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Implementing Tier I And II Fluency Based Interventions In An Elementary Classroom

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IMPLEMENTING TIER I AND II FLUENCY BASED INTERVENTIONS IN AN

ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

by

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INTRODUCTION

Point of View

In my experience as a former kindergarten teacher and now a fourth grade teacher, I am fortunate to see how reading begins in the early years and how those emergent skills are applied in intermediate reading. When five year olds would walk into my classroom on the first day of kindergarten, they may have never experienced what school looks and feels like or they may have been engaged in rich literacy environments from birth. At this stage in their schooling, I would work diligently to expose them to the very beginning skills of reading; phonemic awareness, rhymes, sight words, letter names and sounds. These primary skills, while simple, carry a tremendous amount of weight when it comes to learning to read. Those students who had rich literacy environments growing up, were read to, sung to, engaged in games and songs in preschool, and interacted with print and conversation around it with the adults in their life. They were the students that very quickly grasped the concepts of print and were very eager to try their hand at sounds, words, and eventually entire books. This is an ideal scenario for a teacher. In reality, that scenario was not always true for each and every child that I was responsible for teaching to read. Instead, I would have to tap into my bank of strategies and start doling out the different strategies to different kids in an effort to make up for what they missed up until that point. The question I was trying to answer was: *How do*

regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?

Sometimes this would result in great success, other times, despite my hard work, I would run out of time and would reluctantly send one or more of my students to first grade in the hope that the important work of skill intervention would continue.

Reading continues for kids their entire school career. By the time students get to fourth grade, ideally they have been able to gain the skills necessary to be a fluent reader. Most students do, however in my experience, there is always a small percentage that have not yet. When I observe these students, they are often the ones who choose picture books instead of chapter books, graphic novels instead of pictureless narratives. They are the students that can rattle off a list of events or characters but don't really describe the story as it happens, carefully inserting and deleting the pertinent details.They are the fake readers, they have become self-conscious of the fact that they are not strong readers, and they have found ways to cope and make it look as though they are.

In the same way that I had in kindergarten, I would pull out my figurative tool box at the beginning of the year and get to work. I would discover their interests, try to match them with good fit books. I would model fluent reading, sit alongside them as they read orally and gently correct their errors. I would host small group lessons about punctuation, decoding and give them ample time to read independently. As I did in kindergarten, I would see many successes but I would also find myself on the last day of fourth grade sending some of those students onto the next grade with all the hope in the

world that their fifth grade teacher would be able to solve the problems I couldn't or that perhaps time would solve their reading problems.

Many of the strategies I've used have proven to be effective. But what I felt was getting in the way of truly being efficient and effective at intervening is that there wasn't strong purpose in my choices. The strategies were in and of themselves, good strategies and solid protocol for implementation but I was unsure if they were the right strategies and protocol.

For example, Kelly is a fourth grade student who shared with me in the first week of school that she was not a good reader. When I asked her why she thinks that about herself, she replied, " Most books are too hard, so I just like picture books, but I know I should be reading more chapter books." Kelly's honesty proved be an asset for her, it motivated me to dedicate my work to improve her confidence and skills so that she would, by the end of the year, think of herself as a good reader.

I got to work right away, sketching out a plan for her. I had her read for me often and I took many anecdotal notes about her reading behaviors. I completed assessments with her and decided that she struggled with decoding. I was diligent about meeting with her three times a week for six weeks, focusing on decoding and offering practice for acquisition of the skill. Kelly improved quickly, she saw and felt a change in her ability to take on new or difficult words and it created momentum for further growth. By mid year, she had stacks of chapter books on standby, ready to read, she rarely sought out picture books anymore. By the end of the year, with continual learning and practice, she

could engage in meaningful conversations about what she was reading with myself and her peers.

Her success fueled an ongoing question I have, how do I help ALL of my students in the way that I helped this one? I have to believe there was a little bit of luck involved with this student. I picked the right strategy because it sounded good, or it looked like it was likely to work because it was engaging or addressed the skill I was seeking to improve. It wasn't necessarily intentional, rather was a professional gut instinct. In reality, I want assurance that I have surveyed my options, and I am carefully following an effective path to success. Every student in my class should be able to expect that I can do the same for each of them. The challenge, for me, is how to decide what will work, how long to try it for, what to do if it doesn't work, and the best way to measure progress. It was time to take action and take responsibility for the professional growth that is needed for me in this area and answer the question: *How do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?*

Teachers are learners too. I am always exploring, refining and collaborating to find new and better ways to meet the needs of my students. I have found that teachers, including myself, often struggle with what is the most effective and efficient use of intervention strategies and my learnings from this research will help mainstream classroom teachers meet the needs of their students as well.

In my school, we are accustomed to working within a model that provides interventions to students with the highest need, which is referred to as Tier four in our

instructional model with tier three being served by an intervention teacher or reading specialist. This includes reading and math interventions groups taught outside of the classroom, to students with a demonstrated need, many of whom are English Language Learners and/or Special Education students. All other students receive grade level instruction, but a percentage of those students have established a need for more targeted instruction to help meet grade level learning targets.

