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Using Common Formative Assessments to Guide Fluency Instruction

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An Action Research Report

by Kelly Adrian, Christa Ranweiler, and Abbigail Volek

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Abstract

In the Spring of 2013, first-grade literacy data were reviewed and we concluded that changes needed to occur with teacher instructional methods to ensure growth in student reading fluency. We collaborated to find what effect common formative assessments would have on teachers' abilities to help students meet reading fluency benchmarks. Data were collected on 52 first-grade students within three classroom settings. Throughout this process, teachers monitored student progress toward proficiency in reading fluency, in particular rate, through the use of common formative assessments, teacher observation notes and teacher collaboration. After the data collection period, results showed that the use of common formative assessments had a positive effect on students' reading fluency. We plan to use the data to guide reading intervention groups in the future and will continue to collaborate during weekly PLCs to adjust instruction to meet our students' needs.

As a team of educators of primary students, we continuously critique and change what our instruction looks like in order to help our young students become better readers. Our goal is for students to improve their reading confidence and to read fluently. We resolved to collaborate as a team to research the following question: What effect will common formative assessments have on teachers' abilities to help first-grade students meet fluency standards?

"The development of reading fluency is an important aspect of becoming an efficient reader" (Nes Ferrara 2005, p. 215). According to Angie Ritter, Minnesota Reading Corps Specialist, duet reading is an effective intervention and strategy that enhances fluency rate (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013). Repeated readings help foster sight word automaticity through exposure of predictable text (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013). Reader's Theater enhances expression and student confidence when utilized in the classroom (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013). Students are given the opportunity to showcase their prosody and expression when performing a Reader's Theater script (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013).

There are also various grouping strategies for promoting oral reading fluency. These include: whole group, small group, peer directed learning and individualized instruction. In primary classrooms, small group instruction generally consists of six students or fewer. Teachers listen to students read aloud and make judgments regarding their progress towards mastering reading fluency. Monitoring students in a small group setting helps to ensure that students are participating in appropriate interventions and benefitting from instructional strategies that support their needs.

According to Dixon and Williams (2002), "teachers must be able to understand the nature and function of formative assessment in the teaching/learning process, and also to utilize information formatively" (p. 1). The results of formative assessments allow teachers to make accurate decisions when forming instructional groups. In the assessment-centered classroom, formative assessments help both teachers and students monitor progress. These imperative tools are used to provide both teachers and students with immediate and ongoing feedback regarding student learning. Weekly fluency probes can be a form of formative assessment of reading fluency. By monitoring student progress with fluency probes, teachers can numerically measure and chart students' oral reading rate.

Bailey and Jakicic (2012) draw on DuFour et al. (2010) to suggest the term *common assessment* refers to those assessments given by teacher teams who teach the same content or grade level--those with "'collective responsibility for the learning of a group of students who are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills'" (p. 16). Common formative assessments allow students to showcase their learning and allow teachers, as collaborative teams, to closely monitor student understanding of particular skills on a weekly basis. Using the results from the assessments, teachers pinpoint strengths and weaknesses among their students and adjust instruction and intervention groups accordingly. Bailey and Jakicic (2012) quote DuFour et al. (2010) as stating that common formative assessments do the following:

1. Promote efficiency for teachers

2. Promote equity for students

3. Provide an effective strategy for determining whether the guaranteed

   curriculum is being taught and, more importantly, learned

4. Inform the practice of individual teachers

5. Build a team's capacity to improve its program

6. Facilitate a systematic, collective response to student who are experiencing

difficulty

7. Offer the most powerful tool for changing adult behavior and practice (p. 16).

According to DuFour et al (2010) "common assessment means student learning

will be assessed using the same instrument or process and according to the same criteria"

(p.16). As a team we chose to implement AIMSweb probes as our common formative

assessments provided by Pearson. Pearson (2011) has shown that:

   Listening to a child read graded passages aloud for one minute and

   calculating the number of words read correct per minute provides a highly

   reliable and valid measure of general reading achievement, including

   comprehension, for most students. To assist educators in assessing

   students using the reading probes, Pearson has developed high quality sets

   of Standard Reading Assessment Passages for Grades K-8 as part of the

   AIMSweb system (2011).

AIMSweb provides one-minute grade-level fluency probes, which gather correct

words per minute read by each student, as well as their errors. At the conclusion of each

probe, data is stored in a web-based system and a graph is created to show correct words

read and errors produced by each student. Each graph also includes a goal-trend line that

each student is striving to achieve. Each week we used the same probe in all three classrooms in order to assess student progress in a precise way.

In the next section, we will describe the process of how we addressed the action research question within our first-grade classrooms.

The Description of Research Process

The research conducted by our team occurred over the course of four weeks at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. Data were collected from our three first-grade classrooms using common formative assessments, teacher observations during small group instruction, and notes recorded during our teacher collaboration meetings.

Our classrooms are located in a rural district outside of the Twin Cities. The town consists of about seven thousand community members. There is minimal cultural diversity among the students in our district and approximately 40% of students receive free and reduced lunch. Our school is a Kindergarten through second-grade building consisting of approximately four hundred students. There are seven sections of first grade classrooms within our building. Our research tracked the data in three of the seven first grade classrooms. Next we describe the demographics of our classrooms; we use the terms Classroom A, Classroom B, and Classroom C to protect the confidentiality of our participants.

Classroom A consists of 18 students, of whom 11 are girls and seven are boys. Within this classroom, three students receive special education services, while one student receives ELL services. Reading Corps, Title I and RtI services are provided to five students.

Classroom B consists of 18 students, of whom ten are girls and eight are boys. Within this classroom, three students receive special education services, while no students receive ELL services. Reading Corps, Title I and RtI services are provided to four students.

