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The effects of speed reading courses have been widely researched (cf. Berger, 1968). Stevens and Orem (1963) have suggested that the superior reader entering such a course with a more rapid reading rate, is an average or above average student, and likes to read. Rauch and Weinstein (1968) and Combs (1966) stress "read, read, read" as the best method for gaining speed. However, the National Association of Secondary School principals (1965) has warned that speed and comprehension do not necessarily go hand-in-hand, a finding which challenged earlier research by O'Brien (1921). A study of Air Force personnel (Brim, 1968) suggests that comprehension remains fairly constant as speed increases. Ray (1962) summarized nineteen representative studies since 1945 and found that most of these reported gains in rate of reading. Fewer than half the studies showed gains in both speed and comprehension.

Ray and Belden (1965) reported on a program calling for thirty hours of class work which produced significant gains in both speed and comprehension. Staton (1950), Beasley (1959), and Siegel (1962) have also reported significant gains in reading skills after speed reading courses. Retesting in these studies varied between three and six months. Stebens and Belden (1970) report significant gains in reading skills, except comprehension, five semesters after a college speed reading course.

The studies mentioned have focused on college and adult reactions to speed reading programs. Holmes and Singer (1966) have reported on a high correlation between speed reading and power among high school students and have presented a detailed correlational analysis of all the variables involved in their study. The present study was undertaken to test the effect of a speed reading course on ninth grade girls, replicating to some extent at the high school level studies reviewed above (Ray and Belden, 1965; Stebens and Belden, 1970). There were three major hypotheses: (1) that there would be a significant improvement in speed and comprehension as a result of the speed reading course; (2) that these gains would endure over a period of time; and (3) that gains in speed would be related to such variables as initial speed, initial and final comprehension, IQ, time of the year the course was taken (first or second quarter), and number of books read.

Subjects and Procedures

The subjects were 94 ninth grade girls at a Catholic high school for girls in a largely middle class section of a large midwestern city. All were members of "B" (average) or "C" (above average) classes. Mean IQ was 116. All students took a 30-lesson programmed-learning television course in speed reading (Visual Concepts Company, 1969). Six television lessons on study skills followed the speed reading program. The television lessons lasted from 28 to 30 minutes and were given five days a week, with supplementary practice sessions each day with a reading drill directed by a record provided by the Visual Concepts program.

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test A was administered to a "B" class (N=26) and a "C" class (N=19) who began the course in September, 1970, and to a "B" (N=28) and "C" (N=21) class who began the course in November. All classes took the Nelson-Denny Reading Test B at the completion of the course. Retesting was done with the Nelson-Denny A Test (cf. Brown, 1971) in April, 1971, approximately six months after the first group had completed the course and three months after the second group finished it, similar to the time intervals used by Ray and Belden (1968). An additional retest was given in October, 1971, to 34 of the students in the "C" classes. In addition to the test, students were asked to estimate the number of books they had read in the three months after the end of the course.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 show significant improvements in both speed and comprehension subsequent to the speed reading course. Results also substantiate the hypothesis that gains made in reading skills would remain over a period of time (Tables 2 and 3). Although speed leveled off and eventually dropped slightly after the

Table 1. Gains in Speed and Comprehension During Course

	Beginning	End of course	t	p
Words per min.	255.7553	628.6277	227.2	<.01
Comprehension score	36.4481	40.0000	11.44	<.01

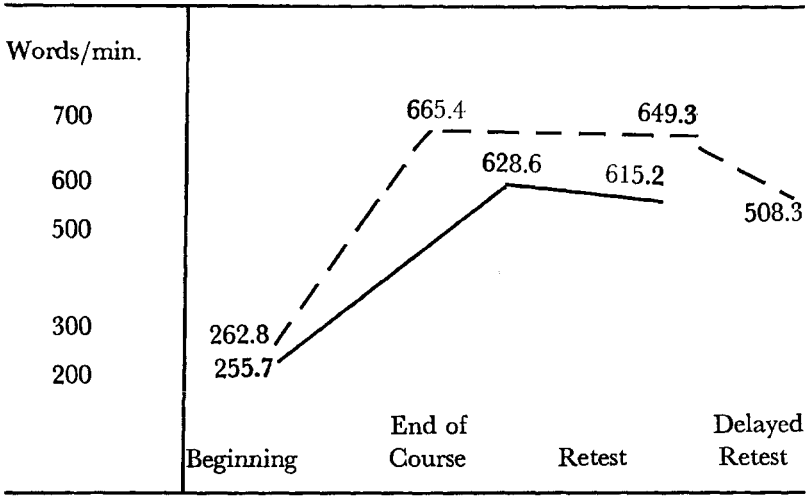
Table 2. Gains in Speed and Comprehension as Reflected in First Retest Scores

