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Reading aloud in high schools: students and teachers across the curriculum

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Reading aloud is apparently an indispensible part of teaching. Nevertheless, little is known about reading aloud across the curriculum by students and teachers in high schools. Nor do we understand teachers' attitudes towards issues such as error correction, rehearsal time, and selecting students to read. A survey of 360 teachers in England shows that, although they have little training in reading aloud, they are extremely confident. Reading aloud by students and teachers is strongly related, and serves to further understanding rather than administrative purposes or pupils' enjoyment. Unexpectedly, Modern Language teachers express views that set them apart from other subjects.

Keywords: literacy; pedagogy; reading; secondary education; teaching

Introduction

A voice reading aloud in the classroom is a vivid memory for many adults, and a daily experience for many children. The persistence of the practice of reading aloud (RA) from the past to the present in classes of younger children can be explained by means of the understanding of its benefits for early reading in particular and literacy in general, and also its diagnostic capability. Why the practice persists into high schools and the teaching of teenagers is less clear, but persist it does. The aim of this study was to investigate what high school teachers do and why, in terms of RA, across subjects, i.e. not just in subjects such as English or Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) where RA might be expected to be part of the subject. The investigation was intended to indicate possible theoretical foundations of RA, as well as begin to suggest some pedagogical recommendations, given that, although it may be practised in high schools, there is a significant lack of research into its actual use (Hodges 2011).

Reasons for reading aloud

There must be some very good reasons for a teacher to ask pupils to read aloud in class, given the wealth of anecdotal evidence that RA is a source of diversion from or disruption of intended outcomes. Many teachers to whom we have spoken during the course of this work have shared with us memories of embarrassment as pupils themselves having to read something out and doing so badly. Others have shared with us memories of choosing a pupil to read something out, and then wishing they

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had not, because hesitancy or mispronunciation caused humour and shame. Shah (2013) describes an experience with a Year 9 class in which a student became distressed when asked to read aloud a line containing the word "sex":

> Hassan abashedly said it was against his religion to say that word. It took me a moment to realise what Hassan meant, before I explained that "sex" in this sentence referred to gender as opposed to sexual activity. (Shah 2013, 197)

Teachers are not usually trained to conduct RA, as far as we can tell, yet those of us who undertake lesson observations regularly find teachers asking pupils to read out their work, which often has little impact on the rest of the class listening. The evidence that RA is ineffective or counter-productive is not only anecdotal. The practice of reading round the class, also known as "round robin" reading, seems to persist in classrooms despite being an outmoded (Harris and Hodges 1995) and ineffective practice (Ash, Kuhn, and Walpole 2009). This is because students may simply rehearse their own section of text and subsequently lose focus and become disengaged (Kuhn and Schwanenflugel 2006). Belbin's reflection on his own experience in school demonstrates how damaging this can be:

> We each took turns to read aloud, slowly and badly, killing off our interest in the process. I all but stopped reading fiction for pleasure. (Belbin 2011, 132)

However, criticism of RA is not only directed at the round robin method. Frager (2010) identifies several issues with RA. For example, he describes how silent readers have the freedom to reread a text in order to gain a clearer understanding before moving on, whereas oral reading does not allow this type of recursive practice. Moreover, he states that meaning is made from the dialogue between the voice reciting the text and the inner voice which interacts with ideas in the text and he argues that oral reading does not develop this inner voice. Furthermore, he claims that engagement with the text is more passive when listening than during silent reading.

Other criticism of the technique refers to pupils' attitudes towards RA. The image of students struggling to read sections of text aloud while the other students who manage to stay awake "make wisecracks or roll their eyes in response" (Frager 2010, 36) throws light on how some pupils feel about this technique. When children themselves researched their peers' perceptions of literacy opportunities, they identified "public" aspects of reading, including RA, as being daunting and intimidating (Kellett and Dar 2007). Other research shows that even skilful and keen readers can feel uncomfortable when asked to read aloud, feeling embarrassed and worried about what others may think of them (Merisuo-Storm 2006). Indeed, there is evidence that RA can cause anxiety (Gibson 2008) and affect children's blood pressure and heart rate (Thomas et al. 1984). But it may be easy to suggest it is counter-productive; the question remains, what is it intended to produce?

