

READING AND LEARNING TO READ, 6/e

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Reading Fluency

chapter **7**

Standards in This Chapter:

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In this chapter, you will discover:

- The importance of developing fluency in young readers
- What classroom routines, strategies, and reading materials help foster fluency development during oral reading
- Why a program of sustained silent reading (SSR) is important for independent reading

Key Terms

- automated reading
- automaticity
- choral reading
- cross-age reading
- fluency
- fluency development lesson (FDL)
- immediate word identification
- oral recitation lesson (ORL)
- paired reading
- predictable texts
- readers' theater
- repeated readings
- support reading strategy
- sustained silent reading (SSR)

Concept Map

Reading Fluency

DEFINING ORAL READING FLUENCY

Immediate Word Recognition

Predictability of Texts

Automaticity

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING ORAL READING FLUENCY

Repeated Readings

Automated Reading

Performance Strategies

MONITORING ORAL READING FLUENCY

DEVELOPING SILENT READING FLUENCY

Sustained Silent Reading

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THEMES OF THE TIMES

Expand your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter by reading current and historical articles from the *New York Times* by visiting the “Themes of the Times” section of the Companion Web Site.

Jamie, a first grader, labored as she read out loud. Word by word, she started, then stopped, then started again. Haltingly slow. Disjointed. She read the story in a monotone, as if the words from the story were on a list rather than a conversational flow of sounds in oral language.

“Jamie, read the story with expression, like you’re talking to us,” Mrs. Leonardo said in a supportive voice. Teachers like Mrs. Leonardo often encourage the beginning reader to be expressive. Perhaps they have known intuitively what researchers are beginning to investigate and understand: Reading with expression is a sign of progress, a sign that a child is reading fluently and with comprehension.

In the delightful book *The Wednesday Surprise* by Eve Bunting, Anna, a 7-year-old, teaches her grandmother to read by reading together with her on Wednesday evenings. Anna says, “I sit beside her on the couch and she takes the first picture book from the bag. We read the story together, out loud, and when we finish one book we start a second.” When asked by her mother, “When did this wonderful thing happen?” Anna explains: “On Wednesday nights. . . . And she took the books home, and practiced.”

Anna’s a smart 7-year-old. The role of practice in learning to read is extremely important. As the authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) suggest: “No one would expect a novice pianist to sight read a new selection every day, but that is exactly what is expected of the beginning reader” (p. 52). A budding pianist practices a piece again and again to get a feel for the composition, to develop control over it, and to become competent and confident with it.

So it is with young readers. In this chapter, we underscore the value of having readers develop fluency in oral and silent reading situations. Examine the Concept Map. It depicts the connections among key concepts related to developing fluent reading, one of the five essential components of effective reading instruction according to the National Reading Panel (2000). We begin by defining reading fluency as *reading easily and well with a sense of confidence and knowledge of what to do when things go wrong*. By examining the concepts of immediate word identification and automaticity, we see that fluent reading is key to comprehension. After considering how materials influence fluency development, we describe teaching strategies and routines to teach fluency, as well as ways to monitor oral reading fluency. Included are descriptions of “best practices” that help orchestrate the teaching and training of fluency with the teaching of comprehension.

Let’s begin by focusing on immediate word recognition, which allows a skilled reader to concentrate on comprehension.

Defining Oral Reading Fluency

The term *fluent* is often associated with doing something easily and well. When applied to reading, **fluency**, in everyday terms, means reading easily and well. Rasinski (2003) defines fluency as “the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression” (p. 26). With this ability comes a sense of control and

Standard 1.4

confidence, and often a knowledge of what to do when the reader gets bogged down or entangled in a text. Rasinski (2004) explains that fluency has three dimensions. The first is *accuracy in word decoding*; readers must be able to sound out words (using phonics and other word decoding strategies) in text with few errors. The second dimension is *automatic processing*. This is when the reader uses as little mental effort as possible in the decoding of text, saving their mental energy for comprehension. The third dimension is *prosody* or *prosodic reading*. Prosody is a linguistic concept that refers to such features in oral language as *intonation, pitch, stress, pauses*, and the *duration* placed on specific syllables. These features signal some of the meaning conveyed in oral language.

Have you ever sat in a class or served on a committee with a person who used few prosodic cues while speaking? Sometimes it's difficult to focus on what the person is trying to say or what the person means. In the same way, reading with expression, or using prosodic features while reading orally, has the potential of conveying more meaning than reading without expression. In addition, prosodic cues convey moods and feelings. Children generally know instantly when a parent is irritated with them. A mother's tone of voice (intonation) is usually enough to signal, "Mom is mad."

In learning to understand oral language, children rely on prosodic features. Similar conditions appear to be necessary in learning to understand written language. Schreiber (1980) found that students learned how to put words together in meaningful phrases, despite the fact that a written text provides few phrasing cues and uses few graphic signals for prosodic features in print. When Mrs. Leonardo asked Jamie to read with expression or as if she were talking to others, she was suggesting to Jamie that she rely on her intuitive knowledge or prosodic features in oral language, not only to help convey meaning to others but also to help her understand what she was reading.

Effective fluency instruction has three parts: instruction, practice, and assessment. Fluency *instruction* should incorporate the teaching of basic skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics. It should also model what fluency looks and sounds like. Fluency *practice* includes the use of decodable text and other independent level texts to strengthen the sounds and spelling that are taught in the classroom. Strategies such as repeated readings, covered later in this chapter, should be utilized often.

Instruction in fluent oral reading produces readers who move from word-by-word reading to more efficient phrase reading (Chomsky, 1976; Samuels, 1979). Fluency instruction has also resulted in improved reading achievement, assessed through measures of comprehension (Dowhower, 1987). Rasinski (2003) explains that because fluent readers do not have to spend time decoding words they are able to spend time and energy on making sense of and comprehending the text.

The final component of fluency is *assessment*. Assessing fluency can be done relatively easily and requires little time; it will be discussed later in this chapter.

Standard 1.4

Immediate Word Identification

The term **immediate word identification** is often used to describe rapid recognition. Keep in mind, however, that the process of immediate word identification is far more complicated than recognizing words on flash cards. When a word is retrieved rapidly from long-term memory, the process is often triggered by well-developed schemata that the reader has developed for a word. In immediate word identification, semantic or physical features in a word (e.g., a single letter or a letter cluster) trigger quick retrieval of that word.

Immediate word identification is the strategy used by skilled readers on 99 percent of the printed words they meet. It is also the method used by children when they identify their first words. Often one of the first words children learn to identify in print is their

Standard 1.4

name. Jessica, a 4-year-old, can recognize her printed name but may not attend to each individual letter. She recognizes her name because some distinctive feature triggers rapid retrieval from long-term memory.

In Chapter 6, we looked at children acquiring phonic knowledge as one tool in identifying words. We also considered how to help children analyze syllabic or meaning-bearing units in unfamiliar words. Both phonic and structural analysis involve *mediated word identification*. Mediation implies that the reader needs more time to retrieve words from long-term memory. Readers use mediating strategies when they don't have in place a well-developed schema for a word: The schema is lacking in either semantic or physical features sufficient for rapid retrieval.

We think that experiencing problems in fluency is a major contributor when students lag behind in reading ability. This can be particularly true for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Rasinski and Padak (1996) studied elementary school children from a large urban district who were referred for special tutoring in reading in the Title I program. The children read passages near their grade level and were measured on word recognition, comprehension, and reading fluency. Although the students' performance tended to be below grade level on all measures, only reading fluency was drastically below grade level. Their oral reading was slow and belabored.

How do skilled readers reach the point at which they read fluently and don't have to rely on mediated word identification strategies? Researchers are finding that *repetition is extremely important in learning to recognize words*. The amount of repetition needed for beginning readers to be able to recognize words immediately has not been appreciated. Traditionally, repetition of reading texts has not been systematically included in reading instruction. Today, reading familiar text is considered a key component of a comprehensive literacy program.

As mature readers, we are able to identify immediately or sight-read thousands and thousands of words. How did we learn to identify these words? Did we use flash cards to learn each one? Did we first sound out each word letter by letter? Probably not. The effects of developing oral reading fluency in meaningful texts have been studied with impressive results (Chomsky, 1976; Samuels, 1979; Allington, 1983; Dowhower, 1987; Koskinen & Blum, 1986).



