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Student-Driven Oral Reading Fluency Curriculum

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Literacy rates in the United States have been declining in recent years, a problem that has only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Minnesota, the state in which I live and teach, alone has seen an increase in the number of fourth graders below reading proficiency from 62% in 2019 to 68% in 2022 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022). While programs exist to counteract these effects at the lower elementary level, the resources available to secondary and adult learners are limited. Studies have shown that the success rates for low literacy readers that are not addressed by the third grade have shown that their chances for success in school decline rapidly as they move through our education system (Salinger, 2011). These statistics are true for all students, whether labeled as English Language Learner, Special Education, or General Education.

As a licensed ELL (English Language Learner) teacher, I am trained to incorporate grade appropriate content in teaching basic and intermediate English language skills. However, what is unique about my current classroom, is that about half of my students are not labeled as ELLs. One would ask, if they are not ELL, why are they in my class? Since accepting my current teaching position, I have worn two hats, as a middle school reading interventionist and ELL teacher. What we find is that many of our long term ELLs and low literacy students have many of the same needs that are not addressed in their general education curriculum. Oral Reading Fluency, commonly referred to by its initials ORF, is the ability to read texts aloud with accuracy, in a smooth manner, and with appropriate expression and speed (Nevo et al., 2020). Through creating an Oral Reading Fluency curriculum for secondary students, I hope to fill this need by

answering my research question, *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?*

In Chapter One, I lay out the context for my project, my experience as a reader, introduce the programs and ideas I have already implemented in my classroom, and describe my experience working with specific populations of students. This chapter sets the stage for the contents to come in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two, the literature review, will provide background information from previously published works and studies that I used to guide my project creation. In Chapter Three, I describe the Oral Reading Fluency curriculum that I designed and how it should be implemented. Finally, chapter four will conclude with my reflection of the project.

My Experience

Growing up, reading was a skill that was encouraged in my home and one that I took for granted. I have vivid memories of my mother laying in bed with my brother and me, reading Harry *Potter* (Rowling, 1998) books to us before bed. By third grade, my love for reading took over and I continued to read the series on my own since my mother was not reading fast enough to satisfy my imagination. This love for reading followed me to middle school, where an advanced placement program I participated in encouraged me to choose challenging books for my own independent reading enjoyment. I chose works such as *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell, 2011), various William Shakespeare plays, *Roots* (Haley, 2016), and many others. While many of these books pushed me to the point of reading frustration, I remember being determined to push through them which only made me a stronger and more successful student.

My brother, on the other hand, did not take off with reading in the same manner I did. He struggled for his whole elementary and secondary school career to finish short chapter books, such as *Captain Underpants*, that were well below his grade level. Towards the end of his elementary school years, my mom purchased the then popular program Hooked on Phonics via infomercial to attempt to supplement his reading education at home. Unfortunately, not every family has the time, means, or ability to provide additional literacy support in the home.

Once I began my pre-student teaching career, I realized how my experience as a young reader differs from that of many students. A great deal of my early work, before becoming a licensed teacher, centered around leading small reading groups as schools attempted to address their literacy needs. Most of the populations I work with and have worked with are of low socioeconomic status in urban communities. This is relevant to my study being that access to literacy materials and prior experience with education varies greatly for these students than it did in my upper middle class household.

Teaching Experience

In August of 2019, I was hired at Hmong College Prep Academy as a full time English Language Learner teacher. However, when I accepted this job, it was explained to me that I would also be teaching their Reading Fluency course for both general education students and ELLs. This course was my first exposure to Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). We used a program called Aimsweb, which measured and tracked student progress through weekly ORF progress monitoring and quarterly reading comprehension assessments. This program was delivered to the student one-on-one with teacher implementation and feedback. Students would set personal goals, but the integration of a

strategy for student ownership was not included.

Spring 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit, which greatly impacted my experience as a teacher and worked to the detriment of my students, in particular for their exposure to literacy. During the 2020-2021 school year, I taught remotely, full time, to barely half full classes. The students who did show up, did not turn on their microphones or cameras, due to many extenuating circumstances, which made Oral Reading Fluency activities virtually impossible. This over a year hiatus would set students back that much further in their literacy skills.

One positive experience that began during this school year was my participation in the LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) program by Lexia as a professional development opportunity through my school and the Minnesota Department of Education. This program was my first formal and extensive training in reading intervention. The first year of LETRS, we completed units 1-4 which were targeted mostly towards phonological awareness, graphemes, decoding, and word recognition skills. While these skills are necessary for many students at the secondary level, the activities that we participated in were very much so designed for elementary age. The next year, I continued on to complete units 5-8 covering vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. While the skills covered in these units were more advanced, again, the delivery was created for younger students. This is where I became more adept in adapting the strategies I learned to fit secondary content.

Rationale

The purpose of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of having students track their own oral reading fluency progress on increases in fluency and how it

correlates with reading comprehension. Additionally, students will be required to give each other feedback on reading skills specific to their fluency. This project aims to answer the question, *In what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?*

This topic is important to me in my role as an English Language Learner teacher and reading interventionist because my students are reading at levels much below their target grade level. Additionally, these students lack confidence in their reading and language skills. As I will prove in chapter 2, Oral Reading Fluency has been shown to have a great impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation. I believe that if the students are in charge of charting and measuring their own growth, they will be provided with the internal motivation to practice and learn.

Oral Reading Fluency and language acquisition are particularly important to myself and my colleagues because our school has a high ELL population, as well as a large population of struggling readers. Our Language Essentials team, of which I am a part, is large and continuing to seek out effective practices to best serve the great needs of our students. I would be able to include my colleagues in this project and we could all use the information to immediately inform our practices.

