

BECOMING BETTER READERS

Fluency Work Makes a Difference

By Susan Hanson

“Alan is really reading. He even volunteers to read to me now. He’s never done that before.” These happy words are from a mother whose dyslexic 7th grade son was finally making substantial progress in reading. When I began tutoring him, he was in the 5th grade and reading at a 1st grade level. Although he made gains the first two years of tutoring, the progress was slow and labored. In the last year of tutoring, he went from a 4th to a 7th grade level.

What made the difference? One practice added to Alan’s biweekly 45-minute tutoring session was a repeated reading activity to build fluency. (See the sidebar for the complete tutoring sequence.) During repeated reading activities, students read aloud sections of books they have read before. The books must be at the students’ instructional reading level (the level at which they know most of the words and understand what they read).

As Alan reread each selection over three different tutoring sessions, he learned to read the piece in phrases and with confidence. Repeated reading was helpful to Alan in part because he could hear himself read fluently, and he had never experienced this before. His reading was beginning to sound skilled, rather than like a robot mouthing sounds.

Alan’s reading rate also increased by the second and third

reading of a selection.

Although fluency instruction is not designed to increase reading speed, increases may occur as a result of the instruction (Rasinski, 2000). Alan’s personal goal was to read approximately 125 to 150 words per minute (wpm), which is considered average for a student reading at an intermediate level.

After his three-minute timed readings, Alan would calculate his wpm and graph the results. The idea of charting wpm was very motivational for him, because he could connect it with his love of competitive sports. We had finally found something in reading that was fun for him! As a result, he went at the task of rereading with full attention, as he does when he competes in sports.

Research has shown that “the major factor limiting reading fluency in older children with reading disabilities is a relative deficiency in the number of words they can read by sight” (Torgesen, Rashotte, & Alexander, 2002). By rereading material three to four times, Alan increased his bank of instantly recognized sight words. Since he no longer had to struggle as much with unfamiliar vocabulary, he was able to concentrate on meaning and use his sense of language to read more fluently.

Reading for Fluency

What does it mean to be a fluent reader and why is it important? According to the National Reading Panel (2000), a fluent reader is able to read aloud quickly, accurately, and expressively. As reading researcher S. J. Samuels (2002) explains, “Fluency is important because it exerts an important influence on comprehension . . . to experience good comprehension, the reader must be able to identify words quickly and easily” (p. 167).

What does research say about the effectiveness of repeated readings? The National Reading Panel (2000) states, “An extensive review of the literature indicates that classroom practices that encourage repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance lead to meaningful improvement in reading expertise for students – for good readers as well as those who are experiencing difficulties.” For students who read in the

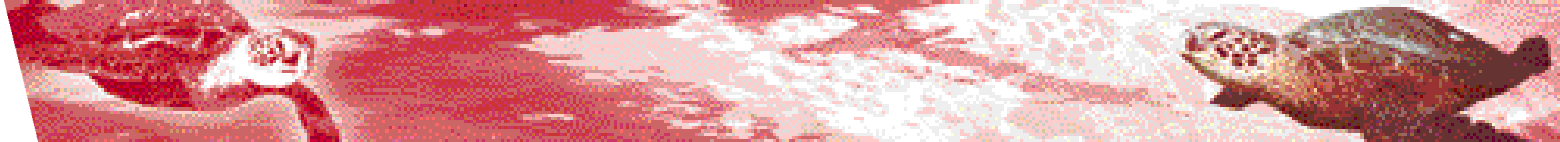


Photo: Rick Sandlin

▷ Repeated reading increases fluency and helps children become better readers.

One-to-One Tutoring Lesson Plan for Reading (45 minutes)

Repeated Reading (3+ minutes)	Practice with familiar material includes graphing and coaching. Allow 3 minutes for reading plus time to graph words per minute.
Guided Reading (20 minutes)	Student reads from a connected text. Practice includes word analysis, concept and vocabulary development, and modeling of comprehension strategies.
After Reading (5 minutes)	Student and tutor discuss reading; tutor coaches student on reading strategies.
Writing (10 minutes)	Student writes to a prompt that involves connections to self, other texts, and the world.
Closure (3 minutes)	Student completes self-evaluation and sets future reading goals.



vernacular, repeated reading is equally effective and should be part of the first language program.

Although Alan's improvement took place in a one-to-one tutoring situation, classroom teachers can include fluency training for struggling readers as part of their comprehensive reading programs. A brief description of a simplified process appropriate for classroom use accompanies this story. Other techniques classroom teachers can use to increase fluency include reading poetry and chant, Readers' Theater, reading in unison with a taped version of a book, and shared reading.

Benefits

Although there were other factors besides the repeated reading technique that helped Alan to make accelerated reading growth during his 7th grade year, I am convinced that repeated reading was the technique that made the greatest difference for him.

How a teacher provides repeated reading for fluency as part of the comprehensive reading program will vary from classroom to classroom, but it must be part of every classroom's reading program. Teachers in all content areas can use repeated reading techniques with their students to improve comprehension of science or mathematics content while developing students' reading skills at the same time. We can't let our students fall further and further behind because they cannot read

NAEP's Integrated Reading Performance Record Oral Reading Fluency Scale

Level 4

Reads primarily in large, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, these do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the story. Preservation of the author's syntax is consistent. Some or most of the story is read with expressive interpretation.

Level 3

Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups. Some smaller groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present.

Level 2

Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage.

Level 1

Reads primarily word-by-word. Occasional two-word or three-word phrases may occur – but these are infrequent and/or they do not preserve meaningful syntax.

Source: www.springfield.k12.il.us/resources/languagearts/readingwriting/readassess/NAEPFluencyScale1.pdf

fluently when we know through research that repeated reading practice will help them become better readers.

References

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Repeated Reading in the Classroom

Repeated reading with guidance works well in a one-to-one tutoring situation, but how can regular classroom teachers make it part of their fluency program? Follow the steps listed below.

- Select a story from basal or other reading materials. The text should be at or slightly above students' instructional level.
- Read the selection aloud to the students while they follow along silently.
- Place the students in pairs, grouping stronger with weaker readers wherever possible.
- Invite one student to read orally while the other follows along.
- Instruct the pair to switch roles so that the other student is the reader.
- Over a period of several days, schedule three more meetings so that the pair can read the selection again.
- At the end of the cycle, when each student has read the story four times, assign new partners and repeat the process with a different text.

Source: This process is based on the work of Semonick, Lewis, & Samuels (2000), as described in "Reading Fluency: Its Development and Assessment," in A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 166-183), Newark, DE: International Reading Association.