

A Qualitative Study of Ontario Teachers' Conceptualizations of Reading Fluency

By

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## ABSTRACT

Research has identified fluency as a central component of skilled reading and as a skill that should be a driving force in the literacy curricula (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel & Meisinger, 2010). Learning to read, teaching children how to read and researching the best way to teach children to be fluent readers is a multifaceted, elaborate process. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which teachers conceptualize reading fluency through interviews. Exploration through a qualitative study provided insights into how seven grade four and grade five Eastern Ontario teachers understand reading fluency. All teachers were found to characterize fluency as primarily reading speed and were found to share the belief that improvement in reading fluency was attributed to the amount of time a reader spent reading a variety of texts. The most prominent finding that emerged from the data was teachers' perception that comprehension should be the instructional focus for junior readers.

Discussions with teachers provided insights into reading fluency that enabled the construction of a more detailed picture of classroom reading fluency and instruction in Ontario. The complex task of teaching reading fluency has not been a central topic in pre- and in-service teacher training in Ontario. This study provides an enhanced picture of classroom reading fluency instruction that may lead to opportunities for future professional development specifically designed around reading fluency instruction and best practice.

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## CHAPTER 1

Reading research literature has identified fluency as a central component of skilled reading and a skill that should be a driving force in the literacy curricula (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel & Meisinger, 2010). The Ontario curriculum (2006) has a limited view of fluency when setting expectations for proficient readers. By the end of grade five students are expected to “read appropriate texts with expression and confidence, adjusting reading strategies and reading rate to match the form and purpose (e.g., read a poem aloud with appropriate phrasing and emphasis)” (p.99). This expectation is limited because reading fluency is a complex, multifaceted process that involves more than reading with expression, confidence and the ability to read aloud. Reading fluency “incorporates the ability to read quickly, accurately, and when oral reading is considered, with expression” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Additionally, reading fluency plays an important role in overall reading proficiency and the ability to read a text fluently is necessary for comprehension (Breznitz, 2006). The importance of oral reading fluency, prosodic phrasing, comprehension and the ability to read with expression in children has been studied extensively. “A fundamental task of fluent reading is to supply the prosodic features [e.g., intonation, stress and emphasis] in a text, although they are not graphically represented” (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005, p. 704).

The ways in which teachers model and teach oral reading fluency are essential for students to become proficient readers. Many teachers are aware when students’ intonation is flat and non-expressive; however, they sometimes view fluency narrowly while in

reality its components are broad and complex (Kuhn et al., 2010; Schilling, Carlisle, Scott & Zeng, 2007).

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which teachers conceptualize reading fluency. Learning to read, teaching children how to read and researching the best way to teach children to be fluent readers is a multifaceted, elaborate process. Teachers and researchers must work together to ensure our education system produces skilled and fluent readers. Exploration through a qualitative study provided insights into how teachers understand fluency as an instructional focus and these insights will enable reading research to build a more detailed picture of classroom reading instruction in Ontario. Previous studies in Ontario have examined fluency in various contexts including, but not limited to, ELL and EL1 students, oral and written language fluency, language remediation, and the cognitive processes involved in the development of reading fluency during early childhood (Geva & Farina, 2011; Preston & Gardner, 1967; Lovett, 2008; Hinchley & Levy, 1988). Additionally, numerous teacher inquiry studies have been completed in Ontario, including an Ontario teacher report on how to improve boys' literacy skills (Ministry of Education, 2009). Although many studies have looked at fluency in various contexts and other studies have discussed professional practice, instruction and education with teachers (Russell & Loughran, 2007), studies in Ontario have not explored how teachers conceptualize reading fluency specifically.

The Ontario curriculum places instructional focus on comprehension and reading for meaning. By the end of grade five students are expected to “identify a variety of reading comprehension strategies and use them appropriately before, during, and after

reading to understand texts (e.g., activate prior knowledge through asking questions about or discussing a topic; develop mind maps to explore ideas; ask questions to focus reading; use visualization to clarify details of a character, scene, or concept in a text; make predictions about a text based on reasoning and related reading; reread to confirm or clarify meaning)” (Ontario Curriculum, 2006, p. 97).

Although reading for meaning is important, research indicates that reading fluency should play a greater role in the literacy curriculum (Kuhn et al., 2010; Hudson, Pullen, Lane & Torgesen, 2009; Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, & Linan-Thomson, 2011; Rasinski, 2004). Research emphasizes the role of reading fluency because they have found a reciprocal relationship between fluency and comprehension, each supporting and contributing to one another (Stecker, Roser, and Martinez, 1998). The Ontario curriculum uses some aspects of fluency to set goals for junior readers; however, the level of explicitness with which fluency is discussed is limited and greater emphasis is placed on comprehension and reading for understanding. By the end of grade five, students are expected to “demonstrate understanding of a variety of texts by summarizing important ideas and citing supporting details” as this is important when reading for meaning (Ontario Curriculum, 2006, p. 97).