Elementary teachers are responsible for more than one content area and must be strategic in planning their day to give learners quality instruction that provides for modeling, practice and feedback. It can be daunting for teachers to choose how best to spend their time and how to fit in the individualized attention to students with specific urgent need. This project is set out to be a tool for mainstream teachers to use as an If this…, Then do this... type of tool. It will be a place for teachers to reference if what they are noticing is difficult for students, or what data shows is lacking, and find out what the best strategy is for solving the problem. Links and resources are attached to the tool so that teachers can have quick access to the information and can get right to work as well as learn about the research behind the strategies and why they have been proven successful. This project is one example of learning in action.

Rationale

Reading works best when the reader can understand and interact with a text. Comprehension is the culmination of the complex weave of skills that makes up reading and in order to achieve this goal, each step or skill must be secure along the way. One of those skills is fluency, even within fluency there is yet another web of skills. The

overarching skill of fluency is a crucial stepping stone along the road of reading comprehension. It is the type of skill that can be a roadblock to comprehension if it is not secure.

At the beginning of every school year, teachers are greeted with a wide range of learners from different backgrounds, previous learning experiences and a wide variety of needs. Often times there are readers that arrive in their classroom disfluent in some benchmark, whether it be letter names, sounds, nonsense words, decoding, or phrasing. In order to move forward with the phases of reading, attention must be paid to the deficit(s) the reader has. The challenge often times is how to do I, as a teacher do this? How do I know what skills are disfluent? When do I fit it in to my already very busy day? How do I know it is working? What strategies do I use?

This project is intended to answer these questions and help a regular education teacher successfully implement an intervention model in his or her classroom and ultimately close the gaps in reading fluency among his or her readers.

Fluency is one of the five pillars of reading instruction. (National Reading Panel, 2000) Readers that lack strong fluency skills find it difficult to move to strong comprehension of texts. I have found that often times when students lack comprehension of texts it is because they have not attained the level of fluency needed to be able to devote cognitive energy to making meaning. When I have focused on boosting the fluency skills by providing targeted practice and guidance, the student is able to make gains in comprehension. This project will describe a few of the most effective intervention models strategies to be successful and give a structure for implementing

them in the classroom, including diagnostic tools, record keeping tools, and intervention strategies.

This research will be relevant for elementary teachers of reading. It will help teachers understand the continuum of learning to read, the strategies that are most effective for closing skill gaps and how to achieve it within a general education setting.This research will fill a gap in the professional learning that exists in my school. Right now, teachers are relying on independent research, trial and error and the occasional Professional Development opportunities that deliver a barrage of ideas that can be overwhelming to apply in the classroom. It will give teachers the knowledge and tools needed to perform effective interventions independently and will be direct and clear. Teachers will be able to go directly to the specific need they have and focus on solutions for it without having to sort out excess information.

Summary

In chapter two, I will offer a review of important literature and research previously done related to fluency, the Response to Intervention Model that is used in this research, and more specifically tier one and tier two interventions chosen as effective tools to use with students as well as common assessment tools that are appropriate for identifying fluency related problems as well as what is most important in providing the proper classroom environment for reading success. Chapter three, will follow with an explanation of methods used in this research. Chapter four will summarize my research findings after having worked directly with students and teacher in a fourth and fifth grade

classroom. The appendix that follows will include useful tools for teachers to use when

implementing a similar intervention system in their own classroom.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review looks to answer the question*: how do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?* The information from this review will help regular education classroom teachers understand how they can make a difference in reading achievement in intermediate grade level readers and best support students that do not meet grade level learning targets. This chapter will discuss the basis for fluency, and its importance in the process of learning to read. I will also discuss the response to intervention model and how tiers are determined for use in this research. In addition I will share the important components necessary for building a successful reading environment in a classroom in order to promote growth in reading among students.

Fluency

Fluency is a multifaceted skill that continues to develop throughout the life of a reader with multiple components such as accuracy, automaticity and prosody (Hudson, Pullen, Lane, & Torgesen, 2009). Yet, fluency has been a misunderstood skill and at times, underemphasized among teachers of reading. In fact, five of the most prevalent researchers in the area of fluency each define fluency differently (Allington, 2009).

First, fluency is not synonymous with speed and expression. When asked what fluency means to teachers, often many will say that fluency means reading fast and smooth. While there is some truth to that, fluency is much more complex.

Over a century ago, Edmund Burke Huey wrote a book about reading entitled,

The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading (Huey, 1908/1968). This book was important

for fluency in particular because it introduced the idea of what would later be referred to

as the theory of automaticity (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Huey describes how a student

progresses from beginning to recognize symbols (letters) to seeing them as wholistic

units (words). When readers are just beginning, they must assign cognitive energy to each

individual letter and assign its name or sound. This takes considerable cognitive work,

leaving little for other tasks simultaneously. With regular practice recognizing individual

letters, the student will begin to see the letters more automatically and gradually begin to

recognize whole words as units (sight words, high frequency words). The process

becomes more and more automatic and eventually the student will be able to take on a

second cognitive task of comprehension or making meaning of what they are

recognizing.

It is commonly accepted that the process of reading is considered a complex task.

