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ABSTRACT

Methods shown to be effective in helping less fluent readers develop fluency suggest a set of principles that teachers may find helpful in designing regular classroom activities for fluency development. These principles include: (1) repeated reading of one text or meeting target words repeatedly in a variety of texts; (2) teacher modeling of fluent reading; (3) direct instruction in fluency and feedback; (4) support during reading, such as choral reading; (5) reading texts in multi-word chunks; and (6) reading easy materials. Informed and creative teachers can design fluency-related instruction and activities that meet the specific needs of their individual classrooms. (Twenty references are attached.) (RS)

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Fluency is for Everyone:  
Principles for Incorporating  
Fluency Instruction in  
the Classroom

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Although there is not universal agreement as to what constitutes reading fluency, most authorities would agree that it refers to the smooth and natural oral production of written text. Harris and Hodges (1981), for example, point to fluency as expressing oneself "smoothly, easily, and readily", "freedom from word identification problems", and dealing with "words, and larger language units" with quickness (p. 120). Thus, at a minimum one might expect the fluent reader to read words and phrases orally with accuracy, quickness, and expression.

Despite the fact that the achievement of fluency is recognized as an important aspect of proficient reading, it remains a neglected goal of reading instruction (Allington, 1983). Most basal reading programs give little recognition to fluency as an important goal of reading. Similarly, few textbooks on reading instruction for prospective teachers provide an indepth treatment of the topic.

Reading fluency often becomes a salient issue only when students demonstrate significant deficiencies in its achievement. At that time students are often referred to corrective or remedial classes in which they finally receive special instruction in the development of fluent reading.

How can classroom teachers teach fluency to their students. Several methods have been developed that have proven successful with children having difficulty in achieving fluency. These include such methods as repeated readings (Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Samuels, 1979), reading-while-

listening or echo reading (Carbo, 1978; Chomsky, 1976; Gamby, 1983; Laffrey & Kelly, 1981; Schneeberg, 1977; Van Der Leij, 1981), the neurological impress method (Heckelman, 1966), and reading in phrases (Allington, 1983; Amble & Kelly, 1970; Gregory, 1986). One potential problem with fluency training methods such as these is that they were, in general, originally intended for use in corrective reading situations. Usually such settings involve an instructor working with one, two or a very small group of students at one time. Despite many positive aspects of these methods, the focus of their application is overly narrow.

Teachers who may wish to make fluency instruction an integral part of the regular reading curriculum may be at a loss in attempting to incorporate any one or a combination of the proven corrective fluency methods into their classrooms in such a way as to make the methods appropriate for the more normal reader. Fortunately, the methods shown to be effective in helping less fluent readers develop fluency suggest a set of principles that teachers may find helpful in designing regular classroom activities for fluency development in the regular classroom. In the remainder of this paper those principles will be identified and discussed.

Repetition. Achieving fluency requires practice. This means practice over one text until a criterion level of fluency is achieved. Although, the principle of repetition is often translated into repeated exposures to target words in

isolation, research has shown that repetition is most effective when students meet the target words repeatedly in a variety of texts or through repeated exposures to one text. Although repetitions of texts may, at first glance, seem to be a rather dull activity for students, there are several ways to make repetitions interesting and appealing. Beaver (1982), for example, notes that young children love to hear their favorite stories read to them repeatedly. Koskinen and Blum (1987) report that students enjoy working in pairs on repeated reading tasks. Rasinski (1988) suggests several ways to use natural occurring events in the classroom to encourage repeated readings. Activities such as putting on dramatic plays in the classroom and having older students read short books to primary students place students in role, which require practicing the text they will have to perform later on.

Model. Young students and students who are less fluent readers may not always know what fluent reading should be like. Poor readers, for example, are usually assigned to reading groups in which the predominant model of reading they are exposed to is other poor, disfluent readers. It seems clear that students need frequent opportunities to see and hear fluent reading. Since the most fluent reader in a classroom is the teacher, the teacher should be the primary model. The easiest and most stimulating way to do this is for the teacher to read good children's trade books to the class. Daily periods should be

set aside for teachers (and other fluent readers) to read aloud to the classroom.

Direct Instruction and Feedback. Research into metacognition in reading is demonstrating that it may be important for readers to be aware of how or what they do when they read or have problems in reading. This may be particularly helpful in the development of fluency. Teachers can point out to students the important aspects of fluent reading. Prior to reading aloud to the class the teacher could remind the class to listen to the expression that he/she embeds in his/her voice during the reading or to pay attention to the speed at which the reading is done, or to when the teacher makes stops or pauses during the reading. A short discussion of these factors after the read aloud or before students' own oral reading could heighten students' sensitivity to these factors in their own reading.

