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Parent-Assisted Reading Using a Paired Reading Model

Angela Howell

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of parent-assisted reading on reading comprehension. The study involved the use of the paired-reading model. The teacher made a short video of herself and each child implementing the model. Parents were given the video and a short list of instructions along with a reading log. The study lasted for the first six weeks of the school year. The researcher analyzed data from the students' selection tests that accompany the basal reader using an interrupted time-series design. The scores showed considerable variation with marked improvement on test five of six weekly tests. Although consistent implementation by the parent seemed to be a problem, these results are promising.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most beneficial skills children can acquire during their lifetime is that of learning how to read. Children are able to apply this skill to learning in all other areas of the curriculum including math, language arts, science, and social studies. According to Cadieux & Boudreault (2005), reading is at the core of a child's education. Learning to read can also facilitate communication between members of society. People must know how to read signs when driving, directions on medicine bottles, and even menus when ordering food. Each of these affect how people function in society, and people who know how to read can accomplish these simple tasks with greater ease. "Historically, reading has been associated with success in life. Reading may be even more important in today's information and technology age" (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003, p. 613).

Educators struggle to find the perfect recipe for teaching children how to read. Many programs come and go with changes in politics. The government usually tells teachers what to teach and sometimes even how to teach it. All too often, teachers must prepare implement the required reading program of their school system. Nevertheless, one technique teachers can adapt to any reading program is parent-assisted reading. I believe that this approach to teaching reading, when taught using a paired-reading approach in the child's home, can be very beneficial to everyone involved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Parent-Assisted Reading?

Parent-assisted reading involves the active participation of parents in their child's education. Although the steps are not difficult to follow, parent-assisted reading requires dedication from both the parents and the children. The method implemented in this study is adapted from the research of K.J. Topping (2001). There are only two simple steps to follow when implementing a parent-assisted reading program. The first step requires both the child and the parent to read concurrently. The parent must read at the child's speed and pay close attention to word pronunciation. The child should be able to notice the parent's reading style and learn from him or her. During the second stage, the child begins to read independently. When the child is ready to read without the parent's help, he or she gives the parent a signal (example: hand signal like thumbs-up). If the child pauses for four seconds or makes an error, the parent will correct the child and begin reading with the child again. This will continue until the child is ready to read alone again (Cadieux & Boudreault, 2005).

Many parents send their child to their rooms to read alone, but the child is not capable of completing such a difficult task independently. This can prove to be frustrating for the parents, teachers, and the child. Many times the child did not read the book because he or she was off-task during the "reading." The child may have come across words that were difficult to pronounce or comprehend. Children and parents waste valuable time when this occurs, time that could be spent reading together and learning from this shared experience. According to Hawes & Plourde (2005), society is aware of

how important parents are to a child's success in the classroom. When a child's reading is reinforced at home, the child performs better in all subjects.

No Child Left Behind

With the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, teachers must work vigorously to ensure that all students perform on or above grade level. The NCLB "law- in partnership with parents, communities, school leadership and classroom teachers-seeks to ensure that every child in America receives a great education and that no child is left behind" (Department of Education, Washington D.C., 2003, p. 23). Teachers strive to teach their students the necessary skills in order to meet state-prescribed standards. Third grade students in Georgia must pass the reading portion of the Criterion-Reference Competency Test (CRCT) in order to gain promotion to the fourth grade. Therefore, third grade teachers put a great deal of emphasis on reading instruction, especially reading comprehension. The use of parent-assisted reading could be one method of reading instruction for boosting reading comprehension. Hawes & Ploude (2005) state that both educators and government officials both acknowledge the importance of parent involvement in supporting students' reading success.

Improving Comprehension

There is much evidence that shows how parent-assisted reading can be implemented as a useful technique to improve reading comprehension. According to Hawes & Plourde (2005), reading comprehension is a very multifaceted part of education. Educators are constantly searching for the best techniques to use when teaching reading. Many students have difficulties understanding the information in textbooks and do not perform well because of this. Teachers can use parent-assisted reading to address this problem. Children can read paragraphs from textbooks at home with their parents. Parents can help their children understand difficult words and explain complicated concepts to them. This is a wonderful way to build upon what the child is learning in the classroom.