A very useful analogy to help understand the role fluency plays in reading is that the most

elite skilled athletes in the world such as alpine skiers and highly skilled musicians such

as concert pianists have something in common with readers. Their coaches or teachers,

take the complex skill level that they are trying to achieve and break it down in to

subskills. The pianist or athlete then practices that skill over and over until it can be

achieved with appropriate speed, accuracy and expression. If the athlete or student tries to

jump ahead to a more complex skill they will likely fail, having had unmastered

prerequisite skills. (Samuels, 2014) Readers go through the same process of acquiring

skill. Teachers, introduce a new letter or sound (subskill) and ask students to practice it until the they have shown they can retain or master it by way of reading it automatically and with expression and accuracy. Teachers continue to increase complexity by adding more letters, sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs and so on.

Historically, fluency is referred to as "reading with expression." However, the early twentieth century literature began to challenge that, by providing evidence that many students could easily and accurately read aloud the words on the page but with little or no understanding of what they have read (Smith, 1934). The idea that reading fluently includes comprehension and understanding and it should be the ultimate goal for readers, began a change in thinking about what fluency means. More fluent readers are also better comprehenders (Hosp & Fuchs, 2005).

The project will look at fluency using both the historical perspective of automaticity, as well as current evidence that comprehension plays a key role in the definition. For the purposes of this paper, fluency means that a reader is able to accurately and efficiently read while successfully obtaining meaning from a text. This interpretation of the concept of fluency will provide teachers with the understanding of the place fluency has in reading so that they can more effectively intervene in skill improvement among their students with highest need in order to answer the question: *How do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?*

Response to Intervention

The primary and original use for Response to Intervention (RtI) is to serve as a progress monitoring tool for students with or without disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). RtI is an umbrella model for several different strategies and methods used. The model is typically broken into three tiers. Tier one being, regular classroom differentiation, tier two being targeted interventions given by the classroom teacher, and tier three being the most intensive, typically administered by a interventionist or special education teacher.

The use of RtI in schools can often be considered a special education identification tool. While that is a valid way to determine eligibility for special education services, it can also serve as a tool for teachers to use interventions systematically and efficiently without ever referring to special education. Response to Intervention is, simply put, a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on a student's response. When a student's response is dramatically inferior to that of his peers, the student may be determined to have a learning disability (Fuchs, 2003). It can also be effective in holding teachers accountable to themselves for implementing the intervention properly and more accurately refer students for special education evaluation. It is common for a teacher to observe discrepancies and wonder, is that behavior a sign that there is a disability? For example, a teacher may notice that a student is making letter reversals when writing but is unsure if that indicates a greater problem, in other words, a learning disability. The teacher could begin a regular intervention to address the problem, document the data associated with it, and watch for improvement over a

determined length of time. If no improvement is shown, the plan is adjusted and re-evaluated. If, after all of the appropriate interventions are exhausted, the teacher can then bring the student up to the specialists in their school for more intensive evaluation.This is an example of how RtI can work for regular education teachers.

Regardless of specifically how schools may implement an intervention model, RtI has one key theme that must be present for it to be successful. There must be some fidelity in how it is used among teachers. The tools used need to be reliable, the correlation between the instrument and outcomes strong, multiple data points are to be used, assessments are reliable and valid, and progress monitoring occurs in regular intervals. (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2004).

Interventions

The classroom teacher is charged with the task of meeting the needs of a wide range of learners. All students receive the core instruction that is intended for that grade level. For many students, differentiation needs to be considered and integrated for those students to be successful. For example, a fourth grade teacher will teach a lesson on main idea to the entire class and may have students work independently practicing the skill. For some students, the teacher observes that the skill is not secure and the teacher will need to work with those students in a small group or individually to re-teach strategies, scaffolding the activity or modeling strategies and providing time for guided practice. For some students this isn't enough. The teacher must take a step back and support that student with a pre-requisite skill. Thinking of a group of students as being in tiers of need helps the teacher assign more appropriate interventions to address the skills needed to

support improved reading success. Both individually administered and small-group interventions have positive or potentially positive outcomes. This is helpful in that it is possible to be effective with the limited time given for instruction in a day. (Gersten, Newman-Gonchar, Haymond, Dimino, 2017).

The first step is understanding what an intervention is. Next, teachers need to know what to look for in their students in order to determine the need for an intervention. Part of the professional responsibility of being a teacher is having a solid understanding of what is being taught. When a teacher has become very familiar with the standards and outcomes required as well as the resources being used, he or she is better equipped to take notice when there is a discrepancy. It is important for teachers to also have a strong basis for how children learn to read. Much of this comes with experience but there are stages of reading development that are important to understand. Chall's stages of reading development beginning with pre-reading where children gain insight into the structure of words, they have a beginning and end, through the final stage where readers are able to use selectively the printed material in those areas of knowledge central to one's concern. (Chall 1983). More specifically, teachers must be familiar with the typical learning outcomes for the students they are teaching. Often times this may be the state or Common Core standards in a broad sense. To more expertly define need, a teacher must understand what learning looks like within that standard or strand. For example, a Minnesota state standard for fourth graders is: Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures, including American Indian.