Classroom C consists of 18 students, of whom ten are girls and eight are boys. Within this classroom, two students receive special education services, while two students receive ELL services. Reading Corps, Title I and RtI services are provided to six students.

The first step conducted within our action research involved collecting baseline data from the first-grade students within our three classrooms during pre-conferences on September 3rd and 4th. To collect this data, we used the online assessment tool called, AIMSweb .We all used the same AIMSweb probe to collect baseline data. From there, an initial benchmark of 12 words per minute was set for each student, based on his or her initial score.

Students participated in weekly progress-monitoring fluency probes with the use of the same progress-monitoring tool through AIMSweb (see Appendix A). These probes served as common formative assessments. The assessments were used as a tool to measure student progress toward the reading fluency benchmark on a weekly basis. The same probes were used by each classroom teacher and were conducted each Wednesday afternoon during the course of each data collection week.

Every Thursday, we looked thorough observational notes that we collected during small group reading and skill work sessions. Each classroom teacher used small group instruction in order to best meet the needs of each student's individual skill set. Students

engaged in a variety of activities with peers of similar skill sets. Often, students would work alongside their peers and classroom teacher during these small group interactions. During these small group sessions, teachers recorded notes on each student using a data collection document (see Appendix B). Observational notes taken were specific to rate: word attack skills, automaticity in sight words, fluidity or lack thereof, and the automaticity of recognizing familiar phrases. After these notes were recorded, teachers worked to transfer their findings to a Google document that was visible to all teachers involved in this research.

The next portion of our action research involved the use of collaboration among the teachers included within the action research project. We met each Friday during the data collection period to discuss the data collected each week. During these collaboration meetings, we shared the notes we recorded during small group work sessions with students, as well as data collected from the common formative assessments (see Appendix C). This combination sparked meaningful conversations regarding trends seen within each classroom. Using the data, we were able to aid each other in grouping students with similar instructional needs. Students were grouped into three different categories:

1. Proficient

2. Partially Proficient

3. Non-proficient

Students within the proficient category were able to read 12 correct words per minute or more on the initial assessment. These students also portrayed some degree of automaticity in their sight word recognition and blending skills. Students in this category,

however, varied in their abilities to effectively use appropriate expression, prosody, and intonation when they read. Because "researchers have argued that the definition of reading fluency should extend beyond the observable behaviors of reading rate, accuracy, and prosody," we concentrated on expression, prosody, and intonation during small group sessions that developed necessary fluency skills that met this group's instructional needs (Hasbrouck & Tindal 1992, p. 636).

Students within the partially proficient category scored between six and 11 correct words per minute on the initial assessment. These students portrayed some sight word recognition skills and varied in their abilities to blend unfamiliar words with or without prompting. Readers in this category were choppy at times and lacked appropriate expression when reading. As expected, the majority of our students fell into this partially proficient group.

The third category consisted of students who were non-proficient. These students read five correct words or less per minute. Non-proficient students lacked any sight word recognition skills and also struggled with blending skills, even when prompted by the teacher. Students in this category seemed to lack confidence and were very timid to even attempt any kind of word attack strategy.

During our first week of collaboration, our main focus was to discuss these three student groups. We discussed strengths and weaknesses among these groups, and in the end we were able to choose interventions that fit each of our groups' needs accordingly. We chose to implement four different interventions among our groups.

The intervention we chose to implement with our proficient group was Reader's Theater. We felt this would be a good fit for this particular group because these students

had high levels of automaticity in their sight word recognition and blending techniques, and displayed a good level of word flow. However, these students lacked expression and appropriate pauses while reading, so we thought Reader's Theater would improve their lack of skills. We chose to work with students on their Reader's Theater scripts twice per week during small group time in order to support, model and practice desired reading behaviors.

The next category was the partially proficient group. Since this was our largest group of students, we took the time to disaggregate this group's strengths and weaknesses, and were thus able to be more specific about each student's area for growth. In this category, we found that there were two sub-groups that appeared to have two very different needs, so we divided students accordingly and chose separate interventions for each group.

One group of students in this category had strong sight word automaticity, but lacked blending skills. For this group, we decided to implement repeated readings as the intervention. We met with students individually twice per week to practice the repeated readings. The remaining days we worked in small groups with a focus on blending techniques and Fry Phrases in order to build student skill sets and confidence levels in the area of blending and word attack. Fry Phrases are a group of familiar phrases that have been developed from Dolce Sight Words. These sight words are the most common sight words in primary literature. We implemented this strategy because "fluency is a skill that develops with practice and observation and permits the reader to grasp larger units and even phrases with intermediate recognition" (Nes Ferrara, 2005, p. 215).

The second group of students within this category had strong blending skills, but lacked automaticity in their sight word recognition. Therefore, we chose to implement duet reading with these students. This particular intervention supported students with sound blending skills, and pushed students along in their word flow and sight word recognition. This was important because "other reading skills that fluent readers demonstrate are automaticity in sight word recognition, word attack strategies, self-correction, comprehension skills, and the ability to read in a flowing manner throughout while implementing appropriate expression" (Nes Ferrara, 2005, p.216). We decided to meet with students twice per week to practice duet reading in a one-on-one setting. The remaining days we worked on specific sight word recognition activities, Fry Phrases, and word attack strategies. By supporting students in these particular areas, we believed we would see the most growth over the course of the four-week data collection period.

The non-proficient group consisted of our most vulnerable group of students. We noticed strong negative emotional responses among these students. Our conversation during collaboration about this group revolved around how we could best support the intense needs of these students. We chose to implement letter sound automaticity exercises, intense blending skill work, and sight word recognition activities in order to build students' skills from the ground up. We agreed to meet with these students twice per week to work on these specific skills individually with children, in addition to during small group.

