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## **Increasing Reading Fluency in Students with Reading Difficulty**

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**Increasing Reading Fluency  
In Students with Reading Difficulty**

**A Project Report**

**Presented to**

**The Graduate Faculty**

**Central Washington University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

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**Master of Education**

*by Kathryn Balabanis*

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INCREASING READING FLUENCY  
IN CHILDREN WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

by  
Kathryn Balabanis

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Four methods designed to increase reading fluency were employed in a primary level Special Education resource room. The methods were implemented in accordance with the theory and research regarding reading fluency. Each of the four methods effectively increased the students' ability to read fluently. However, the implementation of these methods varied in cost and time.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Chapter 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Importance of the Study.....	2
Scope of the Study.....	3
Limitations of the Study.....	4
Definition of terms.....	4
Summary.....	6
Chapter 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	7
Introduction.....	7
The Assisted Reading Method.....	1 1
Choral Reading.....	1 3
The Neurological Impress Method.....	1 4
The Method of Repeated Reading.....	1 6
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY .....	2 7
Purpose of the Study.....	2 7
Research Methodology .....	2 7
Subjects.....	2 8
Reading Fluency Methods.....	2 8
The Modified Assisted Reading Method.....	2 9
Choral Reading.....	2 9
Tape Recorded Neurological Impress Method.....	3 1
The Method of Repeated Reading.....	3 2
Chapter 4: RESULTS.....	3 3
Introduction.....	3 3
Analysis of Reading Fluency Methods.....	3 3
Modified Assisted Reading Method.....	3 4

Choral Reading.....	37
Tape Recorded Neurological Impress Method.....	39
The Method of Repeated Reading.....	41
 Chapter 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	 47
.....	.....
Introduction.....	47
Summary/Discussion of Findings.....	48
Modified Assisted Reading Method.....	48
Choral Reading.....	49
The Tape Recorded Neurological Impress Method.....	50
The Method of Repeated Reading.....	51
Conclusions.....	52
Recommendations.....	53
References.....	54

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

A major problem elementary teachers face is trying to encourage reading fluency in students with reading difficulties. Often the instructional emphasis for these children is on additional skill practice (Allington, 1983). However, researchers have reported several effective methods of oral reading which provide frequent opportunities for successful reading practice (Samuels, 1979; Dowhower, 1987; Chomsky, 1970; Hollingsworth, 1970, 1978; Hoskisson, Sherman, Smith, 1974; Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Rashotte & Torgesen, 1985, Miccinati, 1985; Koskinen & Blum, 1986; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1985). A review of related literature describes these methods and their effectiveness when used by students with reading difficulties.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Although there are many remedial programs and techniques designed to improve the skills of poor readers, reading fluency is often overlooked as an important instructional

objective (Allington, 1977). Students who are unable to read fluently need to focus their attention on the decoding process which impedes their ability to comprehend ( LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Therefore, teachers need to discover and implement methods designed to increase reading fluency in the classroom.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

According to Adams (1980) approximately 40% of all students have reading difficulties. Many of these students with reading difficulties lack fluency. Reading fluency is considered an important goal by most reading authorities but is often neglected in reading instruction (Allington, 1977). In fact, Allington (1977) observed that often the emphasis of remedial and corrective reading instruction is on isolated skills. This emphasis is typically designed to increase the speed and accuracy of word recognition which teachers believe will lead to fluent reading (Allington, 1983). However, LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) theory of automatic information processing in reading does not support this belief. According to this theory beginning readers are nonautomatic in decoding so their attention is focused on word recognition making it difficult to fully comprehend the meaning of the passage. As students begin

reading more proficiently, less attention is needed for decoding and the students can focus their attention on comprehension. Samuels (1979) summarized his recommendations when he stated:

"Teachers can do two things to help students achieve automaticity in word recognition. They can give instruction on how to recognize words at the accuracy level. Second, they can provide the time and motivation so that the student will practice these word recognition skills until they become automatic" (p. 406).

Several methods for increasing reading fluency have been studied, including the assisted reading approach, choral reading, the neurological impress method, and the method of repeated reading.

This study includes a review of literature in the area of reading fluency, describes several methods used in a first through third grade special education resource room, and reports these results of the methods on the students' overall reading progress.

#### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Several methods designed to increase reading fluency were used in a first through third grade special education



resource room in the Snoqualmie Valley School District at North Bend Elementary School. The strategies included a modified assisted reading method, choral reading, the tape recorded neurological impress method, and repeated reading. All of the methods were based on theory and research involving reading fluency.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations of this study should be noted:

1. The study is limited to primary level children. Results of the study may not be applicable to older students.
2. The study is limited to resource room special education students. Results of this study may not necessarily be generalizable to children with reading difficulties in other instructional settings.
3. The study involved a small number of subjects.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Learning disability.** No commonly accepted definition exists for the term, learning disability; however, students who are called learning disabled are typically described as apparently capable children with serious learning difficulties that cause

them to function below their ability level (Ekwall & Shanker, 1985).

**Reading fluency.** Reading orally with accuracy, quickness, and expression (Rasinski, 1989).

**Basal reading program.** "A sequential set of reading texts and supplementary materials such as workbooks, flashcards, placement and achievement tests, and filmstrips" (Mercer & Mercer, 1985, p. 341).

**Individualized educational program.** "A plan, developed and implemented for each handicapped student who receives special education, which includes the child's present levels of performance; annual and short term instructional objectives; the specific education services to be provided and the extent the child will participate in regular education; the projected date for initiation and duration of services; and criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining if the objectives have been achieved" (Mercer & Mercer, 1988, p. 14).

**Prosody.** The rhythmic structure of sound in speech.

**Special education resource room.** A program in which a child leaves the regular classroom for a portion of the school day to receive instruction from a resource room teacher (Mercer & Mercer, 1985).

**Instructional aide.** A school staff member who assists the teacher in the classroom.

**Free reading time:** A time in which the children choose a book that interests them.

## SUMMARY

The major sections of this project report are as follows:

Chapter one presents a theoretical framework upon which the study is based.

Chapter two is a review of the related literature in the area of reading fluency.

Chapter three presents the methodology of the study. The subjects and procedures used in the study are explained.

Chapter four presents the results of the study.

Chapter five contains a summary of the study, conclusions based on the findings of the study, and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Because the majority of learning disabilities are in the area of reading (Snider & Tarver, 1987) one of the major concerns of teachers today is employing the most effective instruction for students with reading difficulties. Researchers and teachers have recently devoted much energy toward comprehension instruction. Reading fluency, previously dismissed as unimportant, is now recognized as a necessary prerequisite to comprehension (Snider & Tarver, 1987). According to LaBerge and Samuels (1974) the decoding process must become automatic so that attention can be focused on reading comprehension. Since poor readers characteristically lack fluency, fluency is an important aspect to consider.