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). The teacher should know in advance what it is that students will show or do to demonstrate that they are secure in the skill. In this example, the student may make a very simple comparison with a short phrase or sentence or the student may describe in detail with specific text examples of the themes in a text. The teacher must decide what is considered secure and base their decision to scaffold, reteach or intervene on that level of security with the benchmark.

The practice of determining criteria for success or secure level helps the teacher better decipher the level or intensity of intervention needed when teaching. This can be done individually, with grade level teams or district wide.

Classroom Environment

There are other factors to consider when supporting student need besides the type of intervention you use. Teachers can impact the reading success and foster reading development of the students by including important components in their everyday routine of teaching. While there is an exhaustive list of strategies and ideas, the five listed below are consistently highlighted in research on fluency.

The first is providing access to books that are within the students range of readability. Reading development is best fostered when students have "just right" books in their hands (Allington, 2009). These are texts that a student can read with at least ninety five percent accuracy. Teachers should make it a priority to build a library or utilize the resources in the school to offer a variety of options for students. Students should be encouraged to spend time everyday reading those "just right" books both independently, partner reading or guided by the teacher or another adult.

Another component that teachers can be mindful of is the way feedback is given during reading aloud. Allington suggests that the Pause-Prompt-Praise strategy is the most appropriate (Allington 2006b). For example, when a child misreads, pause for up to three seconds. This is to allow the reader the time to notice a misread, and self-correct without a prompt. If the self correction doesn't happen, the teacher should then prompt the child to correct the error. Such as saying "sound it out", "start with the first sound", or simply provide the correct pronunciation. If during the pause, the reader does self-correct, the teacher should provide a praise specific to the strategy used.

Many classrooms quickly change from boisterous, active spaces to calm, quiet settled spaces when a teacher pulls out a picture book or a chapter book and begins reading aloud. Read alouds are often a cherished part of the day. However, they are not just enjoyable, they are impactful. Beyond building interest in reading, by exposing students, to different and/or more sophisticated books that he or she may have not chosen on their own, their vocabulary and comprehension improve through read alouds (Cohen, 1968). In addition, by modeling how expression, tone, phrasing and pausing can impact meaning, students gain understanding of fluency (Rasinski & Padak, 2008).

Another consistently proven method for supporting fluency is repeated reading. This can come in more than one form. It can simply be a student rereading a passage or their just right books multiple times. Engaging in this process can have even more positive effects when the readings are monitored and charted for progress. You will see some examples of this given in the project portion of this paper. Often times a more motivational way for teachers to encourage repeated readings in their classroom is to

provide opportunities for reader's theater (Worthy & Prater, 2002). Teachers can offer this by finding scripts of texts that are within a child's readability, model and offer practice on reading the texts, and have dramatically reenact them. An alternative is to have students choose a text and have them create their own script using the words from the text. This may encourage students to more deeply engage by choosing texts that are high interest.

Finally, one of the most important ways a teacher can support fluency in the classroom environment is by offering extended and deliberate practice. Practice is essential for the acquisition of a skill. Reading is no exception. The evidence is quite clear that it takes a lot of reading to become a good reader (see Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Knapp, 1995; Krashen, 2004; Meyer & Wardrop, 1994; National Reading Panel, 2000; Stanovich, 2000; Samuels & Wu, 2003; Stanovich et al., 1996). It isn't just about volume, however. Students should not only be reading books that are high readability, they should also be intrinsically motivated to read, meaning they must balance the content and readability. Books need to be high interest for a student to sustain this practice. This can be challenging for a teacher to match students with high interest books that students are also able to read with success but it is worth the effort. Teachers must explore all resources available; school and public libraries, audio books, second hand books, sharing amongst colleagues. Build a large repertoire of any and all titles so that students have choice in what they read, this will foster further intrinsic motivation to read.

Data driven decision making

For teachers to be able to appropriately meet the needs of their students, they first need to diagnose the problem or struggle for each particular student. This can often be done with district common assessments, teacher formative assessments or standardized measures. In order to choose an intervention that targets the correct skill, a diagnostic assessment must precede the intervention. Continual monitoring is also necessary for the teacher to adequately monitor and adjust. Choosing the right assessment tool is important for getting accurate information in its intended context, thus allowing for appropriate interventions to be assigned.

There are several types of assessments; direct, indirect, formative, summative, standardized, rubric, and projects to name a few. Each has an important role in the process of data collection and it is important that a teacher matches the most appropriate assessment to the skill being measured. For example, if a teacher wishes to find out how many words per minute a students can read, he or she would likely choose a timed passage for a student to read. In this example the teacher aligned the intended outcome with a tool that can accurately measure the intended outcome. When it comes to fluency, most often teachers are focused on the types of assessments that measure, accuracy, pace, decoding, letter recognition, word identification, blending and nonsense word recognition. All of these skills require a fairly straight forward objective assessment that times a student and records the number of words or letters correct.

Prosody and expression, the smoothness of the way a reader reads orally, is usually better measured with a rubric. Fountas and Pinnell (2010) have compiled the Six Dimensions Fluency Rubric that describes the specific behaviors that readers may exhibit when reading orally. The dimensions; pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate, and integration are included in the rubric. The rubric can be used to observe and record a student's oral reading fluency and helps the teacher notice and think about the characteristics of oral reading that a student controls and needs to develop. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010, p. 192, 193).

