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Fluency: What does IT really mean?

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ISABELLE FARRINGTON COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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This is to certify that the action research study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,

and that any and all revisions as required by

CT Literacy Specialist Program have been made.

College of Education

Department of Leadership and Literacy

EDR 692 - Applied Reading and Language Arts Research

Fluency: What does IT really mean?

Advisor: Dr. Karen C. Waters

Fluency: What does IT really mean?

Jacquelyn E. DePierro

ABSTRACT

Shared and repeated readings are assumed to reflect influence on increasing oral reading fluency abilities through accuracy, rate, expression, and phrasing. The purpose of the study was to examine how repeated reading increased students' oral reading scores across the six-dimensions of fluency transferring phonics instruction to oral reading. Specifically, we tested the repeated reading process that focused on improving early fluency skills on 6-7-year-old students in a first grade classroom who were reading at or below grade level expectations and received a score of 2 or below in terms of their oral reading fluency as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. The goal was to ascertain a one point gain targeted in the students' fluency that reflected pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate, and integration of the domains. At the beginning, students' voices were not reflecting punctuation, poorly phrasing sentences, lacked pitch/tone that implied meaning, and were not integrating fluency skills consistently in their first read of the passage. At the end of the study, students were able to read with some inflection, pause at appropriate places, utilized appropriate phrasing, and stressed necessary words or phrases during their first read. Following the second read, students' accuracy, rate, and words per minute increased significantly, producing a love of literature and the determination to work hard towards a more "challenging" text. Repeated reading of a text is crucial to students to build the necessary automaticity and comprehension to be a proficient reader.

Keywords: *fluency, repeated reading, shared reading, phrasing, poetry, word recognition, accuracy.*

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Introduction

Of the five key elements of reading instruction encompassing phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency - *fluency* is responsible for producing the desired result - proficient readers (Rasinski, 2006). Fluency instruction influences word knowledge, reading speed, and oral accuracy. Further, forms of guided oral reading and practice, such as shared readings, promotes reading growth in elementary grades (2006). Additionally, it impacts reading comprehension and reading scores.

Oral reading fluency is an important dimension of proficient reading. Fluency should appear effortlessly. Additionally, words and phrases should be read in appropriate groupings and with proper expression (Rasinski & Zutell, 1991). It is crucial for early literacy students to develop substantial fluency skills and strategies to be proficient readers (Pikulski, 2006). Thus, using a research-based benchmark system to determine students' oral fluency capabilities is essential when assessing independent and instructional reading levels. Raising awareness to educators about the importance of rating students' oral fluency capabilities when assessing students' independent and instructional reading levels using a researched based benchmark system is imperative.

Extensive research has shown the importance of incorporating fluency strategies among readers at all levels. Fluency is distinguished as a foundational reading skill according to the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. put the page number is you are using the language of the ccss). Consequently, research presents students at the upper elementary, middle, and secondary grade levels have not attained sufficient fluency skills; thus experience adversity with silent reading and comprehension (Rasinski, 2014).

Timothy Rasinski defined fluency as the ability to read automatically and effortlessly (2014). Fluency is a vital component to proficient and meaningful reading. Automaticity is a finite factor between proficient and struggling readers as proficient readers have the cognitive resources to automatically recall words; struggling readers are using too many cognitive resources that leaves little to make meaning of a text (Rasinski, 2014).

Rationale

Fluency implies the rapid decoding of words, automaticity in word recognition, and appropriate phrasing and prosody (Schrauben, 2014). Low or lack thereof word recognition, automaticity, is an indicator of dysfluent reading and processing context. Fluency inadequacies are clear shortcomings of comprehension (Rasinski & Rupley, 2016). In order for students to comprehend texts appropriately, they need to read fluently. The study of fluency is imperative for students to advance as readers in order to successfully decode, recognize words automatically, and comprehend grade level texts.

Problem

In 2015, 43% of Connecticut fourth grade students scored at or above proficient reading; which is a microcosm of the greater problem nationwide: 57% of fourth grade students scored basic or below (NAEP, 2015). As stated previously, fluency produces the desired result - proficient readers. However, over half of the nation's fourth graders lack the necessary decoding skills, automaticity, rate, and prosody to comprehend expected grade level texts on standardized tests. Furthermore, students with poor reading fluency also do not perform well on high stake standardized tests (Rasinski, & Padak, 1998; Valencia & Buly, 2004).

