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EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR PRIMARY GRADE STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH READING FLUENCY

Timothy Rasinski and Chase Young

ABSTRACT

In the United States, a significant number of primary grade students struggle to achieve fluency in reading. Research indicates that achieving proficiency in the foundational reading competencies is a common difficulty manifested in a majority of these students. We will explore approaches for helping younger students develop proficiency in word recognition, reading fluency, and ultimately comprehension. A number of the research-based strategies can be used with the whole class which creates a context for inclusive literacy education.

 Keywords: Reading competency; word recognition; fluency; comprehension; inclusive literacy practices

INTRODUCTION

Literacy development for all children continues to be an ongoing concern in the United States and around the world. According to the US National Assessment of Educational Progress (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2015) 31% of fourth-grade students reading performance is below the 'basic' level. While that

is an improvement from 1992 where 38% of fourth graders were identified below basic, it still reflects the reality that nearly one out of every three students who emerge from primary grade (grades K-3) reading instruction in the United States struggle in becoming proficient readers. Lack of proficiency in the primary grades often leads to continued difficulty in reading in succeeding grades – over a quarter of 12th grade students, students who are ready to move on to full-time employment or higher education are identified as 'below basic' in reading achievement.

Students identified as 'below basic' are characterised as experiencing difficulty in interpreting the meaning of words in grade appropriate texts as well as achieving an adequate understanding of such texts. If comprehension can be considered the ultimate goal of reading, these students struggle to make meaning from the narrative and informational texts they encounter.

WHAT'S BEHIND READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES?

There are many reasons children can struggle in reading, because reading is a complex process. Unfortunately, teachers have little control over numerous causes for reading difficulties. Most salient of the causes is poverty, which has been shown repeatedly to be one of the most powerful correlates to reading difficulty. Children living in poverty are more likely to struggle in reading. Several other factors outside the teacher's control also impact reading development, including family and community dynamics, such as parents reading to and with their children, frequency of family relocations, and access to books.

Regardless of these uncontrollable factors, we have a responsibility to develop proficient readers in our classrooms, and schools should indeed take responsibility for the controllable factors. In the United States, phonemic awareness, phonics or word decoding, reading fluency (automaticity in word recognition and expressive reading), and text and word comprehension have been repeatedly cited in the Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) as essential to student success in learning to read. While we recognise that other factors such as motivation for reading play a role in a child's reading development, the factors identified by the NRP provide a reasonable starting point for examining primary grade children who struggle in learning to read.

Understanding what one reads, or textual comprehension, is arguably the main goal of reading. Students who cannot comprehend grade-level text are often assumed to be struggling readers. Why do students struggle in comprehension? Could difficulty with phonemic awareness and word decoding cause students to struggle in reading? Could difficulties in reading fluency (as measured by speed of reading) be a cause of reading difficulties? Is it possible that

some readers can decode words well and read with fluency, yet still experience difficulty in making meaning from texts they read? In reality, all these possibilities exist. That is why reading and learning to read are such complex activities. Yet, according to the research, there appears to be a predominant profile of readers who struggle (Valencia & Buly, 2004). Moreover, with such a profile it then becomes possible to design instruction that meets the needs of such students.

Two reading competencies, in particular, lay the foundation for reading success: word identification (also known as phonics, word decoding, or word recognition) and reading fluency (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Rasinski, 2010). Word identification in its simplest form is the ability to produce an oral representation of a word from its written representation. Clearly, proficient word identification is necessary for proficient reading comprehension.

Reading fluency is generally considered to be made up of two sub-competencies: word recognition automaticity, and prosody (Hudson, Pullen, Lane, & Torgesen, 2009; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Word recognition automaticity is the ability of readers to effortlessly decode words so that they can apply their cognitive resources to comprehension. If readers direct too much of their cognitive energy to word decoding, less will be available for comprehension. Stanovich (1980) argued that rapid and automatic word recognition, along with the use of general comprehension strategies (e.g. prediction, visualisation, compare-contrast), appear to distinguish proficient from less proficient readers. Word recognition automaticity is usually assessed by reading speed. More automatic word recognition (and its consequence, improved reading comprehension) is marked by faster reading.

