Beyond "Too Hard": Unlocking complex texts through the power of the re-read

ARTICLE
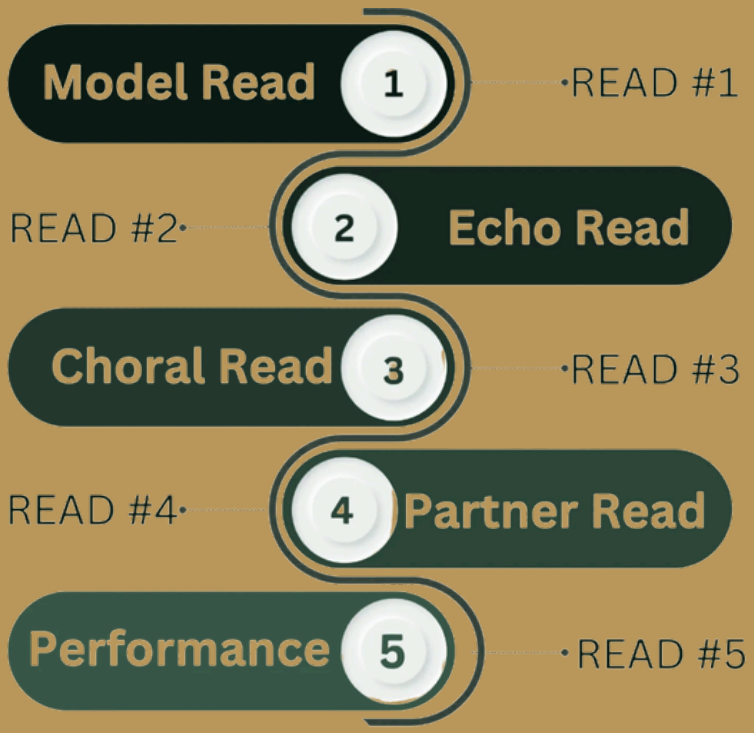
Downs, J., & Young, C. (2025). Complex text and fluency: Evaluating the read like us protocol with third and fourth grade students, *The Journal of Educational Research, 118* (1), 51-62,

WHAT DID THEY DO?

Downs and Young conducted a small group intervention study examining the effect of a repeated-reading fluency protocol, “Read Like Us,” on 174 third- and fourth- grade students who were reading below benchmark. The Read Like Us protocol consisted of five repeated reads: teacher read aloud, echo reading, choral group reading, partner choral reading, and then an individual read or performance read. Fifty different complex texts included: funny poetry, informational texts, and folk tales, to name a few – and averaged around a 5th grade level.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

After 50 lessons, students in the Read Like Us group grew more on words per minute (14.91% increase) and the MAZE task (7.82% increase) on post-tests than the control group (11.04% and 7.01% increases, respectively). The control group did slightly better on word accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension post-tests. For both groups, growth in reading accuracy was only 1%, despite the active control group receiving word reading instruction and the treatment group none. Furthermore, their results were not significantly moderated by grade, gender, or language status.



WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

Below benchmark, upper elementary readers can access and even benefit from repeated reading of a wide variety of complex texts with fluency scaffolds in a small group. Thus, reading teachers may want to consider utilizing repeated-reading of complex text to support reading growth for upper elementary students. (See figure). Notably,though students’ automaticity of reading complex text improved, this did not immediately give way to accuracy and comprehension gains, underscoring the importance that educators should continue to provide strategic decoding and comprehension supports as needed.

William & Mary School of Education | LITERACY LAB

WRITTEN BY SARAH KIM TRIP FELLOW