Automaticity

Samuels (1988) argues that word recognition needs to be accurate and *automatic*. To explain the term **automaticity**, an analogy is often made to driving a car. Most of the time, a skilled driver will focus little attention or use little mental energy while driving. Skilled drivers frequently daydream or ponder happenings in their lives as they drive, yet they still manage to drive in the appropriate lane at an appropriate speed (most of the time!). They drive on automatic pilot. Nevertheless, when the need arises, a driver can swiftly focus attention on driving—for example, when a warning light goes on or when weather conditions suddenly change. In other words, most of us drive with automaticity, with little use of mental energy, but when necessary, we're able to refocus rapidly on what we're doing as drivers.

When readers are accurate but not automatic, they put considerable amounts of mental energy into identifying words as they read. When readers are both accurate and automatic, they recognize or identify words accurately, rapidly, easily, and with little mental energy. Like the skilled driver, the skilled reader can rapidly focus attention on a decoding problem but most of the time will put energy into comprehending the text.

Fluency strategies are also one way of getting rid of the “uh-ohs,” which are a part of learning any new skill. When taking tennis lessons, the beginner often makes mental

comments such as “Uh-oh, I need to hit in the middle of my racket” or “Oh, what a crummy backhand shot.” Each hit is judged as either good or bad. Children are also prone to struggling with the “uh-ohs” when learning to read. This happens especially when they think about which words they can and cannot identify. As with the beginning tennis player, the reading beginner often gets anxious because the “uh-ohs” interfere with constructing meaning from the text. Developing automaticity is one way to give beginning readers a feel for reading without anxiety.

Predictability of Reading Materials

For children to develop into confident, fluent readers, they need to read lots of texts that are easy for them. For first and second graders, *predictable literature* can be read with ease. Rhodes (1981) has delineated several characteristics of predictable stories. Some criteria for predictable literatures are outlined in Figure 7.1.

Predictable books have a context or setting that is familiar or predictable to most children. The pictures are supportive of the text; that is, there is a good match between the text and the illustrations. The language is natural, meaning that common language patterns are used. The story line is predictable. There is a repetitive pattern such as the mother rocking the child at night regardless of the trials during the day. There is also repetitive language in the refrains. Further contributing to the predictability of the book is the rhyme of language.

Other characteristics of predictable books delineated by Rhodes (1981) are rhyme and the use of cumulative patterns, as in *The Great Big Enormous Turnip*:

The black dog pulled the granddaughter.
The granddaughter pulled the old woman.
The old woman pulled the old man.
The old man pulled the turnip.
And they pulled—and pulled again.
But they could not pull it up.

Standard 2.3

FIGURE 7.1

Characteristics of Predictable Stories

1. Is the context (setting) one that is familiar or predictable to the reader?
2. Are the pictures supportive and predictable given the text?
3. Is the language natural? That is, does the author use common language patterns?
4. Is the story line predictable after the book has been started? Are the transitions clear?
5. Does the language “flow”?
6. Does the book reflect creativity, capture an interesting thought, or communicate something worthwhile, worthy of the title “literature”?
7. Is there repetition of specific language?
8. Are there cumulative episodes in the plot?
9. Is there rhyme?

Source: “I Can Read! Predictable Books as Resources for Reading and Writing Instruction,” by L. K. Rhodes, 1981, *The Reading Teacher*, 34, pp. 314–318.

Predictable texts are particularly helpful in developing fluency because children can rely on these characteristics of predictability. With predictable stories, less able readers can use intuitive knowledge of language and sense rather than rely on mediated techniques that draw on their mental energy. Using predictable texts, readers can develop fluency by reading them repeatedly with less and less assistance.

Developing Oral Reading Fluency

Standard 2.2



Children learn to become fluent in an environment that supports oral reading as communication. In mindless situations in which children take turns reading in round-robin fashion, little that is constructive is accomplished. In round-robin reading, children often do not view their role as that of tellers of a story or as communicators of information. Instead, their role is to be word perfect. Accuracy, not automaticity or comprehension, permeates round-robin reading. Although we are strong proponents of oral reading in classrooms, the emphasis during oral reading must be on communication and comprehension, not word-perfect renderings of a reading selection. We suggest students, especially English language learners, have the opportunity to read text silently before they read aloud. Let's take a closer look at several classroom routines and strategies that can help foster fluency during oral reading.

Repeated Readings

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), **repeated readings** increase reading fluency. Rasinski (2003) informs us that, "Oral repeated readings provide additional sensory reinforcement for the reader, allowing him or her to focus on the prosodic elements of reading that are essential to phrasing. Oral readings also ensure that the student is actually reading, not skimming or scanning the text" (p. 31). Repeated readings, as defined in earlier chapters, involve simply having a child reading a short passage from a book, magazine, or newspaper more than once with differing amounts of support. Reading poetry is a natural way to develop fluency. Children of all ages enjoy and respond to the rhythm of poetry, and it can be incorporated easily into the classroom routine (Perfect, 1999). In order to read or share a poem for the class, students need to practice the poem using repeated reading, thus developing reading fluency. Samuels (1979) proposes the method of repeated readings as a strategy to develop rapid, fluent oral reading. Here are several steps Samuels suggests when using the method of repeated readings:

1. Students choose short selections (50 to 200 words) from stories that are difficult enough that students are not able to read them fluently.
2. Students read the passage several times silently until they are able to read it fluently.
3. The teacher can involve students in a discussion of how athletes develop athletic skills by spending considerable time practicing basic movements until they develop speed and smoothness. Repeated reading uses the same type of practice.
4. Samuels suggests that students tape-record their first oral rendition of the passage as well as their oral rendition after practice so that they can hear the difference in fluency.

Lauritzen (1982) proposes modifications to the repeated-reading method that make the method easier to use with groups of children. Mrs. Leonardo, a first-grade teacher,

used the repeated-reading method in this way. She began by reading aloud to her students and discussing what happened in *Love You Forever*, a predictable text written by Robert Munsch (1989) and illustrated by Sheila McGraw. It begins:

A mother held her new baby and very slowly rocked him back and forth, back and forth.
And while she held him, she sang:

I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living my baby you'll be. . . .

However, when the baby grew and pulled all the food out of the refrigerator and took his mother's watch and flushed it down the toilet, sometimes his mother would say, "This child is driving me crazy!"

But at night, while she rocked him, she sang:

I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living my baby you'll be.

After this initial reading by the teacher, Mrs. Leonardo read it with the children in choral reading fashion. She and individual children next took turns reading parts of the passage, with the children reading the refrain with repetitive language: "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, / As long as I'm living my baby you'll be." Then Mrs. Leonardo asked the children how they thought the mother felt when she was rocking her son at night and how they could read the refrain to show that feeling. She also asked how the mother felt when she said, "This child is driving me crazy!" and how she showed this with her voice.

Finally, each child chose a passage in the book and read the passage silently and then several times orally to a partner. Some of the children also read along while listening to a tape-recorded version of the story. These activities were continued until each child was able to read the passage with accuracy and fluency.

Studies on repeated readings have fallen into two categories: *assisted* repeated readings, in which students read along with a live or taped model of the passage, and *unassisted* repeated readings, in which the child engages in independent practice (Dowhower, 1989). In both assisted and unassisted repeated readings, students reread a meaningful passage until oral production is accurate and smooth and resembles spoken language. Notice that Mrs. Leonardo used both assisted and unassisted readings to develop reading fluency, beginning initially with assisted reading. First she read the passage and the students listened and discussed the story. Then she gradually assisted students less as they continued to reread the story.

When teachers discuss the repeated-reading strategy, they frequently ask, "Don't students find repeated readings of the same story boring?" To the contrary, teachers who have used repeated readings find that young children actually delight in using the strategy. Children plead to have their favorite bedtime story read again and again. In the same vein, they get very involved in practicing a story with the goal of reading it accurately and fluently and are eager to share their story with parents and classmates.

Paired Repeated Readings

In paired repeated readings, students select their own passage from the material with which they are currently working. The passage should be about 50 words in length. Students, grouped in pairs, should each select different passages, which makes listening more

interesting and discourages direct comparison of reading proficiency. The material should be predictable and at a level where mastery is possible.

When working together, the students read their own passage silently and then decide who will be the first reader. The first reader then reads his or her passage out loud to a partner three different times. Readers may ask their partner for help with a word. After each oral reading, the reader evaluates his or her reading. A self-evaluation sheet might ask the reader, “How well did you read today?” Responses to be checked might range from fantastic, to good, to fair, to not so good. The partner listens and tells the reader how much improvement was made after each rendition of the reading; such as if the reader knew more words and read with more expression during the final reading. A listening chart can be used to help a student evaluate a partner’s reading (see Figure 7.2). The partners then switch roles.

