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Podcast Transcript & Annotated Bibliography

**Transcript**

Hello and welcome to the Primary Podcast, a podcast about literacy practices in the primary grades! My name is Maggie Glos, and today we will be learning about fluency. Fluency is considered one of the “Big Five” literacy practices from the National Reading Panel research (Brown, 2014). The Big Five elements of literacy are phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (Brown, 2014). Today’s topic of fluency came about because, as a teacher of kindergarten through second grade students, I have grappled with what fluency is, how best to teach it, and how best to assess it. In my podcast today, I will share with you what fluency is, several approaches to teaching fluency, specific instructional practices you can use in your own classroom, whatever grade you teach, and suggestions for assessing fluency in a meaningful way. Let’s get started!

The construct of fluency consists of three part, identified in the National Reading Panel research and explained in various research articles: speed, accuracy, and proper expression (Reutzel, 2006; Kuhn et al., 2006). Speed demonstrates a student’s level of automaticity with reading: can the student recognize words and decode words quickly, thus freeing up mental space to focus on text meaning (Kuhn et al., 2006)? Accuracy refers to whether the student correctly identifies and reads words, again allowing the student to focus on meaning (Kuhn et al., 2006). Lastly, proper expression, or prosody, refers to whether a student reads text with appropriate expression, phrasing, emphasis, tone, tempo, or rhythm (Ness, 2009). This last aspect of fluency is often neglected in teaching and assessing, and we will return to it later.

Research has also been done concerning when students must master fluency and the differences between oral reading fluency and silent reading fluency. Park, Chaparro, Predciado, and Cummings (2015) followed students from kindergarten to third grade, assessing students in oral reading fluency to determine when students should master the skills. They found that by the beginning of second grade, students should have reached “mastery levels of fluency” (Park et al., 2015, p. 1203). This is because, as the researchers write, “In order to become a fluent reader, students must master the component skill areas of phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and fluency with reading connected text” (Park et al., 2015, p. 1188). Author and researcher Melanie Kuhn (2007) also feels that, prior to second grade, students should be focused on mastering the building block skills that lead to fluency. She writes, “Prior to second grade, most print-oriented literacy instruction focuses either on concepts of print (pre-K and kindergarten) or word recognition (first grade). By the time students reach second grade, there is a shift in this focus” (Kuhn, 2007, p. 108). This doesn’t mean that as primary teachers, we don’t encourage our students in reading fluently and introduce them to the ideas of speed, accuracy and prosody. However, the focus in the early grades should also be on mastering the literacy skills that will enable students to become fluent readers.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that oral reading fluency and silent reading fluency are separate constructs. Research has demonstrated that students progress from oral reading fluency to silent reading fluency; however, as students transition between these skills, comprehension can sometimes falter (Price, Meisinger, Louwerse, & D'Mello, 2016). Silent reading fluency also needs to be modeled and directly taught (Price et al., 2016). In the primary grades, oral reading fluency is often a better indicator of comprehension than silent reading fluency (Kim, Wagner, & Foster, 2011). Again, in the primary grades, a focus on mastering decoding skills frees up the reader to focus on the text, whether reading orally or silently, but silent reading is typically something students transition to in the upper grades, so we will focus today on oral reading fluency.

In my research, I read about several approaches to teaching fluency in the classroom. In an article by Kuhn and a group of researchers, two approaches were studied with second grade students-fluency-oriented reading instruction or FORI and the wide-reading approach (Kuhn et al., 2006). In FORI, students read one text throughout the week, using echo, choral, and partner reading, as well as text-based activities (Kuhn et al., 2006). Wide-reading also uses these types of oral reading but students read three books during the week instead of one (Kuhn et al., 2006). Both approaches showed gains in reading efficiency and comprehension (Kuhn et al., 2006). The real benefit of these approaches was that students spent more time on text than in a typical classroom. Giving students plentiful opportunities to reread text helps to boost student fluency, whether with one book or several.