Solution

Fluency is connected to the amount read, which leads to reading progress (Rasinski & Rupley, 2016), and requires instruction geared towards effective approaches that encompass consistent opportunities for students to practice fluent oral reading. Since oral reading fluency is a foundational pillar to developing proficient readers, it is crucial for students to master this skill before or by grade 5 (Rasinski, 2014). One one of the most effective strategies for increasing students' overall reading achievement, inclusive of comprehension, fluency, and accuracy is repeated reading, which has taken a variety of forms over the past thirty years (Samuels, 1979).

Learning Theory

The application of fluency is supported through the sociocultural theoretical approach. In other words, when learning is embedded in social activities students are more likely to cognitively absorb what is being taught (Wang, Bruce, & Hughes, 2011). Activities such as Shared Reading would be considered a social activity because students are reading together, while applying various reading skills to a shared text. Furthermore, cognitive and social constructivism theories are additional platforms to support reading fluency. Cognitive constructivism is a common pathway for students to develop personal academic achievement. Constructivism supports students to learn skills easily through methods and strategies (Powell & Kalina, 2011).

Research Questions

This research study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most effective research-based approaches to increase students' oral reading fluency?

2. How can research-based approaches for increasing students' oral reading fluency be customized for struggling readers?

3. What types of activities lead to increasing students' oral reading fluency?

Review of Literature

The review of literature begins with a chronology of the embryonic attempts to bring fluency to the forefront, from its humble beginnings in which community village leaders needed to communicate the news of the day to the villagers to the collapse of fluency instruction in schools. From there a discussion of repeated reading a viable force for modeling and demonstrates the power of fluent oral reading. Additionally, specific activities that promote fluent reading such as rereading and shared reading will be addressed. After which an array of specific researched based activities citing the effectiveness of these strategies includes shared reading, poetry, and music. Undergirding the lessons, the pedagogy, and the effects of repeated reading is the sociocultural learning theory, which frames the study.

The research data basis included Academic Search Premier from Sacred Heart University's Library. Fluency, oral fluency, fluency strategies, and prosody were terminology used in the search for academic articles pertaining to the topic.

A Chronology of Fluency

Fluency was popularized during the colonial era, when students were required to demonstrate mastery in reading the Bible at a fast pace. During that time period there were few books and texts. Communities and households relied on one person to read aloud in order to hear news, information, or the simple joy of entertainment (Rasinski, 2006). Teaching fluency focused on reading expressively and elegantly.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reading instruction took a turn; oral reading was questioned by researchers and educational scholars because it focused more on deliverance rather than understanding of the text. Horace Mann (1891) argued that students were unable to understand what they read because their focus was on speech instead of on the meaning of the

text (Hoffman & Segel, 1983, p.4). Moreover, Frances Parker (1894), a researcher affiliated with the Language Experience Approach in reading instruction, also contended that "reading itself is not expression…. Reading is a mental process…. Oral reading is expression, and comes under the heading of speech" (Parker, 1894, cited in Smith, 2002, p. 150. As cited in Rasinski, 2006).

The Evolution of Silent Reading as an Efficient Mode for Disseminating Information

As reading materials evolved into the production and manufacturing of more books, magazines, newspapers, silent reading became a more efficient and cogent path to comprehension (Rasinski, 2006). The Ohio Department of Education (1923) maintained that silent reading was not only a powerful medium for making interdisciplinary learning possible, but also prepared one for negotiating life's pathways because it attributes developing interests.

Silent reading skills became the main focus as it was sought that most people read silently instead of orally as the need for oral reading to large groups declined from colonial times. As fluency gained popularity during the Colonial Era, the need to read aloud diminished, simply because people no longer depended on spokespeople to share news and events; thus, silent reading became the preferred mode (Rasinski, 2006). Furthermore, with the turn of the twentieth century - also known as the "Standardized Testing Movement," support of oral reading seized and shifted toward silent reading because students were expected to read a great amount of text through timed assessments (Rasinski & Zutell, 2006).

Information Processing for Self-Regulation of Independent Reading

Decades later, the introduction of automatic information processing (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) implied the need for students to employ self-regulation when reading: in other words, phrasing words together, and visual perception was done concurrently to reduce energy spent on decoding so that the student could focus on comprehending the text (Rasinski, 2006). The processing of words in reading needs to be at a self-regulating pace, which means phrasing

words together, sounding, and visual perception is done concurrently at a certain pace to sound natural (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, Rasinski, 2006). This concern led to the method of repeated readings that was introduced by the classic, R. Jay Samuel, who addressed fluency needs to struggling readers spending an exuberant amount of energy decoding words, and left little cognitive resources to make meaning of the text.

Common classroom practices such as shared reading, repeated oral reading, and poetry, among other activities encompass modeling fluent reading, decoding strategies, and automaticity in recognizing common sight words furtherance in students achieving high reading rates while balancing comprehension of a text. These practices are considered sociocultural because they are participating in social activity with an embedded lesson.