Similarly, providing feedback to students on fluency related aspects after a student reads orally can facilitate growth in fluent reading. Koskinen and Blum (198<sup>b</sup>7), for example, propose a model of fluency instruction in which students are trained to provide helpful feedback to fellow students after oral reading. In this case the reader benefits from receiving a formative critique of his or her reading and the student critic benefits by developing a heightened metacognitive sense of what it means to be a fluent reader.

Support During Reading. The notion of scaffolding or support while performing is critical to the development of fluency, especially in the beginning stages of fluency development or with students having difficulty in achieving fluency. In fluency instruction support is achieved through the student hearing a fluent rendition of a passage while simultaneously reading the same. Several types of support are available. Choral reading is perhaps the most common form of support reading and is highly appropriate for the regular classroom. Here students read a selected passage in unison. The teacher needs to insure that several fluent readers are part of the group or that the teacher's own voice leads the way in the choral reading. The neurological impress method (Heckelman, 1969) was designed as a remedial technique for use on a one-to-one basis. In the technique the teacher begins by reading slightly ahead of and louder than the student and later, as the student gains in fluency, to softly shadow the student's reading of the target passage. Although labor intensive in its one-to-one format, the technique can be adapted for regular classroom use with aids, volunteers or fluent classmates acting as tutors for other students. The use of tape recorded passages to which students listen while reading is another way to provide support during the reading experience. Carbo (1978) reported students making good progress in reading while simultaneously listening to passages presented in this "talking book" format. This particular format is especially appealing

as it allows the students to work on their fluency independent of the teacher or others. Students need to be reminded, however, that they are supposed to concentrate on reading the passage and not simply to listen passively as the passage's presented to them.

### Text Unit

Fluency reading involves reading texts in multi-word chunks or phrases. It should be emphasized to students about the need to read in this way. Word by word reading, even if it is accurate and fast, is not fluent reading. Timely reminders should help drive the point home.

Research has shown (e.g., Weiss, 1983) that marking phrase boundaries in texts for students with a pencilled slash or vertical line may aid in promoting fluency. On occasion it may be worthwhile to ask students to read short texts which are annotated in this way. Reciting poems, famous speeches, or popular songs marked in this way may help students develop and maintain a mature sense of phrasing during reading.

### Easy Materials

Fluency is best promoted when students are provided with materials that they find relatively easy to read in terms of word recognition. On such materials students can move beyond having to deal with decoding into issues of phrasing, expression and comprehensibility of production. These materials help students develop a sense of power and confidence over the task of reading. Teachers, then, need to stock their



classroom libraries with trade books that represent a variety of difficulty levels and interests. For their independent reading, students can be directed to those materials that they will not find frustrating.

### Combining Principles

These principles offer some building blocks and guidelines for teachers in developing reading instruction and activities to promote the development of reading fluency. Rather than think of these principles in isolation, it may prove effective for teachers to design lessons and activities that combine two or more of these principle.

In her study of disfluent third-graders, Carol Chomsky (1976) combined the principles of repetition and support to design a successful approach to teaching these children to read when all else seemed to fail. In the approach she had students listen to and read a text that was tape recorded until they could read it with fluency. When fluency was achieved students received instruction in various components of the text. In a similar vein Koskinen and Blum's (1987) instructional model for fluency development combines repetition and direct instruction. Students read a text three times and receive formative feedback (direct instruction in fluency) from their peers. In both the Chomsky and Koskinen and Blum models substantial improvements were noted for students engaging in the fluency instruction and activities.

Hoffman (1987) and Aulls (1982) offer even more complex models of fluency instruction involves modelling, repetition, support, and direct instruction. Hoffman's model incorporates elements of repetition, modelling, support and direct instruction. The Aulls model incorporates elements of repetition, modelling, phrased reading, and tape recorded reading.

The point to be made from this discussion is not that teachers should blindly endorse any of the models identified and described here. Based upon the various principles of fluency instruction mentioned in this article, informed and creative teachers can design fluency related instruction and activities that meet the unique needs of their individual classrooms. Teachers can incorporate one or more principles into the stories that students encounter in their daily lessons or pleasure reading. Depending upon students' progress in fluency teachers can delete or rely upon more principles, or employ any one principle more or less strenuously.

Fluency is an issue that needs to be taken seriously in the reading classroom. The principles outlined here, while neither prescription nor panacea, offer teachers several tools for making their classrooms and reading instruction reflect their own professional judgement. Through the use of principles such as these, prepackaged and "teacher-proof" reading instruction programs that foster the deskilling of

teachers and promote the perception of teachers as incompetent can be turned back in favor of alternative and effective teacher designed instruction.

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