



Improving students' sensitivity to rhythm enables them to connect words more fluently

extending it to 15 weeks, during which time they gradually became more accurate with their letter sounds. As the name suggests, the programme is based on rhythm – counter-intuitively, students work in groups of up to 10 to learn to read music where they associate each note with a sound, and make actions and sounds to these. The focus is on fluency. They later learn the letters for the phonemes. At first, staff could not understand the concept and were extremely sceptical about how learning might transfer back into the classroom. However, after a training session from Dr Long, they could see exactly how it worked, and as the programme progressed, slowly but surely students' reading became clearer.

We tried it with students who have moderate to severe learning difficulties, including autism and Down syndrome, and staff have additionally differentiated sessions for students with visual and hearing impairments. We think it succeeds because it is very active and the musical notation shows students how to speed up and slow down, and consequently they quickly develop a rhythm to their reading. In the past, they learned to read with letter blends and even whole words, but their reading was so disjointed that they didn't understand what they were reading. Here they were tackling phrases rather than individual words or sounds.

Initially, the programme was run as an action research project by Dr Long,

who came in on Wednesday afternoons to lead six groups of students supported by teachers and TAs. From our point of view, it was easy to pick up.

The key, we think, is that this is a different way into reading and so there is a different level of engagement. All the students who took part in the action research project are now reading more fluently; they have access to a range of materials, from books on Kindles to magazines, catalogues and environmental prints around the school, and we've seen a lift in their willingness to engage with all of these. Parents also gave us good feedback indicating that the methodology was working at home.

**“The focus is on fluency”**

The programme includes pre- and post-assessments to enable staff to monitor levels of student engagement. Dr Long continues to keep our skills up to date using Skype calls. Meanwhile, our own action research is drilling down into the details – we have now identified that the best time of day to teach the programme to our students is straight after lunch. The format also seems to suit pupils on the autism spectrum perfectly. Meanwhile, it has also helped two young men with

Down syndrome who are very able communicators but had refused to try and read anything.

From the teachers' point of view, it is fabulous to have students engaged at the start of lessons and wanting to try something new. Today, every member of staff has been fully trained and actively uses the programme in their classrooms.

**The Rhythm for Reading programme costs between £2,500 and £5,000 depending on the size of the school and type of delivery.**  
<https://rhythmforreading.com>



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## FIND OUT MORE

*'I can read further and there's more meaning while I read.' An exploratory study investigating the impact of a rhythm-based music intervention on children's reading, a peer-reviewed article by Dr Marion Long, published by Sage. <http://bit.ly/sc240-02>*