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ABSTRACT

Although research efforts into improving reading fluency and general reading performance through fluency training have enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, basal reading approaches still dominate reading instruction, and fluency is rarely viewed as an important component of the instructional package. Several models of reading fluency instruction make fluency an integral part of the regular reading curriculum. For example, the Oral Recitation Lesson incorporates aspects of repeated readings, teacher modeling of fluent oral reading, and standards for student mastery of the text. Other recently developed curriculum models for fluency capitalize on the notion of pairing students into cooperative dyads and having them work together in supporting each other's growth in fluency and general reading proficiency. Using these models as guides, teachers can begin to incorporate elements of fluency instruction into their classrooms. (Eighteen references are appended.) (MM)

Research and Practice:

Making a Place for Fluency Instruction in the Regular Reading Curriculum

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Research efforts into improving reading fluency and general reading performance through fluency training have enjoyed something of a resurgence in recent years. Much of this research has been directed at individual methods or techniques for improving reading fluency. Articles on methods such as repeated readings (Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Samuels, 1979; Taylor, Wade & Yekovich, 1985) and reading--while--listening (Chomsky, 1976; Laffey & Kelly, 1981; Reitsma, 1988) have been found in the research literature with increasing regularity.

This research has tended to find facilitative effects for fluency training. One important implication from the research, then, has been support for the inclusion of a fluency component in the reading curriculum. However, this corpus of research has, in general, tended to treat fluency training as an independent or special method, isolated from the rest of the reading curriculum. Most research studies into fluency methods have not addressed the applicability of fluency instruction into the regular reading curriculum. These studies have tended to take place outside the regular classroom context, apply fluency instruction to special and often small groups of students, and/or apply the fluency instruction treatments for brief durations. All these factors tend to limit the generalizability of fluency instruction methods to broader instructional contexts and populations.

In this present day, while reading instruction is increasingly dominated by basal reading approaches, instruction

in fluency is rarely viewed as an important component of the instructional package. And, because basal approaches are often viewed as total reading instruction systems, little consideration is given by teachers to the inclusion of a reading fluency component in the reading curriculum.

Yet, the theory underlying reading fluency points to its development as a sensible part of general reading and literacy instruction. For example, the fluency characteristic of reading in syntactically appropriate phrases (Schreiber, 1980) means that fluent readers read expressively and process written texts in clause and phrase units rather than as individual words. Reading with expression enhances the sense of story for young readers and helps make the connections between written and spoken language clearer.

The focus of this paper, then, is on the development of and research into well articulated models of reading fluency instruction that make fluency an integral part of the regular reading curriculum. Our purpose is to bring to light ways in which researchers, teachers and reading curriculum decision-makers can make reading fluency instruction an important part of and achievable goal for the general reading curriculum.

Oral Recitation Lesson

Using a lesson format that harkens back to an earlier period of reading instruction, Hoffman (1985) has developed the Oral Recitation Lesson which incorporates aspects of repeated readings, teacher modeling of fluent oral reading, and standards

for student mastery of the text.

The Oral Recitation Lesson also shares important characteristics and theoretical underpinnings with the Shared Book Experience (Holdaway, 1979) that is advocated in many whole language approaches to reading instruction. For example, teacher modeling, repetitions of texts, independent reading, and the use of predictable and meaningful materials are key elements to both approaches.

The Oral Recitation Lesson has two basic components, each made up of several phases or subroutines. In the first phase of the direct instruction component the teacher models fluency by reading the assigned story to the class. This is followed by a teacher-led analysis and discussion of the story and student generated summaries of the text. In this phase comprehension is the key focus.

The second phase of the direct instruction component involves student practice on the story with the goal of improving oral reading expression. Here, the teacher talks directly about the elements of expressive oral reading (pitch, stress, and juncture) and directs the students in oral reading episodes alone and in chorus. Student practice begins with small text segments which gradually increase as students develop proficiency in oral reading.

The third phase of direct instruction is the oral performance phase. Students are allowed to select and orally read a portion of the assigned text for their classmates. Class

members are encouraged to provide positive feedback to the performing student.

