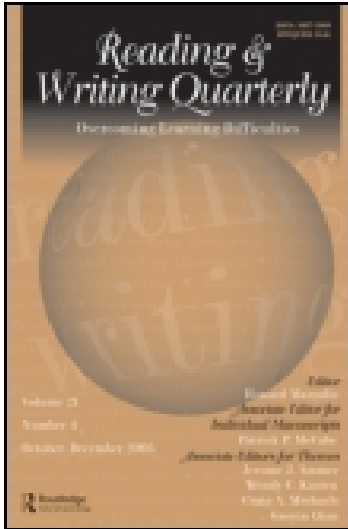


This article was downloaded by: [Clemson University]
On: 20 January 2014, At: 20:20
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:
1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street,
London W1T 3JH, UK



Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties

Publication details, including instructions for
authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urwl20>

USING TALKING BOOKS WITH READING-DISABLED STUDENTS

Michael C. McKenna^a, Michael C. McKenna^a,
David Reinking^b & Linda D. Labbo^b

^a Georgia Southern University, Savannah,
Georgia, USA

^b University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA
Published online: 28 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: Michael C. McKenna, Michael C. McKenna, David Reinking & Linda D. Labbo (1997) USING TALKING BOOKS WITH READING-DISABLED STUDENTS, *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 13:2, 185-190, DOI: [10.1080/1057356970130206](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057356970130206)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057356970130206>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever

or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

USING TALKING BOOKS WITH READING-DISABLED STUDENTS

Michael C. McKenna

Georgia Southern University, Savannah, Georgia, USA

David Reinking and Linda D. Labbo

University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA

Talking books are computerized versions of traditional print books. While they typically preserve the original text, page layouts, and illustrations of the print versions, they offer readers support in the form of synthesized or digitized pronunciations. Encountering an unfamiliar word need not be an intrusive obstacle, since the reader can readily access the stored pronunciation and move on. The growing availability of commercially produced talking books has raised the intriguing question of whether such books may at last offer the sort of on-the-spot, individualized assistance that many disabled readers need. If so, then the wide reading these students must undertake in order to attain fluency may be possible without placing inordinate demands on classroom teachers and without provoking self-consciousness and frustration on the part of students.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Despite the relatively recent appearance of talking books, a few studies have already investigated whether they produce desirable effects on children experiencing reading problems. So far, the results have been

Preparation of this column article was carried out under the sponsorship of the National Reading Research Center.

Address correspondence to Michael C. McKenna, 13015 Abercorn Street Extension, Suite E-4, Georgia Southern University, Savannah, GA 31419, USA. E-mail: mmckenna@gsvms2.cc.gasou.edu. David Reinking (e-mail: dreinkin@coe.uga.edu) and Linda D. Labbo (e-mail: llabbo@moe.coe.uga.edu) may be contacted at Reading Department, 309 Aderhold Building, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602, USA.

Issues in Technology is edited by Ernest Balajthy. Prospective contributions should be 3 to 5 double-spaced pages prepared according to the guidelines set forth in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (4th ed., 1994). Contributors should submit five paper copies, preferably accompanied by a PC or Macintosh disk copy, to Ernest Balajthy, School of Education SUNY—Geneseo, Geneseo, NY 14454, USA (phone: 716-245-5254; fax: 716-245-5220; e-mail: Balajthy@uno.cc.geneseo.edu).

encouraging. A decade ago, Olson, Foltz, and Wise (1986) conducted a pioneering study into the use of talking books by disabled readers between 8 and 12 years of age. They reported clear advantages, both in comprehension and word recognition. Olofsson (1992) also reported advantages for a reading-disabled sample but observed greater benefits for children in grades 4 and higher than for younger children. Lewin (1995) obtained positive results in decoding for children aged 8 to 12 in England, just as Wise et al. (1989) had reported similar advantages for American children aged 8 to 11.

The children in these studies seem to have benefited from the sheer amount of engaged reading made possible by talking books. At the National Reading Research Center, our studies of beginning readers have made clear that extensive exposure to talking books can lead to impressive sight word growth once a foundation of decoding ability has been established (McKenna, Reinking, Labbo, & Watkins, in press). Moreover, the words children learn are acquired incidentally, through the reading itself, and are unrelated to the words for which they access pronunciations. A pilot study suggests that this is true for older disabled readers as well. An instructional priority should therefore be to maximize the amount of interaction a child has with talking books.

FACTORS IN SUCCESSFUL USE OF TALKING BOOKS

We believe that talking books can benefit virtually all students. Elsewhere we have offered guidelines for using them with developing readers (McKenna, Reinking, Labbo, & Watkins, 1996), but their use with problem readers in classroom settings involves special considerations. The issues listed below are discussed in the context of best practice based on available evidence.

Independent Reading

It appears that talking books need not be integrated into a thematic curriculum. While planning units around talking books is possible, we believe that talking books are better utilized as a means of facilitating wide, independent reading. Literature units may be more productively devoted to print books—books that require more in the way of teacher support. A brief introduction of the talking book is a good idea, so that relevant prior knowledge is activated, but our experience suggests that centering the book within an elaborate unit is unnecessary.

Reading for Comprehension

Remedial readers are often preoccupied with word recognition and may be slow to realize that comprehension is the real goal of reading.

Talking books, because of the support they offer, represent an excellent opportunity to help them arrive at this realization. A simple focusing statement can go a long way toward making their reading more engaged and purposeful. For example, a teacher might suggest, "Read this story so you can tell me what happens," or "Read to find out what they see at the beach."

In promoting the remedial reader's attention to comprehension, teachers might also arrange for the child to respond to the book in some way, such as by drawing a picture, writing a brief critique, or suggesting an alternate ending. The knowledge that such a response is expected will encourage the child to attend more carefully and to construct meaning productively.