The findings from this study have the potential to indicate a starting point for recognizing the importance of educating educational professionals, both in-service and pre-service teachers, about the ways they can explicitly teach children to become fluent readers (Kuhn et al., 2010; Hudson et al., 2009; Rasinski et al., 2011; Rasinski, 2004).

### *Rationale*

Phelps & Schilling (2004) found that when it comes to math and science, there is great interest regarding the specialized ways teachers need to know a subject to teach it to others; however, there is less discussion in terms of proper reading instruction and best practice for reading proficiency. In many respects it is assumed that if teachers are competent readers then they must be able to teach reading (Phelps et al., 2004). The complex task of teaching reading fluency has not been a central topic in pre- and in-service teacher training courses in Ontario and other studies have found that few regular classroom teachers have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what constitutes oral reading fluency (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991; Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2011).

Oral reading fluency has been described as a neglected aspect of regular classroom reading instruction as fluency tends to be seen as an outcome of skillfulness in word recognition rather than as a contributing factor to reading comprehension (Zutell et al., 1991). Without such understanding teachers are left with incomplete ideas about how to teach children to become fluent, expressive readers.

This current study is exploratory. Interviews with seven grade four and five teachers were conducted in order to understand teachers' perceptions of reading fluency as well as their instructional practices. A qualitative approach enabled a glimpse in to the reading fluency and literacy instruction of junior readers in Ontario through discussion. Increasing both in-service and pre-service teachers' understanding of reading fluency through discussion has been shown to improve the ways in which teachers can become more accurate and reliable judges of oral reading fluency (Zutell et al., 1991).

By conducting conversations with teachers about their knowledge of reading fluency, instructional practices and resources, I began to build a clearer understanding of how reading fluency is being taught in Ontario classrooms.

Three research questions guided my study:

1. How do teachers understand the construct of fluency and its development?
2. How do teachers understand the relationship between fluency and comprehension?
3. How do teachers perceive fluency as a subject of instruction?

#### *Summary*

Insights into how fluency is perceived in the classroom can be used to bridge the gap between teachers and researchers in order to improve reading fluency instruction and techniques for best practice in Ontario. This enhanced picture of classroom reading instruction may lead to opportunities for future professional development specifically designed around reading fluency instruction and best practice. Studies have found that fluency increases rapidly from the end of first grade to third grade (Chall, 1996; Kuhn et al., 2003) and because of this, fluency's role in the literacy curriculum in the USA has shifted over the past decade (Kuhn et al., 2010). Research considers fluency to be a critical component of reading development (Rasinski et al., 2006; Samuels & Farstrup, 2006); however, “the current implementation of fluency instruction in many classrooms is often driven by assessments that build upon an incomplete conceptualization of the construct and can lead to both inappropriate instruction and serious misconception of this essential characteristic of skilled reading” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p.230).

## CHAPTER 2

### *Literature Review*

This review of the literature will examine what I established about previous reading research on the characteristics of reading fluency, fluency's role in reading proficiency as well as studies involving teachers and reading fluency instruction. Leading reading research has featured the importance of reading fluency in the development of reading proficiency for years (Kuhn et al., 2010; Schilling et al., 2007). This large body of research provides evidence to support the importance of reading fluency and how it should be taught in elementary school classrooms in order to produce good, fluent readers. Additionally, this review of the literature will examine the Ontario curriculum expectations for junior students and teachers when it comes to fluency and literacy instruction.

#### *What is reading fluency?*

Although there is no single definition of reading fluency, there is a general agreement amongst researchers that “fluent reading incorporates the ability to read quickly, accurately, and when oral reading is considered, with expression” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Good readers are those who can identify words quickly and accurately, maintain a consistent pace and are able to use phrasing and expression appropriately. Poor readers are those who have difficulty with all or several of these characteristics of fluent reading (Hudson et al., 2009; Hudson et al., 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000). A reader's fluency is measured by a combination of rate and accuracy (Hudson et al., 2009; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Maxwell, 1988). Although some researchers prefer to define fluency “in terms of

phrasing, adherence to the author's syntax, and expressiveness'' without the use of the term rate (Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman, and Oranje (2005), p. v). Samuels (2006) defined reading fluency as ''decoding and comprehending at the same time'' (p. 39) and suggested that rate, accuracy, and prosody are indicators that this happening (Hudson et al., 2009). Prosody is a linguistic term used to describe the rhythmic aspect of spoken language. Prosodic features include intonation, emphasis, rate, stress patterns and duration (Torgesen & Hudson, 2006; Allington, 1983; Dowhower, 1991; Schreiber, 1980,1991). In the reading literature, *prosody* is often used synonymously with *reading with expression*.

#### *The importance of reading fluency*

Research has found that children who read texts word-by-word and are unable to maintain their rate do not have the same ability to understand what they are reading when compared to children who recognize words efficiently and accurately (Rasinski, 2006; Hudson et al., 2005). Reading fluency is complex and requires instruction and practice as ''reading fluency involves every process and sub-skill involved in reading'' (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001, p.220; Zutell et al., 1991; Schwanenflugel et al., 2010). As children learn to read fluently they are also learning and developing a knowledge base of how, when and where they can use prosody in their fluent speech and language.