PEER TUTORING ● Another way to organize fluency practice is to use a **paired reading** strategy with peer tutoring. This is a particularly useful strategy in second and third grade, where differences between the most fluent and the least fluent readers become evident.

Topping (1989) noted that the collaborative work of children in pairs has enormous potential, but teachers must be able to organize and monitor this activity carefully. He advocated structured pair work between children of differing ability in which a more able child (tutor) helps a less able child (tutee) in a cooperative learning environment.

Teachers often recognize the value of extra reading practice in a paired reading situation for less able children but sometimes express concern about the worth of the activity for more able students. Research reviews on the effectiveness of peer tutoring with paired reading have shown that the more able reader accelerates in reading skill at least as much as the less able reader (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1981).

For growth in fluent reading to be maximized, the teacher needs to pair students carefully. One way to do this is to match the most able tutor with the most able tutee. This procedure seems to aid in matching students with an appropriate *relative competence* to each other, which maximizes the success of using this technique. As in any collaborative learning group, do not group best friends or worst enemies. You also need to consider how to handle absences.

Here’s a general plan for paired reading with peer tutoring. The tutee chooses a book that has been read to the children or used in direct instruction. The book needs to be within the tutor’s readability level (i.e., 95 to 98 percent accuracy level). The tutor and the tutee discuss the book initially and throughout the reading. They read together aloud at the tutee’s pace. If the tutee happens to make a word error, the tutor says the word correctly. The pair continues reading together. When the tutee wants to read alone, he or

FIGURE 7.2

A Listening Chart

Reading 3

How did your partner’s reading get better?

He or she read more smoothly.

He or she knew more words.

He or she read with more expression.

Tell your partner one thing that was better about his or her reading.



Paired reading is a useful strategy for developing reading fluency.

she signals nonverbally—for instance, with a tap on the knee. The tutor praises the tutee for signaling, then is silent and the tutee reads alone. The tutor resumes reading when requested by the tutee. If the tutee makes an error or does not respond in 5 seconds, they use the correction procedure just described, and then the pair continues to read together. At the conclusion, the pair discusses the story based on questions developed by the tutor before the session.

This procedure allows tutees to be supported through the text with higher readability levels than they would attain by themselves. The text level also ensures stimulation and participation for the tutor, who promotes discussion and questioning on the content of the text.

PARENTS AND PAIRED READING ● The subject of reading is often perceived by parents as too complicated for them to teach to their children. All too often, attempts at “teaching” word attack skills end in frustration for both child and parents. Paired reading offers the possibility of making parental involvement in the reading growth of their children easy, effective, and enjoyable (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1991). Several years ago, teachers in the Akron, Ohio, public schools decided to emphasize at parent meetings that paired reading is easy to learn and do, works with all ages of children using texts from books to newspapers, takes only a few minutes a day, and is proven to improve reading fluency. After reading teachers were introduced to paired reading, Title I parents were asked to participate in paired reading with their children for 5 minutes each day. Many did and, at the end of the school year, a mother of a Title I child reported, “At first I thought this was silly and that it couldn’t make much difference in Katie’s reading. Then I saw the improvement myself. We both had fun together, and she was reading. I now believe in the program and really enjoy it” (p. 515).

Sylvia, a whole language teacher in a mixed class of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade inner-city students, has developed a home reading program that includes activities such as paired reading (Vacca & Rasinski, 1992). The children may take home classroom

books that have been coded (one dot for “easy”). Their parents are “expected to read to or with their children or listen to their children read” (p. 83). Parents reading daily with children can be most effective.

Automated Reading

Technology



Standard 2.2

Another practice that supports children as they increase oral reading fluency is **automated reading**, or listening while reading a text. An automated reading program employs simultaneous listening and reading (SLR), a procedure suggested by Carol Chomsky (1976). In the SLR procedure, a child reads along with a tape recorder. In addition to audiotapes, SLR can be done with digital text stories and stories on CD-ROM. The steps in SLR are as follows:

1. Students listen individually to tape-recorded stories, simultaneously following along with the written text. They read and listen repeatedly to the same story until they can read the story fluently.
2. Students choose the book or a portion of the book in which they want to work. When they are making their selections, the teacher explains that they will continue listening to the same story until they are able to read it fluently by themselves. Students need to choose a book that is too hard to read right away but not out of range entirely.
3. Students are to listen to their books every day, using earphones and following along in the text as they listen. They need to listen to the entire story through at least once; then they can go back and repeat any part they choose to prepare more carefully. They can also record themselves as they read along with the tape or tape-record themselves as they read aloud independently.
4. Every 3 or 4 days, the teacher listens to the students read orally as much as they have prepared. Students are encouraged to evaluate themselves on how fluently they read the selection they have prepared.

Sometimes it takes students a while to get accustomed to working with tape recorders, and at the beginning they can keep losing their place in the book. It takes practice to coordinate their eyes and ears in following along with the text. Once students become familiar with a story, keeping their place is not a problem.

Chomsky (1976) reported that when students first begin using this method, it may take as long as a month before they are able to read a fairly long story aloud fluently. As they become more proficient with SLR, the time can be reduced by as much as half.

When students are able to read the story fluently without the aid of the tape, they need to be given opportunities to read the story to their parents, the principal, or fellow students. Students using this strategy could not present the story without having a book to follow, so they have not really memorized the book. However, a combination of memorization and reading enables students to have an experience of successful, effective, fluent reading.

These techniques are effective with students of all ages, including those in middle school. The Viewpoint in Box 7.1 gives an inside look at how an adult learned to read at age 30.

Several schools in Madison, Wisconsin, have used SLR in an automated reading program (Dowhower, 1989). Children were sent to the library to choose a book, accompanied by an audiotape, that was not too easy or too hard for them to read. The criteria for selecting tapes for the automated reading program included high interest, appropriate pacing, language patterns, clear page-turning cues, and lack of cultural biases. To monitor the

Middle Grades



Standard 2.2

VIEWPOINT

Craig's Story

Craig learned to read at the age of 30. With the help of friends, he began using the repeated reading and simultaneous listening and reading strategies to read texts that were meaningful to him. In a quite natural way, Craig joined the community of readers after being painfully aware of not being able to read for many years. Here's his story.

Because I did not learn to read, elementary school was quite rough. I felt out of place—like I was in a foreign country. For one thing, there was so much competing. The teachers gave out stars, A's, and sparkles for the best readers, but I didn't learn to read. We had those desks that one pulls up to open. Well, I would steal some stars and A's and put them in my desk because I couldn't win one. I was told I was "slow," so I came to believe I wasn't smart. I excelled in art and mechanical drawing. And in high school I learned to type. Also, most things I heard I could remember.

I would sweat when I was asked to read aloud. Someone would tell me a word and then the next paragraph I couldn't remember it. Consonants and vowels made no sense to me. I am just starting to understand about nouns and action words. Words like *though*, *through*, and *thought* all looked the same to me. Once in third grade I covered my paper with my hands and the teacher hit me severely. I couldn't stand up and read because people would laugh, so I wouldn't go to school. I remember not going to school, just walking around. I remember leaving by the fire escape.

I remember being with my friends on a cloudy day. We walked by a store. They could read the name of the store, but I couldn't.

In elementary school and junior high I would listen because the stories were so interesting to me. One story that brought tears to my eyes was *Flowers for Algernon*. It is about Charley, who had about a 70 IQ and was put into an experiment that made him smart. At the beginning of the story Charley was just like me—stupid, dumb, couldn't read. He talked like me. I wished and dreamed that a drug like that would work on me. A teacher read *Flowers for Algernon* over and over to me.

The *Big Book*, the book of Alcoholics Anonymous, says, "No man likes to think he is mentally and physically different from his fellow man." I definitely felt different! By high school I read about second-grade level and was resentful and rebellious. I couldn't be a nerd or a jock, so I

was a rebellious person. I felt inferior—I had an ego complex. I couldn't get a job because I couldn't fill out an application. I created a street hustle. I was on the other side of the law for about 10 years. I ran with a certain gang who experimented with alcohol and drugs. All through this scenario I feared what people thought of me; I had no way to fit in. I was an actor who watched what "normal" people did. For example, I would get a newspaper because other people did. No one knew I didn't know how to read.

