

## ORAL READING

### 1. ORAL READING SHOULD BE WITH MATERIAL THAT IS FAIRLY EASY.

Material that students read orally with an adult should be easy enough that they will make no more than five errors per hundred words read. If the average sentence length is seven words, this would be no more than one error every three sentences. It is very important that children not make too many errors because their ability to cross-check drops dramatically when they are making so many errors that they can't make sense of it.

### 2. CHILDREN SHOULD NEVER CORRECT THE READER'S ERROR.

Allowing students to correct errors inhibits the reader's ability to self-correct and forces the reader to try for "word-perfect reading." Although it might seem that striving for word-perfect reading would be a worthy goal, it is not, because it would keep our eyes from moving efficiently as we read.

When we read, our eyes move across the line of print in little jumps. The eyes then stop and look at the words. The average reader can see about 12 letters at a time—one large word, two medium words, or three small words. When our eyes stop, they can see only the letters they have stopped on. The following letters are not visible until the eyes move forward and stop once again. Once our eyes have moved forward, we can't see the words we saw during the last stop. As we read orally, our eyes move out ahead of our voice. This is how we can read with expression because the intonation and emphasis we give to a particular word can only be determined when we have seen the words that follow it. The space between where our eyes are and where our voice is is our eye-voice span. Fluent readers reading easy material have an eye-voice span of five to six words.

Good readers read with expression because their voice is training their eyes. When they say a particular word, their eyes are no longer on that word but rather several words down the line. This explains a phenomenon experienced by all good readers. They make small, non-meaning-changing errors when they read orally. The reader says "can't" when the actual printed words were *can not*. They read "car" when the actual printed word was *automobile*. Non-meaning-changing errors are a sign of good reading! They indicate that the eyes are ahead of the voice, using the succeeding words in the sentence to confirm the meaning, pronunciation, and expression given to previous words. The reader who says, "car," for *automobile* must have correctly recognized or decoded *automobile*, or that reader could not have substituted the synonym *car*. When the reader says "car," the word *automobile* can no longer be seen because the eyes have moved on.

Good readers make small non-meaning-changing errors because their eyes are not right on the words they are saying. If other children are allowed to follow along while the oral reader reads, they will interrupt the reader to point out these errors. If

children are allowed to correct a reader's non-meaning-changing errors children learn that when reading orally, you should keep your eyes right on the very word you are saying. Too much oral reading with each error corrected by the children or the teacher will result in children not developing the eye-voice span all good fluent readers have.

### **3. IGNORE ERRORS THAT DON'T CHANGE MEANING.**

Of course, since you recognize small, non-meaning-changing errors as a sign of good eye-voice span, you will grit your teeth and ignore them!

### **4. WHEN THE READER MAKES A MEANING-CHANGING ERROR, WAIT!**

Stifle the urge to stop and correct the reader immediately. Rather, wait until the reader finishes the sentence or paragraph. What follows the error is often the information the reader needs in order to self-correct. Students who self-correct errors based on subsequent words read should be praised because they are demonstrating their use of cross-checking while reading.

### **5. IF WAITING DOESN'T WORK, GIVE SUSTAINING FEEDBACK.**

If the reader continues on after making a meaning-changing error, the teacher should stop the reader by saying something like:

**Wait a minute. That didn't make sense. You read, "Then the magician stubbled and fell." Does that make sense?**

The teacher has now reinforced a major understanding all readers must use if they are to decode words well. The word must have the right letters and make sense. The letters in "stubbled" are very close to the letters in *stumbled* but "stubbled" does not make sense. The teacher should then pause and see if the reader can find a way to fix it. If so, the teacher should say,

**Yes, "stumbled" makes sense. Good. Continue reading.**

If not, the teacher could say something like:

**Look at the word you called "stubbled". Do you see any parts of the word that you know?**

If that does not help, the teacher might continue by pointing out the *m* before the *b*, or by modeling the decoding.

Oral reading provides the "teachable moment"—a time for teachers to help students use the sense of what they are reading and the letter-sound relationships they know. When teachers respond to an error by waiting until a meaningful juncture is reached and responding first with a question, such as "Did that make sense?", children focus

more on meaning and begin to correct their own errors. The rest of the reading group hears how the teacher responds to the error. As they listen, they learn how they should use “sense” and decoding skills as they are actually reading. Feedback that encourages readers to self-correct and monitor their reading sends a “you can do it” message.