

Round Robin Reading: Is there justification for its use or are there better alternatives available for oral reading instruction?

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This study was intended to review what the research had to say regarding round robin reading instruction. Round robin reading is rarely referred to among teaching professionals as a good strategy to use in the classroom and, yet, it persists in elementary school classrooms across the country. This study was designed to discover what negative effects there may be related to using round robin reading in the classroom and what alternatives are available for teachers.

The literature was very clear about how ineffective and potentially harmful round robin reading is for students. Round robin reading wastes time, does not help poor readers, and can lower students' self-esteem among other negative effects. Oral reading instruction is important, however, and there are various alternatives suitable for the classroom. These alternatives, most notably, include: the Shared Book Experience, the Oral Recitation Lesson, repeated readings, choral reading, and guided reading. All of these alternatives are regarded as instructionally superior to round robin reading within the literature.

Round robin reading is an ineffectual reading strategy that has continued partly due to tradition. The research out there comparing round robin reading to other instructional strategies is limited and more studies need to be done to eliminate this outdated practice from the classroom.

There is an instructional reading strategy that has been around for decades; we've all seen it and many of us have experienced it. Students in the class surround a teacher. One student reads a passage aloud while everyone else listens and follows along. Some students are acting out, disinterested in the topic at hand, while others are merely staring into space with that blank expression in their eyes. Others sit nervously awaiting their turn frantically scanning the text in preparation for what they might be asked to read. The scene described is called round robin reading, and for decades researchers have questioned its value in classrooms.

This paper is a critical review of the literacy practice. Round Robin Reading (RRR), defined as a form of oral reading instruction where students are called upon to take turns reading a selection of a longer passage is also called 'popcorn reading' and 'barbershop reading'. These terms essentially mean the same thing; students take turns reading a part of a selection aloud (Durkin, 2004; Eldredge, Hollingsworth, & Reutzel, 1996; Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

The goals of this review are several. First, I will review how RRR is viewed within the literature and discover what justifications, if any, may exist for its sustained use within classrooms. I will explore any negative effects RRR has for students as well as alternative methods of oral reading instruction available to teachers. It is my assumption that the literature is wrought with criticism on RRR and that it is not supported as a valued teaching method, which will lead to investigating why it is still popularly used within classrooms. This assumption is based on the negative way RRR was addressed within my reading methods class as well as informal observations made by my student teaching cohort and myself.

Brief Review of Relevant Literature

There is a general agreement among researchers that RRR grew out of the story method, where good literature was modeled orally by the teacher, rehearsed by the students, and then performed (Eldredge et al., 1996; Hoffman, 1987; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). However, as vocabulary control and sight word recognition became more and more important, RRR developed as a means to assess students' word learning (Hoffman, 1987; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). According to teachers there are several advantages in using RRR including: assessing students' reading, classroom management, amount of preparation, providing motivation for poor readers, and tradition (Beach, 1993; Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

Of the reasons that teachers continue to use RRR, one of the most common is tradition. RRR had been integrated into basal reading programs and been a prominent classroom practice since the 1950's regardless of its questionable validity as an instructional practice (Ediger, 2000; Hoffman, 1987). It is most interesting that RRR has survived considering that the research suggests that teachers are not taught this instructional strategy within their reading methods courses (Hoffman, 1987; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Teachers seem to fall into this trap as they were taught trap even though their pre-service training offered better alternatives. Additionally, Opitz and Rasinski (1998) indicate "Most often teachers learned the practice during student teaching and hesitated to give it up for fear of causing problems" (p. 85). Today's teachers are offered other alternatives, yet RRR instruction persists in some form or another.

There are numerous negative effects caused by RRR and arguments against its use. One of the most serious concerns regarding RRR is that it does not provide an accurate view of reading for students. It assigns too much importance that reading be word-perfect instead of recognizing the importance of comprehension (Durkin, 2004; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Faulty reading habits can form instead of effective reading strategies because students read at different rates (Durkin, 2004; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Additionally, since only one student is reading at a time, other students are often inattentive even though they are supposed to be following along, the text, therefore, will have much less meaning for them.

Oral reading is much slower than silent reading and the amount of reading that will occur during RRR is less, both in quantity and meaning (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Perhaps most important, however, is that students do not gain confidence during RRR, instead they are often embarrassed and their self-esteem is lowered. RRR is unrehearsed and can be challenging and frustrating especially because teachers correct students' errors in a public way, usually before the students can attempt to self-correct (Beach, 1993; Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

There are several benefits to oral reading instruction and it should not be eliminated simply because RRR is ineffective. Some goals of oral reading instruction include: allowing teachers a variety of feedback strategies, modeling strategic reading, developing fluency, and increasing vocabulary and meaning construction ability (Beach, 1993; Hoffman, 1987; Samuels, 1979). Opitz and Rasinski (1998) define reading as "language that has a social dimension; oral reading is necessary when we want to share

information with another individual” (p. 3). Additionally, Opitz and Rasinski (1998) give twelve reasons for using oral reading, some of the most salient include: to whet students’ appetites for reading, to share or perform, to develop listening comprehension and vocabulary, to promote language learning for English as Second Language (ESL) students, and to build confidence (p. 5-6). “Clearly oral reading can be beneficial, however, round robin reading is not. It more often prohibits rather than facilitates the ability to read” (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 8).

The reading we do in life is almost always silent, and silent reading should encompass a good amount of time within a reading block in the classroom, but oral reading needs to be addressed as well (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 303). Fortunately, research has been devoted to effective alternatives for oral reading instruction. Shared reading, choral reading, guided reading, repeated reading, and readers’ theater are just some of the instructional strategies available to teachers looking to reap those benefits of oral reading (Eldredge et al., 1996; Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; Samuels, 1979).

