For primary teachers and reading leads · Evidence briefing

ONLINE PAIRED READING AND THE FOURTH-GRADE CLASSROOM

Can paired reading work just as well on a screen as it does side by side?

One classroom's early trial of moving a well-established reading strategy online, translated for any primary teacher running paired reading.

Which of your struggling readers could benefit from a stronger partner, even on the days they can't sit side by side?

In one line

A signal about digital delivery, not proven superiority: over one term, 22 fourth-graders paired stronger and weaker readers together for 36 lesson hours of online paired-reading practice, and researchers reported improved reading fluency, comprehension and reading self-concept afterwards, but with no comparison class, an ordinary term's progress cannot be ruled out.

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Avşaroğlu, B. B. C., & Yıldız, M. (2025), Reading Research Quarterly, 60(4), e70063, doi.org/10.1002/rrq.70063
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Twenty-two fourth-graders, one class, three reading measures all moving the reported direction

Twenty-two fourth-graders, a mix of stronger and weaker readers, were paired up for online paired-reading sessions across the spring term of the 2023-2024 school year, for 36 lesson hours in total. Every learner sat the same reading checks before the programme and again afterwards; there was no separate class running without the online sessions to compare against.

- ✓ **A traditional, face-to-face strategy, moved online** · Paired reading, an established method for combining stronger and weaker readers, was "implemented online" for the whole programme
- ✓ **Reading fluency improved, the study says** · Measured with curriculum-based measurement (CBM); the published abstract reports "a significant improvement" but not its size
- ✓ **Reading comprehension improved too** · Same CBM approach, same reported direction; again, no effect size is stated in the accessible abstract
- ✓ **Reading self-concept improved as well** · Measured with the published Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995); a "positive improvement" is reported
- ✓ **No second class to compare against** · A one-group, pretest-to-posttest design: every learner is compared only with their own starting point

Three measures, one reported direction

What the published abstract states about each outcome. No number describing the size of any change is reported to us.

READING FLUENCY

Measured with: Curriculum-based measurement (CBM)

Reported result: "A significant improvement"

READING COMPREHENSION

Measured with: Curriculum-based measurement (CBM)

Reported result: "A significant improvement"

READING SELF-CONCEPT

Measured with: Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995)

Reported result: "A positive improvement"

The published abstract states these results in words, not numbers, and the full text (with any effect sizes or statistics) sits behind a paywall we could not access: see page 4.

What ‘online paired reading’ means, and what the study leaves for you to work out

THE MOVE	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE AT SCHOOL (OUR EXAMPLE)	WHAT THE STUDY CONFIRMS
Pair a stronger reader with a weaker one, online instead of side by side	*“You two are reading partners this term, same as always, just over a video call instead of at the same table.”*	The abstract describes paired reading, “an effective method… which allows students to work collaboratively,” as “a traditional practice… adapted to the online environment.” It does not state the platform, session length, or how pairs were matched.
SL GUIDANCE	**Do it well, for every learner:** pilot your own tool with two or three pairs first. The published abstract does not say which platform or format this study used, so treat the mechanics as yours to design.	
Keep it running for a full term, not a single week	*“We will keep this pairing going every week until half term, then check in on how it is going.”*	The programme ran for 36 lesson hours across the spring 2023-2024 term, not a short trial. The abstract does not break this down into a weekly schedule.
SL GUIDANCE	**Do it well, for every learner:** budget for sustained weekly time, not a one-off event. A single session is very unlikely to show anything either way.	
Check fluency and comprehension the same way, before and after	*“We will use the same reading check in September and again in the summer, so we can see what has changed.”*	Researchers used a curriculum-based measurement (CBM) approach, a widely-used method of tracking reading progress with brief, repeatable tests, before and after the programme.
SL GUIDANCE	**Do it well, for every learner:** use a check you can repeat identically at both ends of the term; CBM-style running records are built for exactly this.	
Ask how learners feel as readers, not only how they score	*“On a scale, how much do you enjoy reading, and how good a reader do you think you are?”*	Researchers also used a published instrument, the Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995), to track learners’ own sense of themselves as readers alongside the skills checks.
SL GUIDANCE	**Do it well, for every learner:** add a short self-concept check alongside your fluency check. A skills score alone can miss a confidence shift.	

The honest fence: where this evidence stops

No comparison class

This is a one-group, pretest-to-posttest design: the abstract states this explicitly. There was no second class that carried on without online paired reading, so an ordinary term's progress, normal maturation, or simple novelty cannot be ruled out.

No effect size or test statistic reported to us

The abstract states "a significant improvement" and "a positive improvement" without giving the size of either change, a test statistic, or a p-value. We do not invent one.

One class, 22 learners

A single class at what appears to be one school. No information on the school, region, or country is stated, and we do not supply one.

The online format itself is not described

The abstract says the strategy "was implemented online" but not the platform, whether sessions were live, or how pairs were matched or rotated.

Full text is not openly accessible

This article has no open-access copy (checked via Crossref, Semantic Scholar and Unpaywall; the publisher itself returns a paywall response). Our review is bounded to the published abstract, not the authors' full results or their own stated limitations.

No independent replication known

A single study, single research team, one class. No second trial of this specific online adaptation has been found.

● Early signal

A real, peer-reviewed quasi-experiment with no comparison group, reviewed only at abstract level. Promising direction, far from proven yet. Open full-text access, a matched-comparison design, or independent replication would raise this grade.

Worth testing: could pairing your struggling readers online work as well as pairing them in person?

The pattern worth borrowing isn't the specific tool this class used; the abstract never says what it was. It is the underlying idea: paired reading, a long-established technique for combining stronger and weaker readers, does not have to happen face to face to plausibly still work. If part of your class learns remotely, is split across sites, or you simply want more flexibility in how pairs meet, this early signal suggests it is worth trialling, not assuming it must be in the same room.

1. **Keep the core of paired reading intact, just move the room**
   Pair a stronger reader with a weaker one as you already would, and trial the same session online, whatever tool you already trust, before assuming it needs to be face to face.

2. **Measure the same way, before and after, on your own class**
   Use a quick, repeatable fluency and comprehension check before and after a term of paired reading, online or in person, so you see your own class's change, not someone else's.

3. **Ask learners how they feel as readers, not just how they score**
   A short confidence check at the start and end of the trial can surface a change a fluency score alone will not show, exactly as this study also tracked.

Early signal, so run it as an experiment: pick one small group of struggling readers, pair each with a stronger reader online for a term, and compare their own start-of-term and end-of-term reading check, since this study had no comparison class to tell us what would have happened anyway.

Why not try? Planning a paired reading rotation is easier with a framework to build it from. Open a free account to plan your next reading intervention at app.structural-learning.com.

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