

# READ TWO IMPRESS

## An Intervention for Disfluent Readers

Chase Young ■ Timothy Rasinski ■ Kathleen A.J. Mohr

Although there are many important components and processes in learning to read, recent research places reading fluency at the foundation of proficient reading (National Governors Association for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Snowling & Hulme, 2005). According to automaticity theory (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), in order for students to become proficient in reading comprehension, they must work toward automatic (fluent) word recognition. Recognizing words automatically and effortlessly allows readers to focus on higher-order processes such as comprehension. Struggling readers are often disfluent (Rasinski & Padak, 1998; Valencia & Buly, 2004); their reading is characterized by slow, labored, word-by-word reading that does not sound like normal spoken discourse. Such disfluency often requires specific, research-based corrective action. Classroom fluency support typically involves stand-alone instructional practices such as Readers Theatre or choral reading (Rasinski, 2010), but many students need more concerted, synergistic, intentional, and individualized attention. In this article, we offer a method for increasing students' reading fluency called *Read Two Impress* (R2I; Mohr, Dixon, & Young, 2012; Rasinski & Young, 2014; Young & Mohr, in press; Young, Mohr, & Rasinski, 2015). This approach combines some recommended strategies that can have a powerful effect on students' oral reading proficiency.

### The Genesis of Read Two Impress

To understand the power of R2I, it is necessary to understand two instructional reading fluency strategies that were initially introduced decades ago. The first—repeated readings—was described by Samuels in 1979. He had students read passages multiple times and found that each rereading led to increased reading rate (automaticity) and reduced word recognition errors. In that study, a student first read a passage at 30 words per minute (WPM) with 12 word recognition errors. After seven repeated readings, the student read the same passage at nearly 90 WPM with only one word recognition error. The student read four more passages, each more challenging than the first. By the final passage, the student's initial reading was at 70 WPM with only two errors; the student's final repeated reading of the text contained no errors and reached nearly 90 WPM. Thus, not only did the repeated readings aid the student with WPM rate and word recognition on the passage itself, but the practice transferred to new and more difficult texts.

Heckelman (1969) described another strategy, the Neurological-Impress Method (NIM), where a tutor

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**Chase Young** is an assistant professor and the Silverman Endowed Chair in Literacy at Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi, USA; e-mail chase.young@tamucc.edu.

**Timothy Rasinski** is a professor at Kent State University, OH, USA; e-mail trasinsk@kent.edu.

**Kathleen A.J. Mohr** is an associate professor at Utah State University, Logan, USA; e-mail kathleen.mohr@usu.edu.

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sits on the dominant side of the student to read a text together. The pair begins reading aloud together, but the tutor reads slightly ahead of the learner with appropriate expression. When the learner begins to “catch” the tutor, the tutor reads slightly faster but continues to read with good expression. This assisted reading strategy serves to increase students’ word recognition accuracy and also promotes more expressive and meaningful reading (Eldredge, 1990; Eldredge & Butterfield, 1986; Eldredge & Quinn, 1988; Henk, 1981; Hollingsworth, 1970; Hollingsworth, 1978; Topping, 1987). In Heckelman’s (1969) first report, students enrolled in a summer reading program received 7.25 hours of NIM training, which resulted in a mean increase of 1.9 years in students’ reading levels.

In my role (Chase; first author) as reading specialist, I had two students who were in their third year of additional reading support (Young & Mohr, in press). These third graders were still reading on a first-grade level. Both were disfluent readers, exhibiting slow, choppy, and laborious reading. It was no surprise that their reading comprehension also suffered. For one student, Emilio, Kathleen (third author) and I decided that repeated readings would be a good first step to improve his fluency (Mathes & Fuchs, 1993; Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer, & Lane, 2000; Samuels, 1979; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008).

As was expected, Emilio made significant gains in reading fluency. His word recognition automaticity increased and his reading levels consequently increased. Repeated readings helped this student’s reading level increase six levels (from 18 to 24) in eight weeks, according to the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 1997).

Although Emilio made significant gains, he still read in a monotone voice. Fortunately, research on NIM notes that use of the strategy can “etch” prosody (expression) into a student’s brain when reading aloud with a tutor (Heckelman, 1969). Because repeated readings were working so well for Emilio, we decided to stack the two approaches, NIM and repeated readings, to continue Emilio’s growth in word recognition accuracy while supporting the prosodic or expressive component of reading. This stacked intervention is what we now call R2I. Essentially, the learner follows the lead of the more proficient reader and then demonstrates his or her fluency in a rereading of the same text.

The impact of R2I was immediately apparent as Emilio began to read more rapidly and with greater expression. In light of his progress, we also began the NIM/repeated readings hybrid intervention with the other student, Maria. After receiving the intervention for 16 weeks, both students were reading on grade level and successfully exited the reading intervention program (Mohr, Dixon, & Young, 2012; Young & Mohr, in press).

Recently, we (Young, Mohr, & Rasinski, 2015) revisited this NIM/repeated readings hybrid to more formally study the effects of R2I. We recruited volunteers from various backgrounds—parents, undergraduate students, staff members, and tutors—who were trained to deliver the R2I tutoring. During a four-week intervention, the volunteers tutored 29 students every school day for

20 minutes. Thus, each student received approximately 400 minutes of one-on-one tutoring with R2I. At posttesting, the students who received the intervention outperformed on several measures a control group of students who had received the school’s existing instruction. R2I had large effects on students’ oral reading fluency (measured by words read correctly per minute) and prosody (reading expression measured by a multidimensional fluency scale). In addition, scores on the district’s reading assessment indicated that R2I had a moderate effect on the students’ overall reading comprehension. This research supports R2I as a viable and powerful way to increase students’ reading fluency (see Young, Mohr, & Rasinski, 2015, for a full description of the study).

## Rationale for Combining the Methods

We believe that combining the two methods benefits disfluent readers because the entire process fits the gradual release model, adheres to Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and creates synergistic instruction where the effects of an integration of two approaches are greater than the sum of the two (Rasinski, 2010). In NIM, the tutor provides a strong scaffold and assumes slightly more of the responsibility. The tutor acts a model for proficient oral reading while supporting the student with word recognition, pace, and expression. By using a challenging text with our assistance, the student can perform at the outer limits of his or her ZPD. Directly following the assisted reading, the student practices the challenging text through a repeated reading. This provides the student with immediate feedback and allows him or her to experience success on a challenging text. Through the method’s transfer of responsibility on a single text, from

### *Pause and Ponder*

- Why is fluent reading important?
- How does reading fluency support reading comprehension?
- Who is available to deliver this intervention?

assisted to independent, the student can read the text aloud accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with appropriate expression. Essentially, what was once at the outer limits of a student's ZPD is now within the instructional range of the student. Moreover, because we employ a more challenging text with R2I, there is a greater likelihood that students will accelerate their growth in reading than if they were to read easier texts for greater fluency.

### Implementing Read Two Impress

It is important to note that this intervention is for fluency, and students' assessments should reveal that they experience difficulty with word recognition automaticity and reading expression. In other words, while there are many components and processes of reading (such as phonics and vocabulary), R2I targets disfluent readers and provides the assistance and practice needed for automatic and expressive reading. We believe that fluency is a bridge to comprehension (Rasinski & Young, 2014) and that teachers should keep in mind that this intervention is designed to enhance reading fluency in order to free up cognitive resources so that students can focus on the main goal of reading: comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

To initiate R2I, it is important to ascertain the reading proficiency of the student(s). Determining initial reading levels plays an important role in appropriate text selection. We recommend an assessment that will render a reading level (e.g., DRA, iStation, Informal Reading Inventories). Once you have determined a student's independent reading level, you can begin the text selection process. However, in this approach, the identified reading level is not where you will start with

a student. Research (Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000; Stahl & Heubach, 2005) suggests that students can read more difficult material when engaging in assisted reading, and we recommend beginning with a text approximately one year above the student's independent reading level. This is contrary to previous research on NIM that asserts the text should be easy for the students (Anderson, 1981), but it follows the findings of our previous research (Young, Mohr, & Rasinski, 2015). Students can handle more challenging material in this context because they will be receiving support from their tutors while reading. You can always make adjustments later if the text is too difficult or too easy for the student. Moreover, experiencing success with more challenging material is more likely to result in accelerated reading development, which is critical for struggling readers who currently read well below their grade placement.

Any type of text will work, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and having a few texts on hand is a good idea so that the student can have some input on what to read. With the text selected for the session, sit side by side with the student and begin NIM, reading into the student's dominant ear (which typically corresponds with the student's dominant hand). That is, tell the student to read with you and begin reading aloud with the student, but stay slightly ahead of the student. (You may have to adjust your rate if the student's reading rate fluctuates during the

reading.) Continue NIM-style shared reading through a short section of the text. For chapter books, you may want to stop after each paragraph or two, and for picture books you may read an entire page. If you are using poetry, you might be able to read the entire poem. After completing the determined text segment using NIM reading, ask the student to reread the selection aloud; this is the repeated reading component. At this point, you should begin hearing the benefits of your assisted reading and expressive modeling, and the student should feel some success reading the more challenging passage. Students should be able to read through the text relatively smoothly, and you should be able to hear your expression reflected in their oral reading. You might ask what the student has noticed about his or her oral reading.

If a student struggles during the rereading, you may want to repeat the NIM reading of the segment or ask if the student would like to try it again. You could also decrease the length of the text segment. If the text is too challenging for fluent or inflected reading, you can switch to another, perhaps less challenging text until the student is comfortable with the process. Conversely, if the student reads the text with adultlike fluency, you may want to consider moving to a more challenging text or lengthening the selection of text. The goal here is to extend students to the outermost limits of their ZPD, the zone at which a student can be

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successful with the aid of a knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

If the text is at an appropriate level, continue this method with several segments of the text. If selecting a new text, assess whether the student can handle a more difficult text or that of another genre. This method is for students who struggle with oral reading; therefore, it is important to continuously challenge them while giving them opportunities for success. Ultimately, using more difficult text exposes the students to higher levels, perhaps even grade-level texts, which is an expectation of every student in K–12 (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010).

## Your Turn

We have seen great success with R2I, and we plan to continue our research of this hybrid reading fluency technique in various contexts with different grade levels and diverse groups of students. Meanwhile, we invite you to use this method with your struggling readers, particularly those whose struggle to read fluently. We cannot yet say whether the gains we have witnessed in students' reading progress are due to the increased amount of reading, the modeling, the repetition, the one-on-one assistance, or the integration of these

into R2I; however, we can say that R2I has worked with a significant number of students, many of whom were previously considered struggling and who now read alongside their peers with proficiency and confidence.

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## TAKE ACTION!

1. Choose a challenging text.
2. Read a page or a paragraph aloud together.
3. Read slightly ahead of the student.
4. Read with good expression that matches the meaning of the text.
5. Have the student reread the page or paragraph aloud.
6. Continue with subsequent pages or paragraphs for 20 minutes.