Literacy in the Home

Parent-assisted reading can be extremely beneficial for all members of the household. The number of illiterate adults living in America is staggering. According to the study conducted by the United States Department of Education in 2003, approximately 14 percent of American adults tested in the “below basic” prose literacy level. These adults can accomplish basic literacy skills, which include reading and interpreting charts and forms, filling out a bank deposit slip, and performing basic addition to solve problems (Kutner, Greenberg, & Baer, 2003). By incorporating parent-assisted reading into the curriculum, parents who may struggle with reading will have opportunities to make improvements. It is a great way to create family literacy, which is a renewed trend in education today. Family literacy honors “parents as their children’s first teachers and refers to the many ways in which they, along with siblings, and extended family members, have the potential to impact the literacy learning of children” (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006, p. 262). Therefore, all members of the family can benefit from parent-assisted reading.

Home-School Connection

Parent-assisted reading can be a wonderful, productive way to create a connection between the child’s home and school. Hawes & Plourde (2005) state that it is imperative for parents and educators to work collectively to create a successful education experience for students. When parents are involved in their child’s education, they send a very important message to the child. It shows children that their educational success is important to their parents. Teachers also appreciate parents who are dedicated to their children and are willing to do whatever it takes to promote success in the classroom. Parent-assisted reading is one method of instruction that helps create a flawless connection between educators and parents (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006).

Homework + Parent Involvement = Success

Parents of elementary children must understand that their children require their assistance when completing homework assignments. Too many children enter the classroom with incomplete or inaccurate homework assignments. Teachers know which children are receiving help at home and

which are not. Parent-assisted reading can be one homework assignment that allows parents to get involved with minimal effort. There is evidence that academic achievement increases when parents are actively involved in their child's homework (Bailey, Brabham, & Ross, 2004).

Completing homework can be a very frustrating task for both parents and children. Parents may not understand the concepts their children are learning at school and feel as though they provide accurate explanations. The child may not be willing to accept the parents' help and rebel completely. Teachers give homework so that their students will remember and practice concepts taught at school. They also want to show the parents which concepts their child has been learning at school. Because reading is a daily concept, it is imperative to make it a weekly homework assignment. Children can complete this homework assignment with the parents in a relaxing setting with minimal interruptions. Parent-assisted reading sessions require a minimum of 10 minutes, but can go as long as both the parent and the child allow.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of parent-assisted reading on reading comprehension. There is much evidence that supports parent-assisted reading as an extremely beneficial practice for all members of the family. Parent-assisted reading could be one approach to help all children become excellent readers. The expectation was that implementation of a structured parent-assisted reading program would have a positive effect on reading comprehension. Reading comprehension was measured on weekly tests from the basal reading program for third graders within the school system.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Third grade students at an elementary school in middle Georgia were the participants in this study. According to the 2004-2005 State of Georgia K-12 Report Card, out of 1,037 students who were enrolled at this school, about 72% of the student population was Caucasian and about 23% of the student population was African American. There were also 16 Hispanic students and 19 multi-racial students. One hundred percent of the students at qualified for free or reduced lunch (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2006).

According to Podunk (2006), the median household income for residents of this area in 1999 was \$41,442.00. This website also states that approximately 39% of the residents graduated from high school, 19% have an Associate's degree, 8% hold a Bachelor's degree, and 7% hold a Master's degree, professional or doctorate degree. About 68% of the residents owned their own homes, while about 17% chose to rent their homes. After observing the 2000 United States Census Bureau data, it seemed as though these citizens were doing well economically, educationally, and personally.

The participants in this study included one class of third grade students. There were 19 participants in this study, which included 11 girls and 8 boys. These students are between the ages of eight and nine years old. There were 10 Caucasian students, 7 African American students, 1 Hispanic student, and 1 Multi-racial student in the class. Their level of intelligence ranged from average to high.

INSTRUMENTATION

The reading selection tests used were based on the stories in the third grade reading basal, Scott Foresman Basal Reading Program, Reading in Georgia (Pearson Education, Inc., 2004). Each selection test consisted of fifteen questions. About six of the questions referred to the vocabulary words in the stories, and the other nine were comprehension questions based on the stories.

PROCEDURES

Permission to do the study was obtained from the school principal and the Institutional Review Board at Georgia College & State University. In addition, a letter of explanation and a consent form were sent home to the parents. At the beginning of the first three-week period (baseline), the students were given a selection test subsequent to reading the first story in the basal. The researcher followed the same procedure for the next two selection tests. The results of these three selection tests were recorded. With the help of a preservice teacher from a local university, the teacher made a short video with each third grader to model the assisted reading program for his or her parents.

