

Study Guide for *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy V. Rasinski

Introduction

When someone says “reading instruction” what picture forms in your head? Maybe you see little children sitting comfortably on the floor looking at the big book on a chart stand. The teacher has a pointer that follows the words as she reads aloud. Or perhaps you envision a group of fourth graders with paperback books in their hands, having an animated discussion about the events of the story. If you are a middle school teacher you might see a teacher valiantly struggling to engage students, some with boredom chiseled into their faces. Truth be told, the expression is really a cover up for their true feelings of frustration and embarrassment brought on by years of failure. High school teachers might immediately picture themselves teaching great works of literature—Shelly, Keats, Shakespeare, Faulkner, and Poe.

No doubt your picture illustrated important reading skills—concepts of print for the little ones, comprehension for the fourth graders, story grammar for the middle school students, and literary appreciation for the high school students. Did your picture illustrate fluency? What does fluency look like? How is it taught? How is it measured? What role does it play in emerging literacy, comprehension, reading skills, and appreciation of literature? If your original picture did not lead you to think of fluency, it is an incomplete picture. This study guide is designed to support you and your colleagues through discussions that will lead you to a picture that includes fluency, an oft-neglected but critical aspect of reading instruction.

It is our hope that you are studying The Fluent Reader with colleagues. It might be through a college course you are taking, a teachers' workshop, or just with a few teacher friends who like to get together to discuss their practice. If you are studying it on your own, we encourage you to make notes and think about how you can informally start conversations in the hallway, in the teachers' lunchroom, or at a staff meeting.

If there is anything that the research community agrees on, it is this: The right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting. Our experience with schools across the nation bears this out unequivocally. (Schmoker, 2004, p. 48)

Part I of the study guide, *Thinking About Your Practice*, should be used as an orientation to the subject of fluency before your group begins reading the book. Questions are provided to help you think about what you already know and what you would like to know about the fluent reader. Use all or some of the guiding questions and pose some of your own. Let the experience and wisdom of the group guide you. Part II, *Guidelines for Study Groups*, includes guidelines for each chapter, including a chapter overview, a quote or excerpt for you to reflect on, discussion questions, and finally action steps for you to implement in your classroom and prepare to discuss at the next study group meeting. Again, we believe in the collective expertise of the group as you consider the suggestions and add others to guide your study.

Part I: Thinking About Your Practice

Thinking About Fluency

Brainstorm a list of words or phrases that go with *fluency*. Create an open word sort by putting the words into categories. What do you notice about what you and your colleagues think regarding fluency?

What are your memories of learning to read in school? Did the teacher do anything to help you read fluently? If so, what did s/he do?

Do you remember hearing disfluent classmates read in school? Describe the experience.

Have you listened to a disfluent adult read aloud? Describe the experience.

In his Foreword to The Fluent Reader, James Hoffman says, “Faster is not always better” (p. 5). Can you describe situations when slower reading might be better?

James Hoffman says of fluent oral reading and fluent silent reading, “Both are important, but fluent silent reading is more than just silent oral reading” (p. 6). Reflect on that statement. Rephrase it. What does it mean to you?

In his Introduction to the book, Tim Rasinski calls round robin reading a “detrimental form of oral reading” (p. 7). How might round robin reading be detrimental? Some teachers claim that students *like* round robin reading. Do you agree or disagree?

Give examples of times you personally need fluent oral reading in the real world, outside of the classroom.

Thinking About Your Fluency Instruction

Do you intentionally plan instruction that teaches children how to read fluently? If so, describe what instructional strategies you use.

What materials do you have or need to teach fluency?

Think about your students. Is there a relationship between reading fluency and how a student performs in other areas of the curriculum?

How do you assess fluency? How do you use the information you gain from that assessment?

How often are your students provided the opportunity to practice fluent oral reading?

Is fluency relegated to the language arts block or do you incorporate fluency instruction into the content areas? Describe a content area lesson that incorporated fluency instruction.

Have you communicated with parents about fluency and how they can help their child? How?