In the context of younger children's education, the answer is straightforward. RA to and by primary aged children is known to fulfil a number of purposes; for example, it helps with decoding skills, models what it is to be a reader, enables teachers to identify skills and problems, and is a method of introducing children both to the enjoyment of books and the power of narrative (Goodwin and Redfern 2000). RA is held to be a good indicator of overall reading competence (Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hosp 2001) and contributes in various ways to developing that competence (Kuhn et al. 2006). Public moments of RA can efficiently unmask any misinterpretations that pupils tend to disguise (Ross, Hunter, and Chazanow 2006). In addition, certain RA

techniques have been found to be successful as intervention strategies for students who are struggling to learn to read (Rasinski and Hoffman 2003) and interactive RA sessions can support students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or bilingual students (Delacruz 2013). RA is "probably the most highly recommended activity for encouraging language and literacy" (Beck and McKeown 2001, 10). But in the context of older children the answer is less clear. We suggest four main areas of possibility: efferent reading, aesthetic reading, a therapeutic practice, and a social practice.

Consider Rosenblatt's analysis of reading as either efferent or aesthetic (see for example 1982). In the context of silent reading, efferent reading has a focus on what is taken away from the text in terms of content. Our everyday observations have revealed teachers reading out, or having students read out, key passages of information in various subject classrooms. Albright and Ariail (2005) report that the majority of RA in US middle-school classrooms is for efferent purposes. The practice of teachers may also be prompted by a sense of the persistence of phonology in the creation of meaning. That is to say, silent reading never quite bypasses the sounds of the words (Van Orden 1987). Or, to put it another way, teachers may be building on the fact that "even skilled readers have a little voice running though their heads the whole time" (Pinker 2014, 115).

Aesthetic reading is Rosenblatt's binary twin of efferent reading, and has a focus on the artistic and rhetorical effects of the text. Examples of aesthetic RA practice abound. People of all ages enjoy being read to. More and more people are using audio-books and enjoying the experience of hearing texts read aloud. This is reflected in figures from the Audio Publishers Association which show that the publication of audio-books doubled between 2007 and 2010 and that a 16% increase over the previous year could be seen in their most recent sales survey (Audio Publishers Association n.d.). Listeners are not passive: "Anyone who listens much to audiobooks soon becomes fiercely opinionated about narrators. The good news is that we are not sheep" (Varley 2002, unpaged). This view is strongly echoed by Allen, Griffin, and O'Connell (2011), who argue that audiences "are not simply passive recipients: most frequently, they are political, instructive, demanding, authoritative, involved and conscious" (7). Dreher (2003) describes how he used RA to engage students with challenging texts such as *The Stranger* by Camus, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *Macbeth*. He organised his class into three groups which students could choose between: a group which was read to, another which used shared RA and a final group which read silently. Children had autonomy to move between groups as "some days a student might want to listen, other days to read silently, and on other days to read aloud" (Dreher 2003, 51). Another example of using RA to give insight into and engagement with a difficult text is to be found in "Reading Aloud: The 'Moby-Dick' Marathon" (Ross, Hunter, and Chazanow 2006).

Two examples of RA as therapeutic activity perhaps indicate a wider range of possibilities. We have found local instances of primary school children with low self-esteem and weak reading skills reading aloud to dogs. Therapy Dogs International (n.d.) is one of a number of organisations advertising the benefits of this practice. Mature people can also enjoy and gain health-giving benefit from RA to each other, according to The Reader Organisation's Shared Reading Scheme (Davis et al. n.d.) This report explains the work of the charity The Reading Organisation (TRO) running weekly RA sessions called Get into Reading (GiR) in a range of health and

social care settings. The GiR model is based on small groups formed to read aloud together short stories, novels and poetry. The report concludes:

> Shared reading involves active rather than passive response, the experience of immersion, sharing and liveness, the articulate expression of feeling from real readers rather than a theoretical reader-response, the use of previously denied or painful experience in the challenge and acceptance offered by literature, a process that involves unpredictability and hesitation rather than a definite end point, and the potentially healing effect of a community formed out of the meeting of individuals' personal thoughts and feelings. (Davis et al. n.d. 39)

This work was conducted with adults in health and social care settings. Nevertheless it is an instructive claim to the therapeutic value of RA, suggesting a process which transcends "reader-response" and aspires to "healing". These views are very much at odds with Frager's earlier criticism of the lack of opportunity for "inner voice". The act of listening represents a transaction between the listener and the text to create meaning. Indeed, there is evidence that skilful listening "involves a very complex and varied set of activities" with neuroscience revealing that many areas of the brain are involved in listening (Rose and Dalton 2007, 6).

