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Best practices in teaching reading fluency in the elementary classroom

Tina Schneider
University of Northern Iowa

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Best practices in teaching reading fluency in the elementary classroom

Abstract

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Best Practices in Teaching Reading Fluency
in the Elementary Classroom

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Elementary Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

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Elementary Classroom

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
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10-31-03
Date Approved

Lynn E. Nielsen

Graduate Faculty Reader

10-30-03
Date Approved

Connie J. Erpelding

Graduate Faculty Reader

12/3/02
Date Approved

Rick Traw

Head, Department of Curriculum and
Instruction

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The focus of this review of literature was Best Practices for teaching reading fluency in the elementary classroom. Research shows that students' reading fluency rates need improvement. Teachers must create a classroom environment that fosters reading fluency and use research based teaching practices to improve students' reading fluency. Journal articles were selected that addressed best practices in teaching reading fluency in the elementary classroom. Reading fluency influences the academic success students attain at school and therefore it is a skill which must be taught. Because best practices have a positive impact on students' reading fluency rates, it is recommended that principals and parents encourage reform in the way of reading fluency is taught.

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Introduction

The public is demanding more accountability from schools. One way this is occurring is through the "No Child Left Behind" legislation that has been passed by the federal government. This legislation requires schools "...to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. These systems must be based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years" (The No Child, 2002). As well as identifying measures schools must take to be accountable for student learning, this legislation also lists essential components of reading instruction which must be explicitly and systematically taught. The components are "...phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary development; reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and reading comprehension strategies" ("Reading First", 2002). Improving reading fluency among elementary students will be the focus of this paper.

Using best practices to improve reading fluency will make students better readers. Educators need to rely on best practices for two reasons. First, these activities will provide the most benefits for students. Secondly, as pressure mounts to add curriculum to the already crowded school day, it is critical to use instructional time wisely.

Definition of Reading Fluency

Levy, Abello, and Lysynchuk (1997) describe fluency as a time "when children learn to read texts rapidly, accurately and with comprehension" (p. 1). "Samuels (1979/1997), one of

the earliest scholars to emphasize the importance of fluency, described fluency as simply a function of reading speed and accuracy of word recognition" (Tyler and Chard, 2000, p. 164). Blau provides an eloquent explanation that students can relate to. "One definition of fluency is the ability to read aloud expressively and with understanding. When fluent readers read aloud, the text flows as if strung together like pearls on a necklace, rather than sounding halting and choppy" (Blau, 2002, p. 1).

Based on these definitions we can build a consensus regarding the meaning of reading fluency in the classroom. Fluency begins with the rate a student can read text. However, the number is not the whole picture. Students must be able to recognize the word automatically and read the words without mistakes. Finally the phrasing of the reading should make the information easy to understand. All these components add up to a fluent reader.

Importance of Reading Fluency

There are two reasons why reading fluency is important. First, reading fluency has a big impact on our view of the reader. Slower and less articulate readers are considered poor readers. "Clearly reading rate, or speed, was a significant factor in classroom teachers' perceptions of their students' proficiency or lack of proficiency in reading" (Rasinski, 2000, p. 1). The impression a teacher has about a student's reading has a huge impact on the instruction and assistance the student is likely to receive from the teacher.

Secondly, reading rate is connected closely with reading comprehension. Reading words automatically allows students'

attention to focus on comprehension reported Tyler and Chard (2000). When students are able to spend less time focusing on reading the words they are able to make sense of what they read. Providing students with activities to improve their reading rate will impact their comprehension abilities.

Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Research has shown that reading fluency has been linked to improved comprehension. Rasinski (2001) found significant correlations between reading fluency and comprehension. Rasinski studied third and fifth graders. With each group he found a significant correlation between the students' reading rate and comprehension tasks. Students comprehension was assessed using retell, multiple choice comprehension, and a Gates-MacGinitie subtest on comprehension. What does this mean for the classroom?

Educators need to use best practices to insure that students are improving their reading fluency. There are many different approaches and opinions on the best ways to impact reading fluency. What are the best practices for improving reading fluency? To answer this question effectively, information should be obtained from research studies as well as journal articles. By including research studies in this review of literature, educators can be assured that the practices will be effective at impacting student learning.

Methodology

Sources of Information

Information for this review was obtained by searching several databases accessed through Rod Library at the University of Northern Iowa. The ERIC, Education Full Text and Expanded Academic ASAP databases were all used to locate

articles. Full text articles were identified that addressed the issue of improving reading fluency among students in the elementary classroom.

