

## ORAL READING PRACTICES REPORTED BY CLASSROOM TEACHERS OF GRADES 1-6

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A survey of current reading methods textbooks reveals continuing concern over the appropriate use of oral reading. Particularly is criticism leveled at the practice called "round robin reading" described as "going around the circle with each student taking his turn reading aloud" (Gilliland, 1978, p. 153). A number of negative effects from this practice have been detailed (Burns & Roe, 1976; Olson & Dillner, 1976; Gilliland, 1978; Heilman, Blair & Rupley, 1981; Stoodt, 1981; Dallman, et al., 1982).

Reading methods textbooks invariably suggest that oral reading in a group be preceded by silent reading (Smith & Robinson, Aukerman & Aukerman, 1981; Stoodt, 1981). Suggestions are also made for other procedures during students' oral reading. May (1982) notes the following trend in basal reading series: "No longer are teachers encouraged to stop a child every time he makes a reading error" (p. 295). Smith and Robinson suggest that "Unless meaning is distorted by pronunciations or substitutions that deviate from the expected response, pupils should not be corrected" (p. 354). Heilman, Blair, and Rupley (1981) contend that "Instruction during the oral reading itself will usually destroy the value of the oral reading" (p. 471). Current theory has undoubtedly been influenced by Goodman's (1976) research viewing reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game." As such, teachers do not correct oral reading miscues which do not affect meaning.

Directions for administering oral informal reading inventories and analyzing the results are a part of survey and diagnostic/remediation texts in reading. Many basal series now also include such oral reading inventories with their series for individual testing. Assessment of oral reading in group settings is also suggested: "Even though a choral reading or the reading of a book report or poem is not planned as a diagnostic testing session, knowledgeable teachers use these opportunities to study their students" (Robin, 1982, p. 110).

Research has highlighted some dichotomy among different groups' views on oral reading practices. Taylor, Pickert, and Chase (1980) compared the views on language and reading of university faculty, teachers, and parents. Most of the parents (89%) surveyed thought teachers should correct mistakes in oral reading. Only 20% of university faculty agreed while 62% of the thirty-four primary teachers surveyed agreed that mistakes should be corrected.

Research indicates that teachers do frequently correct oral reading miscues (Weinstein, 1976; Allington, 1980). Immediate correction of students' miscues was found to have negative effects on their accuracy and self-corrections (McNaughton & Glynn, 1981; McNaughton, 1981).

Spiegel and Rogers (1980) observed the responses of sixteen second-grade teachers to students' oral reading miscues. They found that the teachers told the child the word miscued in 50.2% of the 181 responses coded. A cue related to the visual characteristics of the word was given in 29.7% of the responses. Meaning cues were given only 5% of the time.

The present study was designed to further explore teacher's practices, through a questionnaire, related to oral reading. How these reported practices reflect current reading theory and teachers' perceptions of the reading process need to be investigated.

### Method and Procedure:

A two-page questionnaire on oral reading practices was developed and field-tested with graduate students in the summer, 1982. The questionnaire contained general categories of

frequency, assessment, purposes, and procedures. Some items allowed more than one choice and some to rank order choices.

Questionnaires were distributed during Fall, 1982, to schools in north Alabama whose administrators agreed to allow their teachers to participate in the study. Twenty-seven schools participated in the study, seventeen of which were in city school systems and ten of which were in county school systems.

The voluntary questionnaire was completed by 325 teachers, although not every item was responded to by each of these teachers. Of the respondents, 170 taught in grades one through three and 155 taught in grades four through six. Results were analyzed by primary and intermediate grades because of the assumption that differential teaching procedures might be employed at the primary and intermediate levels.

### Results

Regarding frequency of oral reading, 56.7% of the primary level teachers reported daily group oral reading in their classrooms. Other percentages were: three days, 18%; two days, 12%; four days, 11%. At the intermediate level, 42% of the teachers reported daily oral reading, 24% reported reading four times weekly; 18% three times weekly and 12% four times a week. The following percentages, in descending order, were reported for each child reading to a group during the week: Primary Level - five times, 34%; three times, 25%; two times, 14%; four times, 13%; 1 time, 12%. Intermediate level three times, 27.2%; 5 times, 13.9%; 4 times, 8%. The item requesting the number of times a student read alone to the teacher was the item most often omitted by teachers. Only 117 teachers at the primary level and 114 at the intermediate level responded. At the primary level 53.8% of the teachers responded in a range of one to ten with two times (12.8%) being the most frequent response. Of the intermediate teachers, 54% gave a response in the range of one to ten; however, the most frequently reported response, 33%, for this group was zero.

