Spring 2019

Using Reading Fluency Assessment to Target Intervention in the Middle-Level Mainstream ELA Class

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USING READING FLUENCY ASSESSMENT TO TARGET INTERVENTION

IN THE MIDDLE-LEVEL MAINSTREAM ELA CLASS:

A WORKSHOP

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

April 2019

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To my mother, who let me believe I had learned to read *The Foot Book* when really, I had memorized it, and who continues to encourage a love of reading in young readers by giving me money each month to buy books for my classroom.

"I have a passion for teaching kids to become readers, to become comfortable with a book, not daunted. Books shouldn't be daunting, they should be funny, exciting and wonderful; and learning to be a reader gives a terrific advantage."

Roald Dahl

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

I watched my eighth-graders take standardized tests for twelve days this school year. As their Language Arts teacher, I am responsible for administering the reading, writing, and language usage tests required by the state and our district. Each period I asked my class to do their very best so the results would reflect the progress I already knew they had made as readers. By the time testing season rolls around every spring, I can pretty well predict how my students will do. My most-struggling reader made three years' worth of gains this year, but nonetheless the words *does not meet* will appear on the letter she gets from the state this summer. There will be no official record of the growth one of my most-gifted readers made since September, due to the sound the HVAC system was making on the day of the test.

This capstone is not about standardized testing, although my frustration over watching students I know so well sit for tests that do not accurately capture their abilities is a favorite conversation topic of mine this time every year. I know the data from these tests follows my students to high school, where it paints an incomplete picture of who they are as readers. I likewise anticipate the scores I receive for my new class next fall will be similarly incomplete. Rather, this capstone is about helping secondary English teachers better understand the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension, which is often left unaddressed in secondary teacher preparation. In addition, using the

three-session workshop inspired by my research, this capstone also assists teachers in understanding reading fluency and deciding which students to assess.

Rationale

It took me a long time to feel that I was ready to complete my degree. I have been told by some colleagues that I should get it over with as soon as possible, while others warned that I would be unmotivated if I did not find a topic I was truly and intensely curious about. I determined to find that topic, which I later came to refer to as a burning question, as soon as possible. As I thought more about my efforts to help readers grow, I arrived at *burning question, version one:* How do you find the most effective reading intervention models? I tried my best to apply the research I was finding to my intervention plans and I realized that even with scores from three different standardized tests, I was ill-equipped to target reading interventions until I had collected additional data of my own, including several weeks of observations, conferring, and formal classroom assessment. As teachers, we need to make the most the time we have with our students from day one, so I shifted my focus from the interventions themselves to finding better assessments to determine which students need what interventions. I realized that instead of looking at past standardized test scores and hanging my hopes on future test scores, I needed to find an efficient, simple, and low-stakes assessment to identify who is struggling in the first few weeks of the school year.

I determined that in order to have any chance of choosing the most effective interventions for my students, I needed timely and trustworthy assessment data. In my research on reading assessment, I discovered an entire component of reading

development and instruction I had never studied: reading fluency. Before starting this project, the word *fluency* reminded me of my friend who took six years of Spanish in high school and college but was unable to maintain casual conversations with locals when she visited Puerto Rico. In my training to become certified to teach fifth through twelfth-grade language arts, I was never exposed to more than a rudimentary understanding of a reader's journey from morphemes to meaning.

As I dug into the topic of reading fluency, I hypothesized that students who read slowly and stumble over their words would find comprehension challenging. I wondered if some of my most-struggling readers might need to improve their fluency in order to fully benefit from comprehension interventions. My review of the research revealed that fluency does not only support reading comprehension, but that the two are so closely linked that to improve fluency is to improve comprehension (Burns et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). This sent my capstone topic in an even more focused direction, and I narrowed my gaze to reading fluency assessment in particular. This led me to my final *burning question*, which became the research question this paper sets out to answer: *How can middle-level English Language Arts teachers use reading fluency assessment to better know their students and target reading interventions in a mainstream ELA class?*

Context

My first teaching job was in an urban Title I school where the majority of my class was reading below grade level. The district, and this school in particular, were strong proponents of balanced literacy – teaching reading through a workshop model with

students self-selecting novels from diverse classroom libraries instead of studying a whole-class novel or textbook. This was challenging in some ways. Since I had not read every book my students were reading, I could not easily guide their comprehension. At times, it was difficult to help students find a *just-right* book to read. At the same time, I found it to be an exciting and effective way to teach reading. There was a thrill to getting a reluctant reader riveted in the first book of a series, ensuring they would be engaged in that world for months as they checked out books two, three, and four.. The very fact that I had not read all their books pushed my instruction from the literal to higher-order inferential and interpretive thinking. The absence of whole-class texts allowed my students to read about the topics (sports, romance, vampires) that interested them and made it possible for me to give them something other than frustration-level text after frustration-level text all year long. All students were able to choose books that were not only interesting to them but were an appropriate reading level – a stark contrast to the dry, leveled, canonical texts included in so many curriculum packages.

Each day in class, I would teach a mini-lesson on a skill important for readers to master, and the students would get to work, practicing that skill in their self-selected books. The majority of my instruction was done at the small-group or individual level. I got to know these students as readers very quickly. I co-taught special education inclusion classes and an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) inclusion class, so the abilities and needs were high in number and quite diverse. I appreciated the built-in time I had to confer with students and to deliver interventions and enrichment.

I love teaching eighth-graders, and when I moved to my home state, I was happy to find a job teaching eighth-grade ELA. So many things about the work are the same, and just as many are different. The contrast in population is distinct; the majority of my students are reading at grade-level. Most of their parents are middle class, which has recently allowed my school to go one-to-one with iPads and purchase a new curriculum to go with them. While the technology in my students' hands is modern, the curriculum itself is more traditional. I have been able to find ways to individualize and differentiate my instruction, but more than half of our texts are read together, be it a whole-class novel study, short stories, poems, or informational texts.

Before I enrolled in my research methods class, I wanted to study the benefits of a reader's workshop model. I held off, knowing there was no point trying to change the minds of the people who had just paid tens of thousands of dollars for a traditional textbook package, especially as a young teacher brand-new to their school. I was also uncomfortable with the thought of researching a topic about which my mind was made up. I knew this was not my burning question, and despite my misgivings about traditional textbooks, I did my best to teach my students well with them. As I continue in the district, the other eighth-grade ELA teachers and I have found many ways to incorporate book clubs and independent reading into the curriculum that was purchased for us.

