

"Is That How I Really Sound?": Using iPads for Fluency Practice

Molly Ness

When students follow the Record, Listen, Reflect process, repeated readings tap into 21st-century technologies in an engaging and motivating manner.

Student 1: Wait, let me try again! I can do better than that!

Student 2: What will you do to make yourself better this time?

Student 1: Next time, I will read more slowly and make my voice go higher at the end to show a question.

I overheard this conversation in a third-grade classroom where students worked with iPads in fluency centers. Though her students often read aloud, this teacher was concerned about their infrequent opportunities to hear their own oral reading. Intending to bring awareness to students' prosody, expression, and intonation, this teacher capitalized on the easy video recording capacities of her classroom's iPads. She implemented a process called Record, Listen, Reflect. In this teaching tip, I showcase this three-step process with iPads to give students the opportunity to listen and to critique their oral reading to improve their fluency.

Understanding Fluency

Rasinski (2014) defined two essential components of fluency: "automaticity in word recognition and expression in oral reading that reflects the meaning of the text" (p. 4). Both components are essential for proficient, meaningful reading (Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, & Linan-Thompson, 2011). Conversely, poor reading fluency may significantly contribute to poor overall reading (Rasinski, 2014; Rasinski & Padak, 1998; Valencia & Buly, 2004). LaBerge and Samuels (1974) argued that individuals have limited cognitive resources, so automaticity in decoding contributes mental energy that is needed to comprehend text. Students who are not decoding words automatically have fewer cognitive resources available, and therefore, they have decreased comprehension.

There is no shortage of ideas on how to incorporate fluency into small-group instruction and

literacy centers (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Some tried-and-true fluency strategies include paired reading (Topping, 2014), choral reading (Rasinski, 2013; Topping, 2014), and Readers Theatre (see Young & Rasinski, 2009). Teachers have a plethora of engaging strategies available, including digital fluency tools such as cyber read-alouds and virtual Readers Theatre (Thoermer & Williams, 2012). For fluency instruction, teachers can take advantage of alternate texts such as poetry (Faver, 2014), tongue twisters (Stern, 2014), and joke books (Ness, 2009). Rasinski (2012) reminded us that fluency should continue to be a hot topic in elementary classrooms.

A 21st-Century Version of Repeated Readings

One of the most effective strategies to build students' fluency is repeated readings (Samuels, 1979). The purpose of repeated readings is to provide readers with short-term, achievable goals, such as increasing speed and accuracy, while reading for a better comprehension of the text (Cohen, 2011). Multiple studies have demonstrated the benefits of repeated readings with diverse student populations: word recognition, accuracy, automaticity, comprehension, and students' attitudes toward and confidence in reading all improve through the act of repeated readings (Cohen, 2011; Dowhower, 1989; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski, Samuels, Hiebert, Petscher, & Feller, 2011).

Repeated readings, however, can also be problematic. Rasinski (2012) cautioned teachers that the sole focus of repeated readings should not be merely speed. As students aim to increase only their speed and calculate their increasing reading rates, they run

Molly Ness is an associate professor in the Division of Curriculum and Teaching at Fordham University, New York, NY, USA; e-mail mness@fordham.edu.

the risk of becoming readers whose “comprehension actually declines as they learn to blow through periods, commas, and other forms of punctuation in their quest for speed” (p. 518). Cahill and Gregory (2011) noted that “the problem with repeated reading in the classroom is that it can be dull and lifeless, leading students to avoid the practice” (p. 128). According to Rasinski (2014), a key element of repeated readings is rehearsal, which holds the student accountable for a prosodic and meaning-driven delivery of a text. It can be a challenge, however, to find an engaging way to encourage readers to reread the same text.

In my work with struggling readers, I have incorporated iPads into repeated reading activities in a process called Record, Listen, Reflect. My instruction has been influenced by previous research in the use of video self-modeling, also known as feedforward video self-modeling. In these approaches, students watch video footage of themselves to reflect and improve their performance (Decker & Buggey, 2014; Robson, Blampied, & Walker, 2015). Decker and Buggey investigated the impact of video self-modeling with students with learning disabilities. Students were video recorded while they orally read short passages, and later, they were shown these videos once a week. With this approach, students’ fluency (as measured by words correct per minute) increased. This study, however, did not examine the use of video self-modeling on other elements of fluency, such as prosody, inflection, intonation, and expression. In a similar approach, Robson et al. had elementary-age students read difficult text six times over a two-week period. After video recording themselves and watching these videos, students improved their fluency and comprehension and scored higher on measures of reader self-efficacy.

My focus is on the use of iPads as a 21st-century version of video self-modeling to improve reading fluency (see Pluck, 2012). Previous authors (Hutchison, Beschorner, & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012) have noted the advantages of using the iPad in literacy learning, stating that “the iPad, and other tablets like it, has changed mobile learning possibilities for teachers and students” (p. 15). In this instructional practice, teachers capitalize on the ease and usability of the iPad’s video recording capabilities.

