

Putting It in Perspective

I (Lynne) came across the Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) when I was teaching first grade. Using the FDL, I watched my students transition from emergent readers into fluent readers who could successfully decode and comprehend. As the years progressed and I taught older students and students who were Multilingual Learners (MLLs), the FDL proved time and time again to be my go-to instructional practice. Each year I would select grade-level poems and incorporate word study and writing activities aligned to grade-level literacy standards. And each year, my students grew into proficient readers and writers. They learned new words, grew their knowledge, stayed motivated and interested, and always participated more fully in class. For me, student engagement was perhaps the most compelling reason for implementing the FDL. My students grew to read for both aesthetic and efferent purposes (Rosenblatt, 1978), and no other instructional practice proved to be more impactful.



Defining the FDL

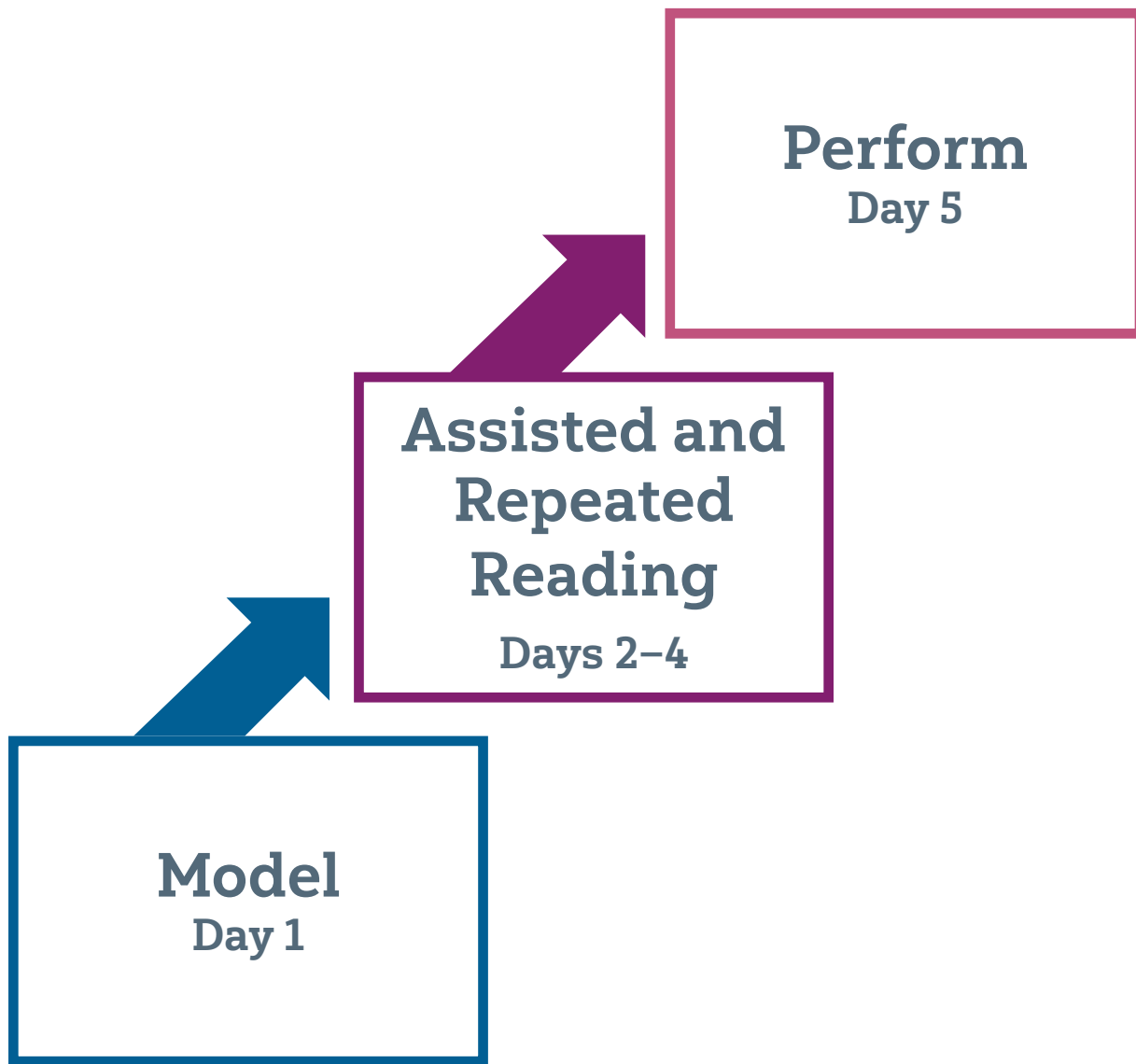
To understand what the FDL is, imagine what might have happened if Albert Einstein met Pablo Picasso. The FDL is an artful scientific masterpiece!

