

Ohio Literacy Conference for K-3rd Grade Teachers

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B-3 Fluency Matters! What Does It Mean & How Do We Teach for It? (Gr. K-3)

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Building Fluency in a Variety of Ways

Why do adults attend speed reading classes? There are lots of programs out there that can assist adults in reading faster, but why do people spend time and money on these? Rarely do we ever read adult texts aloud to anyone so it can't be a job or performance-related reason. The reason is so that they can improve their comprehension skills. These people were most probably falling readers who were able to read, but they read slowly and deliberately. They probably focused their attention solely on the 'code' or the visual cueing system. They had so much trouble decoding that they either learned to attend to sounds and letters or they were taught to do so during the primary grades. The result of this journey led to slower reading rates and ultimately, problems with understanding what was read. Fluency and comprehension are linked. One feeds the other...

When working with falling readers, we want to be sure that we are constantly building fluency in their reading so that they can gain meaning quickly and easily. What good is processing a whole book if you can't understand what you read?! Here are a few suggestions when supporting struggling kids as they strive for fluent phrasing, strong visual scanning skills, expression, and of course, greater comprehension:

1. Flash sight word phrases at falling readers DAILY. I published 2 sets of 50 Sight Word Phrases©2003 (www.crystalspringsbooks.com) and I am delighted that teachers are using these throughout the country. They will build automaticity of basic sight words, increase fluent phrasing, train the eyes to visually scan left-to-right quickly, and improve vocabulary.
2. When a reader is reading 'painfully,' that is, reading each and every word slowly, you can suggest the following: "I'll read a page (or a line), then you read a page (or a line). This should not be done regularly, but it is a form of modeling that works!
3. When first graders demonstrate control over voice/print or one-to-one correspondence in early text levels, you will want to encourage them to "read with their eyes" now. That means getting the pointer finger out of there! They can bring their finger up if they get stuck, skip lines, or need to physically break up a difficult word. However, pointing to every word and shaking the head when pronouncing each word, must stop or fluency will be hindered. Say, "Good readers read with their eyes. Let me see you try that. Good for you! You are sounding like a good reader!"
4. Model fluent reading whenever you engage children in shared reading with a big book or when reading back a class story during shared writing experiences. Do not spend too much of the year pointing to each and every word with a pointer. If you want to use a pointer to keep the kids' place when reading together as a group, SCAN the text with the pointer

- rather than deliberately pointing to each word. This is good modeling and it will lead to greater understanding on the part of the kids. They will copy you!
5. For very tough cases of children who continue to read 'word by word' into 2nd and 3rd grade, you may want to cut a small 1" by 2" piece of oaktag or poster board. Use the card to push across the words as a child is reading. That means that they need to read it before you cover it. This, in itself, is forcing the eyes to scan across the text, but you are controlling how fast they do this. Don't do it every day, but once in a while it can improve fluency and remind the child to scan, rather than 'point' with his/her eyes.
 6. Teach fluency, expression, diction, intonation, and poise by engaging small groups of children in Readers Theater. It is effective in building fluency because it forces readers to keep their eyes "on the text." Even if they memorize their lines, do not allow them to take their eyes off the text as they read aloud. The key to successful Readers Theater approaches is coaching. We must TEACH children how to project, scan, and perform the story with expression. This does not come naturally to many children; especially falling kids. They will build confidence in this approach as it is fun, engaging, fast, rhythmic, and positive.

As teachers and parents, we want our children to be proficient readers, writers, and thinkers. We must, therefore, strive to teach children how to read and write fluently so that their brains can attend to comprehension. After all, we do read to gain meaning, don't we?! Why else?

C. Hebert. *Catch a Falling Reader*. (2008). Corwin Press.
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Choosing Books for Fluency Practice



What reading experts say:

"Knowing my books and my children, and making a match between them, is one of the most important things I do...and one of the most demanding. It is exacting work that has led me to adjust my priorities in how I use my planning and class time."

Sharon Taberski (2000)



Reaching Readers (Opitz & Ford, 2001)



"When selecting texts for your students, we suggest considering three key variables simultaneously:

- *The purpose of your instruction.*
- *The students with whom you are working.*
- *The texts to which you have access."*





Reflections . . .