Reading Lab by MaryPat Caldwell



This month I would like to discuss fluency. What is it? Why is it important? Fluency is the ability to read with accuracy, speed and prosody (expression and phrasing). Fluency is important because fluent readers have more mental attention available to comprehend the text – *the ultimate goal of reading*. As children are learning to read, the initial focus should be on accuracy. In the initial phases of learning to decode (sound-out) words, a child may need to read one sound at a time, and their oral reading might sound very labored. That is fine! At this phase, we want our readers to slow down and attend to each letter. With enough multisensory instruction and practice, decoding will eventually become automatic. How long that takes will depend on each individual student and their particular learning profile. From the beginning it is important to directly teach students about fluency. As I dig into books with my students, I tell them that the first time we read, we read to make sure we are reading the words accurately. The second time we read, we read to practice our fluency (*reading in whole words and phrases, "reading" the punctuation and reading with expression*). Lots of modeling is critical at this phase. Once fluent our main focus can shift to comprehension. Some children will need many repetitions to read a text fluently. That is fine! It is important to find meaningful and motivating opportunities to practice. Poems, plays and reading aloud to family members and younger children are great opportunities for repeated reading. Echo reading is another great way to model and practice fluency. Having children record their reading and self evaluate for fluency is also very effective. When assessing fluency, I evaluate both words correct per minute ("WCPM") and prosody (expression and phrasing) based on a four point scale (see below). It is important to use caution when evaluating words per minute, as there are many factors that contribute to a reader's pace including working memory and processing speed. Pace can also vary depending on the type of text and text complexity. While not all children will be fast readers, most can improve their pace, and read with automaticity and prosody. Building fluency takes time, and children develop at their own pace. Practice will be most effective when done with a patient and encouraging adult.

Click here for sample fluency scale:
http://roadtocomprehension.com/pdvideo/pdfs/D1_06.pdf

Click here for sample WCPM scale:
https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/2017%20ORF%20NORMS%20PDF.pdf