

Finding Meaning In Fluency

Questions and Answers

1. Where will the recording of the webinar be posted?
2. What are the dates of the Iowa Reading Research Center blogs by Dr. Deborah Reed?
3. If the research shows us this, why do teachers HATE it so much and seem so resistant to it? (This= the importance, predictive value, and connection between fluency measures and comprehension)
4. If a student has a 504 for delays in cognitive process speed, is it still appropriate to use oral reading fluency to determine that student's ability as a reader?
5. My teachers in grades 4-5 think the passages are ok, but 1st grade passages seem very difficult. Especially vocabulary like prank...I get a lot of questions around the 1st grade passages and their level of difficulty.
6. Any convenient research figure for the opposite direction kind of question: What percent of slow or non-fluent readers might actually be comprehending? I hear that type of question/comment, "He/she comprehends. He/she just reads slowly."
7. Suggestions on how to respond to the many times I hear that these benchmarks on CBM-r seem very high and difficult for so many to reach. Teachers even tell me that they have timed themselves and read the passages and feel it is a FAST read to make the benchmark. Ideas on how I can combat this thinking?
8. What if a student comprehends (aReading met benchmark) but doesn't meet benchmark on CBM-R?

1. Where will the recording of the webinar be posted?

- a. Webinar Link: <http://iowa.adobeconnect.com/p8b7vxzxs33/>
- b. On the Partner School site, Iowa TIER Knowledge Base, and the ELI (Early Literacy Implementation) webpage: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/early-literacy-implementation>

2. What are the dates of the Iowa Reading Research Center blogs by Dr. Deborah Reed?

- b. January 6, 2016: Universal Screening:
<http://www.iowareadingresearch.org/blog/universal-screening/>
- c. February 22, 2016: Instructional Decisions Aligned to Screening Data:
<http://www.iowareadingresearch.org/blog/instructional-decisions-aligned-to-screening-data/>

3. If the research shows us this, why do teachers HATE it so much and seem so resistant to it? (This= the importance, predictive value, and connection between fluency measures and comprehension)

- b. Connor gave us a great bit of perspective in this discussion- something along the lines of “...sometimes I hate the bathroom scale. But that doesn’t mean it is wrong.” Sometimes teachers are hard on themselves and it is easy to fear or dislike something you don’t understand and don’t know how to influence. Do your best to understand and thoughtfully respond to student data and needs.
- c. There is a resource making the rounds right now about **why** there's a disconnect between classroom practices and the research on reading in general...(big thanks to **Barb Schutt at Heartland** for sharing and summarizing the opening chapter!!)
 - i. *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties...* by David Kilpatrick, 2015, Wiley
 - 1. College literacy instructors seemed unaware of scientifically oriented research in reading (for example 80% confused Phonological Awareness and Phonics)
 - 2. College textbooks draw very little from empirical research
 - 3. Journals that teachers read, when they do, rarely draw from recent reading research
 - 4. Some philosophies actively disparage fluency and automaticity because of potential misuse, instead of correcting misunderstandings or misuse (throwback to Literacy Wars)
- d. *Why do they hate it and what is it?* As a coach or collaborator, ask good questions and listen.
 - i. Listen for misunderstandings, or misconceptions *such as*:
 - 1. Fluency is speed reading
 - 2. Reading fast doesn’t measure comprehension
 - 3. Good-for-kids vs. compliance
 - 4. Context: reading and literacy big picture
 - ii. Listen for functional/logistical problems
 - 1. Too much assessment
 - 2. Not enough time to use assessment results
 - 3. Assessment vs. Instruction; *Assessment and Instruction*
 - iii. “There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact you can’t read the words.” (Archer, 2008) Fluency provides a strong indicator of the basic ability to read the words.

4. If a student has a 504 for delays in cognitive process speed, is it still appropriate to use oral reading fluency to determine that student’s ability as a reader?

- a. There are two parts to this question: (i) Should the student still receive instruction and focus on oral reading fluency at all (ii) Should high stakes decisions be made for this student using oral reading fluency?

