

# Principal

January/February 2009

## Promoting Reading Comprehension

*Fluency flourishes when reading teachers select and implement research-based strategies.*

Lisa H. Bramuchi

**F**or decades, educators have focused on three components in teaching reading: accuracy, rate, and expression (Kiley, 2005). Accuracy refers to recognizing words automatically without thought; rate is the speed at which words are read; and expression imparts meaning or feeling to what is read. Recently, a fourth component—comprehension—was added. Fluent readers must be able to construct meaning through use of all four components of reading, automatically and without thought.

**Accuracy.** The first dimension of reading is sounding out words accurately without having to decode for meaning (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Rasinski, 2004). Careful observation and miscue analysis allow teachers to determine the appropriate strategies to remediate reading accuracy (Kiley & Jensen, 2005).

**Reading Rate.** This is usually determined by having a student read a passage and counting the errors in order to calculate a correct word-per-minute rate (Kiley & Jensen, 2005). It also can be measured by the number of correct words per minute or the amount of time to complete a passage (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Many interventions focus on increasing reading rate, because slow reading can result in weakened comprehension.

**Expression.** The easiest dimension of reading to assess is expression, or prosody, a linguistic term describing the rhythmic aspects of oral reading (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Struggling students often lack this dimension, reading in a monotone and lacking the appropriate phrasing to construct meaning from the text. Prosody describes a qualitative aspect of reading fluency that includes emphasis, voice quality, pausing, phrasing, and appropriate use of punctuation (Kiley & Jensen, 2005).

**Comprehension.** Recently added to the list of reading dimensions, comprehension is a predictor of reading success (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Successful instruction that incorporates appropriate reading rates, reading accuracy, and reading with expression leads to readers who are able to read and comprehend text fluently.

By using effective research-based practices and appropriate teaching strategies matched to the needs of individual students, failure is not an option in reading instruction (Moats, 1999; Rasinski, 2000). Students can overcome weaknesses in reading development if teachers incorporate effective direct instruction in an organized and systematic method (Moats, 1999). For example, a child's oral reading rate can be increased through such small-group instructional activities as:

- Repeated reading—repetitively reading text to improve students' oral reading fluency and literal comprehension. It can be measured by correct words per minute read and errors while reading;
- Paired reading—reading with a student peer;
- Echo reading—reader echoes a more able reader; and
- Reader's theater—student orally reads a script to practice reading strategies (Kiley, 2005; Rasinski, 2000).

Research suggests the following steps for incorporating fluency instruction into comprehensive reading programs:

- Use read-alouds to model fluent oral reading;
- Provide direct instruction and feedback to teach decoding of unknown words, correct expression and phrasing, and return-sweep eye movement;
- Provide oral support and modeling for readers by using assisted reading, choral reading, paired reading, recorded books, and computer programs;
- Provide students with adequate materials at their reading level to read on their own; and
- Offer opportunities to practice reading progressively more difficult text.

As for the principal's role, it is important for administrators to document the reading performance of the students who are struggling with reading. This is the first step in carrying out a response to intervention program. Our school uses the Fluency Plus program, which has all the components of response to intervention. Teacher assistants implement reading interventions that document the achievement of students, thus allowing me, as the principal, to document improvements and struggles

# Principal

of students in their reading ability. Subsequently, parents are able to see data that easily explains the reading achievement and progress of their child as it relates to reading.

When schools implement research-based best practices with integrity, students improve in their reading ability most of the time. For the 5 percent who do not show the growth necessary to be considered proficient readers, further testing is provided to determine the student's weaknesses and strengths.

According to Kiley (2005), educators have long operated under the assumption that decoding instruction would increase fluency. Because the art of reading takes place instantly in the mind, and teachers are not able to visualize the process, teachers must judge reading competence on the basis of correct words per minute read, with appropriate comprehension (Moats, 1999).

With proper instruction, 95 percent of all students can be taught to read (Moats, 1999). When reading teachers select and implement appropriate research-based strategies, fluency flourishes.

## References

Hudson, R., Lane, H., & Pullen, P. (2005). Reading fluency assessment and instruction: What, why, and how? *The Reading Teacher*, 58(8), 702-714.

Kiley, T. J. (2005). Research in reading part I. Fluency: A missing piece of the puzzle? *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 34(2), 70-73.

Kiley, T., & Jensen, R. (2005). Research in reading part II. Fluency: A missing piece of the puzzle? *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 34(3), 62-67.

Moats, L. C. (1999). *Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: The American Federation of Teachers.

Rasinski, T. (2000). Speed does matter in reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(2), 146-151.

Rasinski, T. (2004). Creating fluent readers. *Educational Leadership*, 61(6), 46-51.  
for their 150 families.

---

**Lisa H. Bramuchi** is principal of Parks Elementary School in Cleveland, Mississippi.  
Her e-mail address is [lbramuchi@cleveland.k12.ms.us](mailto:lbramuchi@cleveland.k12.ms.us).