A Scientific Masterpiece. The FDL is a direct, intentional, and science-backed instructional practice that, when implemented regularly, closes reading gaps. It improves foundational reading skills, reading fluency, and comprehension for all students, including MLLs (National Reading Panel, 2000; Kulich, 2009; Zimmerman, et. al, 2019). While the FDL supports the Big Five reading components, it is focused squarely on fluency, since difficulties for striving readers often manifest in this area (White, et al., 2021).

An Artful Masterpiece. The FDL is also an artful approach to teaching fluency. Students are asked to rehearse texts for the authentic and artful purpose of performing assigned texts for an audience. In other words, students are tasked with learning to read a text with fluency. When students have a real purpose for practicing and developing their fluency, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated to read (Guthrie, 2001). While the FDL can be implemented with any genre, poetry, with its rhythmic language, is a perfect choice. This is especially true when supporting Multilingual Learners who benefit greatly from the rhythm, repetition, and rhyme that poetry offers (Vardell, Hadaway, & Young, 2006).

Implementing the FDL

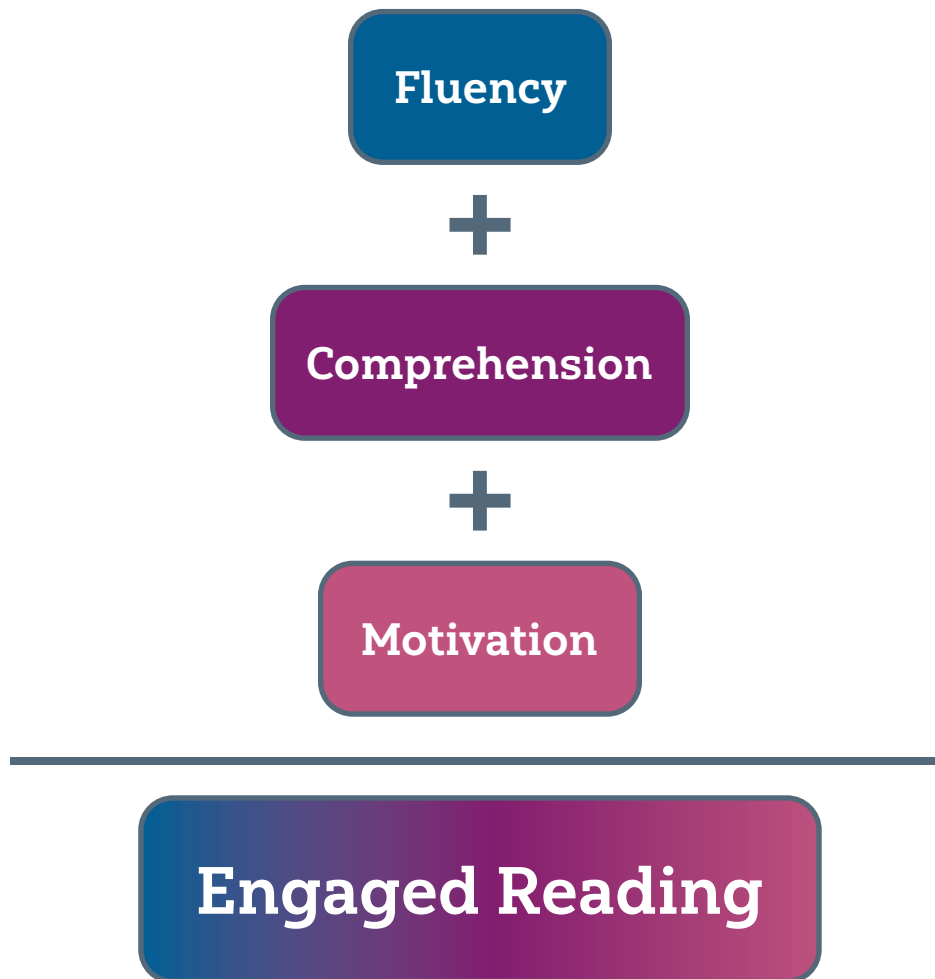
To implement the FDL, a grade-level text or above is carefully selected. For four days, the text is read aloud to model fluent reading, and students engage in assisted and repeated reading options. On Day 5, students read aloud the text with confidence in a performance-like setting.