In general, my students were making great progress, yet I struggled to understand the reason that some were not. I had much less time to spend conferring with students. I was able to find some minutes for small-group and individual lessons, but I did not feel

confident that the interventions I used were what those students really needed. I became frustrated at what seemed like ineffective and inefficient use of my time with my struggling readers.

As I learned more about theories of literacy, I saw that reading fluency instruction and assessment are considered foundational skills in the primary grades, but they do not appear in middle- or high-school reading standards. I met with our remedial reading teacher, who shared that many more students come from elementary school with low reading skills than she is able to take in her classes. She helped me connect the academic research I was reading with practices I might incorporate into the structure of my mainstream curriculum demands and time constraints.

I was excited about the task before me, but it seemed to be at least six-fold: (1) establish an academic understanding of what reading fluency is; (2) discover how it relates to reading comprehension, (3) explore the impact of reading fluency on readers beyond the primary grades; (4) research assessment strategies, searching for a balance between accurate data and the constraints of a mainstream middle-school ELA class; (5) once students are assessed, determine how to grow the skills of those who are found to be dysfluent, and *finally* (6) measure the effectiveness of those intervention methods. I was excited, yes, but slightly daunted.

I learned that my school would be revamping its homeroom time to serve as a more structured and targeted intervention and resource model. It was a relief to know I would have dedicated time to work with my struggling readers without the rest of their

classmates in the room. Some of my colleagues were less enthusiastic, unsure about what exactly to do with that time, which we call priority days. Again, I narrowed my focus. Instead of a full-blown human participant study, I decided to bring my department the information they needed to drive decisions about what to do during their intervention time on priority days. My capstone will be used to design a professional development curriculum to help myself and other secondary teachers (1) understand what reading fluency is; (2) how reading fluency is related to comprehension; (3) why reading fluency matters for their students even though it is not in their standards; and (4) how to quickly and accurately assess for reading fluency. From there, my colleagues and I can each identify our dysfluent readers and use classroom research to identify the most effective reading fluency interventions as a part of our year-long collaboration within our professional learning community.

Summary

In this introductory chapter I provided background information to help readers understand how my first burning question evolved into my research question: *How can middle-level English Language Arts teachers use reading fluency assessment to better know their students and target reading interventions in a mainstream ELA class?* With less time for individual and small-group instruction than I was used to, I came to realize that the time I can make must be used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The standardized testing data I receive at the start of each year is not helpful in targeting intervention for my most-struggling readers. This made me want to collect more helpful data myself from the first week of school, so I could start interventions as early as

possible. I knew that in order to best support my students I needed a more detailed understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. My research on reading development and assessment brought reading fluency to my attention, a foundational skill I was wholly unfamiliar with. As I continued in my studies, I learned that fluency is essential to reading comprehension. Like many secondary teachers, I did not fully understand the importance of reading fluency, as it does not appear in my grade-level standards. Once I realized its importance, I was not sure how to assess fluency within my classroom structure. My capstone addresses these gaps – the questions of why and how fluency assessment can improve secondary ELA practices – for myself and for other teachers. My colleagues benefit from the research I present in Chapter Two, a review of the literature on reading fluency, its relationship to reading comprehension, its importance for secondary students, and its assessment. The contents of that literature review are presented in my project, a three-session professional development workshop which I describe in detail in the third chapter. The fourth and final chapter reflects on what I have learned by reviewing what was found in the literature review, considering the successes and limitations of the workshop, and explaining how I will continue to improve my teaching as a result of engaging in this process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

Chapter Two is a review of the research related to reading fluency, its relationship to reading comprehension, implications for middle-level ELA teachers, and methods for assessing reading fluency. First the definition of reading fluency, as well as definitions of each of its component parts, is reviewed. This is followed by research findings on the relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension. Exceptions for students with special needs and different linguistic backgrounds are noted. The implications for middle-level and high-school teachers is presented. Finally, theories and assessment tools for the measurement of reading fluency are presented, allowing secondary teachers to assess the reading fluency of their own students in order to best target reading interventions.

What is Reading Fluency?

This section orients fluency's relevance within the larger context of reading development and provides a basic definition of reading fluency in three parts: the ability to read accurately, quickly, and with expression. It presents information regarding the debate around an official definition and conception of reading fluency. Establishing definitions in this section is important for many middle-level teachers who may not be familiar with the topic.

Strengthening reading comprehension is often the primary objective in models of reading development. If not the ultimate goal, comprehension is at least an important

component (Hosp & Suchey, 2014). This is not the case for reading fluency. Although fluency is considered to be important for skilled reading, its inclusion in development models is not universal. Its definition, in fact, is not entirely clear: "Despite near universal agreement that there are important educational outcomes associated with the ability to read fluently, the construct of fluency has been criticized for lacking clear theoretical and definitional consensus (Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006, p. 336). One understanding of fluency addresses reading at the word level. Many models of reading development identify word reading, the accurate decoding of single words, as an essential reading skill (Gough & Tumner, 1986; Perfetti, Hogaboam, & Williams, 1975). Someone who can recite words from a new language in isolation would not be considered a fluent speaker. Similarly, decoding at the word level does not make one a fluent reader.

Indeed, a reader's ability to accurately identify single words is only part of the puzzle; LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) automaticity theory introduced the aspect of speed to fluency. According to their theory, a reader has a limited amount of cognitive resources. The more automatic – that is to say, decoding accurately *and quickly* – reading is, the better. Automaticity frees up a reader's cognitive resources for comprehension, suggesting that a dysfluent reader, one who makes frequent mistakes while decoding slowly, has exhausted their cognitive resources before start to make meaning of the text.

This conception of fluency as automatic reading is still incomplete. Allington's (1983) research made a case to include the ability to read expressively, and indicated that

many students who receive interventions for word identification would be better served by learning to read with appropriate phrasing (1983). Researchers began examining the relationship between expressive reading and comprehension, leading to the creation of multidimensional assessment tools that include the expressive qualities of phrasing and smoothness in addition to pace (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). The addition of expression as a component of fluency was made official in 2000 when the National Reading Panel defined reading fluency as "...the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression" (NICHD, 2000, p. 3.5) and was widely accepted amongst researchers thereafter (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel 2010; Hosp & Suchey, 2014; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006; Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Pikulski & Chard, 2005, Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014; Rasinski, 2012; Zutell & Rasinski 2011). This expression in reading, also known as prosody, "generally includes pacing, phrasing, inflection, and intonation" (Hosp & Suchey, 2014, p. 63).