Kuhn et al. (2010) emphasize that the goal is reading fluently not reading quickly. Children should not be taught to focus on being fast readers and instruction should emphasize prosody and accuracy, not speed. ''Children will not be able to read both very quickly and with proper prosody, so directing them to read passages quickly and

accurately will have the perverse effect of having them read less expressively” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 234).

One of the reasons that reading quickly will not influence reading fluency is because syllable duration becomes shorter over long sentences (Ladd, 1984). Therefore, a child who is instructed to read quickly will have difficulties with stress marking and phrase-final lengthening and this will affect their overall ability to read fluently (Kuhn et al., 2010).

Kuhn et al. (2010) identify that there are still several questions surrounding fluency and our understanding of its role in instruction and assessment. Further research is required in order to develop new research and assessment tools for identifying and teaching prosodic and fluent reading in the classroom, as well as the relationship between fluency and comprehension (Kuhn et al., 2010; Pikulski et al., 2005).

Similarly to Kuhn et al. (2010), Rasinski (2004) addresses concern over the confusion of fast speech and fluent speech. Rasinski (2004) found that some schools in the United States define and conceptualize reading fluency as fast speech and that some teachers instruct reading fluency as reading quickly. It has been found that improvement of reading rate has become the primary goal of fluency instruction in some schools and teachers have been found to encourage students to “pick up the pace” (Rasinski, 2004, p.48) and use time tests to encourage readers to beat previous scores. In these cases students are being engaged in daily reading activities that focus on speed over meaning and fluency. “If we emphasize speed at the expense of prosodic and meaningful reading, we will end up with fast readers who understand little of what they have read” (Rasinski,

2004, p.48-49). Fast readers who do not understand what they read are missing the ability to comprehend and this will affect their ability to read fluently.

Fluency instruction and daily practice will assist students in becoming efficient readers. As readers gain confidence in their decoding and expression, they improve reading fluency and understanding (Rasinski, 1991; National Reading Panel, 2000). Rasinski (2004) found that reading fluency is a crucial factor among fourth grade students and beyond the elementary school grades. Reading fluency should be taught and demonstrated during read aloud sessions and through class discussions about a text or passages; however, it was found that hearing fluent reading is not the same as being a fluent reader. Students must have the opportunity to practice reading out loud with proper pace, at a conversational rate and including appropriate accuracy and expression in order to develop reading fluency. Teachers play an important role in the development of prosodic and fluent reading skills by modeling proper reading techniques in the classroom (e.g., paired readings, reading buddies and choral reading) because fluency develops through experiences, not just hearing and modeling fluent reading.

Additionally, by hearing and modeling fluent reading teachers will help to build students' understanding and comprehension of texts. Reading fluency provides a bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension that ensures that a child reaches high levels of reading achievement (Rasinski, 2004).

#### *Word Level vs. Text Level Fluency*

Jenkins, Fuchs, Espin, van den Broek, and Deno (2003) examined the criterion validity of fluency scores when students read words in isolation (word level fluency) compared to words read in context (text level fluency). They studied 113 fourth-grade

students, the majority (85) of which were skilled readers. Skilled reading was defined as performing at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Reading Comprehension test of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Riverside, 1994). The remaining students included 21 students without disabilities but below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile and seven students with disabilities, Jenkins et al. (2003) reasoned that this sampling approximated a normal distribution of fourth grade students. During testing students had to read from two measures for one minute each. One measure was a 400-word folktale while the second was the folktale's words in a random list. Readers were scored on their performance based on how many words were read correctly in one minute. Additionally, the reading comprehension portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was used. It was found that when comparing text fluency to list fluency, text fluency accounted for variance in reading comprehension and comprehension and list fluency made contributions to the predicted outcomes of text fluency. Jenkins et al. (2003) concluded that the ability to read text aloud fluently predicted reading comprehension and that comprehension is a predictor of oral reading text fluency. Thus, oral reading fluency serves as a means to look at many components when assessing a reader's overall reading proficiency.

Junior students must progress from learning to read to reading to learn and this shift is explained by Chall's stage theory (1996). This model proposes six stages of reading development. In the early reading or emergent literacy stage, learners develop insights into reading such as concepts about print and phoneme awareness. Next formal reading instruction begins in a stage called conventional literacy. During this stage learners develop basic sound-symbol recognition and basic decoding abilities. Fluency appears during the third stage where readers begin to confirm what they know about

reading in order to develop fluency and automaticity with print. As learners get more comfortable with what and how they are reading (e.g., using appropriate phrasing, stress and intonation) then they can begin to focus on understanding what they are reading and constructing meaning from the text. Learners then move to a stage where they are no longer learning to read, they are reading to learn with a focus on content-rich material and more complex readings. As readings become more complex readers progress to a stage where they must learn to look critically at different points of view. Finally students must construct and reconstruct texts in order to evaluate their own understanding and perspective of a text. A skilled reader is one who can look critically at a text and determine his or her own perspective on a reading. In this model fluency is considered a prerequisite for success in reading comprehension. Readers must develop comfort with print as well as automatic decoding abilities in order to process text for meaning. As readers are learning to decode and are developing fluency, sight-word reading plays an important role.