Additional sources were used to provide data. An interview with Wendy Robinson, a reading specialist from Heartland Area Education Association, addressed fluency assessment. I purchased "Fluency: Questions, Answers, and Evidence-Based Strategies" at the Iowa Reading Conference to provide additional fluency building activities. Other information was gathered from the U.S. Department of Education and the Scholastic web site.

Criteria for Selecting Articles

Several criteria were used to identify articles to be included in this review. The first criteria used was the journal containing the article. Only articles from noted journals in the education field were included in this review. Secondly the date of publication was examined. All the articles selected were published in the last fifteen years. This insures that the information and activities are the most current available. Lastly the credentials of the authors were examined. Articles from a variety of authors and several noted professionals in the field of reading fluency were included in this review.

Even after using all the above mentioned criteria a large pool of articles existed. Next it was necessary to examine each article for its contribution to this review. Articles were selected based on their ability to assist educators in developing sound practices for improving reading fluency with their students.

Analysis and Discussion

Reading Fluency Research Data

Many of the students in our schools are not fluent readers. "The NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] recently reported that 45 percent of all fourth graders tested in the U.S. are not fluent readers" (Blua, 2002). This statistic is a great concern especially when one considers that "the 1992 NAEP study found that 15% of all fourth graders (one out of every seven) read 'no faster than 74 words per minute..." (Rasinski, 2000, p. 2). These numbers represent a drastic increase in the percentage of nonfluent readers over the last ten years.

Almost half of fourth graders are not fluent readers. If elementary schools do not enable students to become fluency readers, schools are setting students up to fail. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) state:

After the primary grades, students are expected to read independently. As the volume and complexity of reading expectations and materials expand, students who are not developing fluency have a hard time understanding and keeping up with schoolwork and often find themselves in increasing difficulty even if they have previously done well. Students with inadequate fluency are also likely to avoid reading because of fear of failure and negative attitudes.(p. 2)

The elementary classroom is where fluency building needs to begin.

Classroom Environment

Educators need to consider several factors when establishing an environment conducive to improving fluency. Educators need to assess student fluency, select appropriate

reading materials, implement Shared Reading Approach as an alternative to round robin reading, model good reading fluency, and provide students with time for independent reading. When planning quality instruction it is imperative for educators to prepare the classroom as well as to plan instruction to meet the needs of students.

Student assessment. A quality fluency program should begin with student assessment. Johns and Berglund (2002) recommend combining quantitative and qualitative information to accurately assess a student's ability to read fluently. A quantitative measurement should be obtained by giving a student a passage which can be read at 85% to 95% of accuracy. The student reads for one minute. The teacher marks miscues such as: "mispronunciations, repetitions, insertions, substitutions, and omissions" (Johns and Berglund, 2002, p. 7) on an additional copy of the text. A fluency rate is calculated by counting the number of words read and subtracting the miscues. Students should be asked to answer a few questions or retell the story following the reading. Wendy Robinson (personal communication, March 27, 2003), a Reading Specialist from Heartland Area Education Association, also recommends having students read a connected text passage out loud for a minute to assess oral reading fluency. She adds that several readings may be done to obtain an accurate picture of the student's reading rate. Numbers are only part of the picture. Kame'enui and Simmons (2001, p. 206) warn "...assessing accuracy without fluency provides an incomplete picture of reading competence and limits potentially meaningful information for designing and delivering instruction." Johns and Berglund (2002) recommend

constructing a rubric to record reading behaviors such as: "voice quality, expression, and phrasing" (p. 8). Wendy Robinson (personal communication, March 27, 2003) suggests noting these observations in anecdotal records. Combining these observations along with the reading rate will allow teachers to plan quality instruction for students.

Reading materials. It is important to select appropriate reading materials for students. Instructional level texts should be selected to work on fluency. This will allow students to focus on their oral reading rather than decoding unfamiliar words. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) stated:

We also found that the difficulty of text was important. Having children read easy texts for instruction did not seem to improve their oral reading. Instead, the texts should follow the "Goldilocks Principle"--they should not be too easy, or too difficult, but be just right. These texts might be instructional-level or be a bit more difficult. (p. 2)

The goal of reading fluency is not only to have students read faster but to read effortlessly. Reading without effort allows students to focus their attention on understanding the author's message. Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998) reported:

By definition, text within a reader's instructional range reduces word recognition demands and allows for more rapid reading. As rate increases, the reader is able to devote more attention to meaning and the interpretation of meaning through phrasing and expressiveness. (p. 327)

As well as selecting appropriate materials for students,

educators must incorporate quality reading practices into the classroom routine.