The addition of prosody was one among several noteworthy changes in the NICHD report (2000), which also identified five components of critical reading skills – more than ever before. These skills were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some researchers advocated for the definition of fluency to expand to include comprehension. This capstone, however, utilizes the National Reading Panel's definition of speed, accuracy, and prosody. The next section illustrates why some researchers include comprehension, as it examines the relationship between fluency and comprehension.

How Does Fluency Affect Comprehension?

This section reviews the research linking the three components of fluency to research showing its support of reading comprehension. The first part of the section establishes this paper's focus on text-level, as opposed to word-reading, fluency. The second part of this section examines research showing that automaticity supports comprehension, and vice versa. The third part of this section shows that prosody has also been shown to increase comprehension, though it is often left out of studies that examine the relationship between fluency and comprehension. The fourth part of this section accounts for inconsistencies in the relationship between fluency and comprehension for students with different learning backgrounds and needs. In its final part, this section highlights the importance of fluency at the secondary level, where explicit reading instruction often fades away at the exact time when students most need to know how to read.

The basic theory of automaticity, that as a student can decode words effortlessly, more cognitive resources remain to dedicate to comprehension, is well-confirmed across grade levels (Lipka, 2017). Indeed, automaticity is supported by the Common Core State Standards, which include in the Foundational Reading Skills (grades one through five) goals for decoding, phonics, and word recognition, leading to the final standard, "Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency *to support comprehension* [emphasis added]." (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010, pp. 16-17). Reading fluently does not guarantee reading proficiency, but "there is a very strong research and

theoretical base that . . . fluency is absolutely necessary for that achievement and for comprehension" (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510).

The distinction between word-reading and text-reading fluency. Despite this documented support for automaticity theory, there remains a significant degree of variance in the correlation between fluency and reading comprehension. This is due, in part, to inconsistencies in defining reading fluency (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). Many studies, especially those involving students in the primary grades, examined word-reading fluency alone, or the rate at which students can decode words. This was often measured according to the speed and accuracy of a student's naming of sight words or other unconnected words on a list (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Lipka, 2017). So-called *word fluency*, better-known and more-accurately described as decoding with automaticity, is an important foundational reading skill, as the CCSS reflects (NGA, 2010). Like word-fluency and decoding, some scholars (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008) used the term syntactic processing to describe what others (Kim, 2015) deemed text-reading fluency. Regardless of the terminology, the difference between the two is important (Berninger & Richards, 2002; Burns et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008).

Text-reading fluency was found to be functionally different from fluency at the word level (Berninger & Richards, 2002), and can be measured and analyzed as separable skills (Kim, 2015). It follows, then, that completely different interventions are called for to improve either skill (Burns et al., 2011). Further illustrating the difference between word- and text-reading fluency was Kim's discovery that, for students with some level of

reading proficiency, listening comprehension was more directly linked to fluency than decoding skills (Kim, 2015). The research question considers decoding a prerequisite to text-reading fluency. Although decoding is sometimes called text-reading, decoding is not necessarily reading a text fluently. The studies in this subsection examined the relationship between reading comprehension and *text-reading fluency*, not word-reading fluency or decoding. This paper refers to so-called word-reading fluency as decoding and uses the term fluency rather than text-reading fluency for the sake of clarity and consistency.

The relationship between automatic reading and comprehension. By the time most middle-school students arrive in a mainstream Language Arts class, they should be proficient sight-word readers. At this point in a child's reading development, it is not reading words in isolation that is important, but rather their fluency – the ability to read words within a larger context – that will enable them to meet the literacy standards across the content areas. In contrast to automaticity theory's relationship between decoding and comprehension, fluency does not simply free up cognitive resources for making meaning. Rather, Pikulski and Chard (2005) famously described fluency as "absolutely necessary for [reading]achievement and for comprehension, serving as a bridge *connecting* fluency to comprehension (p. 517). Since its publication, the bridge theory has been tested and confirmed across the literature (Burns et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012).

Fluency development is so closely related to comprehension because fluency in and of itself "captures some comprehension processes" (Kim, 2015, p. 475). In fact,

while fluency growth is predictive of comprehension growth, comprehension growth inversely predicts fluency growth, suggesting that the two skills improve in tandem (Berninger & Richards, 2002; Burns et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). The dual-development of fluency and comprehension is true not just for emergent readers but continues well into the secondary grades (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014). The fluency-comprehension correlation is strong enough that fall fluency assessments are better predictors of spring comprehension scores than fall comprehension scores are (Kim, Petscher, & Foorman, 2015; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008).

The relationship between expressive reading and comprehension. While these studies illustrated a strong connection between fluency and comprehension, they focused only on reading rate. As Kuhn and Stahl (2003) reported in their meta-analysis:

> there are two primary theories regarding fluency contribution to a reader's understanding of text, each of which emphasizes one of fluency's component parts. The first, and better known of the two theories, stresses the contribution of automaticity to fluent reading, whereas the second focuses on the role of prosody. (p. 4-5)

Although it is listed explicitly in many definitions of fluency, prosody, described as reading that approximates normal speech, is often overlooked (Allington, 1983).

This feature of fluent reading has been excluded from consideration in most quantitative studies, perhaps because it is difficult to quantify. Speed and accuracy can be assessed quite objectively, while rating expressiveness is more difficult. Zutell and

Rasinski (1991) encouraged teachers not to let this deter them from assessing prosody, which they characterized as "the extent to which reading 'sounds' like speaking, that is, how much it conforms to the rhythms, cadences, and flow of oral language" (p. 212). The publication of their multidimensional fluency scale allowed for a more thorough assessment of fluency that includes prosody. In order to best describe prosody behaviors and to minimize inconsistencies among raters, the scale was divided into the three related but distinct dimensions of phrasing, smoothness, and pace (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). In contrast to merely increasing the speed of a student's reading, which some teachers prioritize (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014), developing a reader's expressiveness enhances the meaning of the text and according to Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell (2012), results in more proficient readers:

> … fluent readers, when reading orally, exhibit prosody that reflects the meaning of the text. They speed up and slow down, raise and lower pitch, increase and decrease volume, and embed pauses and lengthened syllables that reflect punctuation and enhance textual meaning. By contrast, those who are less fluent tend to read in a word-by-word monotone manner that makes the understanding of the text more difficult. Fluency is more than automatic word recognition; fluency also consists of prosodic reading that reflects textual meaning. (p. 68)

Berninger and Richards (2002) found that prosody predicts comprehension beyond measures of decoding. Later, Benjamin and Schwanenflugel (2010) discovered that prosody is a better predictor of students' comprehension of difficult texts than easy ones. Similarly, although students may pause more often when reading the difficult texts,

their pauses are grammatically-correct, occurring at commas that marked off clauses, between items in a list, and during shifts in topic. This suggested that while frequent pausing may slow down reading rate, it may also mediate comprehension by "mimic[ing] oral language, thus increasing its interpretation" (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014, p. 126).