References

Schmoker, M. (2004). Start here for improving teaching and learning. The School Administrator. 61(10), 48-49.

Part II: Guidelines for Study Groups

Chapter 1

Overview of Oral Reading

A Brief History and Rationale

Overview

Chapter 1 provides a look into oral reading as a classroom staple. A brief history of oral reading in the classroom is presented, from the “blab” schools of early America, to the silent reading emphasis around the turn of the century, to the ever resistant-to-change round robin reading, to the rationale for oral reading in the twenty-first century. You will learn how students benefit when teachers read orally, how students benefit when they read orally themselves, and how you as a teacher can build reading fluency.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 1:

“Oral reading performance has the potential to transform a self-conscious student into a star performer—especially when he or she is coached and given opportunities to practice...These children have been transformed—not only as readers and learners, but also as people. Oral reading is the vehicle that allows them to find their voices.” (p. 23)

Discussion Questions

In 1892 William James indicated, “...the teacher’s success or failure in teaching reading is based, so far as the public estimate is concerned, upon the oral reading method” (p. 12).

What is the perception of a teacher's success or failure in teaching reading based upon today? Is that a legitimate measure? What other measures would you accept as evidence that a teacher is doing a good job of teaching students to read?

Do you tell your students explicit reasons for reading aloud in life or do they view reading aloud simply as a part of schoolwork?

When silent reading began to replace oral reading as the preferred mode of reading instruction, it was assumed that it focused the reader's attention on grasping meaning while oral reading tended to focus attention on accurate recitation of text. Do you think your students attend to meaning when they are reading orally or are they focused on not making errors? Provide evidence for your answer. How can you help students feel comfortable enough with reading aloud that they are hearing the meaning behind their words?

Do your students ever read in round robin fashion? Why? What did you think as you were reading the section on the drawbacks of round robin reading? Can you think of other ways to achieve your goal?

If you are a middle school or high school teacher, do you ever read aloud to your students? How often? Describe the context. When do you do it? How do students respond? What benefits for students do you notice?

“When students read in a choral fashion, for example, they implicitly say to one another that they are part of a classroom community” (p. 23). *Community of learners* is a term that is commonly bandied about in education. Have you ever thought of a community of learners in this context? How has this statement added to your thinking about your classroom as a community of learners?

How do you teach word recognition? Decoding? After reading this chapter is there anything you might do differently?

Take Action

Reading aloud helps students “see reading as emotionally powerful” (p. 20). Find a children’s book that could bring tears to your eyes and that is appropriate for the grade level you teach (i.e., Faithful Elephants, Love You Forever, Bridge to Terabithia, The Clown of God). Read it aloud to your students, sharing your emotions freely. Talk about how the book made you feel and ask students to share how they are impacted by both the book and by your show of emotion.

If you are a high school or middle school teacher, find a picture book with thought-provoking content and read it aloud to your students (i.e., Old Turtle, Seven Blind Mice, Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!, The Wretched Stone). Ask students to do a focused free-write on their reaction to the book. Stress that it is not to be a plot summary but rather a reaction to the book. In a focused free-write students write continuously for four minutes without putting down the pen. If they run out of things to say, they should re-write what

they have already written; typically more ideas will come to mind if they do not stop writing. Ask students to share their focused free-write orally.

“Many students believe that good reading is word-perfect, accurate decoding” (p. 21).

Ask your students to respond in writing to the questions below. Tally their responses.

What conclusions can you draw?

What is reading?

Who is the best reader you know? What does s/he do that makes him/her a good reader?

What does your teacher do to help you learn to read?

Try paired reading as described on page 28 with a disfluent reader. Do it daily for two weeks and chart progress in word recognition and words per minute.

If you have limited English proficient students, give them recorded materials to take home and use nightly for two weeks. What progress do you observe?

Do you ask comprehension questions after one reading of a passage? Try a repeated reading before asking questions and see if you notice any difference in the quality of responses and in who volunteers to respond.

