

Study: Simple teaching tool boosts student reading performance

29 August 2011



Researchers found that teachers whose reading curriculum incorporated the HELPS program saw a significant increase in fluency and other reading skills. Credit: John Begeny, North Carolina State University

Research from North Carolina State University shows that utilizing a freely available literacy tool results in significant advances in fundamental reading skills for elementary school students, without requiring schools to drastically overhaul existing programs. The research focused on children who were characterized as "struggling readers" at risk for a learning disability in reading.

"Our goal is to put effective tools in the hands of teachers," says Dr. John Begeny, an associate professor of school psychology at NC State, lead author of the study and creator of the literacy tool. "This research shows that our program works, and it's easy to use."

Begeny developed the literacy program, Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies (HELPS), to give teachers a new tool to promote reading "fluency." Reading fluency is effectively a child's ability to read with sufficient speed and accuracy, while also reading with good expression - for example, pausing at commas when reading out loud. When students read fluently, they have a greater capacity for understanding what they read,

and they are also more likely to choose to read.

Begeny focused on fluency, in part, because it has been the most neglected component of early reading instruction, with some studies showing that as many as 40 percent of U.S. students are not fluent readers.

In the study, researchers found that teachers whose reading curriculum incorporated the HELPS program saw a significant increase in reading fluency - and several other reading skills - compared to students whose curriculum didn't include HELPS. Specifically, the study showed that the HELPS program also led to improvements in reading comprehension and basic [reading skills](#) (such as sounding out words).

Because schools have limited resources, the HELPS program is available to teachers and parents for free. This is made possible by a nonprofit organization Begeny founded, called the HELPS Education Fund.

More information: The paper, "Effects of the HELPS Reading Fluency Program when Implemented by Classroom Teachers with Low-performing Second Grade Students," was published online this month by the journal *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

APA citation: Study: Simple teaching tool boosts student reading performance (2011, August 29)
retrieved 28 January 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-simple-tool-boosts-student.html>

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