Eldredge et al. (1996) compared RRR and the Shared Book Experience (SBE). The SBE is a form of oral reading instruction where a text is read multiple times and assistance is given to students while they read. This assistance takes the form of another person reading with the student or the student listening to a fluent recording while reading (Eldredge et al., 1996). Students given the SBE were found to have outperformed children taught with RRR on all measures of reading growth including vocabulary acquisition, word analysis, word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Eldredge et al., 1996). As Hoffman and Rasinski (2003) state, “This

study suggests that the criticisms aimed at round robin reading by critics do have merit” (p. 512).

There are several other effective and fun oral reading strategies that teachers can choose from including repeated readings, choral reading, and readers’ theater. Repeated readings as investigated by Samuels (1979) and Chomsky (1976) was found to be effective with poor readers as well as students with special learning problems. The method consists of rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached; the procedure is then repeated with a new passage (Samuels, 1979, p. 404). Choral reading can be defined as rehearsed recitation of prose or poetry by a group of voices (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 37). Students learn to read together with expression and fluency without the embarrassment of reading something aloud with no support. Similarly, in readers’ theater two or more people read a piece of writing aloud assuming the roles of the characters (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 36). Readers’ theater is a wonderful way for students to learn to read fluently and practice their oral reading skills in a confidence- building manner.

Procedure for Conducting Study

The procedures for conducting this critical review of the literature include mostly an analysis of reading programs and curriculum, both historical and current. Additionally, I will look at case studies involving RRR instruction as well as both descriptive and inferential statistics proving that other oral reading strategies are superior to RRR.

Contribution to Knowledge and Application of Study to Concepts in Education

This study will contribute to knowledge about curriculum and instruction because it sheds light on the fact that RRR instruction is still in use within classrooms regardless of its nonexistence in reading methods courses for pre-service teachers. It describes some of the justifications and reasons teachers have given for its use. Additionally, it describes the negative effects of RRR on students as well as on students' reading development. More importantly, however, this study describes some alternatives for oral reading instruction practices that are proven effective within the literature. Oral reading instruction is an important part of any literacy program in any school. Therefore, hopefully, an additional study that describes alternatives to traditional RRR might prevent some teachers from resorting to the 'outmoded' method of RRR (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 222).

Limitations of the Study

This study is a critical review of the literature and includes no action research. As such, it has limitations in proving the widespread, continued reliance upon at least some form of round robin reading. It's based solely on a review of the literature and not physical observations of any classrooms.

Teachers' Justifications for using RRR

Although the scholars of reading instruction do not support the use of RRR, it persists within classrooms. Clearly, teachers seem to have their reasons for continuing to use such an “outmoded” practice (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 222). Researchers have not agreed on a single reason or justification for the continuation of such an outdated reading practice instead several are continually cited.

RRR is conducted in a whole class setting or by dividing the classroom into homogenous groups based on ability (Beach, 1993; Ediger, 2000; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Millward, 1977). RRR is not even limited to teaching reading but can also be seen in the content areas most popularly history and science (Armbruster & Wilkinson, 1991; Durkin, 2004; Hill, 1983; Kelly, 1995; Millward, 1977). One reason that RRR still exists is for the convenience it affords teachers. This convenience can be seen in two ways, because of the lack of preparation required to use RRR as an instructional practice and also for classroom management purposes (Ediger, 2000; Hill, 1983; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Millward, 1977; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

A teacher only has to pick up the teacher’s guide to a basal series and gather the children around to begin a reading lesson; this is the only preparation required. RRR can also be used in all content areas even if the teacher does not have a background in that area (Hill, 1983). Teachers also view RRR as a means to ‘make it through’ the textbook or basal, concerning themselves more with content coverage instead of quality instruction (Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991). This struggle to make it through the material while still trying to encourage reading was a justification cited by Shelby Wolf in her yearlong study with one teacher and her class of 17 students (Wolf, 1998). Opitz and Rasinski (1998) also

argue that teachers feel pressured that students read a specific number of stories and they feel that reading orally saves time (p. 85-86).

In RRR instruction, all students are to follow along silently while one student is reading aloud. Whether the students are in a whole class setting or small groups, teachers feel they have greater control over the classroom (Hill, 1983; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Teachers believe that if all students are doing the same thing at the same time they can manage classroom behavior (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 85). Teachers also feel that they have more control because typically a student is called on to read without warning so everyone should be paying attention (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 512).

A very common justification teachers give for using RRR is that it allows them to assess students' oral reading. When students read aloud in front of others, teachers can assess each student while the story is also being read; essentially it is meant to save time (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). The teacher is given an opportunity to analyze oral reading miscues that can provide objectives for future reading lessons (Durkin, 2004; Ediger, 2000; True, 1979). In a study conducted by Kelly (1995), teachers who were interviewed regarding why they use RRR included to evaluate students' reading; yet, there were no observations that the teachers recorded any information as their students read aloud (p. 105).

Teachers also believe that RRR is a strategy to develop fluency as well as a motivation for poor readers to work harder. Many sources regard fluency as an essential component in good reading, however, poor readers in RRR mainly hear other poor readers and rarely have a fluent reading model to follow (Allington, 1983). Teachers truly

believe in some cases that they are helping poor readers. RRR is a public display and, therefore, the way all students read becomes public knowledge. Teachers believe that RRR provides motivation for a poor reader to work harder to improve his or her reading because they will be forced to read publicly (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003).

Furthermore, teachers believe that students ‘love’ to read aloud. The belief exists that students like to show off their skill (Hill, 1983; Millward, 1977). According to *Teaching Reading with Children’s Literature*, “There is one way of reading a core book that guarantees boredom and turns the experience into a chore: round robin reading. In a group of children each child takes a turn reading aloud. This is a practice that no authority recommends” (Cox & Zarrillo, 1993, p. 107). In observing RRR groups, Millward found that 85% of students were concerned with other activities during RRR including: talking, daydreaming, reading ahead, or engaging in disruptive behavior (Millward, 1977, p. 290).

