

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

A professional learning series presented by David Kilpatrick, Ph.D.

Module 4 Session 5

*Sponsored by the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and created in collaboration with
Specific Learning Disability Specialists Jill Marshall and Veronica Fiedler*



COLORADO
Department of Education

Module 4: Word-Level Reading

Session 5: Word-Reading Fluency

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Objective:

Through engagement in this series of 13 on-demand webinars, participants will understand the current research, implications, and the essential elements necessary for assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.



ASSESS



PREVENT



OVERCOME

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Webinar Series Modules

Module 1: Reading Research and the Research to Practice Gap

Module 2: Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners Still Struggle

Module 3: The Simple View of Reading

MODULE 4: WORD-LEVEL READING

Module 5: Reading Comprehension

Module 6: Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

Module 7: Assessing Phonics Skills

Module 8: Assessing Word Identification and Reading Fluency

Module 9: Assessing Reading Comprehension and Related Skills

Module 10: Effective Approaches for Preventing Reading Difficulties

Module 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties

Module 12: Case Examples of Reading Disabilities

Module 13: Specific Learning Disability Identification

Module 4 Overview

Module 4: *Word-Level Reading*

- 4.1 The Challenges of Word-Level Reading
- 4.2 Word Reading Development
- 4.3 How Poor Phonological Skills Hinder Word Reading
- 4.4 Orthographic Mapping
- 4.5 Word-Reading Fluency**
- 4.6 English Learners and Written Word Learning
- 4.7 Understanding Word-Reading Difficulties

Learning Intentions



Module 4 Session 5: Word-Reading Fluency

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Describe the nature and importance of word-level reading fluency
- ✓ Describe the basis for reading fluency
- ✓ Understand why many fluency–related efforts fail, and what can be done about that

Defining Word-Reading Fluency

- Fluency is typically defined as word-level reading that is
 - Fast
 - Accurate
 - Expressive
- Reading with expression involves *prosody*
 - From two Greek words, *pros* (*to* or *toward*) and *ode* (*song*)
 - It involves the voice's pitch and emphasis, delivered at the right time
 - Typically served best when one is comprehending what is read as one goes along (not guaranteed)

Importance of Word-Reading Fluency

- Fluency is highly correlated with reading comprehension
- When word-level reading is fluent, the reader's attention and working memory can focus on the meaning of what is being read

Reading Faster

- Almost any reader of any skill level can read faster when simply asked to do so
- This is typically not sustainable, however
 - The focus is on reading speed and not on reading at our normal reading speed
 - Our normal speed has been optimized for comprehension (a speed we have developed implicitly), and changes based on text comprehension difficulty

Word-Reading is Not Paired-Associate Learning

- The nature of paired-associate learning
- Learning letter names and sounds is paired-associate learning
- Learning written words is not
- Paired-associate learning for faces, objects, letters, etc. involves visual/verbal long-term memory
- Word reading involves orthographic memory
 - Different brain activation patterns are involved
 - Notice how you may forget a familiar person's name or block on the name of a familiar object, but never “block” on familiar written words

Fluency is Not Paired-Associate Recall

- We often assume speed of identifying words has to do with speed of retrieval
 - Barring a problem with rapid automatized naming, this is not a fair assumption
- But correctly identifying a word will be based upon phonic decoding, guessing from context, or recall of a familiar word
 - The first two are slow and strategic, the third is fast and effortless
- We need to examine our assumptions
 - Do we think the words are in memory but are not being recalled fast enough?
 - Do we think phonic decoding should be fast and effortless?
 - Do we think guessing is easy and integrates well with reading?