Context

As I describe my setting, there are many specific needs that apply to the students I work with that can be applied to a variety of diverse learners country wide. These students are predominantly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, live in urban communities, many are long term English language learners, and come from parents of

limited formal education backgrounds.

Low literacy rates can have detrimental effects on students and the communities they live in. Some of the effects of low literacy include health problems, incarceration, living in poverty, and the cyclical effect that is passed onto future generations. The cyclical nature of this problem is impacted by a variety of factors such as parents' experiences with formal education, parents being out of the home often working long hours, lack of access to reading and educational materials in the home, and students who are often in charge of their own education and motivation (Rea, 2020). This is essential to my curriculum because student stamina to read needs to be intrinsic, meaning that it comes from within. In the student-led ORF curriculum, the hope is that each learner will take charge of their own learning and monitor their growth which will lead to greater reading comprehension and student engagement.

Summary

My experiences as a reader and teacher have led me to greater understanding of how essential stamina is to reading. While a great deal of research and curriculum development has been done in addressing the literacy gap and student needs, most of what exists is aimed towards elementary students. In designing my students led Oral Reading Fluency Curriculum for Secondary Students, I aim to fill this gap while increasing student stamina and engagement. The question I plan to address is, *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?*

In this chapter, I introduced my research question and reflected upon my journey

as a reader. Next, I summarized my experience as a teacher and tied my experience to my research question. Additionally, I described the rationale for creating my curriculum project and explained the context in which it would be applied. In Chapter Two, I summarize my relevant research that pertains to my curriculum such as the work that has previously been done on oral reading fluency, student stamina, reading comprehension, literacy in secondary learners, and low-literacy statistics and consequences. Chapter Three describes the ORF curriculum project itself: routines, fluency skills, stamina, the use of outside resources, and assessment. Finally, Chapter Four concludes the paper by reflecting on major learnings, revisiting the literature, analyzing implications and limitations, and looking forward to the next steps for my project.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

As described in Chapter One, literacy rates amongst students are declining across the United States. Approximately two thirds of fourth grade students are not reading at their grade level, and a similar proportion graduate from high school without reaching proficiency in reading. These statistics place the United States considerably behind other countries in literacy (Rae, 2020). In order to address the current literacy crisis in schools, this capstone project synthesizes a curriculum designed for secondary students to drive their own literacy practice through Oral Reading Fluency. This capstone project is significant because it addresses a previously underserved need for explicit literacy instruction and reading intervention at the secondary level. The research question guiding this literature review is *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?*

The purpose of this literature review is to explore previous studies related to this capstone project. In this chapter, I first address what Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) is and the key components that comprise this practice. This section is integral to this project being that ORF is the driving force behind composing this curriculum. I describe strategies that exist to improve ORF assessment and the effects of ORF on reading comprehension. Next, I discuss the significance of stamina on students' learning and literacy development. In this paper, I utilize the terms stamina, motivation, and engagement interchangeably. When citing literature, motivation is most commonly used

being that is the most commonly used term. However, when I reflect and apply my learning, I switch to stamina because it implies a growth mindset. Ultimately, the terms motivation and stamina results in overall engagement as applied in my research question. I used the *TARGET* Model (Mizelle, 1997) as a guide when I developed my ORF curriculum, which I also describe in this review. This chapter then dives into what reading comprehension is and the three levels of comprehension that are pertinent to this project: word level, syntax, and discourse. The next section discusses the significance of age and grade level in literacy development and the lack of resources that exist at the secondary level. Finally, the literature review concludes with specific statistics on low literacy levels and the detrimental effects low-literacy has on the population. This literature review sets the stage for the significance behind this capstone project which creates an Oral Reading Fluency curriculum for secondary learners.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)

Oral Reading Fluency, often referred to by its initials ORF, refers to one's ability to read texts aloud with accuracy, in a smooth manner, and with appropriate expression and speed (Nevo et al., 2020). When a student has strong fluency, they read through a text smoothly, processing words automatically and without the need to pause and decode frequently (Nieporent, 2020). Fluency must be explicitly taught through modeling and practice of the following pieces: accuracy, rate, prosody, and word recognition/automaticity (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020).

Accuracy is a fluent reader's ability to read words correctly, recognizing high frequency sight words and decoding with ease. Students who read with accuracy make few errors as they move through a passage. However, when they do make mistakes,

fluent readers quickly self correct and progress with their reading while maintaining a consistent rate (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020).

Rate, or speed, is how fast a reader moves through a passage, taking brief pauses to indicate punctuation. As for speed, faster is not always better. A fluent reader reads at an appropriate pace; not too fast and not too slow. Students often view reading quickly as a strength and reading too fast might not allow them to adequately comprehend the text (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020).

Prosody describes a fluent reader's ability to read a text aloud with appropriate expression, pitch, tone, volume and rhythm. Experienced readers apply their understanding of the passage to their reading prosody, meaning that prosody and comprehension are intertwined (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020).

Finally, automaticity refers to a fluent reader's ability to combine all of the previous skills innately while reading aloud (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). For a student to be able to automatically implement these skills, a great deal of modeling, practice, and feedback is required (Nieporent, 2020). The culminating effects of these skills is referred to in this curriculum simply as fluency. When students reflect on their own reading, provide peer feedback, and set goals for themselves, they will refer to this automaticity piece as fluency for the sake of consistency.

