

Powerful

Teaching

Strategies

Enhancing Vocabulary and Reading Achievement in Struggling Students

1. Modified Round Robin (MRR)
2. Power of Paraphrasing (POP)

Advantages of Modified Round Robin (MRR)

- 1. MRR moderately re-designs** traditionally designed reading material, enabling it to better facilitate **student achievement**.
- 2. MRR increases productive time on task** throughout the reading exercise by preemptively addressing anticipated difficulties.
- 3. MRR provides silent reading** opportunities, which nurture **comprehension** and individual **reading pace**.
- 4. MRR provides oral reading** opportunities, which allow teacher **assessment**.
- 5. MRR provides repeated reading** opportunities, which increase **fluency, comprehension, and retention**.
- 6. MRR provides practice-reading** opportunities, which increase exposure to the **reading process** and make possible a more fluid and confidence-building oral presentation by the student.
- 7. MRR provides pre-reading vocabulary clarification**, which enhances the readers' **comprehension, appreciation, and presentation**.
- 8. MRR reduces or removes student apprehension**, which increases the **pleasure component** of reading, especially for struggling students.
- 9. MRR makes possible the pre-reading** of an entire 7 - 10 page selection in **3 to 5 minutes**.
- 10. MRR provides an opportunity for reading to be a community** experience in which students share with their peers. Also, each student develops the capacity to read at **varying rates**, enabling them to follow their **teacher's model reading technique and speed**.

MRR: The Process

Using this strategy in the classroom is a pleasingly simplistic task. The following steps enumerate the process, so that it can be easily and frequently used by beginning as well as veteran teachers.

- A.** Determine the target selection for your whole-class reading activity.
- B.** Pre-read the selection and evenly divide it into numbered sections roughly equal to the number of students in your largest class.
- C.** Copy a classroom set of the numbered selection.
- D.** Distribute a numbered copy to each student.
- E.** Assign each student a section to silently pre-read.
- F.** Advise the students to look for the connection between their part of the selection and the title of the selection.
- G.** Give students 3-5 minutes to practice read their part at least twice.
- H.** Instruct students to raise their hands if they encounter any words that need clarifying.
- I.** If any student raises a hand, go to the desk and quietly clarify any unfamiliar terms.
- J.** Then, proceed with the newly enabled whole-class *guided reading* activity, assessing for metacognitive and grapho-phonemic fluencies.

The Power of Paraphrasing (POP) Technique

1. POP is a **productive habit of mind** for educators because of the gravity and importance of the educators' typical classroom message.
2. POP broadens the **adjacent** (and high level) **vocabulary base** and the **sphere of awareness** (*Social Fluency*) of students who are products of homes in which a limited range of terms is used. Every routine activity is invariably referred to with a single routine expression. i.e. *A bucket of water* is never called a *pail of water*; *Sewing and stitching* are never specifically called *crocheting and weaving* (*even when they are*); *Mailmen* are never referred to as *postmen*; Soft drinks are *drinks* -- not *sodas*; etc.
3. POP is an authentic and naturally-flowing means of **scaffolding** (vertical and horizontal / adjacent). Every paraphrase fosters a new connection or fortifies an existing one.
4. POP **extends instruction time** to the full period of student / teacher interaction. Students learn before, during, and after all target lessons.
5. POP ensures every important point is automatically **reiterated**, because all important messages bear repeating.
6. POP promotes and models **reflective listening skills**, which enhance the verbal and written communication processes. When students learn to accurately reflect what their teacher says, they will have in fact learned to **quickly interpret** and **process** important information.

[Narrative Illustrating POP's Process & MRR in Tandem]

Some Call Him Pop

The Plight

1 The late bell buzzed. A silver-haired gentleman, with a yellow attendance folder in one hand and slightly worn copies of a favorite student story in the other, strolled in to his classroom. He donned a maroon and gold jersey, the colors of the Fighting Tigers of West End High. His clear eyes twinkled, fixing on the middle of a pasty chalkboard where he'd earlier jotted four repetitious sentences. Like rungs on a short ladder, each sentence queued directly beneath the other. What purpose was served by such sentences? The surprising answer is couched in recent history. Consider an occasion in the life of this gentleman, ten years past:

2 About a decade ago, Mr. Restates learned a mind-molding lesson. It was about the power of repetition and the impact it could have on the lives of his so-called *underachievers*. Most of his students hailed from homes in which plain routine was embraced, for it gave each day both sanity and security. Everybody did the same things the same ways, and called the same things by the same names -- with never an exception. Thus, these students typically learned to call one thing by *only* one name. Things had no other names: a bucket was a bucket -- it was never a pail; aunt was pronounced *ant* -- no exceptions. No one called a postman anything but a mail man; so, mail man was all he was. Going to *just look* was going to *just look* -- it was never *window shopping*.

