

If they don't read much... 30 years later.

Richard L. Allington
University of Tennessee

Thirty years ago (1977) I had a paper, "If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good?", published in the *Journal of Reading*. That paper has become the most frequently cited paper I've ever written. The paper appeared during the last heyday of skills instruction and the last time that research was going to solve the problem of many readers struggling to learn to read. It followed upon the heels of another paper that challenged the prevailing view that learning to read primarily involved the sequential mastery of hierarchical set of subskills (Johnson & Pearson, 1975).

Given the return to an emphasis on mastery of reading sub-skills in the design of federally-funded reading interventions, it seems time to revisit the questions raised in my original paper.

That paper simply reported on some not very rigorous observations of reading instruction in elementary schools (However, later, more rigorous studies verified the original findings: Allington, 1980; 1983, 1984; Hiebert, 1983, Thurlow, et al, 1984; Vaughn, et al, 1998). I noted that struggling readers read very little during either classroom or remedial reading lessons. My question was a simple one: Should reading lessons for struggling readers include greater opportunities to actually engage in reading connected text.

In this paper I revisit the original question and note that the question may be more complicated in that the nature of the reading activity (teacher-directed vs. student directed) seems to play an important role in determining the relative progress made by good and poor readers. Additionally, the role of motivated and deliberate reading activity (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004) needs to be better delineated in accounting for the effects of reading practice.

Bibliography.

Allington, R. L. (1977). If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good? *Journal of Reading*, 21, 57-61.

- Allington, R. L. (1980). Poor readers don't get to read much in reading groups. *Language Arts*, 57(8), 872-877.
- Allington, R. L. (1983). The reading instruction provided readers of differing abilities. *Elementary School Journal*, 83, 548-559.
- Allington, R. L. (1984). Content coverage and contextual reading in reading groups. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 16(1), 85-96.
- Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P., & Fielding, L. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 285-303.
- Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., Fishman, B. J., Schatschneider, C., & Underwood, P. (2007). Algorithm-guided individualized reading instruction. *Science*, 315(January), 464-465.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Katch, E. L. (2004). Beyond the reading wars: The effect of classroom instruction by child interactions on early reading. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8, 305-336.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Petrella, J. N. (2004). Effective reading comprehension instruction: Examining child x instruction interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(4), 682-698.
- Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (1998). The impact of print exposure on word recognition. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning literacy* (pp. 235-262). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Guthrie, J. T. (2004). Teaching for literacy engagement. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 36(1), 1-28.
- Guthrie, J. T., & Humenick, N. M. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase motivation and achievement. In P. McCardle & V. Chhabra (Eds.), *The voice of evidence in reading research*. (pp. 329-354). Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.
- Hiebert, E. H. (1983). An examination of ability grouping for reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 18, 231-255.

- Jenkins, J. R., Peyton, J. A., Sanders, E. A., & Vadasy, P. F. (2004). Effects of reading decodable texts in supplemental first-grade tutoring. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8(1), 53-85.
- Johnson, D. D., & Pearson, P. D. (1975). Skills management systems: A critique. *Reading Teacher*, 28(8), 757-764.
- Kim, J. (2004). Summer reading and the ethnic achievement gap. *Journal of Education of Students at Risk*, 9(2), 169-189.
- Kim, J. S. (2006). Effects of a voluntary summer reading intervention on reading achievement: Results from a randomized field trial. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 28(4), 335-355.
- Knapp, M. S. (1995). *Teaching for meaning in high-poverty classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Krashen, S. (2001). More smoke and mirrors: A critique of the national reading panel report on fluency. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October, 119-123.
- Krashen, S. (2003). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.
- Krashen, S. (2004). False claims about literacy development. *Educational Leadership*, 61(6), 18-21.
- Kuhn, M. R. (2005). A comparative study of small group fluency instruction. *Reading Psychology*, 26, 127-146.
- Kuhn, M. R., Schwanenflugel, P., Morris, R. D., Morrow, L. M., Woo, D., Meisinger, B., et al. (2007). Teaching children to become fluent and automatic readers. *Journal of Literacy Research*.
- Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. A. (2003). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 3-21.
- Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. A. (1998). Teaching children to learn word meanings from context: A synthesis and some questions. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30(1), 119-138.
- Leinhardt, G., Zigmond, N., & Cooley, W. (1981). Reading instruction and its effects. *American Educational Research Journal*, 18(3), 343-361.

- Lewis, M., & Samuels, S. J. (n.d.). *Read more, read better? A meta-analysis of the literature on the relationship between exposure to reading and reading achievement*. Unpublished paper, University of Minnesota.
- McIntyre, E., Rightmeyer, E., Powell, R., Powers, S., & Petrosko, J. (2006). How much should young children read? A study of the relationship between development and instruction. *Literacy Teaching and Learning, 11*(1), 51-72.
- Meyer, L. M., & Wardrop, J. L. (1994). Home and school influences on learning to read in kindergarten through second grade. In F. Lehr & J. Osborn (Eds.), *Reading, language, and literacy: Instruction for the twenty-first century*. (pp. 165-184). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Samuels, S. J. (2006). Looking backward: Reflections on a career. *Journal of Literacy Research, 38*(3), 327-341.
- Samuels, S. J., & Wu, Y. C. (2003). *How the amount of time spent on reading effects reading achievement: A response to the National Reading Panel*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Retrieved on March 22, 2007 from www.tc.umn.edu/~samue001.
- Scanlon, D. M., Vellutino, F. R., Small, S., G, Fanuele, D. P., & Sweeney, J. M. (2005). Severe reading difficulties -- can they be prevented? A comparison of prevention and intervention approaches. *Exceptionality, 13*(4), 209-227.
- Stanovich, K. E., West, R. F., Cunningham, A. E., Cipielewski, J., & Siddiqui, S. (1996). The role of inadequate print exposure as a determinate of reading comprehension problems. In C. Cornoldi & J. Oakhill (Eds.), *Reading comprehension difficulties: Processes and intervention*. (pp. 15-32). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Taylor, B. M., Frye, B. J., & Maruyama, G. M. (1990). Time spent reading and reading growth. *American Educational Research Journal, 27*(2), 351-362.
- Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Clark, K., & Walpole, S. (2000). Effective schools and accomplished teachers: Lessons about primary grade reading instruction in low income schools. *Elementary School Journal, 101*, 121-165.
- Thurlow, M., Gaden, J., Ysseldyke, J., & Algozzine, R. (1984). Student

- reading during reading class: The lost activity in reading instruction. *Journal of Educational Research*, 77(5), 267-272.
- Vadasy, P. F., Sanders, E. A., & Peyton, J. A. (2005). Relative effectiveness of reading practice or word-level instruction in supplemental tutoring: How text matters. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(4), 364-380.
- Vaughn, S., Moody, S. W., & Schumm, J. S. (1998). Broken promises: Reading instruction in the resource room. *Exceptional Children*, 64, 211-225.
- Vellutino, F. R. (2003). Individual differences as sources of variability in reading comprehension in elementary school children. In A. P. Sweet & C. E. Snow (Eds.), *Rethinking reading comprehension*. (pp. 51-81). New York: Guilford.