Fluency – Background Information

Introduction

Designing lessons that increase time and opportunities for students to read, and that teach vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and increase fluency, can help students improve their understanding of the text they read. (University of Texas System/Texas Education Agency, 2004, 2003, p. 13)

Content-area teachers frequently ask students to read complicated, non-fiction text and introduce students to new vocabulary and concepts embedded in textbooks. Students who have difficulty comprehending text and cannot grasp the meaning of new words and concepts will no doubt find learning this material more difficult.

ALL struggling students need direct and explicit instruction in:

Vocabulary

Comprehension

Motivation and Engagement

SOME struggling students need direct and explicit instruction in:

Advanced Word Study

Fluency (to promote comprehension)

What skills do fluent readers have?

Good readers are fluent readers. They decode words automatically and continuously group and regroup words in ways that promote understanding. Fluency is important: both accurate word reading and comprehension are related to fluency (Shinn & Good, 1992). Because fluent readers identify words "by sight," they can devote time and effort that might have gone to decoding words, to understanding what they are reading. It is necessary to read frequently to expand the sight word vocabulary readers need to read fluently, and this is one area where students with reading difficulties fall behind. Fluency does not 'cause' comprehension; it is, however, a necessary component of successful reading. Fluency instruction may be useful for struggling adolescents, who often are not fluent readers (Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilcong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005).

Most of the research findings about the benefits of fluency instruction concern readers whose reading fluency is at or below third grade reading expectations. Fluency instruction for older students with reading difficulties may also be appropriate (Wexler, Vaughn, Edmonds and Reutebuch, in press). (Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M., 2008, p.9)

The table below presents typical features of successful and struggling readers in the area of reading fluency. (Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M., 2008, p.10)

Successful Readers	Struggling Readers
• Read 100-160 words per minute (at the middle school level), depending on the nature and difficulty of the text. • Decode words accurately and automatically. • Group words into meaningful chunks and phrases. • Read with expression. • Make few word identification errors and usually self correct when they do make errors. • Combine multiple tasks while reading (e.g., decoding, phrasing, understanding, and interpreting). • Understand what they read	• Read slowly and laboriously. • May continue to struggle with decoding or may decode correctly but slowly. • May not pause at punctuation or recognize phrases. • Often lack voice or articulation of emotion while reading. • May lack proficiency in individual skills that result in dysfluent reading and limit comprehension.

How do we develop fluency?

Although reading rates do not increase substantially after about sixth grade (Tindal, Hasbrouck, & Jones, 2005), students must continue to increase the range of words they can recognise quickly (sight words) in order to continue to meet grade-level expectations for reading fluency (Torgesen & Hudson, 2006). Normally, students continue to increase their store of sight words as they expand their range of reading, but if they don't maintain relatively high levels of reading practice, they can fall behind. Each year, students must add large numbers of words to their sight vocabulary to maintain their ability to read grade-level text fluently. Although individual differences in reading fluency contribute less to variations in reading comprehension at higher grade levels than at earlier levels (Schatschneider et al., 2004), reading fluency continues to explain substantial variance on reading comprehension tests, even in high school. (Torgesen, J. K., Houston, D. D., Rissman, L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J. Francis, D. J, Rivera, M. O., Lesaux, N., 2007, p.6, 7)

Researchers support a systematic plan of action when working to improve the fluency of Middle Years students with reading difficulties. Practice is the essential component of improving fluency. The more frequently and regularly students practise reading, the more fluent they become. Both decoding and vocabulary influence fluency. As a reader gains mastery over new content vocabulary, fluency is likely improved for that content area.

Fluency interventions generally fall into one of two categories:

- repeated oral reading (reading and listening to the same passage several times) and
- non-repetitive wide reading (increased reading opportunities).

Repeated reading may be no more effective than a similar amount of non-repetitive wide reading for increasing the reading speed, word recognition, and comprehension of older students with reading difficulties, on unpractised and dissimilar passages (Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993).

Further research is needed on the role of fluency instruction generally for older students and the relative effects of various fluency practices, including repeated reading and non-repetitive wide reading.

Whether repeated oral reading or non-repetitive wide reading is the instruction of choice, certain practices should be standard in either:

- Assist students to set reading goals.
- Track students' gains in fluency and provide frequent feedback to ensure that students are practising reading as accurately as possible. Students can monitor their own progress by maintaining a graph that shows changes in performance over time. (see Appendix)
- Support fluency practice by having a teacher, tutor, or capable peer provide appropriate models of fluent reading and corrective feedback.
- Involve students in monitoring their own progress toward reading fluency goals.
  (Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M., 2008, pp10 - 11)

The following suggestions for instruction promote frequent and regular practice for the Middle Years student with reading difficulties.