At the conclusion of the data collection period, we administered the initial probe again in order to find out if students improved their fluency. All students took this post-

assessment probe to display fluency gains or discrepancies. During our final reflective session, we discussed the growth students made over the data collection period.

Data Analysis

After our four-week data collection period, we began the data analysis process. We started by reviewing our baseline data. We looked at students who met the benchmark of 12 correct words per minute on the initial probe, as well as students who did not meet the benchmark. We compared the following groups of students: students who met the benchmark at the pre-assessment and the post-assessment, students who did not meet the benchmark at the pre-assessment, but then did meet the benchmark at the post-assessment, and students who did not meet the benchmark at either assessment. We also looked at students who improved throughout the data collection period, as shown in *Figure 1*.

Data was collected for a total of 52 students. At the time of our data collection process in early September, we came to find that just under half of our students were reading at a proficient rate. To be exact, 48% of students met the benchmark while 52% of students did not meet the benchmark on the pre-assessment. At the end of our data collection period, we found that 67% of students met the benchmark at the post assessment while 35% of students did not. Ninety percent of students showed improvement from the pre-assessment to the post assessment, leaving 10% of students who did not improve from the pre-assessment to the post assessment. Lastly, 21% of students did not meet the benchmark at either the pre-assessment or post-assessment.

Figure 1.
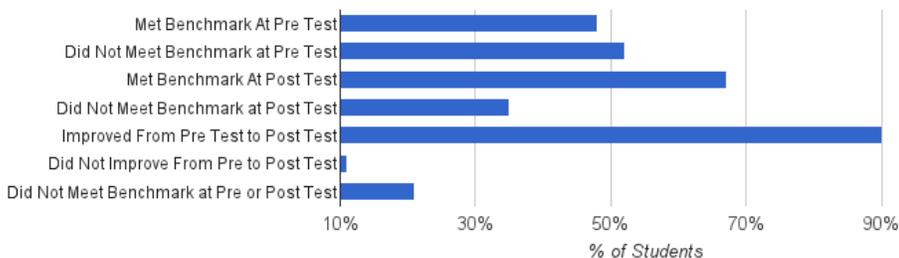
Figure 1. Overall student performance on common formative assessments.

After analyzing our data as a whole, we broke it down into several sub-categories. The first category we analyzed was based on gender. We found that 36% of boys and 57% of girls met the benchmark at the pre-assessment. Sixty-four percent of boys and 43% of girls did not meet the benchmark at the pre-assessment. Forty-five percent of boys and 83% of girls also met the benchmark at the post-assessment. Fifty-five percent of boys and 17% of girls did not meet the benchmark at the post-assessment. Ninety-one percent of boys improved from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. One hundred percent of girls improved from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Fifty-five percent of boys did not meet the benchmark at pre-assessment or post-assessment. Seventeen percent of girls also did not meet the benchmark at pre-assessment or post assessment. Analyzing our data based on gender was interesting. As first-grade teachers, we tend to see that girls show stronger reading abilities than boys do at this age. Therefore, it was interesting to see that the data we collected correlated with the overall general findings that we have as teachers.
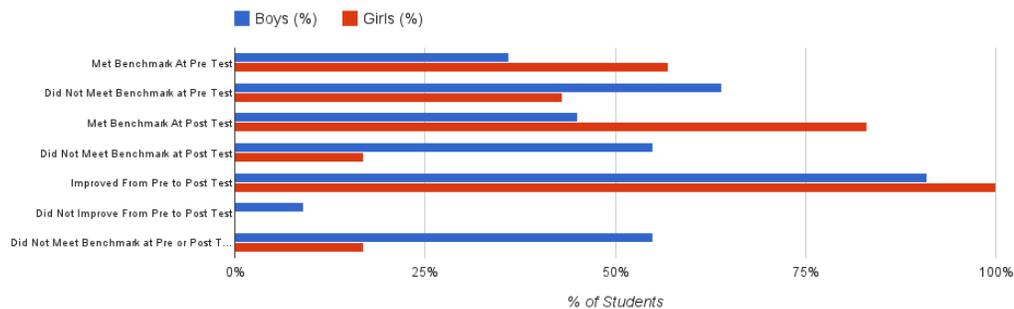
Figure 2.

Figure 2. Overall student performance by gender.