A sense of the social value of RA may also explain why it happens in the classroom. It has a long history as a social practice. It is not certain when reading silently became the norm, but it is generally accepted that RA was the norm from the beginning of the written word (Manguel 1996). He mentions how the *Confessions* record Saint Augustine's surprise at finding Ambrose silently perusing the page, rather than reading aloud, and he suggests that it was not until the tenth century that silent reading became usual in the West. Others suggest it might not have been until much later, maybe as late as 1900, that reading changed to a predominantly silent activity (Allen, Griffin, and O'Connell 2011). The Romans tended to read literature aloud, and reserve silent reading for more functional texts: "Literature was appreciated primarily through the ears rather than the eyes" (Starr 1991, 338). RA was taught in early US schools mainly because it was a daily practice for passing on information and for home entertainment (Rasinski and Hoffman 2003). Kellett and Dar (2007) refer to the perceived need for young people to develop "confidence" in "public reading" (36). Our society is one where RA is prevalent in both the workplace and the home (Lundy 2004). Because making presentations is such a common practice at work, to live and virtual audiences, the ability to read aloud effectively seems to be an essential skill on which to build.

Given that there is little empirical research into the use of RA at high-school level, the aim of our investigation was to explore the importance of RA for teachers and students across the curricular areas taught in these schools. We were also interested in the possible impact of RA on students' confidence levels and engagement, and whether, as Fisher et al. (2004) believe, RA should be taught as a pedagogical practice in training courses. The study reported here focuses on the views of teachers and logically precedes any future investigation of the impact of RA and the measurement of its outcomes in student performance.

Research

The central research questions were, what do high school teachers claim to do in terms of RA, and why?

As has already been suggested, we encountered a wealth of response to these questions in preliminary discussions, including some strong views about practice in different subject areas. The research design of this investigation was intended to reveal inductively aspects of the attitudes and practice of teachers, rather than test pre-conceived hypotheses. Armed with ideas from the existing literature we would then be able to suggest possible rationales for their practice which could be investigated in further research.

The investigation comprised three phases: focus groups, pilot questionnaire, and final questionnaire. The focus groups were three discussions amongst teachers in different schools. This method was used because it is useful for gathering data on attitudes, values and opinions and for identifying themes and topics which can then be developed into questionnaires (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011). The focus groups were semi-structured with some outline areas for discussion; these included an open question about use of RA and follow-up questions exploring what is read, benefits/reservations of RA, which classes it is used with and examples of when it worked well (or not). The discussions were audio recorded, transcribed, and then manually coded into descriptive and evaluative comments. Comments were then analysed inductively using NVivo software to identify emergent themes. From these themes a questionnaire was developed which was piloted using the staff of three schools. A refined and clarified version of the questionnaire was created which raised nine questions:

(1) How widely spread is RA by students and teachers in each area of the curriculum?
(2) What do teachers consider to be the purpose of their own RA to students?
(3) How confident are teachers about their own RA?
(4) To what extent was RA part of their training as a teacher?
(5) Who do teachers think should teach students to read aloud?
(6) Do teachers ask for volunteers or choose who will read?
(7) Do teachers believe that students' concentration is improved by not knowing if/when they will be asked to read aloud?
(8) Do teachers allow students rehearsal time?
(9) Do teachers correct mistakes when students read aloud?

Reflection on the pilot questionnaire led to the wording of questions for the main project being improved. For example, it was important to make clear whether questions referred to teachers or students RA. The main change to the questionnaire, however, was in the type of scale used. On the pilot questionnaire we used a four-point Likert scale. In order to provide finer differentiation, however, this was replaced in the main study by a six-point numerical scale on which only the maximum and minimum values were given descriptors.

Questionnaires are sometimes criticised for limited validity in that they tend to impose predetermined categories from the researcher (see for example May 2011). Our research design in this case, generating survey questions from focus groups, and refining them in the light of a pilot process, was intended to mitigate this tendency.

Ethical agreement from headteachers and teachers was gained and anonymity of data guaranteed, in line with university protocol.

The questionnaire was administered to staff in five schools: a selective state grammar school for girls aged 11–18; three large mixed urban comprehensive schools, two of which have a high proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds; and a smaller than average aged 11–16 rural comprehensive school. This was an opportunity sample, rather than a random or stratified sample of schools well known to the researching institution; the sample was chosen to contain a broad range of representative types of school recognisable beyond the immediate region. All the headteachers of the schools we approached agreed to participate in the project. There were no refusals and no school dropped out. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers during full staff meetings. This guaranteed an unusually high response rate for educational research. We are not aware of any teachers who failed to submit a completed questionnaire.

We did not set out to consider possible differences between schools or types of schools. All the data were pooled, and guarantees of anonymity maintained. An analysis of the more general questions at the beginning of the questionnaire revealed no overall differences between schools; this process was not repeated for the rest of the questions.