Rasinski (1989) defines a fluent reader as one who can at least "read orally with accuracy, quickness, and expression" (p. 690). Unfortunately, even though fluency is a main goal in reading, it is seldom addressed in most basal reading programs, textbooks used in teacher preparation, daily lesson plans, or individualized education plans. Allington (1977) informally

observed several remedial reading sessions and group instruction of the poorest readers by regular classroom teachers. He noticed that very little reading actually took place. Instead a large variety of instructional techniques and materials were used to teach isolated skills. These observations do not meet the recommendation that teachers must emphasize reading fluency as soon as students can accurately decode letter-sound correspondences (Snider & Tarver, 1987).

Allington (1977) suggests that teachers set a goal that each student read about 500 words per lesson each day. This would take an extremely slow reader about 20 minutes. In addition, teachers should not interrupt the reader. The only useful question might be, "Did that make sense?" and this should only be asked at the end of a sentence or passage. Allington (1977) states, "This allows the reader to get more read and at the same time forces the development of independent reading and correction strategies necessary for effective reading" (p. 59).

Allington (1983) also discusses several hypotheses as to why some readers have difficulty moving from word by word reading to phrase level reading while other readers do not have such difficulty:

1. Children who have been read to understand that fluency or prosody is the goal of reading. Modeling of fluent reading by teachers may teach children to use prosodic features in their own reading.

2. While the emphasis of reading instruction is on reading with expression for the successful reading groups, the emphasis for poor readers is typically on letter, sound, and word instruction.
3. There is evidence that successful readers engage in more assigned contextual reading than do poor readers (Allington, 1983). This opportunity to practice reading more frequently may aid in a faster transition to fluency.
4. Poor readers are often reading material that is difficult for them. Successful readers more often read material that is easy which may lead to fluent reading.
5. Successful readers are assigned more silent reading than poor readers. "In silent reading, children can reread sentences in an attempt to understand phrases and experiment with intonation, juncture, and stress".
6. Poor readers may view the reading process differently than successful readers. Poor readers seem to see reading as an "accuracy competition" rather than an act to understand the meaning of a text. Also, they may not develop their own response to reading but feel reading is done to satisfy someone else. (p. 558)

Rasinski (1989) suggests several principles that teachers can use to improve fluency. He suggests using the following principles in combinations of two or more rather than as isolated activities. First, students need to repeatedly practice one text to achieve fluency. The acquisition of isolated words is more effective when the words are used by the student in a variety of texts or in repeated practice with one text (Rasinski, 1989). The second suggested principle is the reading of good children's literature to students daily. Non-fluent readers

benefit from the modeling of fluent reading. Unfortunately, non-fluent readers are usually assigned to a reading group with other non-fluent readers. Therefore, it may be helpful to expose students to particular aspects of reading as emphasized in a teacher's reading. For instance, having the students listen to reading speed, expression in the teacher's voice, or when pauses and stops occur can make the students aware of these factors. Also, students benefit from immediate feedback after they have completed oral reading. The fourth suggestion involved "scaffolding" or support during reading. Several types of support are useful, including choral reading, impress method, and the use of tape recorded passages. Fifth, marking phrase boundaries with a slash has increased fluency since fluency involves reading in "multi-word chunks" or phrases. And finally, students need to be provided with abundant materials that are "easy in terms of word recognition, so that they can move beyond decoding to issues of phrasing, expression, and comprehensibility of production" (p. 692). Rasinski's suggestions are incorporated in several important techniques designed to increase fluency. These techniques include assisted reading, choral reading, the impress method, and the repeated reading method.

## THE ASSISTED READING APPROACH

The assisted reading approach is "based on the assumption that children may process written language in a manner similar to the way they process spoken language" (Hoskisson, Sherman, & Smith, 1974, p. 710). When parents read to their children, the children have the opportunity to experience language that is more "syntactically complete" than the spoken language they may normally hear. The assisted reading method is modified to meet different levels of reading ability. The parents read three to four times a week to the nonreader until the child has built an attention span long enough to listen to a story. At first the parent has the child repeat some words or sentences from a page in the story. Another way to do assisted reading is to have the child repeat each sentence after the parent reads it. The reading should be a fun activity.

Hoskisson, et al. (1974) conducted a study with two second grade children who were identified by the principal and teacher as having obtained low reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test and exhibiting reluctance to participate in reading. The four month study implemented the assisted reading method. In this study the reading sessions were 5 to 20 minutes in duration. The parents were informed of appropriate positive reinforcement such as physical contact or saying,



"That's correct", "Right", or "Good." Three methods of assessing the children's reading behavior were used, including miscue analysis, reading rate, and a standardized reading achievement test. The data from the study showed significant increases in reading ability and reading rate, and significantly less miscues. Although other reading interventions had been used, they failed to have an effect on the students. Parental involvement in the reading program seemed to be the important difference. Moreover, the authors also reported dramatic positive changes in the students' attitudes toward reading and willingness to practice reading.

Chomsky (1976) modified the assisted reading method by using 24 tape recorded story books and five tape recorders. This study involved three boys and two girls of normal intelligence in the third grade who were functioning two years below grade level. The students could decode words at a slow pace. The stories ranged from second to fifth grade reading levels. Chomsky's intent was to get the students to focus their attention on "larger amounts of connected discourse and to integrate their fragmented knowledge" (1976, p. 289). The students listened to the taped stories and followed along in the books. A variety of games were used that involved sentence and word analysis and composition. Each week the students had a half hour individual session at which time they read the parts of

the stories they had prepared, analyzed the text through language games, and wrote or drew in their notebooks about the stories. It took four students about a month to master a book and one student two weeks. The mastery seemed to be a combination of memorization and true reading which allowed the students to get a feel for fluent reading before they had gained the skill. The parents and teachers reported a change in the students' motivation to read new material. They began choosing reading as a free time activity. Chomsky (1976) felt the biggest factors contributing to this change of attitude were added motivation, a guarantee of success, increased input, and concentrated attention.

### CHORAL READING

Choral reading is a method that allows students to hear the prosodic features of language and to imitate the teacher's use of prosodic cues when reading. Miccinati (1985) suggests that "as they become more sensitive to these prosodic signals, they also become aware of the predictable language patterns of syntax. In other words, they learn to predict words and phrases that follow one another" (p. 207). Choral reading is an activity where students actively listen and respond to sound, stress, duration, and pitch. There are two types of sound in choral reading.

When the semantic content of a text suggests a sound it is called natural sound. Psychological sound refers to the mood or movement expressed in the text. Stress is the loudness and softness the reader uses on various words and syllables. Changes in rhythm are used to draw attention to specific meanings in the text. Duration refers to the length of time needed to say long and short syllables and also affects rhythm. Pitch is used to express feeling and attitude in words and refers to the highness or lowness of sound.

There are four types of choral reading. First, when using the refrain method the teacher reads most of the lines and the students join on the refrain. A second method is the line-a-child. In this type of choral reading each child reads one line of the text at the appropriate time. The antiphonal or dialogue method is a third type. Students in different groups read alternately with varying voice pitch to demonstrate contrast such as high/low or strong/light. And finally unison choral reading is performed by the entire group reading the text together.