Books Referenced

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- Patterson, K. (1977). Bridge to Terabithia. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
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Chapter 2

Read Aloud

Modeling Reading and Motivating Readers

Overview

Teachers today do not need to be convinced that they should read aloud to their students. They see the looks on children's faces when a good story is read to them, and they know the school librarian will soon be fielding requests for that book. "But its benefits do not end there" (p. 20). In this chapter you will learn about the academic, as well as the aesthetic rewards, of reading aloud. You will learn that there are things to think through before you ever pick up that book to start reading aloud. You will also learn that it isn't over when it's over; there are a number of ways you can ask children to respond to a read aloud.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 2:

"The level of vocabulary in storybooks for preschoolers is at approximately the same level as speech between college graduates." (p. 38)

Discussion Questions

Describe in written detail a specific memory of being read to as a child. Now describe in written detail a time when you were the reader. Create a Venn diagram of the two experiences. Reflect on what you see in the Venn.

How would you respond to a supervisor or principal who accused you of wasting time by reading aloud when students should be preparing for state tests?

How do you incorporate poetry into your read aloud? After reading this chapter did you think of other ways to include poetry?

What opportunities do you provide for response after read aloud? Can you think of additional ways students could respond to a read aloud? How often do you do these things?

When was the last time you participated in “text talk” as an adult? How did it impact your understanding of the text?

Take Action

Survey colleagues in your district about classroom read aloud. How often do they read aloud? For how long? What do they read? What do they do after the reading? Do you see any patterns in the responses? Is there a certain grade when read aloud begins to drop off? Is there any correlation between the amount of time spent in one sitting and the grade level? Do certain grades do more with post-reading activities? What else do you notice? What conclusions can you draw?

You can't share a passion for reading unless you are a passionate reader yourself. Begin your own personal reading log. How many books that you have read recently can you list from memory? Make another list of books that you would like to read in the near future. Continually add to both lists and share the lists with your students.

Begin a collection of essays, quotes, and magazine and newspaper articles that you can incorporate into your read aloud time.

Do you share a wide variety of poetry with your students or have you fallen into a Silverstein-like routine? Broaden your students' poetry tastes by sharing poems that express a wide range of feelings and experiences as well as the whimsical, irreverent, or funny poems that are so popular (i.e., The Butterfly Jar, Creation Speaks, Class Dismissed, Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea, etc).

Conduct one of the post-reading activities from this chapter that you have never or rarely tried. What were the results? Will you do it again?

List everything you can remember reading aloud to your students this year. What genres are on the list? Do you have many different genres? If not, look for selections from other genres and begin to incorporate them into your read aloud.

Books Referenced

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Houghton Mifflin.
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HarperCollins

Chapter 3

Supported Reading

Providing a Scaffold for Your Developing and Struggling Readers

Overview

Recently I watched through my kitchen window as construction workers put up a scaffold so that they could safely place bricks high on the house going in next door. The day before they had bricked the lower part of the house, but without the scaffold they could have only gone so far. So it is with reading instruction. Our students can only go so far, and then they need support. Are you intentionally and consistently providing support that will allow your readers to go higher? Could you use additional ideas for making that scaffold strong and safe? In this chapter you will learn some strategies for helping all learners, but especially those struggling learners.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 3:

“The gradual release of support and responsibility from the teacher to the student is at the heart of successful literacy instruction.” (p. 74)

Discussion

What does the phrase *reading while listening* mean to you?

Describe a time in your classroom when students were *in community* because of a reading activity.

Have you ever had students who did not really read during SSR or independent reading time? What did you do? Can you think of other ways to deal with that situation?

What examples of choral reading do you observe in your school at different grade levels?

Describe a dependent reader. Are there different levels of dependence? How can you move a student to increasing independence?

Take Action

Find five texts that would lend themselves to oral support reading. Which strategies from the chapter would you use with these texts?

Establish a child-parent paired reading program. Invite parents for an orientation/demonstration evening. (Use Figure 3.6.) Ask that the Paired Reading Record Sheet (Figure 3.3) be returned weekly. Establish a weekly goal (say, 45 minutes per week). Rather than candy, parties, or trinkets as awards for meeting the goal, give a learning incentive like a small notepad, pencil or pen, or (my personal favorite!) 10 extra minutes of reading time that the student can redeem anytime during the day.

