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Rethinking our Definition of Fluency
Submitted by Helen Mannion, Delaware Valley Friends School

Highlighted as one of the five pillars of literacy by the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency instruction is an integral component of any researched based reading curriculum. Lessons that include fluency instruction and assessment are standard practice throughout schools yet “experts still disagree about the precise definition of reading fluency” (Morris & Gaffney, 2011, p. 331). How can it be that experts cannot agree upon this definition when fluency “is often responsible for driving major instructional decisions?” (as cited in Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, 2010, p. 230). If we do not have an agreed upon definition of fluency, how do we know we are assessing it correctly? Are there additional components to fluency that we are not currently assessing and using to inform our instruction? A discussion of recent research answers these questions and seeks to enhance our current instruction and assessment of fluency.

Fluency Definitions
Experts concur that fluency is a critical component of reading ability. However agreeing upon a definition for fluency is difficult because there are various components that can contribute to its construct. A review of current research highlights that “there seems to be a growing consensus that accuracy, automaticity, and prosody all make a contribution to its construct” (as cited in Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 231) yet the definitions vary widely in the emphasis they place on the separate components. “The current implementation of fluency instruction in many classrooms is often driven by assessments that build upon an incomplete conceptualization of [fluency] and can lead to both inappropriate instruction and a serious misconception of this essential characteristic of skilled reading” (p. 230). Effective instruction and accurate assessments require a thorough understanding of what constitutes fluency because “how we define a construct such as fluency...”

Fluency continued on pg 7
In the spring of 2012, a unique partnership formed between The Hill Center of Durham, North Carolina and two other groups; Mebane Charitable Foundation of Mocksville, North Carolina and Beaufort County Public Schools of Washington, North Carolina. This affiliation was created for the purpose of improving reading outcomes among K-3 students in the Beaufort County Schools by training teachers in the evidence-based, multi-sensory structured language Hill Center Reading Achievement Program (HillRAP) and the newly designed HillStrategies for Reading and Writing.

Training was conducted for kindergarten teachers in the Hill Early Literacy Program (HELP), a program designed to prepare very young children for the literacy instruction. With funding provided by the Mebane Charitable Foundation, The Hill Center developed a research-based “best practices” early literacy curriculum that brings together critical pre-reading research and creates a model for the successful development of reading skills in young children. The HELP curriculum serves as both a prevention and an intervention model for children at risk for failure to develop critical literacy skills and is based on several decades of research analyzing how children learn to read and write. Studies reveal that early literacy experiences are highly correlated with school achievement and enhanced productivity in adult life. The development of early literacy skills is important for all children, but especially important for children who do not have the advantage of literacy-rich experiences.

Through the HillStrategies for Reading and HillStrategies for Writing programs general education teachers were trained in multisensory strategies and activities for phonics, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, as well as multisensory strategies and activities for spelling, note taking skills, handwriting, and sentence, paragraph and research paper writing. The HillStrategies for Reading Assessment is delivered through an iPad application and allows teachers to identify students’ specific reading skill gaps. This allows teachers to group students appropriately and helps them to provide strategic group instruction efficiently.

Special education and reading teachers were trained in HillRAP. HillRAP is a combined curriculum and instructional process approach delivered on a 4:1 basis by teachers who are extensively trained in multi-sensory structured language professional development and provided follow-up classroom support, mentoring, and coaching during implementation. The HillRAP curriculum is segmented into eight levels and includes the components of phonological awareness, word attack/sight words, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. All pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students received instruction in the Hill Early Literacy Program while students in grades 1-5 were assessed to identify their needs. Assessment results and teacher recommendations identified students as: a) meeting expectations (Tier 1); b) needing strategic intervention (Tier 2); or c) needing intensive intervention (Tier 3). Tier 2 students received reading and writing strategies instruction in larger groups. Tier 3 students who were identified as needing intensive intervention received HillRAP.