#### THE NEUROLOGICAL IMPRESS METHOD

The neurological impress method is a strategy in which a book is held jointly by the teacher and the student and is read aloud by them simultaneously. The teacher sits just behind the

student and reads into the child's ear. The student puts his/her finger under each word as they are reading. In the beginning the teacher leads the reading. However, as the student gains fluency he/she leads with the teacher reading softly and slightly behind the student. Heckelman (1966) conducted a study with 24 students in grades six through ten using the impress method. The total instruction time for each student was about 7.5 hours. The mean gain was 2.2 years.

Two difficulties with the impress method are that across several sessions it is time consuming and fatiguing for the teacher. Therefore, Hollingsworth (1970; 1978) conducted two studies using the EFI Multi-Channel Wireless Language System in which up to ten children listen to a tape recording and hear his/her own voice while reading a story. The first study involved fourth grade normal readers. There were no significant differences between the students who used the wireless system and a control group who did not. In the second study only remedial readers were involved and the number of sessions were raised from 30 to 62. Twenty fourth, fifth and sixth grade remedial readers participated in 62 fifteen minute sessions. Ten students in the control group continued the regular remedial program and engaged in reading the same amount of time as the ten students in the experimental group. The experimental group used a variety of prerecorded stories from

grade levels one to six. The students listened to the tape and read the story while putting their fingers under each word. The teacher could successfully monitor all ten students to make sure they were in the right place. One third of the sessions the children read stories one grade level below their achievement level; one third of the sessions the students read at their reading level; and for one third of the sessions the stories were one grade level above their reading level. During the semester, the experimental group made a mean gain of one year as opposed to the control group's .04 year gain in comprehension. Furthermore, it was noted that the students enjoyed the procedure using the wireless system.

#### THE METHOD OF REPEATED READING

It is important to understand that repeated reading is a supplemental reading method and is not designed to teach all the necessary reading skills. The method involves rereading short meaningful passages of 50 to 200 words. When a criterion rate of 85 words per minute is reached on a passage, the student progresses to the next passage. According to Samuels (1979), fluency has two components; word recognition accuracy and speed of reading. To avoid creating a situation where the student fears making mistakes, speed rather than accuracy

should be stressed (Samuels, 1979). A graph can be used to record the student's progress and is typically an effective motivator.

The repeated reading method is primarily based on LaBerge and Samuels (1974) theory of automaticity. According to this theory, one who reads "easily" can maintain attention constantly on the meaning of the text which is the goal of fluent reading. One who has reading difficulties has several different ways of processing a word. For example, the reader's attention may go to the phonological level where the child identifies the letter-sound associations. Or his/her attention may turn toward the visual level in which the reader associates spelling patterns with phonological units. In either case the reader's attention is focused on decoding rather than comprehending the passage.

Practice makes a skill automatic. The rate of growth in making a skill automatic depends largely on the distribution of practice and the presentation of feedback (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). For that reason, when a student is trying to achieve word recognition accuracy, attention should be focused on the letter-sound associations. Once that has been mastered, the student moves to blending the sounds into syllables or words. The student who can accurately recognize words should then focus attention on understanding the meaning of the text. However, each of these individual stages must be automatic before

progressing to the next stage. Otherwise the student must attend and hold too much information in short-term memory making it difficult to acquire new skills.

"Consider for a moment the plight of poor readers. It seems they are never placed in material which they can read fluently. Instead more difficult material always awaits each bit of progress. One effect then is that poor readers seldom have the opportunity to develop traits associated with good reading, particularly fluent and rapid oral reading. The multiple reading strategy allows the poor reader the opportunity to break out of this mold" (Allington, 1977, p. 60).

In addition, LaBerge and Samuels (1974) concluded that the "model indicates that meanings of familiar words and word groups may be activated automatically, leaving attention free to wander to other matters, perhaps to recent personal episodes" (p. 320).

Dahl and Samuels (1974) conducted a study and found that repeated readings produced better achievement than an automatic word recognition program. Schreiber (1980) suggests that the success of repeated reading in this study was not due to practice of certain skills, but that it allowed students to learn how to create meaningful phrases while reading, despite the fact that written text has few phrasing cues. He notes that in oral language, phrases are marked by prosodic features such as pitch, stress, and juncture. Because children rely more heavily on the prosodic features than do adults, it is difficult for some children

to read with fluency or prosody without learning to group the words into phrases (Schreiber, 1987). Dowhower (1987) studied the effect of assisted and unassisted repeated reading procedures on second graders' reading rate, word recognition accuracy, and oral reading comprehension with practiced and unpracticed passages, and the effect of assisted and unassisted repeated reading procedures on the students' prosodic reading. The students involved were 17 beginning second graders at two elementary schools who were chosen because they obtained a reading rate below 50 words per minute on a 200 word passage and achieved 85% word accuracy on the same passage. In addition, the students fit Chall's (1983) stage one description of a transitional reader: a slow, word-by-word reader with adequate decoding skills. The students were randomly assigned to either an assisted or unassisted group. The seven week study used a time-series experimental design where the two groups practiced assisted and unassisted repeated reading to meet the 100 word per minute criterion. A summary of Dowhower's (1987) conclusions follow:

1. The major conclusion was that the repeated reading method increases reading speed, accuracy, and comprehension. In addition, prosodic reading improved. The students used more appropriate and longer phrases and these gains carried over to new, similar passages.
2. Practice of one story is not as effective as a combined practice of several stories.



3. There were few differences between the assisted and unassisted groups in reading rate, word accuracy, and comprehension but the assisted technique resulted in slightly better student prosody. (p. 402)

Conversely, Rashotte & Torgesen's (1985) investigation did not yield support for repeated reading. They investigated two aspects of the repeated reading method. First, whether improved fluency and comprehension across stories depend on the degree of word overlap between passages and, second, whether repeated reading was more effective than the same amount of time spent in non-repetitive reading. The subjects were 12 learning disabled student from three elementary schools. They each met the following criteria of a non-fluent reader:

1. Identified as a slow reader by the learning disabled teacher.
2. Read at a rate of 65 words per minute or less on second grade, 90 word passages.
3. Achieved at least 90% on word recognition of the passage.

The students read 44 different 100 word passages at a second grade level. Thirty-seven of the passages had minimal word overlap, with only about 20 words common to three or more passages in a condition. The seven day study used three conditions. Condition one utilized the repeated reading method

with stories that had few shared words and had unrelated context. Condition two used repeated reading with high word overlap and unrelated contexts. And the third condition used the same number of readings, but each passage was read only once. Each student participated in each condition but in different orders. Comparisons of word recognition accuracy, reading speed, and comprehension scores were completed. The results suggested that a high degree of word overlap among stories does increase in reading speed. Rashotte & Torgesen (1985) concluded, "The findings on the speed measure indicate that there was little carryover of fluency gains achieved from reading the same story several times unless the new stories shared many of the same words" (p. 186). Furthermore, repeated reading was not significantly more effective than non-repetitive practice when the same amounts of time and feedback were provided. The authors note several possibilities that could account for the lack of gains using repeated reading. First, the study was only seven days long. Second, the students repeated each passage a maximum of four times unlike Samuels (1979) procedure of repeating it until a criterion of 85 words per minute is met. And finally, individual differences between the populations studied could account for differences in results.