Another approach to fluency instruction in the classroom is the Fluency Development Workshop model or FDW. Reutzel (2006) writes about this approach in the book *Fluency Instruction: Research-based Best Practices.* FDW is based on the gradual release of responsibility model, in which teachers directly teach and model fluency elements and fluent oral reading, guide students in practicing fluency skills, and then release students to independently practice the skills (Reutzel, 2006). In the FDW model, teachers also administer group and individual assessments and progress monitoring (Reutzel, 2006). One unique aspect of this approach is a focus on metafluency or fluency monitoring (Reutzel, 2006). Students are taught “fix up” strategies and encouraged to monitor and track their reading fluency progress in personal folders (Reutzel, 2006). This gives the students ownership and pride in their reading fluency, while reducing competition among students and encouraging a growth-mindset.

Any of these approaches to teaching fluency would, I believe, provide positive benefits to students. Whether you choose to use one of these approaches or take pieces from each, having a plan to teach fluency during your literacy block means that fluency becomes a priority rather than an afterthought. Along with these specific approaches, there are also plenty of instructional practices and activities that teachers can use to increase fluency in the three areas-speed, accuracy, and prosody. In preschool and kindergarten, students should have plenty of opportunities to use oral language by asking and answering questions and expressing thoughts and feelings (Brown, 2014). Students should also have chances to echo read, recite nursey rhymes and songs, and act out favorite stories (Brown, 2014). Building oral language will help to promote fluency later.

One of the best practice-based articles I read while doing research for this podcast was by Griffith and Rasinski (2004). Griffith is a fourth-grade teacher who wanted to improve her students’ fluency and conducted three years of action research in which she tried three activities (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Two of her activities, in years two and three, were the use of timed reads and the use of partner reads (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Timed reads can be a useful tool, which I will discuss as a possible assessment later, but Griffith did not just have students read a passage. Instead, these passages were from award-winning authors and were also used to teach students in writing (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Partner reading was also effective, as it created a classroom reading culture and encouraged student sharing and book talk (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Griffith remarked, “Children seem to be more serious about reading commitments to a friend than they are to the teacher or a parent” (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004, p. 135). Using timed reads and partner reads in your own classroom are effective fluency practices.

In addition, fluency is often best encouraged by giving students a reason to want to read well out loud, through repeated readings for performance. As Rasinski (2006) writes, “What would really inspire me to engage in repeated reading or rehearsal is performance” (p. 705). In Griffith’s classroom, she used Reader’s Theatre as a motivational and engaging way to encourage fluency and repeated readings of text (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). In Reader’s Theatre, there are no props or costumes; instead, students use their voices to act, a perfect time to encourage prosody, that often-forgotten element of fluency (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Students in Griffith’s class were given scripts regardless of ability and through practicing the scripts, students were using repeated readings without becoming bored (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Jokes are also another unique instructional practice that specifically help students focus on prosody. Ness (2009), in an article on the use of jokes, writes, “Jokes are the quintessential texts for oral delivery; they require that a reader attend to punctuation, intonation, and phrasing” (p. 692). We can probably all think of a joke that fell flat due to a lack of prosody-the person missing the mark on emphasis, tone, or phrasing. Teachers can teach, model, and give feedback on joke-telling and again, students can give performances of their jokes to fellow classmates or to families.

Finally, how should we be assessing fluency in our classrooms? We can have specific instructional approaches and fun activities and practices, but if we aren’t assessing fluency, it is difficult to know whether these practices are improving student oral reading. To assess speed and accuracy, Kuhn (2007) suggests using a one-minute timed-read to determine a student’s correct words read per minute score or cwpm. These texts should also be grade-level appropriate and cold-reads, meaning that students have never read the text before (Kuhn, 2007). Student scores can then be compared to norms to determine where a student falls in grade-appropriate reading rates (Kuhn, 2007). In addition, using timed reads allows you, as the teacher, to determine if just a few students need targeted fluency instruction or whether your entire class would benefit from one of the approaches discussed earlier, like FORI or wide-reading (Kuhn, 2007).

