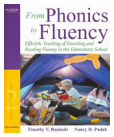


From Phonics to Fluency



I recently attended a fascinating seminar on reading sponsored by the Monroe County Community School Corporation. The presenter was Dr. Timothy Rasinski, a professor at Kent State University who authored From Phonics to Fluency: Effective Teaching of Decoding and Reading Fluency in the Elementary School. The topic of the seminar was fluency in reading. While some school systems equate fluency with reading speed, Dr. Rasinski described it as a bridge between reading mechanics and comprehension. Children need to achieve accuracy in the surface or mechanical level of reading which includes phonics, spelling, and vocabulary to progress to the deep level where they make meaning. The link between the two is fluency. Fluent reading involves automaticity, or dealing with the mechanics of reading without stumbling and struggling. Fluency also requires prosody, the ability to read aloud or silently with proper phrasing and expression. Dr. Rasinski shared several methods that teachers and parents can use to help students improve their fluency. I was thrilled to hear that we public librarians have been promoting and supporting these activities at MCPL for years. His presentation focused on singing, poetry, and reader's theater.

I already knew that singing with preschool children is important because it helps them pay attention to the rhythms and rhymes of spoken language. Because most songs have a different note for each syllable, children can break down words and hear the individual sounds in a word. This is essential for learning phonics. Songs also build vocabulary and add to a child's general cultural knowledge. Now I have learned that songs are an important way to help school aged children master the mechanics of reading. Gonna Sing My Head Off: American Folk Songs for Children, collected by Kathleen Krull is a fine source of songs that promote our American cultural heritage in fun, singable songs. Wee Sing America, by Pamela Beall is a book with CD combination that is full of American patriotic songs. To use these songs for reading practice an adult should create a separate lyric sheet using a 14 - 16 point font.

Poetry is another fun way to promote accuracy in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. Sharing Mother Goose rhymes with young children and poetry with older students helps them hear rhyme and rhythm. Parents and teachers can work with children to identify rhyming words that make word families. They can harvest unfamiliar words from song texts and poems and then define, collect, and use those new words to build vocabulary. Every time a child processes a new word, he or she is less likely to stumble over that word when it is encountered again. A couple of good resources for poems to share with your child are Poetry Speaks to Children, edited by Elise Paschen and The Random House Book of Poetry for Children: A Treasury of 572 Poems for Today's Child, selected by Jack Prelutsky.

Groups of children can practice reading together using reader's theater. It is easy to adapt songs, poems, and folktales into simple scripts for several readers. Children don't have to be actors to enjoy authentic participation and effective reading practice at the same time. Reader's theater is great for classrooms, scout groups, church groups, or any place where children come together. Look for 25 Just-Right Plays for Emergent Readers, by Carol Pugliano-Martin or Read! Perform! Learn! 10 Reader's Theater Programs for Literacy Enhancement, by Toni Buzzeo in the Parent/Teacher Resource Room in Children's Services.

