments (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009).

Phrase Reading

Phrase reading can be used to help students read in meaningful phrases so that they can better understand the reading, increase comprehension, and improve automaticity and word recognition. The teacher begins by selecting a text at the student's independent level. The student then reads aloud a chunk of text, from a paragraph to a page, in order to audio-record the reading. The teacher models the same reading for the student both word-by-word and in meaningful phrases. The teacher and student work together to mark the text into meaningful phrases while discussing and explaining how they have chosen to divide it. The student then practices reading the text orally while using the meaningful phrases. The last oral reading is recorded to compare it to the first. To conclude, the teacher discusses with the student how the meaning and quality of the reading improved when read in meaningful phrases (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009).

Poetry Club

Poetry club provides a wonderful opportunity for students to use repeated readings to practice reading a piece of poetry before performing it in front of an audience (Opitz & Rasinski, 2008). First, the teacher models how to read poetry aloud. The teacher provides students with various types of poetry resources and allows them the opportunity to explore and select pieces of poetry that interest

them. The teacher provides time for students to practice reading their poem and encourages students to practice reading his/her poem at home by reading to a family member, a pet, or even a stuffed animal. After the student has prepared her poem, she performs it at a class meeting. Students can also share with the class why they selected the poem.

Readers Theater

Another research-based strategy that will engage students in meaningful reading is readers theater. Students will enjoy participating in readers theater and it can also positively influence their fluency, comprehension, and word recognition skills. Because readers theater is flexible to implement, it can be used for a variety of learners with various reading levels, which give all students an opportunity to successfully join in on the classroom literacy experience (Garret & O'Conner, 2010). Because readers theater is done with a text used as a script and students don't have to memorize it, but read from the page, it provides students with an experience that is non-threatening and in a supportive format. This allows for more active involvement. It also focuses on incorporating all pieces of language arts instruction: writing, reading, listening, and speaking (Fredericks, 2011).

In order to participate in readers theater, students develop a personal interest in the literature they are sharing, which Fredericks argues creates other benefits in reading. Some of these benefits include time to creatively interact with classmates, the development of creative and critical thinking because there is no right or wrong way to interpret a story, more students investment during performance, and reader motivation because readers theater is encouraging, stimulating, and fun. The development of reading fluency also occurs through the use of readers theater. During readers theater students are given both opportunities to practice reading fluently and to hear fluent reading (Fredericks, 2011).

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal Teaching is a similar strategy to Jigsaw; students read selected passages silently and then discuss the material they've learned. Students have an opportunity to lead the discussion, focusing on the cognitive/meta-cognitive strategies of predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009).

Scaffolded Silent Reading

The goal of scaffolded silent reading is to set a purpose and set a time period for students to participate in silent reading. It is meant to provide students with structure, guidance, support, monitoring, and accountability so that they can use their reading skills in silent reading. Scaffolded silent reading was created as a better alternative to independent silent reading. Therefore, the teacher's role is to teach and scaffold students in appropriate ways to make the reading selections accessible, and the teacher is also to assign texts at the student's independent reading level. The student's role is to read orally to the teacher, answer any teacher questions about the text, set personal reading goals, and to complete one or more book projects. The teacher monitors student progress through the use of reading conferences and encourages student motivation and reading fluency and comprehension. The classroom library should have a variety of genres and reading levels so both students and teacher are able to locate the appropriate texts easily (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson & Smith, 2008).

Think-Aloud

The Think-Aloud strategy can be performed in both large and small group settings. It is best to first model how to use the Think-Aloud strategy and then gradually release responsibility to students. The teacher chooses a challenging piece of text and reads it aloud to students. As the text becomes difficult for students to comprehend, the teacher will stop reading and talk about the thoughts in his/her head. These thoughts may include what strategies to try using or discussion of a particular word that is unfamiliar to students. As students become familiar with the Think-Aloud method, they participate more in the group discussion. Eventually students will be ready to practice using the Think-Aloud strategy in a smaller group setting or even in paired reading. It is important to remind students that reading is not just about "sounding good," because good readers read to make meaning of text.

Conclusion

Reading programs are only as successful as the quality instruction used within them. Teachers need an in-depth understanding of students as learners and a view of reading as a developmental process in order to be the most effective in teaching students

to read (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009). As practitioners, the authors of this article have applied some of these alternative strategies to round robin reading within our own classrooms. One author, Jennifer, uses scaffolded silent reading in her classroom on a daily basis. She sets a time period for her students to read silently as she supports and monitors students in their oral reading skills. Texts are carefully selected at each student's independent level so that comprehension and fluency are both developed.

Another author, Jillian, implemented the Jigsaw strategy in her science classroom when studying the human body systems. Students were collaboratively grouped and each was given a certain area of focus, such as the organs and their roles within the system, the functions of the system, or problems and diseases that can affect the system. Students enjoy working together and appear to comprehend the material better due to their interactions with the text and each other. When students have opportunities to engage in meaningful reading activities, it is likely that they will be more motivated and take more responsibility for their learning. Teachers need to plan their reading instruction with these incentives in mind and captivate students by their own reading example in order to help readers continue to develop successfully.

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