As an adult, I moved to a place where people were less rebellious and were willing to help me. They found out I couldn't read. People began reading the *Big Book* to me, and I could interpret to them what they read. They perceived me as smart. Someone gave me a tape recorder and brought me books on tape. They read pamphlets into a tape recorder and I would listen to them. I would listen to the same pamphlet over and over. Even when I wasn't reading, I would play the tape recorder. I could repeat what many of the pamphlets said. The first book I read through was *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach. I had to read it over and over because I got stuck on words. The next was *Illusions*, also by Richard Bach. Then I read *Joshua* by Joseph Girzone and *The Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox. I read *Tao Te Poo*. Then I began reading all kinds of stuff. *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, *Zen Beginner's Mind* by Suzuki Roshi. I got an audiotape of *Sidhartha* by Hermann Hesse. I listened to the same book over and over. I read these books fast. More recently I have read the commentary of the *Tao Te Ching* many times as well as the *Tao Te Ching* itself.

It is still difficult for me to take words apart, but I can remember words. Spelling is difficult. Sometimes I can see words in my mind. When I put it on paper, it usually doesn't come out right.

A teacher, a poet, and someone I called a "cowboy" helped me by putting books on tape. I could listen and follow and then read. They were friendly and made me feel comfortable. So I no longer feel like an outsider.

difficulty level of books chosen, each child took a test by reading a list of 20 words from the story. If the child knew more than 15 words, the book was probably too easy; if 8 or fewer words, the book may have been too hard. Another way to monitor book difficulty level is for the child to read a short section orally, with a teacher, librarian, or aide keeping a running record of miscues made. Dowhower (1989) indicated that on the first reading a child should read with 85 percent accuracy or better before starting to practice; otherwise, the text is too hard.

Once a book was selected, the child then read along with the audiotape several times daily until the story could be read smoothly and expressively. When children were ready, they read the entire book (or several pages, if the book is very long) to an adult.

To provide further fluency practice, the SLR strategy can be used with computer software. Some “talking books” read the text to the child, allowing the child to slow down and speed up the reading speed, to click on text to have it reread, to click on a word to be given help, and to click on an illustration to learn additional information or activate animation.

The use of the tape recorder and automated reading has great promise for independent practice for English language learners (ELL). Koskinen and his colleagues (1999) reported that most ELL students reported that they practiced almost daily reading with the books and tapes, and that the least proficient ELL readers were most likely to use the prerecorded materials to practice and improve their reading at home.

The SLR strategy as used in automated reading is a useful way for students to develop fluency through practice reading. It is important, however, that students be involved in experiences in which expressive oral reading is modeled and texts are discussed, in addition to having the opportunities for practice that SLR provides. With this word of caution, we turn next to two performance strategies that actively engage students in fluent and accurate oral reading.



Choral Reading

Telling students to read with expression is not enough for many developing readers. Rather, many children need to listen to mature readers read with expression and interpret and practice different ways of orally reading selections. **Choral reading** is an enjoyable way to engage children in listening and responding to the prosodic features in oral language in order to read with expression. In essence, through the use of choral reading techniques, students consider ways to get across the author’s meaning using prosodic cues such as pitch, loudness, stress, and pauses. For English language learners, choral reading provides practice in a nonthreatening atmosphere, allowing them to build meaning from text and learn more about language.

Choral reading is defined as the oral reading of poetry that makes use of various voice combinations and contrasts to create meaning or to highlight the tonal qualities of the passage. Primary children enjoy choral reading combined with puppetry. For example, with the cumulative story *An Invitation to the Butterfly Ball* by Jane Yolen, children can use paper bag puppets representing ten different kinds of animals invited to a dance by a tiny elf. The story begins, “One little mouse in great distress looks all around for a floor-length dress,” and adds two moles, three rabbits, and so on, up to ten porcupines (Walley, 1993).

In preparing for a choral reading of a text, the teacher models one way the selection can be read while the children listen. Then students identify how the teacher read the passage. Were parts read loudly or softly? What was the tempo? Did the teacher emphasize particular syllables? Was his or her voice pitched higher or lower in different parts of the passage? Students are then invited to try different ways of reading or interpreting a part,





Choral reading can increase fluency, and children enjoy the opportunity to read and reread texts.

and they may want to respond to the mood or feeling that each interpretation imparts (Cooper & Gray, 1984).

Choral reading increases reading fluency (Bradley & Talgott, 1987; Chomsky, 1976; Dowhower, 1987; Samuels, 1979; Schreiber, 1980). In addition, it provides a legitimate, fun way for children to practice and reread a text that leads to a decreased number of oral reading miscues (Herman, 1985).

There are different types of choral reading: refrain, line by line, dialogue, and unison. Each type works well with different kinds of selections.

For example, Mrs. Leonardo used the refrain type of choral reading with *Love You Forever*; that is, she read the stanzas and the children chimed in on the refrain. The refrain is the easiest type of choral reading to model and learn.

Mrs. Leonardo used the line by line type of choral reading with “Five Little Chickens,” an old jingle from *Sounds of a Powwow* by Bill Martin and Peggy Brogan (1970):

Said the first little chicken with a queer little squirm,
I wish I could find a fat little worm.
Said the second little chicken with a queer little shrug,
I wish I could find a fat little bug. . . .

After the five little chickens have spoken:

Said the old mother hen from the green garden-patch,
If you want any breakfast, just come here and scratch!

She had the whole group read the lines that began with *said* and individual children read what the little chickens and the mother hen said. The line by line format can be easily

used on selections in which different characters have lines to speak. When using this type of choral reading, children learn that listening for one's cue is essential or the choral reading breaks down.

Mrs. Leonardo's children giggled when she read to them "The Deaf Woman's Courtship."

Old woman, old woman, will you do my washing?
 Speak a little louder, sir; I'm rather hard of hearing.
 Old woman, old woman, will you do my ironing?
 Speak a little louder, sir; I'm rather hard of hearing.
 Old woman, old woman, can I come a-courting?
 Speak a little louder, sir; I think I almost heard you.
 Old woman, old woman, marry me tomorrow.

GOODNESS GRACIOUS MERCY SAKES! NOW I REALLY HEARD YOU!

Then the class discussed and practiced a dialogue type of choral reading with the boys reading the male part and the girls reading the old woman's responses. This selection was also useful for discussing with the children when to use soft and loud voices and when to pitch their voices high or low.

A fourth type of choral reading is reading in unison, which is often used by teachers who work on oral reading fluency. Yet from a choral reading perspective, this is the most difficult because the entire group speaks all the lines and responds to the prosodic cues simultaneously. Timing, parallel inflections, and consistent voice quality are of prime importance; otherwise, there is a singsong effect. This points to the need for the teacher to model how to read a selection with expression and to discuss how to use stress, pitch, intonation, and loudness when reading in unison. Otherwise, students may get the idea that oral reading should be done in a singsong fashion.

Readers' Theater

Another way to involve children of all ages in orally reading literature to other children is through **readers' theater**. McCaslin (1990) defines readers' theater as the oral presentation of drama, prose, or poetry by two or more readers. Readers' theater differs from orally reading a selection in that several readers take the parts of the characters in the story or play. Instead of memorizing or improvising their parts as in other types of theater productions, the players read them. Because the emphasis is on what the audience *hears* rather than sees, selection of the literature is very important. Readers' theater scripts generally contain a great deal of dialogue and are often adapted from literature. Researchers have found that the use of readers' theater significantly improves reading fluency (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999). An example of a readers' theater script is illustrated in Figure 7.3. Be sure to include stories that reflect culturally and linguistically diverse characters.

During a readers' theater program, the members of the audience use their imagination to visualize what is going on, because movement and action are limited. Although there is no one correct arrangement of the cast in presenting readers' theater, an effective procedure is to have the student readers stand in a line facing away from the audience and then turn toward the audience when they read their part.

In preparing for readers' theater, students read the selection silently, then choose parts and read the selection orally. Students need to practice reading expressively. Props and scenery may be used but should be kept simple. As with oral reading of literature, giving an introduction and setting the mood before the presentation are important.



