STRENGTHENING READERS THEATER THROUGH PHRASE-CUED TEXTS

Rodgers, E., D'Agostino, J. V., Levin, J. R., & Rasinski, T. (2025). Pairing phrase-cued text with readers theatre: Effects on reading prosody and automaticity. *Journal of Research in Reading, 48*(2), 153–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.70002

WHAT DID THEY DO?

In this study, researchers examined the effects of readers theatre with phrase-cued texts on oral reading fluency of ten first- to third-grade students who were not meeting grade-level expectations.

Phrase-cued text is a strategy where phrases are clearly marked in a passage, helping readers see how words should/could be grouped together for smoother reading.

Unphrased: My dog ran across the yard to fetch a ball.
Phrase-cued: My dog/ ran across the yard/ to fetch a ball.

The study took place in a Midwestern state of the United States in a university-based reading lab, and all tutoring took place virtually, one-to-one, over a summer. Students participated in 36 readers theatre lessons using the same instructional protocol, organized into two unequal phases. In Phase A (baseline phase), students read from an unmarked version of the play or poem, while in Phase B (intervention phase), they used phrase-cued texts. The amount of lessons spent in each phase was randomly assigned to each student, providing different start points for the intervention phase.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

- Adding phrase-cued text to readers theatre resulted in significant effects on word identification and on prosody. Students' average performance on WIF was generally lower during Phase A than Phase B, and their increase in average performance occurred when or slightly after phrase-cued texts were introduced.
- There were no significant differences on the other measures of automaticity - DIBELS-ORF submeasures and MFS pace and smoothness.
- Though not a focal point of the study, students demonstrated significant positive gains on all four scales of the GORT fluency measure.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

- Using phrase-cued passages for readers theatre can scaffold a reader's prosodic reading - reading aloud with appropriate expression, rhythm, intonation, and phrasing.
- Beginning readers can work on and improve their fluency when instruction occurs through repeated readings (like a readers theatre format) and when the passages are easy for them to decode.
- Fluency instruction should include instruction in both components of fluency - automaticity and prosody.

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