- i. Fixed or Growth mindset? Can cognitive processing speed be influenced or is it set for life? (Impaired) cognitive processing speed is a reality for this student, however “the right” instruction and (appropriate) opportunities to read aloud are beneficial to building reading skills and to comprehension. Might this be a situation where individual growth is a more appropriate goal than a peer or average comparison?
- ii. The current Iowa TIER system allows an override of the Literacy Status Indicator with another approved measure (such as aReading, untimed). Consider having the student participate in oral reading fluency measures as they are sensitive to growth and beneficial to reading comprehension, but consider higher stakes decisions to be made with a measure that levels the playing field for this known issue of processing speed. If you administer both CBM-R and aReading in this situation, you will have the benefit of looking at the student’s reading from multiple perspectives.
- iii. There are several individual situations where oral reading fluency may not be the best match for certain types of decision-making, for example, dysfluency of articulation, motor difficulty in producing speech, or non-verbal participation in tasks due to developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorders. I propose that the opportunity to participate in oral reading fluency tasks is still valuable most of the time, but alternate means of universal screening and progress monitoring should be considered. These kind of decisions should always be individually based and not applied to whole groups or categories of student (ie. All students with autism will take aReading).

5. My teachers in grades 4-5 think the passages are ok, but 1st grade passages seem very difficult. Especially vocabulary like prank...I get a lot of questions around the 1st grade passages and their level of difficulty.

- a. The benchmarks on this assessment were built based on the responses of countless students, all experiencing the exact same reading passages.
- b. The process of screening and progress monitoring tells us something about our students but also something about our instruction. We mean this very gently, but please consider that the benchmarks were developed across many, many populations of actual student performance. Students across the nation encountered the word prank, and either responded or didn’t to the word. I realize this is just a single example of concern around difficulty of the passages, but I would really encourage us not to fret over single ideas or words.
- c. We discussed in the live answer of the question- is this a decodable word /p/ /r/ /a/ /n/ /k/ or irregular with the vowel sound (a) distorted by the /ng/- /p/ /r/ /a/ /ng/ /k/. The point of this discussion was: do students have the skills to read- whether it is the automatic recognition of a vocabulary word, decoding skills to apply to unfamiliar text, or the seamless integration of these skills? If the passages seem difficult for “our kids” and large numbers of kids are participating in this type of reading at the benchmark levels established, how might we consider responding in our instruction? This is not about whether or not they know the specific word “prank” (and certainly not about

teaching the word because it is on the FAST reading passage), but the ability of children to approach text. The good news is that we are not alone in our grade level or classrooms- the screening data, assessment items, and difficulty level of passages can inform a local collaborative discussion around universal tier practices in our whole system PreK-and up.

6. Any convenient research figure for the opposite direction kind of question: What percent of slow or non-fluent readers might actually be comprehending? I hear that type of question/comment, “He/she comprehends. He/she just reads slowly.”

- a. My thought is that this is not so much a research question as a misunderstanding of the definition of fluency and its relationship to comprehension. Can we infer from an accurate (but slow) reader that he/she *is* comprehending, or do we know that from other sources of data/knowledge? If we know from other sources of data that they *can* comprehend, it doesn’t mean they can do so effortlessly or with enough automaticity to persist in long or difficult passages.
- b. Moreover, especially young students can comprehend much more than they can read, because they don’t know how to read yet! It has been said that just because a student can’t read at grade level, doesn't mean they can’t think at grade level. Fluency (automaticity) speaks to how much effort students have to put into reading “just the words” and how much cognitive effort they can apply to making meaning from connected text.
- c. Remember that oral reading fluency data tells us about automaticity, including accuracy, phrasing, & effort, not just speed. At certain rates and with high levels of accuracy (60-80 wcpm), we know students are reading word by word or sentence by sentence, and therefore in longer passages both motivation and comprehension could be compromised- in “real life” ie. outside of the assessment passage. We also know that in 90-95% percent of students, they can achieve literacy skills at or approaching grade level.
- d. So I might approach this in a couple of ways. Of course rarely there are kids who eat slowly, tie their shoes slowly, speak and read slowly. One thing you can do (suggested by Wendy Robinson in the past) is to time the student speaking aloud conversationally on a preferred topic. If the student speaks more fluently than they read, they have room to grow in reading (or at least no motor or expressive obstruction to prevent improvement in reading fluency)
- e. I might also commend the teacher for the high levels of accuracy that students have in the reading. This is a prerequisite *before* we work on increasing fluency. I would encourage us to think about working on fluency because even though we think it is good enough for comprehension, it should also be telling us about risk level for the student. Good enough to comprehend might not be good enough to maintain comprehension in more complex, less preferred, more rigorous, or longer passages. It might not be good enough with greater independence expected in later grades across content, volume of independent reading, and when reading to learn, not just learning to read.