Another facet of the partnership was the development of The Hill Center’s 10-hour online courses in HillStrategies for Reading and HillStrategies for Writing as a way to extend the training to those teachers who were unable to attend the onsite, in-person training. These interactive online courses include videos of teachers implementing a variety of
The Fourteenth Annual Graduation Ceremony for educators completing the IMSLEC accredited Children's Dyslexia Centers of New Jersey Initial Certification was held on May 23, 2013. The forty-one graduates had been scholarship recipients in a program funded by the Children's Dyslexia Centers in partnership with Fairleigh Dickinson University. Teachers were also awarded FDU’s IMSLEC accredited Orton Gillingham Teacher Certificate.

Dr. Mary Farrell, Director of the Center for Dyslexia Studies, and David Glattly, Deputy for New Jersey Scottish Rite, awarded the certificates to the adulation of over two hundred guests in the ballroom of the “Mansion”, summer home for the wealthy Twombly family in the early 1900’s and now part of FDU’s Madison campus. The picture above shows the graduating class, along with program faculty, on the marble, winding staircase in the main hall of the Mansion.

Teachers were cheered on by the parents, grandparents, spouses, and children who supported them throughout the rigorous two-year program. Thurman Pace, Past Deputy for New Jersey Scottish Rite, awarded Constance Harrell, one of FDU’s first trained and longest serving Orton Gillingham instructors, the John Philip Berquist Award for her ceaseless efforts to improve the lives of children and older community members who are dyslexic.

The Second Annual Phyllis Meisel Scholar Award was presented to graduate, Elizabeth Bradley by Barbara McAuliffe, Director of the Northfield Center, in recognition of Elizabeth’s exceptional skill in teaching the Orton Gillingham approach and in remembrance of Phyllis’s contribution to the joint program.

Scholarship recipients complete the twelve-credit, four semester program through Fairleigh Dickenson continued on pg 11
The Hill Center, a nationally-recognized program for students with learning differences and ADHD, received a Federal Grant in 2011 to support Drop Out Prevention and partner with Orange County Public Schools and the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association to provide best practices professional development for more than 200 Orange County middle and high school teachers, support for parents, and training for 10 special education teachers to implement the Hill Reading Achievement Program (HillRAP) with 40 at-risk Orange County middle and high school students.

HillRAP is an evidenced-based, multisensory structured language approach to teaching reading and writing, incorporating the five essential components of a successful reading program based on The National Reading Panel Report 2000. Instruction is based on student assessment and individualized instruction in phonological awareness, word attack/sight words, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

The “Doing Our Part” effort provided intensive remediation for struggling 6th through 12th graders in the Orange County Schools. It was district teachers themselves who originally sought the training, as they were eager to provide remediation for the middle and high school students who had “fallen through the cracks” academically. The teachers were passionate about giving these students one last opportunity to experience success. Interventions delivered were “Tier III” interventions, which are more intensive than the Tier II interventions already employed, and were appropriate for the participating students who were performing an average of 5-6 years below grade level in reading.

Students involved in HillRAP were selected based on performance as measured by previous End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading tests, NC English I, and subtests from an informal Basic Reading Inventory. They received a minimum of 60 hours of instruction from October 2011 to May 2012 in a group setting with a 1:4 teacher-student ratio. Training in HillRAP was rigorous for seven high school teachers and three middle school teachers who completed 45 hours of course work in reading instruction and a year-long coaching/mentoring component with 5 classroom observations to ensure HillRAP was delivered with fidelity. In addition to completing required coursework, HillRAP teachers passed an exit exam, completed a follow-up activity to show proficiency in acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and met a case study requirement for the HillRAP course.

In addition to special educators being trained in HillRAP, scholarships were provided for both online and on-site Hill Center professional development for 200 Orange County general educators to participate in specially-designed Strategies Workshops to enhance their abilities to individualize study skills and learning strategies applicable across the curriculum. Other workshop topics included Dif
ferentiated Instruction, Teaching Study Skills, Understanding Learning Differences, Phonics Breaking the Code, Multisensory Grammar, Reading Comprehension, and Vocabulary Development.

A third component of the grant provided Orange County families opportunities to attend NCPTA and Hill-developed parent programs to develop and enhance increased awareness of their child’s needs and improved ability to support their child with the increased demands of middle and high school academics. Home libraries of ten books were provided for each student involved in the program. HillRAP teachers, media specialists, and students provided topics and areas of interest to determine the selection of books for each of the home libraries. iPod Shuffles were also provided to all students uploaded with audiobooks so they could listen to books that are beyond their decoding level to improve comprehension and vocabulary. HillRAP teachers provided instruction for use of the Shuffles. Students receiving iPods were excited and happy to have a resource to compensate for their difficulty in comprehension of grade level text. The process of selecting books for their home libraries with their teachers served multiple functions: creating excitement about books, use of Internet tools, and opportunities for guided exploration of appropriate reading materials for their interests and abilities. A sense of investment in them by their teacher provided an increased desire to achieve. A Parent Resource Library was also placed in every school in the project.

Students who participated in HillRAP, on average, attended 63 out of 78 possible one-hour sessions from October 2011 to May 2012. Across all grades, 32 students made the following average progress from pre-test to post-test using Woodcock Johnson-III Test of Achievement reading subtests:

---Word Attack: Pre-test average: Below 3rd grade. Post-test average growth: 1.62 years
---Word Identification: Pre-test average: 3.7. Post-test average growth: .73 (7 months)
---Reading Fluency: Pre-test average: 4th grade. Post-test average growth: .23 (2 months)
---Broad Reading: Pre-test average: 3.5. Post-test average growth: .88 (8 months+)
---Reading Vocabulary: Pre-test average: 3.2. Post-test average growth: 3.0 (3 years)
---Passage Comprehension: Pre-test average: 3.1. Post-test average growth: 1.87 (~2 years)

* Students made greater than expected gains typical of an average-achieving student in several areas tested.

Mr. Marsh, Assistant Principal of Orange High School, was witness to HillRAP classes throughout the school year since a group met outside his office in the conference area. He was overwhelmed by the involvement and investment these students made in HillRAP classes. He heard them learning rules for the six kinds of syllables, practicing decoding words, building fluency, interpreting expository and narrative texts, and getting positive, personal feedback. “Mrs. Strong was amazing as she was constantly giving students instruction, encouragement and had them engaged the entire session. I could hear them reading their timed tests and improving their scores and knowing these students as I do, was so impressed at their commitment to their work. When I asked them what was the difference in this approach to reading than others they all said, ‘It took the mystery out of figuring out words’.”

Based on data that documents student progress, The Hill Center and Orange County Schools have collaboratively developed a plan to continue the HillRAP imple-
mentation for middle and high school students in Orange County beyond this grant funding. In addition, the program will be expanded to the elementary level. Orange County is using district funds to sustain the program. Teacher response to the program was extremely positive, and they requested that HillRAP be continued and expanded. They expressed that it gave them the tools to provide individualized, structured instruction to struggling learners and they truly feel that their professional development has been enhanced. They are now able to assess and instruct with more effectiveness and confidence.

When students were asked to share their experience with HillRAP, the common thread centered on reading improvement, increased confidence, and higher general classroom performance. Several students finished the EOG reading test with greatly improved scores and shared that this was the first Reading EOG they could actually read. Numerous students felt they were reading more for pleasure, as well as class material, by using their newly acquired tools to successfully sound words out. A few students spoke about avoiding situations requiring reading prior to HillRAP, and now reported that they felt they didn’t need to avoid anything. One student described it as having “power” for the first time. Other students involved in athletics shared how their fear of poor academic performance would keep them from playing sports prior to HillRAP and how that had changed...they now felt academic success was possible. Overall, this reading program has given hope to those 40 secondary students who know all too well what it’s like to fail. This “hope” for students who potentially could drop out is one giant step toward keeping these at-risk students in school. When high school kids ask to continue a reading class for a second year, you know it’s working!