The next category we looked at were students who receive special education services. One hundred percent of special education students did not meet the benchmark at the pre-assessment or post-assessment. Although students within this category did not meet the benchmark, 100% of students within this category did improve from pre-assessment to post-assessment.
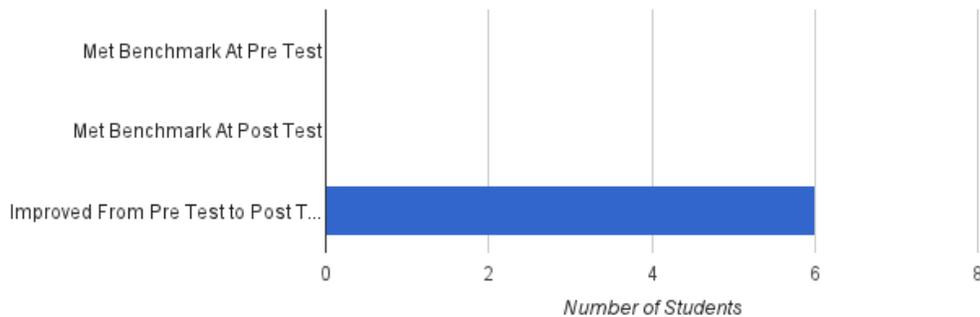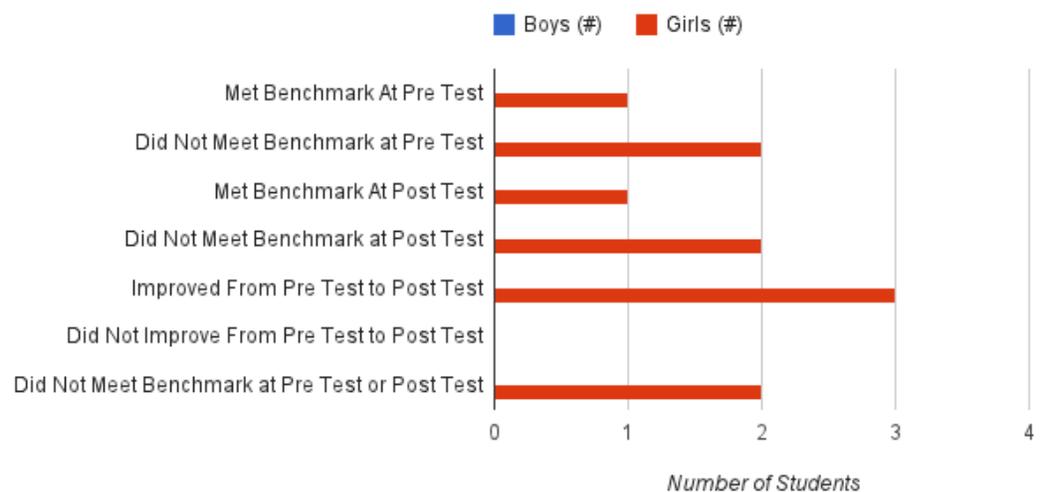
Figure 3

Figure 3. Results from students who receive special education services.

Our third category consisted of our English Language Learners. All of the students within this category were girls. Thirty-three percent of these students met the

benchmark at the pre-assessment and 66% of the students did not. At the end of the

collection period, we found that 33% of students met the benchmark at the post-

assessment while 66% of the students did not. One hundred percent of students within

this category improved from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Sixty-six percent

of students did not meet the benchmark at the pre- or post assessment.
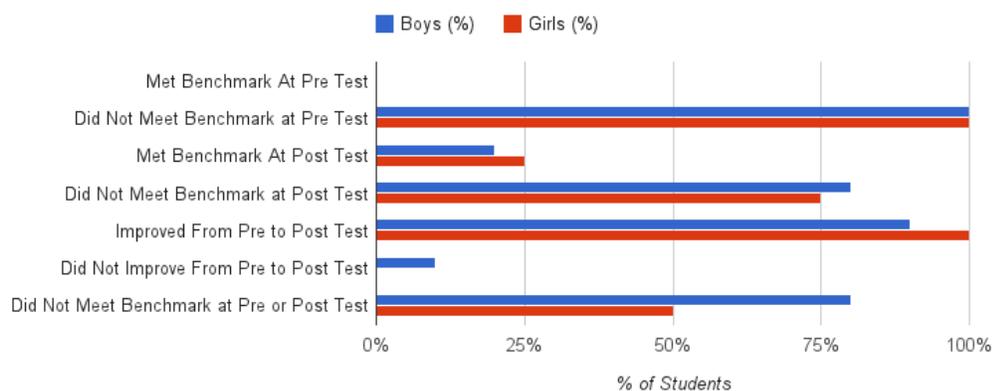
Figure 4.

Figure 4. Results from English Language Learners.

Our fourth and final category consisted of students who were receiving reading

intervention services in our building during the time of data collection. These services

included Reading Corps, Title I and Response to Intervention. Within this category, 0%

of students met the benchmark at the pre-assessment. Twenty percent of boys met the

benchmark at the post-assessment leaving 80% who did not. Twenty-five percent of girls

met the benchmark at post-assessment, while 75% of the girls did not. Ninety percent of

the boys improved from pre-assessment to post-assessment and 10% did not. One

hundred percent of the girls improved from the pre-assessment to post-assessment. Eighty

percent of the boys did not meet the benchmark at the pre-assessment or post-assessment,

and 50% of the girls did not meet the benchmark at the pre-assessment or post-

assessment.

Figure 5.

Figure 5. Results from students receiving reading intervention services.

As we continued to analyze our data, we began the process of coding our

observational notes from the four-week period. We coded our data into seven categories

and looked for trends among the data (see Appendix D). The codes we used were:

- *Noticed Word Flow (NWF)*
- *Noticed Blending (NB)*
- *Noticed Sight Word Recognition (NSWR)*
- *Noticed Expression (NEX)*
- *Discussed General Comments (DGC)*
- *Noticed Emotional Response (NER)*
- *Noticed Prior Knowledge (NPK)*

Noticed word flow was the code we used when we identified moments in the data

when we were monitoring the rate of reading fluency that students displayed. Examples

included are our observations of a steady rate, choppy rate, or lack of rate at all. *Noticed*

blending was the code we used when we described word attack skills, and students'

ability to do attack words when prompted or unprompted. This code also included the

automaticity with which students were able to decode given words. *Noticed sight word*

recognition was the code we used to describe our observations of students' automaticity

and identification of sight words. *Noticed student emotional response* was the code we

used to capture our observations of a student's confidence level, distractibility level, and

a general sense of comfort or lack thereof during reading. *Noticed expression* was the

code we used in order to take note of the use of expression or lack thereof during

observation. This code also included observations of students' appropriate and

inappropriate uses of pauses, inflection, and voice according to punctuation. *Discussed*

general comments was the code we used in order to take note of vague comments we may

have made during the course of our collaboration meetings. *Noticed prior knowledge* was

the code we used when we noticed that we were taking note of students' abilities to use

