

TO IMPROVE YOUR STUDENTS' READING ACHIEVEMENT

Recorded Books *Work!*



Research & Results

- Fluency
- Reading Comprehension
- Vocabulary Development
- Reading Readiness

Recorded Books

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About This Report

During the summer school session of 2003, Recorded Books sponsored several action research projects in school districts across the country. The goal of these projects was to determine the impact of audiobook support on the reading performance of struggling middle and high school readers in our partner districts.

Twenty-three teachers in twelve middle and high schools in the Boston Public Schools and the San Diego Public Schools participated in projects involving the use of audiobooks to improve student learning. In each school, students were divided into groups for independent reading each day, with some groups using audiobook support as they read along in the text (experimental group) and some groups using print texts only (control group).

The results published in this report came from eighth- and ninth-grade classrooms in these districts. Teachers performed pre- and post-testing on fluency and/or comprehension using each district's mandated instruments and then relayed their findings to Recorded Books. Logs were kept at Brighton High School on the number of pages read by the students, and comparative numbers are reported here.

A survey of response journals of Boston Public School students strongly suggests that students who read with audiobook support made more entries and longer entries than students who read with print only. Such a finding reflects the comprehension improvements that we saw, suggesting that struggling readers using Recorded Books better understand what they are reading and so have more to say when asked to write about what they have read. In addition, many teachers observed positive changes in their students' attitudes toward reading in the groups with Recorded Books support.

The balance of this research summary reflects studies and reviews that have been published by educational researchers in the recent past concerning the impact of audio support for struggling readers. Much of what we are learning about the importance of modeled readings for the development of reading proficiency in students has been validated in large-scale national reports, including *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985) and the report of the National Reading Panel, *Teaching Children to Read* (2000). Further confirmation appears in research summary reports from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) at the University of Michigan, as well as in many of the individual studies cited.

About Recorded Books

Recorded Books is the world's largest publisher of unabridged audiobooks for elementary, middle, and high school students. Founded in 1979, the company produces the finest audiobooks available, read by professional narrators, using the highest quality cassettes and CDs. Our audiobooks are packaged in specially manufactured albums for durability and ease of storage on classroom and library shelves and carry the industry's best warranty and replacement policy. Customer service is always available through our toll free number.

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The Benefit of Recorded Books for

Fluency

Research Foundation

- Students need explicit instruction and experiences that specifically target fluency (Pinnell et al, 1995, cited in Worthy and Broaddus, 2002).
- Students become more fluent readers when provided with models of fluent reading (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2001).
- Tape-assisted reading strategies produce significant gains for students (Kuhn and Stahl, 2000).
- Reading-while-listening is the most efficient way to assist readers' transitions to fluency (Dowhower, 1987 and Rasinski, 1990, cited in Kuhn and Stahl, 2000).
- Unassisted silent reading with tape support on a daily basis accelerates the transition to fluency in middle school students (San Diego USD—Recorded Books, 2003).
- Modeled reading is especially effective with struggling readers (Chomsky, 1978 and Samuels, 1979, cited in Worthy and Broaddus, 2002).
- Tape-recorded stories at a read-along center followed by weekly partner-reading sessions improve reader confidence, reading rates, word attack skills, and pleasure in the task of reading (Hoskisson and Krohm, 1974, cited in Kuhn and Stahl, 2000).
- No research evidence is available currently to confirm that instructional time spent on silent, independent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2001).

“Students become more fluent readers when provided with models of fluent reading.”

(Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2001)

Research Implications

Research tells us that effective fluency instruction begins with modeled reading. While having the teacher read texts aloud to students provides limited experience with the characteristics of fluent reading, tape-assisted readings can provide unlimited practice for students. This fact has led researchers to speculate that the instructional use of recordings of fluent readings is in fact the most efficient way to meet this first requirement of effective fluency instruction.

Researchers point out, however, that silent independent reading alone has not been shown to improve fluency or overall reading achievement. Effective teachers of reading ensure that appropriate models of fluent reading are provided to all students. This research suggests that schools and teachers who want to make effective use of reading practice time to improve fluency should make sure that students have access to model readings as part of their practice. This means that providing recordings of fluent readers in popular school programs such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) will enhance reading outcomes for students.

