

Using teacher modeling and repeated reading to improve the reading
performance of mildly handicapped students

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Introduction

Reading is the act of deriving meaning from written text. In order to read a person must be able to decode the printed word and to draw meaning from the words put together in text. Thus, the act of reading can be broken down into two components, decoding and comprehending. Although separate, these components are interrelated. A reader may be able to decode and not comprehend, but a reader cannot comprehend unless he can decode. In fact, according to LaBerge and Samuels (1974), a reader needs not only to be able to decode but to decode text automatically in order to allow his full attention to focus on meaning. Beginning and poor readers who must concentrate on decoding lack fluency and have less attention available for comprehending. Lack of fluency, then, is more than an indicator of poor reading; lack of fluency impedes comprehension. Consequently, fluency is a necessary component of reading (Allington, 1983). In fact, good readers decode text quickly and without direct attention to the act of decoding (Adams, 1990). Consequently, strategies to improve fluency in young readers are important for educators.

The modeling of good reading and the practicing of reading are two strategies that improve fluency. Teacher modeling of the reading of text increases fluency in beginning readers. Neville (1968) demonstrated that students' fluency increased significantly after teacher modeling prior to silent reading, was used as a teaching strategy. Smith (1979) determined that students' oral reading rates were higher and error rates were lower if the teacher read orally before the student read. Rose (1984) concluded that, while prereading raised the performance level of students, listening-while-prereading produced greater increases in reading rate than silent

prereading. In addition, Heckleman's work (1969) with the neurological impress method supports the positive effect of teacher modeling on the attainment of fluency.

Practicing reading also increases fluency (Allington, 1977). Repeated reading is one strategy that provides an opportunity to practice reading and has been shown to be an effective way to increase fluency. Samuels (1979) concluded that repeated reading increased fluency in students experiencing reading difficulty. Knupp (1988) demonstrated that repeated reading increased reading rate, decreased errors, and improved comprehension in students. Koskinen and Blum (1984) determined that, when compared to seat work, repeated reading produced more improvement in students' reading rate than did seatwork. Finally, Herman found that the improvement in fluency as a result of repeated reading transferred to other readings.

Clearly, empirical tests have demonstrated that, used separately, both teacher modeling and repeated reading are good strategies to increase fluency. This article describes the results of using these two strategies in tandem to increase the fluency of students experiencing reading difficulties in a third grade reading classroom.

Method

Subjects

The students participating in this study were enrolled in a large primary school in a major midwestern metropolitan area. These students, who attended a third grade reading class, consisted of seven special education students and 18 Chapter 1 eligible students. All the students were reading below grade level and scored in the lower 40%ile on standardized

tests. One instructional goal for these students was to improve their reading fluency.

Assessment Procedures

The students' progress in fluency was monitored weekly using Curriculum-Based Measures (Deno 1985). Each student was timed for one minute while reading an unpracticed passage taken from the Holt Basal Reader grade three materials. The scores were recorded and the median score of the three most recent timings was graphed. This design, which is referred to as a single subject research design, was used in this study to investigate the effectiveness of the Teacher Modeling/Repeated Reading Strategy (TMRR). The TMRR approach to reading instruction was first implemented with the seven special education students during the fall of the academic year. TMRR was then implemented with the remaining 18 Chapter I eligible students from November to March. The single subject measurement design formed the basis of multiple-baseline comparisons that allowed investigators to look at the benefits of TMRR. An example of a monitoring graph is shown below in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Two phases of instruction are evident on this progress monitoring graph, baseline and TMRR. During baseline intervention the slope of improvement is .32 correct words per week, which suggests the student improved little. However, the student's performance improves considerably during TMRR. The average gain per week during this instructional phase is 2.29 correct words per week.

Baseline Instruction

During baseline instruction all students received 25 minutes of basal reader instruction in the Holt Reading series (Weiss et al., 1983), 25 minutes of reciprocal teaching (Palincsar, 1986), and 25 minutes of phonics instruction.

The Teacher Modeling/Repeated Reading Strategy (TMRR)

In the TMRR instructional strategy, teacher modeling and repeated reading was emphasized in 25 minute sessions. The TMRR sessions replaced the phonics instruction component used during the baseline instructional period.

The materials used for the TMRR instructional strategy were books A through D of the New Phoenix Readers. The reading levels of the books ranged from grade 2 to grade 5. The books consisted of factual passages, 100 to 200 words in length, covering a variety of topics. Every line in each passage was numbered to indicate the total number of words at the end of any given line. Students worked in the level of book they could read initially at 40 to 60 words per minute. When students increased their initial reading of passages to 80 words per minute for five consecutive sessions they worked in the next level book.

TMRR sessions began with each student selecting a passage to practice. The student read the selected passage orally to a partner or to the instructor for one minute, noted the number of words read correctly and graphed that number. The student then read along quietly, while listening to a tape of the selected passage, until able to read the passage alone. (Each passage had been pre-recorded at an approximate speed of 55 words per minute, with correct expression and phrasing.) Next, the student practiced the passage silently. Some students chose to tape record the

passage and self correct their oral reading by listening to their tape recording. Then, a partner or instructor timed the student's oral reading of the passage for one minute, noted the words read correctly and graphed the results. Finally, the student compared the pre-practice rate with the post-practice rate. The goal was to reach a fluency of 80 to 100 words per minute.

Results

Performance of Special Education Students (Phase 1)

After seven weeks of daily instruction (Phase 1) and weekly assessment, the learning rates of the special education students instructed with the TMRR technique were examined. These students made an average weekly gain of 2.35 words per minute. However, the average gains of the Chapter I students, who did not receive the TMRR strategy during Phase I, were considerably less, 1.23 words per minute. A t-test comparison revealed a significant difference between both groups ($t=3.24$, $p=.005$).