There is a plethora of resources and literature available on Oral Reading Fluency practices and how to implement them at the elementary level. While I recognize the need to address these skills early on, my capstone project focuses on how to intervene and address reading fluency in secondary settings. Next, I describe the many strategies that can be used to improve Oral Reading Fluency. in order to answer, *in what ways might a*

student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support

student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary

learners?

Existing ORF Strategies for Practice

There are many strategies that exist to explicitly build the previously stated skills

necessary for Oral Reading Fluency. In order to successfully design an effective ORF

curriculum, there must be at least one skill targeted by an exercise in order to give the

students a solid understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it. When

choosing effective practices to use in this curriculum, I sought resources that would target

the skills accuracy, rate, prosody and automaticity. The following eight strategies

described by Aldhanhani and Abu-Ayyash (2020) and supported by the work of Ming

(2018) should be modeled by the teacher and practiced regularly by students in a

successful ORF curriculum.

Repeated Reading. This practice involves students reading the same passage

multiple times over. Repeated readings increase accuracy, rate, and reading

comprehension. The more familiar the students become with a text, the more likely they

are to recognize vocabulary and make connections. Each time a student reads through a

text, they increase their speed. If a student makes an error, they correct that mistake the

next time through reading (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). Repeated reading can be

used for silent reading, close reading, with a partner, small group, or with a class as a

whole group.

1. Reading practice- Simply put, the more a student reads, the better reader they will

   become. Through practicing reading often with a variety of different texts,

students build their reading strengths while expanding their background knowledge (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). This also can be applied to student choice and engagement. In my experience, allowing students to read independently a book of their choosing takes the focus off reading for school, and shifts it to reading for fun. Choice is also a key component increasing reading stamina.

2. Modeling- In order for students to be fluent readers, they need to understand what fluent reading is. Through modeling the accuracy, pace, and prosody, teachers are the example that students will aim for (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). The significance of modeling is that it shows the students what to do and how they should do it. Reading is a complex practice that requires the teacher to explicitly show students how to apply different skills. For example, an instructor cannot simply tell a student to read with expression. They must show them what the expression looks and sounds like first. Ming (2018) supports this practice and elaborates that teacher modeling additionally supports vocabulary development and comprehension of text structures.

3. Assisted Reading- Students read alongside, in unison with, a teacher or other fluent reader. This helps to build their decoding skills, word recognition, and automaticity (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). This is similar to modeling in its effect, but it also helps to ease student anxiety. When more than one person is reading at a time, there is less attention and pressure placed on an individual.

4. Rhyming Poetry- Through reading pieces that contain common phonemes and orthographic patterns, students catch on to sound patterns easily while engaging

with reading in a fun and engaging way (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). Once readers become familiar with a certain sound to spelling pattern, it is helpful to practice and repeat the sounds as they appear in different words. Instead of simply reciting flashcards of sight words with common sound patterns, rhyming poetry provides a more complex approach to pronunciation that better appeals to secondary learners.

5. Readers Theatre- In groups students read a play aloud, and through practice, are able to perform the script fluently and with expression (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). This practice is adaptable in that the performance aspect can be small-scale, like a pair of partners reading at their desks, or on a grand scale, like a class performance in the auditorium. The application of readers theater involves other strategies such as Repeated Reading and Modeling in order to be effective. Additionally, Ming (2018) proposes that students be required to read the entire script, instead of focusing on selected lines. Practicing the entirety of the script provides extended practice and promotes overall reading comprehension.

6. Choral Reading- In order to build fluency and reduce anxiety, groups of students read a piece in unison matching pace with one another (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). This is similar to Assisted Reading in that more than one person is reading at the same time. However, the focus of choral reading is to match pace rather than improve accuracy. I find that choral reading works best with rhythmic texts such as poems.

7. Paired Reading- In pairs, students take turns reading different amounts of a passage, switching back and forth (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). Paired

reading is an excellent way to support this Oral Reading Fluency curriculum in which the students are expected to work with a partner. Paired reading allows the readers to share the cognitive workload. It also involves a bit of modeling and can be applied with Readers Theater.

While there are other strategies that exist, the aforementioned practices will be integrated into this capstone project. I chose these particular practices because they are strategies that I have found effective to support Oral Reading Fluency in my own classroom. In designing an Oral Reading Fluency curriculum, a great deal of instruction time must be spent building each individual fluency skill before they can be grouped together and assessed. These strategies provide students with the tools they need to grow and prove their growth to themselves and their teacher through monitoring and assessment.

Assessing Oral Reading Fluency

According to Dr. Timothy Rasinski in *Assessing Reading Fluency* 2004, valid and reliable assessment of Oral Reading Fluency is necessary to monitor student progress and measure the effectiveness of teacher instruction (p. 4). Moreover, the assessment strategies he recommended are efficient and effective in the classroom because they are simple to carry out, understandable, and encompass the essential skills required for fluent readers (p. 20). Formal assessments should be administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. These assessment results will shed light on students' abilities and provide insights into how teachers should plan and adapt their literacy instruction to student needs (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). In order to answer the question *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support*

student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners, assessment is necessary for teachers to monitor and verify the effectiveness of the curriculum. Through informal assessments such as student reflection and teacher observations, teachers can monitor student motivation and engagement as it pertains to reading. Formal assessments, such as Oral Reading Fluency check-ins with the teacher, which are described later in this chapter, provide concrete data as to student growth. In order to measure comprehension, teachers will provide checks for understanding on reading assignments throughout the year within the curriculum and in other supplementary materials.