FIGURE 7.3

**A Readers' Theater
Script: "Casey at the
Bat"**



Reading Level: Grades 4 and Up

Characters (8+)

Fans 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

C: Casey

U: Umpire (Pitcher, Flynn, Blake)

- 1: It looked extremely rocky for the Mudville nine that day.
 6: The score was two to four with but one inning left to play.
 2: So, when Cooney died at second, and Burrows did the same, A pallor wreathed the features of the patrons of the game.
- 5: A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest With that hope that springs eternal from within the human breast.
 3: For they thought, if only *Casey* could get a whack at that,
 4: They'd put up even money *now*, with *Casey* at the bat.
- 1: But Flynn preceded Casey,
 6: and likewise so did Blake,
 2: And the former was a pudding,
 5: and the latter was a fake.
 3: So, on that stricken multitude a death-like silence sat,
 4: For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.
- 1: But Flynn let go a single to the wonderment of all,
 6: And the much despised Blakey tore the cover off the ball.
 2: So, when the dust had settled
 5: and they saw what had occurred,
 3: There was Blakey safe at second,
 4: and Flynn a-hugging third.
- 1: Then from that gladdened multitude went up a joyous yell.
 6: It bounded from the mountain top and rattled in the dell.
 2: It struck upon the hillside and rebounded on the flat—
 5: For Casey,
 3: mighty Casey,
 4: was advancing to the bat.
- 1: There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place.
 6: There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face.
 2: And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
 No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.
- 5: Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt.
 3: Five thousand tongues applauded as he wiped them on his shirt.
 4: And when the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
 Defiance glanced from Casey's eyes, a sneer curled Casey's lip.
- 1: And now the leather-covered sphere came hurling through the air,
 6: And Casey stood a-watching it
 2: in haughty grandeur there.
 5: Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped.
 C: "That ain't my style,"
 3: said Casey.
 U: "Strike one!"
 4: the umpire said.

(continued)

After students have presented several readers' theaters using teacher-made or commercially prepared scripts, students can write their own scripts, either adapting literature they enjoy or using stories they have written. Here's how to guide students to develop their own scripts: Once children have read a story, they transform it into a script through social negotiation. The writing of a story into a script requires much rereading as well as knowledge and interpretation of the text. Once the script is written, the children formulate, practice, and refine their interpretations. Finally, the readers' theater is presented to an audience from handheld scripts (Shanklin & Rhodes, 1989).

Choral reading and readers' theater motivate children to read the same material repeatedly to increase fluency. Many children will rehearse a part enthusiastically to present it to an audience.

Routines for Fluency Development

Next we will examine four fluency routines: the **fluency development lesson** (Box 7.2), the **oral recitation lesson** (Box 7.3), the **support reading strategy** (Box 7.4), and **cross-age reading** (Box 7.5). Each emphasizes specific aspects of fluency training

Standard 2.2

Step-by-Step Lesson

BOX 7.2

The Fluency Development Lesson

The fluency development lesson (FDL) was devised for primary teachers to help students increase reading fluency (Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994). The FDL takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Each child has a copy of passages from 50 to 150 words.

Steps in the Fluency Development Lesson

1. Read the text to the class while students follow along silently with their own copies. This step can be repeated several times.
2. Discuss the content of the text as well as the expression the teacher used while reading to the class.
3. Together, read the text chorally several times. For variety, the students can read in antiphonal and echo styles.
4. Have the class practice reading the text in pairs. Each student takes a turn reading the text to a partner three times. The partner follows along with the text, provides help when needed, and gives positive feedback.

5. Working with the entire class, have volunteers perform the text. Individuals, pairs, and groups of four perform for the class. Arrangements can be made for students to read to the principal, the secretary, the custodian, or other teachers and classes. Students should also read the text to their parents. In this way, students are given much praise for their efforts.

Rasinski and colleagues (1994) worked with primary grade teachers in implementing FDL three to four times a week from October to June. The children in these classes experienced greater improvement in overall reading achievement, word recognition, and fluency than a comparable group of children who received a more traditional type of supplemental instruction using the same passages. The greatest gains were made by the children who were the poorest readers at the beginning of the year.

Source: Based on "Effects of Fluency Development on Urban Second Grade Readers," by T. V. Rasinski, N. D. Padak, N. L. Linek, and E. Sturtevant, 1994, *Journal of Educational Research*, 87, pp. 158–165.

The Oral Recitation Lesson

The oral recitation lesson (ORL) also provides a useful structure for working on fluency in daily reading instruction (Hoffman, 1985). ORL has two components: *direct instruction* and *student practice*.

Steps in the Oral Recitation Lesson

DIRECT INSTRUCTION COMPONENT

1. Model fluency by reading a story to the class.
2. Lead a discussion of the story, and ask students to summarize what happened. (As a variation, the children can predict what will happen as the story unfolds. Hoffman emphasizes that predictable stories should be used in the ORL.)
3. Talk with students about what expressive oral reading is like—that it is smooth, not exceedingly slow, and that it demonstrates an awareness of what punctuation marks signal.
4. Have students read in chorus and individually, beginning with small text segments and gradually increasing the length of the segment. (We suggest that choral reading techniques be used. This can show students how prosodic cues facilitate meaning for listeners.)

5. Choose individual students to select and orally read a portion of the text for their classmates. Other class members provide positive feedback to students on the aspects of expressive oral reading discussed.

STUDENT PRACTICE COMPONENT

Students practice orally reading the same text used in the direct instruction component. The goal is to achieve oral reading fluency. Hoffman suggests that second graders should reach the goal of reading 75 words a minute with 98 percent accuracy before moving to another story. This component takes from 10 to 15 minutes, with students doing soft or whisper reading. The teacher checks on individual mastery and maintains records of students' performance on individual stories.

Pairs of students:

1. Read a personally selected portion of the selection silently.
2. Read to a partner three times.
3. Self-evaluate each repetition.
4. Evaluate improvement in smoothness, word accuracy, and expression.

Source: Based on "The Oral Recitation Lesson: A Teacher's Guide," by J. V. Hoffman (Austin, TX: Academic Resource Consultants, 1985).

Research-Based Best Practices

The Support Reading Strategy

The support reading strategy was designed to integrate several aspects of fluency growth into traditional basal instruction over a 3-day period. Morris and Nelson (1992) used this strategy in a second-grade classroom with low-achieving students who had made little progress in the preceding 11 months and thus were at the initial stages of reading development. Their reading achievement increased substantially after 6 months of the support reading strategy.

The first day, the teacher reads a story to a small group of children in a fluent, expressive voice. Throughout the reading, the teacher stops and asks the children to clarify what is happening in the story and then to predict what will happen next. The teacher and children echo-read the story, with the students reading their own

books. The teacher monitors each child's reading and provides assistance where needed.

The next day, the teacher pairs the readers, and the pairs reread the story; each reader reads alternating pages. Each pair is then assigned a short segment from the story to practice reading orally with fluency.

The third day, while the class is working individually or in small groups on writing or other tasks, individual children read the story to the teacher. The teacher monitors the reading by taking a running record, a procedure for monitoring word recognition strategies (see Chapter 6).

Source: Based on "Supported Oral Reading with Low-Achieving Second Graders," by D. Morris and L. Nelson, 1992, *Reading Research and Instruction*, 31, pp. 49–63.

Cross-Age Reading

Labbo and Teale (1990) claimed that a significant problem with many struggling readers in middle school is a lack of fluency. Cross-age



reading provides these readers with a lesson cycle that includes modeling by the teacher, discussing the text, and allowing for opportunities to practice fluency.

Cross-age reading also provides middle school youngsters with a legitimate reason for practicing for an oral reading performance. In short, cross-age reading seems to be a powerful way to provide middle school students with purposeful activities to develop reading fluency, as well as to provide younger students with valuable literary experiences.

The cross-age reading program described by Labbo and Teale (1990) has four phases: preparation, prereading collaboration, reading to kindergartners, and postreading collaboration.

Phase 1

In the preparation phase, the older students are helped by their teacher to prepare for a storybook-sharing session in three specific ways. First, the teacher helps select appropriate books. Students can be guided to select books they personally like, that have elements in the story that the kindergarten students can identify with, and that have illustrations that complement the story.

Second, the teacher helps the students prepare by having them engage in repeated readings of the text. Students may be paired with partners who can give each other positive feedback concerning growth in fluency and expressiveness of oral reading. Students should also rehearse on their own to gain control over and confidence with a story.

Third, as part of preparation, the teacher helps the students to decide how their books will be introduced, where to stop in their books to discuss the story, and what questions to ask to ensure the kindergartner's involvement in the story.

Phase 2

The purpose of the *prereading collaboration* phase is to ensure that the students are ready to share their books orally. In a 15- to 20-minute session a few days before the actual reading to the kindergartners, the older students set personal goals concerning their reading, report on and try out their ideas for involving the

kindergartners, and receive and give feedback in a positive, supportive environment.

Phase 3

Once the readers are prepared, they are ready for *reading to kindergartners*. They go as a group with the teacher to the kindergarten classroom and read their prepared story to small groups of youngsters. This activity generally generates enthusiasm among both readers and kindergartners.

Phase 4

The *postreading collaboration* phase is an opportunity for the students to share and reflect on the quality of the storybook reading interactions. The reflective nature of these postreading discussions can also help students develop strategies to improve subsequent readings.