A Portion of the Plight

3 Knowledge of this circumstance of life was neither cloaked nor veiled. The most casual ghetto guest could have truly attested to it under oath. There was no doubt -- a clear knowledge of it was open and bare. Nonetheless, such was said to be simply a portion of the plight of the *have-nots*! Sadly, ignorance or disavowing of the stunting implications of this fact had kept sealed thousands of informational books from would-be literates, kept locked the doors and windows to thousands of advanced-placement classrooms and laboratories from would-be achievers and researchers, and fanned the flames of prejudicial inferiority until they burned with holocaustic fervor. Indeed, every opportunity freely afforded the *haves* had been ineffectually distanced from the *have-nots*, because this all-too-logical implication had been relegated to the lowly status of *a portion of the plight*.

The Epiphany

4 Albeit, a single instance of daylight makes clearly visible the benighted things obscured by years of darkness. One day, Mr. Restates created two versions of a weekly quiz and two versions of the instructions. He anticipated using one set for make-ups; as absences were chronic among his would-be protégés. He'd purposely made the quizzes equally challenging, carefully designing and weighing each adjacent expression. Shock came in waves as he first watched the random ease with which portions of one set of instructions were understood and the random difficulty that was encountered with the others. A similar occurrence took

place with the actual quizzes. This led him to one of the grandest epiphanies of his career. In a flash of insight, he grasped for the first time why so many of his students had tested *Beg* at the start of that year. Many of them, as far as he could tell, weren't nearly as far below grade level as that test accused them of being. Why then were scores so low? This is what he observed: It was the fated luck of the draw as to whether the grade-level words *they knew* would be the ones used in a given passage. If they were, his students scored well; if they weren't, his students scored *Beg*.

The Fated Solution

5 As he rifled through his junk mail that very night, preoccupied with possible remedies for the scoring quandary, it dawned on him. Benjamin Restates was on every envelope. He smiled and nodded, whispering, "Thank you!" to his Higher Power, determining what he needed to do and how he needed to do it. It was as clear as his baptismal brook. He had to help these students do some traveling. They had to venture to some non-confined households and perhaps even a different village or two. He needed to help them hear varied speech patterns and various sayings. It hadn't been the level of the concepts at all that had hindered their scores; it had been the random choice of the grade level terms!

6 He knew paraphrasing was an effective means of teaching high-level vocabulary. He had driven that car often. It was not a great leap to discern that adjacent levels of vocabulary could be taught that very way as well. He decided

then and there that adjacent scaffolding should be his vehicle of choice. Steering with this solitary intention, the silver-haired gentleman began to develop this technique, lesson by lesson tuning his vital new skill. With constant and deliberate use, this skill to adjacently scaffold increased indeed, becoming a second-nature trait in him. To this day, it remains so.

Today's Account

7 Now, about the queued sentences – as was his custom, he was planning to use them in his after-lunch session to give his students their weekly reminder of the power of shadow writing. And, he knew it would also be a good link to use to introduce the idea that some writers actually repeat things on purpose, especially key things. With the usual lesson header in place, these were the four sentences:

Think and Remember

- a. *There was an inexplicable silence; the muffle was gone.*
- b. *There was an unexplainable silence; the muffle was gone.*
- c. *It numbed us; we were petrified in our stillness.*
- d. *It numbed us; we were frozen in our stillness.*

8 “Good morning, students; top of the morning to ya!” Mr. Restates chimed in his best O’Leary accent.

“Morning, Mr. R,” a few of the younger ones mumbled in staggered unison.

“What’s up, Pop?” joined Aaron, one of the seasoned attendees.