The FDL Instructional Routine

As you will learn in Chapter 3, the FDL presents numerous opportunities to support other learning outcomes. For example, all students arrive at school with a backpack of background knowledge and vocabulary. Some backpacks, however, are lighter than others, which can impede reading comprehension. To close reading gaps, educators are tasked with unzipping and filling students' backpacks with new knowledge and vocabulary. The FDL, which leverages texts rich in content and vocabulary, offers opportunities to fill these backpacks through systematic and explicit instruction focused on knowledge building and vocabulary.

In addition, the FDL includes post-reading activities that reinforce learning and motivate students. This is critical, as reading motivation helps determine the likelihood that students, including MLLs, will engage and persist with texts (Pardo, 2004; Schallert & Martin, 2003). And "fluency + comprehension + motivation = engaged reading" (Young, Paige, & Rasinski, 2022, p. 161). Engaged readers become proficient and lifelong readers.



How to Use This Book

Part I

In Part I of this book, we will unpack reading research and provide examples of science-based instructional practices that are equitable. By targeting fluency development, these instructional practices help to close the reading achievement gap. We then pull it all together to present the FDL and walk you through how to develop your own.

Part II

In Part II of this book, we present 28 poems and Fluency Development Units comprising 140 lessons. Units are categorized into five knowledge strands: History, Culture, Earth Science, Life Science, and People and Family. These lessons represent the intersection between science and artful practices designed to speak to the mind and touch the heart.

Part III

Part III of this book includes reproducible activities for the post-reading options in each lesson. The activity numbers in each lesson correspond to the materials in Part III. These are activities that you can choose to extend your students' learning. Choose the activity or activities that make the most sense for your students' needs. Part III also includes items to support whole-group instruction.

Appendix

The Appendix includes Word Ladder answers and reproducible graphic organizers.

Chapter 1

What Matters in Reading

We know a great deal about what matters in reading. To start, the Science of Reading, a body of evidence-based research on how students learn to read, makes clear that learning to read isn't a natural process (Stanovich, 1992, 1994). It requires teaching what we know and using instructional practices we know will work. We also know that teaching reading is an art. Treating it as such helps engage readers and raises the level of reading performance.

When the science and art of teaching intersect, students develop into proficient readers who want to read, and reading gaps begin to close. In this chapter, we will explore the science and art of reading fluency.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The Science
- The Art

The Science

Years of research have shown that teaching reading is a science. There are essential components that need to be mastered in order to become fully proficient in reading (NICHD, 2000).

These are:

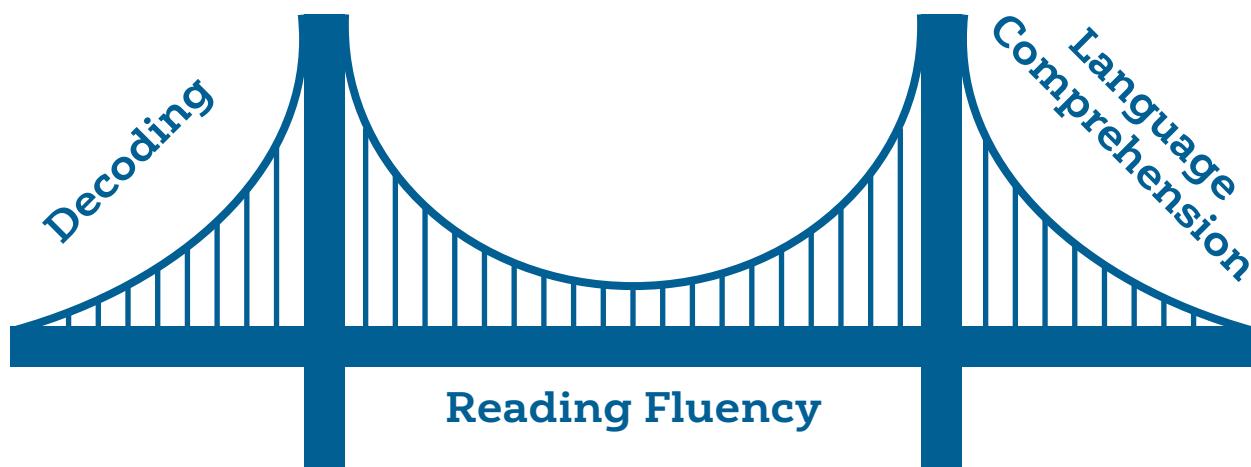
- **phonemic awareness:** the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words
- **word decoding or phonics:** the ability to match the sounds of an alphabetic language with the individual letter or groups of letters
- **vocabulary or word meaning:** the body and knowledge of words used in a particular language that include their structure (morphology), use (syntax), and contextual meanings (semantics)
- **reading fluency:** the ability to read with appropriate pace, accuracy, and prosody to derive and communicate meaning
- **comprehension:** the ability to process spoken or written text and understand the message

SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

An essential component of teaching reading to MLLs is making the language comprehensible (Garcia, 2003). So what is comprehensible input and why does it make all the difference for MLLs? It's about understanding how much knowledge your students have about a topic so you can fill in any gaps that might impede comprehension. The comprehensible input is what a teacher provides in order to make the language understandable. Just as phonics instruction shouldn't be haphazard, teachers must explicitly and intentionally provide comprehensible input for students.

