Does participation in the hope challenge school-based intervention programme based on the reciprocal reading model have a sustainable impact on trainee teachers' teaching practice?

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# ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is to explore the extent to which participation in a schoolbased intervention programme based on the reciprocal reading model has a sustainable impact on trainee teachers' (trainees) teaching practice, specifically their teaching of reading comprehension skills. Descriptive data analysis is used to compare pre and post measures of self-efficacy. In order to build a richer picture, a qualitative approach was chosen, combining interview question responses, focus group discussion, and a case study of a single trainee to explore how participation in the intervention impacted the teaching of reading comprehension. The findings reveal that this intervention was sustainable and all trainees were able to incorporate elements into their teaching, with some implementing the reciprocal reading model fully.

### INTRODUCTION

Based on experiences in school, it is clear that reading is much more than decoding. There has been considerable exploration of early reading, initially using the 'Searchlights' model (NLS, 1998) which was replaced by the Simple View of Reading (SVoR) from the Rose Review (DfES, 2006), which acknowledged the different components of reading (see Figure 1). The key difference between the 'Searchlights' model and the 'SVoR' is that the 'Searchlights' model did not distinguish clearly between decoding and comprehension whereas the 'Simple View' makes a clear distinction.

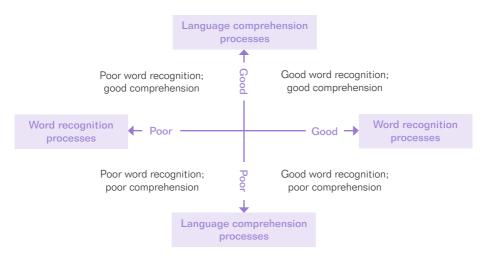


Figure 1: The Simple View of Reading (DfES, 2006)

However, although the Rose Review (DfES, 2006) emphasised the importance of SVoR, this was almost entirely eclipsed by its drive to teach systematic phonics. Durkin (1978, p. 482) describes this lack of comprehension instruction as 'mentioning' rather than 'teaching' comprehension skills. As the Cox Report (DfES, 1989) says, 'Reading is much more than the decoding of black marks on the page: it is a quest for meaning which requires the reader to be an active participant.' (DfES, 1989, p. 20). The Reciprocal Reading (RR) model improves comprehension for children who can decode but have difficulty comprehending text (Palincsar and Brown, 1984; 1985).

This paper explores how participation in the Hope Challenge RR intervention programme influences trainees' teaching of reading comprehension skills. The questions which guide this research are:

- 1. Does the intervention impact trainees' teaching practice beyond five weeks into PPL 4?
- 2. Which factors contributed to the sustainability?
- 3. What are trainees' perceptions of the programme on their knowledge of skills when teaching reading comprehension?
- 4. How does participation impact trainees' self-efficacy??

# LITERATURE REVIEW

### RECIPROCAL READING

Reciprocal Reading is a small group intervention with four to six children in ability groups reading an appropriate text. It is a researcher-developed instructional technique designed by Palincsar and Brown (1984) where children engage in four comprehension strategies, 'The Fabulous Four' (Oczkus, 2003): **predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising** (Palincsar, 1991; Palincsar et al, 1989; Palincsar and Brown, 1984). Palincsar et al (1989) describe each strategy. Predicting can occur at any point, an ongoing interaction with the text, where children activate prior knowledge and

To offer some critique, Searle (1984) was concerned that if used incorrectly, the scaffold could become an imposed structure which was adult-driven, with the child as passive participant. However, RR is much more fluid as the children are active participants and the adult interacts with the child to move them towards independence. Moreover, supporting children's active position in their learning and assisting them in becoming self-regulated learners is at the heart of Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD and at the heart of RR.