In the San Diego Unified School District during the summer school session of 2003, Recorded Books supported a study in partnership with Gompers School to determine the effect of such a program on the fluency achievement of eighth-grade reading students. Eighty students were randomly assigned to one of two groups for an independent reading period of 45 minutes each day; one group read independently from a print text with simultaneous Recorded Books model reading support, while the other group read from the print text alone. Pre- and post-tests of each student's fluency showed that students who had simultaneous model reading support for their reading of a print text increased their fluency by 32.67 CWPM (Correct Words Per Minute) as compared with a 20.35 CWPM gain for the control group. These results were realized during a six-week program in which each group read independently on a daily basis.

Research also suggests that structured practice reading based on model reading is an effective way to help students transition to fluency. Research confirms the value of a wide variety of approaches, including listening centers for groups as well as individualized experiences. Two important challenges teachers face when using this approach include monitoring student engagement while listening and extending the process for additional practice as part of the daily classroom routine.

Using taped readings for models allows teachers to move about the room and monitor student engagement as students listen to a modeled reading by using a rubric or an informal checklist. In order to extend the benefits of listening, teachers include choral, echo, and, most significantly, partner reading in their lessons. Once they have listened to a fluent reader provide a model reading on tape, students are paired to read aloud to one another for practice. Students who followed this approach were observed to 1) grow more confident in their renderings of a text, 2) increase their reading rates, 3) make more successful attempts to identify new words, 4) improve their listening skills, and 5) take more pleasure in their own reading.

Reading Comprehension

Research Foundation

- In a study involving a nationwide sample of thousands of students, listening comprehension in the fifth grade was the best predictor of performance on a range of aptitude and achievement tests in high school, better than any other measure of aptitude or achievement in the fifth grade (The Report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, 1985).
- In a study conducted in the Boston Public Schools, remedial readers at the ninth-grade level improved their scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory by 32% when they read daily with Recorded Books support, compared to a 24% improvement for control group students who read daily without audiobook support (Boston Public Schools Study, 2003).
- In results reported at the International Dyslexia Association Conference in 2002, researchers from Johns Hopkins University and Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic show that high school students who read their civics text with audiobook support showed almost twice the knowledge gain on a test as those who read the same text without support (Boyle, Elizabeth, et al, 2002).
- In a study conducted in the Brevard County (FL) Public Schools, students scored an average of 94.38% on their Accelerated Reader™ tests when they read books with Recorded Books support, compared to an average score of 71.74% for students who read print only (Andrew Jackson Middle School Study, 2003).
- Children must first learn how to recognize and relate print to oral language knowledge and to make this recognition automatic through practice (Stevens et al, 1991).
- Reading comprehension growth can be reliably linked to the volume of reading that students do (Cipielewski and Stanovich, 1992).
- In a study conducted in the Boston Public Schools, remedial readers with Recorded Books support at the ninth-grade level read 77% more pages in a four-week period than a control group that read print only (Boston Public Schools Study, 2003).

Research Implications

Teachers who want to promote reading comprehension gains create many opportunities for reading practice in the classroom, based on their understanding that the amount of reading that their students do has a proven effect on reading achievement. Often, and especially with older students, this requires a selection of high-interest materials so that every student can choose and enjoy the materials they read. In order to maximize the amount of practice for those who need it most, teachers provide Recorded Books support for the readers who have difficulty finding materials to read at their interest level that they can decode comfortably.

The improved comprehension that comes from Recorded Books support translates into greater engagement with the text for students. This permits students who otherwise might be excluded from an age-appropriate discussion of a text to join in and benefit from interaction with others. Students in the Boston Public Schools Study (2003) wrote more in their response journals than the students in the control groups, indicating a richer engagement with the book. Effective teachers understand the importance of a variety of opportunities for students to respond to what they have read, and they ensure that every student in the class, regardless of initial reading level, has the chance to fully participate in the activities shown to promote reading comprehension, including discussion with peers and with the teacher.