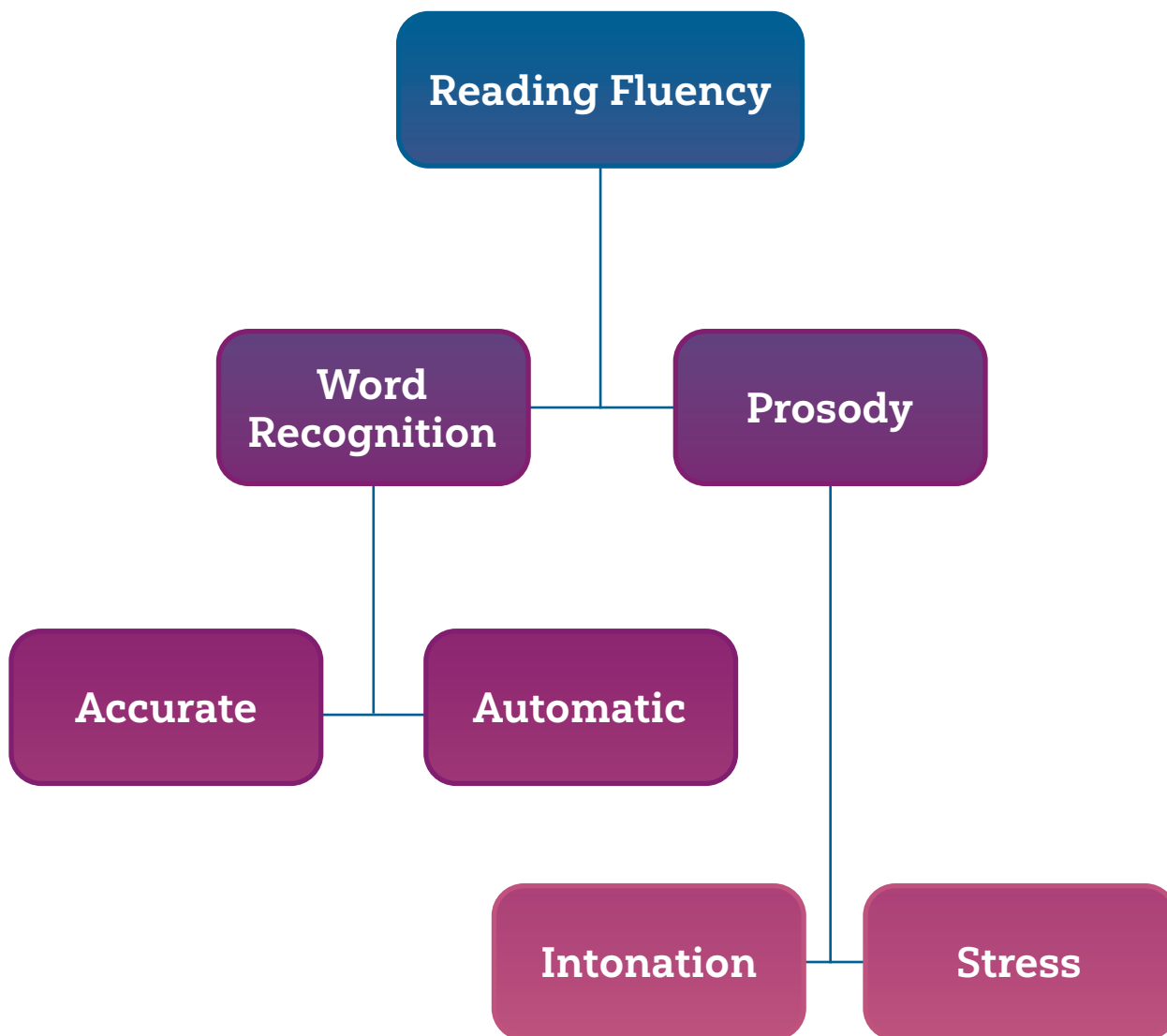
Of these essential components, reading fluency is the most often misunderstood and neglected in instruction (Allington, 1983; Drake & Walsh, 2020; Rasinski & Padak, 1998). This is not surprising given that only 53 percent of teacher preparation programs provide adequate coursework in fluency instruction (Drake & Walsh, 2020).

Further, literacy instruction tends to focus on other Big Five components—namely, phonics and word study. In fact, first-grade teachers report allocating four times more minutes to phonics and word study per week than to fluency, while second-grade teachers allocate three times more minutes per week (Rasinski, et al., 2020). This is particularly tragic as fluency is a bridge that connects decoding and language comprehension. As such, comparable amounts of time in the primary grades should be devoted to phonics and other literacy competencies, including fluency (Shanahan, 2022).



Fluency is a bridge that connects decoding and language comprehension.

What, though, is reading fluency? Reading fluency consists of two subcomponents: accurate and automatic word recognition, and prosodic or expressive reading. The accurate/automatic word recognition component of fluency connects to phonics and vocabulary. Prosody, the patterns of intonation and stress in language, connect to comprehension and are fundamental parts of language learning. While we present these subcomponents as separate from one another, we believe that when they are combined, fluency instruction is more effective and efficient. As you will learn in Chapter 3, the FDL exemplifies this by focusing on the whole of reading fluency rather than the parts.



