

Fluency Research

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According to University of Illinois Department of Educational Psychology Urbana-Champaign Curriculum, Technology, and Educational Reform (CTER), fluency is a key ingredient in moving students forward from word recognition into general comprehension. The program lists strategies such as supported reading, repeated reading, and Readers Theater, together with testimonials from teachers across the country regarding the value of these read aloud strategies ([Reading Fluency, WikEd, n.d.](#)).

The University of Texas Education Department has devoted an entire resource web site devoted to choral reading as a strategy for fluency and comprehension (<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/readstrong/choralreading.html>). Fluency is not simply defined as the ability to read quickly, but rather the ability to read in sensible phrases, using punctuation, page layout, and context. Reading should be as fluid as speaking, and actual comprehension is connected to larger thoughts rather than individual words (Spafford & Grosser, 2005). The National Reading Panel lists fluency as a high priority in reading instruction.

Fluency: the ability to recognize words easily, read with greater speed, accuracy, and expression, and understanding. Children gain fluency by practicing reading until the process becomes automatic; guided oral repeated reading is one approach to helping children become fluent readers (National Reading Panel, nichd.nih.gov, p.1).

With so much evidence regarding the value of reading aloud to promote fluency, and so many strategies for accomplishing the task available, why do teachers spend so much time having students read silently in class? According to Education World (Sustained Silent Reading, education-world.com, n.d.) sustained silent reading promotes the emergence of independent

readers and writers. In Milwaukee Public Schools *Drop Everything and Read* (DEAR) is a popular classroom management strategy to buffer transition time between subjects according to teachers and curriculum specialists (S. Robinson, personal communication, September 9, 2009). Reading aloud in class is being supplanted by silent reading, yet according to literacy experts, fluency is best addressed out loud (Farrell & Glasgow, 2007).

This testimony is corroborated by strategies used by Jackson Elementary School in Green Bay, Wisconsin, the top performing elementary school in the state according to School Digger (<http://www.schooldigger.com/go/WI/schoolrank.aspx>). School Digger is a comparison tool for parents ranking performance through standardized test score results. Jaymi Laabs, a second and third grade teacher at Jackson Elementary says reading aloud to students and facilitating students reading aloud to others is a pronounced part of her reading instruction. One way Ms. Laabs encourages students to read aloud is by pairing them with kindergarten students at the same school. The students have weekly school service time when they visit a kindergarten classroom and read to younger children. Second and third graders seem to feel less intimidated when reading to younger students (J. Laabs, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

Read aloud fluency strategies and drama integration is used at Roeper School for the Gifted and Talented in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (<http://www.roeper.org>). This school is a leader in gifted and talented education and publishes *The Roeper Review*, a journal for gifted and talented educators (<http://www.roeper.org/RoeperInstitute/index.aspx>). Stage III teacher Cathy Wilmers describes a fluency activity using dramatic play. Chapters read aloud by students are retold in small groups like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, then assembled sequentially in scenes with the goal of making the whole story clear (C. Wilmers, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

Ultimately, teachers, students, and literacy specialists agree; reading aloud in a variety of ways including repeated reading, choral reading, partner reading, and guided reading are the most effective strategies for achieving fluency. A review of expert literature as well as personal communications from successful teachers support fluency as an avenue to general comprehension, as well as a bridge from static phonemic awareness to expressive speaking of a text. The literature does not indicate silent reading is a waste of time. It simply states silent reading is not useful for the increase of fluency in young readers.

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