	Beginning	Retest	t	p
Words per min.	255.7553	615.1851	235.9	<.01
Comprehension score	36.4681	44.2340	26.51	<.01

Table 3. Gains in Speed and Comprehension as Reflected in Delayed Retest Scores (Including only 32 Above Average Students)

	Beginning	Delayed Retest	t	p
Words per min.	262.8125	508.3125	109.9	<.01
Comprehension score	43.3125	53.0000	19.54	<.01

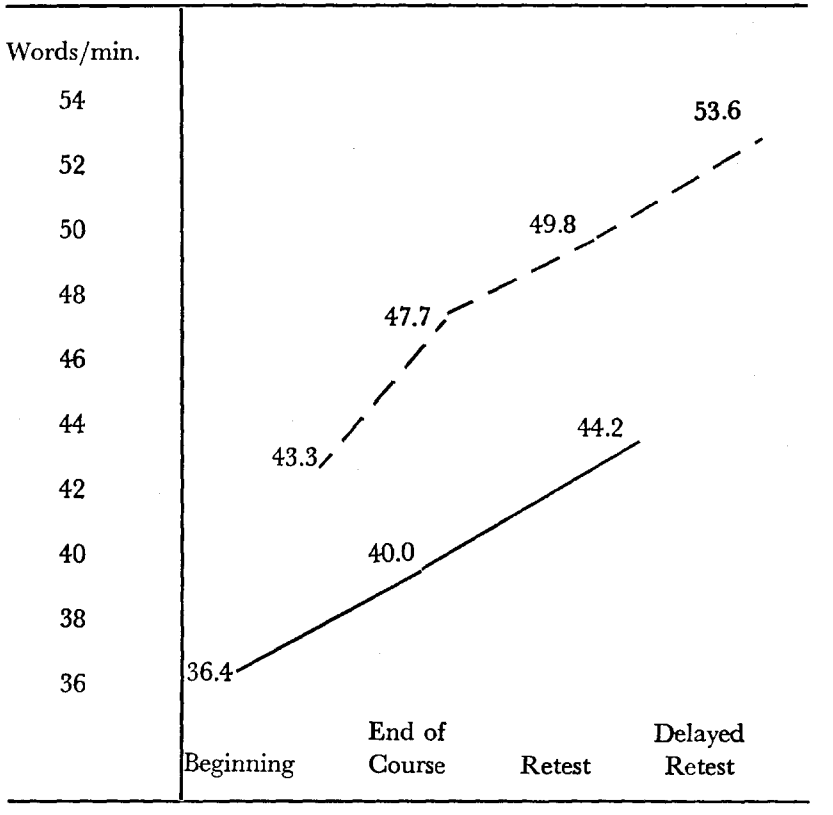
Figure 1. Mean Reading Rates at Beginning and End of Course and on Retest and Delayed Retest



end of the course, there was still a substantial improvement over the initial speed. The increased rate of comprehension even after the course was over (Figure 2) might indicate that reading skills learned during the course continued to develop even after it was over. However, the fact that speed dropped as comprehension increased after the course provides evidence that improvement in speed and comprehension are unrelated. This lack of relationship is further corroborated by the low correlations between speed and comprehension in Table 4.

Table 4 presents the correlations used to test the various parts of the third hypothesis. Although amount of reading as reported by the students was related to initial speed and to final speed, there was no relation between improvement in comprehension or speed and amount of reading. IQ was related to comprehension on each testing occa-

Figure 2. Mean Comprehension Scores at the Beginning and End of the Course and on the Retest and Delayed Retest



Solid line All students (N = 94)
Broken line Above average students who were available for retest (N = 32)

sion, but it was not related to speed or to improvements in speed or comprehension. Initial speed was positively related to initial comprehension, to comprehension at the end of the course, and to final speed, but was unrelated to improvement factors (variables 10 to 13). Initial comprehension was negatively related to improvement in comprehension (probably a ceiling effect), but was not at all related to gains in speed.