The Reading Panel's "Big 5"

- The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) had 6 divisions/chapters
 - 1) **Methodology**
 - 2) **Alphabetics** (phonemic awareness and phonics)
 - 3) **Fluency**
 - 4) **Comprehension** (vocabulary and text comprehension strategies)
 - 5) **Teacher Education**
 - 6) **Computer Technology**
- These got reconfigured at some point and presented to educators as:
 - **Phonemic Awareness**
 - **Phonics**
 - **Fluency**
 - **Vocabulary**
 - **Text Comprehension Strategies**

Fluency and the National Reading Panel

- The “Big 5” have been functionally carved in granite
- But the assumptions that went into their review of fluency are problematic based upon later research
- They found moderate, immediate benefits for repeated readings and other oral reading approaches with feedback
 - None of the studies looked at long-term benefits or generalization
- They found no evidence that silent reading improved reading skills
 - None of the studies actually looked at fluency, only accuracy and comprehension, or other global reading scores

Problems with the NRP on Fluency

- They worked from the assumptions about fluency mentioned earlier that were shown to be problematic (e.g., treating reading like paired-associate learning)
- They had very limited research to go on compared to other areas the NRP studied
- Subsequent research has shown these oral reading practices to be of limited usefulness; no studies show they close the gap between weak readers and skilled readers
 - Current studies show limited standard score gains, and little or no long-term benefit or generalization to unpracticed passages (repeated readings)

Moving Beyond the NRP on Fluency

- It seems sacrilegious to second guess the NRP
- However, more research has emerged to inform us about the nature of reading fluency
- They did excellent work with the limited base of research they had available at the time

The Nature of Reading Fluency

- We now know that word reading fluency is primarily a byproduct of the size of one's sight vocabulary
- Students with large sight-vocabularies read fluently
 - Most or all words “pop out” at them effortlessly as they move through the text
- Students with limited sight vocabularies do not read fluently
 - Word reading is effortful for them; fewer words are effortlessly recognized, so they move slowly through text relying on (typically inadequate) phonic decoding and guessing, both slower, strategic approaches to word identification
- Rapid automatized naming is also associated with poor reading fluency in ways that are not yet fully understood
 - However, sight vocabulary size appears to be the the primary factor determining fluency

Research Regarding Reading Fluency

- Three examples of types of research supporting the sight-vocabulary hypothesis of reading fluency
 - Studies comparing timed list reading vs. timed paragraph reading
 - Studies altering text difficulty
 - Studies of the relationship between phonic decoding and fluency
- More broadly, this is consistent with our understanding of orthographic learning
- Students are not reading slowly because the words are in LTM and not coming out quickly enough

