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Synergy—Putting All the Principles Together

The elements we describe may, by themselves, work to build fluency. Students who engage only in repeated readings or assisted readings will make gains in their fluency and overall reading proficiency.

However, when these and the other elements described previously in this chapter are combined or synthesized into an instructional sequence, they reinforce one another, and you end up with learning and reading achievement gains that are greater than if the instructional elements were presented separately to students. The whole truly becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

In this book, we present fluency instruction from a synergistic and holistic point of view. That is, we see fluency instruction—using practice and performance—as the key, fitting into an authentic and motivating instructional purpose (performance) that requires students and teachers to engage in modeling, assisted reading, repeated reading, coaching, and word study in which the obvious goal is the performance, but the underlying fluency goals include word decoding accuracy, word decoding automaticity, and prosodic reading.

Regular Instructional Routines

What we have described above are the essential elements of instruction aimed at improving that critical competency in reading—fluency. We need to keep in mind that these instructional ideas and roles are not a one-shot affair. They need to be delivered in a regular, consistent, and predictable routine.

Repeated readings or assisted readings done once every so often may be a nice diversion from the other instruction in a classroom. However, they will not deliver the results we would like or that our students need.

For repeated readings, assisted readings, and the other instructional elements to work, teachers and students need to engage in them regularly (we would recommend daily at a regular time of the day) in a consistent and synergistic routine that follows a gradual release of responsibility sequence. When this happens, students' reading success builds on itself and students will pull themselves up by the bootstraps to higher and higher levels of reading proficiency. Imagine a 30-minute daily routine for fluency instruction that follows these steps:

- **Monday:** The teacher models the reading of fluency passages two or three times while students follow along silently. Then the teacher prompts a discussion on the meaning of the passage and the qualities of the teacher's own reading.
- **Tuesday:** The teacher and students chorally read (assisted and repeated reading) the fluency passages together two or three times, using various forms of choral reading. Another discussion of how the passage was and could have been read ensues. Students are encouraged to practice the fluency passages under the guidance of their parents.
- **Wednesday:** The teacher divides the students into pairs and trios. Students continue to practice repeatedly (assisted reading and repeated) the fluency passages, coaching and encouraging one another as they read chorally, alternating lines, and reading alone for one another. The teacher moves from group to group coaching and encouraging students and eventually assigns specific parts for a Friday performance. Students are encouraged to practice the fluency passages with guidance from parents.
- **Thursday:** Dress rehearsal. Students perform their parts in a dress rehearsal for the Friday performance. The teacher again coaches students on their readings. Students are encouraged to continue practicing the fluency passages under the guidance of their parents.

- **Friday:** Grand Performance. Students perform their assigned parts for an audience of classmates, parents, and other school personnel. The positive feedback from the audience motivates students to continue practicing and performing for subsequent weeks.
- **Monday:** The routine begins again with new material assigned for fluency instruction.

The instructional routine that we just outlined for you is, in general, one that teachers around the country have used with remarkable success in improving students' reading fluency, word recognition, overall reading achievement, and motivation to read. You will notice in the five-day routine the various principles we have laid out in this chapter. As you go through this book and think of your own instructional setting and needs, think about how reading fluency and the various elements involved in nurturing can be made an integral and regular part of your reading curriculum for the entire year. The approach that we share with you in this book is intended as a regular instructional routine.

Oral and Silent Reading

Most people think of fluency as involving oral reading. This is true. However, we recognize that fluency is necessary for silent reading as well. Although most of the actual direct instruction in fluency involves oral reading, we also encourage students to engage in repeated and assisted silent reading. More importantly, research has demonstrated that practice in oral reading fluency yields results in silent-reading comprehension. Additionally, recent research in silent-reading fluency, in which students are given responsibility and held accountable for reading appropriately leveled materials, widely has also been found to produce positive results in students' oral-reading fluency and reading comprehension (Reutzel et al. 2008). Oral reading improves oral and silent reading; silent-reading fluency instruction also improves oral and silent reading.