Components of Reading Fluency

Accuracy and Automaticity

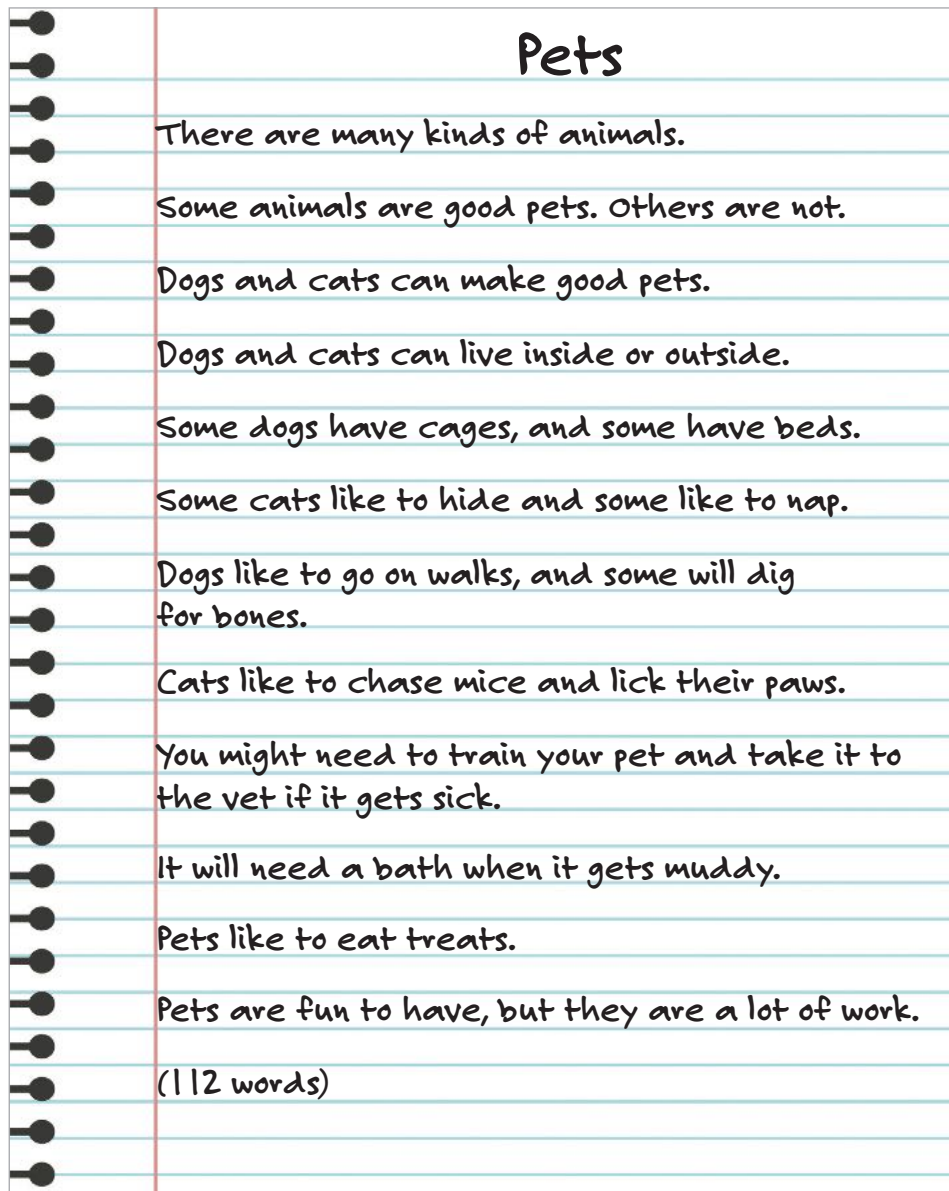
The theory that underlies accurate and automatic word recognition posits that all readers have a limited amount of cognitive capacity. Once used for one task, an individual's cognitive energy cannot be applied to another task (Rasinski, 2006). When readers are accurate but not automatic in word recognition, much of their cognitive effort goes to decoding. As a result, these striving readers have difficulty focusing on comprehension (Rasinski & Padak, 1998). Therefore, our goal in terms of accurate and automatic word recognition is for students to read words correctly *and* at a reasonably quick rate, so their attention can be on comprehension and meaning-making.

Measuring Accuracy and Automaticity

Accuracy and automaticity are measured by reading rate or speed. To measure this, students read a grade-level text aloud for one minute. The number of words they read accurately in that minute is then compared against established norms (e.g., Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017). These norms determine the extent to which a student is at, above, or below grade-level expectations. It's important to point out that even though reading rate is used to assess accuracy and automaticity, emphasizing speed should never be the goal of fluency instruction. Reading speed is only part of the equation. When the focus is primarily on increasing reading speed, students may lose sight of the goal of reading—comprehension.