Finally, teachers fall into the RRR trap because of a combination of tradition and not knowing what else to do. It is stated again and again that teachers are not taught to use RRR but instead observe it during student teaching, observe other teachers, and use it working with their own students in basal instruction; sometimes they are simply afraid to break tradition (Hill, 1983; Hoffman, 1987; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998) Methods courses and textbooks for teaching reading do not recommend RRR, in fact, most openly criticize the use of RRR as an instructional strategy (Hill, 1983; Millward, 1977). New teachers learn about RRR as they observe other teachers and feel they would be “rocking the boat” if they broke with tradition and over time they believe that it

doesn't hurt kids even though it wasn't a reading instructional strategy they were taught (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 85).

Kelly (1995) writes, "teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, rather than the way they were taught to teach" (p. 106). Within Kelly's article (1995), she cites information from Searls, basically stating that teachers receive 16 years of education where they learn about teaching (p. 106). Therefore, it is not surprising the best practices modeled in methods courses do not stick because there is just too much to be unlearned (Kelly, 1995, p.106).

Some of the literature suggests that teachers just don't know what else to do, either they do not realize what alternatives are out there or they are afraid to try something else because what they are doing seems to be working (Durkin, 1993; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). There are teachers that believe the students like RRR and it works as well as anything else (Durkin, 2004). The teacher observed in Wolf's study (1998) did not know how to make the connection between children and books daily (p. 389). "She characterized herself as also being stuck in a groove, between what she wanted to accomplish and what she felt were the constraints of having so many struggling readers" (Wolf, 1998, p. 389).

Although teachers have many justifications for using RRR, ultimately, it is supervisors and principals who continue to allow it to occur, thereby continuing the damaging cycle (Millward, 1977).

The Negative Effects Caused by RRR

RRR is frequently criticized among scholars for its ineffectiveness as well as its effects on students and their reading achievement. Research suggests that it has been

attacked as an instructional reading strategy all the way back to the 1920s (Durkin, 2004; Hill, 1983; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Lynch, 1988). Upon reading professional literature titles including “*Round Robin Is Not an Endangered Species*,” “*Round Robin Reading Is for the Birds*,” and “*Oral Reading Instruction: Retiring the Bird in the Round*,” it is clear how the practice is viewed (Beach, 1993; Millward, 1977; True, 1979). “The teaching methodology of RRR may have destructive consequences to both the learning and attitudinal outcomes of instruction” (Hill, 1983, p. 263).

According to a study conducted in 1983, where fifth grade teachers were surveyed about using RRR, 96% of those surveyed use RRR as a major instructional strategy (Hill, 1983, p. 98). Over half of the teachers in the study believed RRR was of great value, believed that students were listening carefully, and used RRR daily (Hill, 1983, p. 98). The fact that this study was conducted over twenty years ago, unfortunately, does not mean that RRR is no longer used in classrooms or that it does not cause negative effects. RRR is still very alive in classrooms today; and, therefore, it is important to discuss the vital reasons it should be retired as an instructional strategy.

One concern regarding RRR is that it provides students with an erroneous view of reading. The primary purpose in RRR is that students accurately name the words and use expression; comprehension is not usually addressed (Durkin, 2004; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Additionally, while oral reading is important, reading aloud a passage you have never seen before in front of others who have the capacity to judge is not what generally happens in real life. We generally prepare something that we will be reading aloud and expect others to listen attentively while we read; all of these conditions are lacking in RRR (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

The importance that RRR places on word perfect reading can be clearly seen when teachers frequently fill in missing words when students stumble in their reading (Kelly, 1995; Wolf, 1998). Students are corrected by others when reading aloud before they are given an opportunity to correct themselves (Allington, 1984). According to Allington (1984), research is still needed to determine the prudence of providing verbal feedback when students make an error while reading aloud (p. 854). The opportunity to self-correct is incredibly important to new readers and struggling readers. All students need to monitor themselves and pay attention to meaning while reading, if meaning breaks down, students need to learn when to self-correct instead of having the correct words or meaning given to them (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

In an ideal RRR environment, every student would be reading along as one student fluently reads a specified passage aloud. Students would be honing both their listening comprehension skills as well as reading comprehension skills. Studies have shown, however, that this is not how RRR works. Additionally, it is suggested within the literature that since listening and reading comprehension are related, students with poor listening comprehension will also have poor reading comprehension (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 8). Poor readers continue to be poor readers with no end in sight.

Poor readers continue to get the short end of the stick as they as they get older. Teachers often ability group for reading and most often RRR is observed in the lower ability reading groups in upper elementary classrooms (Durkin, 2004; Hoffman, 1987; Kelly, 1995). This practice continues to give students who are already struggling a poor model to follow (True, 1979). Teachers' responses to struggling readers reinforce inappropriate reading behaviors and strategies, while responses to those higher reading

groups encourage the development of strategies consistent with proficient readers (Hoffman, 1987). Essentially, RRR is unfair to less capable readers and does not foster oral interpretation, communication, or comprehension (Hoffman, 1981; Kelly, 1995; Millward, 1977).

Another consequence for using RRR in the classroom is that it wastes time. Since only one student reads at one time, the amount of reading that actually occurs during RRR instruction is insignificant (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). Hoffman (1981) states that “The teacher who daily leads groups of students in taking turns at oral reading is not being very efficient in giving students opportunities to read” (p. 306). Oral reading is also much slower than silent reading and there is a considerable amount of time spent on keeping students on track and focused. This time would have been spent better with other more meaningful reading activities, especially silent reading (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 8). It is a very common goal in the literature to give students as much time to read as possible to help develop their reading skills; it is, therefore, astounding that RRR is still practiced (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Taberski, 2000).