Students with different academic needs and linguistic backgrounds. As evidenced above, the relationship between fluency and comprehension is still not fully understood, leading to continued research on the subject. For students with exceptionalities, there is more to consider than automaticity and prosody alone.

General-education teachers may well be able to speculate on the ways that an autistic student's perception of emotions may impact his/her ability to read with expression. They may wonder just how fast automatic reading should be for students with dyslexia, an attention deficit, or slow processing speeds to read. Teachers with English Language Learners in their room have likely noticed how a student's oral language skills influence their literacy development across other modes. Studies of English Language Learners (ELLs) found a relationship between fluency and comprehension. Varying levels of oral language proficiency amongst ELLs, however, interfere with that relationship in a way that is not present in students who arrive at school with well-developed English-speaking skills (Crosson & Lesaux, 2009; Quirk & Beem, 2012). Rather than try to review all of the research for such students, it would be wise to rely on the professional expertise of your colleagues in the special education and English-as-a-

second-language departments to determine how you can best work together to help the students you share grow as readers.

Why is Fluency Important for Secondary Readers?

The strong, documented correlation between fluency and comprehension is worth the attention of secondary teachers, even though it is not part of their standards or a common feature in secondary English curriculums (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2017). In grades three through five, student differences had three times the impact on comprehension scores than classroom differences did (Kim, Petscher, & Foorman, 2015). The comprehension scores of secondary students (grades six through ten), on the other hand, were more dependent on classroom differences. This suggests that while every elementary classroom focuses on reading growth, it is not necessarily a goal of every secondary teacher. As students progress into the middle grades, their teachers may not all explicitly teach reading skills (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012), even though the very nature of secondary coursework requires students to be strong readers in order to access the information in their textbooks (Seok & DaCosta, 2014). As Paige, Rasinski, and Magpuri-Lavell pointed out (2012):

in general, little time is allocated to direct reading instruction in content classes. When reading instruction does take place, it is most often organized around strategies to improve reading comprehension. At the same time, students possessing poor fluency generally do not improve on their own, although ample

evidence suggests that appropriate fluency instruction results in gains in

comprehension. (p. 71)

Most reading at the secondary level is done silently. While fluency is

most-frequently associated with oral reading, being able to quickly and accurately read a

passage to oneself is vital to comprehension (Rasinski, 2012). Prosody, too, plays a part

in silent reading, as good readers report hearing their own voices in their heads as they

read silently (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012). Often, students who do not meet

the reading fluency standard for grade five are still promoted to grade six, where the skill

ceases to be a focus (Rasinski et al., 2017). These readers, with secondary teachers who

are often not equipped to continue their reading fluency instruction, have a difficult time

understanding the reading material, which continues to become more complex as they

progress into their secondary coursework (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2010;

Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014; Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong,

Friedauer, & Heim, 2005).

In other words, when these struggling, dysfluent readers go from the *learning to*

read instruction of elementary school to the *reading to learn* environment of secondary

school, fluency instruction often comes to an abrupt end. Left unaddressed, that fluency

gap may affect their comprehension, despite Chall's (1983) assertion that fluency

instruction is not necessary beyond the first years of reading instruction. If teachers truly

are to ensure students are college- and career-ready, as the CCSS calls for (NGA, 2010),

they should monitor fluency beyond the grade levels the CCSS requires (Rasinski, 2012).

Even in high school, "fluency is indeed a factor that needs to be considered even among

high school students, and especially among struggling readers" (Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim 2005, p. 25). Provided with this information, and with strategies to accurately and quickly assess their students' reading fluency, secondary teachers are better-equipped to identify their struggling readers who need support to improve their reading fluency, and in turn, their reading comprehension.

How is Fluency Assessed?

Having established the importance for fluent reading beyond the primary grades, this section presents methods that can be used to assess reading fluency. Measurements of correct words read per minute and multidimensional prosody scales are described before closing with support for the use of the latter type, such as Zutell & Rasinksi's (1991) scale, for assessment purposes in mainstream secondary ELA classrooms.

Many of the diagnostic screeners and commercial assessments available to educators share a common construct: students read aloud from a grade-level text while their teacher marks errors. The total number of words read, minus their errors, becomes that student's measure of words correct per minute (WCPM). Researchers suggest telling the student they will be asked about the passage when they finish (Rasinski et al., 2017). This discourages the student from reading as fast as they can, as reading faster than a comfortable conversational rate does not yield greater comprehension and may in fact, hinder it (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2017). Many of these assessments refer to WCPM as oral reading fluency, although they do not assess the third component, prosody, at all. Valencia et al., (2010) found that even when subtracting a student's inaccurate words, WPCM is a measure of reading rate alone, but

by considering accuracy and prosody in addition to reading rate, "the result provided a finer grained understanding of oral reading fluency and fluency assessment, and a stronger predictor of comprehension" (Valencia, Smith, Reece, Li, Wixson, & Newman, 2010, p. 283, 285).

Although WCPM is a common assessment tool, it is not the only one available. In fact, many of the nation's fourth graders have their reading fluency assessed, with prosody included as a measurable component, if and when their schools are selected for participation in the biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A decade before the official addition of prosody to the definition of fluency (NICDH, 2000) and before the inclusion of prosody on the NAEP scale in 2002, Zutell and Rasinski (1991) noted five specific miscues in expression as being indicative of dysfluency:

> (a) inappropriate or overextended pauses that are clear breaks in the flow and pace of reading; (b) sound-outs, in which the reader consciously works at figuring out a word's pronunciation; (c) multiple attempts at a word (including repetitions of its correct pronunciation); (d) run-ons, in which the reader fails to pause appropriately to mark a phrase or clause boundary; and (e) patterns of stress or intonation that are inconsistent with phrase or clause structure. (p. 213)

This research led to the development of their multidimensional scale, which encouraged teachers to pay attention to prosody and provides a tool to note occurrences of improper expressiveness that indicates dysfluency.