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determines and influences to a large degree how we will measure it” (Valencia, Smith, Reece, Min, Wixson & Newman, 2010, p. 289).

**Fluency = Accuracy + Automaticity (rate)**

“There is little dispute that accurate, automatic word recognition is a critical component of fluent reading” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 238) but a growing body of research shows that “fluency is related to accuracy and rate, but not synonymous with them” (Garnett, 2011, p. 296). Current practices in many classrooms, however, measure reading fluency as a “a computational estimate of reading fluency: word accuracy plus reading rate, commonly assessed by the students reading aloud a calibrated passage and the teacher then calculating the number of words read correctly per minute, wcpm.” (p. 294). The standard practice is to measure fluency in one minute intervals even though current research indicates that “one minute of reading overestimates reading rate for second and fourth graders” (Valencia et al., 2010, p. 277) and that “having students read for slightly longer may increase the predictive power of accuracy scores” (p. 278). Despite the potential inaccuracy of this fluency calculation, it “is considered by some to reflect both word recognition and comprehension competence” (as cited, p. 271). Unfortunately “several studies have found considerably low correlations between wcpm and reading comprehension” (as cited, p. 273). This does not come as a surprise to some researchers who are concerned about the over emphasis of instruction to increase speed and accuracy. They warn of “the risks of teaching to a test of wcpm and the potential for comprehension to become detached from reading aloud” (as cited, p. 285).

There is also increasing concern that wcpm scores are being misused as general indicators of reading ability. Research shows that “relying solely on wcpm measures may fail to identify a substantial number of students who have reading difficulty, especially those with a difficulty in comprehension” (p. 288). Unfortunately, “these scores have been integrated into many different instructional programs and generic guidelines for assessment, making the consequences significant for students” (p. 288).

Clearly the definition of fluency should include accuracy and automaticity. Research, however, is suggesting that an over reliance on accuracy and automaticity “simply because they are the most quantifiable elements of fluency” (as cited in Kuhn et al, 2010, p. 238) may lead to a very “limited view of fluency, [and] it is essential that reading educators consider a broader definition of fluency, one that places weight on its less quantifiable elements” (p. 239).

**Fluency = Accuracy + Automaticity + Prosody**

While adding prosody to the definition of fluency is less quantifiable, it is arguably a very critical component of reading fluency. Prosody is defined as the ability to read with “appropriate expression or intonation coupled with phrasing that allows for maintenance of meaning” (p. 232). Measuring prosody is subjective, but consistency is possible when using the prosody rubric created by Zutell & Rasinki (1991). This rubric enables the teacher to rate a reader’s expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace. Research has shown that “adding a prosody measure to a single wcpm measure did improve predictions of comprehension ...[and] the models that included individual measures of rate, accuracy and prosody improved the prediction even further for all grades...but most especially at later stages of reading development”(Valencia et al., p. 285). This research shows that there is a relationship between prosody and comprehension, but further research is needed to determine if comprehension leads to prosody or prosody leads to comprehension and if there is a reciprocal relationship between prosody and comprehension.

**Fluency = Accuracy + Automaticity + Prosody + Comprehension**

The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension and many researchers question how fluency can be assessed without an associated measurement of comprehension.
Research has shown that “instruction that aims at increasing students’ wcpm without attention to comprehension has the potential to adversely affect comprehension and knowledge acquisition.” (Heibert, Samuels & Rasinski, 2012, p. 113). They warn that if a student can read fluently but has little comprehension, the fluency measurement has little validity. This fact that “meaning can be detached from fluent reading has very practical implications, reminding teachers to emphasize meaning making and to actively promote students’ monitoring of meaning” (Garnett, 2011, p. 298). Valencia and her colleagues’ research (2010) demonstrated the “increasing relationship between fluency and comprehension when fluency is defined as simultaneous attention to rate, accuracy, prosody and comprehension” (p. 286). The results of their research highlight that “having a comprehension focus for oral reading fluency assessments seems essential to the construct validity of oral reading fluency and the goal of skilled reading” (p. 287).