prior knowledge in order to read in a fluent manner.
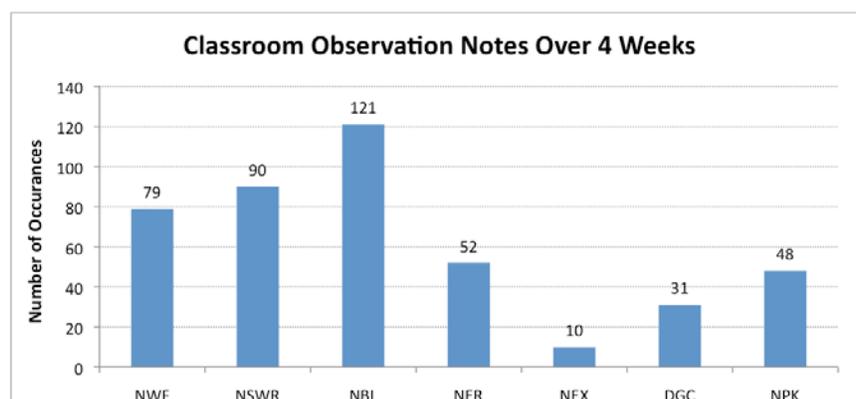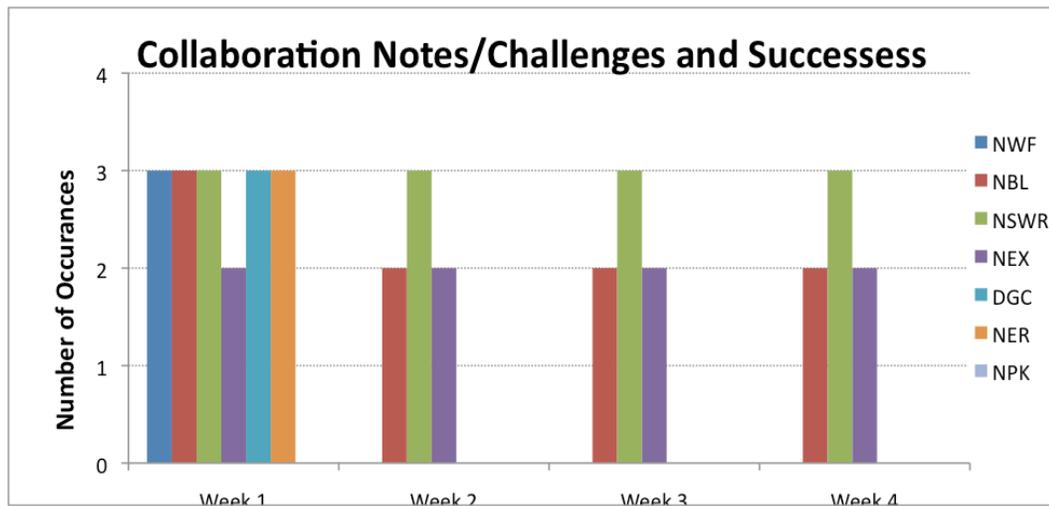
Figure 6. Coding Occurrences

Figure 7. Coding by week.

When we analyzed the data, we came to find that we used three of the codes in abundance compared to the others: *Noticed student word flow* was used in 79 instances; *noticed sight word recognition* was observed 90 times; and *noticed blending* was used 21 times. *Noticed student emotional response* was used 2 times and *noticed expression* was found 10 times. There were 31 *general comments discussed* and lastly, *noticed prior knowledge* was used total of 48 times.

When looking back at our first week of notes, the codes described above were used minimally compared to how many times they were used later in the three weeks. As a team, we think that this occurred because during the first week it was our very first time meeting the students, and it was an entirely new experience for students to participate in fluency probes. We noticed, however, that there was one code that appeared frequently in the early stages of data collection: *noticed student emotional response*. This reflects one of the challenges we faced when working with students who were not familiar with us. Throughout the benchmark setting process, we noticed students, some more than others, who appeared to feel uncomfortable, nervous, or anxious while reading to us. Following

discussion, our team decided that some of the data collected might have been impacted by these emotional responses. It is likely that students' "true colors" may not have shown during the course of the pre-assessment. Another, more specific behavior that was prevalent during the pre-assessment was students' hesitation to move forward with any type of word blending without prompting from us. We believe the hesitation of students stemmed from the fact that this was their initial exposure to reading fluency probes. Reading fluency probes are not administered in kindergarten within the studied school. Overall, we think that this initial attempt at fluency reading probes was possibly less accurate than desired because of students' emotional responses.

Nonetheless, meeting with students in a one-on-one setting seemed successful. Students and teachers were not given a rigid timeline to complete the given probe. With this flexibility there were no distractions as the students completed the reading fluency probe in a quiet and calm environment.

Once we began implementing the instructional interventions outlined above, we found that a lot of energy was spent on modeling and practicing desired reading behaviors and the routines of each intervention for students, particularly during the first week they were introduced. Students in each category appeared to be motivated and excited about participating in their chosen intervention. After interventions were in place for a couple of days, however, we quickly found that there were a handful of students who were a better fit for a different intervention group than they were placed in originally. When this happened, we were able to make immediate changes to our groups and move forward accordingly in a more productive and strategic way. One challenge we discovered during the first week was meeting with each intervention group in the

available amount of time allowed. As we met with groups, the remainder of our class built their work stamina on their own through independent tasks. As a team, we observed that it was distracting and stressful, as teachers, to keep these students on task while at the same time working to give our full attention to our intervention groups.

