

Series: Powerful Best Reading Practices for Struggling Readers

Part 2: Methods that Teach Reading the Way the Brain Learns

by Marie Carbo, Ed.D.

When modeling reading methods are used correctly and often, learning to read becomes easier and more fun, reading improvement is immediate and lasting, and students become more alert and responsive. When that happens, reading is being taught the way the brain learns (see Figure 1).

Why Modeling Reading Methods Raise Reading Levels Quickly

Modeling reading methods do a good job of significantly increasing reading fluency, and we definitely want our students to be able to read fluently, accurately, and with good expression. Here's why: when students read fluently and accurately, it frees the

brain to attend to the *meaning* of what is being read. Good readers are good comprehenders because their brains are always working and thinking while they read. They are *active and purposeful readers*.

Put another way, everyone has a limited amount of attention available when reading. If a great deal of attention is expended trying to decode words, less is available to understand *what* is being read). The correct use of modeling reading methods provides the scaffolding that emerging and struggling readers need to *bypass* the decoding process, read fluently, and concentrate on meaning.

Problems Caused By Insufficient Modeling

Many youngsters in the early grades simply do not receive the amount and kind of modeling they need to become fluent readers. They are pushed along too fast. At a time in their school career when they need to hear and see good reading being modeled, they don't receive it. When those students reach middle or high school, they are often years behind in reading and still do not receive the modeling they require to move ahead.

The Continuum of Modeling Reading Methods

There are many kinds of modeling reading methods. To show their relationship and purpose, I've created the Continuum of Modeling Reading Methods (Figure 2, page 2). Those methods that provide the most assistance to the reader are at the base of the model. Moving from the bottom to the top of the Continuum, each method provides increasingly less assistance or modeling. Finally, at the very top, the student is able to read independently. The strategies at the bottom,

Figure 1

Brain research tells us that:	Therefore, educators should:
1. The brain thrives on meaning.	Use high-interest reading materials.
2. Success motivates students.	Assure student success.
3. Failure dulls the mind and creates anger and fear.	Use modeling reading methods that assure success.
4. Choice is important. It changes the chemistry of the brain.	Provide choices of reading materials whenever possible.
5. Just the right amount of challenge or "stretch" encourages learning.	Use modeling reading methods to stretch students upward.
6. Multiple memory lanes help powerful learning to occur.	Involve many senses of the learner.

which provide the most assistance, are most appropriate for beginning readers and struggling readers.

When the Continuum is used correctly, these two important reading goals are accomplished:

- Students are able to read higher-level, more interesting reading materials.
- When students read aloud, they feel and sound like competent, fluent readers.

In other words, use of the Continuum enables students to read increasingly difficult reading material so that their reading

level increases quickly. And, since sufficient modeling of a text before reading is provided, they are able to read the text easily, without stress. Obviously, we don't want youngsters to struggle and stumble as they read in front of their peers (this experience is, almost without exception, the worst memory of adults who were struggling readers as children).

Amount and Kind of Modeling Provided by the Modeling Reading Methods

Each of the following modeling reading methods models good reading. Different amounts and

kinds of modeling are provided by each method. Since the methods at the base of the Continuum provide the most modeling, let's begin there.

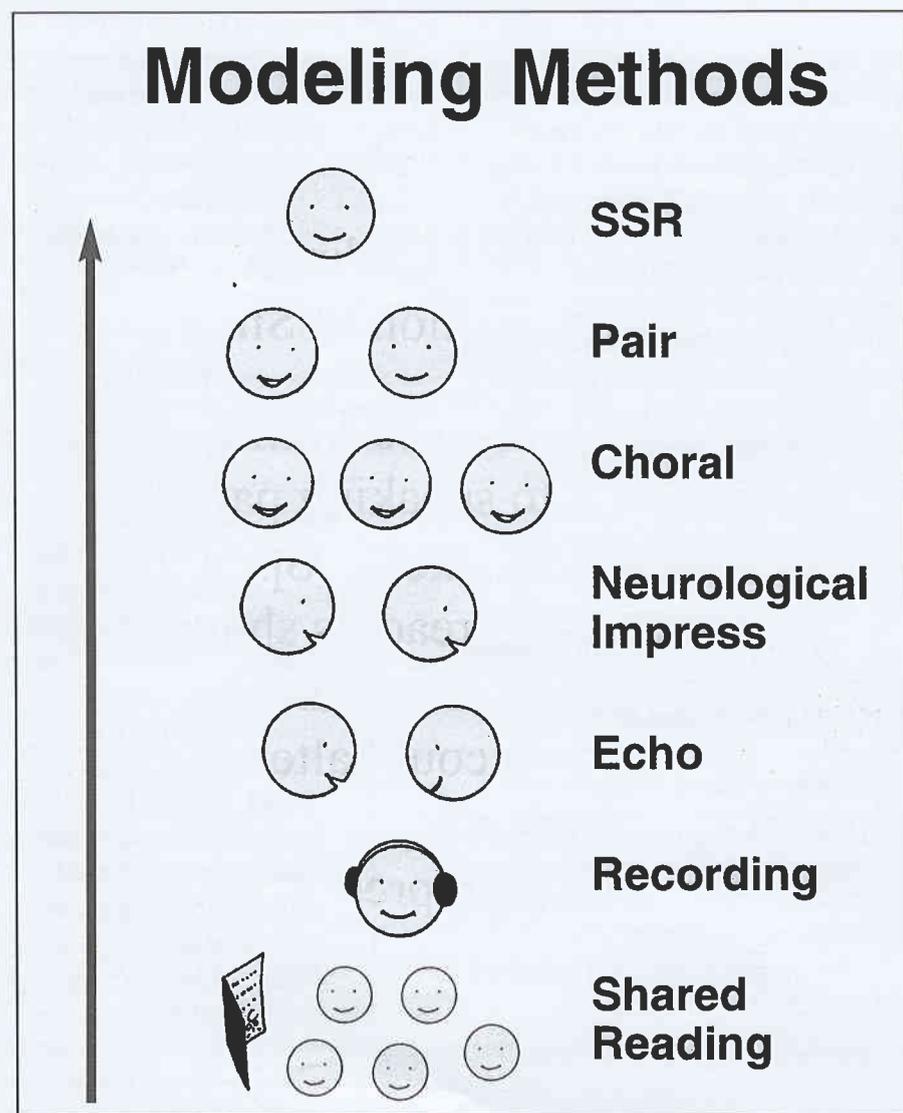
Storytelling and Reading Aloud:

While these two strategies are not on the Continuum because they are not considered actual modeling reading methods, they are extremely important techniques, especially for youngsters who have heard few stories and been read to very little (Trelease, 2006). Storytelling models good oral language for children, and reading a story aloud helps to familiarize children with written language, which often has a different structure and vocabulary than the students' spoken language. We definitely want our students to become familiar with written language; that familiarity will make it easier for them to learn to read. That's why it's very important that teachers set aside time for reading aloud to their students, about 10-15 minutes *at least once* each day, especially with emerging and struggling readers.

Shared Reading: The students can hear and see what is being read. The reader points to the words with his or her finger or a pointer, so that the students can see and track the words as they are being read. Although this method is used extensively in the lower grades, it can easily be adapted for older students.

Specially Recorded Short Stories: Students see and hear a brief passage of a somewhat challenging story being read at a slow pace, and then they read the passage back. With this method, the teacher records a small amount of a story (about one-half to one page) at a somewhat slow pace. The student listens to the recording 2-3 times and reads the passage back.

Figure 2



Echo Reading: Usually students hear a person read a small portion of a passage and they immediately read it back. The text might be a sentence, a paragraph, or a longer amount of material. This method is one step higher on the continuum than recorded short stories, because the students often hear the modeled reading only once.

Neurological Impress: While sitting next to a less-able reader who holds the book or story to be read, a good reader traces his or her finger under the words in the story and reads aloud softly near the ear of the less-able reader. The less-able reader reads along with the good reader, much like choral reading. The advantage of this method is that the good reader traces under the words, sets the reading pace, and reads directly near the ear of the less-able reader (about 6-10 inches away).

Choral Reading: Two or more students read a passage in unison. Choral reading can include a variety of people (including the teacher) reading together. The passage can be very short or quite lengthy. In this method, the less

proficient reader must try to read along with the model as it is being provided. With choral reading, the student is expected to read a passage at the same time that others are reading it. No previous modeling need have occurred.

Paired Reading: Two students take turns reading one or more passages. In addition to simply alternating passages, one student may act as the narrator while the other is a character in the story; any number of variations are possible. Notice that with this method each student is expected to read some parts of a text independently. Some general modeling of reading may occur if at least one member of the pair is a good reader.

Independent Reading: Each child reads alone for a set period of time. Independent reading is the goal of the Continuum.

Using the Continuum in Creative Ways

The Continuum of Modeling Reading Methods can be used in creative ways. Combine modeling methods when it makes sense to

do so. For example, before children choral read a passage, they might listen to a recording of it to improve their fluency. Or a teacher might do an echo reading session with a small group, and then have the group members choral read the passage after it is modeled.

Improve Reading Fluency, Word Recognition, Confidence, and Comprehension

Learning to read should be easy and it should feel like fun. Today's reading achievement tests place far too much emphasis on skills, particularly phonics. As a result, many of our students don't experience the flow of real reading. The modeling reading methods described in this article enable students to feel and enjoy the flow of real reading. When a young person can read words easily and when he or she feels good about being able to read, then that child's mind is freed to *understand* what is being read. That is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.

© Marie Carbo, 2013

References

- Carbo, M. (1978). Teaching reading with talking books. *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 267-73. (Reprinted in Rasinski, T. V. (2009). *Essential readings on fluency*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association).
- Carbo, M. (1981). Making books talk to children. *The Reading Teacher*, 35(2), 186-89.
- Carbo, M. (2005). What principals need to know about reading instruction. *Principal*, 85(1), 46-49.
- Carbo, M. (2009). *Becoming a great teacher of reading: Achieving high rapid reading gains with powerful, differentiated strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Heckelman, R. G. (1969). A neurological impress method of remedial-reading instruction. *Academic Therapy Quarterly*, 4(4), 277-82.
- Holdaway, D. (1982). Shared book experience: Teaching reading using favorite books. *Theory Into Practice*, 21, 293-300.
- Koskinen, P. S., & Blum, I. H. (1986). Paired repeated reading: A classroom strategy for developing fluent reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 40(1), 70-75.
- McCauley, J. K., & McCauley, D. S. (1992). Using choral reading to promote language learning for ESL Students. *The Reading Teacher*, 45, 526-33.
- Trelease, J. (2006). *The read-aloud handbook*. New York: Penguin.



Author

Dr. Marie Carbo is Founder and Executive Director of the National Reading Styles Institute (NRSI). She is a nationally known award winning researcher, and author of more than 100 articles and four ground-breaking books on reading.

For information about Power Reading Online, the brain-compatible reading program used at I.S. 206 in the Bronx, and many of the schools listed in this article, as well as to work with Carbo recordings, visit www.nrsi.com.