SSR: An Old Practice in an ESL Context.

The discussion of sustained silent reading (SSR), an independent reading technique commonly used to support native language literacy development, recommends the method in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). It is argued that because SSR materials are self-selected, they are likely to be selected at an appropriate comprehension level and read with an open attitude. Successful implementation of SSR has several elements: access to books; appealing choice of books; quiet, comfortable surroundings conducive to pleasurable reading; encouragement, including teacher modeling; regular time set aside for reading; and lack of requirements for book reports, logs, or oral retelling that could inhibit student motivation. Tips for teachers to use in beginning and sustaining a SSR program are outlined. (SLB)
SSR: An Old Practice in an ESL Context

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a method of independent reading which surfaced in the early 1970's to give students time to practice the basic reading skills they were learning until the process of reading became automatic. SSR emerged from the psycholinguists' belief (Brown, 1970) that given a text-rich environment in a society that values reading, peer pressure will ultimately cause students to want to become members of what Smith (1994) dubbed, "the literacy club" (p. 217). Krashen's (1993) work with the comprehensible input theory brought the concept of SSR to the attention of ESL teachers.

The guidelines for SSR for native speakers were defined by McCracken in 1971. They are very straightforward: (a) the whole class, department, or school reads; (b) a pre-arranged segment of time is allotted; (c) students self-select reading material; (d) students read a single book for the allotted period; (e) the teacher models reading; and (f) no records are kept. McCracken contended that keeping records or completing reports on what they read put unnatural constraints on students. The assumption behind SSR is that students are naturally motivated to read when they have easy access to interesting books and a reading role model. An added benefit is the unspoken message that teachers value independent reading if they devote precious class time to it.

For ESL students, SSR is an ideal method for language acquisition. Krashen (1998) argues that for comprehension to occur, students need the presence of input they are developmentally ready to acquire and an open attitude (low affective filter). The self-selection aspect of SSR encourages students to choose books they are able to comprehend on topics that interest them. And, since they are not held accountable for what they have read, students can read
Janet Page Schiavone, SSR: An Old Practice in an ESL Context  p. 2

for enjoyment instead of trying to crack the code to find the “right” answer.

Pilgreen (1994), identified seven aspects common to the successful implementation of SSR. Classroom teachers have control over many of these elements and can structure their classrooms to promote an effective SSR program that suits their teaching style and the instructional needs of their students.

1. **Access to Books**

Providing a “book flood” or “saturating” the students with books to begin a successful SSR program is crucial. School and public library access play a large role in successful reading programs as do classroom libraries where the books are physically close by. Students also need to be able to check the books out to take home.

2. **Book Appeal**

Students must have access to reading material covering a wide range of topics and types of materials. Their interests, not literary merit, should be the guiding factor in book selection. Teachers should accept students’ reading choices, including paperbacks, picture books, story books, trade books, magazines, comic books, and even teen romances. It is acceptable to read above or below one’s reading level if what is being read is enjoyed.

3. **Conducive Environment**

When students have quiet, comfortable surroundings they are more motivated to start reading and are able sustain it longer. Many students lack quiet places to read, and they claim they like SSR because it is their only quiet time during the entire day. Comfortable surroundings could include pillows, easy chairs, carpets, and colorful posters.

4. **Encouragement**

The most effective way for teachers to show their support is to model reading. Often
when a teacher reads a book and expresses interest in it, students will ask to borrow the book. In addition, informal follow-up discussions among students and teachers can be encouraging.

6 **Time**

Educators agree that students must be given time in school to read; however, there is dissent as to how much and how often. How much time should be spent doing SSR runs the gamut from 3-10 minutes for younger students to 30-45 minutes for older students. The key is to build to the target amount of time gradually so students can learn how to sustain their reading. Two times a week is fairly standard on the middle school level, but many high school teachers have established successful programs reading just once a week while meeting additional curriculum demands the other days.

7. **Non-Accountability**

Not holding students accountable for what they have read allows poor readers to make mistakes without worrying about what the teacher or their peers will think. Non-accountability can also lower the affective filter for second language learners and allow them to read for pleasure. Book reports, logs, notebooks, and oral retells are not recommended because they convey the message to students that their teacher does not trust them to understand what they have read. Students who dislike writing or oral presentations begin to associate reading with these sources of irritation.

Establishing successful SSR programs is not something that can occur overnight. Teachers need to experiment with the various elements of successful SSR programs until they find the right balance for them and their students. If reading is something teachers believe in, SSR can be an ideal way to convey that message.
Here are a few tips for teachers to keep in mind as they implement an SSR program:

1. Start out slowly. Begin with 10 minutes for secondary students and gradually work up to 30-45 minutes. In the beginning, teachers can fill the remaining time reading aloud to their students.

2. Stick with it. It takes at least one quarter for the behavior to become established and another quarter for students to settle into the routine. Eventually the non-readers get tired of simply flipping through pages and actually engage in reading something.

3. Model the reading behavior expected of students. They quickly get the message that the teacher does not want his or her reading disturbed.

4. Help students find books that interest them. Taking a few minutes to help a student find a book at the outset can save hours of grief later.

5. Talk about the books informally. Students are social creatures who want to be members of the literacy club. Remember, Oprah's Book Club is successful for a reason.
Janet Page Schiavone, SSR: An Old Practice in an ESL Context  p. 5

References


I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: SSR: An Old Practice in an ESL Context

Author(s): Janet Page Schiarovone

Publication Date: March 9-13, 1999

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

______________________________

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

1

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

______________________________

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2A

2A

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

______________________________

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2B

2B

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: ____________________________

Printed Name/Position/Title: Janet Page Schiarovone / Research Associate

Organization/Address: GWU Graduate School of Education & Human Development

2134 G Street, NW Washington, DC

Telephone: 202-994-2865 FAX: 202-994-3365

eMail Address: jschiarovone@gwu.edu Date: 6/30/99

Sign here, please
III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:

Address:

Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:

Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

OUR NEW ADDRESS AS OF SEPTEMBER 1, 1998
Center for Applied Linguistics
4646 40th Street NW
Washington DC 20016-1859

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2nd Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-499-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com

088 (Rev. 9/97)
PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE.