

## Delivering Supportive Fluency Instruction— Especially for Students Who Struggle



*A student performs a poem for a receptive audience*

by Timothy Rasinski

**T**he Common Core State Standards (CCSS) identify word recognition and reading fluency as foundational competencies necessary for reading growth. Yet, despite its recognized importance, fluency instruction is often severely limited in many classrooms.

One reason is that the role of fluency in reading instruction has not been clearly identified. Evidence of this lack of clarity comes from the International Reading Association’s 2013 “What’s Hot, What’s Not” survey, in which reading fluency was identified as “not hot” by the experts. Moreover, since word recognition automaticity (a component of fluency) is often assessed through reading speed, instructional methods have evolved into increasing students’ reading rate. As a result, many teachers view fluency as fast reading and fluency instruction as a quest for speed. Comprehension is minimized at best.

Further, those who view fluency instruction as instruction for speed have deemphasized its role in the classroom.

Clearly, appropriate instruction that leads to improved fluency *and* improved comprehension is sorely needed.

### Teaching Reading Fluency

Reading fluency has two essential components:

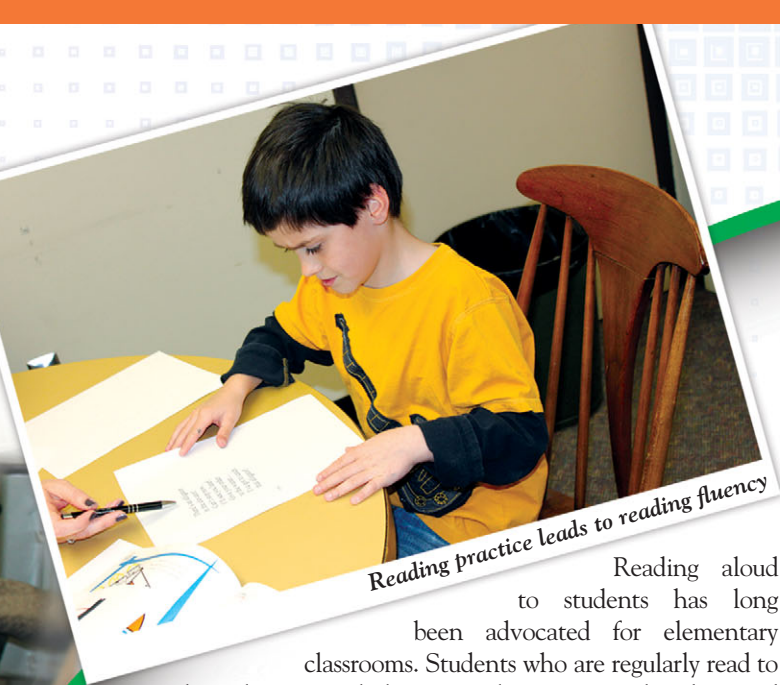
1. Word recognition that is not only accurate but also automatic or effortless (automaticity)
2. Prosodic or expressive reading (prosody)

Given the critical role that fluency plays and recognizing that many students who struggle in overall reading achievement exhibit difficulties in reading fluency, it is reasonable to expect that instruction in this area may lead to improvements in fluency and the more important goal of reading: comprehension.

Several instructional methods have been identified to develop fluency in students. These methods can readily be incorporated into regular reading instruction as well as intervention instruction for students who have not achieved grade-level proficiency in reading.

### Modeling Fluent Reading

Students are more likely to succeed in developing fluency if they have a good sense of what constitutes reading fluency. This can be done by teachers (or other more fluent readers) modeling fluent reading.



*Reading practice leads to reading fluency*



*A teacher and a student discuss a passage and how it might be read with fluency and meaning*

Reading aloud to students has long been advocated for elementary classrooms. Students who are regularly read to have larger vocabularies, are better comprehenders, and are more motivated to read. In addition, when reading to students, the teacher can help students notice how one's voice can be used to enhance meaning and to make the reading experience more satisfying. Students themselves will develop a better sense of what constitutes fluent reading and can try to make their oral reading approximate the reading produced by the teacher.

### Assisted Reading

In assisted reading, developing readers are supported by more proficient readers who read with students during oral reading. This can take a variety of forms, including group reading or paired reading.

If a student does not have a person or group to read with, technology provides an answer. In technology-assisted reading, the reader listens to a fluent recording of the same text while reading. In the past, the recorded reading took the form of cassette tapes, which were often easily damaged or lost. More recently, digital recordings and online software programs have made technology-

assisted reading easy to implement in classrooms or homes.

With the advent of digital recording applications such as podcasts, teachers can create their own library of technology-assisted readings. Another form of assisted reading is captioned television, where the viewer sees the words on the screen while hearing the words read. In addition, publishers have combined authentic literature with technology to create online programs for modeled and assisted reading. These programs use advanced speech recognition technology to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener.

### Wide Reading and Deep Reading

In reading, we generally think of practice in terms of wide reading—where students regularly read new, never-before-read materials. Students read a story or chapter once, discuss it with their classmates and teacher, and possibly engage in extension activities. Then they move on to another new text.