Questionnaires were completed by 360 teachers. Because teachers described their main responsibility in their own words, 35 areas of teaching responsibility were recorded initially. These were rationalised by the research team into 11 broad curricular areas, to allow more meaningful analysis to be carried out, and which gave coverage of the range of subjects taught in this phase of education.

Of course the ideas of school students about RA are relevant and important, as are data about their attainment. But these are not the focus here. In fact we were able to conduct two brief focus group discussions with students as part of the first phase of the project, the results of which will be reported on separately in a smaller study. The aim here is to obtain a descriptive account of the practices and perspectives of a cross-section of teachers.

Results

The first research question asked about the extent of RA by students and teachers in the various curricular areas. With regard to students, Table 1 shows descriptive

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the importance attached to reading aloud (RA) by students-to-students in each subject area.

Subject grouping	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation	Rank
English	5.00	46	0.97	1
Technology	3.22	18	1.77	6
Maths	2.45	43	1.29	11
Science	2.86	55	1.37	8
MFL	4.91	23	1.20	2
Humanities	3.78	48	1.27	4
Physical Education	2.71	24	1.55	9
Visual and Performing Arts	3.16	32	1.83	7
ICT	2.50	9	1.06	10
Support and Intervention	4.72	29	1.53	3
Social Sciences	3.52	21	1.63	5
Total	3.58	348	1.66	

statistics for the question: "RA by students to students is an important part of teaching in my subject area." Here and elsewhere, mean values and standard deviations are presented for ease of comparison between subject areas. In some cases these are supplemented by percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed with a statement. As this was on a scale 1–6, mean responses above 3.5 represent some degree of general agreement. The overall mean across curricular areas, as shown in Table 1, is 3.58.

Unsurprisingly, English teachers have the highest mean score. In fact, 95.6% of them chose the three most positive points on the six-point scale. They were followed by MFL (86.9%) and Support teachers (75.8%). Lowest agreement is shown by teachers of Maths (16.3%), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (11.1%) and Physical Education (25.1%). A very similar rank order of subjects was obtained when teachers were asked whether students were required to read out their own work at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14). In fact the Spearman rank order correlation between the two sets of subjects is strong at 0.782 (where zero would represent no relationship, −1 a perfect negative relationship, and +1 a perfect positive relationship). Again, MFL with a mean of 5.21, English (4.93) and Support and Intervention (4.75) were ranked highest while Physical Education (2.60), ICT (2.77) and Visual and Performing Arts (3.23) obtained the lowest mean scores.

With regard to teachers' RA, the data corresponding to reading by students is shown in Table 2. Here the similarities with Table 1 are striking, with similar mean values for all subjects other than ICT. English, Support and Intervention, and MFL are again ranked highest with over 85% responding positively, while Physical Education, and Maths receive the lowest ratings at 20% or less. It seems that subject areas that value student-to-student reading tend to value teacher-to-student reading correspondingly. This is confirmed by the strong correlation between the rank orders of curricular areas in Tables 1 and 2 (Spearman's rho = 0.882). Furthermore, computing the rank order correlation between the questions about student-to-student reading and teacher-to-student reading suggests a strong *general* tendency for teachers who value one kind of RA also to value the other (Spearman's rho = 0.749). One might expect this result to be an artefact of subject area, but an analysis of teachers within subject departments shows the tendency to exist in nine of the 11

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the importance attached to reading aloud (RA) by teachers-to-students in each subject area.

Subject grouping	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation	Rank
English	5.20	46	0.93	1
Technology	3.22	18	1.52	7
Maths	2.41	45	1.22	10
Science	2.86	55	1.24	9
MFL	5.04	23	1.22	3
Humanities	3.42	48	1.43	4
Physical Education	2.38	24	1.44	11
Visual and Performing Arts	3.16	32	1.97	8
ICT	3.33	9	1.30	6
Support and Intervention	5.14	28	1.30	2
Social Sciences	3.38	21	1.53	5
Total	3.57	349	1.71	

curricular areas. Rank order correlations within ICT, Science, MFL, Physical Education, Visual and Performing Arts, Support and Intervention and Social Sciences are all above 0.7 while Maths and Humanities are over 0.5. Only English and ICT have lower values.

Teachers reading aloud

Research Question 2 deals with attitudes to teachers RA, and asks: What do teachers consider to be the purpose of their own RA to students? This was addressed in the questionnaire by items asking about students' enjoyment, quietening the class, reinforcing instructions and accessing the meaning of texts (see Table 3).

As can be seen from Table 3, teachers across the curriculum read aloud to their students to facilitate access to the meaning of texts. The average ratings on a scale 1–6 are above the mid-point for all subjects and are particularly high for English, Support and Intervention, and MFL. Even a less text-oriented area such as Physical

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the purposes of teachers' reading aloud (RA) to classes.