- f. Another nice feature of this conversation is that not everyone who tested below benchmark needs to go into a 45-60 intensive intervention- the intensity of the intervention should match the reason or cause for the student not achieving benchmark. Some simple fluency building and/or additional can't do/won't do assessment might support a response to a student who is an accurate but slow reader. It might even be addressed with quality differentiation within universal tier.
 - g. Don't get me wrong- I love research. Sometimes we go to research, though, when the real issue is putting together the pieces of the puzzle for the whole student right in front of us. And sometimes we over-generalize to dismiss a powerful measure to help us to help kids. (Research sources will be provided in a separate attachment <https://goo.gl/OQg3Th>)
7. Suggestions on how to respond to the many times I hear that these benchmarks on CBM-R seem very high and difficult for so many to reach. Teachers even tell me that they have timed themselves and read the passages and feel it is a FAST read to make the benchmark. Ideas on how I can combat this thinking?
- a. One of the discussions I had with a site centered around how much higher the benchmarks were than DIBELS Next, which they were using previously. (Also a caution in applying the 'benchmark' numbers from Hasbrouk & Tindal to these passages, when those numbers came from a very wide variety of passages and passage-types for a different purpose- just don't apply numbers from other measures.)
 - b. In our discussion, we made a decision to ask the test developers directly why the benchmarks were so high. We learned that FAST CBM-R passages were written at a lower lexile level, with more frequently used words and phrases, decodable words, decodable names presented in the title, and follow the same narrative story pattern for each and every passage (screening and progress monitoring) at all grade levels.
 - c. The purpose of passage development was two-fold: First, to reduce "bounce" in the passage scores by reducing the effect of background knowledge in reading - as one FAST trainer (you know who you are) says- these passages are all equally boring. These passages were written to do a good job of screening and monitoring progress. Second, these passages allow students to read more. It turns out that a larger sample of reading enhances the ability to measure for students with lower reading skills and is more sensitive to growth. So based on this passage construction more students can be screened and monitored on grade level with measures that are sensitive to growth. The side effect is that the benchmark numbers are higher because we purposely build passages students can read "more" of.
 - d. This discussion helps if it is the numbers themselves that are intimidating. If the act of reading seems rushed when teachers try it themselves, then I'm not sure what other direction to take the conversation. I would suggest possibly listening to another teacher or coach read and timing it- using the training version of Iowa TIER, or of course paper. In the site mentioned above, the testing team found listening to a wide variety of students very helpful- effortless readers, labored readers, readers who just 'missed' word endings/didn't violate meaning, and multiple grade levels. In this case, the testing team, especially teachers who tended to work only with 'struggling readers' found the

variety of student responses and styles gave them confidence in the benchmark numbers and value in addressing both fluency and the underlying cause or symptom of missing benchmarks.

8. What if a student comprehends (aReading met benchmark) but doesn't meet benchmark on CBM-R?

- a. aReading does include multiple domains and constructs of reading including vocabulary, word identification, and of course comprehension. It is a common misunderstanding to say aReading is a comprehension test and CBM-R is just rate.
- b. So what about when data does not converge? Both are approved risk measures and screening measures- a student passes one and not the other- what to do?
- c. In an ideal world, I suspect a student who passes one measure but not another is at-risk for something- in the general sense, not in a compliance or technical sense for ELI- that is entirely another matter. Same for a student who hovers above and below benchmark.
- d. Those students who meet benchmark one on thing & not another (assuming the 'things' are closely related)- here is how I start taking that apart:
 - i. Is there something about the assessment affecting the student performance? Can this student generally respond to a multiple choice measure better/worse than a production measure?
 - ii. Does this student compensate for weakness in independent effortless reading with high vocabulary, background knowledge, "multiple guess" skills? If so, can reading fluency be easily bumped up with universal tier differentiation (or should we spend time there- what is the payoff for expense of time? What is the grade level of the student?)
 - iii. Are there any quick can't do/won't do assessments- what is the student's re-reading rate (does it increase by 35% or better on first re-read)? If I simply provide the student their score and ask them to beat it, can they (remembering to give standardized directions for *best* reading and stop/start over if they speed read)?
 - iv. Essentially I would do some brief problem-solving with 2 or more heads together and see if we could figure out why, and what to do about it. I would not ignore risk on one measure even if there was not risk indicated by another measure, especially for aReading and CBM-R which are intended by the test developer to work together to paint the most accurate picture of risk.