Timed reads are typically what I think of when I think of reading fluency. From a simple timed read as described previously or using a specific assessment, like the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment, students are often evaluated on fluency in this way. While this does give a teacher information about speed and accuracy, two of the components of fluency, it neglects to give teachers information about prosody. Without prosody, students are taught to simply read as fast as they can, which, as we have all seen, can sometimes prove worse for comprehension. Valencia and a group of researchers examined fluency in students in second, fourth, and sixth grade and found that using only word count per minute was not enough to accurately identify students at-risk in fluency (Valencia, Smith, Reece, Li, Wixson, & Newman, 2010). Instead, students should be assessed on rate, accuracy, prosody, and comprehension, and assessments should be differentiated based on grade-level (Valencia et al., 2010). To assess prosody, Kuhn (2007) suggests using a scale that evaluates prosody, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress Oral Reading Fluency Scale. This scale scores student reading on one of four levels, determined by phrasing, expression, and syntax and provides the teacher with a way to track student growth in these areas (Kuhn, 2007).

As you can see, fluency is more than just how fast a student can read. It involves a mastery of other literacy skills, the use of prosody, and a variety of specific instructional approaches and teaching activities. Teachers also must examine how best to assess fluency in a meaningful and authentic way. I hope this podcast has provided you with some new and useful information on fluency. In closing, let’s remember why we teach any literacy skill-we want our students to enjoy reading! Fluent reading allows a student to take pleasure in and develop a fuller understanding of text. Let’s help our students get there!

Thank you for listening and see you next time!

**Annotated Bibliography**

Research Question: What does the research say about the skills needed to demonstrate mastery of reading fluency in the primary grades?

 Brown, C. S. (2014). Language and literacy development in the early years: Foundational skills that support emergent readers. *Language And Literacy Spectrum, 24,* 35-49. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1034914

This article discussed the five areas of effective literacy instruction, as determined by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Brown focused on how to develop these skills in emergent readers, specifically preschool, though her suggestions could also be useful in kindergarten. With young children, fluency can be encouraged through the use of oral language. Students should be given multiple opportunities to use language to express thoughts and feelings and to ask and answer questions. Oral language helps students to comprehend text in later grades. The article provided ideas to encourage fluency at school and home, along with instructional examples and English Language Learner ideas. Ideas include rereading of familiar books, adult modeling of fluent reading, echo reading, nursery rhymes and songs, and acting out favorite books or stories. These relate well to using Reader's Theatre and rereading in the later grades.

 Griffith, L. W., & Rasinski, T. V. (2004). A focus on fluency: How one teacher incorporated fluency with her reading curriculum. The Reading Teacher, 58(2), 126-137.

\*Class text

This practice-based article discussed the various strategies that Griffith utilized in her classroom during three years of action research. Griffith wanted to improve her students' reading fluency, comprehension, and expressiveness. She began by incorporating Reader's Theatre into her fourth grade classroom without using ability grouping of scripts. In year two, Griffith used timed reads of passages by award-winning authors that were also used to teach writing. In addition, she began implementing partner reading with non-Title 1 students. In the third year, she used all three interventions. 93% of at-risk students left fourth grade at a fifth-grade reading level, as compared to 22% of students in a traditional reading program. Partner reading especially motivated students and provided accountability and developed a classroom reading culture.

Kim, Y., Wagner, R. K., & Foster, E. (2011). Relations among oral reading fluency, silent reading fluency, and reading comprehension: A latent variable study of first-grade readers. *Scientific Studies Of Reading*, *15*(4), 338-362. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2010.493964 This research sought to determine whether oral and silent reading fluency are separate constructs and what factors predict or influence these skills and reading comprehension. The researchers used multiple literacy measures with 316 first-grade students. First grade was chosen because it is an important time in the transition between using primarily oral reading to using silent reading. Results indicated that oral and silent reading fluency are separate but highly related constructs. Oral reading fluency better predicts reading comprehension in first grade, as compared to silent reading fluency. Decoding fluency for average readers predicted fluency and comprehension, whereas for skilled readers, listening comprehension was a better predictor. The authors surmised that decoding skills hold back average readers, whereas skilled readers are better able to use context and connected text in both oral and silent reading. A focus on mastering decoding might help average readers shift more attention to context.