Grouping practices in a well-balanced reading program include whole group, small group, partner, and individual. During your individual reading conference time, conduct paired reading with five of your struggling readers for six weeks. Maintain a record of student progress with the Paired Reading Response Form (Figure 3.5).

Partner your class with older students. Have the teacher of the older students instruct his/her students on how to do Neurological Impress with the younger students. Bring the groups together once a week for ½ hour of peer tutoring.

Ask students to practice reading a selection until they are fluent. When they indicate that they are ready, tape record their reading and place the tapes in the listening center.

Children love to hear their own voices and the voices of their peers as they follow along in a book.

If you teach middle or high school ask your students to find texts that would lend themselves to antiphonal or call-and-response reading. Provide plenty of texts for them to look through in their search. Practice with the texts they locate.

Chapter 4

Repeated Reading

Implementing a Powerful Tool for Practicing Reading

Overview

The most oft-recited lament of teachers is that there is never enough time. Never enough time to cover the curriculum; never enough time to meet individual needs; never enough time to conduct ongoing assessments; never enough time to do the “fun stuff.” Anyone who has walked in a teacher’s shoes, if even for a few weeks, knows all too well that the lament is justified. So if there’s never enough time, how can we justify asking students to repeatedly read the same text? In this chapter you will learn why time invested upfront in repeated reading will actually save time in remediation later. You will learn not only the benefits of repeated reading, but also read about some very specific instructional strategies to make repeated reading most effective and efficient.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 4:

“Oral reading fluency means more than reading accurately and quickly.” (p. 89)

Discussion

How often do you do repeated reading in your classroom? How do you make the decision as to when you do it?

What is the relationship between decoding and fluency? Do you know a student who is proficient with decoding but is not fluent? Do you know a student who struggles with decoding but is fluent?

It is a well-known fact that many criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests contain some passages that are above the grade level that is being tested. Why do you think that is?

How important is it to know the readability level before a student is assigned to read a text?

In radio reading students take turns reading as they do in round robin reading. Why is radio reading a better method?

Rasinski suggests that the teacher (and not the other students) provide unknown words when a student struggles (p. 87). How often have you said, or heard other teachers say, “Who can help Sally out?” What message does this send to Sally and to her peers?

Take Action

How often have you heard students protest, just as you pick up a good book to read, “Mrs. Smith read that last year!” Before you read it again ask them to write everything they remember from the passage. Read the passage and ask them to write again. Did they remember more this time? Did they remember higher-level, important information

that they did not remember the first time? Discuss how repeated reading increases comprehension.

Do you have students who read fluently but do not comprehend? Ask the students to do a repeated reading activity from the chapter. Does comprehension improve?

Try out Samuel's theory of automaticity (p. 76) with several students. What were the results?

One of the current trends in assessment is *short cycle assessments*. Have you wanted to implement some short cycle assessments but just have not had time to develop them?

Use a one-minute reading probe (p. 82) as a regular short cycle assessment. Record the results on the Repeated Reading Log (Figure 4.4). How can you use the information you gain from the regular probes?

Choose a text that you use in your classroom. Look it over and predict the readability.

Check the readability using the computer or adapted Fry method (p. 81). How close were you?

If you teach middle school or high school, when your students are learning to write dialogue ask permission to use their pieces for "Say It Like the Character."

If you practice sight words with flashcards, begin using the phrases and short sentences (Figure 4.7) to embed the words in meaningful context. What do you notice? Do students remember the sight words when they are in context? Do they fluently read the phrases? Do they remember the sight words better once they practice them in phrases?

Chapter 5

Performance Reading

Turning Research on Repeated Reading into Engaging and Effective Instruction

Overview

Chapters 1-4 focused on the struggling reader. In this chapter you will learn that some of the same principles can be applied to instruction with normally developing and advanced readers with great results. You will learn how to motivate all students through performances of student-led read aloud, reader's theater, and poetry. You will find a number of great resources to get you started.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 5:

“So while the science of teaching tells us that repeated reading can be an effective instructional strategy, the art of teaching challenges us to make repeated reading engaging for all students.” (p. 102)

Discussion Questions

Is repeated reading important for normally developing and advanced readers or is it simply an “extra”?