ORF and Reading Comprehension

It has been proven by numerous studies that there is a positive correlation between Oral Reading Fluency and reading comprehension. As a reader improves their reading fluency, they spend less time and cognitive effort on decoding and word recognition. This additional time and effort can then be spent on understanding the whole meaning of the text (Nevo et al., 2020).

According to Özenç and Saat (2022), oral reading is made better by comprehension because of the need to understand the text to vocalize with effective prosody. Two components of prosody, or expression as described in this project, are stress and intonation. In order for a reader to know when to stress words and phrases, they must understand the meaning attached to the syntax and discourse of a text. Intonation refers to the way in which a reader alters their voice to reflect meaning; meaning which is extracted from comprehension.

Oral Reading Fluency does not serve as a solution in itself to low literacy and low comprehension in adolescent students. It does, however, serve as the stage for this capstone curriculum project. The activities vary in their implementation from individual practice, one-on-one interaction, small group, and to the whole class. In order to bolster the effectiveness of ORF the students must be engaged in their reading. Student engagement is a byproduct of stamina. When combining Oral Reading Fluency with a community that supports learning and motivates students, reading comprehension will be further improved.

Student Stamina

Students' stamina for reading school texts declines as they progress from elementary to middle school, and at an increased rate amongst struggling readers. In order to combat this decline, motivation needs to be emphasized in an effective and supportive classroom (IES Practice Guide, 2008). Motivation refers to what drives a person to complete a task or to reach for a certain goal. Either internally or externally applied, there is an invisible force that acts upon learners. In a perfect world, all readers would possess the intrinsic, or internal, motivation to read. A student's confidence in their abilities often reflects their view of themselves as a reader. This perception of ability, if negative, can lead to low self-confidence and low expectations for self which often results in low engagement and motivation (Nevo et al., 2020). Adolescents who struggle with reading often expect that they will perform poorly in school. This low confidence in their ability leads them to not trust their own thinking (IES Practice Guide, 2008). Through self-determination and intrinsic motivation, this distrust can be combated.

Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation

A crucial component to a student's success in progressing from a struggling reader to a fluent reader is their ability to drive their own learning, this is called self-determination. Self-determination, as it relates to a reading curriculum, is a student's ability to own their progress through self-monitoring, goal setting, and practicing self-advocacy in the classroom. Educators must teach students self-determination strategies and allow time for them to be practiced in the classroom. Through gradual release of responsibility, students will end up owning their own reading behaviors which leads to them having an intrinsic motivation to grow (Didion et al., 2020).

The role of teacher feedback is a key part of creating self-determined students. It is crucial that the instructor provide feedback that is informative, but not controlling. Feedback should set realistic expectations for students, make a connection between performance and effort, lay out steps to apply strategies, and explain why a given strategy is effective for learning (IES Practice Guide, 2008).

A student's stamina must be intrinsic, meaning that it comes from within themselves. Reading motivation can be described as the set of values, beliefs, and goals that act as a driving force that provides the reader with the desire to engage with a text (Nevo et al., 2020). This intrinsic motivation extends beyond a student's self-concept and further applies to their perception of the value of reading. Students are highly motivated by their peers and often adapt the perceptions of others to fit their own needs. If they feel as though others see them as lesser, they will in turn view themselves with low self-concept. If they feel that those around them view reading as worthwhile, they are more likely to be motivated to read (Nevo et al., 2020). This intrinsic reading motivation

and effect of others on a student are established in this Oral Reading Fluency curriculum through self-reflection and peer feedback. By building a classroom community dedicated to learning together and improving together, there is less negative self-concept and apprehension to read.

Mistakes are a part of learning and must be viewed as such to struggling readers. Often, when students make mistakes, it can lead to frustration and the desire to give up and check out. These reactions are especially true at the secondary level because students try to hide their reading challenges for fear of embarrassment. Students perceive reading as a skill they *should* have learned when they were younger and do not want their teacher or peers to view them as lesser. However, when mistakes are reframed as opportunities for growth in a safe space, recognizing these errors can help students drive their own learning. Reading aloud gives learners the opportunity to to hear their skips, repetitions, word additions, and confusions which can be corrected through practice (Özenç & Saat, 2022). Building a safe learning environment where mistakes are valued rather than feared is an integral part of creating a collaborative learning environment which is necessary for my curriculum project to be successful.

TARGET model and Motivation

In the article, "Enhancing Young Adolescents' Motivation for Literacy Learning", Mizelle (1997) laid out the TARGET model as a framework for addressing student motivation in the classroom. TARGET stands for Task, Authority, Reward and Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, and Improvement. This model is focused specifically on building self-determination as it pertains to literacy.

Task- What are the objectives of the activity and why are the students completing it? It is important that students set short-term goals for realistic completion of tasks.

Authority- Who is responsible for making decisions on student learning? It is a delicate balance between teacher voice and student stamina. Students need to be actively involved in decision making and taking ownership of their learning.

Reward and Recognition- How will students be rewarded and recognized for their progress and achievements? This indicates where value is placed.

Grouping- Students need to be able to work together to promote a sense of cooperation rather than competition in the classroom. This is important for stamina and building community.

Evaluation- What methods will be used to monitor and assess student learning through progress, improvement, and mastery? The results of evaluation techniques should lead students to view making mistakes as a part of learning rather than failure.

Time- What is the pace of the instruction? Make sure an adequate amount of time is being given to complete activities.

Stamina is essential for success in reading being that reading is a demanding task. It is one of the essential components to addressing literacy needs and is integrated throughout the project. The *TARGET* model provided the framework and guiding questions I used to make sure student motivation and engagement is tied throughout. When students are motivated to read, they are more likely to to understand what they are reading leading to greater reading comprehension.