Subject groupings		For their enjoyment	To quieten the class	To reinforce instructions	To give access to meaning of texts
English ($N = 46$)	Mean	5.08	2.44	4.02	5.38
	SD	1.11	1.31	1.47	0.65
Technology ($N = 18$)	Mean	2.11	2.22	4.61	4.44
	SD	1.18	1.63	1.33	1.46
Maths ($N = 45$)	Mean	2.18	1.84	4.40	4.31
	SD	1.32	1.02	1.37	1.43
Science ($N = 55$)	Mean	2.22	1.82	4.15	4.20
	SD	1.17	1.06	1.43	1.34
MFL ($N = 23$)	Mean	3.26	2.08	3.26	5.13
	SD	1.66	1.38	1.54	0.92
Humanities ($N = 48$)	Mean	3.35	1.85	4.35	5.02
	SD	1.41	1.11	1.38	0.74
Physical Education ($N = 24$)	Mean	2.29	2.13	3.92	3.88
	SD	1.33	1.39	1.53	1.73
Visual and Performing Arts ($N = 31$)	Mean	2.72	1.58	3.61	4.13
	SD	1.85	0.85	1.71	1.77
ICT ($N = 9$)	Mean	3.11	1.67	4.78	4.50
	SD	1.36	1.00	1.56	1.20
Support and Intervention ($N = 29$)	Mean	4.38	2.62	4.38	5.36
	SD	1.57	1.59	1.40	1.05
Social Sciences ($N = 21$)	Mean	3.14	2.14	4.29	5.10
	SD	1.46	1.65	1.65	1.18
Total ($N = 349$)	Mean	3.12	2.03	4.14	4.69
	SD	1.70	1.27	1.49	1.33

Note: SD, standard deviation.

Education shows a positive response to this question. A similarly high response rate across subjects can be noted for reinforcing instructions, although for MFL the mean is surprisingly low.

By contrast with the functions of facilitating understanding and reinforcing instructions, RA for pupils' enjoyment and for class control display low average ratings for the data pooled across curricular areas. However, while the former show uniformity across subject areas, there is more variation for reading for pupils' enjoyment, with particularly high scores for English and Support and Intervention. That MFL is rated so much lower than English may seem surprising for two subjects that are often seen as text and literature based, but this probably reflects the transactional nature of communicative language teaching up to Year 11 and the relatively low proficiency of students. Nevertheless, an inspection of the relationship between the means and standard deviations within these two subjects in Table 3 suggests a fairly uniform response from English teachers (coefficient of variation: standard deviation = 21.85% of the mean) compared with wider variation among modern linguists (50.92%).

Research Question 3 investigated the degree of confidence teachers had in reading to their students. Table 4 shows extremely high degrees of confidence across all subjects and relatively small standard deviations show low levels of variation within subjects. Subject areas such as MFL, English and Humanities show almost total agreement with the statement "I feel confident RA to my students". In every subject more than 90% of respondents selected the three highest points on the scale and this rose to 100% English, MFL, Humanities, ICT and Support and Intervention. This level of consistency of response raises the question of whether such confidence stems from training. Question 4, therefore, asked whether respondents' teacher education included using RA.

Table 5 indicates that RA played only a very small part in the training of these teachers. Even for English, an area where one might expect the development of such skills to be given a prominent focus, the rating was below the mid-point and only 48.9% of teachers were at the positive end of the rating scale. Computing the rank order correlation between teachers' confidence (Research Question 3) and the place of RA in training shows no relationship between these variables (rho = 0.070).

Table 4. Teachers' responses to the statement "I feel confident reading aloud (RA) to my students".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	5.80	46	0.50
Technology	5.44	18	0.92
Maths	5.48	44	0.95
Science	5.72	54	0.66
MFL	5.96	24	0.20
Humanities	5.79	48	0.46
Physical Education	5.38	24	1.01
Visual and Performing Arts	5.63	32	1.01
ICT	5.67	9	0.50
Support and Intervention	5.55	31	0.68
Social Sciences	5.57	21	0.81
Total	5.66	351	0.74

Table 5. Teachers' responses to the statement "The use of reading aloud (RA) was part of my training to be a teacher".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	3.31	43	2.05
Technology	2.22	18	1.80
Maths	1.86	44	1.30
Science	1.74	52	0.95
MFL	2.78	23	1.54
Humanities	2.26	47	1.55
Physical Education	2.04	24	1.66
Visual and Performing Arts	2.28	32	1.84
ICT	2.11	9	0.78
Support and Intervention	3.13	24	1.94
Social Sciences	2.00	21	1.55
Total	2.32	337	1.65

However, if we cannot account for teachers' confidence from their training it is possible that confidence comes with experience. The average experience of teachers in the sample was 12.37 years but there was much variation (standard deviation = 10.62) ranging from Newly Qualified Teachers to one person with 50 years of teaching behind him. These data were also heavily skewed by the large number of recently qualified teaching staff. The rank order correlation between experience and confidence proved to be (rho = 0.137) very weak and cannot explain teachers' confidence on its own.