Instruction	Description	Strategies
Provide Models of Fluent Reading	Struggling readers should witness fluent reading on a regular basis. Teachers who demonstrate fluent reading during instruction give students a standard for which to strive. Model fluent reading for students by reading aloud from class texts frequently and regularly. Teachers should not feel that oral reading in the middle years is no longer necessary.	Teachers can integrate repeated reading into their instruction in the following ways: • Provide students with frequent and regular opportunities to read passages aloud several times. Provide feedback and guidance during these oral readings. • Allow students to practise reading aloud by themselves first to avoid the embarrassment that can occur when reading unfamiliar texts aloud.
Engage Students in Repeated Oral Reading of Texts	Research supports the use of repeated oral reading of texts to help students develop fluency.	To establish and improve fluency, the opportunity to read aloud is preferable to silent reading opportunities, especially for adolescent students with reading difficulties. If students are allowed only to read silently, teachers acquire little to no information about the development of fluency. Note: requiring students with reading difficulties to read aloud must be done with sensitivity so as not to embarrass students who are less fluent.
Engage Students in Guided Oral Reading	Guided oral reading is a useful method of improving the fluency of students with reading difficulties. To use guided oral reading, teachers must work individually with these readers on a regular basis.	Guided oral reading involves: 1. Asking individual students to read aloud, 2. Guiding them to self-correct when they mispronounce words 3. Asking questions about content to ensure comprehension.

Engage Students in Partner Reading	When fluent readers read, they provide a model for less fluent readers. As a listener, the more fluent reader can also provide feedback and support to the less fluent reader. Engaging students in partner reading, as opposed to asking students to read aloud for the whole class, may reduce the level of embarrassment that is felt by some adolescent students with reading difficulties, when they are asked to read aloud for the entire class.	To use partner reading: 1. Pair more fluent readers with less fluent readers. 2. Select a text that is at the instructional level of the lower level student. 3. Select reading partners carefully considering both compatibility and fluency. 4. Introduce the reading material by reading aloud the first paragraph or two or selected passages. 5. Inform students that partners are to select different passages to read aloud and that they should both first read each passage silently. 6. Have partners take turns reading aloud to one another.

(Adapted from The National Institute for Literacy, 2007, pp11-14)

Purpose and considerations

The goal of fluency instruction is to train students to read effortlessly. Students who read effortlessly are free to focus on comprehending text because they do not have to work out the words (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002).

It is important to note that effortless reading does not solely refer to how quickly a student reads the words (rate) on the page. A student may be able to read a passage very quickly, but may not necessarily decode words accurately or understand what he or she is reading (Rasinski et al., 2005). Similarly, a student may be able to read every word correctly, but if the student is not reading with **automaticity**, he or she will not be able to understand the ideas behind the words (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). In order to bridge the gap between word recognition and comprehension, improved **rate** or speed of reading must be accompanied by high **accuracy** and **appropriate expression**.

We know that average levels of oral reading fluency stabilise at around 150 correct words per minute for students at the end of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades when reading grade-level text (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006; Tindal, Hasbrouck, & Jones, 2005; Yovanoff, Duesbery, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2005). Does this mean that we should work to bring all students to this level? The answer is likely to vary with the individual student and with the nature of the literacy tasks he or she faces.

(Torgesen, J. K., Houston, D. D., Rissman, L. M., Decker, S. M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J. Francis, D. J, Rivera, M. O., Lesaux, N.,2007, pp 70, 71)

Consider the following when interpreting fluency rates with older students:

- The most important outcome for students is that they can understand and learn from the text they read. If students have below-average fluency but demonstrate average or above comprehension, it may not be appropriate to spend considerable time on improving their rate of reading.
- Students who read above 90–100 cwpm with 90 percent accuracy in grade-level text may benefit from time spent on enhancing their background knowledge, vocabulary, and/or comprehension rather than on fluency instruction. (Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D. Vaughn, S., 2007, p.222)

- Instructional or independent level text is an appropriate level for fluency instruction. Either select passages at instructional level that include "targeted" vocabulary that has been previously taught and practised or choose text at the student's independent reading level.

  (Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M., 2008, p.11)

References

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