Insert Table 1 about here

Performance of Chapter I Students (Phase 2)

After 13 weeks of daily instruction with TMRR and weekly assessment the reading rates of the Chapter 1 students during Phase 2 were examined. As can be seen in Table 1, the average weekly gain of the Chapter 1 students was 2.15 words per minute, similar to the gains of the special education group in phase 1. These gains were then compared with the 1.23 words per minute average weekly gains these same Chapter 1 students made during Phase 1 of the study, when they were not being instructed using TMRR. These students made statistically significant

greater average weekly gains while being instructed using the TMRR strategy than while being instructed in phonics. A paired t-test comparison revealed a significant difference between baseline and TMRR performance ($t=2.14$, $p=.047$).

The overall growth in reading for both the special education and Chapter I students was considerable, as shown by the number of words read correctly during pre-test and post-test levels presented in Table 1. A comparison of special education and Chapter I students before and after implementation of the TMRR strategy is illustrated in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that combining teacher modeling and repeated reading strategies was very effective in increasing reading fluency in 25 third grade students reading below grade level when the study began. There were several factors that may have played an important role in the positive results. First, the time the students were on task was extremely high. Second, the students had ownership of their learning by monitoring their progress, deciding what passages to read and determining how to practice the reading. Third, the students experienced success early in the study and appeared to be very motivated to continue to improve. Fourth, individual students moved to more difficult levels of material as they improved, thus motivating and challenging them constantly. Finally, during the study, many of the students reported an increasing interest in reading outside the classroom. This increasing interest in reading was evident each week as the entire class of 25 students went into the media center to read tape recorded books. As the students'

fluency increased their distractability and inappropriate behavior decreased. It was very gratifying to see these formerly reluctant readers eagerly read along, obviously enjoying the reading activity.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations for words read correctly and weekly gain.

	<u>October</u>		<u>November</u>		<u>March</u>		<u>Average Weekly Gain</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Phase 1</u>	<u>Phase 2</u>
Special Education	34.0	8.7	50.7	9.0			2.35	
Chapter I	50.2	11.9	58.7	13.2	86.7	16.2	1.23	2.15

Figure 1. Sample progress monitoring graph comparing baseline performance to the Teacher Modeling/Repeated Reading Strategy

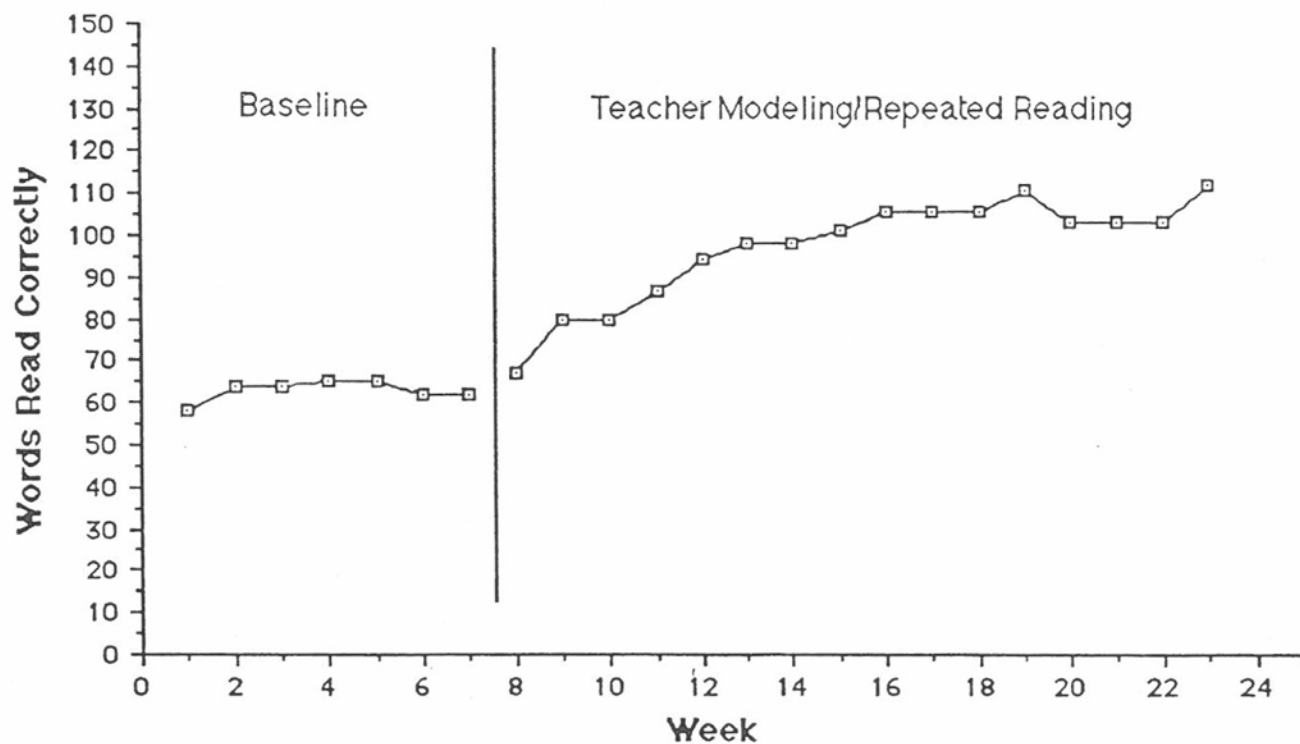


Figure 2. Pre- and post-testings for the Teacher Modeling/Repeated Reading Strategy