Students in our proficient category were especially motivated to participate in the Reader's Theater selection we had chosen. The motivation displayed was definitely the most prevalent strength recognized at the completion of week one. The initial area we focused on with students in this group was learning how to track one another's script parts as they were read aloud. We continued to notice that students wanted to "check out" when it was not his or her turn to read. As a team, we felt that this was an area that needed to be worked on diligently before we could move on to other skills. We had significant discussions on how to redirect students in tracking one another's print. We wanted them to feel personally responsible to do so in order to help their group be successful with the group's task. We also spoke with students about listening closely to one another as each student was reading. We explained that by doing so, it could help them to know the exact type of expression they should be using during their own speaking parts. During our small group instruction that week, we modeled speaking parts for our students. We modeled what appropriate expression, prosody, and intonation sound like. We found this to be a helpful method in supporting students' attention.

Students within our partially proficient category were also excited and motivated to work on specific skills while partaking in either duet reading or repeated reading. It appeared that students enjoyed having individual instructional time with their teachers. We found that, like our proficient group, we spent much of this week setting up routines

and having students practice those routines after they were modeled for them. Students within this group varied in their emotional responses while they worked with us individually. We found that some students appeared to be nervous when asked to read in the one-on-one setting. After sufficient modeling, students tended to relax and began to make headway with the routines and procedures that were involved with both interventions.

Students in our non-proficient group appeared to be motivated to meet as a group, but like the partially proficient group, we noticed strong emotional responses when they were asked to practice routines. These students took a bit longer to feel comfortable and confident with the routines and tasks we asked them to perform. We were prepared to take things more slowly with this group to enable students to gain confidence. This confidence was needed in order to move students forward in their literacy skills over the course of the data collection process.

When it came time to administer the second common formative assessment, the proficient group of students performed well. There was a wide range of abilities in this group because students ranged from reading 12 correct words per minute to 120 correct words per minute. Students showed strength in blending unfamiliar words, identified sight words within the text automatically, and continued to demonstrate fluency.

The partially proficient group read between six and 11 correct words per minute on the common formative assessment. Students in this group continued to sound choppy when reading, but appeared more relaxed when reading the probe for assessment.

The non-proficient students had a difficult time reading the probe that served as our common formative assessment. The AIMSweb probe had several sight words in the

first few sentences, but students in this group continued to lack sight word automaticity, so they fell short of meeting the benchmark. Most students still showed a strong sense of nervousness and hesitation while completing the task.

At the end of our third week of data collection, we observed that students were making adequate progress within each category. Although some gains in independent student work stamina were made, it was still a challenge to keep students on task and independent while we met with our intervention groups. Having enough time to get to each group during our reading block continued to be challenging, as well. The pressure to meet with each group and to allow ample time for quality instruction was also challenging. We still felt rushed this week, but were hopeful that with another week of building independent work stamina and giving each group quality time, we would continue to see growth.

When observing our proficient group during the third week of data collection, we noticed that both sub-groups were reading in a fluent manner. We also observed students using the correct prosody, expression, and intonation while participating in Reader's Theater. Students showed success in following through with the goals and objectives that were set before them: to use appropriate expression, to read fluently, and to use proper prosody and intonation. As a result of meeting their goals, they were already prepared to perform their Reader's Theater for an audience. This was exciting for both students and teachers. Students felt proud and did a tremendous job performing in front of their peers. A sense of unity and accomplishment was evident. As a collaboration team, we decided to move forward and have students begin a new Reader's Theater script. Students were

motivated to begin a script the following week. We decided to have the same goals in place for the next script.

Students participating within our partially proficient category made the most noticeable gains in their reading confidence during this week of data collection. During our collaboration discussion for this week, we each shared how we noticed students' emotional responses being more positive compared to previous weeks. Students displayed more self-confidence overall when reading aloud in a small group and individual setting. More specifically, we noticed that students appeared more confident in their attempts to blend unknown words. This was an exciting observation and reassured us that we had chosen the right interventions for our students.

Although these students made good gains with blending, we still felt they should work on improving their rate of reading fluency, as their common formative assessment scores were still not proficient. We needed to find a way to support students in moving forward. After collaborating with one another, we chose to spend more time involving students in activities revolving around Fry Phrases. By familiarizing students with these phrases, we felt students would be better prepared to recognize them in print, and thus increase their rate of reading fluency. We planned to continue moving forward with each intervention, because both interventions proved to be effective for the sub-groups. In addition, we chose to shift the focus to Fry Phrases during small group instruction.

Within our non-proficient group, we continued to observe emotional responses that seemed to hinder students' progress. Students appeared distracted during small group and one-on-one interventions this week. As a team, we discussed some possible factors that could be impacting their behaviors. The most prevalent factor that came up in our

discussion was that our school-wide math AIMSweb benchmarking was taking place.
Students were being pulled out and assessed several times over the course of this week.
In addition to this, students within this category were receiving reading intervention
services, such as Reading Corps, Title I, and/or Response to Intervention. Within these
programs, students are very closely monitored and assessed on a regular basis. We
discussed concern that students could have possibly felt "over tested" and burnt out. We
brainstormed possible strategies for overcoming this sense of being "over tested." After a
lengthy discussion, we decided that we would move forward by keeping our interventions
the same, but also by finding some creative ways to motivate students during our small
group activities for the next week. We agreed to add blending activities using elkonin
boxes, alphabet cards, and sliders. This would allow students to practice their blending
skills in a hands-on way. We also chose to implement some letter sound fluency
activities. Through our observations, we noticed students were taking extra time while
trying to recall letter sounds while blending. We believed that by including some letter
sound fluency activities, students would be given the opportunity to build automaticity
with this particular skill, which in turn would increase confidence in blending. We were
hopeful that with the addition of some new activities, students within this category would
get back on-board and begin moving in the right direction once again.

We assessed students on Wednesday of that week as planned. Assessment scores
continued to show movement in the right direction. We continued seeing gains in all
student categories. The students within our non-proficient group continued to show
improvements with the interventions in place, however those improvements were not
always reflected during their common formative assessment performance results.