At the beginning of week three, a letter was sent home to the parents of the participants explaining the parent-assisted reading program (Appendix A). The letter also provided parents with detailed procedures to follow (Table 1). The parent-assisted reading program took place on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights. The parents and students made documentations in the reading log (Appendix B) each night and returned it to school the following school day. The parents also received the video of their child and the teacher modeling the parent-assisted reading procedures. This was done so that the parents could refer to the video at any time while they were learning this new technique. It was also a great way to motivate the students and get them excited about parent-assisted reading.

At the beginning of the second three-week period (implementation phase), the students were given a selection test following the reading of the fourth story in the basal. Selection tests were also given after the fifth and sixth story. The results of these three selection tests were recorded and observed to determine whether parent-assisted reading had any effect on reading comprehension.

DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

This study was an interrupted time series design with one group of 19 students. A multivariate repeated-measures analysis of variance was used to determine whether the implementation of parent-assisted reading had an effect on reading comprehension. The alpha level was set at .05. Data from the parent logs was also examined. A line graph displayed class means for all six weeks. (See Figure 1)

RESULTS

Results of the repeated measures analysis of variance were statistically significant in the expected direction of improvement [$F(5,13) = 3.47, p = .03$]. The effect size Partial Eta Squared was .57, the observed power was .75. The group means increased from a low of 81 ($SD = 18$) on the first test to a high of 93 ($SD = 17$) on test five (of six). See Table 2 and Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether parent-assisted reading would improve reading comprehension. Data collected from this study supported the hypothesis that it would in fact support comprehension. However, the weekly test scores were inconsistent; test six had lower results than tests two through five. It was also interesting to observe that test five had the highest test score. Several limitations to validity could have affected the outcomes of this particular study.

Attitude Matters!

For example, testing reading comprehension on a weekly basis necessitates different reading passage selections each week. Therefore one factor could have been that the students found the story that accompanied test six to be less interesting than the other stories. The students could have really been attracted to the story that accompanied test five. Although students must be taught to read a variety of literature, they do not enjoy all literature in the same manner. According to Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) “researchers have consistently found that high motivation and positive attitudes are related to higher reading achievement and more frequent reading” (p. 374). Attitude has a powerful effect on how students perform on tests.

The Latchkey Child

Another limitation could have been treatment fidelity, i.e. that the parent-assisted program was not implemented consistently in each home. Out of nineteen students, only one chose not to participate at all. This particular student’s parent works at night, so she was not able to read with him at home. She leaves for work before he gets home from school, and she gets home after he goes to bed. Research has been conducted that reveals the negative effects of having a parent who works at night. Linda Jacobson (2001) states that “children whose mothers work during the evening are less likely to do well in school than youngsters whose mothers work traditional hours, according to a recent study at Harvard University’s school of public health” (p. 16). Also “for students scoring in the bottom quartile in reading and vocabulary, the study also found, 16% had mothers who worked in the evenings, compared with 12% of the students who scored above the bottom quartile” (Jacobson,

2001, p. 16). The reading teacher and I tried to make up for this lack of parental involvement by allowing this student to read aloud to us for short periods throughout the day. Because of our hectic schedule, this was not done as often as we had planned. The student did appreciate our willingness to help him become a better reader. Although he did poorly on the first three tests, he did very well on the last three tests. This is more evidence that if the parent-assisted reading model was implemented at home, the student's reading skills could be quickly improved.

Children Need Structure

Many parents faithfully completed the parent-assisted model and reading log with their child. There were also those who completed it sporadically. I believe that this could have also influenced the results of this study. For positive results with parent-assisted reading, I believe that parents must have a structured lifestyle for their child, and this model should become a part of the nightly routine. According to Barbara Tylenda (2004) "children who have structure or routine are more available to learn and benefit from their educational opportunities" (p. 8). Parent-assisted reading does provide a child with a regular routine at home.