### Dialogue

Alexander (2005) defines 'dialogic talk' as collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful, all of which are evidenced in RR as a series of dialogues to bring about a shared understanding. Scaffolding must be interactive, and it is dialogue through which support is provided and adjusted (Palincsar, 1986). The significance of this RR research is not the strategies but the means by which the children learn to internalise them, namely through dialogue. Vygotsky (1978) believed that moving into the ZPD is supported by dialogue with the teacher or with more capable peers, and this is exactly what happens in RR through collaboration with peers and adults. RR is about 'reciprocal conversations', initially modelled by the teacher but with children gradually taking over the role of 'dialogue leader' (Palincsar, 1986) to achieve a joint construction of meaning through interaction and dialogue. Mercer (2000) concurs with this idea of providing guidance to children. The dialogue flows because the children share the same goals of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising (Palincsar and Brown, 1984). By predicting, the children then also have another common goal to test their hypotheses which further encourages cooperative learning.

Interestingly, this social dialogue can be seen as a rehearsal for the internal dialogue employed by experienced readers. It is worth reiterating that RR does not necessitate any writing, it is solely about discussion. 'Think-alouds' (Oczkus, 2010, p. 22) allow the teacher to talk aloud about all four strategies in order to scaffold a reader's thought processes. These 'think alouds' can be modelled by the teacher in shared reading and writing, but also occur in RR.

### HOPE CHALLENGE AND THE CYCLE OF AMBITIOUS TEACHING

The Hope Challenge (HC) is a response to concerns about how teacher training providers are supporting schools in challenging circumstances (Ofsted, 2015), primarily how trainee teachers should be best prepared to face the rigours of teaching in these schools. The HC is a collaborative project with Local Authorities, HMIs and head teachers, using 'bespoke learning interventions' to support schools facing challenging circumstances (Moore et al, 2015, p. 189). The HC was designed around the Cycle of Ambitious Teaching (see Figure 2), which structures teaching practice around four key strategies: modelling, learning, rehearsing and refining. To simply increase the amount of time trainee teachers spend in classrooms, will not by itself improve their practice (Valencia, et al, 2009). This practice-based curriculum is also recommended by Grossman (2005), using 'pedagogies of enactment', in addition to existing pedagogies of investigation and reflection, which involves enacting aspects of practice in increasingly complex settings (i.e. from small group to whole class instruction). Despite Scott et al (2013) raising the guestion of whether the competence that trainee teachers gain in a few instructional activities, practiced in a controlled setting, will transfer to other contexts, there is minimal research related to this question.

Lampert, Boerst and Graziani (2009) believe that trainee teachers can be prepared for ambitious teaching through 'ambitious and instructional activity' (IA). These IAs are key to both teacher and teacher educator knowledge building for ambitious teaching. The requisite jointly constructed visible process (Morris and Hiebert, 2009), as well as its highly scaffolded structure, make RR an appropriate IA for the rehearsal aspect of the cycle of ambitious teaching. Trainee teachers can, therefore, use this rehearsal to practise ambitious teaching interactions before enacting them in the classroom. 'Rehearsals' allow trainee teachers and tutors to work together to realise ambitious practices in the moment (Grossman, 2005). Feedback and discussion is interspersed throughout the instructional activity rather than at the end, thereby allowing trainees to reflect 'in action', as well as 'on action'. This collaboration provides 'communities of practice' for trainee teachers (Lampert et al, 2013).

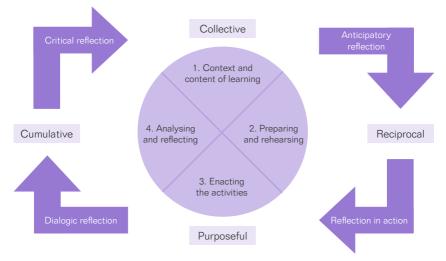


Figure 2: Hope Challenge Cycle for Ambitious Teaching (Moore, Pearson and Cronin, 2015)

### SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy (SE) is 'the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute behaviours required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997, p.3). Artino (2012) terms it 'task-specific self-confidence' (2012, p. 76). Both Schunk (1987) and Bandura (1986) acknowledge the importance of modelling in raising SE, as models can provide relevant information and motivation to observers (Schunk, 2001). Certain elements of this are pertinent to Hope Challenge: observing competent teachers and teacher educators perform a successful sequence shows the trainees how they can also be successful. Bandura, among others, suggests teachers implement instructional practices that encourage trainees to gain knowledge and skills but also promote the development of the necessary accompanying confidence; both are required in order to develop competency. Indeed, Bandura adds that observers must see the task as within reach, something they can successfully perform. Yet it is crucial that trainees have an accurate view of their ability to perform a task, as over-confidence can be detrimental if not accompanied by competence, and low SE can affect motivation to practise and

improve. Thus feedback is particularly important, especially when it is immediate and encourages trainees to evaluate the activity in order to improve (as seen in The Cycle of Ambitious Teaching).

A structured model such as the Cycle of Ambitious Teaching, with its opportunities for performance success, align with Bandura's (1977) emphasis on 'enactive attainment' (Bandura, 1977, p. 72) to provide self-efficacy information. Bandura also explores the role of motivation, which is crucial as trainees will only internalise the model if they consider it a useful skill (Bandura, 1986). In fact, he purports that SE is a more accurate predictor of motivation than is competence.

### CONTEXT

The aim of the Hope Challenge 'Reciprocal Reading' Project was to improve the reading comprehension skills for an identified group of twenty Year 6 pupils in a primary school in challenging socio-economic circumstances (Pupil Premium below 25%). The project created an opportunity to develop pedagogies of enactment (Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald, 2009) using the cycle of Ambitious Teaching (Moore, Pearson and Cronin, 2015). School data from 2016 indicated that reading comprehension (particularly inference) was a focus for the Year 6 children. Moreover, at Liverpool Hope University, evaluations indicated that trainee teachers lack the confidence to teach reading comprehension and the emphasis on phonics has done nothing to rectify this.

Five year 4 BAQTS trainee teachers volunteered to participate in the project and then attended three hours of training. During training sessions, the Reciprocal Reading model was modelled by their teacher educator (who is also the researcher) before rehearsal, with each trainee taking on the role of the 'dialogue leader'. The group rehearsal allowed time for reflection, and trainees were able to anticipate some of the misconceptions and learning barriers their pupils may have. The project consisted of five sessions of one and a half hours, beginning with a short inference activity and followed by a RR session with the trainee scaffolding the strategies and gradually relinquishing responsibility and letting the pupils lead the session. The tutor's role was to prompt the trainees and also to guide the reflection session. It was decided to use a different text extract each week, thereby familiarising the pupils and the trainees with a range of children's literature. Opportunity for collaborative reflection after the project was provided each week, allowing trainees collaborative time to reflect critically and evaluate their experiences and the learning of both themselves and their pupils.

# METHODOLOGY

Action research is 'a strategy...rather than a specific method' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 123). This action research will ascertain whether the Hope Challenge intervention will be beneficial to future cohorts, and which adaptations are necessary to improve the quality of the intervention. The Cycle of Ambitious Teaching means that the research feeds back into practice and is ongoing (Denscombe, 2010). Moreover, this is practitioner research as the research was undertaken whilst being actively engaged in practice (as 'insider research').

In order to build a richer picture through descriptive data, a qualitative approach was chosen which combined the following methods:

- 1. interviews with individual trainees exploring their perceptions of Hope Challenge;
- 2. analysis of trainees' work (including session planning and reflective notes);
- a focus group with four of the five trainees to explore the impact of Hope Challenge on their knowledge and skills;
- 4. a single-person case study with a trainee who had used RR during placement.

This range of methods enabled an exploration of the way in which participation in the intervention impacted trainees' teaching of reading comprehension and also their knowledge and skills. Measuring progress over a short time period is difficult, so the qualitative method is appropriate to explore the perceptions of the trainees and the influence of the Hope Challenge project.