In an urban district in Texas, fourth graders regularly read to kindergartners and first graders in a cross-age reading program. But soon after the program began, the fourth-grade teachers realized they were not able to provide sufficient support to help their students read fluently and lead the younger children through a directed listening-thinking activity. Some children needed more encouragement to practice the book enough to become fluent themselves—particularly as teachers expected the fourth graders to be able to ask the younger children for predictions about a reading as well as answers to simple comprehension questions. To help solve the problem, fourth-grade teachers enlisted the aid of high school students. Soon the fourth graders were paired with high school buddies. Once a week, each pair met to practice fluency and to prepare ways to engage the kindergartners and first graders in making predictions at different junctures in the story.

Cross-age reading has expanded to involve having the middle school children write stories for the younger children to read and then to write stories with the younger children (Leland & Fitzpatrick, 1994). Cross-age reading and writing programs often also have both the older and younger students read the stories to their parents or some other caring adult (Fox & Wright, 1997; Leland & Fitzpatrick, 1994).

Source: Based on "Cross-Age Reading: A Strategy for Helping Poor Readers," by L. Labbo and W. Teale, 1990, *The Reading Teacher*, 43, pp. 362-369.

and integrates the teaching of fluency with teaching other important aspects of reading such as comprehension and word recognition.

Routines such as the fluency development lesson, the oral recitation lesson, the support reading strategy, and cross-age reading are best practices that need to be included in the teaching of reading. Not only do they provide systematic fluency instruction and practice, but they also focus on comprehension.

Next the focus shifts to informal ways to assess and monitor fluency development. How does a teacher know if students are developing fluency? There are no formal tests to measure automaticity in reading.

Monitoring Oral Reading Fluency

Standard 3.1

There are several ways to monitor a reader's levels of fluency. One way to include children in the monitoring of fluency and to build awareness of fluency is to have paired readers use a checklist like the one in Figure 7.2. However, the quickest and perhaps the most effective way to monitor a reader's fluency is simply to listen to the child read orally. By listening to phrasing, rate, and expression, teachers informally monitor which students are not fluent readers. Particularly for students who read word by word, teachers may also use a simple fluency rating scale, as shown in Figure 7.4. Because the text difficulty level often affects fluency, note the selection on which the student's fluency is rated. As you work with children using these fluency-building strategies, periodically rate their oral reading.

The rate at which one reads is related to fluency. Poor fluency is characterized by slow, word-by-word reading. Thus calculating a reading rate offers an approach to monitoring fluency for teachers who desire a more quantitative approach. Rasinski and Padak (2000) suggest the fluency-monitoring procedure in Figure 7.5.

There is another simple, informal procedure a teacher can use to check students' ability to read fluently. First, the student reads orally from a passage that he or she has not previewed or practiced. After reading, the student retells everything that he or she

FIGURE 7.4

Rating Fluency

As a child reads, listen and decide which of the descriptions below best describes his or her general fluency during reading. Chart fluency each time a child reads. In the process, you may want to take notes about what seems to influence the child's reading performance.

Rating

- Poor: Reads primarily word by word
- Fair: Reads primarily in phrases with little intonation; ignores some punctuation
- Good: Reads fluently with expression

Standard 3.2

Source: Adapted from *Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write*, 2nd ed., by P. M. Cunningham and R. L. Allington, p. 49. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 1999 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

FIGURE 7.5

Monitoring Fluency by Calculating Reading Rates

Ask the reader to read the text in a normal manner as you time the reading. The text should be at or slightly below the level the student can read and understand with little difficulty. Keep track of when the reader has read for 1 minute. Then count the number of words read. This is the reader's rate per minute. You need several 60-second samples before you can calculate an average rating. Compare the reader's oral reading rate against the following second-semester grade-level estimates:

- Grade 1: 80 words per minute
- Grade 2: 90 words per minute
- Grade 3: 110 words per minute
- Grade 4: 140 words per minute
- Grade 5: 160 words per minute
- Grade 6: 180 words per minute

Readers who read at a rate that is consistently and substantially below the appropriate grade-level reading rate need assistance in developing reading fluency.

Source: Adapted from *Effective Reading Strategies: Teaching Children Who Find Reading Difficult*, 2nd ed., by T. Rasinski and N. Padak (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2000), p. 105.

remembers about the passage. The teacher can follow up with questions that probe comprehension if the child does not provide enough information.

This informal test gives the teacher two indications of automaticity. First, does the child read with few hesitations and with expression? Lack of expression is an indicator of a disfluent reader. The second indicator is the quality of the child's retelling of the story or the ability to answer questions about it. If the child can read orally and comprehend the text at the same time, as these task conditions demand, the decoding had to be automatic (Samuels, 1988).

In addition to developing oral reading fluency, students need time in class to develop fluency in silent reading, in which comprehension is the sole reason for reading. Next we concern ourselves with the silent reading program.

Developing Silent Reading Fluency

At the beginning of this chapter, we defined fluent reading as reading easily and well with a sense of confidence and knowledge of what to do when things go wrong. Fluent readers are seasoned readers, just as some individuals are considered to be seasoned runners. A seasoned runner has knowledge of what it is like to run for long periods of time. Although seasoned runners have developed patterns of running, they choose when, where, and how far to run. They have gained much knowledge about themselves, how to assess how they feel so they do not run too far (or they run far enough), and what they can do to

protect themselves from a running injury. Self-knowledge contributes to self-confidence as a runner. In short, seasoned runners have *metacognition* for running—they know about the task of running, about themselves as runners, and how to monitor themselves during running.

Standard 1.4

Fluent readers are seasoned readers in that they are able to sustain reading for longer periods. They know that productive silent reading means accomplishing as much silent reading as possible during a period of time. They know that to do this they must keep their mind on the ideas being expressed, responding to high-potency words and sentences and giving less attention to ideas of lesser importance. Although there are distinct patterns in their reading, they choose daily what they are going to read, for what purposes, and how long they need to read to suit those purposes. They know that on some days and with some reading materials, they probably won't be able to concentrate as well as on other days or with other materials.

Similar to seasoned runners, fluent readers develop a metacognition for reading. They know about the task of reading, about themselves as readers, and how to self-monitor their reading. Fluent readers perceive themselves as able readers. They engage in a reading task with confidence that they will succeed.

Fluent readers grow in leaps and bounds from silent reading experiences. A *sustained silent reading* program, in which children read materials they choose themselves, is extremely important to the development of reading fluency and is an important component of a comprehensive literacy program.

Sustained Silent Reading

As explained by Hunt (1970), **sustained silent reading (SSR)** is a structured activity in which students are given fixed time periods for reading self-selected materials silently. SSR is often creatively coined: *SQUIRT* (sustained quiet un-interrupted reading time), *DEAR* (drop everything and read), or *DIRT* (daily individualized reading time). Whatever the acronym, the intention is to provide the students with time to read books of their choice.

Standard 4.1

One of the basic guidelines of SSR is that students should be allowed to select his or her own book to read during the set aside time. Most teachers give students the freedom to choose a book that they think they'll enjoy. However, some teachers have students select from a predetermined reading list or a bin of books color coded to indicate reading level. "Silent" means different things to different teachers, too. Some teachers require complete silence, while others allow children to share quietly with a friend or partner up for paired reading.

A major reason why a structured reading activity such as SSR is so important is that despite teacher encouragement, many students do not choose to read on their own. SSR provides for all students the kind of reading experience in school that avid readers get on their own—the chance to read whatever they want to read without being required to answer questions or read orally. In other words, reading for the sake of reading should not be reserved for only the good readers.

Standard 4.4

The overall goals of SSR are (1) to produce students who choose reading *over other activities* and (2) to encourage students to read *self-selected material voluntarily* for information or pleasure. Today there is growing evidence that these goals are being met. Readence, Bean, & Baldwin (2004), report that SSR influences fluency and students' attitudes toward reading. Gardiner (2001) conducted research in English classes over a 20-year period in order to gauge the impact of SSR on high school students' achieve-

ment. He found that students who were engaged in repeated SSR earned higher grades and were more likely to read for pleasure outside of school. Likewise, international assessments of literacy development show that higher-achieving students are more likely to have positive attitudes toward reading (Shiel & Cosgrove, 2002). These students also check out more library books and engage in pleasure reading outside of school.

Even the most reluctant reader is motivated to read when a structured period of silent reading is provided Gambrell (1996). Levine (1984) found that special education high school students who read 6 to 8 years below grade level became engrossed in reading during SSR. In fact, children who say they do not like to read and who disrupt classes will read during SSR.