Ehri's (1995,1998) developmental theory has four stages to achieve fluency with a focus on the development of automatic sight-word reading. Sight word reading is a fast process that occurs when the sight of a word activates that word in a reader's memory as well as all the associations that belong with the word (e.g., meaning, spelling, pronunciation and how it can be used in a sentence). Ehri's alphabetic stages include the ability to accurately decode words through the identification of sounds represented by letter and sound combinations, the ability to blend phonemes and read common patterns across words (phonograms). Ehri (2002) discusses the importance of classroom instruction on word-identification strategies such as decoding and analogy to teach

readers to figure out unknown words. As children begin to read more difficult texts, the individual meanings of words becomes essential to overall comprehension and thus the knowledge of a large bank of high-frequency words that a reader can read accurately and fluently is important. A reader who cannot easily decode words experiences a deficit in fluency at the word level and this in turn affects a reader's ability to construct the meaning of text. It is necessary for students to build a large store of words that they recognize and read quickly, accurately and automatically so that their focus is not on decoding; rather, energy can be directed towards comprehension of the text (LaBerge et al, 1974; Beers, 2003).

Reading rate involves automaticity when reading words and includes word-reading fluency as well as text-level fluency (Kuhn et al., 2000). Research has found that fluent reading alone does not predict good comprehension; however, fluent reading, both at the word level and at the context level is important for deep comprehension (Pikulski, 2005).

#### *Oral reading fluency and vocabulary*

In addition to decoding skills, a reader's vocabulary will affect oral reading fluency and comprehension. Yovanoff, Duesbery, Alonzo, & Tindal (2005) found that oral reading fluency and vocabulary were predictors of reading comprehension irrespective of grade level. As students encounter more difficult, complex words, vocabulary instruction changes. The focus changes from simple words, sounds and spellings to complex words, with multisyllabic structures and foreign sounds. Simple decoding and word searching become more complex and will take more time as students progress from primary grades into junior grades.

As students begin to read more difficult texts, the individual meanings of words becomes essential to overall comprehension and thus the importance of vocabulary acquisition takes on a bigger role compared to initial, primary school vocabulary learning. Yovanoff et al. (2005) found that vocabulary instruction should remain a key focus of literacy instruction across grades and that there is value in examining each dimension (fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) separately because of their complex and related components that contribute to overall reading proficiency.

#### *The relationship between fluency and comprehension*

Several studies have found evidence of a reciprocal relationship between fluency and comprehension that contributes to how children become quick, accurate and fluent readers. The development of fluency and its bridge to comprehension involves being taught to read with appropriate expression and phrasing to allow for the maintenance of meaning and comprehension (Cowie, Douglas-Cowie & Wichmann, 2002; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006, 2008; Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl, 2004). As children learn to read with fluency, good prosody is also important, as children will learn to display oral language speech and pitch similar to oral language used by fluent adults when they read. Research indicates that although fluency itself is not sufficient to ensure high levels of reading achievement, fluency is necessary for reading achievement because it contributes to reading comprehension (Pikulski et al., 2005).

Schwanenflugel et al. (2006) found that fluent and automatized reading was related to improved comprehension. The Stroop task was used to test children on their autonomous reading factor and it was found that automatized reading interference was a predictor of reading comprehension in the first grade but not in the second or third grade.

They found that automatized reading interference has little effect on reading comprehension once fluency is established and difficulties with Stroop interference correlates with difficulties in reading fluency. This study discusses the complexity, if not impossibility, of capturing every factor that contributes to reading fluency and reading comprehension. The finding shows support for the variability in fluency and automatic reading in early-elementary children's reading comprehension. Additionally, the finding that the role automaticity plays in reading comprehension as children move from early primary to late primary school is important as comprehension is a complex skill with many inter-related factors.

“Once most children are fluent readers, factors other than reading fluency become important for good comprehension...this may be because other factors, such as general oral language skills and the ability to draw appropriate inferences, become more important as children move from learning to read to reading to learn” (Schwanenflugel, 2006, p. 519).

Pikulski et al. (2005) suggests teacher guidance and expert instruction when it comes to developing and improving reading fluency and comprehension. They emphasize the necessity of developing reading fluency as it reflects a reader's ability to comprehend, derive meaning from text and overall reading proficiency. “Fluency without accompanying high levels of reading comprehension is of very limited value” (Pikulski et al., 2005,p.518) because as children learn to read fluently they are also learning and developing a knowledge base of how, when and where they can use prosody (expression) in their fluent day-to-day language.

Cowie et al. (2002) examined prosody to study fluency, expressiveness and their relationship among 8-10 year old readers. They noted prosody's importance in distinguishing types of speech (e.g. pitch movements and emotion). They found expressiveness rarely occurred without fluency; however, fluency occurred without expressiveness. Additionally it was found that a child's fluency and expressive- focus could be broken by the task of turning a page. They concluded that it is easy to identify a child who is obviously not fluent and not expressive; however, the ability to test and recognize higher skill levels of fluency and or expressiveness is less clear. Cowie et al. (2002) suppose that fluency and expression are interacting skills that determine a reader's prosodic abilities.