Students reading aloud

Research Question 5 asks whether it is mainly the responsibility of the English departments to teach students to read aloud. Table 6 shows general disagreement with this claim, including from English teachers themselves of whom less than a third (32.5%) show agreement with this statement. Modern Linguists show strongest disagreement with 100% of responses showing disagreement. No doubt they regard reading in a foreign language as requiring specialist knowledge and skills in students, and subject-specific teaching methodology that go beyond the generic cross-curricular requirements of the first language.

The next four research questions focus on the techniques used by teachers. We are reminded of the negative school-day memories of being made to read aloud that were reviewed in the introduction to this article. Question 6 addresses the issue of asking for volunteers versus selecting the readers. Of course, these two strategies are not mutually exclusive, and this is borne out by the data in Table 7 where teachers in many areas of the curriculum use both to a high degree. If they were mutually exclusive, we would expect a negative correlation between the two questions and, in fact, the correlation is positive though very weak (rho = 0.194). To some extent, therefore, teachers who ask for volunteers also choose students to read.

A common-sense reason for choosing who will read is that not knowing who will be selected focuses students' attention and improves concentration (Research Question 7). This assumption is confirmed by the descriptive statistics for teachers'

Table 6. Teachers' responses to the statement "The English department is mainly responsible for teaching the necessary skills for reading aloud (RA)".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	2.62	46	1.58
Technology	2.83	18	1.76
Maths	2.57	44	1.49
Science	2.59	55	1.56
MFL	1.26	23	0.54
Humanities	2.00	48	1.09
Physical Education	2.29	24	1.40
Visual and Performing Arts	2.00	32	1.27
ICT	3.22	9	1.20
Support and Intervention	1.90	30	1.30
Social Sciences	1.91	21	1.18
Total	2.28	350	1.42

Table 7. Asking for volunteers versus choosing students to read aloud.

Subject groupings		Do you ask for volunteers?	Do you choose who will read aloud?
English ($N = 44$)	Mean	5.13	4.86
	SD	1.17	0.93
Technology ($N = 18$)	Mean	3.67	3.39
	SD	1.75	1.72
Maths ($N = 45$)	Mean	3.49	4.13
	SD	1.42	1.44
Science ($N = 55$)	Mean	3.81	4.11
	SD	1.34	1.24
MFL ($N = 24$)	Mean	5.21	4.42
	SD	0.88	1.02
Humanities ($N = 48$)	Mean	5.19	4.40
	SD	1.02	1.25
Physical Education ($N = 24$)	Mean	4.00	4.33
	SD	1.45	1.37
Visual and Performing Arts ($N = 30$)	Mean	3.61	3.73
	SD	1.76	1.31
ICT ($N = 9$)	Mean	3.56	3.39
	SD	2.13	1.50
Support and Intervention ($N = 27$)	Mean	4.52	4.46
	SD	1.48	1.48
Social Sciences ($N = 21$)	Mean	4.10	3.95
	SD	1.38	1.43
Total ($N = 345$)	Mean	4.28	4.22
	SD	1.52	1.34

Note: SD, standard deviation.

responses in Table 8. The means across subject groupings all tend towards agreement with the proposition, with MFL having strongest average agreement – 87% of these teachers show agreement with the statement.

Research Question 8 investigates whether students are given rehearsal time before being asked to read aloud. Table 9 shows that this is not a common strategy,

Table 8. Responses to the statement "Not knowing if/when they will be asked to read aloud improves students' concentration".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	4.09	46	1.30
Technology	4.44	18	1.15
Maths	3.60	44	1.33
Science	3.90	55	1.42
MFL	4.83	23	1.34
Humanities	3.83	48	1.52
Physical Education	3.88	24	1.51
Visual and Performing Arts	3.63	30	1.75
ICT	3.83	9	1.17
Support and Intervention	4.19	31	1.49
Social Sciences	4.07	21	1.42
Total	3.98	349	1.44

