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# SUSTAINED SILENT READING (SSR) AS IN LET THEM READ

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Sustained Silent Reading is a concept developed and implemented by Hunt (2) and McCracken (3) that has as a fundamental goal the development of proficient readers. Educators in their conscientious efforts to provide direct reading instruction are over-teaching. Because reading is a skill, practice is necessary in order to develop reading proficiency. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) provides opportunity for the much-needed practice by allowing readers to sustain themselves without interruption in silent reading periods of half an hour or more.

The dialogue in a classroom where SSR is utilized may be as follows:

TEACHER: Students, it is STAR (silent time at reading).

LEE: Can we read any book?

TEACHER: Yes, providing you like it and can read it.

TERRY: I will get a magazine from the pile of books on the table.

LYNN: How long will we read silently today?

TEACHER: I believe we have decided on fifteen minutes. When we get ready to begin, I'll set the timer for 15 minutes.

PAT: Ms. Taylor, what are you going to read today?

TEACHER: I have chosen a book on snakes.

CRIS: Do we have to make a book report?

TEACHER: No. Remember, there will be no reporting of any kind. Does everyone have a book, magazine, or newspaper? Are you ready to take the SRO? (Silent Reader's Oath). Then, everyone stand, raise your right hand and repeat after me:

## SILENT READER'S OATH

*I/state your name/do solemnly promise/to read silently one book, magazine or newspaper/that I have chosen /until the bell rings./I understand that I cannot change books/so I must choose one/I can read./I further promise not to talk/leave my desk/or do anything that will disturb other readers./I understand/that I will not have to/report/draw/write/or answer questions/about my book./I understand that my teacher/will also be reading a book./She cannot be disturbed./Again, I promise to read/until the bell rings.*

TEACHER: Be seated. Remember you have agreed to read silently for 15 minutes. Ready! Begin! (Everyone including teacher begins reading. Some classes invite the principal, secretary and lunchroom personnel to join in. A sign is hung on the door "STAR TIME— DO NOT DISTURB.")

TEACHER: (After 15 minutes the timer rings). Good, you read well. Continue reading if you wish.

After the silent reading habit has been established, with minor changes in procedures, the teacher can be involved with related activities with other children while some are engaged in silent reading. Caution should be taken, however, not to undermine the teacher's primary role of assisting each child to read as much and as long as he can within the designated period of time.

Many teachers conclude the SSR period by reacting to the material that they have read. Following are procedures that may be used effectively:

- (1) Summarizing in one sentence the main idea or theme of the book.
- (2) Reading a paragraph from the book and relating it to current happenings, such as national events or something in school.
- (3) Using a dictionary to check a word in the book and commenting about unusual usage of the word.
- (4) Having the children ask questions about the book and developing models of questioning so that the pupils learn to go beyond simple recall-type questions.
- (5) Collecting a journal of interesting or unusual words, phrases, ideas, etc.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the SSR period, the teacher must ask individual students basic questions like the following: "Did you have a good reading period today? Were you bothered by others or by outside noises? Could you keep your mind on the ideas all the time you were reading?" Questions such as these serve as the essential test for SSR.

Four basic assumptions underlie SSR:

1. *Reading is overtaught and underpracticed.* Much practice is necessary to develop the skills which proficient readers must possess. Mork (4) and others suggest that the ratio should be 80% practice and 20% instruction for efficiency in the application of reading skills.

2. *Contextual reading is more important than skills of recognition at the word-letter level.* It is generally agreed that teachers have been and are now more successful in teaching decoding than in producing readers who make critical responses to ideas in print. A need exists to teach more "meaning emphasis" in reading instruction which probably teaches word recognition as rapidly as does the "code emphasis" approach. If a student cannot pronounce a word, it is generally because the word is unknown in terms of meaning, rather than because of difficulties in decoding.

3. *Silent reading is more important than oral reading.* Many teachers attempt to develop oral fluency first; however, the central thrust should be to develop the power of silent reading, *then* oral reading. Proficiency in silent reading can be developed if teachers provide opportunities to develop this skill.

4. *The learner has a right to read on his own terms in regards to selections, purposes and meaning.* If schools are to develop independent readers who read for information and enjoyment, these students must be taught independence in book selection; they must be guided in their purposes for reading and be given ample opportunities to practice the application of their reading skills. Such independence of purpose and practice can only be

developed if teachers will relinquish some of their control to the learner.

In the Winter-75 issue of *Reading Horizons*, Towner and Evans (5) indicated that SSR may be a powerful technique for reading but the data which support SSR are extremely subjective and leave most questions regarding its assumed effectiveness unanswered. An attempt to evaluate various aspects of SSR was undertaken by Harvey (1). She found that a 60-day in-service program for teachers utilizing SSR concepts did not significantly affect their opinions towards certain factors in reading. This in-service experience did, however, significantly affect teachers' knowledge of certain aspects of reading which relate to the SSR concept. The provision for a daily period of SSR for 30 minutes for two months did not significantly affect the students' expressed attitudes toward reading.

The fundamental goal in reading instruction is to develop life-long readers-learners who are aware of the important contribution the world of literature can make in their lives. For many readers, this goal has not been accomplished. SSR offers opportunities and promise in meeting reading challenges in the future.

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