Kuhn, M. R., Schwanenflugel, P. J., Morris, R. D., Morrow, L. M., Woo, D. G., Meisinger, E. B., ...Stahl, S.A., (2006). Teaching children to become fluent and automatic readers. Journal of Literacy Research, 38(4), 357-387.

\*Class text

Two approaches to teaching fluency were the focus of this research study. The approaches, along with a control group, were studied with twenty-four second grade classrooms. The first approach was the fluency-oriented reading instruction (FORI) approach, and the other was the wide-reading approach. Both approaches used echo, choral, and partner reading, but FORI used the repeated reading of one text for a week, while the wide-reading approach used three books during one week. Both approaches utilized scaffolding that allowed for children to access more difficult texts. Students showed gains in word reading efficiency and comprehension after both approaches, and the authors recommend either approach. Children in both groups were exposed to more text and spent more time on text than in regular instruction. This time on text gave students more exposure to words and to challenging texts, which may have caused the gains.

 Kuhn, M. R. (2007). Effective oral reading assessment (or why round robin reading doesn’t cut it). In J. R. Paratore & R. L. McCormack (Eds.), Classroom literacy assessment: Making sense of what students know and do (pp. 101-112). New York: Guilford Press.

 \*Class text

 In this book chapter, Kuhn presented several ways to assess oral reading fluency. She began by defining fluency and discussing effective and ineffective fluency instruction. In order to assess fluency, teachers can begin by using one-minute timed cold-reads to determine a student's correct words per minute (cwpm) rate. This would provide a measure of students' accuracy and word recognition abilities. However, students should also be evaluated on their prosody in reading. Kuhn suggests using a scale like the NAEP Oral Reading Fluency Scale which determines a student's fluency level, including their use of prosody. Kuhn also notes that most pre-kindergarten and kindergarten instruction focuses on concepts of print and first grade focuses on word recognition. By the end of first grade, students should be transitioning into a focus on fluency elements and fluency assessments. Students should also track their own fluency progress through repeated readings.

Ness, M. (2009). Laughing through rereadings: Using joke books to build fluency. *Reading Teacher*, *62*(8), 691-694. http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uwyo.edu/10.1598/RT.62.8.7

Ness begins by emphasizing the importance of prosody in reading fluency, prosody encompassing the emphasis, pitch, phrasing, rhythm, and tempo of reading. In working with a reader who struggled with fluency and prosody, Ness found that repeated readings were both disengaging and yielded minimal improvement. Ness then found that using jokes provided important and motivating opportunities to build fluency and prosody in students. Jokes work well to build fluency and prosody because they depend on the timing, delivery, and emphasis and require students to pay attention to things like punctuation, multi-meaning words, and homophones. Jokes are also fun for students to practice and perform. Ness provides multiple suggestions for implementing the use of jokes in the classroom, as well as suggested joke books. Some suggestions include modeling joke delivery, having the student notice punctuation, recording the student's initial delivery, and having the student perform in a “Comedy Hour.”

Park, Y., Chaparro, E. A., Preciado, J., & Cummings, K. D. (2015). Is earlier better? Mastery of reading fluency in early schooling. *Early Education And Development*, *26*(8), 1187-1209.

 http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uwyo.edu/10.1080/10409289.2015.1015855

This research study sought to answer the questions of when students should master reading fluency and the characteristics of the students who do. The study followed 1,322 students in 42 elementary schools from grades kindergarten through third grade. Students were tested on Letter-Naming Fluency, Oral Reading Fluency, and Nonsense Word Fluency from DIBELS, as well as the SAT-10 and OAKS reading test. Results found that demographics explained 30% of score variance, in that males, English language learners, lower SES students, and minority students achieved oral reading fluency mastery later. Another 15% of score variance was explained by the time frame in which mastery was achieved. Overall, the best time for students to master fluency is the beginning of second grade, and the earlier a student achieves fluency, the better they comprehended text. Fluency provides students with more opportunities for independent reading, applying comprehension skills, and encountering new vocabulary.

