

Improving Reading Comprehension using a Paraphrasing Strategy for Young Adults with Intellectual Disability

by Michelle L. Hinzman, Youjia Hua, and Suzanne Woods-Groves

INTRODUCTION

A greater number of individuals with disabilities are pursuing a postsecondary education than ever before. Estimates suggest nearly 46% of students with disabilities complete some form of postsecondary training. This is a substantial increase from the 19% of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary programs in 1990. However, in comparison to other disability groups, individuals with intellectual disability are the least likely to pursue postsecondary enrollment (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005).

One barrier that substantially limits postsecondary opportunities for students with intellectual disability is a lack of academic preparation, particularly in the area of reading. Students with intellectual disability read on average three grade levels behind their peers (Turnbull, Zuna, Turnbull, Poston, & Summers, 2007). Intensive reading instruction is necessary to enhance the ability of individuals with intellectual disability to gain meaning from text (Baker, 2008).

Unfortunately, a scarcity of research exists studying effective reading interventions for individuals with intellectual disability, especially in postsecondary education. This study investigated the effects of teaching a paraphrasing strategy on the reading comprehension of young adults with intellectual disability.

The RAP paraphrasing strategy is an empirically validated strategy that has improved the reading comprehension of school-age children in elementary and secondary settings (Hagaman, Casey, & Reid, 2010). Developed by Schumaker, Denton, and Deshler (1984), the RAP paraphrasing strategy is comprised of three steps: Read a paragraph, ask myself "What was the main idea and two details?" and put the main idea and details in my own words.

METHODS

Sample

This study included ten participants with intellectual disability enrolled in a two-year postsecondary program. We randomly assigned participants to experimental and control groups. Participants received 12 total lessons of the RAP paraphrasing strategy. The 60-minute lessons occurred twice a week for six weeks.

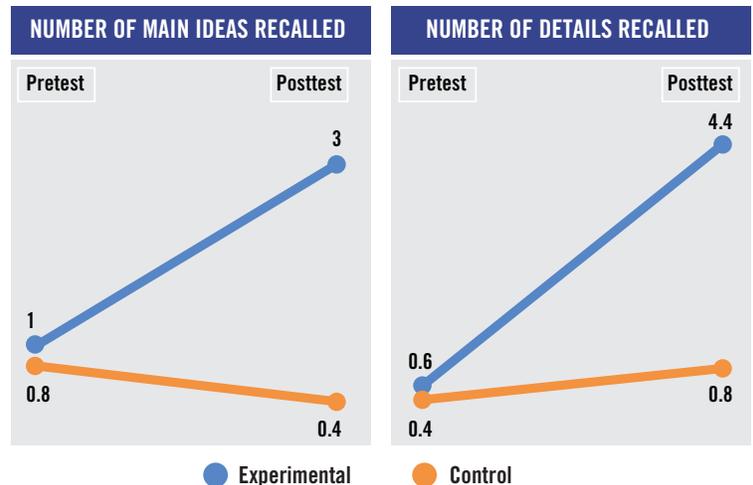
The students learned the paraphrasing strategy as a group during their regularly scheduled supplemental academic class time. We selected expository passages from Time Readings (Spargo, 1989). Each passage was about 400 words with an average reading level of 6.61 according to Flesch-Kincaid. Topics included science, technology, and history. Each lesson began with a review of the previous lesson and identification of lesson objectives. Then the teacher modeled the RAP paraphrasing strategy and provided students with opportunities for practice. Each lesson concluded with a preview of the next lesson. Students in the control group learned a writing strategy instead of the RAP strategy.

Data analysis

We analyzed the experimental and control participants' posttest scores following RAP paraphrasing strategy instruction.

KEY FINDINGS

Differences between the two groups were statistically significant.



- Results indicate that teaching the three-step RAP paraphrasing strategy improves reading comprehension for young adults with intellectual disability.
- Young adults with intellectual disability in the experimental group outperformed control group

participants in both the number of main ideas and details recalled.

- The RAP paraphrasing strategy:
 - » Increased the awareness of young adults with intellectual disability of ideas within paragraphs.
 - » Facilitated comprehension and memorization of text for young adults with intellectual disability by requiring them to construct meaning using their own words.
 - » Reduced the demand on working memory by having young adults with intellectual disability process text in smaller chunks (i.e., paragraphs).

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations are associated with this study. First, we did not assess the ability of young adults with intellectual disability to maintain their reading gains long-term following intervention. Nor did we assess their ability to generalize the reading skills taught to different contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of this study suggest that the RAP paraphrasing strategy is a promising reading intervention for young adults with intellectual disability in postsecondary education. The strategy serves as a bridge between the demands of reading for understanding and the cognitive needs of students with intellectual disability.

Reading comprehension is an essential academic skill individuals with intellectual disability must acquire to fully participate in a postsecondary education. The RAP paraphrasing strategy may be particularly effective when implemented (a) as a supplemental curriculum, (b) by a teacher trained to provide the strategy, and/or (c) with the aide of a teacher script and checklist to ensure implementation of essential components of the intervention.

For students with intellectual disability in college, this strategy could be taught by a disability support professional or a peer mentor or tutor, and used to comprehend required reading. In an inclusive college class, a professor could provide a reminder to the student to use the strategy while they read the instructional materials.

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