

The effect of rereading text at a student's instructional level upon reading fluency

Helen M. Wilson

Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of repeated readings of text at a student's instructional level upon reading fluency. The participants for this study included seven third grade students who were reading below grade level and below the fluency norms for beginning third graders. The participants included three girls and four boys, ages 8 to 9. Data was collected using leveled readers, weekly running records for fluency from a pretest and a posttest, student completed graphs, and a pretest and posttest measurement of reading comprehension using the Scholastic Reading Inventory. The main findings indicated that explicit fluency instruction, engaging students in rereading text, and modeling fluent reading do positively impact reading fluency.

1. Introduction

At my elementary school in central Kansas, the third grade reading instruction is differentiated, meaning that the 51 students in three classrooms are leveled into five reading groups. It was the below grade level readers, a group of seven, with whom I was privileged and challenged to work. At the onset, I was asking myself: "What type of instruction do these students need to become more proficient readers?" While listening to these third grade students read aloud in the first few days of the semester, it was apparent that fluency was an area that needed attention. These same students also had low reading comprehension scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). Knowing that improved fluency in reading has a direct correlation to increased reading comprehension, I decided that I would focus on fluency instruction as a basis for building reading proficiency and investigate the effect of rereading text at a student's instructional level upon reading fluency. As we began the semester, I talked with the students individually and collectively about why reading was important. Each student was fully aware that he/she was reading below grade level, and not surprisingly, each truly desired to work hard toward the goal of becoming a better reader.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

After a Congressional mandate to identify the key skills and methods necessary to ensure reading achievement, the National Reading Panel (2000) issued a report that identified five components that are critical to reading instruction. The five areas of reading instruction that were identified were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). At the earliest stages of reading, students struggle and labor to release the magic of written letters to sounds, the blending of sounds into words, the joining of separate words into phrases, and finally the combining of phrases into meaningful sentences. As readers develop over considerable time and practice, the automaticity of reading begins to take place and the resulting fluency translates into greater understanding of the meaning of the text. Thus, the more fluent the reader, the more that reading comprehension is achieved.

The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed more than 100,000 studies (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001) and began to draw conclusions about what instructional practices would work best to ensure reading success for students. One of their findings was that "if text is read in a laborious and inefficient manner, it will be difficult for the child to remember what has been read and to relate the ideas expressed in the text to his or her background knowledge" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 11). In other words, by the time a student struggles through decoding words and reaches the end of the sentence or passage, he has used so much energy in the decoding process that he has no more energy to construct or retain meaning. Since fluent readers do not have to spend energy on decoding words, they are able to focus their attention on

meaning, and as they make connections between the meaning of the text and their background knowledge, reading comprehension occurs.

The participants for this study included seven third grade students who were reading below grade level and below the fluency norms for beginning third graders, which is 90 words correct per minute (WCPM). The participants included three girls and four boys, ages 8 to 9. Of these students, three had individualized education plans for reading and/or writing. All of these students were in the regular education curriculum with paraprofessional support in the classroom.

On day one of a reading phase, students were measured in a one-minute timed test on a cold read (text that had not been previously read) of text at their instructional level, which is below third grade level. A running record of student errors was made during the reading as well. Students then recorded their cold read (pretest) WCPM and reading accuracy rate on graph paper. Beginning on day two, students were led by the teacher in guided reading of the same passage with repeated readings continuing through day seven. The passage would have been read in whole group or chorus fashion, guided partner reading, and paired reading fashion up to 8-10 times over this period. On day eight, the student would again read the passage aloud in a one-minute timing (posttest) and record the WCPM and reading accuracy rate on his/her graph paper. As a pretest for reading comprehension, at the beginning of the semester students completed the SRI. The SRI was again administered at the end of the semester, with the results being considered as a posttest for reading comprehension.

On two consecutive phases, the pretest readings showed 1 of 14 readings at or above 90 WCPM. After repeated readings, students achieved the desired goal of 90 WCPM or above on 13 of the 14 posttest measurements. Six of the seven students achieved the goal of 90 WCPM on both posttests. One of seven students achieved the goal in only her second posttest. The running records also measured reading accuracy. It is desirable that along with 90 WCPM, 95% reading accuracy is achieved. Accuracy of 95% was achieved on 7 of 14 pretests. After repeated readings, the average of posttest accuracy for all students was 98.7%, with 100% of the students achieving 95% accuracy or higher on both posttests.

Because of the strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension, I administered the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) as a pretest and a posttest for reading comprehension. Beginning third grade students should be reading at 500 lexile points. All seven students measured below 400 lexile points on the comprehension pretest. Three of seven scored 500 or above on the posttest. It is generally thought that a 25 point gain in a quarter, or a 50 point gain in a semester is average. Since the pretest and posttest measurements occurred over a semester, anything over a 50 lexile point gain is significant. Five of the 7 students showed an above average gain, gaining between 76 and 336 lexile points, and 3 of those 5 had remarkable gains of over 300 lexile points. Students' reading comprehension was positively impacted by the improved reading fluency.

3. Conclusions

The pretest and posttest data measurements for reading fluency, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension were analyzed, and all of the recorded data support that repeated readings of text does increase reading fluency. The results of this study were congruent with the findings of *The National Reading Panel Report* of 2000. Repeated readings of text at the student's instructional level will build fluency, and building fluency does have a positive relationship with increased reading comprehension. Explicit fluency instruction, engaging students in rereading text, and modeling fluent reading do positively impact reading proficiency.

4. Acknowledgements

My building principal, the students, and their parents were supportive in my efforts as I conducted my research.

[1] National Reading Panel, *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*, Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000.

[2] B.B. Armbruster, F. Lehr, and J. Osborn, *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read* (Editor: C. R. Adler), Jessup, MD: ED Publications, 2001.