Addressing Reading Fluency

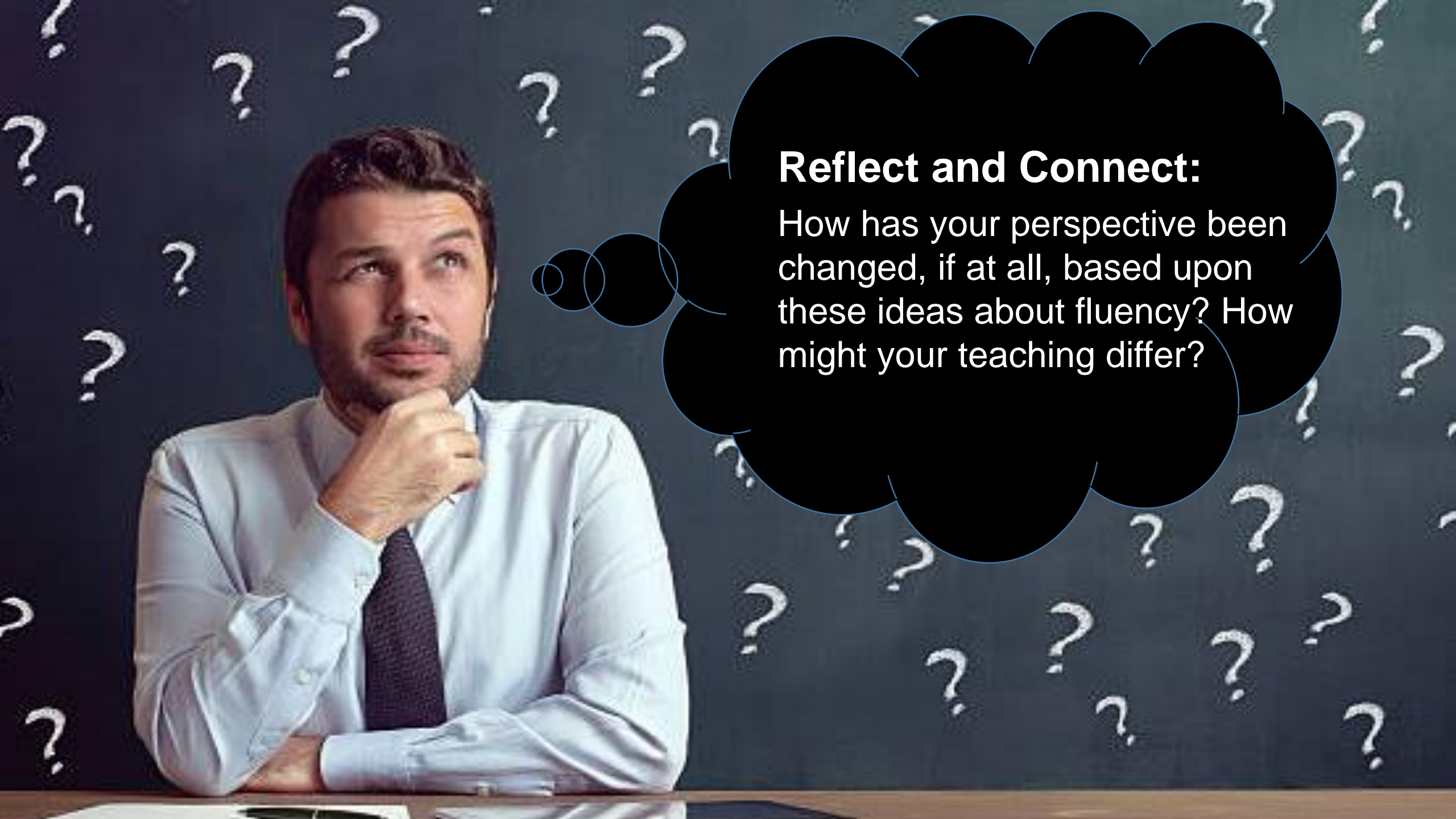
- Who is helped by reading practice?
- We can improve fluency by improving the size of students' sight vocabularies
- We improve the size of the sight vocabulary by improving orthographic mapping
- We improve orthographic mapping by developing letter-sound proficiency and phonemic proficiency
- With skilled orthographic mapping, the sight vocabulary continues to grow, as does fluency

Rethinking Reading Fluency

- This perspective causes us to rethink our traditional conception of reading fluency
- It is okay to have struggling readers do reading practice, as long as we know it is not very effective
- However, when students are good at orthographic mapping (i.e., they remember the words they read), reading practice is the *only* way for them to improve reading
 - All the “mechanics” are in place at that point and they need wide exposure to new words to add to their continuously expanding sight vocabulary

Summary: Module 4 Session 5

- ✓ Fluency involves fast, accurate, and expressive reading
- ✓ Conventional views about fluency are not consistent with more recent research on reading development
- ✓ Reading practice, per se, has limited benefits for students with fluency problems
- ✓ Fluency is best understood as a byproduct of the size of a student's sight vocabulary
- ✓ Efforts to boost fluency should be directed toward helping students build their sight vocabularies by being efficient orthographic mappers
- ✓ Reading practice is the only way to develop reading skills when students are good orthographic mappers



Reflect and Connect:

How has your perspective been changed, if at all, based upon these ideas about fluency? How might your teaching differ?

Wrap Up

What was your biggest takeaway?

What questions do you still have?



Up Next

Module 4.6 **English Learners and Written** **Word Learning**



Thank you!



Please visit the CDE Specific Learning Disability Website for more information:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLD>