

4-1-1982

Rx for Round Robin Oral Reading

Jerry L. Johns
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons

 Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Johns, J. L. (1982). Rx for Round Robin Oral Reading. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 22 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol22/iss3/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

Rx FOR ROUND ROBIN ORAL READING

Jerry L. Johns

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, DeKALB

For more years than I care to count, round-robin oral reading has been a part of classroom instruction. When Dolores Durkin (1978) sought to study instruction in comprehension, one of her findings was that round-robin oral reading was common during the reading and social studies lessons. Oral reading was often poor under these circumstances—children stumbled over hard-to-pronounce terms, read in a monotone, and were often difficult to hear (1978,p.32). Round-robin oral reading, for the uninitiated, is a procedure that has students in a reading group taking turns reading orally. This reading may follow silent reading or may be done *al sight*. Although basal readers are usually used as the reading material, I've also seen round-robin reading take place with weekly news magazines and content area books. This situation is deplorable and there is no support in the literature for such a practice.

An Example

Let's assume that a teacher has a reading group of six students who meet for about twenty minutes each day. The bulk of this time is spent having students read orally. During the time that one student is reading, the others are supposed to follow along in their books. Although some students do follow along, others daydream, lose their place, read ahead (especially if it's a good story), correct words the reader miscalls, poke another member of the reading group, or fall off their chairs while trying to balance on two legs. The range of possible behaviors is alarmingly broad. In addition to these difficulties, the teacher is often disrupted several times by one or more students in the class who have questions about their seatwork activities which include workbook pages, ditto sheets, and other "independent" assignments. After visiting over fifty classrooms in recent months, I know that what I've just described takes place in many classrooms.

Why the Practice Persists

Teachers have offered many reasons for round-robin oral reading, the most common one being that it provides an opportunity to check each child's progress in reading. But what is actually being checked, in most instances, is the child's ability to pronounce words. The child merely reads several sentences or paragraphs while the teacher or other students focus on words that are mispronounced, omitted, or added. Typically, no attention is given to the child's understanding of the material. Having students read orally in order to check their progress in reading is a laudatory practice; however, I question the manner in which it is ordinarily accomplished. This tradition dies hard in the schools.

Why the Practice Should Be Changed

There are several important reasons to change this traditional "instructional" method. For the most part, instruction is not taking place during round-robin oral reading. Only one student at a time is actively participating; moreover, participation of this sort is a questionable educational practice. Because many students are put "on the spot," they may become frustrated or upset. Favorable reading attitudes are unlikely to be fostered in such situations. Finally, the activities in the reading group frequently become misdirected as students focus on pronouncing words and/or correcting the reader's miscues regardless of their significance. But what should teachers do? After all, the practice has been in existence for years.

A Simple, Practical Solution

Let's take the same reading group of six students who spend about twenty minutes a day reading orally. Instead of meeting the children as a group, the teacher would have each student read to him/her on a one-to-one basis. Such a practice would enable the teacher to give each student about three minutes of individual attention. During these few minutes the teacher could check their ability to call words, note difficulties, and perhaps ask some comprehension questions. Without taking any more time than was traditionally spend in the reading group, the teacher could deal with each student individually and still accomplish the major purpose of assessing each child's oral reading. Such assessment need not take place on a daily basis. It can be restricted to those time when the teacher has good reason to believe that the assessment of oral reading behavior is warranted.

Worthwhile Activities for the Reading Group

When the teacher eliminates round-robin oral reading from reading group activities, that time can be redirected to more worthwhile pursuits. Meaningful activities preceding the reading of the story include: 1)helping students relate their knowledge to the selection to be read; 2)developing interest in the selection; 3)building the concepts necessary for understanding the selection; 4)introducing new vocabulary; 5)helping students set purposes for reading; 6)developing hypotheses about what might happen in the story; and, 7)guiding silent reading.

After the story has been read, the group should discuss it. Teachers can ask a wide variety of questions that tap stated and implied information. Students should be encouraged to react to the story by evaluating characters and their actions. Meaningful oral reading may include having students read a sentence or two which help support their answers to comprehension questions. Other students can orally interpret the way a character in the story might have said something. During these types of readings, other students should merely listen; there is no need for them to follow along in their books.

Conclusion

Round-robin oral reading, as it is commonly practiced in today's classrooms, is merely a vehicle for assessing accuracy in calling

words. Such a purpose can be better achieved on a one-to-one basis between teacher and student.

The origin of the term "round-robin" oral reading has never, to my knowledge, been clearly documented in the literature. That's fine with me because round-robin oral reading isn't for kids. It's for the birds.

References

Durkin, Dolores. What Classroom Observations Reveal About Reading Comprehension Instruction. Report No. 106, Center for the Study of Reading. University of Illinois, Urbana, Oct., 1978.