Prosody in reading refers to expressive reading that matches the meaning of the text. Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between prosodic oral reading and silent reading comprehension at a variety of grade levels (Gross, Millett, Bartek, Bredell, & Winegard, 2013; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2008). Proficient readers read with expression while readers who struggle often lack expression in their oral reading (Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2008).

The Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016) in the United States have identified word identification and fluency as foundational competencies for students in the elementary grades. Although we agree with the foundational nature of these competencies, their essential nature to successful reading comprehension suggests that they should be developed as early as possible in students' literacy instruction. Chall (1996), for example, suggests that instruction in and instruction to development of word identification and fluency should occur in the primary grades. Because of their foundational nature, we suggest that teachers develop these skills intensely beginning in kindergarten and continue through grade three. The reality is, of course, that many students fail to achieve appropriate levels of proficiency in these foundational skills by the end of grade three. Problems in word recognition and fluency development may be contributors to

students' difficulty in overall reading achievement at and beyond grade three (Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, & Deno, 2003).

DESCRIBING STRUGGLING READERS

A number of studies have explored the nature of students who struggle in reading, using the framework of the NRP. Rasinski and Padak (1998) examined the reading performance of elementary grade students who were identified by their teachers as having difficulties in reading and were referred for additional instruction. They found that problems in reading fluency appeared to be the most significant factor hindering these students' progress in reading. Valencia and Buly (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Valencia & Buly, 2004) studied slightly over 100 fourth-grade students who had scored at the 'below proficient' level in reading. In other words, these students struggled in comprehending grade appropriate texts. The students were given a variety of literacy assessments to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses in reading and language processing. Valencia and Buly were able to categorise students by these assessments. They reported that only about 18% of 'below proficiency' readers demonstrated sufficient word recognition skills and reading fluency. The remaining 82% of 'below proficient' were considered disfluent, and thus the students' difficulties were with word identification and/or reading fluency.

If students do not master the foundational skills and develop into fluent readers, then they will likely continue to struggle in the upper elementary grades. Leach, Scarborough, and Rescorla (2003) examined the profiles of fourth and fifth grade students that were labelled 'late emerging' after third grade, which suggested the students were struggling with reading. 67% of the late-emerging students exhibited 'word level processing deficits' (p. 220). Moreover, Dennis (2012) examined the reading development of 94 students of sixth, seventh and eighth graders who scored 'below proficient' on a state standardised reading proficiency examination and identified four clusters or profiles of 'below proficient' readers. Three of the four profiles (76% of students) included word identification and/or reading fluency (automaticity) as competencies that were not developed in students. Moving up to eighth and ninth grades, Hock et al. (2009) identified over 200 students identified as struggling readers. Of these, approximately 96% experienced difficulty in word identification, word meaning (vocabulary), and/or reading fluency. Removing those students who were adequately proficient in word meaning, 82% of the students still exhibited difficulties in word identification and/or reading fluency (automaticity).

Taken as a whole, these studies suggest the difficulties in the foundational competencies (word recognition and fluency) are major factors in students' reading difficulties early in their school careers. Moreover, problems in

developing mastery of these foundational reading competencies early on is likely to contribute to ongoing reading difficulties in later grades and will have a profound and adverse effect on students' comprehension, overall reading achievement and ability to adequately comprehend texts in various content areas (Rasinski et al., 2005; Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009). Lack of adequate development of basic foundational reading competencies is likely to lead to more generalised difficulties in reading and in subject areas that are reading dependent. Students who struggle with proficient reading by grade three are four times less likely to graduate from high school (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Therefore it is imperative that we help students achieve mastery in the foundational competencies as early as possible, so that they can excel in overall reading achievement beyond elementary school.

INSTRUCTION STRUGGLING READERS NEED

In this chapter we, then, argue for an authentic, intentional, intensive, consistent and synergistic approach to word identification and reading fluency in kindergarten through grade two for all students and especially for students who are at greatest risk for struggling in reading. Authenticity in reading instruction means that instruction should involve real reading for authentic purposes. Many of the current approaches to word recognition and fluency are marked by reading words in isolation and practicing reading texts, so that students can simply read fast (Samuels, 2007; Young, Vadalez, & Gandara, 2016). In reality, few readers in real life read texts for the purpose of reading fast, therefore we question the authenticity of such a task. By intentional and intensive we mean that instruction should consist of instructional elements that are research-based and proven to be effective when delivered explicitly. Consistency means that such instruction should follow a predictable protocol delivered on a daily or near daily basis. And, by synergistic we mean that when word and fluency instruction is made up of proven elements of effective instruction, the effect of the instruction will be greater than the sum of elements.