What is important to keep in mind when collecting information on student performance is that the student's skills should be measured by more than one measurement tool on more than one day. Children can have days when they are not at their best, in order for them to demonstrate their true ability, the teacher should measure progress using at least two measurement tools and should collect several data points over a period of time. Often times it is useful to chart the data on a graph so that trends and perhaps outliers are more easily seen. Once a variety of data has been collected, the teacher should focus on planning instruction to improve the skill that is deficient. Another way to collect data is to take regular notes on the observations the teacher has during instruction and practice with the student. This is particularly true when assessing fluency. Teachers need to listen to students read aloud to make judgments about their progress in reading fluency (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). It is important to write these observations down regularly and not rely only on memory when judging fluency.

Two of the most commonly used measures for fluency are running records and timed oral reading. Marie Clay (2001) developed a tool to allow to teachers to make systematic and useful observations of their students reading. The basic structure of a running record consists of using a developmentally appropriate book or passage, the student reads it aloud while the teacher follows along listening for errors and recording what is observed. When timed, the running record can serve as a tool to measure reading rate. Typically, a teacher needs to listen to about one hundred words to get an accurate picture of the student's fluency level. Running records, when used with miscue analysis are extremely valuable in providing detailed information about the rate of accuracy and the type of errors a student makes when reading a passage or book aloud, it is also an opportunity for a student to show what strategies he or she uses or fails to use during reading. The teacher can assess the types of errors and look for patterns. This helps to identify areas of need, such as a student continually makes errors on words with vowel pairs like 'ea, 'ie, etc., then the teacher can plan a lesson that teaches strategies around recognizing and practicing words with vowel pairs.

Timed readings (Samuels, 1979) can be used to measure and increase word-reading accuracy and passage-reading rate. Timed readings are conducted using books or passages the student has read before that are at an independent reading level (i.e., books the student can read with 95% accuracy or above). It consists of (a) selecting a short passage at the student's instructional level, (b) setting a rate criterion, and (c) having the student read and reread the passage over time until the rate criterion is reached. The oral reading rate is determined by timing the student for one minute and

then counting how many correct words were read. Charting of the rate is recommended as a means of record keeping and of maintaining motivation with the student (Hudson, Lane, Pullen, 2005).

Once an oral timed reading is administered, the results should be compared to normed data to determine if the student falls within a normal range and then determine the nexts steps needed for intervention. Two commonly used oral reading fluency charts are: Compiled ORF Norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017) and Benchmarks for Oral Reading Rate-Words Per Minute from Beaver, J. M. and Carter, M.A (as cited in Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, 2008, p.1). The Compiled ORF Norms chart shows words correct per minute, based on grade level, which would be most appropriate when using a reading passage. The Benchmarks for Oral Reading Rate-Words Per Minute, shows four tiers of mastery at each reading level J through Z. This would be more appropriate to use when using a benchmark book for the assessment.

Feedback

Teachers facilitate learning by providing students with important feedback on their learning progress and by helping them identify learning problems (Bloom, Madaus, & Hastings, 1981; Stiggins, 2002). Teachers play a large role in developing expressive and meaningful reading. They model what fluent reading looks and sounds like, they serve as coaches to help students experience what fluent reading feels and sounds like. A vital part of assessment and teaching is providing feedback that is specific and action oriented. Teachers can also incorporate the use of charts and rubrics to include students in

self assessment and progress monitoring. These methods can make a large impact on fluency development. (Rasinski, 2004).

Summary

  To summarize, this chapter described the important components necessary for understanding the importance of fluency as well as the need for interventions within the classroom setting. For this project, the information shared will be focused on the types of interventions commonly used in the first two tiers. They are strategies that mainstream classroom teachers can use as a part of their small group or individual skill work with students. The assessment and record keeping tools shared will also offer resources for teachers to appropriately administer interventions to their students and adequately monitor their progress while keeping with the key themes outlined above. This chapter highlighted the important research that has been done to improve fluency instruction and assessment. Research has shown that fluency is worth the effort in learning to read. Students have varied experiences that lead to their varying level of reading skill. It can be challenging to find ways to meet those needs by differentiating the response. This is why I seek to answer the question: *How do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?*

  In the next chapter, I will describe the methods for collecting intervention strategies, assessment tools, and articles and resources that are included in the project. I

will also describe the project, including how it is organized, what information can be found in the project and how it can used in a school setting.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Teachers often struggle with meeting the needs of a wide range of abilities in their classroom. The purpose of this project is to provide a framework for teachers to use for implementing a useful fluency based intervention system that accurately assesses student needs, tailors instruction with high yield interventions to address deficits, and provides progress monitoring tools to inform effect on learning. Its intent is to serve as a tool for teachers to make decisions based on information they have gathered about a student's progress in reading, specifically in fluency. The tool will provide an answer to the question: *How do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?*

For this project I have gathered the relevant research pertaining to fluency, best practices, reading development theory, assessment and data driven decision making. I have organized the information into an If this…, Then do this… type of tool. This interactive document will also serve the purpose of informing teachers about how children learn to read and what to do if they are not able to read well.