Shared Book Experience. The Shared Book Experience as studied by Elridge, Reutzel, and Hollinghead (1996) involved a thirty minute oral reading routine. The first part of the lesson involved teacher instruction and group reading with a big book. The teacher asked prereading questions, read the story, and discussed the story with the students. The last part of the lesson involved students reading independently with a standard trade version of the big book. Tapes of the books were available for the students to use. After students could successfully read several books they were allowed to read with a buddy, with a tape, or independently.

Although round-robin reading is a daily part of many classrooms across the country, it is not the best practice for impacting reading fluency. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) stated that skilled readers are often bored by the slow pace, and less skilled readers are often reading materials that are above their instructional level. Elridge, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth (1996, p. 218) found that "...students in the SBE [Shared Book Experience] group outperformed children in the RRR [Round Robin Reading] group on all measures of reading growth: vocabulary acquisition, word analysis, word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension." Students who hear good modeling are much more likely to incorporate these traits into their own reading.

Teacher modeling. Teachers need to model fluent reading. Blau (2002) reported that when students were exposed to fluent reading they begin to identify its characteristics and incorporate them into their own reading. Students may be cued

into the characteristics of fluent reading several ways. Teachers can give students specific traits to listen for while the teacher reads. Students can also just list the qualities in the teacher's reading that made the selection engaging and easy to understand. Drawing attention to quality reading will assist students in understanding the goal of fluent reading.

Independent reading. Independent practice is an important component of a quality reading program. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) state:

The ease, speed, and understanding gained during meaningful, guided oral fluency instruction and practice helps to develop students' ability to read silently for meaning, a major aim of reading instruction. Teachers must make a commitment to provide regular classroom time for students to read independently. This is not just an add-on to the reading curriculum to promote interest in reading, but should be daily instructional time for students to practice reading with teacher coaching, modeling, and explicit instruction. It is also a time for teachers to assess students in all aspects of reading, modify instruction and texts accordingly, and keep records of student' progress. (p.5)

Stalh and Kuhn (2002) remind educators to allow students the opportunity to spend time reading for fun:

All children, but especially struggling readers, need some time during the day to read texts that are relatively easy, so that they will develop the habit of enjoyable reading. An ideal classroom would provide time for instruction using some what challenging texts and

recreational reading with relatively easy texts. (p. 2)
All students need to have time to develop the love of reading. Spending time reading for fun is an essential part of any reading program.

Research-Based Teaching Practices

After creating a classroom conducive to building reading fluency it is time to prepare lessons and activities to impact student's reading fluency. Johns and Beglund (2002) state "fluency develops from practice...[and] fluency can be improved by teaching" (p. 17). Teaching, modeling, and practice are all important components of a fluency building program. As educators search for activities that include these components it is essential to locate research based practices. Using practices rooted in research will allow students to participate in the highest quality lessons as well as provide teachers with support for the activities they implement in their classroom. Three sections of fluency building practices will be presented in this paper, they are: repeated readings, Readers Theatre, and assisted nonrepetitive readings.

Repeated readings. Repeated readings involve students reading a particular selection over and over. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) reported that the 2000 National Reading Council found "repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a variety of grade levels" (p. 1). It is certainly appropriate for teachers to enlist assistance from parents and others to help students build fluency. Moats (2001) stated that "above all, however, students must read as much

as possible in text that is not too difficult for them to close the huge gap between themselves and other students" (p. 3). Practice is a key element to improving fluency.

Radio Reading is a motivating activity posed by Johns and Berglund (2002) to impact reading fluency. A student practices a selected section of text with an emphasis on being able to read the text as a radio announcer. Once a student can read the text so that it is easily understood and with proper expression the student is ready for a radio broadcast. Only the radio announcer (the student) and the teacher have a copy of the text. This allows the teacher to assist with words if needed. The other students in the class are the radio audience. A real or pretend microphone can add excitement to this activity.

After the radio announcer is finished with the reading, he or she asks questions about the selection that was read. Someone from the audience should be able to provide a short summary of the material covered. Sections of the text may be reread to clarify if information was missed. This question session will ensure that the audience is active and focused on their listening skills as the radio announcer reads.