Reading Recovery (Pinnell, 1989; Shanahan & Barr, 1995) is a good example of intentional, intensive, consistent and synergistic instruction. Each day students are taken through a consistent and multifaceted protocol with the goal to improve both reading and writing. While some research suggests Reading Recovery is effective (Clay, 1993), other research claims the long-term benefits are limited (Bradford & Wan, 2015; Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007). Moreover, the programme is limited to struggling readers in first grade, provides instruction to students on an individual basis, and requires a considerable investment of time per lesson (30 min). Further, Reading Recovery is not always provided to the lowest performing cohort of students.

Much is known about effective instruction in word identification and fluency. We often associate effective word identification instruction with practices such as teaching words taken from texts read, examining words for common word patterns (e.g. rimes), sorting words by critical features, playful practice with words, classroom word displays (word walls), or synthetic approaches to phonics instruction (MacKay, 2007). Reading aloud is another effective means to model fluent reading. Repeated reading and wide reading have also been associated with fluency development (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Although classroom instruction in word identification and fluency are essential, coordinating instruction with the home leads to even better reading outcomes for students (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). While each of the above mentioned instructional elements is effective in itself, combining the elements synergistically can yield even greater outcomes than if implemented individually.

STRUGGLING READERS NEED TIME FOR INSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS TO READ

Time is a critical factor for any instruction or instructional intervention. Within 360 min teachers must provide daily instruction across several subject areas, but we recommend devoting around 20−25 min/day to word identification and reading fluency instruction (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Effective reading instruction requires students to read actual texts. It is critical that we choose texts that support fluency instruction, especially when students engage in repeated readings. We have found that non-traditional texts such as poetry and readers theatre scripts, as well as the more traditional materials such as narrative and information texts, are good text choices for primary grade students who struggle (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Poetry for children is particularly noteworthy. First, children's poems are generally short, and the rhyming words found in most poems allows for explorations of rimes (word families). Moreover, the rhythm, rhyme and phrasing embedded in most poems makes prosody instruction easy and ultimately promotes successful and expressive oral reading. Poetry is also a great choice because poems were written to be performed orally for an audience. Performing poems provides an authentic reason to repeatedly read a text; we call it rehearsal. Furthermore, it gives every student a chance to successfully read a text aloud, because every student, regardless of whether they are struggling or not, has the opportunity to practice. We know that students who struggle in reading do not enjoy much success, but when students are able to master a poem every day and read it with appropriate expression to a receptive audience, success and self-confidence soar (Young, Mohr, & Rasinski, 2015).

Evidence also suggests that occasionally reading and mastering more challenging texts, of all genres, may help to accelerate students' growth in reading (Stahl & Heubach, 2005; Young et al., 2015). Interestingly, many poems can be quite challenging for students to read and understand. However, the relative brevity of poetry, as well as the rhythm, rhyme, and authentic need for rehearsal allows students to master even those texts that may otherwise be above their own reading levels.

READERS THEATRE

Recently the *School Library Journal* referred to Readers Theatre as 'the closest thing to a silver bullet' to meet the Common Core State Standards in reading (Kozilkowski, 2015). Readers Theater is an instructional approach that also contains many of the characteristics of good fluency instruction. A plethora of research indicates that repeated reading of text is a powerful method for developing fluency (Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer, & Lane, 2000; Samuels, 1979; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008). Readers Theatre is a method of repeated reading that requires students to practice and later perform a text. The performance aspect provides students an authentic reason to reread their texts; essentially, students rehearse. The purpose of the repeated readings is not to increase reading speed, as is the case with other fluency interventions. Rather students rehearse in order to give a meaningful performance for an audience. In other words, the purpose of the rehearsal is to improve students' prosodic or expressive reading that reflects and enhances the meaning of the text. Not only does Readers Theatre provide an authentic reason to reread text, but research purports that the activity is motivating (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). It is no surprise that Readers Theatre might be considered somewhat of a 'silver bullet,' as it incorporates several fluency instruction elements that make the synergistic activity effective.