Mr. *R* had won The Most Popular Teacher Award several years before. Since then, he'd been dubbed *Pop* by some of his students who considered multiple nicknames proof of ultra coolness – like Michael a.k.a. Mike a.k.a. M.J. a.k.a. His Airness. This additional handle bothered Mr. *R* not in the least. He knew so well the other reason many of them needed to call him that. The award may even have been an act of familial fate; though, he himself would never have construed it as such. Nonetheless, he was honored by the award and humbled by the solemn obligation that his second handle brought.

9 “What do we have to do today?” moaned Jody, her usual scowling frown of anticipation wrinkling the brow and high-pitched sighs back-grounding her wails. Despite all, however, she took special care to enunciate each word with plaintiff precision. For, that was the only surefire way to avoid Pop's diction speech.

“We're doing something amazing,” Mr. *R* said – “something absolutely phenomenal today. You're going to be thrilled by it! It's going to astound you! It'll be more delicious than thin-crust pizza, more delectable than a banana split with extra walnuts, more scrumptious than an 11 ounce bag of sour cream and onion Doritos!”

10 “Mr. *R*, you're making me hungry, again!” interrupted a youthful but stout young lady nick-named Biscuit.

“Yeah!” added Big Mo; “I feel like it's chow-down time, Pop!”

“So, you're ready to dine – are you?” Mr. *R* asked. His *it's-working- again* smile was growing wider by the second. “If *everybody* learns *everything* in this

morning's session," he proposed, pausing as if he needed to think, "lunch is on me!" His whole class squealed and applauded. Biscuit led in a Pop-Been-jammin cheer that lasted a full minute. That was about as much as Mr. R's modesty could endure.

11 "If you're ready to learn, raise your left hand," Pop instructed. Every left hand was raised. "If you're prepared to enhance your intelligence, raise your right hand," he followed. Every right hand joined its left, pointing high. "If you're eager to grasp very challenging concepts, put both hands down and listen carefully, so very intently that you miss nothing at all." A hush fell instantly over Portable 823. Mr. R started to whisper: "I want each of you to make every tidbit of information, every minute morsel of data yours forever. OK?" As if in communal prayer, every head silently nodded OK.

12 Then, Pop started his class. He scanned his desks for absences; seeing the usual two and suspecting that one of them was a mere tardy, he quickly bubbled then handed out copies of that morning's selection. *A Single Tear* it was called. The kids had already read the adaptation the week before with Mr. R, and were now somewhat eager to tackle the original adult version. Since Pop made them read everything twice anyway, they'd discovered that the second readings were more like real readings for them. They saw stuff in the second readings that was totally invisible in the first, and they'd learned to expect second readings to bring exciting surprises. Besides, they already loved the action in this story, and had

bought in to the idea that better wording and phrasing does make the same story even better. Pop calls it *saying the best things in the best ways*.

13 Since they'd all scored so well on the vocab and other scaffolding exercises, Mr. R had very high hopes for this second reading. He wasn't going to guide them as much this time; he was going to take his place as one of the circuit readers. He would not pause more than once to make sure everybody was in sync.

14 After each student had a copy, he said, "All eyes, ears, and minds front and center; perfect focus on me.... Once I've assigned you a section, I want you to silently read through it at least twice – just as always. You'll have enough time -- about four minutes. That's definitely sufficient time to do a double read." Pop said this so matter-of-factly no one could object. So he continued, "Remember, if you run into any words, any terms you can't figure out, raise your hand and I'll come to your desk and help you decipher them. However, you shouldn't encounter too many that we haven't already learned and made ours."

15 With the last reminders and cautions flagged, Pop gave the pre-reading assignments: Pointing at each occupied desk, he simply counted *section one, two, three, four and five, six, seven, eight-nine and ten...* until each numbered section had a practice reader assigned to it. Purposely, he gave some of his more eager readers more than one section. They fretted about it openly but smiled stealthily, knowing they were being complimented. For, Pop often spoke to them in proverbs, parables, and sayings. Every student understood and could finish his favorite: *To whom much is given....* Thus, being assigned two or three sections was like getting

the last slice of a large pizza. Only the most deserving were ever considered. Then Mr. R said, “Begin your practice reads.”