Another experiment was designed to determine the effects on two groups of students using the repeated reading

method under different cue conditions (O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1985). One group was cued to read for comprehension and the other group was cued to read as quickly and accurately as possible. The subjects were 30 third graders who each functioned at or above grade level in reading as determined by the California Achievement Test and each read between 70 and 119 words per minute on two screening passages. The students in each group used the repeated reading method under three conditions which included one, three, and seven readings. O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea (1985) summarize, "The results of the tests on the attentional cue variable show that students respond as directed to external cues. Students cued to fluency read more words per minute, and students cued to comprehension retold a greater proportion of propositions" (p. 139). In addition, the repeated reading method led to significant gains in comprehension regardless of the attentional cue given prior to reading the passage. The students gained an average of 7% on comprehension after three readings and 11% after seven readings. Furthermore, the repeated reading method significantly affected fluency. Both groups increased reading rate from level to level of repeated reading.

Carver & Hoffman (1981) modified the repeated reading method by incorporating a computer in their study to determine whether research with repeated reading was replicable using a

computer-controlled feedback system. In addition they hoped to determine whether the gains in performance on the practice task transfer to new practice materials and whether participation in reading practice for an extended period of time leads to gains in general reading ability. The research involved two studies. The subjects for each study were six high school students. Study one was conducted from September to December and study two went from January to April. The students read equally poorly. The PLATO computer was used for the training sessions with a program called Programmed Prose. The program involved 100 word passages with an item choice for every fifth word. The passages were read repeatedly until an adequate level of fluency was reached at which time a new passage was introduced. However, the emphasis on this study task was on accuracy rather than rate, unlike Samuels (1979) recommended emphasis on rate. When the student chose the incorrect word, the word "INCORRECT" would flash and the correct word would remain in the text. When the student chose the correct word, the distractor disappeared. After completing the passage, the student viewed a feedback page involving number correct, total items possible, time taken in minutes, and Rate of Good Reading (RGR) score. The RGR score was calculated by a reading efficiency formula that was modified from the National Reading Standards Test manual. The RGR score

combines accuracy, rate, and grade level of passage difficulty. Higher accuracy and/or faster rate result in higher RGR scores. The important variables were the RGR scores and the number of passages mastered. The pretesting measures showed the average reading ability of the students to be approximately grades four to five. The National Reading Standards Test showed an eighth grade reading ability following training. However, the Gates MacGinitie subtests showed scores about fourth or fifth grade after training.

Carver and Hoffman (1981) summarized the results as follows:

"These data, collected using a computer-controlled feedback system, clearly replicate earlier research which found increases in fluency associated with repeated reading practice. Strong support was also found for the notion that gains resulting from participation in such reading training transfers to new material where the same type of performance task is required. However, the results offer only partial support for the proposition that the gains in fluency from reading practice transfer to reading ability in general." (p. 388)

The authors offer one possible explanation for the findings which involve two phases of reading progress: the beginning phase and the advanced phase. Students in the beginning phases had a grade four to six reading ability and were learning to decode sentences that are below their listening level. Therefore, repeated reading was effective because it provided extensive practice in decoding. Advanced phase readers had a

grade five and above reading ability. Repeated readings weren't likely to produce significant gains because students in this phase were reading at a level that was above their listening comprehension level. Instead, greater reading progress may have been gained by increasing the students' amount of knowledge and experiences.

Koskinen & Blum (1986) describe a method called paired repeated reading. When students participate in paired repeated reading, each pair of students count out about 50 words from a book they are using in instruction and read the passages silently. Next one student reads his/her passage aloud three times consecutively. The reader may ask his/her partner to supply a word. The reader completes a self evaluation sheet after completing the passage each time. The self evaluation sheet involves answering the question, "How well did you read?" The listener provides feedback after the second and third reading concerning improvements the reader has made. He/she also records this on a listening sheet. After the first student has completed three readings the students switch roles and complete the same procedure. This activity takes 10 to 15 minutes and can be done independently following reading group instruction. The authors described three helpful sessions to teach the method of paired repeated reading. The sessions were "learning the role of the reader", "learning the role of the

listener", and "putting it together." Several classroom management tips were provided.

1. Select short interesting passages of about 50 words.
2. Be sure reading material is at the independent level.
3. Encourage attentive listening.
4. Provide guidelines for working in pairs.

The method of repeated reading is useful because it encourages students to read. Also, the increases in reading speed often result in a positive attitude toward reading. Dowhower (1987) reports that repeated reading is easy to incorporate into any reading program. Repeated reading is adaptable to a variety of reading materials including trade books, basal reading books, magazines, and newspapers. In addition, the repeated reading method can be implemented by instructional aides, parents, tutors, or peer partners.

In conclusion, reading fluency is an important skill necessary to facilitate comprehension. Many methods of reading fluency instruction have been explored with various levels of success. Regardless of the method individual teachers choose to use, reading fluency should be addressed specifically in reading programs.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to discover and employ effective strategies designed to increase the reading fluency of children in grades 1-3 receiving remedial reading services. A review of the related literature revealed four suggested methods for increasing reading fluency. The four methods included the assisted reading method, choral reading, the neurological impress method, and the method of repeated reading. These methods were implemented in a primary level special education classroom.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study utilizes descriptive research. Descriptive research studies are designed to "determine the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razazieh, 1985, p. 322). In addition, there is no control of a treatment or hypothesis testing involved in descriptive research. The main goal is to describe what exists.



## SUBJECTS

The subjects participating in this study were fifteen special education students. Three students were in first grade, eight were in second grade, and four students were third graders. They ranged in reading achievement from approximately a beginning kindergarten level to a beginning third grade level. The students attended North Bend Elementary School located in North Bend, a rural community in western Washington. The school serves children ranging from low to high socioeconomic levels.

## READING FLUENCY METHODS

The methods were chosen based on theory and research available concerning reading fluency. Each method was administered in a manner consistent with the description of the procedures from the reading fluency research. The procedures for each method are provided in more detail in the following sections.

## THE MODIFIED ASSISTED READING METHOD

**Subjects:** Four subjects participated in the modified assisted reading method. Three students were third graders and one student was in the second grade. All four students were special education students.

**Procedures:** Each student chose a book that he/she was interested in learning to read. The book was to be too difficult to read right away but one they thought they could master with practice. Each student individually listened to a tape recording of the story while following the written text with his/her finger. When the student felt he/she could read part or all of the book fluently, he/she read the story aloud to the researcher.

## CHORAL READING

**Subjects:** Fifteen special education students were the subjects for the choral reading method. They ranged from first through third grade.

**Procedures:** The students participated in a variety of choral reading activities including the refrain, line-a-child, and unison types of choral reading. The antiphonal type of choral reading was not used since its use was recommended for children above the primary level (Miccinati, 1985).