The use of WPCM alone persists today, though prosody has been found to mediate "additional variance in reading comprehension beyond that accounted for by automaticity in ninth-grade students," leading researchers to question not only whether WCPM can be considered an adequate measure reading fluency, but also if separate assessment of the three components is necessary (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014, p. 144). A multidimensional scale such as Zutell and Rasinski's (1991) allows teachers to include prosody without needing an entirely separate scale to measure it. The evolving definition of reading fluency and its relationship to comprehension "would seem to recommend assessments that consider multiple facets of of oral reading--the combined role of rate, accuracy, and prosody in contributing to comprehension" (Valencia, Smith, Reece, Li, Wixson, & Newman, 2010, p. 285).

Researchers will likely never identify the one perfect assessment tool and nor should they; assessments will continue to change as literacy researchers continue to uncover more insight about learning. This should not stop teachers from choosing the best tool that they can implement, in order to collect more data and deliver more targeted interventions than they did before. In doing so, teachers will see more growth in their students, and over time, adapt their assessment methods in accordance with their own classroom research results and discoveries in the field of education research.

Summary

Having established a definition of reading fluency, further review of literature on the topic reveals that fluent reading does not merely free up cognitive resources for comprehension. Fluency and comprehension develop alongside one another. This is

relevant to secondary ELA teachers, who must help all their students grow as readers, even those who never met the fluency standards of elementary school that are considered to be foundational reading skills. Without intervention, dysfluent readers will struggle to comprehend the content area texts they encounter in middle and high school. Despite this, reading fluency is rarely assessed at the secondary level, making it impossible for teachers to know who needs additional support. With a firm understanding of the importance of reading fluency and an assessment tool that fits their classroom best, middle-level teachers can begin to address my research question: *How can middle-level English Language Arts teachers use reading fluency assessment to better know their students and target reading interventions in a mainstream ELA class?* The next chapter describes how I equipped my colleagues with an understanding of fluency's relationship with comprehension, as well as an assessment tool they could use the very next day to identify students for fluency intervention.

CHAPTER THREE

Capstone Project

Overview

Chapter Two's literature review provided an overview of the research on reading fluency, its relationship to reading comprehension its importance for secondary readers, and its assessment. It is presented here to provide a context for the project described below. Beyond providing a condensed context for readers of this paper, the process of writing the literature review prompted me to reflect on middle-school ELA curriculum, the work being done at my school, and my own teaching practice. As I continued to read and write, I became less interested in creating a research project that would bear out the research I had spent so much time analyzing - the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension. Instead, I was drawn to the idea of adjusting current practice to reflect all that I had learned about reading fluency and better help my students improve as readers. Rather than focus my attention on my classroom alone, I determined to create a workshop for my colleagues - and other ELA departments in similar situations - to better understand what reading fluency is and how it impacts our students in order to identify students who struggle with reading fluency and intervene to help them improve their fluency skills. Ultimately, this project allowed each of my colleagues to answer my research question for themselves: *How can middle-level English Language Arts teachers use reading fluency assessment to better know their students and target reading interventions in a mainstream ELA class?*

In this chapter, I describe the professional development curriculum I designed as a three-session workshop for my ELA department colleagues. The chapter includes a description of the workshop participants, setting, and timeline. It discusses the adult learning framework used when designing this workshop and presents an overview of the workshop's learning outcomes as well as its agenda and activities.

Participants and Setting

While it is often said that all teachers are reading teachers, ELA teachers are those held responsible for students' reading achievement. Many middle schools have specialized reading teachers, but at every school I have worked in, ELA teachers are responsible for teaching reading, writing, and language standards within the same class period. My school does have a reading teacher, but her schedule allows her to serve only a fraction of our struggling readers. The participants in my professional development were the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teachers at the middle school where I teach. All nine of these teachers were licensed to teach sixth- through eighth-grade ELA. Some held credentials to teach at the elementary level, while others were qualified to teach high-school English. The nine of us taught ELA to a student population of approximately 950 students at the only public middle school in our district. Although the city itself is only 11 square miles, twenty-five bus routes were required to transport our high number of rural students to and from school each day.

Each teacher had five sections of the same course to teach, using a newly-purchased textbook package with the freedom to use other texts and resources aligned to their standards. Classes were approximately 45 minutes in length, and our

school days began with a half-hour long tutorial time, allowing teachers to pull students for intervention or enrichment on their weekly priority day. This model had replaced the prior homeroom model, which was held at the end of the day, with structure and outcomes that varied widely from classroom to classroom.

Timeline

Grade-level ELA teams meet weekly during their planning time, and the entire department met after school one or two times a month. The after-school meetings were paid, contracted time with no student contact. Other than the textbook adoption cycle, the district has largely left the agenda up to the departments' discretion.

This workshop was a series of three sessions taking place through the first semester of the new school year. The first session was scheduled after students had taken their first standardized diagnostic test of the year and teachers were able to make student observations and collect data from formal classroom assessments. The subsequent sessions were scheduled for several weeks later, after teachers had the opportunity to assess the reading fluency of some of their students. Extending the sessions over time in this way was preferable because it allowed teachers to to put what they learned in the first session into practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). According to Bates and Morgan's (2018) survey of best practices for effective professional development, "one-shot workshops are unable to provide the ongoing sustained support needed for meaningful professional learning. Sustained focus over time is a hallmark of effective professional development" (p. 625). Spreading the learning over three sessions does not, on its own, guarantee that participants find the learning meaningful. By

designing the workshop sessions in alignment with research on how adults best learn, however, that was more likely to be the case.

Adult Learning Theory

This workshop was designed for my colleagues, the other middle-school ELA teachers in my building. I was used to planning lessons for thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds, but some of my colleagues had been teaching for thirteen or fourteen years longer than I had. In order to ensure that I presented my research in a way that was useful to them, I set out to some more research - this time on adult learning theories.