Some students may need more than just practice to improve their reading fluency. Shannah (as cited in Johns and Berglund, 2002) found "appropriate phrasing helps the reader understand the passage" (p. 47). Johns and Berglund offer two activities, Super Signals and Phrased Boundaries, to draw students attention to the important practice of proper phrasing. Super Signals cues students into the meaning of such conventions as exclamation marks, italics, and commas. First, the teacher reads a passage without

expression. Secondly, the teacher rereads the passage with expression. The students are then asked to articulate which reading was better and why it was better. A chart may be used to record these ideas for future reference. For independent practice, the students are then asked to read text containing the same elements as the teacher's passage.

Phrase Boundaries is an activity that includes actually adding slash marks to text to show students good examples of phrasing. Pauses within sentences are marked with one slash and the ends of sentences are marked with two slashes. The lesson begins by the teacher reading a marked selection of text while the students follow along. Next, the students read the text with the teacher. Once the students are successful reading with the teacher, they may try reading on their own. For independent practice, the students try marking their own slashes on a new piece of text. After trying out their skills, they can read the text to a partner to receive feedback on their phrasing. Phrase boundaries is just one activity teachers can use to have students refine their fluency skills.

Readers Theatre. Besides offering students a purpose for practicing text, Readers Theatre impacts the areas of reading fluency, comprehension and motivation (Worthy and Prater, 2002). This statement is supported by Rasinski (2000) who found:

In a 10-week implementation of Readers Theatre in which small groups of second-grade students were introduced to, practiced, and performed a new script each week, students made significant gains in reading rate and overall reading achievement as measured by an informal

reading inventory. (p. 3)

Reader Theatre is easy to implement because there are no sets to design or props to gather. Tyler and Chard (2002) describe the benefits Reader Theatre offers students:

Readers Theatre activities are appealing to children for a number of reasons. They are carried out in a cooperative format with peers, so the students do not feel isolated and alone as he or she reads. Many children are highly motivated to interact with their peers, and Readers Theatre allows them a sanctioned means to do so. Scripts often appear less daunting than other reading materials, since the student does not have to read the whole text alone. (p. 166)

Readers Theatre is a fun way to get students engaged in reading practice.

Marinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) offer teachers lots of practical advice on the how to's of organizing Reader Theatre in the classroom. Having trouble finding scripts? No problem. Write your own. "Stories with straightforward plots that present characters grappling with dilemmas requiring thought and talk can easily be turned into scripts."

(Marinez, Roser, and Strecker, 1999, p. 328) They do caution that narration may need to be added to cover information portrayed in illustrations and sometimes long narrations need to be divided into two parts.

These authors have developed a 5-day plan to implement Readers Theatre. On Day 1, the teacher reads the stories for the week, a mini lesson on a fluency aspect, and students practice reading all of the stories. On Day 2, students practice reading the parts of all the stories. On Day 3,

students continue practicing all the parts of all the stories and assign parts for Friday's performance. On Day 4, students practice their parts and on Day 5, the students present their Readers Theatre. Students take copies of all stories home to practice while they leave the stories with their parts highlighted at school each day.

Although repeated readings are very effective at improving students' reading fluency, caution must be used not to over use these strategies. Homan, Klesius, and Hite (1993) stated that "our overwhelming concern is that repeated readings will be overused as a means of remediating at-risk readers and will have a negative effect on their reading attitude" (p. 98). Rasinski (1990) echoes this concern by saying "repeated reading may have several practical drawbacks; over the long term, students may tire from its use. Students may lose interest in and motivation for the repetition of previously read material" (p. 149). This is a serious warning for educators.

Assisted readings. Assisted reading strategies involve students reading text along with the teacher or other students. Homan, Klesius, and Hite (1993) found there were no significant differences between repeated reading and assisted nonrepetitive reading methods on any of three variables: word recognition accuracy, words per minute, and comprehension. Assisted strategies include echo reading, choral reading, antiphonal reading, and assisted cloze reading. These strategies offer students the opportunities to read a variety of literature and to be exposed to lots of new vocabulary.

Echo reading involves someone reading chunks of text aloud and then having the student's echo. This activity

provides the students assistance with troublesome words, cues them to appropriate phrasing, and demonstrates correct expression. Echo reading can be used with any type of text.