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension, simply put, is the ability to understand what is being read. The act of reading is a process by which a reader receives and processes information given to them in a text. Comprehension is how the reader understands and makes sense of the information from the text (Yildiz & Ceyhan, 2021). Although a great deal of research on reading comprehension has been done, as shown by the works of several scholars including Timothy Rasinski, the objective of this section in the literature review is to focus on the components of reading comprehension that are essential to the Oral Reading Fluency curriculum created for this capstone project.

There are three levels of comprehension that are relevant for the purposes of this project: word level, syntax, and discourse. Word level comprehension refers to the reader's ability to quickly recognize words and apply their meaning automatically as they read. The faster and more automatic the process becomes, the more the reader can focus on comprehending what they read (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). In order for word-recognition to become automatic, students must have a solid foundation of phonemic awareness, sound-letter relationships, familiarity with spelling patterns, and be able to recognize morphological word parts (Moats, 2020). In order to further supplement and support learning, teachers need to explicitly teach these skills and practice them throughout any reading curriculum.

Syntax refers to the meaning created at the sentence level of text. The structure by which words are strung together to create meaning at the phrase level requires a set of grammatical and semantic rules that readers must understand to adequately comprehend a text. Understanding syntax and semantic structures is essential to reading with prosody in

Oral Reading Fluency (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). Language comprehension through understanding the different parts of speech and their roles in sentence structure, as well as vocabulary and background knowledge, play critical roles in syntactic understanding (Moats, 2020). Recognizing language devices at the sentence also promotes comprehension at the whole text level.

Finally, the discourse level of a text refers to meaning and structure that governs the composition of a passage as a whole. Fiction and nonfiction texts are guided by their own rules and word choice. The author's purpose behind composing a text, whether it be to compare and contrast, persuade, inform, etc., designates the structure of the passage and signal words that may be used. As a reader, looking out for these clues leads to greater comprehension of the text (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008).

Grade Level/Age

Age has a significant impact on reading stamina and success rates for intervention with struggling readers. Previous studies around literacy, oral reading fluency, and reading intervention are performed at the elementary level. When literacy discrepancies are met with intervention at a young age, the chances of success are much higher than with adolescent learners and adults. However, adolescent learners and adults are met with the same challenges and consequences pertaining to low literacy.

A student's interest in reading decreases as they age from the elementary to secondary grade levels (Mizelle, 1997). This inverse trend is problematic because the literacy demands increase greatly from middle to high school and into postsecondary settings. This lack of interest is tied directly to a loss in stamina, which when accompanied by a lack of literacy instruction in secondary schools, leads to the current

literacy crisis at the adolescent level. When teachers do attempt to intervene with older students, they often employ variations of the early elementary literacy practices that may have failed these struggling readers to begin with.

Starting in the fourth grade, students receive little to no explicit literacy instruction as they did in the earlier grades. Furthermore, "Grade 4 is almost universally recognized as the point at which students must make a transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'" (Salinger, 2011, p. 2). This transition is accompanied by reading demands that increase in complexity such as context, point of view, and other discourse level cognitive demands. The literacy demands that students encounter as they progress through the grades increase in complexity, and the skills required to analyze these texts requires a variety of actions on the reader's part. Some skills that students employ include making connections, analyzing ideas and points of view, and problem solving (Ming, 2018). The goal of this Oral Reading Fluency curriculum is to address the needs of secondary students. By addressing these challenges in fluency, students can focus their efforts on these more complex reading comprehension strategies. Additional instruction outside of this curriculum is required to explicitly teach these skills. Combating low literacy at the secondary level is essential to student success in school and beyond.

Low-Literacy Statistics and Consequences

As previously mentioned, Minnesota specifically has seen a drastic decline in literacy proficiency at the fourth grade level from 62% being below proficiency in 2019 rising to 68 % in 2022 (Annie E Casey Foundation, 2022). This statistic is especially alarming for me as a Minnesota Middle School literacy teacher because those affected students will be reaching my classroom in the years to come. The significance of being

below reading level in fourth grade is due to a variety of consequences. At this grade level, content transitions from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Students who did not previously receive the reading instruction or intervention they needed will only continue to fall further behind. These students have been shown to have an increased risk for engaging in perilous behavior and are more likely to ultimately drop out of high school (Annie E Casey Foundation, 2022). While intervening before this fourth grade juncture is important, this project aims to address the needs of students who did not receive the early education they required.

Significant long-term consequences may affect students with low literacy skills including higher dropout rates, difficulty finding employment, and likelihood of being involved in criminal endeavors (Didion et al., 2020). Moreover, 43% of adults, according to the National Institute of Literacy, affected by low reading troubles are living in poverty. Those with low literacy skills often have poor health care and lower life expectancies. Unfortunately, in homes with parents with low literacy, the reading challenges are often passed down to their children due to lack of materials and practice in the household. This being said, low literacy and its challenges are often passed down generation to generation (Rea, 2020). For specific data reflecting how low literacy rates vary by community, figures can be found online at the National Center for Education Statistics website. However, while low literacy rates are higher across populations of color, all communities were affected due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The curriculum designed in this capstone project can be used in educational settings across communities.