Repeated Reading for Oral Reading Fluency

The method of repeated readings, a classic study including the work of Samuels (1979), whose insights still hold true today, is an activity that is beneficial for struggling readers to become fluent readers by developing automaticity and leaving cognitive energy available for comprehension. As it says in its name, repeated readings are read repeatedly over the course of time. This successful practice continuously displays growth within students' oral reading in word recognition, rate, and expressive and meaningful phrases (Rasinski & Rupley, 2016).

The concept of repeated reading is often compared to practicing a sport. Athletes need to practice in order to become exceptional by building the necessary skills to play; the same goes for readers. This practice cognitively allows students to absorb common words when exposed to them time and again; causing them to recognize the word and build automaticity in word recognition, which connects to their oral reading rate and speed - the automaticity theory (Samuels, 1979). Educators are concerned that the focus on fluency takes away from

comprehension, but the more a student rereads, the less they have to focus on decoding and have the cognitive ability to understand the text (Samuels, 1997).

Shared Reading for Oral Reading Fluency

Shared Reading is a common practice to model fluent reading. As stated previously in repeated readings, repeated oral reading is identified as a key method to build the necessary skills for a strong foundation of fluency. This form of reading teaches students by modeling how to integrate reading skills, including fluency, over a course of time by rereading the text with a different focus each time as a whole class. Shared reading texts are alleged to be at or marginally above students' independent reading levels and rich with vocabulary (Stahl, 2012), in which students have a copy of the text available to build fluency and automaticity through independent rereadings beyond the teacher's initial reading of the text.

Read Alouds for Modeling Oral Reading Fluency

The purpose of read aloud is to facilitate comprehension and increase expressive and receptive vocabulary (Holdaway, 1979). However, subsequent readings of the same passage similarly impacts fluency when the teacher intentionally addresses this component in the lesson. While students are listening to the text being read aloud, the teacher is subsequently modeling how to be fluent by reading aloud with expression (Rasinski, 2010). This captivates students while motivating them to sound expressive as they read aloud.

Format for Fluency Lesson

The format of a fluency lessons consists of identifying a vowel consonant combination, extending it into a word family and applying it in contextual reading. Rimes all begin with a vowel and are followed by a consonant; they are treated as a word family and allows readers to decode more than 654 words (Rasinski, Rupley, Paige, & Nichols, 2016). Phonics skills,

extracted from the text, allow students to apply new-found skills in a contextual application. Educators guide students in creating word family sorts that are associated with the text by focusing on rimes that are continuously read found in words.

Research-Based Case Studies

Padak and Rasinski (2004) found that first grade students who participated in Fast Start, a word family approach to oral reading fluency, made more than 50% progress in their fluency than those who did not participate in the program. The format of the program involved parents and students reading short rhymes with their children for 10-15 minutes a day outside of school that supported the instruction that occurred during the day for twelve weeks.

Rhyming poetry to develop phonics skills assists in the development of fluent reading (Rasinski, Rupley, & Paige, 2016). The analytical approach is primarily used by comparing common spelling patterns and pronunciations to solve new words. Teaching readers to solve words using orthographic patterns will aid in students achieving fluency goals (Rasinski, Rupely & Paige, 2016). Likewise, poems are captivating and engaging to young readers through their rhyme, repetition, and tone.

Caldwell, Nichols, and Mraz (2006) found that struggling readers increased their words correct per minute (WCPM) by 37.3 from 31.7 WCPM to 69 wcpm over a six week time period when students participated in reader's theater on a regular basis. The group consisted of 19 third grade students in a high poverty school with over 85% of its population receiving free and reduced lunch.

Similarly, in another study by Kuhn, Rasinski, and Zimmerman (2014) found that 18 students increased their reading rate from the 25th to the 75th percentile according to Hasbrouck and Tindal's (2006) fluency norms using the *Fluency Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI)*, an

instructional approach for enhancing oral reading fluency. In terms of specific gains, students increased their mean scores from 78 WCPM to an impressive 120 WCPM.

The FORI (Stahl & Heubach, 2005) is a researched based tool which consists of rereading a designated text over the course of a week based on a five-day cycle using the gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978) as the teacher gradually releases fades and students are able to read independently and fluently by the week's end. The five-day cycle is based on introducing the text, echo reading, choral reading, partner reading, and extension activities to build upon comprehension.

Conclusion

Using repeated readings as an approach to improve oral reading fluency has confirmed multiple times that it leads to success in increasing students' automaticity in word recognition, prosody, and rate. Modeling how to read fluently and gradually releasing students to read on their own, not only teaches them, but reinforces them how to read as a successful fluent reader.