I quickly discovered the work of Malcolm Knowles, who researched and wrote extensively about the differences between child and adult learners. He coined the term *andragogy* as "the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children," (Knowles, 1970, p. 43) though he goes on to note that some of andragogy's assumptions had been implemented by teachers of young learners to great success. While his assumptions did not exclude young learners, Knowles (1970) outlined "crucial assumptions about the characteristics of learners that are different from the assumptions on which traditional [youth] pedagogy is premised" (p. 44).

Concept of the learner. Knowles (1970) purported that adults have a deep desire to direct their own lives, which extends to learning experiences. It is important to make adult learners feel comfortable in their learning environment. Nearly every professional development session I have been to has begun with the presenter reminding us that we are all adults and that we know how to self-regulate our need for restroom, water, and

stretch breaks. In addition to ensuring that learners felt respected as responsible adults and physically comfortable in their learning environments, Knowles (1970) stressed the importance of making sure adult learners are invested in the lesson, as they "are more deeply motivated to learn those things they see the need to learn" (p. 47).

Too often, teachers are made to attend training that does not directly apply to their own work, and they leave wondering how they can take what they have learned and apply it to their own classroom, content area, or age group. To avoid this in my own workshop, I narrowed the intended audience to only middle-level ELA teachers and organized the sequence of lessons in order to best acknowledge my learners' specific needs and pay respect to their valuable time.

Role of learners' experience. Knowles's (1970) second assumption dealt with the accumulated experiences of adult learners. Adults bring a wealth of prior experiences that can help them learn new material, which also benefits those learning alongside them. Adult learners are well-suited for experiential lessons such as class discussions, simulations, and group projects. These types of activities allow them to tap into their own experiences, activating prior skills and knowledge while mastering new content. Adults learn better when they take an active role in their own learning, as opposed to a more passive model of content delivery. This focus on learners having an active role in their ongoing learning experiences is confirmed by Bates and Morgan (2018):

> traditional lecture models are typically not as engaging, and more interactive
>
> experiences should be incorporated. These experiences could include examining
>
> student artifacts, using materials that teachers then implement in their classrooms,

engaging in lessons that teachers could use with students, and participating in or

leading model lessons. The emphasis across these experiences is on active

engagement, and this gives teachers the opportunity to grapple with, question, and

reflect on problems of practice. (p. 623)

Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) were also proponents of

active learning activities, and wrote that "the opportunity to link the ideas introduced

during professional development experiences to the teaching context in which teachers

work" is a second important component of active learning (pp. 925-926). Including time

for learners to reflect on how they will transfer and put their new learning to use was also

advised by Knowles (1970). Planning a workshop agenda with this in mind could help

combat the common post-workshop feelings I have personally experienced of *Wow, those*

are great ideas but I am not sure how I can use them in my situation.

Readiness to learn. Knowles (1970) posited that adults are most ready to learn

something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with

real-life tasks or problems (p. 44). It is a common joke among educators that teachers are

the worst students, but that may well be because they are made to sit through

one-size-supposedly-fits-all workshops that do not address the problems they want to

solve and sometimes do not even pertain to their work in any meaningful way.

Learners' readiness may also be affected by the timing of the lessons (Knowles

1970). I sat and watched a district employee demonstrate *what Powerschool will look like*

once your rosters are loaded - well, the teacher view looks a little different, but this will

still give you an idea at the new teacher orientation program a few weeks before school

started. I remember the physical sensations of annoyance over what I considered to be a waste of my time. It was important to bear this in mind when writing my workshop agenda and looking to place it on the professional development calendar. I could not expect teachers to be ready to plan assessment and intervention of students who they had not even met yet, especially when they were hoping for time to go prepare for the new year in their rooms. Instead, I plotted out a course of learning that introduced concepts when they were likely to be needed, and left sufficient time in between lessons for teachers to put these concepts into action before introducing the next ones.

Orientation to learning. Knowles (1970) wrote that adults "want to be able to apply whatever knowledge and skill they gain today to living more effectively tomorrow" (p. 44). They want to see an improvement in their day-to-day performance as an immediate result of their learning experience.

The project's design was a reaction to the assumptions of andragogy. The first workshop session was not dedicated solely to lectures about reading fluency and its relationship comprehension. Rather, the agenda respected the learners as adults and allowed them to reach their own conclusions based on the information in Chapter Two and their own experience as ELA teachers. Participants learned the theory of reading fluency assessment, and also practiced it themselves before spending time making a list of students to assess and finding time in their upcoming schedule to do so. In order to maximize readiness to learn and ensure a positive orientation to learning, the workshop resumed after participants had time to reflect on their new learning and assess the students they selected. Rather than returning to the importance of reading fluency and its

connection to comprehension, participants used the subsequent workshop sessions to analyze the results of student assessment data and make a plan to help their students improve, either in the ELA classroom, or with the support of other staff in the building.

Workshop Sessions

As outlined above, the workshop consisted of three sessions spread throughout the first school semester, beginning with an overview of the research presented in Chapter Two. This initial session was followed by two work sessions based on the outcome of the assessment teachers conducted following the first session. Reading fluency does not appear in the middle-school ELA standards. As illustrated in Chapter Two's literature review, however, increasing reading fluency may lead to gains in reading comprehension, allowing students to better meet our state's reading standards.

Learning outcomes and assessment. By the end of the first workshop session:

1. Participants will be able to define reading fluency and describe its relationship to reading comprehension. This is assessed using a simple exit ticket at the end of the session (see Appendix F). This exit ticket served as a summative data point to allow the presenter to see whether any concepts need to be reviewed or retaught at the second session.

2. Participants will be able to accurately rate a one-minute recording of a student's reading for rate, accuracy, and prosody, using the reading fluency scale developed by Zutell and Rasinski (1991). They may listen to the recording more than once. This served as formative assessment data, measured through discussion and comparison among the participants, with clarification and reteaching as needed that day.

3. Participants will identify three to eight students to assess for reading fluency and determine when and how they will do so. They will make a list of materials they will need. This was assessed informally through check-ins and conversation with each participant.

By the end of the second workshop session:

4. Participants will sort their students into groups for intervention. They will plan the first lesson for each group and identify materials needed, including a tool for tracking student progress. This was assessed informally through check-ins and conversation with each participant.

By the end of the third workshop session:

5. Participants will share their students' progress and next steps for those who may qualify for additional support through the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) process. They will identify more students to assess, as necessary.