Now, consider students who are not good readers. They read the text once but they don't read it or understand it well. If they never

## Fluency Development Lesson

This daily lesson combines modeling fluent reading, assisted reading, and repeated (and wide) reading, and takes no more than 25 to 30 minutes. The FDL also engages students in brief but intensive word study and in home reading practice, which are critical to reading success.

The FDL uses a daily poem or an other short text of 50 to 200 words. The goal is for students to learn to read one text well. To achieve this, students listen to the text read to them, read it with other readers, practice the text repeatedly, and eventually perform for an audience.

Following is a general outline of an FDL:

1. Students read a familiar passage (story segment, poem, song lyric, etc.) from the previous lesson to the teacher or a fellow student for accuracy and fluency.
2. The teacher introduces a new short text and reads it aloud two or three times, while the students follow along. The text can be a poem, segment from a basal passage, literature book, etc.
3. The teacher and students discuss the nature and content of the passage.
4. The teacher and students read the passage chorally several times. Antiphonal reading and other variations are used to create variety and maintain engagement.

5. The teacher organizes student pairs. Each student practices the passage two or three times while a partner listens and provides support and encouragement.
6. Individuals and groups perform their reading for the class or other audience.
7. The students and teacher choose three or four words from the text to add to the word bank and/or word wall.
8. Students engage in word study activities.
9. Students take the passage home to practice with parents and other family members.
10. Students return to school and read the passage to the teacher or a partner who checks for fluency, accuracy and comprehension.

Although each FDL incorporates repeated (deep) reading, it also allows for wide reading. Each day a new text is practiced and performed. Thus, over a week, students learn to read a variety of texts fluently and with understanding.

For the past decade, we have used the FDL as the core instructional intervention in our university-run reading clinic for struggling readers. When used on a daily basis, students can make remarkable growth in word recognition, reading fluency and, most important, reading comprehension.

get the opportunity to develop mastery over a text, there is a good chance they will not develop as confident, proficient readers. For these students (as well as normally developing readers) we need to occasionally ask them to read a text multiple times until they are able to read it fluently and with good comprehension. This type of practice is known as repeated or deep reading.

When students read a text several times, with feedback, they not only improve their performance on the practiced text, they improve on new texts — some of which may be more challenging than the original text.

The challenge with guided repeated reading is making it purposeful and authentic. One way to do this is to make it a performance activity. If students know they will eventually perform (read orally) the text, they have an authentic purpose for their practice. Thus, readers do not aim their practice at sheer speed; rather the purpose is to give a fluent, meaningful rendering to the listening audience. Students learn to adjust and manipulate the prosodic aspects of their oral reading (e.g. rate, pitch, volume, emphasis) to enhance listeners' understanding. Research into this more authentic form of repeated reading has shown that readers improve in their word recognition, reading rate, prosody, comprehension, and motivation for reading.

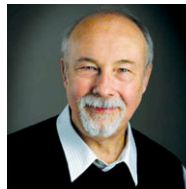
## Synthesizing Fluency Instruction

Modeling fluent reading, providing support and assistance while reading, and practicing repeated (and wide) reading are the building blocks of fluency instruction. When these individual components can be integrated into a lesson unit, it is likely

that students will gain more from it than if they received instruction in each component separately. One such synthesized instructional lesson is the Fluency Development Lesson (FDL), described in the sidebar on the previous page (page 27).

## Final Thoughts

Reading fluency has been relatively ignored or misinterpreted for years. It is time we consider new ways of approaching reading instruction for struggling readers. Fluency instruction is an approach that offers great potential for many students, particularly those who find reading difficult and uninteresting. I hope that you will consider making reading fluency a part of your daily classroom instructional routine.



*Timothy Rasinski, Ph.D., is a professor of literacy education at Kent State University and director of its award-winning reading clinic and is author of the best selling books on reading fluency, *The Fluent Reader* and *The Fluent Reader in Action*, [trasinrk@kent.edu](mailto:trasinrk@kent.edu).*

Timothy Rasinski is a speaker at the **IRA Research Institute** on Friday, May 9 and will present *Let's Get Back to the ART of Teaching Reading* on Sunday, May 11 at the International Reading Association 59th Annual Conference in New Orleans. See the iPlanner at [www.iraconference.org/iplanner](http://www.iraconference.org/iplanner) for session details and see [www.iraconference.org](http://www.iraconference.org) to register.

**COUNCIL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**  
**DESTINATION SUCCESS**

**July 10–13, 2014 • Tampa, FL**  
**IRA's 2014 Council Leadership Academy:  
Destination Success**

Join the International Reading Association for this intensive multi-day program, designed to provide Council Leaders with training in the areas of governance, finance, advocacy and strategic planning. The skills obtained at the Academy will equip Council Leaders and their organizations with the tools necessary to achieve optimal council success.

Twitter hashtag: #IRACLA14  
Visit [www.reading.org/CLA14](http://www.reading.org/CLA14) for more information.  
Registration fee: \$249

INTERNATIONAL  
**Reading  
Association**