For the refrain choral reading activities, the book was read a few times while the students listened. Then the book was read again with the students joining in on the repeated lines. The following books were used for the refrain choral reading activities:

I Know An Old Lady  
The Little Red Hen  
The Gingerbread Man  
The Doorbell Rang  
I Was Walking Down The Road  
Jump, Frog, Jump  
Good Morning, Chick  
Oh, A Hunting We Will Go

To participate in the line-a-child activity, the students each read a line or a page in the book after listening to it being read several times. Most of the line-a-child activities were done as a whole group, but the students did work in small groups to prepare and perform a short rhyme for the rest of the class. The students recited the following books and rhymes:

Buzz Buzz Buzz  
Mary Wore Her Red Dress  
Each Peach Pear Plum  
Ladybird  
There was an Old Woman  
To Market, to Market  
Michael Finnegan  
There were two Blackbirds  
One, two , three, four, five  
Pins

A third type of choral reading activity the students participated in was the unison choral reading. The students listened to the story or rhyme several times and then read it aloud at the same time. Several nursery rhymes were used because they provided a strong rhythm, as recommended by Miccinati (1985). These included:

Bears  
Cookies Week  
Rosie's Walk  
Out and In

#### TAPE RECORDED NEUROLOGICAL IMPRESS METHOD

**Subjects:** The subjects who participated in the tape recorded neurological impress method were 15 special education students ranging from first through third grade.

**Procedures:** The subjects listened to a tape recorded story and simultaneously read the story aloud. As the subjects listened and read, they put their fingers under each word. The stories were from the Houghton Mifflin Basal Series and ranged from grades one through three. Each child listened to a story daily during winter quarter and half of spring quarter. After several days of listening to the taped stories, the subjects read the story aloud to the teacher.

## THE METHOD OF REPEATED READING

**Subjects:** The subjects for the method of repeated reading were five special education students. One student was in first grade, one in second grade, and three students were in third grade.

**Procedures:** The students each chose a selection from a book that was of interest to them. They were asked to practice the selection. Each student individually read the passage to the researcher. The number of words per minute and the number of word recognition errors were recorded. The student read the passage three times consecutively each day. The student continued to read the passage until a reading rate of 85 words per minute was reached. Then the student chose another passage and the procedures were repeated. As recommended by Samuels (1979), speed rather than accuracy was stressed to refrain from creating a student concern about making reading mistakes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The present study employed four methods designed to increase reading fluency in students having reading difficulties. The methods included the modified assisted reading method, choral reading, the tape recorded neurological impress method, and the method of repeated reading. The methods were implemented in a special education resource room containing students in grades one through three. Each method provided the students with repeated exposure to written material and opportunities to practice fluent reading.

#### **ANALYSIS OF READING FLUENCY METHODS**

An analysis of the four reading fluency methods will be described in terms of pre-treatment and post-treatment behaviors. The analysis of each method will be presented in the following sections.

### MODIFIED ASSISTED READING METHOD

The five students who participated in the modified assisted reading method ranged in grade level as well as achievement level. However, one commonality among these students was their inability to read fluently. They could sound out words and struggle through a story, but it was very frustrating for them, with meaning usually lost in the struggle. In addition, the students rarely corrected their miscues without being asked, "Did that make sense?" One area of great concern was the apparent intimidation by trade books. These students had experienced enough failure in reading that they were unlikely to stray far from the comfort of a basal reader where they had experienced success. The trade books were longer and had unfamiliar words so the students would simply avoid them. During free reading time these students would choose a basal reader; a book which was used in a choral reading activity; or a very simple, familiar book.

Each of the five students progressed at his/her own rate for the four weeks he/she participated in the modified assisted reading method. The students listened to the taped stories and then read them aloud when they had practiced part or all of the story. The students were very motivated to practice because the

books were self-selected, and they loved reading aloud individually.

One student, in second grade, completed his first book after practicing for five days. He completed a second book, which was of greater difficulty, in nine days and a third book in six days. Learning the words seemed easier for him after several exposures to the researcher's modeling from the tapes. He was very excited and enthusiastic about choosing the next book.

The first grade student spent almost the entire time preparing one book. It took 17 days to finally read the book fluently, but she was very pleased and wanted to read it to the class. The other children were impressed since she was one of the lowest students and she read a book that most of them couldn't have read. She didn't seem to get overly frustrated about her relatively slow progress since she was given opportunities to receive feedback when she had prepared small portions of the story.

Another student, who was in third grade, learned to read two books fluently in the four week period using the modified assisted reading method. It took him six days to prepare the first book and 11 days to learn to read the second book fluently. The second book was much longer than the first and was a little more difficult. The modified assisted reading method was a helpful strategy for this student because he was very worried



about making mistakes when he read. As a result of this concern he would often avoid reading trade books independently. He was confident about reading the basal reading stories but would just look at the pictures of a trade book when asked to choose one to read during free reading time. The modified assisted reading method provided this student with the opportunity to successfully read trade books in a non-threatening manner while building his confidence in his ability to read trade books.

The fourth student was also in the third grade. She completed one book in nine days and a second book in eight days. However, she could have progressed at a faster rate had she applied herself. Unlike the other students, she needed encouragement to keep practicing. She was the only student that did not initiate reading to the researcher. Despite the apparent apathy on her part, she did learn to read two books fluently and seemed pleased when she finished each book.

Another third grade student completed three books using the modified assisted reading method. She was one of the highest functioning students but did a good job of choosing books that were challenging for her. She completed the first book in seven days, the second book in five days, and the third book in eight days. As was the case with the second grader, she was able to quickly master new words as well as rapidly increase her reading rate after several exposures to the taped story. She

frequently asked to read her books aloud and enjoyed the procedure.

All of the students learned to fluently read at least one trade book that they were unable to read prior to the modified assisted reading method. Furthermore, they enjoyed the individual attention they received when they had prepared part or all of their story. The modified assisted reading method provided an opportunity for the students to hear and imitate fluent reading in a non-threatening situation. In addition, most of the students were very interested in the books since they were given the opportunity to choose the book themselves.

#### CHORAL READING

Rasinski (1989) recommends the reading of good children's literature every day to students. This gives the teacher an opportunity to model fluent reading. The researcher found that when the reading was done aloud, several of the students often had difficulty focusing their attention on the story. They did not dislike story time, but they seemed unable to actively listen to a story for even short periods of time. Their eyes would wonder around the room and they moved around a great deal while shifting positions. When asked questions about the story, these children could seldom answer them.

However, as some choral reading activities were incorporated into story time, some changes in the poor listeners' behavior occurred. The anticipation of responding captivated their attention and drew them back to the story if their attention began to stray. Improvements in their attention span were visible in the amount of eye contact and in their ability to sit still while listening. The students were soon able to answer more questions concerning the story. Probably the most important change was in the class' interest. They really enjoyed actively participating when the stories were read. The students felt greater confidence about reading the book independently after participating at story time, so they would often choose the book for free reading time. The children were usually able to read the stories successfully following the choral reading activities since they were familiar with the story and the vocabulary.