Table 9. Responses to the question "Do you give students time to rehearse before reading aloud (RA)?".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	3.20	46	1.41
Technology	1.50	18	0.79
Maths	1.71	45	0.92
Science	1.98	55	1.18
MFL	3.92	24	1.10
Humanities	2.30	48	1.21
Physical Education	2.71	24	1.73
Visual and Performing Arts	2.87	30	1.72
ICT	2.00	9	1.66
Support and Intervention	3.07	30	1.44
Social Sciences	1.76	21	0.94
Total	2.46	350	1.44

with an overall mean across subjects areas of 2.46. In the lowest scoring group, Technology, no teachers at all scored at the positive end of the scale. By contrast, only MFL with a mean rating of 3.92 attains a score above the mid-point, with 75% of teachers responding positively. One possible explanation is that MFL teachers have been introduced to the idea of providing rehearsal time through public examinations to a greater extent than teachers of other subjects.

The final research question investigated the extent to which teachers correct errors. Table 10 shows that mean responses tended towards the "often" end of the six-point scale, the exception being ICT (only 33.2% of ICT teachers responded positively). Teachers of MFL (75%) and Support and Intervention (90%) stand out as those prepared to correct mistakes most often.

Discussion

These results contribute significantly to knowledge about RA in secondary schools by providing insight into teachers' attitudes and practice.

Table 10. Responses to the question "Do you correct students' mistakes when they are reading aloud (RA)?".

Subject groupings	Mean	*N*	Standard deviation
English	4.09	46	1.19
Technology	3.25	18	1.53
Maths	4.07	44	1.55
Science	4.14	55	1.47
MFL	4.54	24	1.18
Humanities	4.08	48	1.29
Physical Education	3.79	24	1.87
Visual and Performing Arts	3.90	31	1.81
ICT	2.89	9	1.54
Support and Intervention	4.60	30	1.16
Social Sciences	3.76	21	1.52
Total	4.04	350	1.48

The first point of interest is the strong correlation of teachers' responses to questions about student-to-student and teacher-to-student RA. This suggests that there is a general tendency for teachers who value one type of RA to also value the other. A comparison of subject grouping on these two variables suggests that curriculum area is significant in determining the use of RA. In part this may be the practical demands of the subject (e.g. whether it is text-based or not). In addition, it could also be the result of philosophical ideas about the role of RA within the curriculum subject, either the teacher's own personal philosophy about its importance or a more general philosophy reflecting a traditional pedagogy handed down by teachers and teacher educators. Implicit notions of aesthetic and efferent reading may to be at work here, but it seems unlikely that teachers in some curriculum areas but not others would see RA as valuable vocationally or therapeutically. However, the relationship applies not only across the whole group of teachers but also within subject departments, indicating that the relationship is only partially an artefact of the nature of different areas of the curriculum. Thus, neither individual factors nor curriculum area factors are a total explanation in themselves, meaning that further research is necessary to examine this link more deeply.

Another interesting aspect of the results is the consistency of responses from MFL teachers who, other than on the issue of RA for enjoyment, responded in a far more cohesive way than teachers from any other curriculum area. The consistency of responses from MFL teachers is additionally interesting given the range of types of school in our sample and the variation between teachers in their years of experience. Whatever influences MFL teachers here has survived changes in the subject. Traditionally, reading texts aloud round the class used to be common practice and, until the introduction of the GCSE in 1988, reading an unseen text aloud was part of both the O Level and CSE examinations in the UK. An emphasis on teaching language communicatively led to a perception of RA as a task that had little practical value. More recently, work on learner strategies has recommended that students check written work by reading it aloud (Macaro 2001) and official guidance since 2003 has emphasised the importance of developing grapheme-phoneme correspondences in foreign languages, although research shows little effect of this (Woore 2009).

Given that responses from MFL teachers generally showed consistency, it is interesting to note that there was more variation in the responses to the question about RA for enjoyment. The variation among MFL teachers in this one area could suggest variation in approaches to teaching with some taking a more creative approach, using rhymes and poems or writing texts of high interest for students with limited language, while others adopt a more traditional approach.

The question of RA for enjoyment produced high variation between subject areas with relatively low levels of agreement except for English and Support teachers. Once again this would seem to suggest that curriculum area is significant to attitude. While this project explored teachers' use of RA for accessing meaning, for enjoyment and for instructions, it would be interesting in further research to extend this to gain a deeper understanding of how and whether teachers use RA to engage students with the aesthetic effects of a text as opposed to its efferent, informational value.

The results show high degrees of confidence among teachers across all curriculum areas with low levels of variation within subject area. Responses show that RA was not a large part of initial teacher training and so this cannot explain teachers' confidence. The rank order correlation with experience did prove to be positive but, given that the relationship was weak, does not in itself explain teachers' confidence. Further research would be useful to investigate this further and to explore whether this confidence is justified and by what criteria of judgement.