Reading text in unison can be very enjoyable for children. This strategy is used in choral reading to motivate students as well as develop reading skills. Antiphonal reading is a take off of choral reading. In antiphonal reading, students are divided into two groups. The text is divided into two columns. Each group is assigned a column of text to read. Sometimes the groups will read together, other times the groups will read at alternating times. These activities allow students to practice fluent reading in a supportive environment.

Assisted cloze reading requires students to pay attention. Students follow along in the text as the teacher reads. When the teacher pauses the students fill in the next word. This is an especially useful strategy to use when students need exposure to a text that is too difficult for them to read independently. Students will receive the support they need to obtain the important information and at the same time the teacher can monitor students to make sure they are on task.

Research Based Fluency Programs

There are fluency programs available to assist teachers in meeting the needs of the students in their classrooms. Read Naturally and PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Strategies) are two programs which will be presented here. Both programs offer students an opportunity to work independently to improve their reading fluency.

Read Naturally. The Read Naturally program combines

several fluency building components. "The Read Naturally (RN) strategy to improve reading fluency combines the three empirically-supported techniques: reading from a model, repeated readings, and progress-monitoring" (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, Rogers, 1999, p. 2). Before beginning the programs students need to be assessed to establish their reading fluency rate. This will enable teachers to place students in the appropriate level of text. The teacher will also want to assist students in setting a realistic goal. This will allow students to be successful with the program and not get discouraged. Once the level of text is selected and the goal is set it is time to begin the program.

Read Naturally has four steps. First, the student reads an unpracticed passage for one minute. The student marks the words they have trouble on. The student determines the number of words read and subtracts the number of words missed. This number is then graphed on a bar chart. Secondly, the student reads the passage several times with a model reading or a recorded tape of the passage. It is important that the student reads softly with the model to receive the maximum benefit from this practice. Thirdly, the student practices reading the passage for one minute independently. When they reach their goal they signal the teacher. Finally, the student reads to the teacher for one minute. The teacher records the w.p.m. (words per minute) read. The student passes the selection if the goal is met, three words or less were missed, and the selection was read with appropriate phrasing. When the passage is passed the score is charted on the bar graph using a different color, so that the growth of the student may be easily seen.

Hasbrouck, Ihnot, Rogers (1999) found that Read Naturally is an effective method of improving reading fluency. Ihnot collected reading fluency data for six years from 214 second and third grade students who used the Read Naturally program. The second graders averaged a 1.68 words per minute gain per week. These gains are impressive when you consider Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers reported that "...it is reasonable or "typical" to expect 3rd grade students to gain an average of 1.0 word per week, while an "ambitious" goal (one standard deviation above the mean performance) for a 3rd grader would be 1.5 words per week" (1999, p. 1). These statistics are even more impressive when you consider that Ihnot worked with students who were identified for Title 1 Reading. These students scored below the 40th percentile on an achievement test assessing comprehension.

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies. PALS is a program that pairs teacher instruction with partner work to build reading skills. PALS uses the repeated reading strategy. In first grade, the teacher presents new sounds and sight words. The student partners practicing reading words, read short stories, and eventually move on to partner reading. PALS programs have been developed for grades, kindergarten through sixth grade. Each program builds on the talents mastered the previous year and adds new skill building activities.

In a research study involving PAL Fuchs, Fuchs, and Yen added reading the words quickly within a thirty second time limit. This practice led to greater gains in fluency and comprehension. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Yen found that "peer-mediated, repeated reading promoted both reading fluency and reading comprehension" (2001, p.2).

Conclusions and Recommendations

"No Child Left Behind" legislation is forcing teachers and schools to be more accountable for student's learning. In the future, schools will be judged on their student's reading scores. Fluency is an important part of reading and is mentioned specifically in the legislation as an important area of instruction. Teachers have a critical role in meeting the demands of "No Child Left Behind" legislation. They must take what they know about their students and build a quality instructional program that meets the needs of all the students.

As well as meeting accountability standards, improving reading fluency will help students be more successful in school. "Fluency is integral to comprehension and is a critical component of successful reading..." (Worthy and Broaddus, 2001, p. 1). When students do not read fluently they are unable to comprehend the message of the text which is the purpose of reading. Rasinski (2000) reports:

Slow, disfluent reading, then, is linked with poor comprehension. This leads to students reading less, which in turn results in their making slower progress in reading than students who read at a more normal rate for their age or grade placement.(p. 2)

As students progress in their education more of their learning is dependent on reading subject material, students who are not fluent will not be as successful as their fluent classmates.

