

CHAPTER 3:

TIER 2 SMALL GROUP READING FLUENCY INSTRUCTION

If your students are demonstrating difficulties with fluency despite Tier 1 fluency instruction, you might consider delivering Tier 2 interventions to a small group of students who could benefit from more intense fluency instruction. In this section, we offer several research-based methods that are best delivered in a small group setting for those students who need that additional fluency boost. We recommend that you meet with your Tier 2 groups often, perhaps two to three times per week or more.

First, you will read about echo reading. The teacher conducts echo reading in small groups. This method is for students who need extra scaffolding and the opportunity for immediate practice. Echo reading is a type of gradual release that helps students independently read aloud difficult texts with accuracy and expression, thereby also boosting confidence.

Next, we describe paired reading, an approach that does not necessarily require the teacher to meet with the student—all you need to do is pair a more fluent reader with a less fluent reader. It could be an older student, a parent, or another volunteer. It is an engaging approach that allows for choice and builds on social relationships, giving more attention to the student in need of intervention. Essentially, it is a variation of choral reading aimed at increasing accuracy, rate, and expressive reading.

For a more holistic approach, we describe a guided reading delivery method that emphasizes objectives in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, which is ideal for teaching other literacy skills along with fluency. Finally, we conclude this chapter with the Fluency Development Lesson, a framework that you can use with small groups daily to build their reading fluency.

Echo Reading

Echo reading is a fluency-building technique whereby a teacher reads a sentence aloud to a small group of students. Then the students echo, or reread, the same sentence aloud while focusing on accuracy and prosody. The echoing continues for the entirety of the text.

Background

This method is derived from listening-while-reading strategies (Chomsky, 1976). While Chomsky only asked students to listen while reading, this strategy entails a teacher reading a sentence aloud while students listen and then repeat it back to the teacher. So then, it differs from traditional listen-while-reading strategies in that students first listen and then read. Therefore, this strategy has an added gradual release component in which the teacher models the reading and students have an immediate opportunity to practice.

Materials and Procedures

This strategy calls for an independent-level text and a small, homogeneous group of readers. You can use your existing guided reading groups, but instead of selecting an instructional-level text, choose one that students can read easily. Then again, we always recommend that you stretch your lessons to your students' highest potential, so you might consider an instructional-level text or perhaps even a frustrational-level one.

Next, make sure each student in the group has a copy of the text. Explain the procedure in kid-friendly language:

1. I will read a sentence out loud.
2. You will listen carefully to the words and my expression.
3. Then you will all read the sentence out loud to me.
4. Read aloud with good expression.

Begin the procedure by reading aloud. Make sure the students listen carefully, and then echo read with accuracy and expression. Continue this for the entire book, passage, or poem.

Lower Elementary Grade Example

In Mr. Nash's second-grade classroom, groups engage in echo reading once per week. He uses his existing guided reading groups and picks one day per week to switch his instructional method to echo reading. For example, one of his groups is reading at a beginning-of-second-grade level, about a half-year behind the expectation. Because of the added support that echo reading provides, he chooses a level 24 (midyear second grade) book in hopes of rapidly increasing students' reading abilities. Mr. Nash obtains five copies of *The Team* by Sally Murphy, one for himself and one for each of the four students in the group. He begins by explaining the procedure. "Today we are going to do some echo reading. I will read a sentence aloud and then you will all read the same sentence back to me. Listen carefully to how I read with expression, and do your best to read it aloud like I did. This book is called *The Team*. Let's start with chapter one." Mr. Nash then reads the first sentence aloud:

Mr. Nash: "'Catch!' called Kelly, as she threw the basketball to her friend, Mischa."

Students: "'Catch!' called Kelly, as she threw the basketball to her friend, Mischa."

Mr. Nash listens for accuracy and expression. If he does not hear it, he might read it aloud again, and point out the specifics of his expression. Mr. Nash says, "See that exclamation mark? That means we read the word 'catch' enthusiastically. Try it with me."

Mr. Nash: "Catch!" (reads loudly and emphatically)

Students: "Catch!" (also read loudly and emphatically)

Mr. Nash is satisfied, and he observes his students as they read the text. The quick reteach on the word "Catch" helped his students see exactly what Mr. Nash was looking for. He and the group continue echo reading. The goal is to read either the rest of the text or read it for the next 15 to 20 minutes, whichever comes first.