One choral reading activity that the students particularly enjoyed was working in small groups to prepare and present a rhyme for the rest of the class. The students were very motivated to practice and each group eagerly volunteered to share their rhyme with the class. In addition, this activity provided an opportunity for students to work cooperatively with classmates with whom they normally would not have worked. For example, each group consisted of students from a variety of grade and achievement levels. They helped each other learn the

lines so that the group's production would be a success. The students really enjoyed it and a couple of students asked if it could be done again.

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#### TAPE RECORDED NEUROLOGICAL IMPRESS METHOD

Prior to the tape recorded neurological impress method the students read slowly and paused frequently when confronted with a new word. Despite the fact that the students had been introduced to the words both in context and in isolation, they typically had a difficult time recognizing the new words in the story. Furthermore, there were frequent miscues in the students' oral readings, and they rarely self-corrected their mistakes. The students misunderstood the meaning of the sentence because they struggled with each word. Therefore, the students were unable to recognize when they needed to correct their mistakes. This lack of fluency adversely affected their ability to comprehend. The students often could not correctly answer even literal level questions following an oral reading of the story. Struggling to complete the story, the students called out each individual word expressionlessly. These difficulties in part explain why the students tried to avoid reading and would simply flip through the pictures during free reading time.

After using the tape recorded neurological impress method for approximately five months, many changes in the students' oral reading were noticed. The most obvious changes were fewer miscues, increased speed, and reading with expression. Listening to the children read became a pleasure, and they looked forward to reading. They often imitated some of the intonations the researcher had used on the tape and would also use intonations typical in their spoken language. It became clear that they were better able to focus their attention on trying to read with expression and had greater confidence for trying new things. Another important change was in the students' ability to answer the comprehension questions following their story. They were able to answer questions at the literal, inferential, and interpretive levels, and their answers were more elaborate than before the taped reading practice. Occasionally they were asked to tell a summary of the story in their own words, and they could do so with a great deal of accuracy and detail.

One change that occurred gradually over the five month period was the students' abilities to self-correct their errors. The student began paying more attention to context. Prior to the taped recorded neurological impress method they often had to be prompted to correct their errors by being asked, "Did that make sense?" By the end of the year the students were stopping

themselves and re-reading the sentence correctly. Probably one of the most critical changes observed was in the students' attitudes and motivations toward reading. The students wanted to read aloud to the instructional aide and the researcher constantly. They began taking turns reading to each other during free reading time. Just a few successes impacted the students' willingness to read.

#### THE METHOD OF REPEATED READING

The four students who participated in the repeated reading method had several common reading characteristics. All of the students were slow, choppy readers. They laboriously sounded out unfamiliar words and struggled to make sense out of what they were reading. Moreover, they were beginning to lose interest in attempting to read new books during free reading time. They frequently needed to be reminded that they were supposed to be reading. In an effort to break the monotony and get them interested in reading new books again, these four students were chosen to participate in the repeated reading method. The students were asked to practice a passage from a book of their choice. Each student individually read the passage while the word recognition errors and the words per minute were recorded. Each miscue was identified before the student

read the passage a second time. Each student read the selection three times consecutively each day. Tables 1-4 depict the results of the progress made by each student.

Subject #1 was a first grade student who made slow but steady progress. He needed 23 trials before reaching the criterion rate of 85 words per minute on his first passage. He had few word recognition errors throughout the procedure. He began to get frustrated and asked, "Can I get another book?", on three different occasions. However, as he got closer to his goal he became more enthusiastic and was cooperative throughout the procedure. One noticeable characteristic of this student was that he didn't practice to prepare for the timed readings as much as the other students. This may have accounted for his relatively slow progress (See Table 1).

Another student who participated in the repeated reading method was a second grader (Subject #2). He successfully completed five passages. The graph shows the initial speed of reading improved for the first four passages. The fifth passage was from a book that was much more difficult for this student. However, he made very steady progress in reading speed while decreasing the number of miscues. The word recognition errors were few and ranged from zero to eight errors per trial. This second grader really enjoyed the repeated reading method. He asked, "Can I be next?", on many occasions. In addition, he

often asked if he could read the passage a fourth time. He practiced the passages daily and was very enthusiastic about his progress (See Table 2).

Another second grader, Subject #3, successfully completed three passages. It took 18 trials for this student to pass the first passage. However, the second passage was completed in nine trials and the third passage in just two trials. Each initial reading speed was faster than the previous one and there were consistently very few word recognition errors. This student was pleased with his progress most of the time. However, on two occasions he wanted to quit reading after making a mistake but continued when he was encouraged. Typically he was enthusiastic about participating and would smile happily when shown his improvements of words read per minute. One day he said, "This is fun!" and he often asked if he could be the next reader (See Table 3).

Subject #4 was also a second grade student. He completed five passages. The number of trials required to meet the criterion rate were relatively few ranging from three to nine. This student practiced the passages diligently and often got so interested in the book that he finished reading it. Twice he asked to share a book to the class that he had practiced during the repeated reading sessions. The graph, displaying this student's progress, shows an increase in reading rate and, at the



same time a decrease in word recognition errors as he progressed with each trial. This second grader really enjoyed the repeated reading method. He was interested in "beating his score" each day and repeatedly asked if he could read the passage a fourth time. He was anxious to choose a new book and often had one already picked out when the time came to start a new passage (See Table 4).

All of the students improved their reading rate and number of word recognition errors by repeatedly reading the passage. All but one of the students spent some of their free reading time practicing the passage. The students were very enthusiastic about their progress and liked the individual attention they received with the repeated reading method.