16 During the readings, a pair of hands went up. Big Mo couldn’t figure out *inexplicable*. Pop, standing near Mo’s desk, just smiled, raised an eyebrow, and pointed at the center of the chalkboard. Big Mo glanced up, shook his head quickly as if shaking loose cobwebs, then whispered, “Aw man, that’s right.” Brenda, alias Biscuit, couldn’t figure out the expression *hypered breaths*. Mr. R just demonstrated for a few quick seconds in her ear and everything rang clear. “Oh,” Biscuit confirmed; “it’s like Lamaze at the clinic. My sister said that’s a trip. It didn’t help her near as much as the nurse said.” Mr. R just gave her a quiet, acknowledging pat, nodded, and walked away so she would quickly re-focus.

17 When the four minutes were spent, the entire eight-page selection had been pre-read. Now, everyone was ready, willing, and enabled to orally read their practiced parts. Pop knew no one had to count the people in front of them to try to figure out what their part would be the way they’d done at the beginning of some previous years. No one would mumble now because of shame or inability. He knew everyone had been primed for success, and they knew it too. Besides, he was really eager to jointly assess everybody’s progress again – not just in fluency but also their general attitudes toward the business of reading. He’d observed that the more fluent they’d become, the less stupid they thought the prospect of reading was. He could clearly recall Jackson’s reaction at the beginning of the term to the prospect of an oral reading class. Inspired by Jackson’s blatant vehemence, this

whole moody crew had in fact howled, moaned, and pitifully bewailed their academic plights, just like his virgin class ten years before. The six-month-old scene played before him like vintage footage.

Yesterday's Account

18 Like a practiced salesman, Pop had been countering and overcoming Jackson's objections. After ten minutes of sparring, all logistical powers failed; thus, Jackson resorted to his old stand-by:

“Reading bites – just like the rest of it! School bites! Teachers bite! (not you, Pop), but every frickin body else here!” Mr. *R* was amazed at the enormity of Jackson's frustration. He knew that if he didn't intervene, canine craters would surely cover all the Earth.

19 With salvation of the home world in mind, Mr. *R* braved the ultimate question: “Dr. J (That was Jackson's b-ball handle.), tell me – what *bites* the most about reading; what's the most insufferable thing about it?” Before Jackson's expected *everything* response could come, Mr. *R* added, “Give me a list; enumerate every biting detail.” Picking up his chalk holder, he stood poised to take this inflamed dictation.

20 Jackson began, “Every time teachers call on people to read, they mess up every little thing...”

“You mess up, too!” dueted Big Mo and Aaron.

“Yeah, who can you talk about?” snapped a chorus of classmates.

“I’m just saying – I, I know I do; that’s why it bites. Nobody in here can probably read, anyway... except Pop!”

21 “What else?” Mr. *R* prompted quickly, tapping the chalkboard beside his Roman numeral II. Experience had taught that verbal challenge is best quickly stifled. Partially faded stains, like crimson ghosts, testifying from the wooden planks reminded him: Idle threats did not live east of 32nd Street.

“Everybody mumbles!” Jackson ranted on; “I know – I do too. But, you can’t hear people and understand what they’re saying; that makes it even more boring. All I want to do is go to sleep. You can just call all these books and papers sleeping pills.”

22 “Taaaake Somonex tonight and sleeeep,” sang one of the young ones who didn’t really know why he hated reading; he just remembered that it put him to sleep too -- every year since third grade.

“Yeah, he *is* right about *that*, Pop;” the rest of the class started to join ranks.

“I don’t know all these big words,” Biscuit added, beginning to enjoin the truth-ringing sentiments of her former rival.

“Me either,” Big Mo echoed with a snarl. “Why can’t they just talk like normal people?”

23 After another fifteen minutes of heated, discordant complaints, Mr. *R* knew something had to be done quickly. His juvenile adoptees for this year were about to declare a violent and destructive impasse. He saw eidetic visions of pages being ripped, chapters being burned, and primly attired librarians being held in the sway

of revolt. So, he hastily cautioned them not to lose heart, swearing to them and crossing his heart that he'd find a solution just for them.

²⁴ His solution, of course, was exactly what he'd learned it had to be. It had been the same thing with nine antecedent groups; the tenth bore no cause for special alarm. With confidence borne on a trail of sweet success, he flashed before them copies of two versions of a nine-year-old quiz; with histrionic flare, he told them a story about junk mail, fate, and the meaning of names; with eager zeal, he declared to them the ramifications of story copies sporting numbered sections. With that, his tenth difference-making year began in earnest. One more group was then set to escape the throes of *a portion of their plight*.