RRR is also criticized because it promotes faulty reading habits and subvocalization (Durkin, 2004; Kelly, 1995; Lynch, 1988; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; True, 1979). Everyone is expected to follow along while one student is reading. Silent readers are supposed to receive reinforcement on vocabulary from the oral reader. Therefore, their eyes are supposed to always be on the same word, which is almost impossible (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; True, 1979). Students read at different rates, forcing them to stop and focus on a few words at a time can stunt their growth in proficient reading. It

can also lead them to associate frustration with reading, a desirably avoidable effect (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 7).

The idea that RRR can lead to subvocalization is another unintended consequence. For students to follow along silently while another is reading aloud, the silent followers are encouraged to pronounce mentally the words that they hear (Durkin, 2004, p. 52). This “purposeless subvocalization and the kind of halting, list-like reading of text often heard in round robin reading may obscure rather than elucidate meaning” (Kelly, 1995, p. 102). Opitz and Rasinski (1998) warn that this subvocalization may become internal and cause slower reading rates (p. 7).

One of the justifications given by teachers for their use of RRR is that it helps with classroom management; however, the opposite is often true. According to Durkin’s observations (2004), instead of being a management tool, RRR in classrooms is more often the cause of behavior problems rather than the solution (p. 55). Besides following along as they are told to do, other students are reading ahead or searching the text for what they might be called up to read (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). In her observations of classrooms using RRR, Kelly (1995) was surprised at how few students were actually paying attention (p. 107). Some students are not paying attention to the reading in any format but are instead poking one another, whispering, or engaging in other disruptive behavior (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 7).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, one of the worst consequences of RRR is its effect on children’s self esteem and their attitudes toward reading. Reading aloud to others without an opportunity to rehearse causes anxiety and embarrassment (Beach, 1993; Ediger, 2000; Hill, 1983; Hoffman, 1981; Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Rasinski,

2003; Millward, 1977; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; Wolf, 1998). “Children having problems in reading who are required to orally stumble over a paragraph in front of their peers could easily develop poor self concepts as well as negative attitudes toward reading” (Millward, 1977, p. 289). Struggling readers may even have social adjustment problems if scared or embarrassed while reading orally (Hill, 1983; Hoffman, 1981). Hoffman (1981) argues that it is vitally important that children learning to read feel free to take chances and make mistakes (p. 307).

When a student makes a mistake during RRR, the teacher or another student usually supplies a correction. “Students can find this public display of their lack of competence in reading an ongoing source of embarrassment not easily forgotten” (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). Wolf’s previously mentioned study (1998) clearly demonstrated the students’ lack of self-confidence and their negative attitudes toward reading stemming partly from RRR. The children in her study expected and accepted help from the teacher during RRR; however, they often resented their more capable peers when help was offered. Thirteen children were asked how they felt about reading early in the study, and nine of them responded negatively (Wolf, 1998, p. 398).

A child’s negative attitude toward reading after struggling continually through RRR will oftentimes only get worse. “The continual emphasis of reading can create an environment where once children start to fail they build expectations of future failure” (Wolf, 1998, p. 388).

The Importance of Oral Reading Instruction

While RRR instruction is not beneficial for students, oral reading instruction certainly is. Studies show that certain types of instruction involving oral reading by

students can enhance reading achievement (Eldredge, Hollingsworth, & Reutzel, 1994; Hoffman, 1987; Holdaway, 1979). Several alternatives to RRR exist for oral reading instruction, but first, the benefits for this type of instruction must be addressed.

“Oral reading instruction is a legitimate part of a developmental reading program and can offer benefits of increased fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary” (Beach, 1993, p. 337). Oral reading can be used to develop many reading skills, and even to engage students in reading. Oral reading can be motivational, for example, by reading books aloud, teachers introduce children to the “rich and varied possibilities of language” (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 3). Students can be exposed to so many genres that they might not explore on their own. Additionally, teachers can model a love and desire for reading that can motivate children to continue reading a shared book on their own (Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

Students engaged in oral reading instruction can develop listening comprehension and vocabulary. Research has been done to support the idea that children expand their vocabularies just by listening to stories read aloud (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Expanding listening vocabulary supports reading achievement because it gives readers the sounds and meanings of words that can be read. Identifying a familiar word is easier if the students have heard the word before (Opiz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 4). Ideally, a good oral reading “demonstrates the importance of careful pronunciation and enunciation of words, appropriate volume, and an expression that succeeds in communicating feeling as well as facts” (Durkin, 2004, p. 42). Furthermore, by reading books aloud teachers can also be assured of involving all students in reading (Kelly, 1995). Students could listen to read-along tapes purchased or prepared by the teacher as well. This can promote faster and

more fluent reading since the taped reading will demonstrate correct phrasing, an essential component for comprehension (Durkin, 2004, p. 55).

Oral reading can also be very useful in helping students whose first language is not English learn English. An environment where there is little risk, for example, an environment where RRR does not exist, is essential for helping English as a second language students feel free to attempt to read orally (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 5). Repeated practice provides students with the time and repetition necessary to improve fluency. This repeated practice is easily be found in oral reading instruction routines such as choral reading, where many voices read a single passage aloud.

Oral reading instruction also allows students to perform and view performances. By practicing and sharing a performance, students gain confidence while developing a deeper understanding of the need for reading (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; True, 1979). Oral reading can also be viewed as a means of sharing information and communicating. “Students can begin to understand that writing, reading, and speaking are all related language processes. They also begin to understand that reading and listening are integral in everyday life, both in and out of school” (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 4). Oral reading is necessary to share information with someone else in many circumstances and, therefore, becomes an important skill to possess.

Oral reading for assessment is a valuable for teachers; it is simply the way that they go about it that is important. RRR clearly should not be used as a tool for assessment, but oral reading in controlled conditions such as guided reading in groups or individually can be very useful (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; True, 1979). Having students read orally for diagnostic purposes provides

teachers with a wealth of information. Teachers find out how students will perform in silent reading, about what strategies they use when reading, and can respond to miscues (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Millward, 1977; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Students can also use a taped session of their own reading to help them on their way to becoming good readers. Students can compare if what they hear sounds like language heard in everyday life and can determine what they feel needs improvement, helping to develop invaluable self-monitoring tools (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). This information is essential in helping students to become more proficient readers.