The Reading Teaching Efficacy Instrument (RTEI) (Szabo and Makhatari, 2004) was used to measure trainees' efficacy in the teaching of reading. This scale measures trainees' feelings about their ability to teach reading (self-efficacy) and their beliefs about their ability to impact children's reading development (outcome expectancy). Although adopting a primarily qualitative approach, the RTEI was an effective way of measuring confidence, alongside descriptive data.

As this was 'insider research' (Sikes and Potts, 2008) within my own setting, there were considerations about my subjective positioning and the credibility of the knowledge claims, as well as the need for me to be aware that my involvement might inhibit the trainees from being honest. By using multiple methods to obtain data from trainees, triangulation between-methods was used to increase confidence in the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1970). On the other hand, an insider researcher has a 'unique perspective' due to their knowledge of the culture, history and actors involved (Sikes and Potts, 2008). Advantageously, it meant my research reflected the naturalness of the setting, so unexpected data could be captured more easily. However, the dual role, which Denscombe (2010) describes as 'the passion...of full participation...and the cool detachment associated with research observation' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 212) can be difficult to maintain.

# **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### IMPACT ON TRAINEES' SELF-EFFICACY

Trainees	Reading teaching efficacy (RTE)		Reading teaching self- efficacy (RTSE)		Reading teaching outcome expectancy (RTOE)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
R	LOW	HIGH	LOW	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	HIGH
К	LOW	AVERAGE	LOW	AVERAGE	LOW	AVERAGE
D	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	LOW	AVERAGE
J	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	AVERAGE	AVERAGE
Н	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	AVERAGE	HIGH

Trainees completed the RTEI using the Likert scale before they began the project and at the end, before starting placement (see Table 1).

Four out of five trainees showed pre-post project increases in self-efficacy and a belief that they could teach reading effectively. H and J, who went on to use RR in school, showed the biggest increase, and H, who fully implemented RR, showed the most significant increase in all areas. This seems to indicate that those whose scores increased most were most open to using the model in school. In line with Bandura's (1977) theory, a high score on the reading teaching self-efficacy (RTSE) means that teacher candidates are highly confident about their ability to effectively teach reading. According to Stein and Wang (1998, cited in Szabo and Makhatari, 2004, p. 66), these trainees are 'more likely to be open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students than their low scoring peers' which aligns with the data. D, who was unable to implement RR because the school had their own systems, showed the least increase in RTSE.

### IMPACT ON TRAINEES' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The key themes identified through coding of interview data show that trainees had understood the key principles which underpin RR (scaffolding, dialogue), as well as the four strategies (predicting, clarifying, questioning, summarising). Key components of the cycle of ambitious teaching and pedagogies of enactment were also referred to. All the trainees agreed that participation in the project had increased their confidence in teaching reading comprehension using RR. Indeed, the word 'confidence' was mentioned ten times (see Table 2), which also substantiates the findings from the RTEI.

R	К	D	J	Н
training	knowledge	training	training	experiment
pedagogy into	supportive	support	classroom	guidance
practice	reflect	collaboratively	rehearsal	tutor
classroom	collaboration	reflect	classroom	focus
reflect	practice	classroom	child-led	tutor
practice	improve	model	feedback	model
group	scaffolding	guided reading	feedback	re-enact
collaboratively	training	focus	reflection	good practice
improve	microteach	dictionary	collaboration	classroom
feedback	whole class	clarifying	tutor	collaborate
scaffolding	questioning	ownership	text	reflect
questioning	generate	focus	hook	feedback
teaching	questions	strategies	real classroom	formulaic
model	modelling	questioning	apply	engaged
child-led	question types	generate-	classroom	focus
facilitator	modelling	questions	questioning	confident
role	strategies	questioning	highers	well-equipped
questioning	training	scaffolding	confident	resources
self-generated	sentence starters	insight	scaffolding	confidence level
questions	modelled	texts	support	adapt
questioning grid	strategies	knowledge	differentiate	children's needs

model prompt ask questions dialogue impacted practice strategies predicting	predict question clarify summarise scaffold <b>confident</b> creative	confidence roles focus collaboratively ownership child-led curiosity questions	scaffold support independent higher ability lower (ability) clarifying dialogue roles	predicting modelling gradual responsibility models discussions ownership child-led
questioning clarifying summarising focus questioning question starters inference <b>confidence</b> engaging		team work confidence peers talk flexibility high ability low ability positive	engaged on task whole class collaborate different books class differentiation structure <b>confidence</b> flexible mould	hooks model active participation strategies predicting clarifying questioning summarising modelling hooks action drama
				confident confident strategies flexible curriculum