Our final week of data collection was thought provoking and exciting, because we assessed our students using the original baseline assessment. We had high hopes that our interventions used throughout the course of the four weeks would improve student's fluency rates. Each group of students portrayed both strengths and weaknesses during this final week.

The proficient group showed growth in expression, prosody, and intonation when reading the Reader's Theater scripts. This group displayed knowledge of appropriate word flow and we noticed their high comfort level with the given text. The rate at which these students were reading increased and it was more enjoyable to listen to them read the probe. While the development of expression was evident, some students were still focused on rate. We thought this could be attributed to students wanting to read more words than the initial probe. They definitely developed expression throughout the four weeks, but this essential skill could still be enhanced.

The partially proficient group experienced some success with blending unfamiliar words unprompted and automaticity in sight word recognition. Students within this category still lacked a natural flow, but were able to effectively read more words per minute than during the initial probe. We did notice that students in this group still needed to improve their reading fluency rate because they continued to sound choppy.

Students in the non-proficient group worked hard to sound out unfamiliar words. We noticed that students were the most confident they had been throughout the data collection process. Students in this group need to continue to develop sight word automaticity in order to continue to build their reading fluency. Many students still

attempted to sound out sight words, which is not efficient in terms of fluency and this showed on their common formative assessment scores.

<div align="center">Action Plan</div>

In this section, we will explain how our action research will affect our classrooms in the future and the next steps we will take to enhance reading fluency with our first-grade students. As teachers of young readers, we have come to the realization that building confidence in sight word automaticity, blending skills, prosody, and expression will lead our students to become strong and independent readers. The interventions that we implemented, over the course of four weeks, will inform how we adjust our teaching methods in the months ahead.

After four weeks of data collection, we have developed various insights into the growth of first-grade students in the area of reading fluency. Duet reading, repeated reading, sight word building supported by peers, and Reader's Theater were productive strategies for promoting their fluency development. Peer reading interventions were also successful and provided students with a motivating and engaging experience. Students will continue to use each other as supports and guides. Based on our research, we agree with that statement that "peer mediated interventions can be competently carried out by well-trained first-grade students" (Hofstadter-Duke & Daly, 2011, p.643). Repeated readings can serve as a meaningful technique while helping students develop reading fluency, and particularly their reading rates (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013). During repeated reading sessions, students are given multiple opportunities to attempt and familiarize themselves with a given text that is grade-level appropriate (A. Ritter, personal communication, November 14, 2013). By participating in

repeated readings, students are able to gain fluidity, accuracy, rate, and automaticity, all of which are important components of fluency development (A. Ritter, personal communication, August 10, 2013).

Our results have shown that the reading fluency interventions we implemented over the course of four weeks were effective for the vast majority of our students. Although not every group of students met benchmark at the post-assessment, each group: proficient, partially proficient and non-proficient, showed improvement in their rate of reading fluency. We saw growth on the AIMSweb reading fluency probes that were given each Wednesday during the data collection period. Our research focused on reading fluency, but we also saw some gains in expression, sight word automaticity, and prosody and word attack skills from all levels of learners.

From this point forward, we will continue to progress-monitor our students on a weekly basis using AIMSweb fluency probes as our common formative assessments. We will do this because "a collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all, results in high student achievement. When teachers use weekly progress monitoring to aid their instruction and grouping, it ensures an accurate arrangement for students requiring research-based interventions or enrichments" (DuFour, 2007, not paginated). We will move students in and out of specific groups if/when needed based on their reading fluency needs and abilities. As students continue to receive interventions, we will adjust groups accordingly in order to challenge and motivate students to continue growing in their reading fluency abilities.

This action research has also encouraged us to continue seeking new, innovative reading fluency interventions that we can implement within our classrooms. There are

numerous research-based programs available to assist teachers who work with young readers. We each plan to continue utilizing the Minnesota Reading Corps interventions that we were trained in: duet reading and repeated reading, as well as attending training this summer to further our knowledge on these interventions.

As a team, we will continue meeting on a weekly basis to collaborate and share the challenges and successes that we face. In a PLC driven school, grade-level teams participate in weekly Professional Learning Communities. Grade-level teams are given sufficient opportunity to collaborate and share ideas and strategies that are effective in their classrooms in order to move students forward. We agree with DuFour et al. (2007), as he states, "when teachers have access to each other's ideas, methods, and materials they can expand their repertoire of skills. These types of collaboration experiences encompass the necessary work of Professional Learning Communities" (not paginated). With the use of these interactions, we were able to discuss student data collected within our individual classrooms. Teacher collaboration is vital to the success of all students and can encourage teachers to grow in their professional development. We have truly enjoyed collaborating to share ideas and thoughts on what is/is not working in our classrooms. We feel that in order to grow in our professional development, we must work together to push students and ourselves forward in a positive direction. The ultimate goal is to use best-practice techniques and ensure commonalities among classrooms to improve student learning across the grade level.

According to DuFour (2007) "most educators can teach an entire career and not know if they teach a particular concept more or less effectively than the teacher next door because the assessments they generate for their isolated classrooms never provide them

with a basis of comparison" (not paginated). We are eager to share the findings of this

action research project with our grade-level team. We hope to persuade them to join in on

the data collection we are continuing. We feel that it would be highly valuable to utilize

the expertise of our teammates to implement reading interventions that work well in their

classrooms, as well as to share our positive and successful interventions with them.

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Appendix A

AIMSweb

AIMSweb Reading Probe

Pete was very sad. His dog had run away, and he could not find her. He had walked all around the town. He had put up pictures of her. No one had seen her.

Pete sat on the curb in front of his house. His mother came out and sat down next to him.

"Are you thinking about Dot?" she asked.

"Yes," said Pete. "She is all alone."