Although the number of books read in the three months after the course was not related to the amount of gain in reading speed or com-

TABLE 4. Table of Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Group "C" or "B") (Above average or average)	1.000													
2. Time of Course (Nov. or Sept.)	.006	1.000												
3. Initial Speed	.020	*.324	1.000											
4. Initial Comprehension	*.476	-.050	*.296	1.000										
5. Speed at End of Course	.100	-.078	.246	.240	1.000									
6. Comp. at End of Course	*.567	.063	*.335	*.679	.184	1.000								
7. Speed on Retest	.153	.101	*.345	*.273	*.571	.249	1.000							
8. Comp. on Retest	*.367	-.087	.235	*.702	*.298	*.583	.265	1.000						
9. IQ	*.692	.042	.171	*.577	.201	*.567	.226	*.492	1.000					
10. Comp. Gain During Course (No. 6-No. 4)	.166	.141	.080	*-.315	-.048	*.483	-.004	-.083	.045	1.000				
11. Comp. Gain Before Retest (No. 8-No. 4)	-.168	-.044	-.071	*-.441	.058	-.165	-.028	*.329	-.145	*.312	1.000			
12. Speed Gain During Course (No. 5-No. 3)	.097	-.188	-.079	.149	*.947	.078	*.473	.222	.150	-.076	.083	1.000		
13. Speed Gain Before Retest (No. 7-No. 3)	.155	-.017	-.017	.177	*.514	.136	*.932	.184	.175	.035	-.003	*.534	1.000	
14. Books Read Within 3 Months after Course	.015	.211	*.384	.132	.220	.115	*.333	.192	.128	-.008	.067	.099	.207	1.000

*=Significant at the .01 level. Correlations of .267 are significant at the .01 level (Guilford, 1964).

prehension, this variable was related both to initial speed and to speed on the retest. Thus it would seem that reading practice could be regarded as a "natural" way to improve reading speed. There is also evidence that students who had a quarter of the school year during which to practice their reading skills started the course with a higher rate of speed than those who started at the beginning of the school year. It is noteworthy that these beneficial "natural" effects do not occur with regard to comprehension, although improvements in comprehension *do* occur *after* the course.

Conclusions and Summary

The present data confirms on a sample of high school girls the findings of previous researchers that significant gains in speed and comprehension can be brought about and retained over a period of time. In the present study, both speed and comprehension increased significantly, although these gains were *not* correlated. Thus Brim's (1968) findings that comprehension remains constant are not supported, while the warning of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1965) that improvements in speed and comprehension may be unrelated would seem to be supported. Somewhat contrary to previous findings (Stebens and Belden, 1970), comprehension was an area of very significant improvement, especially *after* the course was over.

The results confirm the findings of Stevens and Orem (1963) that the superior reader enters the course with a higher reading speed, is a better student, and likes to read. But at the same time there is evidence that their findings should not be misinterpreted or overemphasized, since there is no evidence that the student described by Stevens and Orem is more or less likely to profit from such a course than other students.

Similarly, the "read, read, read" theory is somewhat supported, since practicing reading in itself has been shown to be somewhat related to reading speed; but the amount of reading has been shown to be unrelated to any of the gain scores, and thus it cannot be viewed as a total solution. It would seem that while some gains can come about through mere practice, a specialized program brings about much greater gains for students who might otherwise remain untouched. It would seem highly unlikely that the gains in Figure 1 would occur in a program depending entirely on individual practice.

In summary, then, it would seem that speed and comprehension are relatively independent variables. The evidence indicates that a

speed reading program such as the one used in this study can provide rather widespread and practical benefits: students on the average can read a book over twice as fast as previously with a gain rather than a loss in comprehension. This in itself is worthwhile. In addition, it seems evident that theories advocating work solely with superior or extremely slow readers are inaccurate, since neither of these groups showed extreme benefit or lack of benefit from this program.

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