For students who are attempting to read informational text written at a level above their independent reading level, audiobook support has been shown to bridge the gap. Knowledge gain from reading for special education students in a high school civics class and for middle school struggling readers in a summer program was significantly higher when audiobook support was provided. In the group that took Accelerated Reader™ quizzes at the end of each novel, the same students who had performed poorly (two to three questions missed) when they read print only missed less than one question per quiz on average when they read with Recorded Books support. Effective teachers offer this support to scaffold the emerging abilities of their struggling students, and to allow them to participate fully in all the activities of the classroom that support comprehension growth. These teachers know that nothing succeeds like success, creating a pattern of higher achievement for the student to build on in the future.

“The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

(The Report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, 1985)

The Benefit of Recorded Books for

Vocabulary Development

Research Foundation

- Less able middle school readers were able to learn a significant number of vocabulary words from listening to orally presented passages (Stahl, Richek, and Vandevier, 1991).
- Reading storybooks aloud helps teach children meanings of unfamiliar words (Robbins and Ehri, 1994).
- Younger children significantly improved new expressive vocabulary from a single oral reading of a book (Senechal and Cornell, 1993).
- Having students encounter vocabulary words often and in various ways can have a significant effect (National Reading Panel Report, 2000).
- The kind of effective vocabulary instruction supported by research emphasizes multimedia aspects of learning, richness of context in which words are to be learned, active student participation, and the number of exposures to words that learners receive (National Reading Panel Report, 2000).
- Dependence on a single method for vocabulary instruction is risky (National Reading Panel Report, 2000).

Research Implications

For students at the middle or high school level, listening to orally presented passages, or modeled readings, is a proven way to acquire new vocabulary. Giving students opportunities to hear new words through a Recorded Book as they follow along in the print text takes advantage of the word hoard they have acquired through listening and bridges the transition from oral to written language.

Effective teachers also know that multiple exposures to new words in context also accelerate students' vocabulary development. High interest reading materials motivate older struggling readers to read more, and their exposure to new vocabulary is increased.

Research also suggests that much vocabulary learning takes place indirectly, while students are doing things other than working on a vocabulary lesson. Independent reading with Recorded Books support is one avenue for indirect vocabulary development. Child-initiated talk about topics covered in class also has a positive effect on the acquisition of new words, so effective teachers make sure that all students, especially the strugglers, can participate in classroom discussions. As part of the summer 2003 research study in the Boston Public Schools, teachers found that students who experienced Recorded Books support as they read independently every day were more likely to talk and write about their books than students who read only the printed text.

Teachers who stimulate vocabulary development provide opportunities for students to hear and see words multiple times, to use them actively in their own talk, and to encounter them in compelling contexts.

The Benefit of Recorded Books for

Reading Readiness

Research Foundation

- Children who were read to at least three times a week were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25% in reading than children who were read to less than three times a week (Denton and West, 2002).
- Young children who were read to three times per week entered school significantly more able to identify the letter-sound relationship at the beginning of words and at the end of words than children who were read to fewer than three times per week (Denton and West, 2002).
- Nearly twice as many children who had been read to three times per week had sight-word recognition skills compared to children who were read to fewer than three times per week (Denton and West, 2002).
- More than twice as many children who had been read to three times per week could understand words in context compared to those who were read to fewer than three times a week (Denton and West, 2002).

Research Implications

On the way to becoming a reader, everyone passes through a phase of pre-reading capabilities known as "reading readiness." There is no evidence to suggest that this stage can be skipped or omitted in the acquisition of reading skills by the student. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that children who had been read to at least three times per week before beginning formal reading instruction exhibited much stronger emergent reading skills, or "reading readiness," than children who had not received this level of auditory support. Authors like Jim Trelease have emphasized the "pleasure" of being read to as a key factor in the development of a positive and more highly skilled approach to reading. The teacher who creates opportunities for students to listen as they read along in the print text fosters an activity highly correlated with the development of strong reading readiness skills. These skills then pave the way for higher levels of reading achievement.

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