Table 1

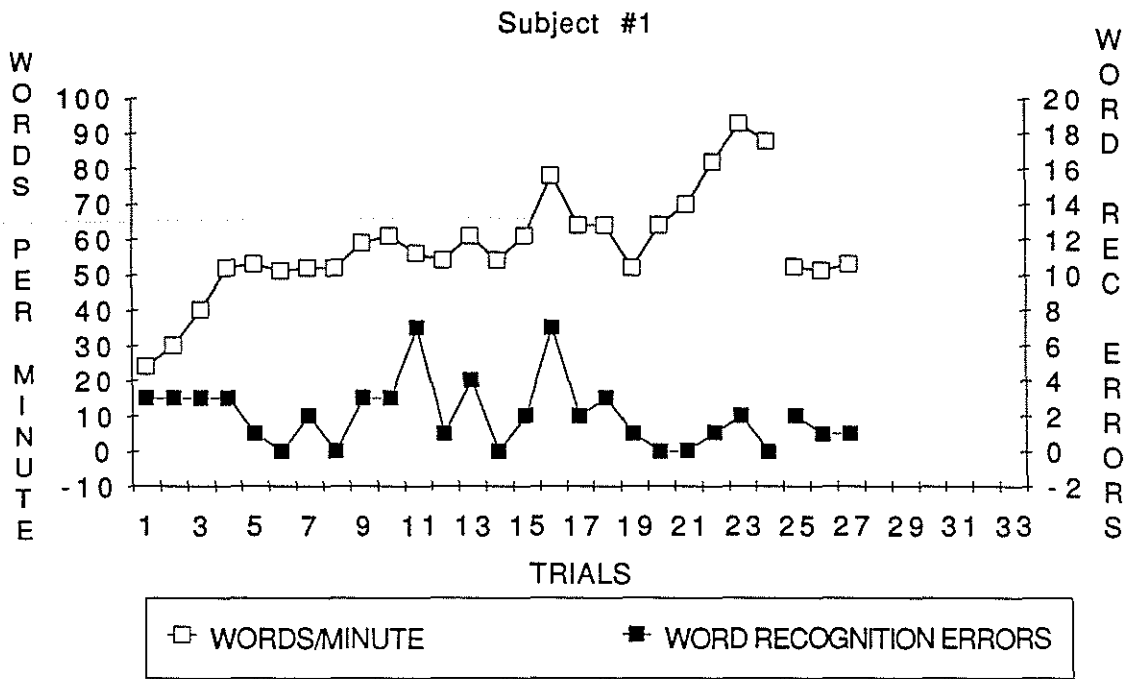


Table 2

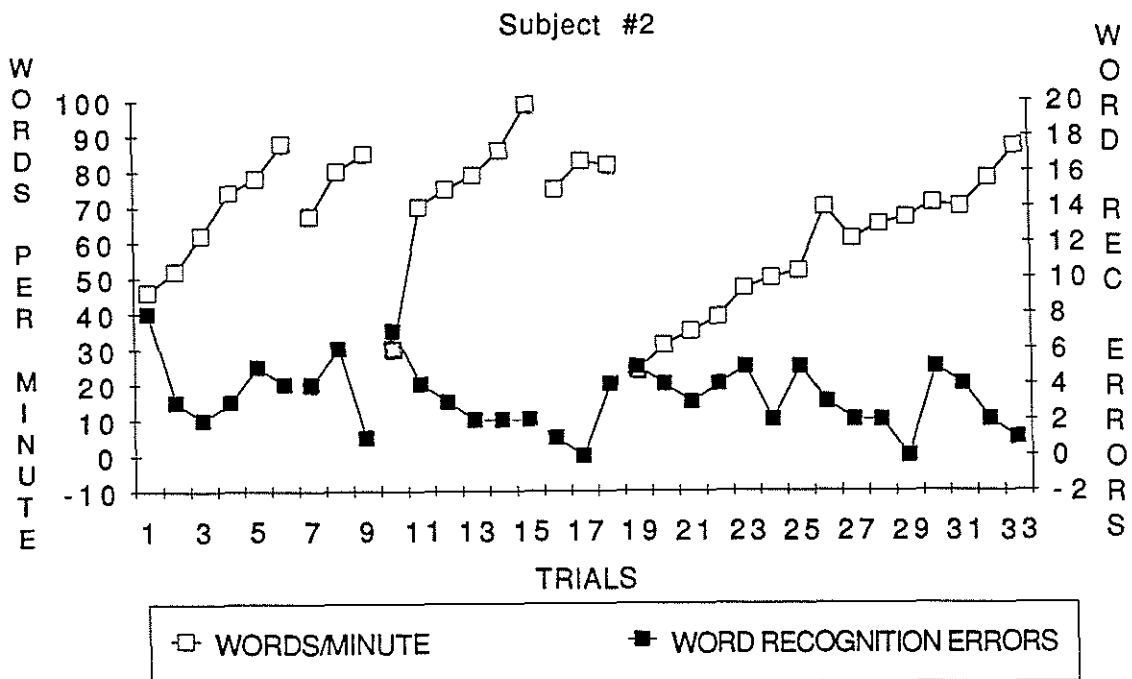


Table 3

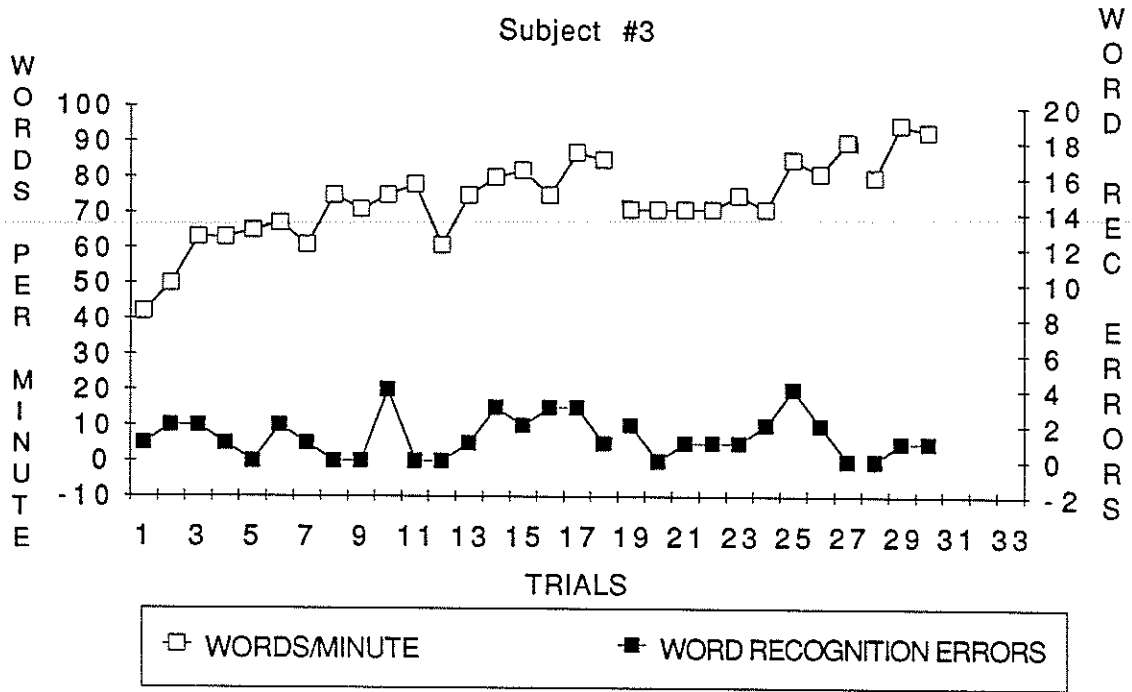
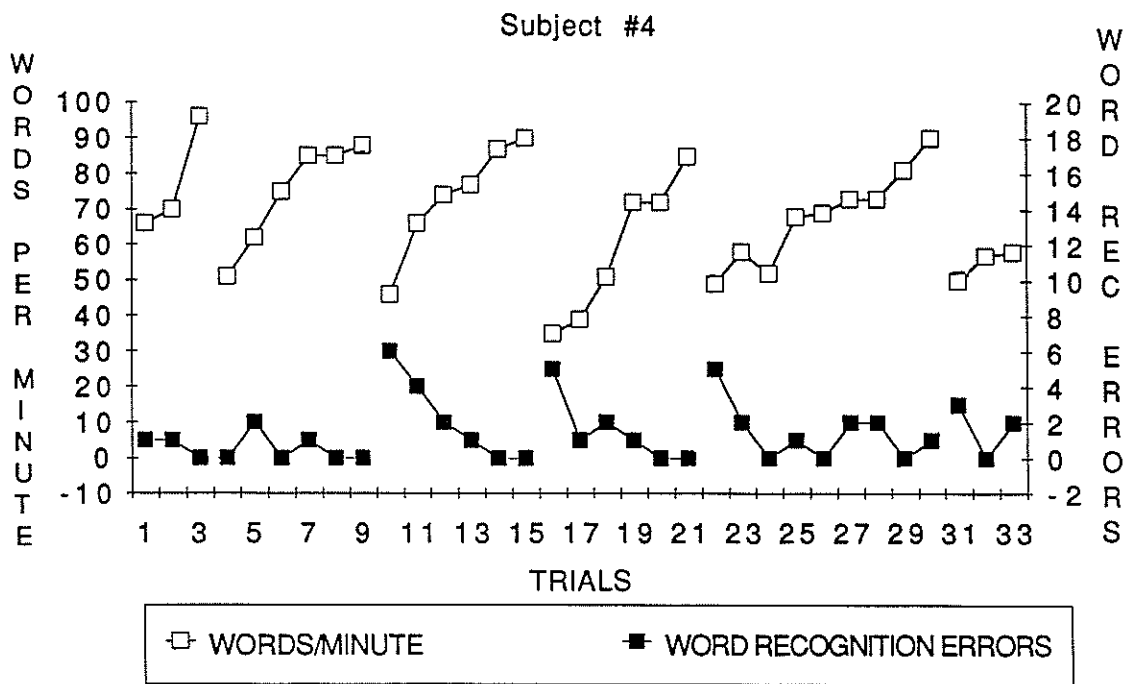