Overall, research has proven that repeated readings build the necessary foundations of success in oral reading within struggling readers. Using evidenced based approaches can make all of the difference for a student with reading difficulties to build comprehension, automaticity in word recognition, prosody, rate, and most importantly… fluency.

Methodology

Participants

In a small suburban K-5 elementary school in New England that receives Title 1 funds has a population of approximately 400 students; 17% who qualify for free and reduced lunch, 9% with disabilities, and 6% receive EL services. Racial diversity accounts for 33% of the population with 9% Asian, 18% Latin or Hispanic, 1% Black, and 5% two or more races (Connecticut Department of Education: School Profile and Performance Report 2014-2015).

This study will focus on students in a first grade classroom consisting of 16 students; eight females, eight males. Out of the 16 students two received Speech and Language services and two received Tier 2 intervention from the Language Arts Specialist. Students range in age from six to seven years old.

First grade students who scored a one or a two on the oral fluency scale on the *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System* (BAS) were selected to participate in the study. Three males and three females qualified to be a part the fluency small group. Students participated in a 15-20 minute small group three days a week during a six week time period. After the study, participants received a picture book for their time and tireless effort.

Materials

Academic resources used for the fluency study will include *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy Rasinski and *Sing a Song of Poetry, Grade 1* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. *The Fluent Reader* provides resourceful procedures of various ways educators can approach teaching fluency within their classroom as well as text suggestions to apply fluency skills. *Sing a Song of Poetry, Grade 1* will be used for the teacher to obtain poems and short nursery rhymes with

targeted phonics elements. It should be noted that *Sing a Song of Poetry* has leveled versions for grades K-3. Additionally, BAS needs to be administered prior to the start of the study. Fluency data from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System will be used to drive instruction to reach students fluency needs.

Equipment for the study is also necessary. A stopwatch and recording device will be used; most cellular phones are equipped with this technology and can be used. The stopwatch will be used to measure the length of time to read a passage and to find the words per minute using the formula: words in text divided by seconds equals words per minute. The recording device will be used on day one and day four of the sessions for students to set fluency goals and to recognize growth in accuracy and rate.

<center>Procedure</center>

The BAS allows educators to actuate a student's independent and instructional reading levels. It is used to observe and record student's reading behaviors that include reading accuracy, self-correction rate, fluency rate, and comprehension in order to drive instruction within the classroom (Fountas and Pinnell, 2010). This information is crucial when planning for fluency lessons. It allows educators to analyze how or if students are able to decode, word recognition of sight words, and to measure students' reading rate on a scale of zero to three.

For this study we are focusing on the fluency scale using the Six Domains of Fluency by the BAS, while keeping the other useful information to help drive instruction for repeated readings. The scale allows educators to score readers zero to three based on their oral reading in the following domains of fluency: pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate, and integration. Each domain is measured by a scale ranging from zero to three; three being proficient. The score of a zero reflects no evidence of the domain and intensive teaching is appropriate. A score of a

one indicates some evidence of the domain and the student needs explicit teaching. A score of a two reflects evidence that is appropriate and some prompting or reinforcement may be necessary. A score of a three, the highest score, reflects that the student is automatically displaying these characteristics of fluent reading and teaching is not needed.

Using the book, *Sing a Song of Poetry* (Pinnell & Fountas, 2017), I chose 6-8 poems and nursery rhymes that fit the needs of my students based on their BAS assessment. I started off with poem that had 67 words and my last poem consisted of 121 words. This resource is useful for determining what poems fit certain phonics elements; on the bottom of the page a teaching target is suggested to use with the text.

In Session one students are introduced to the poem and are recorded individually to hear how they sound as a reader. As students wait for their turn to be recorded, they are reading from a folder of poems that have been collected over the school year. The rest of the class is participating in reader's workshop utilizing word rings, poetry, and other reading tools during this time. They will add the poems they use each week to their poetry folder. After recording and listening to their recording, students will set goals for themselves with help from the teacher. For example, I will adhere to punctuation or I will swoop words into phrases.

The next session, students will participate in a shared reading activity of the poem guided by the teacher. During the shared reading experience, the teacher will then point out phonics elements embedded within the text and guide students connecting that element to other words within the text. The third session will focus on fluency strategies. For example, scooping words into phrases, changing your voice to sound like the character, or adhering to punctuation. In partnerships, the students will practice reading aloud to their partner.