Research Question 5, which asked whether the English department was mainly responsible for teaching students to read aloud, found general disagreement with the statement. MFL teachers disagreed most strongly, suggesting they see RA as an integral and specialist part of their subject, meaning that they consider themselves instrumental in developing students' skills in this area. However, the level of disagreement across subjects suggests that RA is viewed as a cross-curricular skill with teachers from all curriculum areas assuming that these skills should be taught across the curriculum. This finding is encouraging in suggesting a broad view of where these skills belong, and perhaps suggests an implicit belief amongst teachers in the societal value of RA.

The questions about whether teachers chose who reads aloud or asked for volunteers found that these practices are not mutually exclusive. Instead teachers use both strategies, presumably by assessing situations and the needs of the task or students. This suggests that teachers are able to be versatile and differentiate, using RA strategically. This is another positive finding of this research.

Research Question 7 considered whether teachers believe not knowing who will be selected to read aloud focuses students' attention and improves concentration. There was general agreement with this statement across subject groupings. However, although teachers may agree with this statement, the results cannot cast light on whether or how often they actually use this strategy. The literature shows that RA can cause anxiety in children (Gibson 2008; Thomas et al. 1984). Not knowing who will be chosen to read could contribute to this and so it would be useful to explore how prevalent a practice it is in reality as well as students' views on this matter. The therapeutic uses of RA referred to earlier take place in contexts which may be very different from normal classrooms.

Whether or not students are given rehearsal time could also contribute to anxiety because, in general, it is easier to feel confident when well prepared for a task. However, the results show that teachers do not commonly give rehearsal time. The low mean score for this question raises questions about what teachers see to be the

purpose of RA. For example, if teachers are using RA to enable students to access the meaning of texts (an area where there was general agreement across subjects), one could expect more teachers to be providing students with the opportunity to rehearse because a badly read text will impact on students accessing meaning. MFL teachers again differ in being the only subject with a mean rating above the mid-point.

The results for the question about whether teachers correct errors during RA found that, apart from ICT and Technology, teachers do this often. Once again this could be linked to what teachers see to be the purpose of RA. For example, if teachers see RA as a strategy for improving pronunciation or expression, this could explain the results. However, what is not clear from this research is how much error tolerance there is during RA or what type of errors are picked up by teachers and what type of correction or feedback teachers give.

Conclusion

Because RA is commonly used in high schools but is an underresearched phenomenon, this research set out to explore teachers' attitudes and practices in order to develop knowledge in this field. The results have identified a number of interesting aspects. Teachers who value teacher-to-student RA also value student-to-student RA. MFL teachers are generally more consistent in their responses and represent a more coherent group than teachers of other curriculum areas. Teachers are able to reflect on the purpose of RA in terms of whether they use it for accessing meaning, for enjoyment, for reinforcing instructions or for quietening down the class. Teachers feel confident in their RA despite this not being a significant part of their training. Experience seems to be a contributing factor to this, while not fully explaining their confidence.

However, our investigation also raises a number of questions which could form the basis for future research. For example, it would be useful to know more about how students are chosen for RA in terms of the contexts in which volunteers are asked for or students are picked by the teacher. It is not clear whether teachers believe that RA develops skills and confidence, and whether those beliefs affect which pupils they choose. In order to achieve a deeper understanding in this and other areas of teachers' reasons for RA more diverse data is needed such as classroom observations or in-depth interviews to explore our findings more fully. In addition, it would of course be valuable to have students' perspectives on the classroom RA experience.

Further research including the responses of students could indicate RA practices which would enhance the transmission and reinforcement of meaning, the efferent dimension of RA. Such practices might include correcting pupils, giving them rehearsal time, and making explicit how pupils are chosen to read. Also, if teachers and schools wish to act on the notions of RA as a social/vocational skill, or a therapeutic activity we might reasonably expect impact in terms of curriculum organisation, and cross-curricular initiatives.

To judge from the responses of our sample of teachers the prevalence of RA in schools does not seem to be founded on a belief in its importance as a social or professional skill, nor does it seem to be substantially practised for the sake of the pleasure and health of students. But we have not asked them directly about these notions, so we cannot be sure. At a time when impact on student learning is at

the forefront of judgements about teachers and teaching, developing a better understanding of how RA impacts on students is vital. Finally, and despite teachers' confidence in their own ability, we would reiterate the view of Fisher et al. (2004) that teacher education programmes should develop the skills of RA and, furthermore, to encourage an awareness of the issues arising from it.

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