A second instructional component is termed indirect instruction and involves one phase. In this component students are given the opportunity to practice oral reading on their own. The goal of this particular component is for students to achieve and demonstrate competency in oral reading fluency (98% or better in accuracy and 75 words per minute for second-grade students) on one story before moving on to another. This practice period takes about ten minutes each day during which students do "soft" or whisper reading on stories that had earlier been part of the direct instruction component. During this time the teacher checks individual students for mastery and maintains records of students' performance on stories.

Working with students who had previously shown little growth in reading, Hoffman (1987) and his associates noted subtle but significant improvements in reading performance. Comprehension, rather than individual word identification, became the focus of instruction as well as student performance. Students' miscue behavior became more like that of more fluent mature readers, with students attending more to the apprehension of meaning than the perfect recognition of words.

In a year long study, Nelson and Morris (1986) implemented an adaptation of the Oral Recitation Lesson with low readers in the second and third grades of an inner-city school. They reported substantial gains in word recognition accuracy in

contextual and word list reading for children who had previously made little or no progress in reading.

Although, Hoffman's lesson format was designed for use with stories found in basal texts, it seems that it would work equally well with stories in tradebooks for children. Hoffman points out (1988) that the key text characteristic in the successful application of the procedure is that the texts be predictable or follow some predictable pattern.

Paired Oral Reading

Two recently developed curriculum models for fluency instruction have independently capitalized on the notion of pairing students into cooperative dyads and having them work together in supporting each other's growth in fluency and general reading proficiency.

The model developed by Koskinen and Blum (1986) incorporates two major components: cooperative dyads and the method of repeated readings. Their paired repeated reading model is viewed as a fluency building activity that can take place within or independent of the regular reading lesson. Koskinen and Blum identify the activity as a complementary followup to the regular reading instruction. It is designed to take 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

In the model each student chooses a selection of about 50 words from reading material currently being studied. Each student reads his or her own passage silently. This is immediately followed by one reader orally reading his/her passage

to the partner three times in succession. After each oral presentation the listening partner provides generalized feedback to the reader. This feedback requires the listener to pay attention to smoothness, word identification and expression in reading. After one reader has made three recitations of a passage the roles of reader and listener are reversed.

Koskinen and Blum (1986) report that students using the paired repeated reading approach demonstrated improvement in reading fluency, word recognition and comprehension. In one test of the model (Koskinen & Blum, 1984) effect sizes of 2.75 and 4.23 were reported in favor of the model over a control activity on measures of oral fluency and sensitivity to context. Moreover the model is easy to implement, simple to manage and described as enjoyable by both teachers and students. Koskinen and Blum (1986) also provide suggestions for extending paired repeated reading into other areas such as written composition and as an activity parents can do with their children.

The partner reading program described by Stevens, Madden, Slavin and Farnish (1986) is similar to the Koskinen and Blum (1986) model in several respects. In both models students are paired with a classmate and take turns practicing oral reading. The silent partner, in both models, is actively engaged in monitoring the reader's performance.

While the Koskinen and Blum model is designed to fit into a traditional reading lesson format, the fluency instruction model devised by Stevens and his associates is only one component of a

novel approach to a total program for reading and language arts instruction. Other components of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) program include instruction in story grammar, story writing, word identification, word meaning, and spelling.

Two field experiments of the CIRC program (Stevens, Madden, Slavin & Farnish, 1987) with third and fourth grade classrooms have yielded generally positive results. Students in the CIRC program outperformed students in a control program consisting of a more traditional basal reading approach on standardized reading tests, analyses of writing samples and performance on tests of oral reading.

Discussion

Although few in number, these recent reports on general reading curricula that have incorporated a fluency component and fluency methods for the general reading curriculum have been singularly positive. Models of reading curriculum that incorporate instruction in fluency have not proved detrimental to the student. Indeed, students placed in such instructional models have demonstrated substantial growth in reading. When compared with students in more traditional models, students in the models with a fluency component have usually made greater gains.