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on students all over the world in every content area created a great deal of problems in our educational system. One of the greatest problems from the pandemic was the interruption of learning to read in the early years of elementary school. Fostering language development and promoting reading over distance learning was difficult for educators and widened the gap for reluctant readers (D'Souza, 2021). Many students, especially those from low-income families, do not have access to reading materials at home. This lack of material and encouragement at home led to students returning to the classroom without the skills they needed to engage with grade-level content. These elementary students are now entering middle schools, which are not prepared to combat these literacy challenges. This capstone project is designed to be used with these impacted students to get back on track.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to explore past research and findings that are relevant to this capstone project. Within this chapter, the content first described Oral Reading Fluency and its key components, which form the foundation of this curriculum. Strategies for enhancing reading fluency, methods for assessing it, and its impacts on reading comprehension have all been addressed. Moreover, I delved into the significance of stamina in student learning and literacy development, emphasizing the importance of self-determination and intrinsic motivation. The development of this curriculum was guided by the *TARGET* model, also covered in this chapter, in order to foster student engagement through stamina.

This review also touched on the multifaceted concept of reading comprehension, specifically focusing on the three essential levels: word level, syntax, and discourse. The

importance of age and grade level in literacy development, along with the lack of resources at the secondary level, is also discussed. Finally, the long-term effects of low literacy in education and beyond, as well as the far-reaching consequences, are made evident in order to understand the significance of this capstone project.

In order to answer the question *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?,* this curriculum addresses a previously unmet need for explicit literacy instruction at the secondary level. Through understanding what research already exists and what studies have previously been done, I designed an ORF curriculum to fill in the void. Chapter Three describes the Oral Reading Fluency curriculum, establishes the setting in which the project will be implemented, and analyzes the time that was spent creating the curriculum. Chapter Four describes my major learning from this project, readdresses key components of the literature review, analyzes implication and limitations, and looks forward to recommendations for future work and research.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

My Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) curriculum incorporates key fluency skill development, fosters student motivation, and is self-driven by the students to create autonomy and promote engagement. As proven by the literature review, ORF practices show positive correlations with improving student literacy and engagement in the classroom. Key pieces to laying the foundation of this curriculum is to consider who the curriculum is designed for, who it aims to serve, where it will be implemented, how long it will take to demonstrate success, and how success will be measured. The curriculum is designed to be used by secondary teachers with students who read below grade-level proficiency as measured by various testing resources. These practices are designed to be implemented in various instructional classrooms, from push in to pull out. Ideally, the curriculum be used one day a week, for fifty minutes, over the course of an entire school year. The assessment of success is measured formally by the instructor three times a year and informally by students and teachers weekly. The coming sections provide further details to describe each of these components. This project was designed to answer the questions *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners* by providing a framework for students to practice and improve their reading fluency.

Project Description

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) is the practice of reading aloud with accuracy, proper speed, accurate expression, and overall automaticity. As described in the previous

chapter, when these skills are achieved, a fluent reader frees up their cognitive space in order to focus their attention on reading comprehension. Through repeated practice, feedback, reflection, and goal setting, students will build their confidence as readers as they improve their ability to understand texts. This improved ability to read leads to greater stamina and engagement from previously hesitant readers.

In my classroom, ORF is completed once a week over the course of an entire school year. This curriculum is designed to be completed in this time frame. Initially, students are taught the basics of Oral Reading Fluency: what it is, how to do it, and classroom routines. Eventually, each week will have its own skill or purpose in addition to the ORF routine. These weekly practices will give students knowledge to assess their own learning, set goals, and build motivation. While teacher assessment is incorporated throughout the year, students are primarily responsible for maintaining their own data. This data will be used by the instructor to inform curriculum planning and modify their teaching strategies.

The first portion of this project introduces the key skills required to be fluent readers. In order for students to master each skill, they must first learn them in isolation. These skills include pausing, phrasing, expression, rate, and overall fluency. The routines for instruction of each are described later in this chapter. Once the skills have been taught independently, they are combined into a template for providing peer feedback. Peer interaction and constructive feedback are important to building a community of students with growth mindsets who are able to support each other in their learning.

The Oral Reading Fluency routine is implemented one day a week for consistency and independent practice from the students. This involves leveled texts being read aloud

for one minute a piece in pairs, alternating for two turns. As they read, they record their data and provide feedback to their partners. As the students become comfortable with the practice, teacher involvement decreases ultimately leading to the students owning their own learning. This project builds upon itself week to week with gradual release of responsibility from teacher to students.

Daily ORF Routine

Students are provided with tables and graphs to fill in weekly to track progress. At the beginning of each ORF session, students will review their previous weeks' data and goals in order to complete a warm-up reflection describing their focus of the day. This reflection may be universally shared amongst the class or unique to the individual, depending on the week. Next, the teacher will review objectives, including the "Why?," or the rationale for this fluency practice, so that students understand the significance of what they are learning. After the objectives are reviewed, there is a targeted lesson where students practice the routine or specific fluency skill as a whole group. This grounds the unique purpose for each week. When the whole group activity is completed, students gather their ORF materials and complete the routine. Finally, students calculate their data, graph progress, provide feedback to peers, and set goals for the following week. Each ORF class session is concluded by an Exit Ticket reinforcing math skills needed to calculate data. As the students become more familiar with the routine, the more self-driven it becomes over the course of the school year.

Fluency Skills

Once the basic routine is established, weekly skill work is introduced around quarter two. The fluency skills practiced each week provide students with the knowledge

to assess their own learning and provide feedback to their peers. The skills build their prosody and are introduced in this order: pausing, phrasing, expression, rate, and overall fluency. Pausing refers to taking short breaths or breaks in reading to indicate punctuation. Phrasing describes grouping words together in a way that makes reading sound conversational and natural, rather than reading like a robot. Expression is divided into two weeks, stress and intonation. Rate measures how fast the student is reading; not too fast or too slow. Finally, all of the characteristics are grouped together to describe overall fluency.

