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Using ECRI Techniques to Improve Reading Skills in Social Studies

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USING ECRI TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE READING SKILLS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

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Improving the reading skills of students is the responsibility of every content area teacher. Since too few secondary teachers are provided the techniques to further students' growth in reading, we looked for ways and programs which dealt with integrating reading in the subject area.

In our search for current, reliable programs for this level, we found one design which seemed applicable. This program was instituted at the Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI), a nationally recognized project to improve reading performance at the elementary level. Its findings were based upon seven years of research data and included many of the components in the reading process.[1] This project facilitates the teacher's ability to elicit correct responses from non-responding pupils, establishes high mastery levels of responses with performance and rate as criteria, and varies the number of practices needed by individual students. It also utilizes effective management and monitoring systems and diagnoses and prescribes instantly when errors or no responses occur.[2]

Since these techniques seemed applicable for secondary content materials, we decided to design a study for the purpose of comparing this program to the regular type of content presentation. Two eighth grade heterogenous social studies classes were used to evaluate the program by using one as a control group. The following procedures were used with the groups for five separate units, each covering a three week period.

Experimental	Control
1. Pre-Test	1. Pre-test
A pre-test covering twenty words from the social studies unit, testing both spelling and	Same

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[1] Dr. Ethna R. Reid, SEVEN YEARS OF RESEARCH IN READING, Salt Lake City, Utah: Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction.

[2] Dr. Ethna R. Reid, Letter of Information for ECRI Instructional Packages, Salt Lake City, Utah: Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction.

definitions was given. Each word was pronounced twice and used in a sentence once. Context clues were utilized in the sentences.

2. *Correction*

The pre-tests were corrected and returned to the students for them to restudy the words or definitions which were incorrect.

3. *Presentation of words as content vocabulary*

Words for spelling and vocabulary were presented using directives to reach word attack, to elicit responses and to emphasize penmanship.[3]

4. *Textbook assignment*

Students read the assigned material three times, once to themselves, twice orally to another student.

5. *Post-test*

A post-test covering the same words presented on the pre-test was given; the test included both spelling and definitions. Each word was pronounced twice.

Each student was required to achieve one hundred percent mastery on the spelling; he retook the spelling portion until this was achieved.

6. *Discussion of assigned material*

A lecture-discussion of the assigned material was presented for student notetaking practices.

7. *Mastery tests*

Mastery tests were given,

2. *Correction*

Same

3. *Presentation of words as content vocabulary*

Words for spelling and vocabulary were pronounced and briefly defined. Students were then instructed to study and review the words.

4. *Textbook assignment*

Students were instructed to read the assigned material and to answer study questions.

5. *Post-test*

Same

These students were *not* compelled to attain one hundred percent mastery.

6. *Discussion of assigned material*

Same

7. *Mastery tests*

Mastery tests including six

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[3] Dr. Ethna R. Reid, Teacher Training Kits, Salt Lake City, Utah: Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction.

including reading a list of twenty words accurately in a designated period of time, reading a passage (given to the students before the test) accurately in a designated period of time, and answering five out of six comprehension questions.

comprehension questions were given.

These tests were passed according to mastery expectations; if they were not, the student retook the test.

No requirement was made for a certain number of correct answers.

Students signed up for these tests after they had read the material according to instructions and were prepared for the test.

Students were advised of beginning date for the tests; the names were randomly drawn.

All tests were administered individually.

All tests were administered individually.

8. *Maintenance tests*

These unannounced tests were given to check spelling retention.

8. *Maintenance tests*

Same

In order to judge the ECRI program, pre- and post-test scores for spelling and definitions for each unit were analyzed. On most of the comparisons, significant or noticeable gains were shown by the experimental group.

As a reading comprehension check in which students were to score five out of six answers correct, scores on the unit mastery tests were compared for four of the units (See Table 1).

Reading Comprehension Unit Tests
5 of 6 Answers Correct

Unit Tests	Experimental N = 30	Control N = 31
Civil War	29	10
Industrialization	26	17
Growth of the City	21	16
Foreign Affairs	15	3

Table 1

In addition to these formal analyses, other classroom observations included improved penmanship, more attentive listening, eagerness to help one another, more careful study of assigned material to pass mastery tests on the first attempt, and improved self concepts from meeting with success.

After using ECRI techniques in a content area classroom, we feel that definite gains were shown by the experimental group in specific areas of the

reading process, such as vocabulary, spelling, and content area comprehension. Because of the success shown with the social studies class, we feel that the techniques of this program can be used successfully by any content area teacher at the secondary level.