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Developing Fluent Readers in the Classroom

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Did you know that a child in the third grade should be able to read 114 words per minute? This is reading fluency. Reading fluency is the ability to read text aloud quickly, smoothly, naturally, and automatically. The ultimate goal of fluency is to read silently and concentrate on comprehension rather than decoding individual words. If readers labor to decode each word, they lose the ability to comprehend or enjoy what they are reading.

Current research shows that when a child reads the same passage over and over, the number of word recognition errors decrease, reading speed increases, and oral reading expression improves. Consequently, reading comprehension improves. Research also indicates that a student's fluency highly correlates with his/her scores on standardized reading comprehension tests.

These four steps promote reading fluency in the classroom:

1. Motivation: It is essential to motivate students to want to read. To accomplish this, teachers must provide frequent opportunities for students to listen to stories and read to others. Reading material that sparks students' individual interest is more likely to encourage them to want to read. Including different genres of reading material in the classroom reading experience is fundamental to building students' interest.



2. Practice: Provide plenty of time for students to practice reading and do repeated readings of the same stories or passages. It is a good idea to use tape players and have students record themselves. Choral reading (everyone in the class reads together) and partner reading (one student reads with another) will also spice up the reading routine in your classroom!



3. Modeling: Teachers should model fluent reading every day and encourage students to practice doing the same. Students who struggle with basic decoding skills may benefit from echo reading where the teacher reads a short 3-5 word phrase and students echo the same phrase. By using this method, the teacher is modeling and allowing emerging readers to practice, all at the same time. This is an effective way of increasing students' confidence levels, as well.



4. Help: Teachers should assist in developing self-correction skills by encouraging students to listen to themselves read and monitor their own reading. After reading a selection, teach students to ask themselves, "Did what I just read make sense?" It is also important for teachers to demonstrate to students how to utilize illustrations, graphs, and captions to help make sense of what they are reading.



Resources:

Chalmers, Patricia. (2003). *Developing Fluent Readers*. Retrieved January 7, 2005, from Public Schools of North Carolina, School Improvement Division Web site: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/briefs/developing>

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