Student Stamina

Using the *TARGET* Model for motivation, I designed this Oral Reading Fluency curriculum in such a way as to increase stamina. Reinforcing student stamina is key to any class, but is especially important in an environment where struggling readers are being targeted. The first two weeks of the school year, students will learn about having a growth mindset and this will be revisited each week in the practice of setting goals. Additionally, once the students have an understanding of their individual fluency skills, self-evaluation and partner feedback become key pieces to this curriculum. In order for students to grow, feedback needs to be structured in a positive way that leads to more practice and improvement. These practices foster motivation through students sharing and reflecting upon their strengths in addition to areas of needed improvement.

Outside Curriculum

This Oral Reading Fluency curriculum does not in itself constitute a reading intervention program. Instruction and practice outside of this one day a week is needed to support additional work, reading comprehension, and writing application. Outside

instruction on vocabulary building, text features, inferencing and more are some of the practices that I implore in my own classroom. These activities occupy the other four days of the school week. It is important to acknowledge that this additional instruction will have an impact on the effectiveness of the ORF curriculum. The more reading practice, the greater improvement students will show.

Assessment

Data is measured and assessed by both the teacher and students throughout the school year. Students measure their progress with a partner by tracking their words correct per minute, tracking errors in accuracy, and computing their average score for two rounds. They then graph their weekly average to track growth over the course of a year. The teacher will informally use this weekly data to assess student progress and inform planning.

The teacher formally assesses each student three times a year: at the beginning, at the semester break, and at the end. Each student will read aloud for one minute with the teacher as they follow along, track accuracy, and assess overall scores. After this read, the teacher will review the scores with the students setting long-term goals for the semester. Students will use these long-term goals to help inform their weekly goals throughout the practice. The teacher will be able to track student progress and measure effectiveness of ORF routines through growth, or lack of growth, at the three checkpoints. These formal and informal assessments will be the guide by which the effectiveness of this curriculum is measured. Success in this project should answer *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners?*

Audience/Setting

My own classroom in the middle school of Hmong College Prep Academy in Saint Paul, MN, will be the primary setting for the implementation of this project. The students in my classroom range from grade sixth through eighth, are all of either Hmong or Karen descent, and are mostly long term English learners (LTELs.) reading at least two years below grade level. Intended for struggling readers at the secondary level, this ORF curriculum aims to address a gap in teacher preparation, college course and professional development, and classroom implementation. The majority of resources in Oral Reading Fluency that are available are designed for early elementary age students. At the middle and high school level, there is little to no explicit literacy instruction available at most schools to address the needs of students reading below grade level proficiency. This practice can be incorporated into many different content classes including English/Language Arts, classes for English Language Learners, and intervention settings.

Timeline

The creation of this project informally began in the fall of 2019 when I was first introduced to Oral Reading Fluency in my work setting. Since then, I have spent time seeking out materials and adapting them for secondary readers. Formally, the process of generating my research question commenced June of 2023. The research that supports the creation of this curriculum spanned from June to December of 2023. In February of 2024, the process of revising previous work to apply new knowledge began as I created the presentations, lesson plans, unit outline, and supplemental materials that comprise the curriculum. The curriculum was finalized in April of 2023, however, I intend to continue

improving and adapting it in later years. As I continue to use ORF in my classroom, the curriculum will be carried out with secondary students.

Conclusion

In summation, this Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) curriculum has been designed with the focus of improving fluency skill development, fostering student stamina, and empowering students with a self-driven approach to practicing reading. The foundation of this curriculum is built upon previous studies and my own experience in order to target secondary learners and educators, over the course of a school year, and provide the materials to monitor and measure success.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone project was to design an Oral Reading Fluency

(ORF) curriculum for secondary students in order to answer the question, *in what ways*

might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum

support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary

learners? I came up with this question as a result of my work with middle school

learners, both ELL and those struggling with literacy. Through my work in the classroom,

I was on a constant quest for resources to use with my students to promote overall

fluency and comprehension. The resources I encountered were designed for elementary

age learners and were not appropriate, and potentially insulting, for older students. Due to

this lack of preexisting resources, this capstone project was born. As a result of the

implementation of this curriculum, educators will see improved fluency, increased

student stamina, and growth in reading comprehension. These outcomes will help make a

positive impact on the overall decline in literacy rates being exhibited in Minnesota, the

state in which I work, and across the country.

In this chapter, I describe the major learning concepts that resulted from my

project, recap the literature review, analyze the implications and limitations, and look

forward to the next steps in store for my curriculum.

Major Learnings

Initially, I sought out a pedagogy for curriculum development that would serve as

a guide for designing content in a way that would increase student stamina. Through my

research, I came across the TARGET Model by Mizelle. This model, as the acronym title stands for, lays out the elements necessary in a curriculum that, when addressed, would lead to a positive result in student learning: Task, Authority, Reward and Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time (Mizelle, 1997). When creating my routines, materials, and overall curriculum, I used the aforementioned elements to serve the foundation on which I built.

In order to design an effective ORF curriculum, I first had to review the different pieces that make up fluency: accuracy, rate, prosody, and word recognition/automaticity. Prosody, a fluent reader's ability to read a text aloud with appropriate expression, pitch, tone, volume and rhythm, comprises the real meat of my curriculum due to its strong ties to reading comprehension (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). The skill work I focus on each week in my project is designed to address students' reading with prosody. In order to practice these skills, I then had to discover what strategies exist.