Age-Appropriate Materials

The support provided by talking books means that remedial readers, often for the first time, can negotiate text that is beyond their instructional level and that is indeed closer to their listening comprehension level. Age-appropriate talking books can therefore be a source of true interest and can help preserve a struggling child's self-respect. Text that would have been frustrating without support suddenly becomes negotiable in an electronic environment, and remedial readers can read the same books as their classmates.

Hardware Requirements

If the children's interaction with talking books is limited to occasional visits to the school's computer laboratory, appropriate titles should be chosen and made readily available at the lab for their use. It is possible to network a single talking-book CD-ROM, but doing so slows the access to pronunciations since more than one reader must be served. Classroom microcomputer stations equipped with CD-ROM players can be used as reading stations at which students explore talking books as sponge activities or during regular center time. Headsets prevent noise pollution and keep the number and kinds of words accessed a private matter. Such stations might be made available to developing as well as remedial readers, both as a matter of equity and to avoid stigmatizing the talking book station.

Software Examination

Talking books must be critically examined in advance of their purchase for classroom use. Different companies provide different formats and

options. Teachers should be familiar with them in order to guide and monitor students. For example, Broderbund's "Living Books" series offers a "play" option in which students delight in discovering hidden animation segments. Such an option can be distracting, but it can also be suppressed. One possibility is to allow students to fully explore the play option before moving them along to purposeful reading. Other series, such as Scholastic's "WiggleWorks" and publications by Discis, limit "play" opportunities to maintain children on-task.

Most talking books also provide a "listening" option, in which the story is read aloud to children as the virtual pages are turned. Such an option can serve to familiarize the student with the story line, but the student should be encouraged to move into supported, independent reading as quickly as possible. Little incidental word learning can be expected through the listening option alone.

Repeated Readings

Given a large enough inventory of talking book titles, a remedial reader would be able to read new material on a continuing basis. At present, however, their cost and the limited number available commercially precludes this possibility. Despite these circumstances, the repeated reading method can be used with talking books so that the student can read the same book more than once, perhaps with a variety of purposes. Our experience with combining repeated readings with talking books has been very positive. This is a powerful method that is especially effective among remedial readers (see, e.g., Pikulski, 1994; Stahl, Heubach, & Cramond, in press). Students in the primary grades are not quickly bored by repetitions. In fact, they develop favorites to which they enjoy returning.

Prerequisite Skills

Some problem readers may not have mastered the skills needed to use talking books appropriately. Students must possess minimal print concepts, such as knowledge of left-to-right directionality and the ability to discern word boundaries. Also, if incidental sight word learning is to occur, a knowledge of the alphabet is essential. Finally, some students may need instruction and practice in manipulating a mouse so that they can access pronunciations.

Monitoring Student Progress

When remedial students first encounter talking books, close monitoring is required to determine whether they grasp the basic idea of fol-

lowing along with the text and accessing pronunciations as necessary. Teacher modeling of the process is important. Once they get started, it is still a good idea to observe the students in passing from time to time to ensure that they are on task. After they have finished a talking book, other opportunities for monitoring arise. If earlier they have been given a purpose for their reading, they might be assessed as to the accomplishment of that purpose. Their responses to the book, in the form of writing, drawing, or discussion, might be monitored. Teachers need not turn the use of talking books into drudgery, but the expectation that comprehension is an important outcome must be clearly conveyed to the students.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS?

Talking books have the potential to give remedial students extensive supported practice in real reading. We know that this kind of contextualized word recognition practice can result in improved decoding ability and a larger sight vocabulary. Moreover, the support provided by talking books makes it possible for remedial readers to develop an appreciation of what reading can be, long before they achieve true fluency. On the other hand, classroom teachers should not expect too much from talking books. They are no substitute for a balanced, systematic program and must serve instead as one component of such a program. In particular, they must not be regarded as a means of fully meeting your instructional responsibility to these students. To be sure, talking books represent a new resource for an old dilemma, but they are not a total solution.

SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS AND DISTRIBUTORS

Broderbund, P.O. Box 6125, Novato, CA 94948-6125

Discis Knowledge Research, 90 Sheppard Avenue East, 7th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M2N 3A1

Scholastic New Media, 2931 East McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101

REFERENCES

- Lewin, C. (1995). *The evaluation of talking book software: A pilot study*. Technical Report No. 220. Milton Keynes: Centre for Information Technology in Education, The Open University.
- McKenna, M. C., Reinking, D., Labbo, L. D., & Watkins, J. H. (in press). *The effects of electronic trade books on the decoding growth of beginning readers*

- [Technical Report]. Athens, GA, and College Park, MD: National Reading Research Center.
- McKenna, M. C., Reinking, D., Labbo, L. D., & Watkins, J. H. (1996). *Using electronic storybooks with beginning readers* [Instructional Resource]. Athens, GA, and College Park, MD: National Reading Research Center.
- Olofsson, A. (1992). Synthetic speech and computer aided reading for reading disabled children. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 4, 165–178.
- Olson, R., Foltz, G., & Wise, B. (1986). Reading instruction and remediation with the aid of computer speech. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers*, 18, 93–99.
- Pikulski, J. J. (1994). Preventing reading failure: A review of five effective programs. *The Reading Teacher*, 48, 30–39.
- Stahl, S. A., Heubach, K., & Cramond, B. (in press). Fluency-based reading instruction. *Elementary School Journal*.
- Wise, B., Olson, R., Ansett, M., Andrews, L., Terjak, M., Schneider, V., Kostuch, J., & Kriho, L. (1989). Implementing a long-term computerized remedial reading program with synthetic speech feedback: Hardware, software, and real-world issues. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers*, 21, 163–180.