"I think she will find her way home," said his mother.

"I hope so," said Pete. "I miss her a lot!"

Pete's mother gave him a hug and went back in the house. Pete stayed out on the curb. He looked up and down the street, but he did not see any dogs. As the sun was setting, Pete's sister Amy called him for supper. Pete got up and walked slowly to the house.

At supper, Pete was not hungry. He was looking at Dot's red dish. He hoped she had something to eat. He wished he could give her some of his chicken.

After supper, Pete got ready for bed. He did not want to hear a story without Dot. He got into bed, but he could not sleep. All of a sudden, he heard something outside his window. He jumped out of bed and ran to look out.

"Dot!" he cried. "I knew you would come home!"

AIMSweb Results
Table

Progress Monitoring Improvement Report
from 09/04/2013 to 12/18/2013

Goal Statement

In 15.0 weeks, _____ will achieve **12** Words Read Correct with **0** Errors from grade **1** Reading - Standard Progress Monitor Passages. The rate of improvement should be **-1.00** Words Read Correct per week. The current average rate of improvement is **-0.39** Words Read Correct per week.

Date	09/04	09/11	09/18	09/25									
Corrects	27	21	23	25									
Errors		8	8	3									
Goal/Trend ROI	- 1.00/- 0.39												

Grey data points are baseline/goals sessions.
Yellow data points have corresponding program interventions.
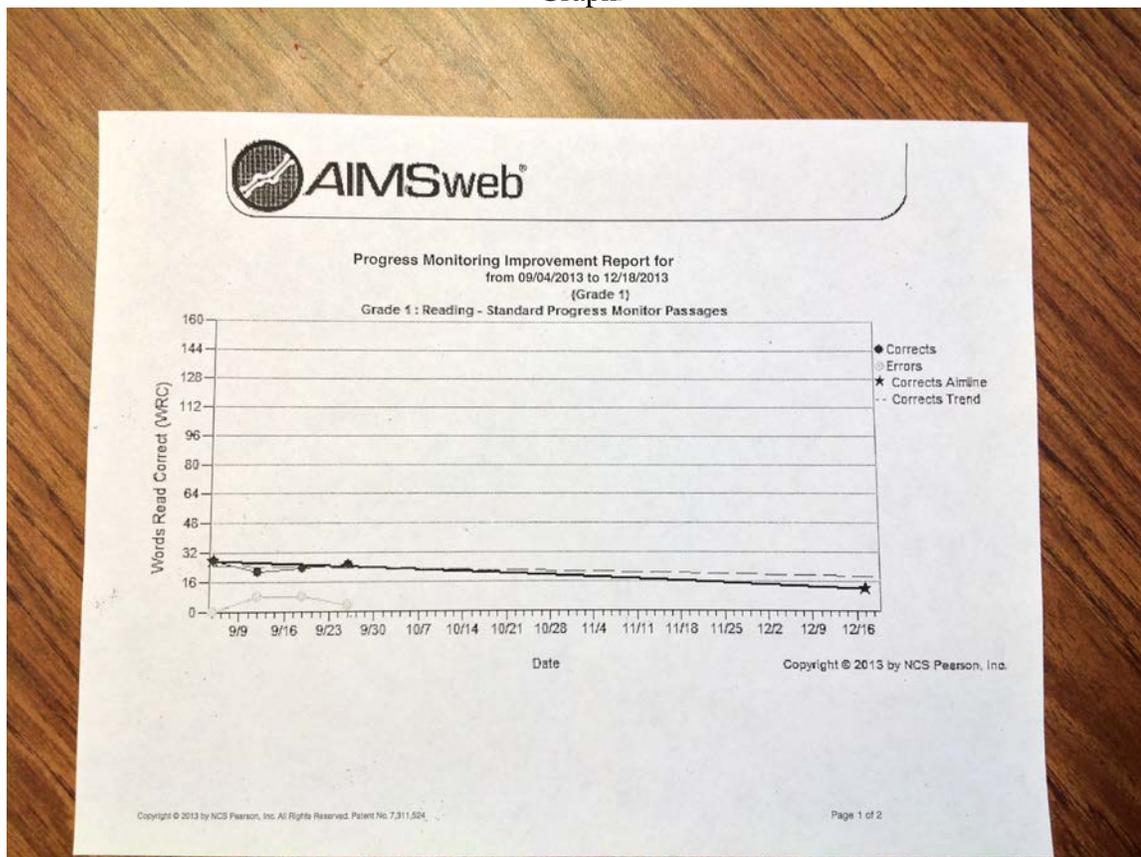M represents missed scheduled dates.

Goal Changes & Intervention Descriptions:

9/4/2013 -   (Baseline Corrects = 27 : Goal Corrects = 12)

Grey entries are baseline sessions or goal changes.
Yellow entries have corresponding program interventions.

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AIMSweb Results
Graph.

Appendix B

Data Collection Document

Teacher Observation Notes:

Student Name	Week __	Rate Notes

Appendix C

Teacher Collaboration Document

Teacher Collaboration Notes:

Week __ Date	Proficiency	Student Names	Pinpointed Strengths	Pinpointed Weaknesses/Area of growth	Intervention/Enrichment moving forward
Date	**Proficient** Proficient is 12 or more cwpm				
Date	**Partially Proficient** Partially Proficient is 6-11 cwpm				
Date	**Non-proficient** Non-proficient is 2 or less cwpm				
	Challenges		Successes		

Appendix D

Coding Guide

Noticed Word Flow (NWF)

Noticed Sight Word Recognition (NSWR)

Noticed Blending (NBL)

Noticed Emotional Response (NER)

Noticed Expression (NEX)

Discussed General Communication (DGC)

Noticed Prior Knowledge (NPK)