So, as you work through this book in which most of the work we engage in with students involves oral reading, our overall purpose is to improve oral- *and* silent-reading fluency, oral- *and* silent-reading comprehension, and overall reading proficiency, both *silent and oral*. Additionally, we aim to improve motivation for reading, another important reading goal, through our practice and performance approach.

In the remainder of this book, we explore these various components of fluency instruction from the perspective of practice and performance. From our own experience and the experiences of other teachers, we will share with you ideas and approaches that will help you make fluency instruction work for you and your students.

Planning Fluency-Filled Days

Now that you have thought through your year, you may have decided to infuse your day with lots of fluency practice, perhaps with a song in the morning or a poem to close in the afternoon. It could be a fluency development lesson several times each week to make sure you are teaching prosody and expression as the focal points of fluency. It could also be a full-blown poetry unit once or twice during the year. Figure 5.2 below shows a sample weekly lesson plan that infuses fluency throughout the schedule.

Figure 5.2 Weekly Lesson Plan

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00 A.M. Daily: (10 min.) Song!				
10:00 A.M. (20 min.) Fluency Development Lesson	10:00 A.M. (20 min.) Fluency Development Lesson	10:00 A.M. (20 min.) Fluency Development Lesson	10:00 A.M. (20 min.) Fluency Development Lesson	
2:00 P.M. (10–15 min.) Practice	2:00 P.M. (10–15 min.) Practice	2:00 P.M. (10–15 min.) Practice	2:00 P.M. (10–15 min.) Practice	2:00 P.M. (30–40 min.) Grand Performance

8:00 A.M. Song:

Introduce a new song on Monday and have the students sing along with the lyrics that are displayed on an overhead projector. Use the same song all week to introduce new vocabulary to English language learners and struggling readers, to reinforce the sight words as they fly by to a melody, to simply enjoy the community of singers in a classroom, and to set the stage for a positive school day. The song time is a welcome addition to calendar time for primary students or a refreshing introduction to the word block for second through sixth grade.

10:00 A.M. The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL):

The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) (Rasinski, Padak, Linek, and Sturtevant 1995) is particularly useful with students for whom fluency is a major concern. The FDL employs a daily passage that is rich with opportunity for expression and prosody exploration. The passage can be simply pulled from the reading story you are using during that day or week. It could be a passage from the read-aloud you are using that day. The passage could be a wonderfully written piece from a news article relevant to the topic that you are teaching in one of the content areas. When the passage is connected to writer's craft, it becomes an internalized example of something you want replicated in the students' writing. This lesson format can even be used in kindergarten with the "Morning Message."

At the beginning of the school year, I use the FDL to instruct all of my students at any level of reading ability. By using it with all of your students at the beginning of the year, you are actually multiplying yourself by including the strong readers in the mix of students reading dramatically to one another. The stronger students will model for the weaker students. As the school year moves into the fourth or fifth week, I begin to use it less during my full class instructional time and continue it a few times a week with my struggling readers. Eventually, I use it only with my struggling readers during their small-group time in the afternoon.

As I write this chapter, my fifth graders are beginning a study of the regions of the United States. We are reading poems from the Scholastic book *My America: A Poetry Atlas of the United States* (Hopkins 2000). When my students were reading a poem about the nation's capital ("Washington, D.C.") the assignment for fluency homework was to read the poem to five different people, the "Lucky Listeners," and have each of them sign the back of the poem. By adding a "Lucky Listener" piece to the process, the FDL also goes home in the same day.

The listeners at home can learn numerous important things by listening:

- There is value in rereading a text.
- The students are studying the United States this year and Washington, D.C., in particular. The content has come home for discussion and further exploration.
- Reading aloud is fun!
- The student can read grade-level text!

Synergistic Instruction

Figure 5.3 on page 91 shows a step-by-step process for planning a Fluency Development Lesson (FDL). The FDL (Rasinski et al. 1995) employs relatively short reading passages (poems, rhymes, songs, story segments, or other texts) that students read and reread over a short period of time. The format for the lesson follows a routine of the teacher taking responsibility for reading the daily passage and gradually shifting responsibility for the reading to the students.