Price, K. W., Meisinger, E. B., Louwerse, M. M., & D'Mello, S. (2016). The contributions of oral and silent reading fluency to reading comprehension. *Reading Psychology*, *37*(2), 167-201. http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uwyo.edu/10.1080/02702711.2015.1025118

This study examined oral and silent reading fluency as separate constructs that influence comprehension, as well as examining other subcomponents of reading, such as vocabulary. The researchers administered a variety of reading measures to 106 fourth grade students. The results indicated that oral reading fluency and silent reading fluency are distinct constructs. In addition, oral reading fluency contributed significantly to comprehension. However, silent reading fluency did not contribute significantly to comprehension. This could be because students are transitioning from a focus on oral reading to a focus on silent reading in the upper grades. Vocabulary was an important subcomponent that influenced comprehension. This study viewed readers from a lifespan developmental perspective, noting that readers progress from oral to silent reading fluency. Silent reading fluency is a necessary, and often overlooked, part of reading fluency that needs to be modeled and taught to students in later grades.

Rasinski, T. (2006). Reading fluency instruction: Moving beyond accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. *Th*e Reading Teacher, 59(7), 704-706.

\*Class text

Rasinski starts by discussing the three key elements of fluency: accuracy in decoding, word automaticity, and the use of prosody in reading. When students have difficulty in any of these areas, they may become discouraged or unenthusiastic or struggle to comprehend text. While all three areas are necessary, Rasinski argues that the focus on the use of repeated reading to improve reading rate fails to engage students in the reading. Instead of using repeated readings alone, this instructional technique should be used with the goal of performance. Students can read and rehearse texts meant for performance, such as poems, rhymes, or plays, and teachers may find that students are not only more engaged but improve in fluency without a specific reading rate focus. Rasinski cites his previous article with Griffith and her work in using Reader's Theatre. This article encourages a holistic focus on fluency through meaningful oral reading work.

Reutzel, D. R. (2006). “Hey, teacher, when you say ‘fluency,’ what do you mean?” Developing fluency in elementary classrooms. In T. Rasinski et al. (Eds.), Fluency instruction: Research-based best practices (pp. 62-85). New York: Guilford Press.

\*Class text

This book chapter discussed the use of the Fluency Development Workshop model (FDW). This model incorporates a variety of best practices in the teaching of fluency. FDW consists of teacher explanation and modeling of fluency elements and fluent oral reading, guided group or individual repeated oral reading practice, and group or individual assessment and progress-monitoring. FDW is based on the gradual release of responsibility model, in that teachers begin the instruction and then gradually transfer responsibility to students through modeling, explanation, and feedback. A unique aspect of the FDW model is the emphasis on metafluency or fluency monitoring. Students are taught to monitor their oral reading and to use “fix up” strategies to improve their oral reading fluency. Assessment occurs through biweekly one minute readings and retells, and students are responsible for recording their progress in individual folders, reducing competition and promoting a growth mindset.

Valencia, S. W., Smith, A. T., Reece, A. M., Li, M., Wixson, K. K., & Newman, H. (2010). Oral reading fluency assessment: Issues of construct, criterion, and consequential validity. Reading Research Quarterly, 45(3), 270-291.

\*Class text

This study examined the construct of word count per minute (wcpm) as used to measure fluency and identify at-risk students. 279 students in second, fourth, and sixth grade participated in this study. Results indicated that using only wcpm is not enough. Assessments for fluency should include measures for rate, accuracy, prosody, and comprehension. Students in the beginning stages of reading development tend to rely more on decoding, whereas in later grades, the focus shifts to comprehension and prosody. Therefore, the authors suggest the use of developmentally different models of assessment that focus on different facets of fluency as the student progresses through grade levels. Using only wcpm also fails to identify students who can read quickly but struggle to comprehend text. Wcpm should be used in tandem with other measures of fluency to design instruction and identify and instruct at-risk students.