Learning to read independently is a major benefit. Without SSR some students may never obtain independence and self-direction in reading and in choosing what they would like to read. Students will read if they are given time to read, if they are permitted to choose their own reading selections, and if what they read does not have to be discussed, labeled, or repeated back to the teacher.

McCracken and McCracken (1978), who have contributed much to the concept of SSR, identified seven positive messages about reading that children learn by participating in SSR.

1. *Reading books is important.* Children develop a sense of what the teacher values by noting what the teacher chooses to have them do. Children who spend most of their time completing worksheets will perceive of this work as important. Children who read only basal-reader-length stories will perceive of reading stories five to ten pages in length as important. If teachers want their students to choose to read fully developed pieces of literature, they must provide time for children to read such materials.
2. *Reading is something anyone can do.* Because no one watches them, poor readers can make mistakes without worrying. Able readers are “relieved they do not have to prove that they are bright every time they read something” (McCracken, 1971, p. 582). When one is allowed to choose one’s own material and read at one’s own rate, reading is something *everyone* can do.
3. *Reading is communicating with an author.* Reading is often perceived by students as communicating with a teacher if it is done only in situations in which short snatches of material are read with reactions then elicited by the teacher. One of the most exciting reactions to SSR we have observed in students is their individual responses to an author’s message.
4. *Children are capable of sustained thought.* Many teachers are concerned that students “have short attention spans” and that they “don’t stick to a task for very long.” Students, however, have relatively little trouble sustaining their reading for long periods of SSR. They actually look forward to the extended peacefulness.
5. *Books are meant to be read in large sections.* If basal reading is the main way students participate in reading, they often get the notion that reading involves reading three- to ten-page segments, not whole selections of literature. In SSR, students get to read larger chunks of material.
6. *Teachers believe that pupils are comprehending.* It is neither possible nor desirable for teachers to know what each student has learned and felt about every story or book read. Students take something away from every reading experience. One way teachers can show students they trust them to learn from reading is not to question them about what they read during SSR.

7. *The teacher trusts the children to decide when something is well written.* When SSR programs are functioning, students are not asked to report on what they have read. What often happens is that students will want to share spontaneously what they have read and feel is worth sharing.

Classrooms without voluntary, sustained reading often foster the idea that reading is something one does when forced and only for short periods of time. Each of these positive messages about reading is an important notion to get across if we want students to choose reading over other activities.

Putting SSR into Action

When beginning SSR with your class, talk over with students the reasons for having it and the rules. For example, (1) everyone reads; (2) everyone is quiet; and (3) everyone stays seated (Hilbert, 1993). If they are near the end of a book, they need to have a new choice at hand. Many teachers do not require that students sit at their desks during SSR, but students must decide where to sit before SSR begins. A “Do Not Disturb” sign outside the classroom door is often helpful.

Initially, begin with short periods of SSR, perhaps 5 to 10 minutes for first and second graders and 10 to 20 minutes for third through sixth graders. Gradually extend the time to 30 to 45 minutes for the middle school students. Hilbert (1993) suggests beginning the timing when the last child has actually begun to read.

During SSR, children read books of their own choosing. At first many reluctant readers choose comics, joke books, and other short books with pictures. Often, as the year goes on, children begin selecting more challenging pieces of literature as well as nonfiction selections (Hilbert, 1993). This is particularly true when SSR is combined with other strategies, such as literature circles (see Chapter 12). It often takes a month of daily SSR for the more reluctant or restless reader to get into reading for a sustained period of time.

SSR for Beginning Readers and Struggling Readers

The standard procedures for SSR imply that students must already have some degree of reading proficiency before they can participate fully. Nevertheless, it's very important to establish and nurture the habit of sustained attention to a self-selected book in children's earliest classroom reading experiences. Hong (1981) has described some procedures for adapting SSR for younger readers in what she called *booktime*. Booktime was used with a group of first graders who had been placed in the lowest reading group in their class. Characterized by their teacher and the reading specialist as having exceptionally short attention spans, the children appeared uninterested in reading and lacked a basic sight vocabulary and word identification skills. Here are the procedures for booktime, which Hong says “evolved gradually as the children made clear what they need and want in their reading environment” (p. 889).

1. Booktime is held at the same time each day so that children come to expect this period as a permanent part of their routine. Repetition of instructions quickly becomes

unnecessary. Younger and slower readers will probably have to begin with 1 to 5 minutes. With these readers, an eventual 10- to 15-minute session should be sufficient each day.

2. The reading group for booktime consists of five to seven students rather than a whole class. This contributes to a certain intimacy and allows some sharing without getting too noisy and hectic.
3. Introduction and accessibility of books are critical factors. Booktime assumes that the teacher regularly reads aloud to the children. After books are read to the group, they should be placed in the classroom library. The library will gradually accumulate a set of books, each of which will have been introduced to the group in an earlier reading-aloud session. This avoids the problem of a child's trying to select a book from a collection of unknown ones. New titles will constantly be added to the library, and less popular or overly familiar ones can be removed.
4. Children select just one book. They may go through several books in one period, but they must peruse only one at a time. And no one may "save" books by tucking them under one's arm or sitting on them while reading another book.
5. Because children may go through more than one book in a given session, booktime is best conducted with children sitting on the floor near the book collection, rather than each child taking a book back to his or her seat. There should be little or no people traffic through the reading area. If possible, larger, noisier activities are restricted to the opposite side of the room.
6. The teacher reads with the children as in standard SSR but may also respond to children's questions about print, such as, "What's this word?" or "Does this say *wait?*?" This gives children feedback on their hypotheses about print. They feel encouraged when they learn they've successfully decoded a new word, and they know when they have to revise their conclusions. However, teachers will want to avoid becoming word machines, spewing out every unknown word. Children should be encouraged to read as best they can and to try to figure out words on their own.
As in SSR, teachers don't interrogate children either during or after the reading; teachers only respond. With such a limited teacher role, other individuals can help with booktime.
7. Children may read in pairs and talk to each other quietly. The sharing of a book avoids the fuss that comes when two children want the same book. The quiet talk also has educational benefits. It can be helpful in reviewing a story (i.e., for comprehension and sense of story), exchanging reactions and feelings (i.e., a response to literature), and figuring out some of the text (i.e., word identification skills).
8. Children are guided toward treating books with respect, with no throwing or rough handling of books tolerated. This reinforces the perception that books are something special.

Hong (1981) reports that the success of booktime depends on the quality of the books presented. A major criterion is that the plot be clear, well paced, and predictably sequential. The language should be whole, using complete, natural sentences that create a flow and rhythm. Predictable, patterned books are excellent choices for booktime.

As the children described by Hong (1981) participated in booktime, they became more accustomed to it. They began by focusing their attention on specific books, then developed favorites to which they often returned. The children progressed from a merely general interest and a focus on illustrations toward paying more specific attention to the features of print. After several weeks of booktime, it was not unusual to see the children

spend an entire session on the first few pages of a single book, attempting to read the text using a combination of context clues and decoding.

Parents and SSR

Often parents want to help students with their academic progress. However, helping students with workbook pages or with oral reading can become frustrating for both the child and the parents. Encouraging parents to have short, sustained silent reading times with their children is one way for parents to do something specific that assists their children's school progress but limits the activities to low-pressure, pleasurable interactions. Spiegel (1981) suggests the following schedule for sending a series of newsletters to parents to acquaint them with the recreational reading program of which SSR is a major part:

Newsletter 1 (day 1). Explain what a recreational reading program is and how it will work in your class, and include a schedule of what information will be contained in subsequent newsletters.

Newsletter 2 (day 3). Present a rationale for having a recreational reading program, with emphasis on how it fits into the basic curriculum. Include a short statement of support from the principal and reading teacher.

Newsletter 3 (day 5). Make suggestions about how parents can help support the program through their efforts at home.

Newsletter 4 (day 7). Make a list of the ways parents can volunteer their time in the classroom to support the program.

To prepare parents for what to expect, some teachers begin the school year with a letter sent home. Vacca and Rasinski (1992) write about Gay, a third-grade teacher who sends a letter to parents highlighting her philosophy toward literacy. She explains in the communiqué that “children learn to read and write by reading and writing” (pp. 159–160). Informal chats, formal conferences, and telephone calls to parents in the evenings are other ways to keep parents informed about how their children are doing and why they are spending time on activities such as SSR.

There is one other person whose support parents and teachers can enlist to promote independent sustained reading: the principal. Explain to the principal the importance of a recreational reading program and the need for a large supply of books. The principal can also be invited to participate in classroom SSR and thus be an important model. This is a good way to convey the idea that reading is important to everyone.