Table 4



**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**INTRODUCTION**

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Children with reading difficulties are often described as slow, word-by-word readers (Allington, 1983). Often efforts to remediate these difficulties are centered on individual skills instruction (Allington, 1977). However, several reading fluency methods have been effectively implemented in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to discover and employ effective strategies designed to increase the reading fluency of primary level children with reading difficulties.

This study utilized four methods of increasing reading fluency including the modified assisted reading method, choral reading, the tape recorded neurological impress method, and the method of repeated reading. The methods were administered in a manner consistent with the description of the procedures from the reading fluency research. Fifteen first through third grade special education students at North Bend Elementary School in the Snoqualmie Valley School District participated in the study.

## SUMMARY/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Each of the methods implemented in this study had varying degrees of effectiveness. The researcher found that knowledge of a variety of fluency methods was valuable in matching the learner with an effective approach. The following sections describe a summary of the results and a discussion of the finding for each reading fluency method employed in this study.

### MODIFIED ASSISTED READING METHOD

All five students gained fluency from the modified assisted reading method. Each student was able to progress at a rate that was comfortable to him/her. The students enjoyed choosing books of interest and proudly read the book fluently as a result of the practice from the taped stories.

The students listened to the tapes independently when they were not receiving direct instruction. Therefore, the students were able to listen to the modeling of fluent reading as opposed to completing worksheets. In addition, the method was simple and the students learned to use it quickly.

While utilizing the modified assisted reading method, the researcher identified a couple of potential weaknesses. First,

there was considerable time involved in recording each story. This would not be a problem if the teacher were using the modified assisted reading method with only a few students. However, in most special education resource rooms there are typically many children who need reading fluency practice. As a result, the amount of time needed to record each individual story could become a problem. On the other hand, parent volunteers or instructional aides could record the stories. A second potential problem is the amount of time necessary for one student to listen to the tape. Several tape recorders need to be available so that each student has time to listen to his/her story. The cost of the tapes and the tape recorders could make the modified assisted reading method too expensive to implement in some school districts.

#### CHORAL READING

The students enjoyed the choral reading activities. They were more attentive while being read to and showed greater confidence toward independently reading the books after practicing the stories together. The use of several types of choral reading activities kept the students interested. In addition, the activities were simple for the students to understand and easy for the teacher to implement. Utilizing

choral reading activities in the classroom is an excellent way to provide modeling of fluent reading while stimulating the students' interest and enthusiasm.

#### THE TAPE RECORDED NEUROLOGICAL IMPRESS METHOD

The students improved their reading fluency through the tape recorded neurological impress method. The students read with more expression, made fewer miscues, frequently self-corrected their miscues, and accelerated their reading rates after utilizing this method. Furthermore, the students showed an increased willingness to practice reading independently.

The method was easily mastered by the students. Instead of spending class time completing skill-oriented worksheets, they were able to listen to and practice fluent reading. In addition, the preparation time required to record the stories was manageable because the students practiced the stories in small groups. The small group characteristic of the tape recorded neurological impress method also kept the cost of implementing this method within reason. Children working in small groups required fewer tapes and tape recorders making this method less expensive than the individualized modified assisted reading method.

## THE METHOD OF REPEATED READING

The method of repeated reading was effective in improving the reading fluency for the four students participating in it. All of the students accelerated their reading rate and reduced the number of word recognition errors by repeatedly reading a passage. Furthermore, the students generally exhibited an increased willingness to practice reading independently. They were motivated by the instant feedback which was provided by recording the reading rate and word recognition errors.

One strength of the repeated reading method is that it is not necessary to spend time instructing the students on how to participate in the method. The students were only expected to choose an interesting book, practice a passage independently, and read the passage as rapidly as possible while they were timed. On the other hand, one drawback of the repeated reading method is the amount of time required to perform the procedure. Involving several students in this method would be very time consuming for the teacher.



## CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of the methods teachers choose to employ, reading fluency needs to be addressed in the classroom. Students with reading difficulties need to be exposed repeatedly to modeling of fluent reading. Opportunities should be provided that allow the students to practice fluent reading so they can break away from word-by-word reading and can begin the transition to reading fluency. After the students have successfully experienced fluent reading, they demonstrate greater confidence in their reading ability. This growth in confidence increases the likelihood that they will try new things. Moreover, the students become more interested in reading so they spend greater amounts of time practicing independently. In addition, the modified assisted reading method and the tape recorded neurological impress method provide alternatives to worksheet activities when the students are not receiving direct instruction.

Possibly the most important aspect of the four methods employed in this study was the increased amount of time the students spent on reading. As Allington stated, "To become a proficient reader one needs the opportunity to read" (1977; p. 60-61). Each of the methods provided at least a portion of the

practice necessary for students with reading difficulties to become fluent readers.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations for further research are suggested:

1. Additional research is needed on the effectiveness of reading fluency methods in the regular class setting.
2. Comparative research is needed on the effects of independent silent reading versus reading fluency methods on reading achievement.
3. Additional research is needed to ascertain the extent to which reading fluency is addressed in basal reading programs, teaching textbooks, and teacher's daily lesson plans.

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