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Repeated Readings to Promote Fluency for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Reading fluency is a skill that's difficult for many students to acquire. However, research suggests that consistently implementing the Repeated Reading intervention can help students increase fluency and comprehension. The effect of this strategy when used to promote reading fluency in secondary students with severe intellectual disabilities has yet to be investigated. My research will examine the effect of the Repeated Reading intervention on the fluency level of students with intellectual disabilities in a public high school.

Statement of the Problem

According to Wendt (2013), in order to be successful during high school and into adulthood, secondary students need to develop the ability to read, which facilitates the ability to comprehend difficult texts and to communicate socially and electronically in effective and meaningful ways. These skills are not only paramount to obtaining academic mastery, but also to becoming productive and successful adults within society. Students with intellectual disabilities frequently exhibit academic deficits alongside their cognitive deficits, particularly in the area of reading; however, there are very few studies examining ways to address the reading problems of this population at the middle and high school level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the Repeated Reading strategy on reading fluency when applied to students with intellectual disabilities at a high school level.

Literature Review

Wexler et al. (2010) conducted a study with a total of 106 high school students with significant reading difficulties from 11 classrooms in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. A substantial positive effect was found in reading comprehension. Another study by Strong, Wehby, Falk and Lane (2004) looked at the additive effects of a Repeated Reading intervention, in conjunction with Corrective Reading, on the fluency and comprehension scores of adolescents with emotional behavioral disorders. The study concluded that for four of the six participants, the Repeated Reading component resulted in an increase in oral reading rates both at their functional reading level and in age/grade leveled text. Devault and Joseph (2004) looked at the effectiveness of Repeated Readings in conjunction with word boxes on reading fluency performance for a sample of high school students who had severe delays in reading. By the final steps of the investigation, all students were reading passages two grade levels beyond their independent reading level as measured on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). These findings suggested that Repeated Readings coupled with word boxes phonics technique showed promise for helping students increase their reading fluency. A study by Ardoin, Binder, Zawoyski, Foster and Blevins (2013) looked at the eye movement of students participating in Repeated Readings. Researchers found that as the number of readings increased, the average amount of gaze duration decreased consistently for all groups except the high performing group when reading low frequency words, suggesting that Repeated Readings generally facilitates the rapid identification of words when reading.

Research Methodology

Research will take place from January 2015 to March 2015 in a public high school classroom located in Miami-Dade County. Participants will be six students identified as having severe intellectual disabilities and ranging in age from 15 to 20 years old. During the pre-

intervention stage, students' average reading comprehension, reading rate and oral fluency levels will be recorded when completing weekly Reading Plus, DIBELS, and Running Record sessions. Each assessment tool will be administered twice per week. Throughout the three-week intervention period, two-sessions of structured Repeated Readings will be coordinated with students on a weekly basis. Words read correctly per minute and reading rate will be recorded and charted on a cumulative graph. During the post-intervention phase, the same assessment tools and their implementation frequency used during phase one will be implemented again. Scores for all assessments and intervention sessions will be averaged and recorded on a color-coded line graph to facilitate the identification of effect of Repeated Readings on reading fluency.

After analyzing the data, it was concluded that the Repeated Readings intervention may be effective for some, but not all students with cognitive disabilities. I suspect that this is due to the wide range of varying characteristics of disabilities which fall into the "cognitive or intellectual disabilities" classification. Although the majority of students did see a slight to major improvement in reading rate and accuracy, some students did not benefit from the intervention. It should be noted that the students who saw the least amount of benefit from the intervention were the only 2 students who had Down syndrome. This observation does not imply that individuals with Down syndrome would not benefit from this intervention, as the sample size was limited and there is a possibility of mere coincidence. During the first week of intervention, 4 out of 6 students experienced an increase in reading accuracy and rate. This trend continued throughout the intervention, although growth rate fluctuated tremendously.

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