The goal of developing reading fluency can be accomplished through oral reading instruction as well. Even though fluency is rarely addressed as a meaningful goal, research suggests that the development of fluency plays a key role in reading acquisition (Allington, 1983; Allington, 1984; Blum & Koskinen, 1991; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Kuhn, 2004). Fluency can be described as “reading in which words are known so well that readers can give total attention to the meaning of connected text” (Durkin, 2004, p. 42). An important reason for the importance of students becoming fluent is that they do not have to intentionally decode the majority of words they encounter in text; their sight vocabularies have increased and they do not have to employ word attack strategies (Chomsky, 1976; Kuhn, 2004; True, 1979). Fluent readers can recognize words automatically and accurately. Additionally, fluency allows oral reading to sound like spoken language (Kuhn, 2004, p. 338). Once students become fluent and their attention is not focused on decoding text, they are free to focus their attention on comprehension, the ultimate goal in reading.

All of the benefits of oral reading can be attained when the instruction is purposeful, based around helping children make meaning out of print, and engages all students (Beach, 1993, p. 337).

What Studies Have Found Regarding RRR and Comparisons to Other Instructional Strategies

“It is increasingly clear that what children learn from their classroom experiences is a function of what they do during class time” (Cooley, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1981). The notion that RRR instruction is ineffectual and potentially harmful for young readers is not novel. There have been studies done proving that certain alternative instructional strategies are superior as well as studies showing the prominence RRR still holds within elementary classrooms. The findings essentially speak for themselves.

Hill (1983) conducted a study where he surveyed 80 teachers in South Dakota to discover how often RRR is used and why it is used. The teachers solidly supported using RRR, 65% of who believed it was of great value while 96% considered it to be a major instructional strategy (Hill, 1983; Lynch, 1988). RRR was frequently used to teach science and social studies to fifth graders in South Dakota (Hill, 1983). This study emphasizes the widespread acceptance of a strategy that was considered as “pedagogically outdated as the dodo” more than two decades ago (Hill, 1983; Lynch, 1988; Millward, 1977). The idea that this outdated practice has survived well into the twenty-first century is simply met with bewilderment.

More than five years later, Lynch (1988) described an experiment that investigated the reading comprehension performance of fifth grade readers under three conditions: listening, silent reading, and RRR (p. 98). Approximately 80 students

participated in the experiment where they were randomly divided into test groups. The study found that reading comprehension performance declines from listening to silent reading to RRR (Lynch, 1988, p. 101). This study found RRR to be very common in classrooms but ineffective especially compared to a fluent reading of the text (Kelly, 1995; Lynch, 1988).

In 1995, Kelly led pre-service students in an investigation of RRR. Approximately 75 classrooms in southwestern counties including urban, suburban, and rural schools were studied (Kelly, 1995). Surveys were completed by the pre-service students concerning RRR use in the classrooms where they observed. The prominence of RRR use was evident; 68% of the students indicated they observed RRR in their classrooms and RRR was somewhat more prominent in primary classrooms compared to intermediate classrooms (Kelly, 1995, p. 103). Similar reasons were given for the use of RRR as discussed earlier in the chapter including: to involve students, to ensure attention, to develop fluency, to cover the material and to evaluate students' reading (Kelly, 1995). Several alternatives to RRR are cited and they will be discussed in the next section.

Not all researchers consider the value found in oral reading instruction and choose to compare RRR to silent reading. While this information is constructive to demonstrate what can be gained from giving up RRR as an instructional strategy, it fails to compare apples to apples. One such study was conducted by Armbruster and Wilkinson (1991), they were looking to answer if oral reading as done in a RRR format provided better conditions for learning or if silent reading was preferable (p. 154). They found two specific positive effects for silent reading. Namely, students were more attentive during silent reading because of the fewer opportunities for disruptions and off task behavior

(Armbruster & Wilkinson, 1991). Additionally, students were more responsive in discussion following silent reading; they were more eager to participate and they used information from the text when answering questions (Armbruster & Wilkinson, 1991, p. 154). In this study, students were reading silently, with the rest of the group during instruction; it was not sustained silent reading of individual material. Even in the whole group session of silent reading, RRR instruction still did not come across as an effective tool for instruction in comparison.

The next study, conducted by Wolf in 1998, specifically looked at RRR compared to another form of oral reading instruction, classroom theater. This study was conducted in an ethnically diverse, third and fourth grade urban classroom with students who had been labeled remedial readers. Wolf (1998) spent one year in the classroom initially studying the teacher's use of RRR instruction and how the students felt about themselves as readers prior to her guiding the teacher through a shift in instruction. In the observation stage of the study, Wolf (1998) found RRR to be the dominant form of reading instruction. The teacher found it difficult to get through the pertinent material when she had readers on so many levels and found RRR to be a safe instructional strategy. She wanted the students to feel protected in the environment she had set up (Wolf, 1998). It became clear that the students had no love for reading and saw themselves as failures when it came to reading (Wolf, 1998).

After this initial period of observation, the students were introduced to a theater director who was also a drama teacher and they began to work with the stories in their basal books in a new way (Wolf, 1998). The students would act out scripts that had been developed from the basal stories preparing them to put on their own plays in a

culminating experience at the end of the year (Wolf, 1998). In all reading instruction in the classroom, these students began to make the connection that the characters in stories could be roles and they began to read more fluently. They also reread stories helping with their comprehension as well as fluency (Wolf, 1998). Furthermore, the students also became better decoders and they began to rely on their background knowledge. Prior to this theater experience, during RRR the students did not have the opportunity to get inside the text (Wolf, 1998, p. 406). At the end of this study, 14 of 16 children expressed positive feelings about themselves as readers, compared to only 4 children in the beginning of the study (Wolf, 1998). “Most important, the children learned to shift perspectives not only to see themselves as characters or as actors, but to see themselves as readers” (Wolf, 1998, p. 383).

