



# The Reading Fluency Project: Raising Reading Achievement in the UK

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## Introduction

The importance of reading fluency has gained recognition as a key component to early reading curriculum, especially for pupils who struggle in reading [1,2]. Despite this, fluency instruction is not commonly integrated into early literacy curriculum. Fluency continues to be allocated the least amount of time, and therefore by implication, the least amount of importance among the major components of early literacy [3]. Misconceptions that fluency was all about fast reading and only oral reading tended to make some literacy educators skeptical of its appropriate role in literacy learning [4].

It is clear that the impact of fluency instruction continues to be a contentious subject for teachers of reading. Many wonder whether fluency is related to reading comprehension, and if so, how can fluency be taught in ways that are relatively easy and simple to implement, whilst engaging the interest of pupils? This article describes a promising approach to fluency instruction, the HFL Reading Fluency Project, developed in the United Kingdom (UK) for children ages 8-11 (Grades 3-5 in the US). The project intended to strengthen children's instant word recognition and inner reading voice, thus providing them with the opportunity to read a range of texts with appropriate levels of automaticity in word recognition, pace, prosody (expression, phrasing, and intonation) so that the words on the page become capable of imparting meaning as they are read. This is achieved through a combination of modelled expert

prosody, echo reading, repeated reading, performance reading, text-marking and challenging text selection.

## Outcomes

Qualitative evidence from teachers forms an important impact tool of the intervention. Every time the project teachers gather together for their final instalment of project input, after just 8 weeks of explicit reading fluency instruction, the enthusiasm is infectious and palpable. Reflections, testimonials and 'turning points' are gathered from the teachers – those moments when they sensed that their pupils were experiencing a shift in their proficiency, aptitude, or enjoyment of reading – and they are encouraged to gather feedback from the pupils. The most important outcome from the project that teachers identify is that previously reluctant pupils now actively seek out and ask when the next fluency session is taking place. Two teachers noted this change, stating "A very reluctant reader would ask every day, "Are we reading today?" and "My favorite thing about the group has been seeing the children's attitude towards reading change. Before, they felt reading was a burden and now they are enthusiastic to begin the session." Another teacher noted the pupils' new "enthusiasm for books and reading! Confidence – persevering with the books they have." Teachers recalled their "magic moments" during the project. One teacher stated, "A child in my group joined as a selective mute and now has the confidence to do a performance in front of the class

with confidence and fantastic expression.” Another teacher noted how “a child with speech and language needs [is now] applying the techniques in whole class reading, reading loud and clear with expression and confidence.” Overall, this feedback indicated that this project provided a positive experience for both teachers and pupils.

### Next Steps

The introduction of fluency instruction has proven to be immensely impactful for both our students and teachers. It serves as a crucial component in facilitating not just smoother reading, but also enhanced comprehension and increased confidence among readers. Furthermore, our experience has highlighted the efficiency of incorporating fluency instruction into the curriculum, requiring only approximately one hour per week for eight weeks. With readily available materials and a straightforward instructional plan, effective fluency instruction can be implemented with ease. Encouraged by our own significant achievements, we urge educators in early literacy to embrace fluency instruction, whether by following the ideas in this article or by crafting their own approach grounded in key principles such as modeling fluent reading, guided reading, repetition, and meaningful discussions about texts. We are

confident that students, particularly those grappling with literacy challenges, stand to benefit greatly from this endeavor.

### Acknowledgement

None.

### Conflict of Interest

We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

### References

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