*The Ontario Curriculum: Reading with Fluency*

By the time a student finishes the fifth grade, the expectations in the Ontario curriculum (2006) includes the ability to “read appropriate texts with expression and confidence, adjusting reading strategies and reading rate to match the form and purpose” (p.99). The Ontario curriculum uses some aspects of fluency to set goals for junior readers; however, the level of explicitness with which fluency is discussed is limited and greater emphasis is placed on comprehension and understanding. *Reading with fluency* is a section of the language curriculum document, where it states what is expected of a student at the end of grade five. Under the heading *Reading with fluency*, the curriculum expects reading familiar words, reading of unfamiliar words and reading appropriate texts. These expectations provide few examples and little guidance for how teachers should teach reading fluency.

In addition to the Ontario curriculum, teachers have access to a variety of supporting documents that supplement the curriculum and provide information from researchers about best practices. The *Literacy for Learning* (2004) document is one of the supporting documents and resources teachers can access and use to guide instruction. This document was written specifically for junior grade (4-6) literacy instruction. This educational resource describes reading fluency by highlighting important characteristics including how “fluency involves the ability to read texts quickly and automatically and at a good pace through longer texts” (p.74). Additionally, this resource refers to the relationship that exists between fluency and comprehension.

“Fluency alone does not guarantee comprehension, but it is an essential condition for deep comprehension. Without a store or “bank” of words that can be read quickly and automatically, students’ working memories focus on decoding, leaving them with little of the energy needed to concentrate on making sense of the text. Students need a bank of words that come to mind automatically requiring no conscious effort in order to manage difficult decoding and comprehension challenges. Automaticity is best developed when students read and re-read easy, familiar texts at their independent reading level” (p. 73).

Although this document defines fluency using some of the characteristics research has found to be important for reading fluency, there is emphasis placed on pace and decoding with an overall focus on comprehension. This paragraph about reading fluency is the largest section on fluency within the document. When examining the teacher’s role in reading fluency, the document highlights that “the teacher models expressive, fluent reading” (p. 74) for their students; however, expressive, fluent reading is not described nor is there suggestions as to how a teacher should model expressive, fluent reading. The

document does not suggest instructional methods for fluency instruction; however, there is explicit instruction for teaching children how to understand what they read.

“Successful comprehension instruction involves four components: large amounts of time for actual reading; teacher-directed instruction in comprehension strategies; opportunities for peer and collaborative learning; and occasions for students to talk to a teacher and one another about their responses to reading” (*Literacy for Learning*, 2004, p.66)

Furthermore, motivation to learn and exposure to texts is attributed to increased comprehension and the document states that “students who are motivated to read will read more, and this exposure to more texts increases comprehension” (p.62).

The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario (2003) advises that the goals of reading instruction are fluency, comprehension and motivation to read. Fluency is defined as “the ability to identify words accurately and read texts quickly with good expression” (p.2) The report instructs teachers that the goals of reading instruction work together in order for a reader to gain proficiency and that “as children develop fluency, they improve in their ability to read more expressively, with proper phrasing, thus gaining more of the text’s meaning” (p.2-3). Although reading fluency and its complexities are initially discussed, suggestions for instructional practice are focused on comprehension although the report emphasizes, “no single skill in this complex interaction is sufficient on its own, and the teacher must be careful not to overemphasize one skill at the expense of others” (p.10). Importantly, this report highlights a finding from the American National Reading Panel which found no evidence to support “instructional time spent on silent independent reading with minimal guidance and

feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement” (p.13) The report does not suggest abandoning independent reading time; however, they suggest focusing on having children read aloud with guidance and feedback from a teacher, volunteer or peer to enhance fluency, comprehension and motivation to read.

### *Teachers’ Conceptualizations of Teaching Reading Fluency*

For years reading research has understood the importance of reading fluency; however, some researchers posit that it has been neglected in regular classroom instruction, which has largely focused on comprehension skills, vocabulary and word recognition (Zutell, 1991; Allington, 1983; Anderson 1980).

When examining teachers’ beliefs about and implementation of a balanced literacy framework, one that includes phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction, fluency and comprehension, Bingham et al. (2011) found that it is important to assess teachers’ beliefs and behaviours in order to understand teachers’ literacy practices and instruction. Bingham and colleagues found that the teachers they studied had a good understanding of literacy component skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction and comprehension. The only process that reflected confusion was their view of fluency. Teachers were found to have difficulty conceptualizing and measuring fluency in teaching and learning practices. The teachers who were interviewed asked questions about how children go from non-fluent to fluent readers and how fluency could be measured. They were found to be unaware of how to assess fluency and were not clear on instructional practices for improving a student’s fluency and/or implementing fluency practices within the classroom.