What is the difference between a play and reader's theater? What are the advantages and disadvantages of reader's theater?

What skills could you model using a reader's theater script?

What famous speeches can you think of for a good reader's theaters?

When teachers are asked what their hobbies are "Reading," is usually the first response.

When was the last time you read poetry for your own enjoyment? Purchased a book of poems at Borders? Recommended a good poem to a friend?

Take Action

Does your district get desired results from summer school? Do you try to cover too much in too short of a time? Begin a conversation with administrators responsible for summer school to determine if the summer school focus could be reader's theater.

When you are working with individuals or small groups, ask other students to practice their reader's theater in the back of the room. To what extent do students stay on task?

Do a google.com search using the term *reader's theater*. You will find many sites that offer free scripts as well as scripts to purchase.

If you are a middle school or high school teacher assign your students to transform a favorite children's book into a reader's theater to send to the elementary school.

Discuss this statement with your students: "Without movement, props, or scenery, [you] have only one attribute to make [your] performance meaningful and satisfying: [your]

voices” (p. 105). Model some especially important lines from a text to illustrate the point.

Create a reader’s theater for a content area lesson you teach.

Ask students to sign up for a student-led read aloud. Prior to reading they should practice the piece and come up with two questions to ask their audience—a literal or fact-based question and an inferential question (see Chapter 4, p. 88).

Chapter 6

Creating Synergy

Lessons That Integrate Oral Reading Activities

Overview

By now you have learned many instructional strategies you can use in your classroom to build fluency. In fact, does it almost seem like too many? Do you wonder where to begin or how to fit it all in? This chapter will provide you with ideas for combining activities that save time and get results. Once again you will read concrete examples of lessons that can be modified for your own students as you create your own synergy.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 6:

“Remember, in instruction, the whole, when created from a logical combination of good practices, is greater than the sum of the parts” (p. 143).

Discussion Questions

“Imagine devising an extended lesson that combines teacher-led read aloud, oral support reading, and repeated reading...” (p. 122). What would be the advantages to such a lesson? Would there be any disadvantages?

The Fluent Reader presents fluency activities that involve both direct and indirect instruction (see for example, Hoffman’s ORL, p. 124). In your opinion, should one approach be more prevalent than the other? If so, which one and why?

The story map on page 125 is designed for a problem-solution story structure. What other text structures do your students deal with?

Will all students respond enthusiastically to oral fluency activities? What about very shy children? How can teachers scaffold them as they work on fluency?

What is the lowest area of reading performance for your Title I students?

“I have found that once readers get locked into word-by-word reading it is difficult to move them toward more phrased reading,” (p. 140). Is it ever too late?

Take Action

Develop a plan for creating synergy in your fluency instruction. Make a commitment to begin.

Go to www.readnaturally.com and follow the link *Determining Who Needs Fluency Training*. Use assessment data from your classroom to locate several of your students on the Oral Reading Fluency Norms table (Hasbrouck/Tindale table). Set some fluency goals for those students and outline a synergistic plan for meeting those goals.

Begin creating a lending library of recorded passages for repeated reading while listening. Recruit middle school or high school students to record texts. Students can

reduce the time before moving on to another passage by practicing at home as well as at school.

Jean Larson's Oral Recitation Lesson (ORL) includes a mini-lesson focusing on aspects of fluency such as pitch, stress, and juncture (p. 126). Choose a book you currently use and develop a mini-lesson to teach those aspects of fluency.

Begin a *Lucky Listener Club* (p. 130) for school and home.

Ask each child and his/her parents to find a poem they especially enjoy, copy it on a piece of paper and illustrate it. Create a class poetry book with each poem labeled "Recommended by [the _____ family]." Place the book in the classroom reading corner.

Create a notebook of poems for your own Fast Start program. Conduct a parent training.