Record, Listen, Reflect

In the first step, Record, students read passages at their independent or instructional level that they can read with minimal assistance. This time, however,

they use the iPad to record themselves reading. The video capabilities of an iPad are easy enough for even very young students to use independently. Students simply tap the camera icon, tap the Record button at the bottom of the screen to start recording, and then tap the Record button again to stop recording.

In the second step, Listen, students view their recording to note their accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. Their aim here is to act as the teacher would—to mark their errors as a teacher would use a running record, to pay attention to their prosody and intonation, and to notice their use of punctuation as a visual signpost for fluency. I teach students to follow text copies, circle words that they miscue, and use the time stamp on the videos to note how quickly they read the text. On their text copies, students learn to note the following errors:

- When they omit a word
- When they substitute a word
- When they invert the order of words
- When they insert a word that is not in the text

Because their recorded readings are relatively short, I encourage students to listen to themselves more than once. As Vasinda and McLeod (2011) noted, “allowing students to listen to recordings of their reading is a good way to promote self-evaluation, which is a key tool in becoming a successful reader” (p. 492).

In the third step, Reflect, students complete an evaluation to monitor progress and set goals for their next rereading. This chart (see Figure 1) has two purposes: to increase their speed while decreasing their errors and to reflect on the elements of fluency that are more difficult to quantify, such as intonation, attendance to punctuation, and other elements that are essential for oral delivery. This final reflection step encourages students to be metacognitive about their oral reading. With each reading and recording, their fluency rate increases, their intonation improves, and ultimately, their comprehension improves.

Applying Record, Listen, Reflect to Third-Grade Literacy Centers

As a teacher educator, I am often invited into the classrooms of my former students. I recently spent several weeks in a third-grade classroom with one former student who expressed her interest in “tapping into technology to make fluency instruction more engaging.” In her daily literacy centers, we introduced the Record, Listen, Reflect process. After

Figure 1
Reading Checklist

Name:

Date:

Title of the Text:

Watch your video. Think about your own reading. Ask yourself these questions:

	Well done	Needs improvement
Did I take my time and read at the appropriate pace?		
Did I read smoothly, the way we talk in a conversation?		
Did I pay attention to punctuation and what it means?		
Did I sound expressive?		
Did I pause at the correct places?		
Did I read clearly?		
Did I say each word correctly?		
Did I self-correct if I made a mistake?		

I made ____ mistakes (fill in the number). Next time, I'm aiming for ____ mistakes (fill in the number).

It took me ____ seconds (fill in the number). Next time, I'm aiming for ____ seconds (fill in the number).

Here's where I ran into trouble:

Here's my plan for next time to address that trouble:

Other comments I want to make about my video:

becoming familiar with the process, students were challenged to create their best possible recording of themselves. Our aim was to create a library

of videos that showcase each student as the best possible reader. To select and prepare their videos, students worked with partners to watch each

other's videos and give feedback. I overheard students make comments to each other such as "You got all the words right, but you read so fast that I couldn't really follow you," and "This video shows your voice loud and proud. You also made your voice sound scary here, so I knew which character you were pretending to be." One young girl told us the following:

We always get practice in reading aloud. I think our teachers use it as a way to check if we are reading a just right book or one that is too hard. I'm always listening to other kids read out loud. But I never really had the chance to listen to myself. At first, it felt funny to hear my own voice. I kept thinking, "Do I really sound like that?"

We conferenced with students and gave them feedback on their videos. The feedback from peers and a proficient reader, along with the friendly pressure to showcase their best possible video, served as instant motivation. Without nudging or nagging from the teacher, students independently returned to their iPads multiple times to record again. We were delighted to overhear student comments such as "Let me try that again!" and "That wasn't good enough." When satisfied with their best possible video, students uploaded their clips to a YouTube channel that was private to the class. The possibilities for this YouTube channel were endless. We shared the video library with parents and families. Parents wrote comments about the videos directly underneath each video. We used the videos in our work with our first-grade class reading buddies. In their reading buddy partnerships, students showed their videos to their partners with conversations such as "Did you notice how I raised my voice to show a question?" and "What was the best thing I did in this video?"

As we continued with our work, we experimented with other apps—MoviePro, Videoshop, and Magisto—to enhance the quality of the self-recorded videos. Although each app was relatively easy to use, the cost and the complications of these apps made them unnecessary. Because our students' video clips were short and did not require editing, the iPad video camera itself was sufficient, especially because our students wanted to record and delete videos immediately. We eventually purchased several tripods (approximately \$10 to \$20 each) that helped students get the perfect camera angle while they recorded. For us, the appeal of this instructional practice was its low cost and its technological ease.

Concluding Thoughts

In our work with these third-grade readers, fluency instruction became modern and motivating. Additionally, after our initial setup and directions, students became self-sufficient in their iPad fluency work. They independently selected text, recorded themselves, watched and reflected, and continued this cycle until they were satisfied with their delivery. Perhaps most beneficial was that by watching themselves read and reflecting on their delivery, they had instant feedback on their performance. Over several weeks, student responses shifted from "Is that how I really sound?" to "I can do better than that!"

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