Binks-Cantrell, Malatesha-Joshi & Washburn (2012) have explored numerous research studies and reports on reading instruction and believe that effective teaching is one of the most important elements when it comes to students' reading abilities and overall educational success. Additionally, they found evidence that early primary students suffer when classroom practice is ineffective.

This evidence is thought to contribute to many of the reading difficulties children face. Poor classroom instruction and students struggles can be connected back to teachers' lack of understanding of basic reading concepts, processes and linguistics (Spear-Swerling & Brucker,2003).

Phelps et al. (2004) discuss content knowledge in mathematics and science which has stimulated great interest in the specialized ways teachers need to know a subject to teach it to others; however, there is less interest in terms of what teachers' need to know about reading to teach it effectively. In areas such as mathematics and science, developing teacher content knowledge has been a major concern because it is generally accepted that teachers who know these subjects are better able to teach them. In many respects reading is not regarded as a discipline and it is assumed that if teachers are competent readers than they must be able to teach reading. This study found that teachers lacked the linguistic knowledge needed to properly teach reading to children. Content knowledge for teaching reading includes multiple dimensions and teachers' use of their content knowledge affects their ability to teach reading with expression and fluent reading abilities.

Kuhn et al. (2003), found that explicit fluency instruction was successful in improving the reading achievement of children. However, they found that little fluency

instruction happens in schools. Thus, their study suggested that educators integrate repeated readings, assisted texts and parsing into classroom practices and instruction more frequently in order to improve reading fluency and understanding.

A study done by Zutell, et al. (1991) looked at how we could train teachers to attend to their students' oral reading fluency. Both pre- and in-service teachers were asked to define fluent reading and its characteristics. They found that teachers were able to offer characteristics such as accuracy in word recognition, fast word recognition, the ability to read quickly and confidence among many characteristics. They found a large variation in the responses and determined that it was due to a lack of definitiveness when it came to the meaning and term fluent reading.

Teachers were then asked to engage in three activities including the marking of phrase and clause boundaries and listening to children's oral readings with and without the texts available. Teachers studied were asked to use fluency-rating scales to make assessments about students' fluent reading abilities. It was found that with training teachers were able to learn to use the scales consistently and accurately and that a multidimensional fluency scale helped teachers to consider each dimension equally, all the while accurately highlighting individual readers strengths and weaknesses.

The more teachers in this study learned about oral reading fluency, the more they recognized the importance of supporting fluency through classroom activities. The value of implicit fluency instruction and practice were recognized especially when dealing with poor readers.

Zutell et al. (1991) found that four components should be present for an effective fluency program: 1) models of fluent reading behavior, 2) use of materials that are well

within the reader's instructional range, 3) use of texts that provide natural (written) language patterns that can be read with fluency and expression, and 4) opportunities to establish and practice fluency by multiple readings of familiar texts. Additionally the importance of modeling good fluency practices and reading to children on a regular basis were emphasized in order to avoid situations where poor readers have other poor readers as models (Zutell et al., 1991; Allington, 1983). Additionally, Zutell et al. found that with the proper training teachers can become accurate and reliable judges of oral reading fluency, which, in turn improved classroom reading fluency instruction.

### **The Current Study**

Similarly to previous studies (Zutell et al., 1991; Bingham et al., 2011), the present study looks at how teachers perceive reading fluency including the characteristics of fluent reading and how fluency should be taught. In my study, teachers listened to recordings of children reading aloud from a text. The text was available to the teachers interviewed and teachers were asked to discuss the qualities of the reading, their judgments and speculations of the readers' fluency and/or disfluency and the factors that contribute to the reading. Suggestions for appropriate instructional techniques and activities were also encouraged in order to understand how teachers conceptualize reading fluency.

Based on the review of the literature, fluency instruction is more effective when it is explicitly taught, modeled and practiced. Teachers are the first line of defense when it comes to teaching fluent reading, developing good readers and intervening when it comes to poor readers. The ability to understand how reading fluency is being taught and understood by teachers is significant when it comes reading fluency instruction Ontario.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Method*

Research studies have been completed in Ontario to understand fluency in a variety of contexts including the development of reading fluency in children, fluency in language learners and language remediation (Geva & Farina, 2011; Preston & Gardner, 1967; Lovett, 2008; Hinchley & Levy, 1988). Additionally, studies about teacher inquiry and literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) as well as professional practice studies have been researched (Russell & Loughran, 2007); however, a study of Ontario teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency specifically has not previously been conducted. The aim of this current study was to inform and supply research with a new perspective by understanding teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency. Teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency have never been discussed or documented in Ontario and these kinds of studies are necessary in order to understand how teachers' perception of fluency play a role in their instructional practices when teaching children to be fluent readers.

I ascertained teachers' conceptualizations of reader fluency using interviews. The General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University granted ethics clearance to conduct interviews.