Upper Elementary Grade Example

A group of fourth graders are reading considerably below grade level in Mrs. Valadez's class. The group of students struggles greatly with fluency

and requires considerable scaffolding when tackling difficult texts. In order to adhere to RTI-based recommendations that students requiring Tier 2 interventions should receive at least 60 minutes of small group instruction per week (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010), Mrs. Valadez has dedicated three days per week to a group of six struggling readers and provides echo reading for approximately 20 minutes. She believes the strategy is perfect because the gradual release model and teacher support provide the necessary scaffolding that her students need. They are currently studying savannas, so Mrs. Valadez chose to use *Wild Savanna Zoos* by Lucinda Cotter, a second-grade book that is at the instructional level of her group of students.

She begins by explaining the procedures to the group. “I am going to read this book sentence by sentence. You will reread each sentence aloud after I’ve read it to you. Make sure you read it like I did—with good expression.” She begins by reading aloud the first heading.

Mrs. Valadez: “What Is a Savanna?”

Students: “What Is a Savanna?”

Mrs. Valadez listens carefully to make sure the students mimic her expression. Because the first heading is in the form of a question, she makes sure that students read it as such with the proper inflection. Once she is satisfied, she continues the echo reading procedure for the next 20 minutes. It is possible she will need an additional text, depending on the length.

Adaptations

The easiest way to modify echo reading is to adjust the text difficulty. If you find that your students struggle, decrease the level of the text. Conversely, if they appear to engage in the strategy with ease, perhaps it is time to increase the level of the text. You can also modify the strategy to fit the chosen text type. For example, if you choose to use poetry, you may not want to read each sentence (if it even has sentences), so you could read line by line or perhaps short stanzas.

Effectiveness

Researchers have studied the effectiveness of echo reading and found the method to be a powerful way to increase students’ reading fluency (Homan, Klesius & Hite, 1993). Echo reading can potentially increase

reading accuracy, rate, and expression (Rasinski, 2010). However, it must be implemented consistently to achieve the desired results. Thus, if you choose to use echo reading with your students, find a good place for it in your schedule and stick to it.

Paired Reading

Paired reading is a great way to develop fluency. However, some students may need a more direct and intense form of assisted fluency instruction. Paired reading provides students with a one-on-one experience in assisted reading. As the name implies, a less fluent reader is matched with a more fluent reader. For a regular and specified period of time, usually 10 to 20 minutes, the two readers read together chorally and simultaneously. The more fluent reader adjusts his or her voice to keep pace with the less fluent reader.

Background

Although the procedure seems simple enough, the results can be quite impressive. Through a number of studies on paired reading, Keith Topping (1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1995) found that daily use of paired reading with struggling readers can make dramatic improvements, not only in students' reading word recognition and fluency, but also in their reading comprehension and overall reading achievement.

Materials and Procedures

The beauty of paired reading is that it can be used with any text. Normally the student who is being tutored (tutee) chooses the text—it can be pleasure reading, assigned reading by the teacher, or perhaps even incidental reading, such as something found in a magazine. By allowing the tutored student a choice, we are giving him or her ownership of the activity. The material should be at the tutee's instructional level—challenging but not frustrating (usually this means material at which the tutee can read about 95 percent of the words correctly).

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The procedure is also easy to implement. The tutee and his or her partner (tutor) sit comfortably side by side. On cue, the tutee and tutor read the text orally. Note: Paired reading does not involve the readers alternating lines or paragraphs—both readers read the same text together or chorally. As the reading continues, the tutee follows along by pointing to the words in the text as the pair reads. The tutor adjusts the rate of his or her reading to that of the tutee and the difficulty level of the passage; however, the tutor may wish to slightly “push” or “pull” the tutee by reading at a slightly faster clip than the tutee. Also, if the text or a portion of the text is more challenging than usual, the tutor can also read in a slightly louder-than-normal voice to provide more support to the tutee.

If the tutee feels comfortable and confident enough to “go solo,” or read without the assistance of the tutor, he or she can signal the tutor with a tap on the wrist or some other nonverbal cue. When such a signal is given, the tutor simply stops reading aloud but continues to read silently. When the tutee signals again, that is the tutor’s sign to continue reading aloud with his or her partner.