Table 2: Key Words from Interview Data for Individual Trainees<sup>2</sup>

Data suggests that using pedagogies of enactment allowed the trainees to rehearse RR, so they felt more confident about implementing it in the classroom. As one trainee said, 'lt wouldn't have been the same doing it in a workshop, but because I was able to do it with children, I remembered it better.' Every trainee acknowledged the value of being able to 'reflect and improve our own practice through collaboration'. The increased confidence levels are also testament to the benefits of using the cycle of ambitious teaching: 'The training session prepared me and then I was able to put this pedagogy into practice in the classroom because it made more sense because we had tried it.'

'I suppose I have used the strategies without even thinking of it.'

'The scaffolding in the training really helped me to remember the model.'

'It's definitely given me confidence, or a different way to approach reading comprehension.'  $% \left( {{{\mathbf{r}}_{i}}} \right)$ 

<sup>2</sup> Reciprocal Reading and reading comprehension are not included as they comprised the question.

'I found that the children were using inference without even realising. I just had to model the sentence starters and the children started to use it.'

Reference was also made to engagement through creativity and use of quality texts. All trainees viewed themselves as 'facilitators' – stating that scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility playing a key role in ensuring that the children were able to take ownership and lead the dialogue.

'It has given us more of an insight into texts. I wouldn't have had a clue which texts to use with year 6 but it gave us a lot more scope and ideas for books to use. I feel that I have a better knowledge of children's books.'

There is a risk that the prescriptive nature of the RR model could take away from engagement and creativity; however, this was counteracted by using quality texts as a hook, so the pupils read a range of authors. All trainees stated that this had also helped to extend pupils' enthusiasm. As reading for pleasure is paramount, this an important outcome of RR.

### IMPACT ON TRAINEES' TEACHING PRACTICE DURING PPL 4

Two out of five trainees who participated in the project implemented RR with their class when on placement; one student did some RR with the whole class but only one trainee fully implemented RR as a model with her own class and also disseminated this to other teachers in her placement school. This trainee made adaptations to the model for KS1 and introduced creative approaches to teaching the strategies.

Creativity is a word that is rarely associated with RR, but one trainee implemented adaptations to make it appropriate for KS1. It was found that using dramatic play helped the children's understanding, a point made by Owocki (1999, cited in Myers, 2005). Although Seymour and Osana (2003) calls these 'lethal mutations', the trainee reported that they actually enhanced the teaching of comprehension skills, ensuring high levels of engagement. By having actions for the strategies, the children can recall the steps and respond to prompts from the trainee. This aligns with Myers' (2005) research, which suggests using puppets (Clara Clarifier, Quincy Questioner, the Wizard to predict and Princess Storyteller to summarise). It was found by the trainee that modelling was used more extensively, with much more 'think alouds' and active teacher involvement: 'I decided to focus each session at the beginning on solely one step in order to build both confidence and familiarity with the process'. This concurs with the views of Oczkus (2010) and also Coley et al (1993). The trainee emphasised the hook, using props to develop inference and predict what would happen. OR codes were stuck into books with children's summaries, so that others could listen. She also used the higher ability readers, who were 'flying', to be dialogue leaders and scaffold for the lower ability.

One trainee adapted the model to use with the whole class through a shared read: children were still active participants, using the four strategies collaboratively to understand the text. Kohn (1996, cited in Oczkus, 2010) favours this sense of community support to reinforce RR strategies and share ideas through a common text. The trainee also tried using teams, scaffolding each strategy and modelling how to generate questions. This alternation of whole class and small group teaching corresponds with research showing that because whole class teaching cannot cater for individual needs, a solution is to alternate whole class and groups (Oczkus, 2010), as long as it is structured correctly in whole class teaching.