The increased opportunities for practice helped the students in Wolf’s study (1998) to become better readers, they were more accurate and fluent; but, it also gave them better attitudes toward reading. Repeated readings have been found to be an effective instructional strategy, particularly for struggling readers (Chomsky, 1976; Samuels, 1979). Samuels (1979) and Chomsky (1976) have studied the effectiveness of repeated readings and found them to improve both reading comprehension and fluency. Samuels (1979) describes the method to be rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached; the procedure is then repeated with a new passage (p. 404). He found that as reading speed increased, word recognition errors decreased.

Additionally, as the students reread they are better able to comprehend because they do not have to focus so much on decoding unknown words; therefore, more attention

becomes available for comprehension (Samuels, 1979, p. 405). In these studies the students were reading a short passage of something they found interesting, but this method could be used for any type of reading and the passages can be broken down into any size selection, although for these studies the size was usually 50-200 words (Chomsky, 1976; Samuels, 1979). These findings provide a valid instructional option. This method may be particularly valuable because of its success with struggling readers, especially since it is those struggling readers that are most often submitted to RRR instruction in the intermediate elementary years (Chomsky, 1976; Cunningham, 1988; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Samuels, 1979).

There is one oral instructional strategy that has received a lot of attention in the research called the Shared Book Experience (SBE) (Holdaway, 1982). The SBE is an oral reading instructional strategy that involves multiple readings of an assigned text. Oral support or assistance is available for students while they read, usually with the student listening to a fluent recording of the text or another person reading with the student (Beach, 1993; Eldredge et al., 1994; Eldredge et al., 1996; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Holdaway, 1982).

Eldredge et al., (1996) conducted a study comparing the effectiveness of two oral reading practices, RRR and the SBE on second graders' reading growth. The SBE is also called the shared reading approach because it is teacher supported; teachers and students read large versions of books together while the teacher touches the words. As students become familiar with the words they join in and share the reading (Eldredge et al., 1996). Their study was conducted with 78 second graders from two elementary schools in the

Rocky Mountain region. Half of the students were randomly assigned to the RRR group while the other half was assigned to the SBE group (Eldredge et al., 1996).

In the RRR group, students were given the same literature books as the SBE group but were taught in achievement groups in the typical “barbershop” method (Eldredge et al., 1996). Students read for the same 30 minutes that students in the SBE group read. In the SBE group, the teacher first introduced the students to the book using the big book and then read the story dramatically to the students. A discussion would follow and then students would retell the story to another student using the pictures in the big book (Eldredge et al., 1996). There would also be repeated group readings before the students would read a smaller version of the book independently or with a taped version (Eldredge et al., 1996). There were several goals of the SBE including: to increase student participation, to teach characteristics of books and of print, to develop sight vocabulary, to teach useful reading strategies, and to explore all three cue systems in language (Holdaway, 1979).

Students were given pre and post tests that looked at word analysis, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Eldredge et al., 1996). The findings were quite incredible but not surprising. Students in the SBE group outperformed students in the RRR group on all measures of reading growth, most significantly, however, in word analysis and ability to answer both textually implicit questions and those requiring use of background knowledge and experience (Beach, 1993; Eldredge et al., 1996). In the word analysis category, students given the SBE treatment had a 20-percentile difference for average students and a 41-percentile difference for below average students (Eldredge et al., 1996, p. 215). The findings from this study are so important for both researchers and

reading teachers; the SBE is clearly a better oral reading instructional strategy than traditional RRR.

As previously mentioned, the SBE has received a lot of attention by researchers and has not only been compared to RRR but also to another oral instructional strategy called the Oral Recitation Lesson (ORL) (Hoffman, 1987). Similar to the SBE, in the ORL the teacher reads the assigned passage followed by a summary with the students and a story map is created. Students then read and reread a section of the story with the teacher. Where the ORL differs from the SBE is that students then select, practice, and perform an oral reading of a segment of the story (Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). Eldredge et al., (1994) compared the SBE and ORL on ten characteristics of effective oral reading instruction. This study was conducted in the same Rocky Mountain region also with approximately 80 second-grade students as the study comparing the SBE to RRR (Eldredge et al., 1994; Eldredge et al., 1996). Four classroom teachers participated in the study, two taught using the SBE for 30 minutes every day and two taught using the ORL for 30 minutes each day. Students in this study were also given pre and post tests to determine which method was more effective (Eldredge et al., 1994).

The findings of this study are very valuable for teachers looking to include one of these oral instruction strategies to replace RRR in their classrooms. There were no significant differences between the SBE and the ORL on comprehension. The only exception was that students given the SBE had a slightly greater ability to respond to text/script implicit questions (Eldredge et al., 1994, p. 54). Additionally, the SBE seemed to be a better overall instructional routine for instructing larger groups. Vocabulary and fluency measures were comparable for both treatments (Eldredge et al., 1994). Finally,

below average students in the ORL group made more reading errors that did not affect meaning than the SBE below average students. Overall, the SBE approach seemed to produce better results for these second-grade students (Eldredge et al., 1994). However, the ORL does provide a valuable alternative compared to RRR for teachers who cannot implement the SBE for some reason.

Other Alternatives to RRR

To be succinct, RRR instruction is simply ineffectual and harmful to students; that has been quite clearly shown throughout this chapter. Oral reading instruction is important, however, and teachers need alternative methods to replace RRR. In addition to those methods mentioned in the previous studies including repeated readings, the SBE, and the ORL, there are various other methods that teachers can adopt in their classrooms. One important concept to keep in mind is “the way teachers adapt or adopt new practices in their classrooms relates to whether their beliefs match the assumptions inherent in the new programs or methods” (Anders, Lloyd, Richardson, & Tidwell, 1991, p. 560). When asking teachers to cease using RRR, it is not simply asking them for a change in behavior, but asking them to adopt a new perspective, one that they must believe in (Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991).