“ Even though reading rate is used to assess accuracy and automaticity, emphasizing speed should never be the goal of fluency instruction. ”

Let's look at an example of this. Imagine asking two first-grade students to read aloud the poem "Pets" individually for one minute.



Pets

There are many kinds of animals.
Some animals are good pets. Others are not.
Dogs and cats can make good pets.
Dogs and cats can live inside or outside.
Some dogs have cages, and some have beds.
Some cats like to hide and some like to nap.
Dogs like to go on walks, and some will dig
for bones.
Cats like to chase mice and lick their paws.
You might need to train your pet and take it to
the vet if it gets sick.
It will need a bath when it gets muddy.
Pets like to eat treats.
Pets are fun to have, but they are a lot of work.
(112 words)

As one student reads, you mark and then count the word recognition errors made. When the student is done reading, you take the total number of errors and subtract that number from the total number of words read in one minute. This gives you the student's words correct per minute (WCPM) score.

total number of words read - errors = words correct per minute

Next, you compare your students' WCMP against Hasbrouck & Tindal's (2017) oral reading fluency norms. According to these norms, a first grader in winter should have an oral reading rate of at least 29 WCPM, which is at the 50th percentile. A score falling more than ten points below this suggests the need for increased fluency instruction.

Oral Reading Fluency Assessment		
Student	Accuracy	Automaticity (WCPM)
Brayden	100%	80th percentile
Reese	100%	38th percentile

What do you notice? While both students accurately decoded the poem, Reese's automaticity fell more than ten points below the 50th percentile. In turn, she is likely using a great deal of cognitive energy to decode, which may negatively influence her comprehension. Reese would benefit from support that improves her automaticity. This example demonstrates that accuracy alone isn't enough to support comprehension. Instead, fluency instruction should support both accuracy and automaticity. The FDL does just that.

SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

When assessing oral reading fluency for MLLs, consider the grade-level and English language proficiency level of the student. MLLs may read slower to focus on comprehension or decode accurately and automatically without understanding the text. Additional data presenting a holistic view of the student's language and reading skills is likely needed to make informed instructional decisions.

Prosody

Prosody, or expression in oral reading, is the second subcomponent of fluency. Attention to prosody includes “pitch, tone, volume, emphasis, and rhythm in speech or oral reading.” (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019, p. 13). To make these decisions, a reader must monitor the meaning of the text while reading. For fluent readers, this monitoring occurs almost simultaneously as they notice markers such as punctuation, grammar, or font that express tone or emphasis in the text. This expressive reading further amplifies meaning and promotes deeper comprehension.

Prosody typically gets less instructional attention in our classrooms. In fact, instructional practices often overemphasize rate and automaticity at the expense of prosody (Applegate et al., 2009; Lipson et al., 2011). Moreover, many educators feel that since most reading is done silently, focusing on oral expressive reading is not the best use of instructional time (Hasbrouck, 2006). Research is clear, however. When compared to readers who lack prosody in their oral reading, readers who read orally with good expression tend to have better silent reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000).

“Prosody includes ‘pitch, tone, volume, emphasis, and rhythm in speech or oral reading.’”

Measuring Prosody

Like accuracy and automaticity, prosody can be evaluated. Prosody is best measured by listening to students read and rating their reading along a rubric that reflects elements of prosodic reading.

Rubric for Measuring Prosody

Prosody: Inflection/Intonation and Expression	
1	Reads in an inexpressive, monotone manner and does not attend to punctuation.
2	Reads with some intonation (pitch/tone/volume/stress) and some attention to punctuation. Reads in a monotone manner at times.
3	Reads by adjusting intonation (pitch/tone/volume/stress) with minor errors. Consistently attends to punctuation.
4	Reads with intonation that reflects feeling, anticipation, tension, character development, and mood.
Prosody: Phrasing	
1	Reads word by word. Does not attend to author's syntax or sentence structures. Has limited sense of phrase boundaries.
2	Reads slowly and in a choppy manner, usually in two-word phrases. Some attention is given to author's syntax and sentence structures.
3	Reads in phrases of three to four words. Appropriate syntax is used.
4	Reads in longer, more meaningful phrases. Regularly uses phrase boundaries, punctuation, sentence structure, and author's syntax to reflect comprehension and fluent reading.