True, few models have been designed, the implementation of those models has been limited, and the testing of the models has been, in some cases, less than complete. Still, the implication

that comes through this research is clear and promising. There is a positive place for fluency instruction in the regular reading curriculum. Positive outcomes tend to emerge from reading programs that incorporate some elements of instruction in fluency. Based upon this assertion we see opportunities for action on three fronts: research, classroom instruction, and curriculum materials development.

Educational researchers should see fluency as a fruitful area of research. Knowing that elements of fluency instruction have had positive outcomes in more basic research, educational researchers should design, implement and test curriculum models of reading instruction which incorporate a fluency component and stand alone fluency instruction models that can be fit into existing models of reading instruction with intact classrooms of children. The optimal conditions for this type of research occur when the researcher enters into a collaborative relationship with practitioners participating in the study. Under such conditions continuous monitoring of the various treatments can occur over long durations, adjustments and fine tuning of the instructional models can be made based on the informed observations of the researcher and practitioners, and large amounts of in-process qualitative data can be generated. These types of contextually rich studies can help answer the critical questions as to the merits of certain types of fluency instruction models, the types and ages of students who seem to benefit most, and the optimal length of such instruction.

Beyond this practical oriented research, teachers themselves can begin to incorporate elements of fluency instruction into their own classrooms. Certainly, enough is known and has been written about certain fluency related instructional techniques to warrant trying them out informally in classroom settings. Innovative teachers can develop variations of such well known fluency methods as repeated readings, choral reading, oral recitation, neurological impress, reading-while-listening, and others to meet their own particular needs, styles and classrooms. Rasinski (1988), for example, has suggested several ways in which repeated readings can be incorporated naturally into regular classroom routines. Classroom plays, for instance, provide students with opportunities to practice their lines until they can be recited fluently from memory. Through practice students engage in repeated readings in order to learn their parts of the script. The Language Experience Approach, with its emphasis on the reading and rereading of group and individually dictated stories, is a well known instructional approach that implicitly includes elements of fluency practice and instruction. Moreover, Koskinen and Blum's (1986) variation of the method of repeated readings is an excellent example of adapting a fluency instructional method to meet particular circumstances and needs.

Teachers may also need to modify their attitudes toward and responses to children's oral reading behavior so that they model, discuss and support fluent reading. For beginning readers especially there is a trade-off between perfect word accuracy

and fluency. Teachers will need to be more willing to accept a certain number of fluent, sensible minor inaccuracies during oral reading so that readers can maintain fluency. Corrections during the act of oral reading should probably be held to a minimum.

For publishers and developers of instructional materials in reading, knowledge of the importance of fluency training methods should have some impact in the development of materials for reading instruction. Basal reading programs are nowadays touted as complete instructional systems. Little else is needed. If such is the case the lack of fluency building activities is a noticeable void. In 1983 Allington reported that fluency was a neglected goal in reading instruction. Over five years later that perception has changed little. Few, if any, basal programs devote a strand of the curriculum to fluency. Similarly, few college level textbooks in the teaching of reading dedicate even a chapter to the development of reading fluency in students.

Although we would prefer to see fluency activities be developed and implemented by informed teachers, we concede that most reading instruction is directed by the guidelines and dictates of basal reading programs. And, if basal programs are to be with us for a while, and there is little reason to believe that they will soon fade away, developers of materials and instructional systems need to become aware of and incorporate fluency as a goal into the reading program. Hoffman's Oral Recitation Lesson, or some variation, could easily fit into a system of instruction provided by a basal program. Similarly,

the paired oral reading activities described in this paper could easily be incorporated into a larger systematic program of instruction.

Fluency instruction needs to move beyond the instructional methods designed for and tested on small, special groups of students. Fluency is a legitimate goal of the reading curriculum and, as such, it deserves an important place in the reading instruction provided to students. To suggest that models of fluency instruction for regular classrooms do not exist is simply not the case. Models, such as the ones described here, do exist and are currently being tested. Teachers knowledgeable of research efforts of the past into fluency methods can develop adaptations of those methods for their own use. The stage is set for further development of models of reading fluency instruction for all students. If done with care, this development holds the promise of making significant progress in the instruction provided and gains made in reading by students.

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