One instructional strategy that teachers could use as part of their reading programs is choral reading. Choral reading can be defined as the rehearsed recitation of prose or poetry by a group of voices (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 37). Choral reading can be incorporated into oral reading instruction because it promotes fluency and is also non-threatening to students. Many voices contribute in choral reading and that fact protects students who might make errors and feel self-conscious if they were reading alone. In

choral reading all students have the opportunity to grow and it lends itself to performance for groups (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 36). Material that is very suitable for choral reading often has a repetition of words that ensures time well spent on word practice (Durkin, 2004). Children can choose favorite poems or sections of books to read chorally and it often makes reading enjoyable for them. Choral reading is also very easy for a teacher to implement in the classroom that requires little preparation.

There are some strategies that can be categorized under assisted reading that are also useful for oral reading instruction. Assisted reading is defined by Hoffman and Rasinski (2003) as “oral reading of a text while simultaneously listening to a fluent rendering of the same text by a reading partner, by a group reading chorally, or from a recording” (p. 514). One version of assisted reading is paired reading (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 2003).

Paired reading is most beneficial with struggling readers because it is a one-to-one situation where a struggling reader is paired with a better reader perhaps the teacher, an older child, or proficient peer (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). The pair is positioned side by side and they read the same text. They may read together, or the struggling reader may read alone until he or she encounters difficulty (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Paired reading has been found to be very successful. Topping (1987) found that students make remarkable progress sometimes three to five times the progress they would normally be expected to make regarding accuracy and comprehension when reading with their parents.

This type of paired reading is similar to what is seen in the Buddy Reading Program discussed by Friedland and Truesdell (2004). In this program, primary and

intermediate students select and read orally together for pleasure. The goal was to encourage a love for reading as well as giving struggling readers opportunities to read to develop their self-confidence (Friedland & Truesdell, 2004). This program can be set up within schools and within school districts, essentially anywhere that readers could partner. Each partner will read aloud their selected book and there should be discussion time with teachers afterward. Some benefits of the program discussed by teachers included: one-on-one attention, interacting with students of different ages, increased confidence, increased motivation to read, and the quality literature that surrounds students (Friedland & Truesdell, 2004). “Book buddy reading can foster relationships between students of different ages and is fairly easy to put into practice in most elementary schools” (Friedland & Truesdell, 2004, p. 78).

Repeated readings and assisted reading can also be combined in the form of students rereading a text multiple times while listening to a fluent reading of the same passage (Durkin, 2004; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). This activity may promote faster and more fluent reading while decreasing oral reading errors (Durkin, 2004, p. 55). Students could listen to the taped version prior to rereading in order to scaffold their reading or they could also record themselves reading and compare it to the fluent reading (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). This comparison would allow students to hear the differences and give teachers the opportunity to teach exactly what strategies the student might need to further his or her reading growth (Durkin, 2004). According to Chomsky (1976) and Hoffman and Rasinski (2003), this strategy of listening to a fluent oral reading of the same passage improves students’ overall reading

achievement enabling students to increase their comprehension, overall fluency, and word identification abilities.

Another very effective oral reading instructional strategy is readers' theater. In readers' theater two or more students read aloud a story, poem, or passage that has been scripted with several different parts, usually assuming the roles of the characters (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003; Kelly, 1995). In readers' theater, only the voices convey the meaning, the parts are not memorized or acted out. Students, however, still require time to rehearse, and this provides them with the opportunity for multiple readings helping them to develop fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 36). Students perform with their scripts but they read with expression and meaningful voices (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 516). Readers' theater has been found to be very effective including one study that found students participating in readers' theater outperforming control classrooms on measures of reading rate and overall reading achievement (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 516). Students also seem to enjoy readers' theater motivating them to read and boosting their self-confidence (Kelly, 1995, p. 113).

Another oral reading strategy that can be used to develop fluency is called the Fluency Development Lesson (FDL); it was developed to supplement a traditional basal reading program (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). In approximately a 15- minute lesson, students will read and reread a short passage such as a poem because they are meant to be read orally. The teacher reads the poem followed by a discussion and then the students read chorally several times (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 515). Students practice in pairs with a partner, perform for the class, and then read the text at home (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 515). Its implementation has been found to have positive effects for

reading rate, offering yet another way for teachers to help students develop fluency (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 515).

Person (1990) suggests an activity that is useful for oral reading within elementary classrooms and is easy for the teacher to implement. This strategy can be seen as a game or exercise called “Say It Right”. The students are divided into groups and given sentence and expression strips that they keep face down in separate piles. Students choose sentences to read to themselves silently and then orally, the student would then read the sentence with the expression indicated on a second slip (Person, 1990, p. 429). Students can read with different expressions and a game can be made of it for a specified amount of time. This is an activity that can be used to help students read with expression and fluency; there is also the added benefit of working with a group that can help decode unfamiliar words (Person, 1990, p. 429).

A final reading strategy that teachers can use in the classroom is guided reading. Guided reading is meant to be incorporated into a larger reading workshop, which might also include independent reading and literature study. Guided reading is a form of small group instruction in which children read multiple copies of the same text with the teacher (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Taberski, 2000). The group should be homogenous: the students read at similar levels, demonstrate similar reading behaviors, and share similar instructional needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 17). These small groups are essentially temporary; they should change as students’ needs change. “Guided reading is a way to help children understand how reading works and learn techniques to figure out words and comprehend texts that are just a little too challenging for them to read without support” (Taberski, 2000, p. 96).

