

## **Richard Allington on Three Ineffective Reading Instruction Practices**

(Originally titled “Reading Moves: What Not to Do”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Richard Allington (University of Tennessee) seeks to correct three common classroom errors:

- *Overemphasizing oral reading* – The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is independent (mostly silent) reading with good comprehension, says Allington. Yet many teachers have students doing a lot of oral reading. Silent and oral reading are different processes, he says, and proficiency at one doesn’t have much impact on the other. A 2009 study found that emphasizing oral reading produces students who can read more quickly and accurately but don’t make gains in silent reading comprehension.

In addition, teachers tend to have their best students doing more silent reading while struggling students do more oral reading. Since most people can read much faster to themselves than they can when reading aloud, the result is low-achieving students reading fewer than half as many words a day as good readers. “This deficit in sheer reading volume is exactly the opposite of what lagging readers need,” he observes.

- *Interrupting students as they read* – Allington says many teachers correct students as they read aloud, breaking their momentum and often interfering with comprehension. There are two important differences in the way struggling and proficient readers are interrupted. Teachers tend to cut in on their weaker readers immediately, sometimes before they finish saying a word incorrectly, and they mostly correct surface-level features (“That *e* is a silent *e*. Try again”) rather than addressing meaning. With more-proficient students, teachers tend to wait longer before interrupting, sometimes till the end of the sentence or the page, and these students are encouraged to self-monitor (“Does that make sense to you?”).

This pattern creates two types of readers, says Allington: “good readers who self-regulate, and struggling readers who stop after almost every word and look up at their teacher for a cue. These differences are not inherent in the struggling readers; rather, they’re caused by variations in where teachers direct the students’ attention. Good readers learn to pay attention to making sense; struggling readers learn to focus on letters and sounds while paying almost no attention to making sense of what they read.”

- *Asking low-level questions* – Most of the reading questions in classrooms and textbook manuals are low-level interrogations of literal, trivial details that don’t improve reading comprehension, says Allington. The most-effective teachers ask higher-order questions, have “literate conversations” with their students, and get them writing about what they’ve read. The problem is that many teachers aren’t skilled at doing this.

Allington has the following suggestions:

- Use oral reading selectively. “By the middle of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, most reading should be done silently,” he says.
- After silent reading, monitor comprehension by having students re-tell or write.

- When students are reading aloud, “consciously bite your tongue,” waiting at least until a complete sentence is read.
- When responding to students’ errors, encourage self-monitoring and self-regulation.
- Have students turn, pair, and share after reading and work to develop discussion skills. “Don’t be surprised if many students appear confused or incompetent when you first integrate paired discussions into instruction,” says Allington. “Be patient; nothing worthwhile is easy to accomplish.”
- Explicitly teach discussion skills – for example, prompting students to say, “I disagree, and here’s why.”
- Gradually increase the amount of time students are engaged in literate discussion.

“Reading Moves: What Not to Do” by Richard Allington in *Educational Leadership*, October 2014 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 16-21), <http://bit.ly/1rSaulT>; Allington can be reached at [rallingt@utk.edu](mailto:rallingt@utk.edu)