### *Rationale for Qualitative Method*

By conducting interviews, I was able to meet with teachers in a comfortable, one-on-one setting. Interviews, instead of questionnaires or surveys, were the best way for me to learn about teachers' knowledge of reading fluency because they were able to share their instructional methods, stories and practices with me. Additionally, I wanted to meet

with teachers in person in order to have them listen and respond to audio-recordings of children reading from a text called “Frog and Toad”. These recordings featured readers who could read the words on the page and yet struggled at times with various aspects of reading fluency including pace, accuracy and expression. Open-ended questions allowed for conversations with teachers to flow easily and for the teachers to feel relaxed discussing their practices, opinions and perceptions with me. Stake (2010) discusses the importance of professional and clinical knowledge and their reliance on qualitative inquiry. “When we examine the practices of teaching...we see that the characteristics of qualitative research fit nicely. Qualitative inquiry is interpretive, experimental, situational and personalistic” (p. 14). Qualitative research is used to improve the way we do things professionally and was a point of focus for me when undertaking this study.

Three research questions guided this present study:

1. How do teachers understand the construct of fluency and its development?
2. How do teachers understand the relationship between fluency and comprehension?
3. How do teachers perceive fluency as a subject of instruction?

#### *Sampling Procedure*

To recruit grade four and five teachers as participants, I contacted Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) teachers in Eastern Ontario with whom I was familiar, but did not have a personal relationship. Board approval was not required as I met with teachers outside of school hours. I used a letter of recruitment (Appendix C), sending it via email and social media. Once initial contact was established, teachers contacted me via email

with their intention to participate, verification of their years of experience and their availability.

### *Participant Selection*

All seven participants in this study were OCTs with three or more years experience teaching full-time in a junior level classroom (either grade four and/or grade five) over the past 10 years. Experience, for the purpose of this study, was classified as three or more years of teaching full-time in a junior level classroom over the past 10 years. I chose to define experience this way because it usually takes an Ontario teacher several years to acquire his or her own classroom. Experienced junior-level teachers were chosen because by the time a student finishes the fifth grade the Ontario Curriculum expects students to “read appropriate texts with expression and confidence, adjusting reading strategies and reading rate to match the form and purpose” in addition to other skills (Ontario Curriculum Document, p.99, 2006).

Junior teachers, who have been teaching the same junior grade for three or more years, will have encountered students with various reading abilities. Meeting with these professionals and asking them to respond to pre-recorded readings by primary/junior students allowed for insights into their knowledge of reading fluency.

### *Participants*

My participants included five female teachers and two male teachers. Five of the seven participants had more than 10 years teaching experience in a junior classroom including two teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience total. Two of the participants had three or more years experience teaching in a junior classroom.

Participants included four teachers from Ottawa, two teachers from Toronto and one teacher from Kingston.

### *Data Collection*

The use of interviews was the sole method of data collection for this study. Each one-on-one interview was conducted in a classroom to ensure that each teacher felt comfortable discussing his or her practices and had enough time to describe his or her experiences and thoughts with me. The one-on-one classroom setting allowed for opportunities for each teacher to share personal anecdotes and opinions with me in the anticipation that having more time to express personal stories would gather a richer understanding of participants' experiences and conceptualizations (Morgan, 1998).

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and took place outside of school hours. The interviews were facilitated using six semi-structured open-ended questions concerning teachers' reading fluency practices. Three questions focused on general discussion of reading fluency:

1. In your experience as a junior teacher what are the characteristics of fluent reading?
2. How do children become fluent readers?
3. In your experience as a junior teacher is fluency something you need to teach explicitly?

While the three other questions were designed around three pre-recorded examples of primary/junior students reading from a text called "Frog and Toad" created for another study. The recordings came from a previous project cleared under the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board.

1. How would you rate this child's fluency? Why would you rate it this way?
2. Based on what you just heard could you speculate on this child's comprehension?
3. What would your next steps be when working with this child?

The three recordings were selected because they demonstrated readers who could identify the words on the page and yet struggled with the ability to use phrasing, fluidity, pace, accuracy and, at times, expression. Instead of relying on teachers to remember a time when they had a student who could or could not read fluently, I provided examples of fluent and non-fluent readers and discussions were built upon these readers and their abilities. By using the recordings of children reading aloud as a way to focus discussion I was able to build a conversation with the participants about reading fluency and their conceptualizations of reading fluency.

*Frog & Toad: The Level of Text*

The teachers listened to oral readings from a text called "Frog and Toad." The readers were grade three and grade five students; however, the level of the text was for grades two or three. This level of text was chosen in order to avoid students feeling frustrated or having difficulties with decoding. A passage that was a little below a students' ability would allow for a good sense of students' use of fluency including their accuracy, their conversational rate and their ability to use prosody.

Teachers were presented with a copy of the text; however, teachers were not told about the level of the text or the grade level of the students. This was done in order to leave the opportunity for discussion about the level of text and students open to teachers' interpretations and evaluations. Not informing teachers of the level of text allowed for teachers' perceptions of the level of text and students to be revealed through discussion.

### *Data Analysis*

All interviews were audio recorded to allow for verbatim transcription. Transcription yielded 67 pages of data. After transcriptions were complete, I began by open coding (Patton, 2002) one transcript at a time, starting with my initial four interviews. As I read through the transcript I would code line by line and looked for words, ideas and statements that described teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency.