This chapter will discuss the method for obtaining information included in the chart with a description of the project. I will also describe the intended audience that this tool will be shared with and utilized by, as well as a description of the students that will benefit from the tool. In this chapter, I will also discuss the types of assessments that are included and a description of each as well as a description of additional resources included in the tool.

Project Description

When I began my research for this project I consulted the literacy coach for our school, whom also served as the content advisor for this project. She encouraged me to move forward with a focus on fluency and intervention. Her work throughout the district has shown that, despite the fact that there is an abundance of highly skilled and experienced teachers, there is a need among teachers across all of the elementary schools in my school district for more support for teachers in the area of intervention and fluency learning. When reflecting on the students in my school and the discussions in our Professional Learning Communities, it is apparent that the same is true in my school. Teachers often have the capacity and the skills necessary to effectively support the struggling readers in their classrooms, but regardless of skill level and experience, simply lack the time to do the research on what is best. This project above all, is intended to be a clear, comprehensive and pragmatic tool that an elementary teacher of reading will be able to use with ease.

The tool is a document divided into four columns. Each column represents a component in a fluency intervention model beginning with a reading behavior that the

reading teacher observes while working with a student or based on assessment data. Each behavior leads the teacher to the next column where a teaching method or strategy is suggested to use in order to address that particular skill. The strategy also leads to further resources on the topic such as articles or research to give more depth of information if the teacher chooses to explore in more detail. Finally, there is a list of assessments commonly used for fluency with a description of each and most appropriate use.

The first column is reserved for common reading behaviors that indicate a problem with fluency such as, errors when reading, irregular phrasing, slow decoding, etc. The user will locate the behavior that is being addressed and can continue on using the chart to determine next steps.

The second column is a breakdown and description of the main components of fluency such as rate, accuracy, and prosody. The definitions of these components are linked to the research outlined in the literature review. The user will utilize this column to learn about the importance of the skill, its place in fluency by reading the research or following links to articles relevant to the topic.

After the behavior that is to be addressed has been identified and there is understanding about its relevance to fluency the chart will lead to the third column which offers a list of strategies that have shown to be effective based on my summary of the literature found in chapter two.

Finally, the fourth column is a list of assessments that are appropriate for identifying student need related to fluency as well as measurement of progress. This

column also includes tools for teachers to use to record observations and data related to the intervention strategy being used.

The tool does not need to be used in a particular order, it is organized in such a way that the teacher can start in any place on the chart and utilize all or part of the information given. The tool includes live links to resources in the form of web pages, links to articles, books and documents that can be printed for the teacher to use as appropriate.

Intended Audience

This tool will be used by elementary teachers throughout the school year when reviewing assessment data, planning instruction and providing interventions to students with identified need. I forsee the tool being useful to guide discussions in Professional Learning Communities when working to set goals and implement useful strategies in the area of fluency. It will also be shared with reading specialist teachers who traditionally work with students in the highest tier of need in the area of reading. This tool will be useful for them when working to interpret assessment data and planning small group or individual instruction. This tool will also be shared with the Literacy Coaches in my school district to utilize when working alongside teachers in the context of professional development in the area of literacy. In addition to sharing the tool with teachers of literacy, I will also share it with the school's administrative team. This team can use the tool to provide consistency in discussions around interventions and fluency as well as planning for instructional models and decision making related to student data.

The students that this project intends to benefit from are students in a suburban elementary school in a large suburban school district. The school is represented by a diverse population, with fifty two percent of the population being of Hmong, Hispanic and Somali descent. Less than twenty percent of the students are English Language Learners (ELL). Approximately fifty percent of the students in this school receive free or reduced priced meal benefits.

Method

The information and resources included in the tool are based on the information obtained through the literature review provided in chapter two. Through the research, I was able to find the most researched and proven strategies for effective fluency instruction, assessment, recording and tools for teachers to use to be successful. Much of the research suggests that repeated reading is a key component to successful fluency. "Oral reading plays a significant role in effective reading instruction" (Rasinski, 2010, p. 44). Many of the strategies to address targeted skills in fluency revolve around repeated readings, done orally, that can be used in a variety of ways such as, partner reading, reader's theater, or simply guiding practice of a passage within readability with a student over and over until mastery is achieved.

The project also describes ways that teachers can support skills that impact fluency, such as phonemic awareness and decoding. Phonological awareness was found to be a better predictor of reading readiness than standard reading readiness tests (Stanovich, Cunningham, and Cramer, 1984). Included in the project is a collection of short activities that suggests ways to provide support and practice for skills in decoding,

sight word fluency, word part analysis, and phonemic awareness. Teachers can use these activities in conjunction with the work being done to improve fluency.

Another component to fluency that is addressed in the project is assessment. Several types of assessment and record keeping tools are provided that correlate with each strategy or reading skill. These assessments can be used as initial assessments, for ongoing data collection, or progress monitoring. The assessments included in the project can also be used as a formative assessment when considering whether to continue intervention, change the intervention, or to discontinue the intervention.