Current Research-Based Fluency Definition
The exact definition of fluency is still being debated, but it is important that the assessments used to measure fluency accurately reflect a definition of fluency that incorporates results of current research. Kuhn, Schwanenflugel & Meisinger (2010) have created a definition that attempts to synthesize current research:

Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity and oral reading prosody, which, taken together, facilitate the reader’s construction of meaning. It is demonstrated during oral reading through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit or support comprehension. (p. 240)

Using this definition of fluency to inform instruction and guide assessments will help teachers develop interventions that will meet the literacy needs of their students.
In the 2012-2013 school year a total of 172 Beaufort County teachers were trained in either HillRAP or HillStrategies and these teachers impacted over 4,700 students with their new skills. Mrs. Betty Jane Green, the principal of John Small Elementary School, commented that she had seen positive results from HillRAP instruction at her school: "We are all anxiously awaiting the end of the year to see how much our HillRAP students have grown, but we have already seen many benefits to the program. First, students enjoy going to the class. They love feeling successful and can recognize that their reading improvement assists them in all of their classes. They do not like to miss that period for any reason and always ask me if the substitute will be able to do the HillRAP session if their teacher is absent. Second, student behavior has improved. Many of the students who attend HillRAP were discipline problems in the past, but, through HillRAP, they have met with success and feel more a part of regular classroom activities. Third, academic achievement for these students has improved in their other classes. Classroom teachers report that students who would not read in their classes are now volunteering. Some of the HillRAP students are now on the Honor Roll. Fourth, parents love the program. They have reported to me that their children did not like school before they started HillRAP and now have blossomed. We have children that will now step up and do the readings in their church, whereas, prior to HillRAP, they would not participate at all. Many times, I have heard ‘I don’t know what the RAP is, but my child loves it and talks about how he can read just like everybody else now.’ Fifth, HillRAP students are learning character building. They have learned to set a goal and work toward it. They have learned that with support and perseverance, they can achieve.”

The Hill Center looks forward to continuing its partnership with both the Beaufort County Public Schools and the Mebane Charitable Foundation and future training is planned for the 2013-14 school year. Partnerships such as this one benefit all constituencies, but are particularly important as early interventions since HillRAP and HillStrategies have the power to change struggling readers into successful students.

2012 - 2013 Hill Center Beaufort County Cohort
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Drs. David Chard and Julie Masterson come together for two-day dyslexia symposium

The 17th Annual DuBard Symposium: Dyslexia and Related Disorders, brings together 15 speakers from different backgrounds to create an all-encompassing two-day symposium for professionals and parents alike. Professionals in their field, Dr. David Chard, Dean of the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University, and Dr. Julie Masterson, Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Missouri State University, will serve as keynote speakers to kick off each day.

Topics include Transforming Education: Balancing Innovation with Evidence with Dr. Chard, Spelling, Reading and Writing: Using Metalinguistic Skills to Enhance Literacy Performance with Dr. Masterson; Experiencing Dyslexia – A Learning Disabilities Simulation; MSL Methods – What’s Alike and What’s Different; and the use of iPads for People with Disabilities, to name a few. Held in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, September 18-19, 2013, this two-day event is only $115 to attend. The symposium offers a diverse selection of breakout sessions, as well as a parent track and a professional track on the second day.

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DuBard continued on pg 11
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IMSLEC Annual Meetings  
Tuesday November 5

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council Lunch</td>
<td>NOON</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Meeting</td>
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Location: Hilton New Orleans Riverside  
Additional details will follow.

Note: All meetings will be held on Tuesday ~ before the conference begins.