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Students who are less accurate and automatic in their decoding skills are less likely to give prosody much attention, and in turn, are challenged to comprehend the texts (Rasinski, 2006). When readers lack prosody, they are likely to group words into inappropriate phrases or apply expression without fully understanding the contextual meaning of the words (Kuhn, 2004). Written language doesn't always offer sufficient clues about the prosody of language (Schreiber, 1980). Consider the following example, "Oh, that's perfect!" In the absence of prosodic features, such as intonation and stress, a reader may have difficulty determining whether the speaker thinks something is perfect, or if they're being sarcastic.

SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

MLLs need to hear fluent readers breathe life into the text by modeling the pitch, intonation, and expression.

The Art

While acknowledging the importance of science, we also recognize that teaching is an art. By art, we mean that students are given opportunities to engage in learning that is authentic, aesthetic, and creative. The best teachers are both scientists and artists because they recognize the synergy and understand how to creatively weave science into artful instructional practices.

Artful Instruction	
Authentic	instruction that reflects what occurs in real life
Aesthetic	instruction that has the ability not only to teach the mind but also to touch the heart
Creative	instruction that awakens a spirit of inventiveness, engages students, and brings joy to the learning experience

Authentic Practices

Students have unique lived experiences that reflect their true, authentic selves. They yearn for opportunities to share these experiences with others and see themselves accurately and positively represented in print. Teachers can support students' authentic selves by crafting reading lessons that include diverse texts and experiences that benefit all students. Learning experiences that mirror real life and include poetry, deep conversations, word games, etc., are authentic and providing them is time well-spent in the classroom.

Aesthetic Practices

Reading experiences that allow students to not only accumulate and comprehend information but actually experience emotions while transacting with a text are aesthetic experiences. There's something magical about a reader who tears up while turning a page or reading a poem with expression! This is as real as it gets.

I (Lynne) recall reading *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls to my young sons who were captivated by the main character Billy and heartbroken over the loss of his dogs. My sons and I vicariously experienced Billy's loss and understood what the red fern symbolized. That read-aloud experience created a lasting memory and the chance for my sons to understand loss, empathy, and the power of language.

In another example, while teaching first grade, my students were mesmerized by the fictional character, Junie B. Jones. Junie B. Jones managed to create chaos and win over her elementary school readers because they could relate to her lived experiences. My classroom was filled with laughter each day after recess when I read aloud from this series.

Laughter, like tears, is a contagious, aesthetic response that is the result of the relationship between the text and the reader. This relationship, in which the reader's own lived experiences help define the meaning of the text, is known as the reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). Reading instruction is more than teaching students to decode words on a page, and we must take every opportunity to evoke the aesthetic experience between the reader and the text. Words carry meaning and elicit emotion.



Creative Practices

Creativity is often considered a job requirement for educators; however, it's also likely to disappear in a flash when other priorities ramp up. Experiences with reading should engage all students, speak to their hearts and minds, and leave them wanting more. You can probably list activities that you wouldn't consider creative, and they are the ones your students likely wouldn't miss. Instructional practices, like the FDL, provide teachers and students with opportunities to be creative in response to what they read.

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Concluding Thoughts

We recognize the need for science to explain how students learn to read. We also know that without artful instructional practices, students experience reading activities that do not mirror real life. Often, these experiences are also not rich or engaging. When we create reading lessons based on how students learn to read (science) and that honor their lived experiences and awaken their spirits (art), we can grow lifelong readers.

In the next chapter, we will explore some instructional practices that are grounded in the science and art of teaching reading fluency.

Key Takeways

- Teaching reading is both science and art
- Reading fluency consists of accurate and automatic word recognition, and prosodic reading
- Instructional practices should be authentic, aesthetic, and creative