To create a fully exhaustive list of research and resources would not be practical and would be overwhelming for teachers. I have included only the more heavily researched and proven resources in the project. Many of the links to strategies and articles can lead the user to more information on a topic and additional related resources if the user chooses to do so.

I have also incorporated the resources that are recommended and utilized in the school district that this project is intended for. In doing this, the project will be further useful to teachers as the resources may already be familiar and readily available. Perhaps it will bring highly effective, yet underutilized resources to the forefront of instruction and intervention.

Summary

This chapter covered the methods and process for this Capstone project and the components needed for it to be successful. Chapter 4 will describe the findings of the

research and conclusions drawn from the project, as well as new connections made

between the research and practice.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The research for this project led me to answer the question: *how do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?* Working in an elementary school with students who have a wide range of skill has proven to be difficult task. I sought the answer to this research question because I wanted to better understand how fluency develops and how to best intervene when a student needs more support. It was important for me to know which targeted fluency strategies have been proven to be best practice. I also wanted to know what I could do in my classroom to create strong readers and nurture an environment where they can thrive. In addition, I sought to learn how to collect relevant information that will help me make quality decisions when planning for skill

intervention. As a way to present all that I have learned and make it accessible and concise, I created the Capstone project. The goal of the project was to make it applicable to my work around fluency instruction and intervention in my daily practice. The project is a digital document with links to articles, videos, and strategies appropriate to each component of fluency: rate, accuracy and expression. This document can be referenced on an ongoing basis as new or different needs arise. The information included in the document is a culmination of my research and it highlights the most important practices to fluency development.

Literature Review

My research for this Capstone led me through many important research studies, books, articles, websites and other resources around the topic of fluency. Since the topic of fluency is so broad, it was an overwhelming task at first. As I continued sifting through the information, I found that certain themes became clear. The discovery of these themes and ideas were beneficial in answering my research question.

I found that one of the most important themes is the definition of fluency. Even in the last century, fluency has gone through "growing pains"(Samuels, 2014, p.3). I will admit, my pre-professional training led me to mistakenly think that fluency and speed were synonymous. In fact, the research around fluency has shown that perhaps a more appropriate synonym for fluency should be, automaticity. This means that recalling and naming words has become automatic for the reader and no longer needs to focus on the laborious task of decoding, but can focus on making meaning of what the text says. Understanding the difference between the two terms is important because it impacts the

end goal of fluency, it changes the focus on instruction and changes the way we measure it.

When teaching fluency and providing intervention, it is important that the focus be placed on achieving reading that is appropriately quick, reasonably accurate (maintaining intended meaning), and with meaningful expression. Understanding these ideas means teachers should not only rely on a timed oral reading fluency assessment to determine fluency. Measurement of fluency must include diversified measures that can assess the types of errors the reader makes, how they phrase their sentences, how their tone changes with punctuation, and how effective the student is when comprehending the text.

Another theme across the research that clarified my thinking around best practices in fluency intervention was the act of practice. Several experts on the subject of fluency (Allington, 2009, Bender & Shores, 2012, Crawley, 2012, 2007, Rasinski, 2010) highlighted the importance of practice. What I have gained from this is practice should be guided and intentional. Students should use books that are within their own readability, they should practice alone, and they should also practice with a partner. Also, sometimes practice should be with the same story or passage multiple times until fluency is achieved. There is great value in teachers being intentional when planning for multiple forms of practice in reading. Planning done before assigning practice, to make sure practice happens in multiple ways and on a regular basis, is worth the effort.

When reflecting on my own practice, I see where I can make changes to better support fluency. Before this research, I put most of the emphasis of reading practice on

independent reading. Students in my classroom would gladly read thirty to forty minutes or more at a stretch. While this is wonderful, I understand now that the research tells me that my practice was limiting. Students need to practice in other ways too. I must model and provide practice reading with a partner. I should lead guided practice beyond conferencing with students or listening to them read aloud passively, instead offering actionable feedback and explicit instruction around strategies for individuals.

Something that I became much more familiar with in my research was The National Reading Panel Report (2000). It was one of the most often cited works in the research I did, even among the experts in the field of fluency. It was a unique literature review conducted by the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), in consultation with the Secretary of Education. This report is a consensus document based on the best judgments of a diverse group of experts in reading research and reading instruction. It summarizes the critical components of reading instruction into an almost five hundred page document. I found this report to be highly credible and very comprehensive. However, while fluency hasn't changed all that much over the years, the way teachers teach it, has changed.

One of the limitations of the research is that it gets old. For example, the National Reading Panel Report states, " It is generally acknowledged that fluency is a critical component of skilled reading." "Nevertheless, it is often neglected in classroom instruction." (p.3-1). However, I found in newer research that fluency is, in fact, very much a part of regular instruction. According to Rasinski (2010), "it is difficult to visit a contemporary classroom to observe reading instruction where fluency practice has not

assumed a fairly central role and a significant portion of the allocated instructional time." (p.7).

I think often times that the pendulum in educational theory swings back and forth and what was once not important, becomes very important and vice versa. When it comes to fluency, I think the importance of it will remain in the forefront. I gathered from the research that there is little controversy within the subject and less room for interpretation. Perhaps it is more concrete than other topics in literacy education. Mainly the incentive programs in fluency have changed, for example: Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) were all very popular ways to encourage independent practice (National Reading Panel Report 1999). While the practice itself is still prevalent, the brand name or buzz word changes in popularity over time.

I feel confident in what I have learned about fluency through the literature review. I think I am more informed at a deeper level about what fluency looks like, sounds like and how to impact the acquisition of fluency among my students.

Writing Reflection

I have grown as a teacher throughout the Capstone writing process but I have also grown as a researcher and a writer. Writing a Capstone paper is different than any other type of research writing I have done before. It has been a growth experience that has required, dedication, perseverance and patience. There were challenges presented in the research process as well as the writing process. I had to find ways to organize my research, make a plan, revise the plan and start over with a new plan. I found that I needed to have a good system for collecting and reviewing research at the same time that

I was reading copious amounts of pages. It eventually became easier by creating folders for each stage in the process and having a place to organize subtopics and ideas.

I also became a much more critical consumer of information. Being accountable to the source of information that I included in my research taught me to think carefully about the validity of it, how credible it was, was it too old, too new, was it worth holding onto, was it okay to leave it behind? All of the answers to these questions took practice and, as I narrowed my focus, it became easier to choose what would be most important.

From the beginning, it seemed impossible to write more than forty pages about one topic. Beginning is often the hardest part. The most challenging part about writing for me was keeping my thoughts organized. With a topic as broad as fluency, it is easy to head off on a path that takes away from the focus. I am often the kind of writer that just dives in and adjusts as I go. For this paper, I needed to rely on outlines and organizational tools to help me lay out my thoughts prior to writing.

What I appreciate about the process of writing a Capstone and creating an accompanying project, is that I experienced writing in a whole new way. I can see a broader perspective of writing and how each type really serves an important purpose. I am much more accountable to my words in this type of paper than I would be telling a story. It has also forced me to think more about how the reader sees what I am writing, considering the readers potential perspective, level of background knowledge and experience.

Benefit to the Profession

While my main motivation for researching this topic was personal, I also expected it to be valuable to others in my profession too. The project offers many benefits to the profession. First, individual teachers will be able to keep the document on hand electronically for reference as they plan for instruction. They will also be able to read through some of the attached articles to become more informed about how fluency impacts reading success, often times the investigation of the links and articles included lead to further exploration on the topic. Teachers will also be able to use it as a resource for printables, strategies and for assessment reference when diagnosing problems with fluency among their students. It can also simply be a place to look when a teacher just needs a new idea or perspective.

Teacher teams, such as reading specialists or interventionists and other Professional Learning Communities will be able to utilize this tool for the same reason as above, but will also be able to use it as a framework for goal setting and conversation around fluency achievement. As teams discuss behaviors or issues they see when observing students read, they can reference the project to guide their decisions about how best to meet the needs of their students. The project will also be important to use when measuring fluency among their students in a consistent, aligned manner. The project points out appropriate assessments to use to adequately measure specific outcomes as well as resources for using the assessment with fidelity.

The results of my research and the project will be shared with elementary teachers in my school and across the district I work in, as needed to individual teachers or support staff. It will also be incorporated into the Literacy Curriculum website created by the

District's Literacy Coach and accessible to all staff. Literacy coaches, principals and other staff will be able to utilize the project when coaching teachers. It can also be integrated in literacy related professional development as needed, and across content areas to help support alignment within the instructional model at each school.

One limitation that the project has is that it is not an exhaustive list of strategies, research or assessments. While this is a valid limitation, it is also intentional. I set out to take the most effective and proven strategies and resources that I discovered in my research in order to produce a concise tool that is not overly complicated or involved. As research and discovery continues around the topic of fluency, it is likely that new or refined strategies and tools will become available. One of the benefits of creating the project electronically is that it can easily be updated in order to stay current.

As I reflect back on all that I have gained from this research, it leads me to new questions for further exploration. For example, my project is strictly electronic. I could print it all out and put it into a PDF or a binder but that would be far less efficient and accessible. The benefit of it being electronic leads me to wonder, what are ways that we can better support or teach fluency through electronic methods? One of the specific strategies presented in the project is to record and play back a student reading a passage in order self assess, identify and correct miscues. What is available to students currently? How effective is new technology relative to older, less technologically advanced methods of audio assisted reading? Should one be eliminated or should there be a place for both? Further research could explore these ideas and questions and perhaps put more efficient

and useful tools into the hands of teachers and ultimately improve reading achievement among elementary students.

Conclusion

In this final chapter I have reflected on how much I have gained through the research as well as the creation of the project. I walk away from this experience a better teacher, a better writer and a confident researcher. All of these improved skills will impact my perspective and strength in my professional life. I am hopeful that other educators will find the project useful and will consider what I have shared in order to improve their own practice and ultimately help children become strong, confident, lifelong readers. I look forward to using the research based methods, strategies and tools in my classroom now that I have answered the question: *how do regular education classroom teachers best use fluency based interventions in the classroom to accelerate fluency skills and improve comprehension?*

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