The last session, session four, will start off with a group shared reading of the text. The shared reading will emphasize and reinforce fluency strategies to use during reading; i.e. go back and smooth your reading or go back and read the word like you always knew it. During this session, the teacher will record: accuracy, rate, and speed. While students are waiting for their turn they will read from their poetry folders in partnerships. After recording all of the students, each student will compare their first reading to their last reading by listening to their recordings. They will then rate themselves, in addition to the teacher's rating, to create new goals for the following week. The main focus of this group was to integrate the domains of fluency to sound more fluent.

Data Collection

The Six Dimensions of Fluency Rubric from Fountas and Pinnell (2010) was used to observe and record student's oral reading fluency in a poem during a repeated reading session. The assessment allows teachers to note the characteristics of oral reading in which students have control and those that are not yet mastered in the process of attaining fluency. Pre and post assessments were administered individually for each student following each of the repeated reading lessons.

Description of Students' Performance on the Six Dimensions of Fluency

Table 1 represents the integration of the six-dimensions of fluency: the ability to integrate rate, phrasing, pausing, intonation, and stress consistently. A total of six students were assessed on the Six Dimensions of Fluency. All students scored at two or higher. The range of scores at pretesting was from zero to one. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was one. One student scored a zero at pretesting due to lack of integrating all of the dimensions administered on the assessment; however, at post testing the student as able to integrate 3-4 of the dimensions independently.

At posttesting six students were assessed. Here again, all students scored above two. The range of scores at post testing was two to three. The mean score at posttesting was two. Analysis of mean scores from pre to posttesting revealed a one point increase, which indicates repeated reading with explicit strategies imbedded increases students fluency and integration of pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, and rate.

Table 2 represents Pausing; the way the readers' voice guides their reading by adhering to punctuation. The range of scores at pretesting was from one to two. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was one. The three students who scored a two displayed reading evidences of appropriate phrasing and needed some reinforcing.

At posttesting, all students scored above a two. The range of scores at post testing was two to three. The mean score at posttesting was two. Analysis of mean scores from pre to posttesting revealed a one point increase, which suggests that explicit instruction prompting pausing strategies during repeated reading directly impacts students' oral reading fluency.

Table 3 represents phrasing; the way readers group words together to represent meaningful units of language. The range of scores at pretesting was from one to two. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was a score of a one. One student scored a two carefully scooped words and paid attention to commas within the text, a result of previous work done with the student in the classroom.

At posttesting five out of six students scored a score of a three. The range of scores at post testing was two to three. Analysis of the scores suggests that modeling appropriate phrasing while reading a text orally increases students' abilities to read orally.

Table 4 represents stress; the emphasis a reader places on certain words to reflect meaning such as using a louder tone. All students scored a one. No student scored in the in the two or three range. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was a one indicating a need for explicit instruction in this area across all six students.

At posttesting here again, all students scored above two. Out of the six students, four students scored two and two out of the six students scored a three. The range of scores at post testing was two to three. The mean score at posttesting was two. Analysis of mean scores from pre to posttesting revealed a one point increase, which further supports repeated reading to increase fluency abilities among students.

Table 5 represents intonation; the way the reader ranges their voice in tone, pitch, and volume to reflect meaning and expression. Four students scored one and two students scored zero. No student scored two or three. The range of scores at pretesting was from zero to one. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was one. Two students scored a zero implying to work on prosody and changing the tones of their voice.

At posttesting, three students out of six scored three and the other three students scored two. The range of scores at post testing was two to three. From pre to posttesting, one student went from zero to three; revealing further evidence that repeated reading with imbedded fluency strategies are effective when teaching fluency.

Table 6 represents rate; the pace a reader moves through a text - not too fast or too slow. No student scored in a three. The range of scores at pretesting was from one to two. The mean score for students assessed at pretesting was a one.

At posttesting students' scores ranged from two to three. The mean score for students assessed at postesting was a three. Further analysis of mean scores from pre to posttesting reveals significant increases in students' oral reading fluency.

Data Analysis

The results of the study validates the effectiveness of repeated readings when measured by the six dimensions of fluency. Repeated readings correlates to students' success in rate, phrasing, pausing, intonation, stress, and integration of dimensions. It suggests that when reading a text repeatedly students are able to successfully and proficiently read aloud a text fluently.

It must be noted that time limitations due to weather related cancellations and student absences may account for students' performance. However, the validity is well established due to multiple and repeated experiences with the text.

Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to study the effectiveness of repeated reading in a first grade classroom. Participants read poetry repeatedly that was supported with phonics and automaticity activities in order to increase the six domains of fluency over a six time period. It fostered the ability to read fluently in addition to comprehending the text by using prosody to convey the story.

By embedding and highlighting phonics skills within the repeated reading process allowed students to transfer the skill to reading. It further aided in decoding and word recognition that impacts fluency.