Agenda and activities. The first session, which occurred several weeks into the first semester of the school year, consisted of four major components:

1. An overview of the research on reading fluency and its relationship to comprehension summarized in Chapter Two, presented in a slideshow with discussion questions that invited participants to reflect on their own experiences with reading fluency;

2. A collaborative reading exercise consisting of selected excerpts on the risks of dysfluent reading for secondary students from work cited in Chapter Two, with prompts for participants to annotate for information they already knew or suspected, information

that was new to them, and questions that arose from the reading;

3. An overview of the practice of reading fluency assessment, introduction of Zutell and Rasinksi's (1991) multidimensional scale (see Appendix D), and practice rating a recorded sample of student reading;

4. Identification of three to eight students to assess for reading fluency, informed by standardized test results, student observations, and classroom assessment data. In addition, participants determined when to do these assessments and made a list of supplies needed to complete them (see Appendix E).

The second session took place two to four weeks later, after teachers had a chance to assess the students they identified in the first session. It consisted of three major components:

5. Review of each participant's student assessment information in small groups, with help from the presenter to assess recordings of student reading that participants were unsure of;

6. Forming student groups based on assessment score, scheduling, and personality, and finding time to work with them on ELA priority days, during class warm-ups, worktime, or on library days (see Appendix G);

7. Planning each group's first intervention lesson, from a list provided by the presenter, and those ideas generated from the combined experience of the group (see Appendix G). Participants created a list of materials needed including a progress tracking tool (see Appendix I) . Note that some students may not require intensive small group

intervention, but could benefit from whole class activities that strengthen reading fluency and participants may choose to include more of those activities in their classroom plans.

The third session took place four to six weeks later, after teachers had started interventions and been able to track student progress for at least twenty days. It consisted of three major components:

8. Report on each participant's intervention groups and student progress in small groups, followed by a discussion and determination of next steps depending on student needs;

9. Advice for the completion of MTSS paperwork for students who need more support than could be provided in a mainstream ELA classroom alone;

10. Closing discussion, workshop feedback, and support for participants who planned to continue with the identification-assessment-intervention process beyond the three sessions of the workshop.

Summary

I began this process with a feeling of uncertainty when it came to identifying and helping my most-struggling readers. As I learned more about reading fluency, I began to realize that my lack of knowledge on the topic was keeping from identifying my dysfluent readers. As I researched the connection between fluency and comprehension, I discovered the importance of fluency intervention - especially for secondary readers - and determined to find a way to share that information with the other ELA teachers at my school.

This chapter provided an overview of the three-session workshop I created, the participants is was designed for, its setting, and the timeline. The framework for adult learning - Malcolm Knowles's (1970) andragogy - that I used is described. It provides a brief overview of the learning outcomes for each workshop session as well as and the agenda and activities for all three, which were designed in accordance with the assumptions of andragogy. More details, including copies of presentation slideshows, articles for collaborative readings, assessment texts and scales, and planning documents are provided in the project documents.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Overview

This project came to be after I found myself searching for the answer to my research question: *How can middle-level English Language Arts teachers use reading fluency assessment to better know their students and target reading interventions in a mainstream ELA class?* Many of my colleagues had advised me to do the work to get my master's degree as soon as possible, but I found it difficult to commit to doing so much work without a *burning question* guiding me and providing motivation. Once I acknowledged my own frustration over my struggle to truly understand how to best help my struggling readers, it was not long before I realized that I needed different data. I start each year with comments from last year's teachers and data from multiple standardized tests, but find that I need even more - but completely different - data.

My research revealed that my own teacher preparation left me with a lack of a fundamental understanding of the importance of reading fluency. Once I learned about the link between reading fluency and comprehension, I knew I had found my burning question. I decided to design a multi-session professional development workshop for the other ELA teachers at my school so that they could better understand reading fluency, its connection to comprehension, and why it matters for secondary readers. In order to make the workshop's learning meaningful and actionable, I included opportunities for my colleagues to assess their struggling readers' fluency and make a plan to provide appropriate interventions and track their effectiveness.

In this concluding chapter, I share my reflection on the process of creating the project, summarize the salient topics within my literature review, and discuss the potential impact of this work.

Major Learnings

The process of reading the published research on the topic was more difficult that I had expected. I truly cannot imagine completing such a project without the internet, although I had to be judicious in my electronic reading. I often found myself skimming through the scholarly articles I searched for so meticulously on my university's databases. In my day-to-day life, I do not need to read informational texts for deep understanding. When I felt myself zoning out, I created a system for keeping track of the most important details from each paper, revisiting those points a few days later, assigning a code to them to keep track of my sources, and then summarizing each notable idea in my own words on dozens of index cards.

For the first time since Mrs. Pole, my senior-year Advanced Placement English teacher, forced me to, I was shuffling furiously through index cards, summarizing my own summaries to avoid plagiarism and internalize the research for myself, color coding the cards by literature review section, and arranging each one precisely on my couch - each cushion representing a major subcategory of my research. As an ELA teacher, I often grow frustrated with my students' reticence to engage with the writing process, since I know that planning, prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing truly does make for a stronger finished product. It can be a struggle for me to imagine what my students are experiencing, as writing more or less comes easily to me. For the first time in many

years, I had to find brand-new strategies to help myself as a writer, which has helped me understand my students better.

Once I had my research organized, I did enjoy writing the literature review. It was a different style than I am used to, but I enjoyed the challenge of weaving so much research into my own narrative, explaining for my audience all that I had learned so they could skip the balancing-an-index-card-between-two-couch-cushions-to-indicate-that-it-would-work-well-as-a-transition steps. As an English major, I have written almost exclusively in MLA style. I got a lot of practice checking and double-checking a reference tool, another process my own students resist doing, but is often so necessary!

Upon starting the final course of my master's degree, I was shocked to find that the conceptualization and writing of the actual project was more difficult than the literature review had been. I knew that I did not want to write a thesis based on my own original research. My study of the scholarship in my literature review had convinced me of the importance of reading fluency for secondary readers and I was not interested in proving it again in my own classroom. I knew I wanted to share my new learning with my colleagues in the ELA department at my school, but I was unsure how to approach designing and leading a workshop for my colleagues - some of whom know more about reading fluency than I do, and all of whom have so many demands on their time.