Teachers need to make reading fluency a priority in their classrooms. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, and Jenkins (2001) state:

Teachers and researchers, for the most part, have ignored not only theoretical and empirical accounts of the importance of fluency as an indicator of reading competence but also recent calls for a stronger focus on the assessment of oral reading fluency. (p. 250)

Teachers need to assess the fluency of their students and plan their instruction accordingly. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) stress that students will not develop reading fluency just by being exposed to quality literature activities. Fluency instruction must be explicit. Student must understand the purpose and goal of reading fluency.

Fluency building instruction needs to rely on best practices. These practices which are rooted in research will be the best tools for teachers to use. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) state:

Whether it is called Best Practice, or Whole Language, or integrate learning, or interdisciplinary studies, by some other name, or by no name at all, this movement is broad and deep and enduring. It is strongly backed by educational research, draws on sound learning theory, and, under others names, has been tested and refined over many years.(p. 7).

Best practices will be the most effective at providing quality instruction for students and will provide support for the instructional decisions teachers must make.

Before beginning fluency instruction, teachers should assess their students' reading fluency rate. John and Berglund (2002) recommend determining a numerical reading rate and recording notes about the reading behaviors of the students. This will provide teachers with the information

they need to select appropriate text selections for the students. Reading materials used for reading fluency instruction should be at students' instructional level. Students are unlikely to increase their fluency unless they are placed in materials that are at their instructional level (Stahl and Kuhn, 2002).

In addition to selecting the appropriate reading material, students benefit from such practices as the Shared Book Experience, teacher modeling, and independent reading. Teachers should implement the Shared Book Experience or similar strategy to involve students in more oral reading. This is more beneficial than having students participate in round-robin reading (Elridge, Reutzell, and Hollingsworth, 1996). Teacher modeling helps students incorporate good fluency characteristics into their own reading (Blau, 2002). Independent reading is a time for skill building and fun. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) propose students use this time to practice and receive coaching from the teacher. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) remind educators that it is important to provide students with a time to read easy books just for fun.

Best practices for improving reading fluency include repeated readings, assisted readings, and Readers Theatre. Repeated readings and assisted have a positive impact on reading fluency (Homan, Klesious, Hite, 1993). Repeated readings allow students to practice the same text repeatedly so they can begin to get the phrasing of the selection correct. Assisted readings provide an opportunity for students to follow the lead of the teacher or their classmate. Readers Theatre is a motivating method of having students practice reading text. Students enjoy working with

classmates and may find it easier to read with expression as they become a character.

Implementing best practices in the classroom may be a change for some educators and change can be challenging. Support from inside and outside the school is needed to bring about change. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) say it well: "Teachers, students, parents, and principals must go through many learning steps to make new approaches work. They need time and positive support as they grow. They need organizational structures and relationships that provide this support (p. 217). Therefore, it is recommended that principals and families become involved with teachers in improving students' reading fluency.

Principals need to provide teachers with opportunities that will promote the growth of reading fluency in their students. Greenwood, Tapia, Abbott, and Walton (2003) reported that "teachers collaborating with researchers in a multiyear effort will implement and sustain the use of new evidence-based reading/literacy practices (p. 2). This idea is further supported by Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) who stated "teachers' change efforts must be supported by collaborative, social experiences and extensive, open discussion of issues" (p. 226). For teachers to be successful in changing their current practice to best practices, they require support. Teachers need time to work with other professionals and experts in the field. These interactions must take place over an extended amount of time for this transition to best practices to occur.

Families are also influential in building fluency in students. Worthy and Prather (2002) describe the role of the

family in Readers Theatre activities: "Brothers, sisters, and parents have taken turns reading the various parts, parents have supported students with their fluency and expression" (p. 3). Besides assisting students with reading activities at home, the support of families will strengthen the Best Practices reform effort. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) stated:

We nevertheless have found that enlisting parent support for Best Practice teaching is actually one of the easier elements of the school change process. In schools and districts that have developed comprehensive parent education and involvement programs, parents quickly "buy in" to the new methods and curricula, becoming boosters of the program, participating in the community action and at-home support that are often keys to real curriculum change and improvement in student achievement (Murnane and Levy, 1996, 4). (p. 262)

Including parents in implementation of Best Practices is imperative for the success of the program.

Students need to become fluent readers. For this to happen, teachers need to incorporate Best Practices into their classroom. Including principals and parents in this process will make this reform more likely to be successful.

Appendix

References

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