Chapter 7

Oral Reading Across the Curriculum

Making Reading Fluency an Everyday Classroom Experience

Overview

Now that you have a number of fluency strategies in your repertoire, and now that you know how to combine those strategies to create synergy, it is time to think about how to weave them into the day-to-day life of your classroom. In this chapter you will learn how to establish routines for using the strategies you learned in other chapters. You will get ideas for integrating the strategies into your reading curriculum as well as into your content area curriculum.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 7:

“Creative teachers make essential information and ideas tangible to students.” (p. 151)

Discussion Questions

Why should teacher-led read aloud be a non-negotiable component of instruction everyday?

Describe the science of reading instruction. Describe the art of reading instruction. What does it look like when they “come face to face”? (p. 133)

What does a healthy home-school partnership look like? How can the principles of this book reinforce such a partnership?

Classroom poetry reading often evolves into poetry writing. Frequently children's initial attempts at writing poetry result in a sing-song rhythm and contrived rhyming at the expense of meaning. How can you help children write authentic poetry?

How can you "...educate parents about the critical role they can play and give them the tools to carry out that role effectively and enjoyably?" (p. 154).

Take Action

Choose two or three of the strategies you learned in previous chapters and think about how you could use them with your district-adopted basal reader program.

Choose two or three of the strategies you learned in previous chapters and think about how you could use them with some of your favorite children's literature.

Ask members of your study group to share oral reading strategies they use that are not presented in this book.

Develop a plan for including the reading routines that should be carried out every day (pp. 146-147). Establish a time and a place for each routine. Think about some ways to put your own personal touch on the routines.

Choose one of the oral reading strategies and implement it with content area texts.

Gradually add some of the other strategies until a variety of strategies are part of your content area routine.

Pair up with other classes at your grade level. Each class should prepare Radio Readings for concepts that all students at that grade level are expected to learn. Perform for one another. Not only will this build fluency, it will also reinforce the content.

Chapter 8

Assessing Word Recognition and Fluency Through Oral Reading

Effective Ways to Check Students' Progress

Overview

All the ideas you have learned from this book are for naught if you do not meet the students' learning needs. How do you know what those needs are? Certainly standardized tests, norm-reference tests, and criterion-references tests can provide insight, but such tests are limited in providing information about fluency and word recognition. In this chapter you will learn how to use oral reading to help you gain a more complete picture of your students' reading needs.

Reflection

Share your thoughts on the following quote from chapter 8:

“Consider standardized tests, for example. The student reads a series of passages marking the correct answer from a list of choices. Or the student reads a passage or series of passages silently and writes a summary of other responses after the reading...The reading process, in these cases, is buried within the reader.” (p. 157)

Discussion Questions

How many of your students regularly work at an instructional level (90-95% accuracy in word recognition)? Does it vary by subject?

Are there students whose reading difficulties puzzle you more than usual? Describe them. What could you do to gain more insight into their difficulties?

Have you ever had students who are unwilling to try to figure out unknown words? What did you do? What else could you try?

Is there ever a time you need to encourage a student to read more slowly?

How do you currently assess reading fluency? Do your current methods of assessment provide enough insight into learners' needs?

Do you feel you have an "expert ear" for fluency? What are you listening for?

Take Action

Administer an IRI to a few students for whom you are most concerned. What did you learn about their reading level? What instructional adjustments can you make to help them?

Administer a one-minute reading probe quarterly with all of your students. Chart their growth to share with them and with their parents.

Pick three struggling readers and look for patterns in their errors (pp. 162-164). Develop a plan for helping those readers.

Ask students questions to assess their metacognitive awareness of errors. Regularly make their thinking transparent by asking questions such as those posed on page 165.

What other questions can you add to this list?

Listen for student errors in your classroom over one week and categorize them according to semantic, syntactic, or grapho-phonetic. Which group of errors seems more prevalent?

What might this mean?

Interview students orally or in writing using the questions on page 172. Analyze responses for patterns. Do you notice any similarities in the answers of advanced, proficient, or struggling readers? Do the answers shed any insight into your teaching?