

Live webcam coaching helps struggling readers make rapid gains

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A new literacy webcam coaching strategy, developed by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been shown to help struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers in rural classrooms keep pace with their peers. The strategy, known as "Targeted Reading Intervention" (TRI) webcam coaching, not only helps reduce the gap between readers who struggle and those who do not, but does so at low cost by eliminating geographic barriers and reducing the need for special education.

Unlike many other strategies designed to improve [reading skills](#), the TRI webcams make use of classroom teachers already in place to deliver enriched instruction. Literacy coaches, who can be located far off-site, provide state-of-the-art coaching to teachers in classrooms as they work in 15-minute one-on-one sessions with struggling readers.

Teachers use laptops with webcams so that they can see and hear the off-site coaches' real-time feedback and the coaches can see and hear the teachers as they work with children. These sessions focus on reading for [fluency](#), guided oral reading and a variety of strategies for helping students manipulate, say and write words.

"Teachers need to see results with their students or they won't stick with it," said Lynne Vernon-Feagans, the UNC researcher behind the TRI webcam strategy. "When their readers make rapid gains, teachers have those 'A-ha!' moments."

Sixteen schools from five low-wealth rural counties in Texas, New Mexico, Nebraska and North Carolina participated in the research, with about one-half the children coming from minority backgrounds.

The study, published in the new issue of the Journal of Educational Psychology, revealed that using webcam technology to coach classroom teachers with the TRI can significantly help struggling readers progress more rapidly across a broad range of reading skills in comparison with children who do not receive the TRI. In measures of word reading and spelling of sounds, struggling readers who received the TRI even progressed at the same rate as their non-struggling peers.

"These results are quite surprising, because the gap between readers who struggle and those who don't typically widens," said Vernon-Feagans, a fellow at UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and William C. Friday Distinguished Professor in UNC's School of Education. "This is a strategy that helps close that gap."

The TRI's webcam coaching also has a low price tag. Instead of employing a reading specialist, hiring one-on-one tutors, or covering travel expenses by experts to remote rural areas, with TRI webcams a half-time doctoral student can coach up to 12 teachers. Laptop computers are inexpensive, and iChat and Skype are free. Most remote rural schools have adequate Internet access.

The TRI webcam coaching has potential to make a significant impact, especially where it is most needed. Low-wealth rural schools often provide less access to important educational resources and are isolated from professional development programs for their [teachers](#). Students from these communities typically enter elementary school without as many skills as their peers from wealthier communities.

Collaborating on the TRI study with Vernon-Feagans are Kirsten Kainz

(also with FPG), Amy Hedrick (Lenoir Rhyne College), Marnie Ginsberg (an educational consultant) and Steve Amendum (N.C. State University).

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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