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUSTAINABILITY

Findings from the focus group revealed that there was commonality amongst the trainees' responses in terms of the barriers to sustainability. The main factors which prevented trainees using RR in their placements were time, SATs and whole class teaching. Three trainees were on placement in Year 6, which meant that they were involved in SAT preparation, and it was not possible to work with a group doing RR. Although reading comprehension was a focus area, the emphasis was on practice papers. One of the trainees did talk about using the four strategies alongside SAT paper questions to make it more creative and encourage the children to use the strategies when answering. As all trainees needed to be building up to whole class teaching, taking a small group was not always feasible. Nevertheless, though trainees could not find opportunities to teach the RR model, they were still able to use the key principles in their teaching:

'Although I have not been able to use RR, I do think it has impacted on my practice generally.'

All four trainees mentioned their increased confidence when teaching reading comprehension and how it had changed their approach to this. The adaptability of RR was mentioned, as well as its flexibility: using it in different year groups or curriculum subjects and using all or just elements of the model. Indeed, questioning emerged as particularly significant and impacted most on trainees' teaching practice. Trainees all talked about using the questioning grid provided during the pre-project training to help children generate questions, and modelling this to encourage inference. Several of the trainees also commented on how they had effectively used questioning as an assessment tool.

The descriptive data from the interviews also indicated that RR could be used across the curriculum. For example, trainees mentioned using the model in Maths when talking about shapes using key terminology. These findings support research by Van Garderen (2004) showing how RR could be used in Maths to solve word problems by using predicting, clarifying, questioning and planning; children can also draw diagrams, underline key words and use a Maths dictionary.

# CONCLUSION

This action research was 'based on action and reflection with the intention of improving practice' (Ebbutt, 1995, p. 156, cited in Charmaz, 2006), so it is important to consider the implications on practice. This exploration confirms that participation in a school-based intervention programme based on the Reciprocal Reading model does have a sustainable impact on trainees' teaching practice. Certain barriers existed such as time, SATs and whole class teaching, but these were not insurmountable due to the adaptability of the model. The principles of scaffolding, questioning and dialogue, in particular, were transferable to other subjects.

In future, it would be interesting to use the Hope Challenge RR project with different year groups, including KS1. Making it more creative by using hooks, drama, and technology (e.g. Morfo, QR codes), which would potentially add to the engagement of the children. Focusing on one strategy at a time, to build up competence, would be a better approach across KS 1 and KS2. Connections also need to be made to encourage

the transfer of strategies. For example, strategy teaching should permeate whole class reading and should be included during activities such as listening to children read, discussing Maths problems and with non-fiction texts across the curriculum.

The project successfully allowed trainees to plan, practice, enact and receive feedback on their teaching before using it with children (Grossman et al, 2009). *This pedagogical cycle reinforced teaching as an interactive and experiential practice* (Scott et al, 2013) by conducting teacher education inside real classrooms. Using pedagogies of enactment meant that the trainees felt well-prepared and confident about using RR in the classroom. The project certainly helped to increase confidence, and all trainees plan to use RR when they have their own classes next year.

### BIOGRAPHY

**Katharine** is a professional tutor in Primary English at Liverpool Hope University and has recently assumed the role of Professional Placement Lead for Primary PGCE. She also delivers training on grammar, guided reading and reciprocal reading through Hope CPD.

Katharine has twenty years teaching experience across the primary phase, which included eight years as Assistant Head and a term as Acting Headteacher, in addition to her role as English subject leader. In her ten years as an English Advanced Skills Teacher, she worked in various Wirral schools supporting staff with the teaching of reading and writing; moderating writing; mentoring teachers and NQTs.

Katharine has a National Professional Qualification for Headship and an executive coaching award. She is currently studying for a MEd in Professional Practice.

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