Teaching Sustained Silent Reading

Productive reading can be strengthened by helping readers realize that success means learning to sustain themselves with print for longer periods of time. Children can keep track of the amount of silent reading accomplished during the reading period through charts (see Figure 7.6) or graphs (see Figure 7.7). Such demonstrations of growth are particularly important for lower-achieving or at-risk readers.

After a silent reading session, the teacher can build the climate for productive silent reading and self-evaluation by discussing—individually, in small groups, or with the whole class—students' responses to open-ended questions.

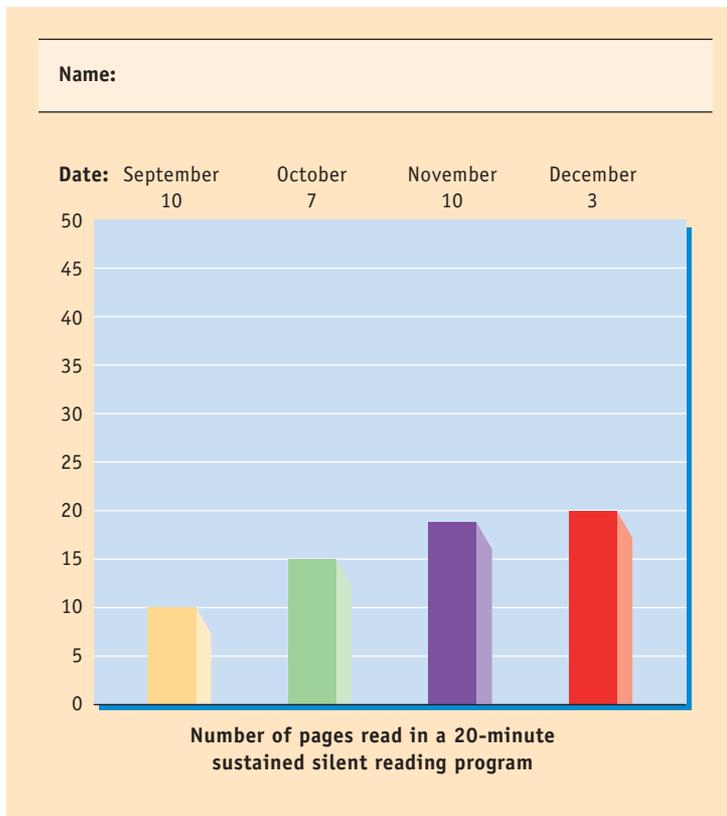
FIGURE 7.6

A Chart for Sustained Silent Reading

Name:		Date:		
Title of Book:				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
pages	pages	pages	pages	pages

FIGURE 7.7

Graph for Charting Progress in Sustained Silent Reading



By discussing their own experiences with sustained silent reading and using questions, teachers can develop the understanding in young readers' minds that reading means getting as many big ideas out of print through sustained silent reading as they possibly can. The teacher's main role in SSR is one of modeling the importance of reading, showing students the "teacher as reader."



What About Struggling Readers and Reading Fluency?

Slow, inefficient reading requires students to invest large amounts of time and mental energy in the task of reading, time that could be better spent processing and comprehending text. One important way to assist struggling readers is to provide models of fluent reading so they know what a good reader sounds like. This can be accomplished through teacher read-alouds or by using books and audiotapes in a listening center. Audiotapes can be sent home with children as an effective way to practice fluency outside of school. Minilessons on the essentials of fluency prior to reading aloud will help students focus on important features of fluent reading such as attention to punctuation, appropriate phrasing, and expression.

Research has shown that fluency can be increased through repeated readings of texts. Struggling readers will benefit from repeated readings of predictable and familiar texts, choral reading, and readers' theater. Strategies such as these support struggling readers by providing them with opportunities to enhance reading fluency without risking failure. Providing safe opportunities for oral reading practice will increase fluency for struggling readers, enhancing text comprehension.



What About Standards, Assessment, and Reading Fluency?

Fluent readers are able to read aloud with ease, accuracy, and proper intonation and phrasing. They recognize words with a high degree of automaticity and are therefore able to focus their attention on the meaning of the text rather than on simply decoding words (Rasinski, 2003). A report of the National Reading Panel (2000) cites fluency instruction as a key, though often neglected, component of effective reading programs.

Most grade-level standards for the English language arts established by state departments of education include an explicit standard for fluency development in the elementary grades. Included among North Carolina's third-grade competency expectations, for example, is the goal of being able to read aloud a grade-appropriate text with fluency and expression. Similar fluency goals are included in the North Carolina standards for other elementary grade levels (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1999).

At the national level, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to evaluate the academic

achievement of students nationwide, has included the study of oral-reading fluency in its assessment of reading achievement. To assess the oral-reading fluency of fourth-grade students, NAEP (NCES, 1995) used the four-level rubric summarized below:

Level 4. The student reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrase groups. Some deviations from the text may be present; however, these do not detract from the overall clarity of the story. The author's intended syntax is consistently communicated. Appropriate expression is used throughout the reading of the story.

Level 3. The student reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups. Some smaller word groupings may also be present. Most of the student's phrasing is appropriate and the author's syntax is preserved; however, little or no expressive interpretation is evident in the reading.

Level 2. The student reads in two-word phrases with some three- or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may also occur. The manner in which words are grouped may make the reading sound awkward, and may inhibit the meaning of the passage from being appropriately conveyed.

Level 1. The student reads primarily word-by-word. Occasionally, two- or three-word phrases may occur, but these are infrequent and do not preserve meaningful expression of the story.

The NAEP assessment also considers the accuracy and rate of the student's oral reading. Accuracy is defined in terms of the number of miscues made by the reader including omitted, inserted, or substituted words. Reading rate is defined by the number of words read per minute. NAEP data suggest that students who read with greater fluency also read with greater speed than less fluent readers.

Summary



This chapter explored how to help children develop both oral and silent reading fluency. An important goal of reading instruction, fluent reading with expression and comprehension requires practice and rereading.

We examined how automaticity in word recognition leads to the growth of competence and confidence in the developing reader. We defined and discussed repeated readings, choral reading, readers' theater, the use of technology, and routines and strategies that can be used to foster and develop fluency. Ways to involve parents and older students were suggested through paired reading and cross-age tutoring.

To provide all students with the kind of experience in school that avid readers get on their own—reading without having to respond immediately to questions—we believe in building a program of sustained silent reading (SSR). SSR is crucial in developing independent readers. We presented numerous practical suggestions for implementing SSR and showed how it can be part of a comprehensive plan to incorporate independent reading time into daily classroom routines.

Teacher Action Research

1. Either interview several elementary teachers or conduct a short survey in an elementary school about the different ways that teachers provide practice in oral reading for the purpose of developing students' reading fluency. Compile a list of the ideas in this chapter, including the oral recitation lesson (ORL), paired repeated readings, choral reading, cross-age reading, and automated reading. Based on what the teachers report, which of the ideas on your list seem to be the most popular ways of developing oral reading fluency in students? Furthermore, how does a teacher monitor for oral reading fluency? What are some of the indicators that a child is a disfluent reader? If the opportunity presents itself, observe one or two of the classrooms and describe what actual practices are used.
2. Develop a plan to use SSR regularly in a primary, intermediate, or middle school class. Use the following questions, and add several of your own. Then compare plans with your classmates.
 - a. How often would you conduct SSR? At what time of day?
 - b. In what ways will your students benefit from SSR?
 - c. How would you set up your classroom for SSR?
 - d. Describe some changes you might expect to see after a few weeks.
 - e. How will your school principal and others participate in SSR? What effect do you think this will have?

Related Web Sites

Aaron Shepard's Homepage

www.aaronshp.com

This Web site is an excellent resource for readers' theater and the possibilities it holds for enhancing fluency. It has scripts to download as well as resources for storytelling.

Poetry Teachers.Com

www.poetryteachers.com

The site provides ideas for poetry lessons, contests, and activities, as well as poetry plays students can perform.

StoryPlace: The Children's Digital Library

www.storyplace.org

This award-winning bilingual (Spanish and English) site, sponsored by the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg Counties, includes a collection of online materials for elementary students including texts for reading along.

Teachers.Net

www.teachers.net

An excellent source for fluency-related lesson plans.

Gander Academy's Reader's Theater Page

www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/langrt.htm

Gander Academy's Reader's Theater page has downloadable scripts, recommendations for writing your own scripts, and links to online resources.