The ultimate goal of reading instruction is for students to become proficient readers. This study indicates that through the repeated reading process, shared reading, and other fluency strategies, teachers are able to model proficient reading effectively and students are able to experience successful fluent reading. Fluency instruction helps build automaticity in word recognition, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate, and pausing which aids in the achievement of proficient reading.

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Tables

Table 1
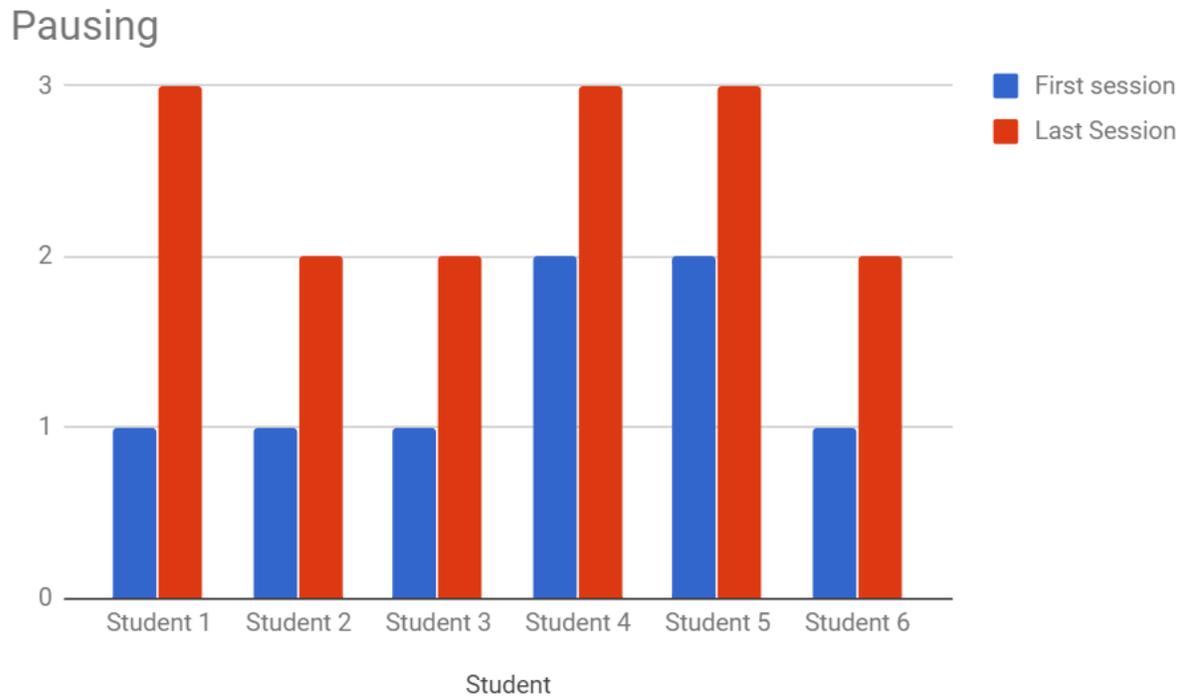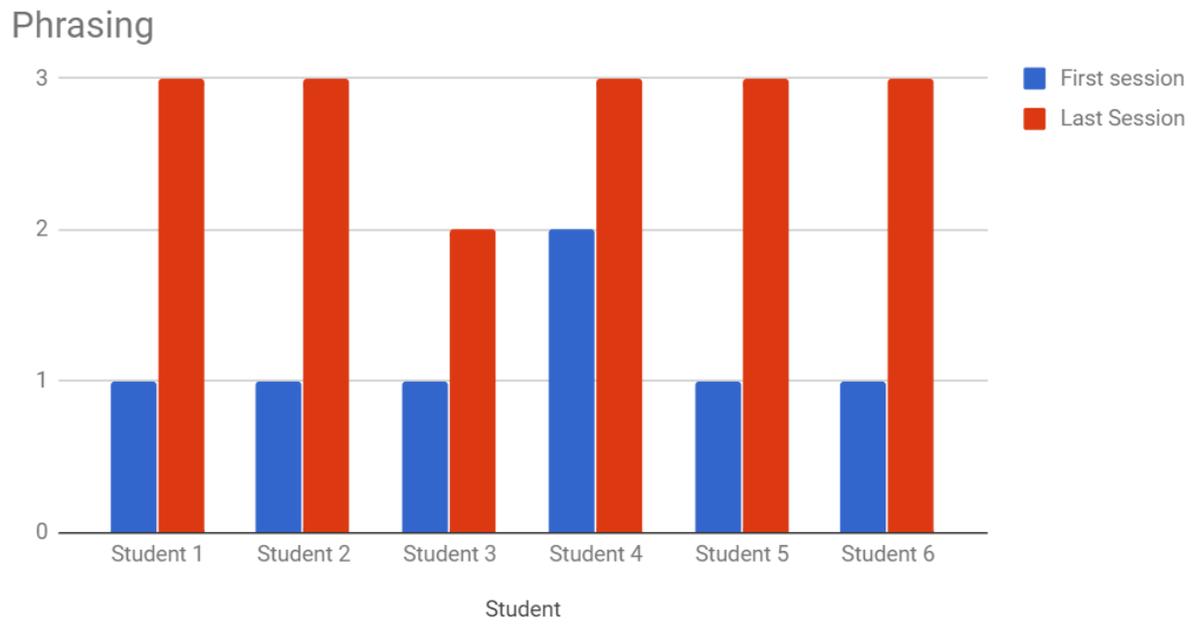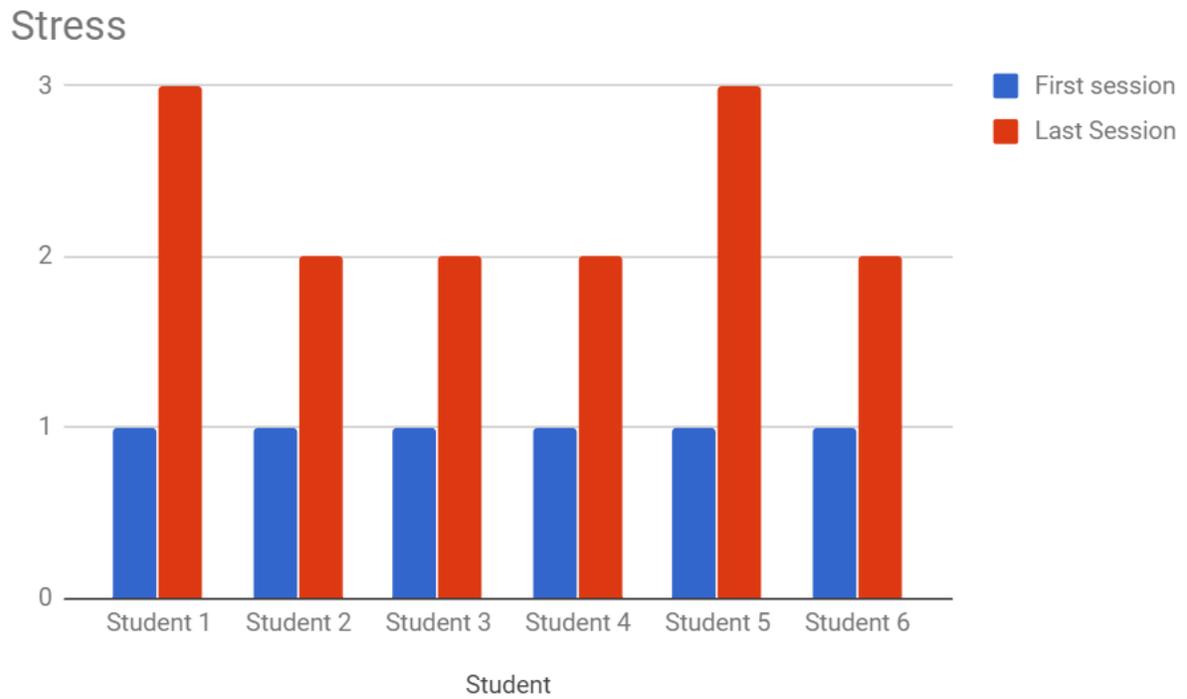Integration of the Six Dimensions of Fluency
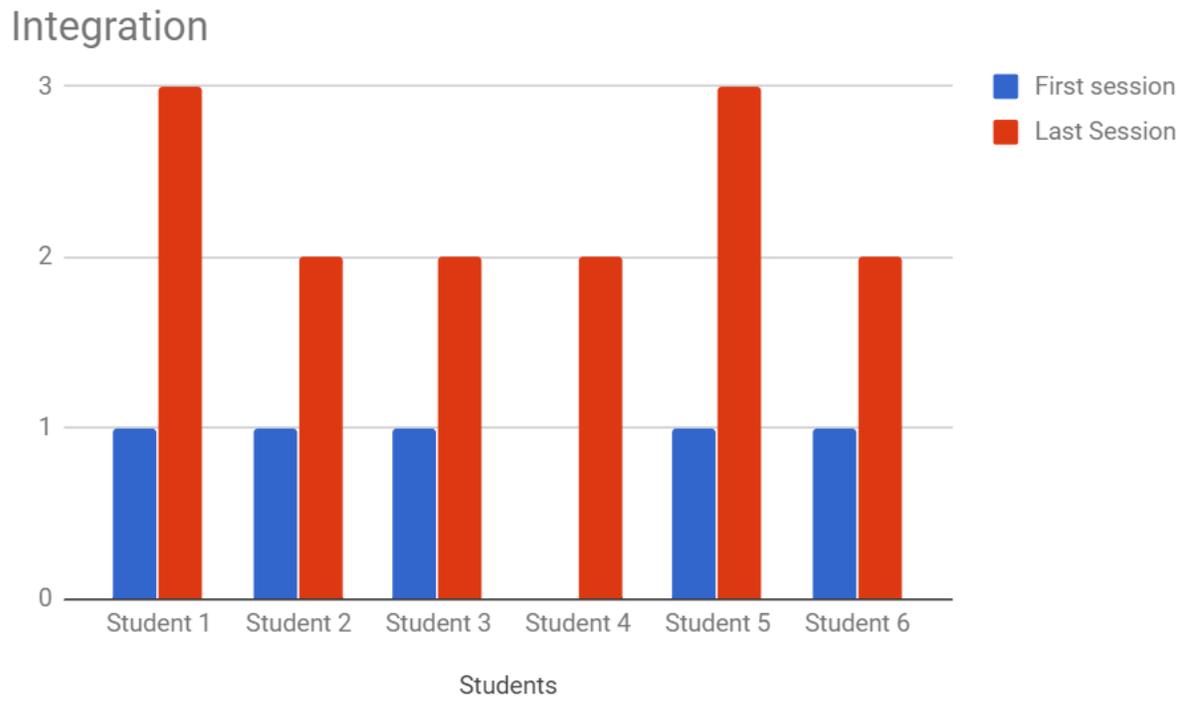
Table 2
Pausing