Although teachers implement Readers Theatre in different ways, research suggests that systematic approaches yield the greatest gains in reading proficiency. In 2009, Young and Rasinski utilised a weekly format that increased students reading comprehension, word recognition accuracy, reading rate and prosody. The authors attribute much of the success to the consistent use of Readers Theatre in the classroom which was implemented for 35 consecutive weeks.

On the first day of the week, the teacher read through the script choices for the week. Scripts are essentially trade books converted into plays. Unlike a play, however, the students do not dress up or act, but entertain audiences with their expressive reading. There are hundreds of scripts available on the internet (e.g. thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html, timrasinski.com). After listening to the scripts, the students choose their favourite. Once groups are formed, students read over the entire text chorally, and take the script home to read through it again.

Students return on the second day, meet with their groups, and select their parts. This can be chaotic in the beginning, but students get used to it. However, if problems occur, 'rock, paper, scissors' works well to settle disputes. After each student has a part, they practice their lines. The teacher instructs the students to focus on word recognition, emphasising that the day's goal is only to know the words. Daily rehearsals typically range from five to 10 minutes.

On the third day, students reconvene in Readers Theatre groups, and focus on prosody, expressive reading. Students in the groups coach one another and rehearse until participants can read aloud their parts with appropriate expression. In order to read with appropriate expression, students need to understand the author's intended meaning, and thus rehearsal also promotes reading comprehension.

On the fourth day, students practice their performance in groups. The teacher walks the room and listens carefully, providing feedback if necessary. The students can then bring their scripts home for a final practice, paying particular attention to any aspects they find difficult.

The fifth and final day is dedicated to the performance. Each group performs their script for an audience. Whether the audience consists of other classes, parents, administrators, or for each other, it is important that someone is there to witness their hard work to preserve the authenticity of the instructional activity.

ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

There are several other research-based methods that teachers can use in classrooms that are based on repeated readings, which also require students to perform. Poetry Slams are an engaging activity that incorporates choice, rehearsal and performance (Wilfong, 2008; Young & Nageldinger, 2014). At the beginning of the week, students choose a poem. Throughout the week, the students rehearse the poem in class or at home. On the performance day, the students recite their poems for the class. Teachers sometimes transform their classrooms into 'poetry cafes' to set the mood – teachers dim the lights and students dress in black to achieve the desired effect. Not only does the method increase students' reading fluency, comprehension and attitude towards school (Wilfong, 2008), it is also a lot of fun – a premise that Plato advocated centuries ago, 'let early education be a sort of amusement'.

Another possibility is to have students rehearse and perform speeches or segments from famous speeches. Like poetry, speeches were written to be read aloud and performed. There are countless speeches available online for students and teachers to choose from. As an added bonus, the choices of speeches could align with content area curriculum. As with other performance activities, it is important that students have plenty of time to rehearse, and also an

opportunity to perform for an audience. Although it is not necessary, teachers sometimes ask the students to dress up as the original speaker.

Songs are also meant to be performed. Students reading and rehearsing written song lyrics in the classroom includes the elements of effective fluency instruction (Rasinski, Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013; Young, Gandara, & Valadez, 2015). Students learn two songs per week by reading and singing along with the teacher. There are thousands of pre-made karaoke-style videos on the Internet, ready to engage young students and boost reading proficiency. Of course, there are many other forms of performance reading activities, and we certainly encourage teachers to continue to creatively enhance their students' reading abilities through practice and performance.

READ TWO IMPRESS

Although many students respond positively to the aforementioned whole-group fluency activities, we know that there is no single strategy that works for every student. Sometimes, students need small group or even one-on-one instruction. Read Two Impress (R2I) is relatively new one-on-one intervention derived from research conducted in the previous century (Young, Rasinski, & Mohr, 2016). It combines two timeless methods, the neurological impress method (NIM) (Heckelman, 1969) and the method of repeated readings (Samuels, 1979). This synergistic approach to fluency development helps students read challenging texts more fluently. First, the teacher provides a high level of support through NIM. The teacher sits beside the student, and the pair begins reading aloud together. Once the pair has established their choral reading, the teacher begins to read slightly ahead of the student. The slight advantage helps students hear words immediately before reading them, and also provides a model for fluent oral reading.

After reading a paragraph or page using NIM, the student then rereads the text aloud to the teacher or tutor. Because the student received high levels of support through NIM, the student often reads the text accurately, at a good pace, and with expression. The successful reading of a challenging text can be motivating for students. In addition, the rereading provides an opportunity for the teacher to informally assess the student's oral reading. If the student struggles with the independent rereading, the teacher has a several options to ensure a more successful reading.

First, the teacher could shorten the length of the text read with NIM. For example, a full page can be reduced to a paragraph. If the student still struggles, the teacher should choose a less challenging text. Conversely, if a student rereads the text with excellent fluency, the text level could be increased. In a previous study using R2I (Young et al., 2015), the researchers found that choosing a text approximately one year above the student's independent

reading level was a good starting point. Most often, the level needs to be increased within the first week of intervention, and thus teachers should carefully monitor and continue to increase the text difficulty frequently.

THE FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT LESSON

The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) is a simple, consistent, time efficient and synergistic approach to foundational reading instruction that has the potential to have a significant impact on literally millions of children who struggle in reading in the primary grades due to not having achieved mastery of the foundational reading competencies.

The FDL (Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994) was developed as a fluency intervention that can be applied to large groups of normally developing elementary grade students or more intensively to smaller groups of students who have yet to achieve proficiency in fluency and who also struggle in overall reading achievement.

The FDL is a daily lesson in which students are given the task of mastering to the point of fluency a new relatively brief (100−200 words) text each day. The lesson takes approximately 20 min and can be implemented with whole-class groups, small groups, or individual students. Throughout the FDL there is never an explicit or implicit focus on increasing reading rate; rather the focus is on achieving a reading characterised by appropriate and meaning-filled expression. The general daily protocol for the FDL involves the following steps:

1. The main preparation for the lesson involves the teacher choosing a text for the day's lesson. The text can be a passage from a story, an informational piece, a poem, or a song. The texts should be at or slightly above the students' instructional reading level and should lend themselves to reading with good phrasing and expression. The teacher makes two copies of the text for every student, and also makes a larger display copy (chart or document camera) for group reading.
2. The teacher introduces the display copy of the text to students and reads it to the students two to three times while students follow along silently. With each reading, the teacher reads the text with various forms of expression (or lack of expression).
3. Following the teacher's readings, students are led in a discussion of the content of the text. The teacher also asks students to comment on the quality of the teacher's oral readings.
4. The teacher and students then chorally read the display copy of the text two to three times. The choral readings can vary from whole group reading to having different subgroups read the passage.
5. Following the choral reading, students are divided into groups of two or three, provided their individual copies of the text, and are given

approximately five minutes to continue practicing the text with their partner(s). One student reads the passage while the partner(s) follows along silently, providing help as needed, and giving generally positive feedback. Each student is given the opportunity to practice in this manner.

6. At this point students are able to read the text with some degree of fluency. In order to make the FDL an authentic activity, students are then invited to perform their text for an audience. The audience can simply be other class-mates, but it can also include the school principal, volunteer adults stationed outside the classroom, or even other classrooms of students.

7. At the end of the performance the teacher and students select 5−10 words from the passage and engage in a quick set of word study activities. These can include finding other words that contain a targeted rime or word family from the passage, sorting the corpus of words in various ways, examining the morphological nature of certain words, and playing word games. The formal classroom-based FDL ends with the word study.

8. The FDL can continue at home. Students take their second copy of the passage and are encouraged to read the passage to family members at home a select number of times, usually five or more. (Parents should be advised in advance that their children will be bringing home a FDL text regularly and that the parents' role is simply to be a positive listener of the child's reading.) Students who achieve the targeted number of home readings may be provided with a reward or special duty in school.

9. A new FDL is implemented the following day with a new text. However, before beginning the new text, the teacher leads students in reading and cele-brating texts that have been mastered from previous days.

Teachers employing the FDL are encouraged to vary the protocol to meet their own style of instruction and needs of students. The essential elements in any FDL should include modelling fluent reading, assisted reading, repeated reading and word work. The essential goal for any FDL is for students to mas-ter a new text (poem) with each lesson to the point of reading the text with good comprehension and fluency. (This promotes the skills of word recognition accuracy, automaticity and expression). Students who struggle in reading often do not achieve a sense of succeeding in reading or see themselves making steady progress in reading. Using the FDL regularly, students achieve a sense of accomplishment with each lesson. Moreover, that success can be enhanced by having students master passages that are relatively challenging were they to read them one time only.

PROOF OF CONCEPT

A very common practice in learning to play a musical instrument is to play and replay a composition until it is mastered, at which point a more challenging piece is introduced. The students then use the knowledge gained from reading

notes and playing a simple piece to understand and play a more complex one. This form of bootstrapping may be useful as an approach to reading texts, so that students may generate improved learning outcomes in reading. Some of the best evidence for gains in reading comes from real teachers doing class-room-based research on potentially innovative instruction.

Research on Readers Theatre consistently reports remarkable results in vari-ous components of reading (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Research on utilising Rock and Read (karaoke-style singing and reading in the classroom) reveals that learning a song or two a week, rehearsing, and performing, has a remarkable effect on students' reading prosody, expression, phrasing, and pace (Young et al., 2016).

Studies of instructional approaches to fluency that combine identified elements of effective fluency instruction, such as *Fluency Orient Reading Instruction* (Stahl & Heubach, 2005) and R2I (Young et al., 2015, 2016) have documented substantial and significant reading gains not only in terms of fluency, but also in overall reading achievement.

The Kent State University reading clinic works exclusively with children experiencing difficulty in reading. Most of the students enrolled in the clinical programme manifest difficulties in word recognition and fluency. Regular use of the FDL (4 days/week for 4 weeks) resulted in substantial gains in word rec-ognition accuracy, automaticity and comprehension (Zimmerman, Rasinski, & Melewski, 2013). Similarly, a three month implementation of a home version of the FDL called Fast Start (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005) resulted in at-risk first grade students making nearly doubled the progress in letter and word recogni-tion accuracy as well as word recognition automaticity over a similar group of students who received the same instruction in school but without the home intervention.

Given the consistent positive findings of focused and synergistic fluency instruction, perhaps it is time to include such instruction in the regular reading curriculum.

WHAT NEXT?

Given that high levels of comprehension are dependent on a strong foundation of automatic (and accurate) word recognition and prosodic meaningful reading that is developed as early as possible in children's literacy development; and recognising also that students who struggle in reading comprehension very often present difficulties in these foundational competencies, it seems that early and intensive instruction in those skills would be beneficial. It is not enough for young students to be able to decode words accurately; they need to develop their word decoding competencies to an automatic and effortless level so that they can read with good expression and focus their attention on reading for meaning.

An effective foundational reading curriculum would occur in kindergarten through grade two. Each day students would receive the type of literacy instruction that would be considered exemplary: read aloud by the teacher, authentic reading of stories and dictated texts followed by meaningful response activities, time to read and explore books and other reading material independently, instruction on how words work (phonemic awareness, phonics and word study), and opportunities to engage in authentic writing. In addition to these critical instructional elements, students would also receive a daily synergistic fluency lesson such as the FDL, R2I, or Readers Theatre. Daily employment of an authentic and synergistic fluency lesson would help to move students beyond mere word recognition accuracy, where they can decode the words in text but use up so much of their cognitive capacity that they struggle to comprehend, to word recognition automaticity (fluency) where students are freed from word recognition challenges so as to apply their energies to text comprehension. If difficulties in word recognition and fluency are major contributors to reading difficulty in the primary grades, then it seems highly appropriate to provide students with authentic, consistent, focused, and intentional word recognition and fluency instruction that addresses those needs. Cracks in the reading foundation of young readers need to be repaired in order for an impressive reading edifice to be constructed. The research-based strategies presented in this chapter provide an authentic, intentional, consistent and synergistic approach to developing word identification and reading fluency and contribute to the development of inclusive and effective literacy practice.

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