A typical guided reading group session might include an introduction to the text and a demonstration of the target strategy that the group needs practice with. The students would then read the text and practice the strategy, at the end of a session the students are reminded to practice the strategy when they read independently (Taberski, 2000, p. 108). A key element of guided reading is that all students in the group will be reading aloud in low voices while the teacher listens to each student and provides assistance as needed. The students might start at the same time or be staggered but regardless of how they start since they all read at different rates the students will be at different places very quickly. Rather than being a disturbance, hearing each other read aloud supports them and helps the less confident readers to get started (Taberski, 2000, p. 112). This method is very different from RRR instruction but it still accomplishes those goals of oral reading instruction.

“Guided reading procedures rely on the context of oral reading practice for teachers to offer explicit instruction on strategy use” (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003, p. 518). The oral reading gives teachers the chance to model, assess, and respond to effective strategies (Hoffman & Rasinski, 2003). Aside from the oral reading portion there is another important element to guided reading and that is that the books must be worth reading (Taberski, 2000, p. 103). The books chosen for guided reading need to be quality literature that will keep students engaged and hopefully instill a love for reading. According to a study done by Butterfield and Eldredge (1986), the use of children’s literature to teach children to read had a positive effect on students’ achievement and attitudes toward reading, much greater than the traditional methods used (p. 35). The traditional methods in the study included basal stories from the basal reading program

that the Utah school districts had in place (Butterfield & Eldredge, 1986). There are many sources out there for teachers to find good children's literature including a monthly column entitled "Children's Books" in *The Reading Teacher*. Additionally, there is a source called "Children's Choices" published by the International Reading Association annually (Kelly, 1995, p. 108).

Clearly, teachers want students to become better readers in such areas as comprehension, fluency, accuracy, and word recognition. All of the alternatives reviewed in this chapter are tools that teachers can use to supplement their teaching techniques and certainly to replace RRR instruction, where it is still in use.

Chapter Three: Conclusion

According to an investigation by *The First R*, after more than 2,000 observations of reading instruction in elementary schools across America, it was concluded, “that present-day reading programs were mediocre at best and not currently designed to produce a future society of *mature* readers” (Robinson, 1964, p. 44). Four decades have come and gone and, unfortunately, the existence of RRR instruction in classrooms has not changed this prediction significantly. To be sure, there are teachers out there implementing other alternatives to RRR that meet the needs of their students; but, for those teachers who still rely on RRR, not only are students’ needs not being met, but the teachers may be doing more harm than good.

To summarize the results of this literature review, RRR instruction should be obsolete in elementary school classrooms throughout the country. This is not new information; RRR instruction has been criticized for decades. The teachers who have the power to eliminate RRR from their repertoire of teaching techniques, however, have not heeded this criticism. The most disturbing finding from reviewing the literature is that RRR can actually cause negative effects and reading behaviors in students. It is assumed that most teachers do not get into the field of teaching with the intention to harm students. Therefore, it is vitally important that this information concerning RRR instruction be disseminated.

Teachers use RRR for an assortment of reasons including its convenience. RRR does not require much preparation by the teacher nor does it involve managing several reading groups at one time. RRR is also used as an assessment technique to hear how well students read aloud and to analyze any miscues. There is also a mistaken belief that

children love to read aloud and that teachers should take advantage of a strategy that they find useful and that the students enjoy. Furthermore, teachers use RRR because it is tradition; they remember it when they were in school and see it used in student teaching. A final justification given for RRR is that teachers may not know what else to do. This reasoning is certainly addressed within this paper considering the many viable alternatives offered.

The negative effects caused by RRR were quite clearly laid out in this paper but there are also explicit reasons given why oral reading instruction is a necessary part of any reading program. Amid other unwanted effects, RRR wastes valuable class time, does not attend to poor readers' needs, promotes faulty reading habits, and, perhaps most importantly, can be extremely damaging to students' self-esteem. Students can begin to see themselves as failures because of the public display of their lack of ability in reading. This is quite obviously an outcome to be avoided at all costs. There are, however, effective strategies for oral reading instruction. Oral reading instruction can help develop listening and comprehension instruction and can engage students in the joy of reading. Oral reading instruction helps students to develop fluency and can be used to assess students' reading abilities when done in a manner other than RRR.

There were many alternative strategies offered in this paper that give teachers options for use in their classrooms. Teachers can choose to implement such alternatives as choral reading, repeated readings, guided reading, paired reading, the SBE, or the ORL. Whatever reading instruction program they choose to adopt, the key is balance. The best reading programs will include oral reading, silent reading, and direct instruction that flow together; they should not all be taught in isolation. This balanced approach is

actively encouraged by Duke and Pearson (2002), “Exemplary teachers and schools implement a comprehensive reading curriculum in which decoding and meaning are taught in synergistic ways” (p. 252).

Although RRR instruction is widely discredited among researchers, there are few studies comparing RRR to other forms of reading instruction to show what methods are superior. The studies conducted by Wolf (1998) and Eldredge et al. (1994) and (1996) contributed a great deal to the literature base surrounding RRR instruction. All found other methods of oral reading instruction to be superior to RRR. More research needs to be done assessing the prominent role RRR plays in elementary reading classes. Furthermore, additional studies discrediting RRR in favor of other reading instruction strategies are desperately required to rid classrooms of RRR entirely.

According to Wolf (1998), “While criticism is appropriate, what can’t be forgotten is that teachers today are often the victims of past research. While research is rapidly highlighting new discoveries, teachers are left with the artifacts of less current understandings” (p. 387). The idea that the research is simply not reaching teachers is disheartening and implies that professional research and literature need to be more widely available and easily accessible to those who need it most. There are no suggestions within this paper for how to accomplish this goal but that does not make it any less worthy of attention. The job of a teacher is one of the most rewarding and one of the most challenging. Teachers are entrusted with shaping children’s lives each day and they need all of the tools they can get, that certainly includes the most up-to-date information about best practice when it comes to teaching reading.

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