The most frequent response for "typical assessment" during group oral reading was "Mental notes are made of the individual reader's difficulties" (Primary, 141; Intermediate, 126). The other responses and their respective numbers, by primary and intermediate teachers were: written notes of the individual reader's difficulties (92, 68), mental notes of the groups reading difficulties (84, 71), and written notes of the group's reading difficulties (56, 38).

The same three purposes for oral reading were most frequently selected by primary and intermediate teachers; these choices and respective numbers were: 1) to check word attack skills, (165, 117), 2) to check pronunciation of vocabulary words (151, 108) and 3) to confirm answers to comprehension questions (131, 125). These purposes also had the greatest frequency of first, second, or third choices of the eight.

Teachers were asked to rank their responses from sixteen choices when students made oral reading errors. Telling the student to "sound it out" was the procedure given most often as a first choice and as either a first, second, or third choice by both groups. This procedure was most frequent in choice by primary teachers (147) and second most frequently chosen by intermediate teachers (97). The kind of cue becomes more pervasive when including the procedure "Tell the student to use other word attack skills such as \_\_\_\_\_" is included, the third most frequent response (73) for primary teachers and marked thirty-nine times, seventh in frequency, by intermediate teachers. Few teachers described these word attack skills, but syllabication, rhymes, short vowels, root words, and context were mentioned.

Telling the student the word was the procedure marked most often (106) by intermediate teachers with this being the second most frequent response (100) for primary teachers. Third in frequency for intermediate teachers was "Draw attention to the meaning of the word" (53), similar to their fourth choice "Tell

them to look it up in the glossary or dictionary" (50). These were selected only slightly less frequently than "Tell the student to read to the end of the sentence and then attempt," (49), which was ranked sixth for primary teachers (69). Fourth and fifth ranked responses for the primary level related to picture clues (72) and the word in another context (70).

"Ignore the mispronunciation" was the procedure selected least often by both primary (4) and intermediate teachers (8). There was a slightly higher frequency for "Ignore the mispronunciation if it does not affect meaning" (Primary, 34; Intermediate, 27) as compared to "Ignore the mispronunciation if it is close to the actual pronunciation" (17 and 22).

"Silent reading usually precedes oral reading" was the procedure selected most often by primary (70) and intermediate teachers (79). The other procedures ranked respectively were: "Silent reading always precedes oral reading," (59, 46), "Silent reading sometimes precedes oral reading," (45, 29), "Silent reading rarely precedes oral reading," (6, 11) and reading never precedes oral reading." (3, 2).

Both groups of teachers reported "Assuring each student has an opportunity to read" as a predominant choice (Primary 133, Intermediate, 113). "Randomly calling on students" was second ranked (101, 105). Other procedures were "Asking for volunteers" (31, 42) and "Taking turns around a circle or down a row" (48, 30). Both groups also agreed that no differentiation was made in oral reading for the high, average and low groups, and that no differentiation was made among the best, average, and poorest readers in a group.

### Discussion and Conclusions:

According to these teachers, oral reading is a definite part of their on-going reading program, although to a greater extent in the primary grades. However, individual assessment is considerably less frequent, particularly in the intermediate grades. Many of these teachers reported no one-to-one reading. Overall findings suggest that individual assessment techniques such as the informal reading inventory are not frequently used in the classroom. It is possible that teachers do use these techniques with *selected* children since the response item stated "Each child reads to the teacher alone \_\_\_\_\_ times during the school year." An item requesting the number of times a teacher uses an individual oral reading technique may have yielded different results. Both groups' reliance on mental notes for assessment further suggests that classroom oral reading may not be an effective technique for determining specific individual strengths and weaknesses in reading.

Teachers' main procedures of "sounding" or "telling" for mispronunciations appear consonant with their frequently selected purposes of checking word attack skills and pronunciation of vocabulary words. Use of meaning was not a predominant cue, except for intermediate teachers' focus on the meaning of the individual word. That simply telling the word was not because of a concern with fluency in oral reading is suggested by these teachers' unwillingness to ignore mispronunciations. This practice is at variance with procedures suggested by psycholinguistic theory and those found in many reading methods texts. Teachers' reported practices of silent reading usually preceding oral reading does show general agreement with current theory and practice suggested in these texts.

Teachers' responses relative to differential treatment of oral reading for groups and individuals suggests an emphasis on equality of treatment. This emphasis may not, however, be in the best interests of students. Further investigation of teachers' rationale for such practices appears warranted.

This study was limited to a specific geographical area and was further limited by reliance on a self-report technique. Further investigations with other groups should help to determine what the practitioners of reading instruction actually do. Classroom observations may be more insightful. Furthermore,

more investigation should be conducted to determine what classroom oral reading practices are of most benefit in the development of students' reading skills.

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