I found that many strategies to improve Oral Reading Fluency exist, however, I determined that the strategies I would include in my curriculum are reading practice, modeling, readers theater, and an adapted version of paired reading. In choosing these practices, I am in no way doubting the validity or need to utilize the other strategies, however, as I will address later in this chapter, time was a factor that limited how many strategies can be incorporated. I strongly believe that it is more important to have students practice a few strategies regularly in order to become familiar with and gain independence in using each practice, rather than try something new every week. This goal to push towards student independence led to my final learning.

Ultimately, this curriculum was designed to be student-driven, in order to increase stamina and overall buy-in from these older learners. By investigating concepts to build stamina, such as self-determination and intrinsic motivation, I feel that I was able to add these theories to the curriculum in order to make it more effective. Self-determination is a student's ability to own their progress through self-monitoring, goal setting, and practicing self-advocacy in the classroom (Didion et al., 2020). This concept in particular was vital in the creation of the curriculum's weekly goal setting routine.

When I set out to design a curriculum around the question *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners,* I found the previously stated learnings to be the driving forces behind refining and building upon my previous experience and knowledge. These major concepts were not new to me, but revisiting and expanding upon them through the literature review was a pivotal moment in my capstone project.

Literature Review

The literature review process, while challenging, was vital to the creation of this capstone project curriculum. As described in my question, in what *ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners,* the large themes addressed in the review were as follows: oral reading fluency (ORF), student engagement, and reading comprehension.

Oral reading fluency refers to one's ability to read texts aloud with accuracy, in a smooth manner, and with appropriate expression and speed (Nevo et al., 2020). In the

literature review, I looked further into the skills of ORF which includes accuracy, rate, prosody, and automaticity. Then I explored the strategies for practicing fluency that already exist. Additionally, I explored methods by which to assess oral reading fluency. Finally, I researched the direct ties between ORF and reading comprehension.

Student engagement was represented in this chapter when I dove into the methods by which to increase student reading stamina through self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and the use of the TARGET model. Throughout this paper, I use the words engagement, motivation, and stamina interchangeably. I chose to refer to motivation, only when referring to the literature due to the fact that this is the term most often used. I chose to pivot to the word stamina because it carries with a growth-mindset connotation. Ultimately, engagement is the result of these terms which will be seen when implementing this curriculum in the classroom.

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand what is being read. As I often rhetorically ask my students, "What is the point in reading if you don't understand it?" At the secondary level of education, little to no time is spent explicitly teaching and practicing reading. It is simply assumed that students are capable of reading independently and retaining the information. As discussed in the sections of the literature review titled Grade Level/Age and Low-Literacy Statistics and Consequences, this assumption often is not true. These sections of the literature review provide the evidence to support my purpose for embarking on this project in the first place.

Implications and Limitations

An invisible hurdle often referred to in English Language acquisition pedagogy, is a student's affective filter. This imaginary wall represents the blockages that exist on a

learner's path to education that can deter them from reaching where they need to be (Vasquez, n.d.). This affective filter applies to all learners, especially in the case of struggling readers. The ultimate implication of this curriculum would be that these hurdles are lowered or altogether removed from the students' paths. However, the existence of these barriers is a limitation I fought against in creating this project.

I have found in my experience that students who struggle with literacy often have low confidence and even embarrassment in their reading intervention environments. Adding to this embarrassment are materials for elementary schoolers that are not suitable content for older learners. When I created the slides and other materials, including the passages and examples, I sought out age appropriate visuals and materials to avoid triggering any feelings of embarrassment. Additionally, the practice of increasing student stamina and self-determination combats the affective filter.

Another limitation I encountered in creating this curriculum is time. There are so many transformative ideas and strategies that exist in the realm of literacy, but, due to the time constraints that exist in my classroom, where I will implement this curriculum, there simply is not enough time to use everything. As I mentioned before, I selected the strategies that I believed would be most effective in the context of this project, and that could simultaneously lead to independence on the part of the students.

Next Steps

One aspect of curriculum development that I struggled with was knowing when to stop. If I had infinite time to create and time to implement, this curriculum would last years. However, that is not the reality, which is why I had to be deliberate in what

strategies and materials I included. Just because this project creation has come to completion, it does not mean that the work is done.

Implementation and Future Research

Currently, I use a rough version of this curriculum in my classroom. I am excited to use this polished version next year in my classroom. I plan to use pre, during, and post assessments to measure the effectiveness of my work. Additionally, I hope that my colleagues will also be interested in using this curriculum in their classrooms. I am curious to see the results with learners with varying levels of literacy and grade levels. It is my belief that students will respond well to the materials and a strong positive correlation between oral reading fluency, student engagement, and reading comprehension will be the result.

Future research pertaining to this project would be beneficial in exploring other components of reading fluency such as accuracy and automaticity. Additionally, expanding upon this project, potentially creating a second semester curriculum, utilizing explicit practice in reading comprehension and tying it to ORF would be a next step. In the realm of literacy intervention further work must be done at the secondary level in order to address student need and intervention.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the major learning concepts that resulted from my work, reviewed the literature that informed my creation, reflected upon the limitations and implications that affect my project, and, finally, forecasted the next steps in store for the curriculum. When setting out to take on this project, my aim was to answer the question, *in what ways might a student driven oral reading fluency (ORF) progress monitoring*

curriculum support student engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension for secondary learners? While the first step is complete, the creation of the materials, the real work has yet to begin. It is my belief that the implementation of this project will help to fill a void of materials available to address literacy needs at the secondary level and take steps towards alleviating the literacy crisis being experienced in schools in my state and across the country.

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