If the tutee makes a word-decoding error when paired reading with the tutor or alone, the tutor simply states the correct pronunciation of the word while pointing to it and signals the tutee to do the same. There is no need to stop and make a lesson out of a word-decoding error. That would take away from the authentic reading experience and divert both readers’ attention from the meaning of the passage. The tutor can make a mental note of any errors made during the paired reading and chat about them with the tutee at the end of the session. A brief discussion about the text and the tutee’s reading usually concludes a paired reading session.

Adaptations

What we like about paired reading is that it is an authentic reading experience. The student who is the tutee chooses the text and has some control in the intervention, perhaps then increasing the engagement factor. The essence of paired reading is simply two readers reading (and enjoying) a text together. There are many ways that paired reading can be varied in order to create a variety of reading experiences.

First, the person playing the role of the tutor can change. It can be the teacher, a parent, another family member, a classroom volunteer or aide, an older student, or a classmate. The main consideration is that the tutor

needs to be a more fluent reader than the tutee. As mentioned earlier, the text that is used in paired reading can change depending on the preference of the tutee. However, if the tutor finds a particularly intriguing text for paired reading, there is no reason why he or she cannot recommend a text or series of texts for paired reading.

Repeated reading is a highly regarded approach for fluency development. Paired reading can easily be matched with repeated reading in order to get a synergistic effect. A text read one day can be reread on a second day (perhaps with the tutor providing somewhat less support, such as reading in a softer voice and allowing the tutee's voice to lead the reading). After the second (and perhaps even a third) day of reading a text, the tutor and tutee should discuss how the tutee's reading has improved. It's very encouraging for the tutee to see that the amount of text read in a 10-minute period increased from the first to second (and even third) reading. An added benefit is that the improved fluency from one reading to the next allowed the tutee to cover more text.

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We think it is a good idea to spend a few minutes talking about the tutee's reading after a paired reading session. The tutor should focus on the positive aspects of the tutee's reading—confident voice, good expression, pausing at appropriate points, good phrasing, etc. The tutor may also bring up some areas for improvement. If word recognition errors seem to plague the paired reading, the tutor may wish to spend a bit of time focusing on the errors, providing the tutee with strategies for working through difficult words and also talking about the meaning of such words.

Lower Elementary Grade Example

Second-grade teacher Mrs. Robinson thinks that students should read as much as possible. So, in addition to encouraging reading in school, she works hard to get parents and families involved in students' reading. "I love that my parents read to their children daily. It's perhaps the most important thing that they can do, and I remind parents about it all the time." Mrs. Robinson thinks that parents can do even more at this critical stage in their students' reading. Early in the school year, she asks parents to attend one

of several hour-long sessions on paired reading. During the training, she describes paired reading, demonstrates how it is done with a student, and asks parents to practice with their own children. Then she asks parents to do paired reading with their children at least three times a week. She provides parents with a weekly log to track their paired reading with their children.

“The improvement, especially in my struggling readers, is quite remarkable.” Mrs. Robinson is so sold on paired reading that she regularly sends home notes and has paired reading trainings and follow-ups throughout the school year. In fact, every May she celebrates her students’ and parents’ success with a paired reading celebration in her classroom. It’s at that time that she asks parents to sign a pledge to continue to do paired reading during the summer break.

Upper Elementary Grade Example

Like many classrooms around the country Ms. Destin’s fifth-grade class contains high, average, and struggling readers. While sustained silent independent reading is a daily occurrence in her classroom, Ms. Destin also adds variety into her class’s reading experience with paired reading activities. Every other month she will pair her stronger readers with students who are less fluent. Then for 10 to 15 minutes, the pairs of students find a quiet corner or area of the classroom and engage in paired reading. Some months, she assigns one book that she thinks students would enjoy reading in this manner. Other months, she allows each reading pair to choose a text.

“No question, paired reading is well worth the time I take to train students in doing it. What I really like about my way of doing paired reading is that it encourages students to help one another. Even the more advanced readers seem to benefit as they develop empathy and provide support for their partners. I will often match partners who may not normally be ‘best buddies.’ Yet it is so neat to see them work together to read and understand a book or other text.”

Later in the year, Ms. Destin will work with a third-grade teacher and allow volunteers to engage in paired reading with third-grade partners. Ms. Destin notes that this allows her struggling readers to read texts that they can more easily master and puts them in the position of being the helper as opposed to the student who is receiving the help. “It truly is a win-win situation for all students involved!”