Suggestions for Implementation in the Future

In this study, I found that using the basal reading series could be one method for testing reading comprehension. Future research may reveal that using Accelerated Reading test scores or another reading series could produce better results. In addition, this research study could be strengthened if the process could be lengthened to two nine-week periods. An expanded study could have a positive impact on the data and the reading comprehension of the participants. It might also be helpful in future research to follow-up with parents during the implementation phase with a phone call or note. This could be a positive way to encourage those parents who lack consistency and praise those who are following the plan without fail. It could also be helpful to use extrinsic motivators such as holding a raffle for a prize for those students whose parents turned in a completed reading log. Finally, one may find it helpful to implement peer-assisted reading in the classroom. Teachers could pair excellent readers with weaker readers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research study showed that parent-assisted reading can increase reading comprehension. The video created by the researcher and the students provided the parents with the necessary guide to ensure proper implementation of the program. Although the study produced mixed results, the results are promising. Certainly the program did no harm and has potential for supporting comprehension. It is imperative to a child's academic success for parents to realize their important role as their child's first teacher. Once parents realize this fact, researchers believe that most children will be able to read on or above grade level (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006, p.262).

TABLE 1

Parent-Assisted Reading Format

1. Choose books for reading (Either A.R. books from school or books from home).
2. Set the timer for twenty minutes.
3. Parent and child read at the same time (simultaneously).
4. *Intervention:* Parent stops and makes corrections if the child: omits words, substitutes words, or pauses for more than three seconds.
5. *Corrective procedure:* If this occurs, point to and say the word, have the child repeat the word, and then continue reading simultaneously.
6. Child gives thumbs-up signal when ready to read alone (praise child for giving signal).
7. Child begins reading independently (praise child during this process).
8. When necessary repeat steps three and four.
9. Return to simultaneous reading until the child is ready to read alone again.
10. Repeat steps 4 through 7 until you have read for twenty minutes.
11. Please complete the Reading Log and return to school tomorrow.

Remember: WE ARE CREATING READERS AND TOMORROW'S LEADERS!

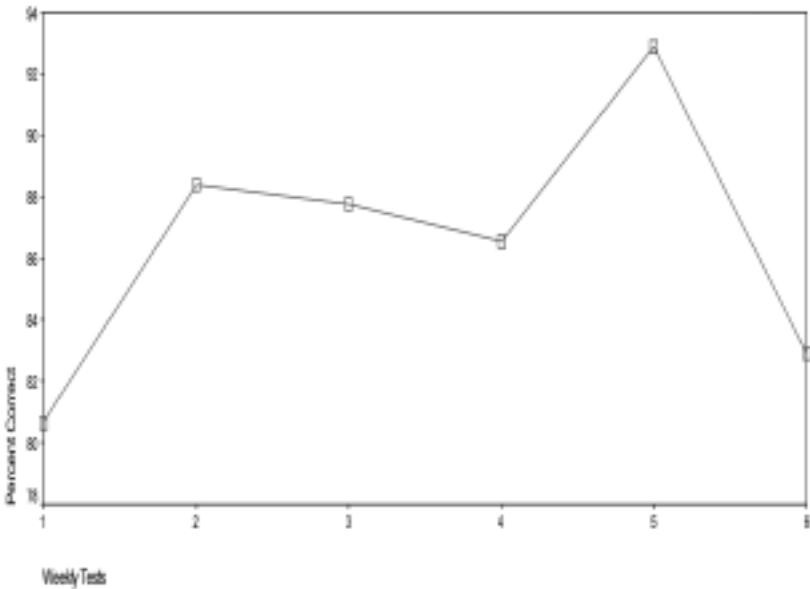
TABLE 2

The Effects of Parent-Assisted Reading on Reading Comprehension

	M	SD
TEST1	80.7	18.1
TEST2	88.4	9.3
TEST3	87.8	12.9
TEST4	86.6	9.5
TEST5	92.9	6.6
TEST6	82.9	17.0

FIGURE 1

Results of weekly tests



APPENDIX A

Explanation of the Parent-Assisted Reading Program

On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights your child will have a graded homework assignment. This assignment will require your help, and it will be your child's only assignment for the night (other than studying for tests). You will be required to read for twenty minutes with your child using the format in Table 1. After the reading session, both you and your child will record information into the reading log. The reading log must be return to school the following day in order for the child to receive full points for completing the assignment. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this assignment. I truly appreciate your support in making our students become better readers!

Thank you,

Angela R. Howell

APPENDIX B

Name _____

My Reading Log

	Date	Book Title	Minutes / Parent's Signature
	<u>Ex. 8-1-06</u>	<u>The Giving Tree</u>	<u>22</u>
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____
13.	_____	_____	_____
14.	_____	_____	_____
15.	_____	_____	_____

TOGETHER WE ARE CREATING READERS AND TOMORROW'S LEADERS!

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