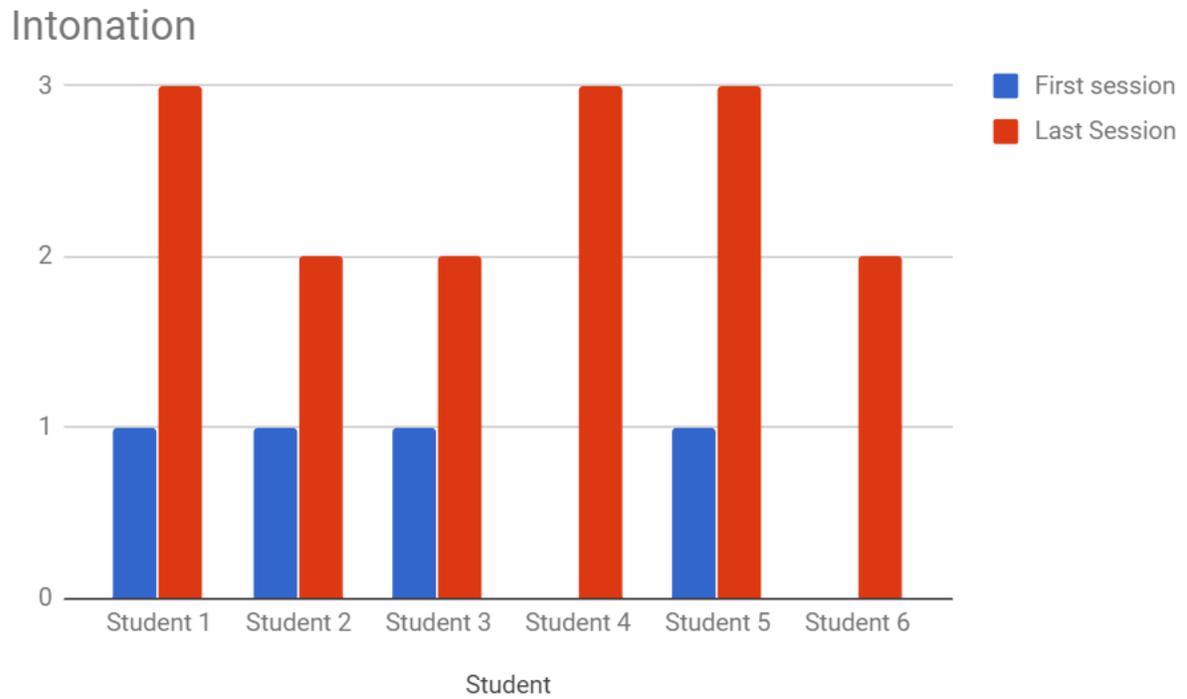Table 3
Phrasing

Table 4
Stress

Table 5
Intonation

Table 6
Rate

Rate

Student