I began to outline the activities that I wanted to present in my workshop, but found it hard to strike a balance between the pedagogy I plan for my eighth-graders and the painful professional development experiences I have been made to sit through as a busy teacher with a long to-do list at the forefront of my mind. Studying Knowles's

(1970) assumptions for adult learners in his vision of andragogy helped immensely. His research confirmed some of my gut instincts about ceding some of the responsibility as the presenter to create a more active learning environment that draws on the skills and experience of my colleagues. While I was reluctant to ask for too much of their time, I knew that like our students need time for independent practice, "teachers need time to apply new thinking to their classrooms" (Bates & Morgan, 2018: p. 626). Once I internalized Knowles's assumptions and decided to plan multiple workshop sessions, it was much easier to plan a professional development experience that I believe will truly introduce my colleagues to new learning and help them make real adjustments to their practice in order to accommodate that learning and help struggling readers improve.

Literature Review

In Chapter Two, my literature review summarizes major scholarship on the following topics: defining reading fluency, fluency's relationship to reading comprehension, its importance for secondary readers, and strategies for assessing reading fluency. Although it is basic, defining reading fluency was a major learning for me. LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) automaticity theory seemed logical: if a student struggles to recognize words, they have fewer cognitive resources at their disposal to make meaning of those words. Conversely, readers who can decode words automatically are able to focus all their attention on what whose words say. Prior to my research, this was a gap in my own knowledge - as it is for many secondary English teachers.

The concept of expressive, or prosodic, reading as a facet of reading fluency, as introduced by Allington (1983), also gave proof to my intuition. Although text-to-speech

technology can be helpful, robotic readings of text can render them meaningless to me. It makes sense that it a student reads to themselves without expression, it would impede understanding. For this reason, I was drawn to Zutell and Rasinski's (1991) assessment scale, which includes phrasing and smoothness alongside reading pace and accuracy. Overall, I was drawn to Dr. Timothy Rasinski's body of research and writing, which presented complex research studies in approachable language and almost always included action steps for teachers to take in their classrooms. Often alongside other researchers, his name is most prominent on my works cited page (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2017; Rasinski et al., 2005; Rasinski, 2012; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Implications

I hope that my colleagues who participated in my workshop found they learned something and are able to better identify students who struggle with reading fluency and plan appropriate interventions. We each have the power to make changes to the policies and procedures of our own classroom practice. If the department found this work valuable, I could imagine integrating this type of assessment and intervention into our departmental work every year and potentially requesting curricular materials designed to support our work.

Neither the ELA curriculum nor the MTSS intervention schedule at my school provides adequate time for intensive reading fluency programs. This time last year, however, we did not have time dedicated for intervention time through the MTSS model at all. This time next year, we will have an instructional coach, funded by literacy grant

funds, working with teachers to improve their practice. School systems can seem difficult to change, but they are always changing. Equipped with new learning about the importance of reading fluency even for middle-school students, teachers in my department may certainly adjust their own practice, and are in a better position to advocate for any structural school-level changes we find to be necessary.

Limitations

Of course, the benefits of this research will be limited by the extent to which my colleagues learned from and engaged in the process. Even when we give our best efforts, we face daily the limitations of our short class periods, the needs of other students who require other interventions in our limited time with them, and the many other factors that may impact reading achievement that are beyond our control - such as inconsistent attendance, adverse student health, the distractions common to the adolescent mind, as well as linguistic and learning differences. Based on what we learn from the process of reading fluency assessment, intervention, and monitoring, we may decide to focus on fluency as a department, or to advocate for our school to offer additional fluency interventions beyond the scope of what we can offer in our mainstream ELA classrooms.

Going Forward

In my own practice, I expect to track, at minimum, informal data on the results of my reading fluency interventions. For those interested in organizing more formalized, methods-based research on the topic, the information presented in this capstone may be a useful starting point for their own research.

As my school continues to develop a more robust literacy plan, supported in part by grant funding, I hope to involve our instructional coach in the work of ensuring our students have the reading fluency skills necessary to be successful during their time in our building and as they advance to the high school. With some dedicated administrative support, it would be worth tracking the progress of students we identify for reading fluency intervention in their high-school coursework.

Although I think it will be a long time before I undertake another project of this magnitude, I personally am interested in the connection between proficient reading fluency and students' perceptions of themselves as readers. In addition to analyzing the research that exists on this topic already, I would like to create a student-completed rating and reflection system that indicated their perception of their success and identity as readers to compare with reading fluency ratings, standardized test results, classroom assessments, and their independent reading selection, habits, and volume.

Depending on the number of students who necessitate reading fluency intervention, I could imagine advocating for more specialized reading intervention classes, as the once-weekly MTSS intervention time we have is best suited to helping students acquire new skills, not to filling years-long gaps that persist from their elementary years.

Communicating and Using Results

I organized the workshop sessions to present them to my colleagues in the ELA department during the fall semester of 2019. Thereafter, I will work with my building's new instructional coach to include some mention of reading fluency in our school's

literacy goals. Since I began my research, I have planned to share my project with content

adviser, so that her department can use it in their own professional learning. In addition,

my capstone project will be shared on my university's digital commons for download.

Although it was designed with my school and circumstance in mind, teachers are

wonderful at finding ways to adapt, not adopt, others' ideas.

Benefits to the Profession

Reading proficiency is growing more important than ever, with our students

increasingly facing pressure from high-stakes tests and facing limitless options for their

independent reading lives as the media and book publishers produce more content than

ever. Increasing student proficiency on state tests is an important, and explicit, function

of my job. Developing confident, discerning young adults who identify as readers will

always be of paramount importance to me. I know this is true of so many other ELA

teachers, at my own school and everywhere else I have met them. Increasing reading

comprehension via identification and intervention of students struggling with reading

fluency will benefit their future teachers by setting them up for success as the complexity

of school textbooks increases and diminishing behavior and engagement problems borne

of low reading confidence.

Summary

In this final chapter, I revisited the line of thinking that led me to my research

question, the topics contained in my literature review including the researchers whose

work influenced my learning most, and outlined ways in which my capstone may impact

my own and others' literacy understandings and practices.

I am constantly getting ideas from educational researchers and other teachers. Some of what I see I can easily try out, but I often feel a sense of despair when I come across a big idea that seems like it could transform my teaching, if only I had the time to adequately implement it. Although the process of researching and writing this capstone was a difficult one for me, it feels great to know that I put in all of the work necessary to fully adjust change my practice to better serve my students. It feels even better to know that next fall I will pass that opportunity on to my department colleagues, without requiring nearly as many hours of database-searching, index-card-scribbling, outlining, writing, and revising tasks as it took me.

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