As each participant's statements were coded, categories began to emerge that were then sorted into separate files and sub-files. An emic approach allowed for the codes to develop into patterns and for "...insiders' views, such as words, actions, and explanations that are distinctive to the setting or the people" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.372)

Beginning with the first four interviews, I coded the transcripts and found 121 codes that were narrowed into nine relevant categories. These nine categories included exposure to texts, lack of instruction, poor access to resources, junior readers reading to learn, student support, professional development, misunderstandings about fluency, the importance of comprehension, and associating speed and fluency. Categories were stored in an Excel file and colour coded to participants' related statements to assist future retrieval of quotations and perceptions.

I repeated this process of coding and categorizing with each additional interview. The number of codes differed from interview to interview; however, as I explored the data, the nine categories remained: exposure to texts, lack of instruction, poor access to resources, junior readers reading to learn, student support, professional development,

misunderstandings about fluency, the importance of comprehension, and associating speed and fluency. These nine categories were narrowed into three themes that emerged from the data:

1. Teachers associate reading fluency with speed.
2. Teachers perceive exposure to text as sufficient to improve fluency.
3. Teachers believe the focus for junior readers should be comprehension.

### *Trustworthiness*

Various methods were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I was the primary facilitator, asking the pre-designed questions, moderating, facilitating, and guiding the discussion. It was important, as the facilitator, to remain relaxed and friendly so that the participants remained relaxed as well (Flores & Alonso, 1995). Reassuring the participants that all comments are interesting for research and that there are no good or bad or right or wrong opinions is essential to the study (Flores & Alonso, 1995). In order to develop an understanding of teachers' conceptualizations, every effort was made to implement a design, methodology, and analysis that would construct a greater understanding of how teachers' view the constructs of reading fluency. Conducting the interviews outside of school hours and in a comfortable setting allowed participants to speak freely without holding back thoughts and conceptualizations (Champion, 2003).

Digital audio recording was done through the use of two digital recorders in case of mechanical malfunction. Audio recording ensured that participants' exact words and tone of the conversation could be used and analyzed during data analysis. Verbatim accounts across multiple interviews were important in order to gain insight into teachers' conceptualizations.

Discussing my initial analysis of the transcription with a small group of graduate students from Queen's Faculty of Education allowed for a variety of ideas and questions to consider when developing categories for analysis.

### *Summary*

This current study was exploratory. Interviews with seven grade four and five teachers were conducted in order to understand teachers' perceptions of reading fluency as well as their instructional practices. A qualitative approach enabled a glimpse in to the literacy instruction of junior readers in Ontario through discussion. Verbatim transcription and open coding allowed for categories and themes to emerge that captured teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency in the junior classroom. These themes included the association of reading fluency and speed of reading, exposure to texts as sufficient to improve fluency instruction and that the focus for junior readers should be comprehension.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Results*

This study had teachers listen to recordings of children reading and comment on these readers' fluency and comprehension abilities. Teachers were presented with a copy of the text "Frog and Toad" and before listening to the recordings, teachers asked numerous questions about the nature of the text and the readers. Questions ranged from how many times was the text read before it was read aloud? To how many times was this child allowed to read this text aloud? And was this a first read through?

As I examined my discussions with teachers, teachers' conceptualizations of reading fluency emerged and I began to find patterns and themes from the data. In this chapter, I share these findings by beginning with the analysis of teachers' characterizations of reading fluency and its development. Following characterizations, I discuss teachers' descriptions of reading fluency instruction and finally, the most prominent finding from this study concerned how teachers conceptualize comprehension as the instructional goal for junior readers.

#### **The characteristics of reading fluency: Reading speed**

Initially during the interviews teachers were asked to identify the characteristics of fluent reading. "When I see the word fluent I think of oral reading. So I think about things like pace, speed, smoothness [and] expression" (14005,p.1). Capturing which characteristics teachers viewed as indicators of reading fluency was a way by which I could begin to delve into teachers' knowledge and understanding of reading fluency. This process of identification revealed a variety of responses including words such as decoding, smoothness, comprehension, eye contact and expression. "A fluent reader

tends to read very smoothly. Tends to read looking at the punctuation. And they comprehend what they read... you enjoy listening to a fluent reader” (14001, p.1)

“[A fluent reader is] someone that can read with good speed and doesn’t make very many errors and when they are reading...if they are also reading out loud they can look up and make eye-contact with an audience and still be able to read” (14006, p.1) In examining participants’ characterizations of reading fluency, the characteristics that came up the most in these conversations included attention to punctuation, expression and speed/pace.

#### *Attention to Punctuation*

Attention to punctuation was a characteristic of reading fluency that was identified by all teachers interviewed. “A fluent reader tends to read very smoothly...tends to read looking at the punctuation” (14001, p.1). When characterizing fluent reading all of the teachers conceptualized a students’ ability to attend to punctuation as an integral component to reading fluency. “I look for students that are able to...pause for punctuation appropriately” (14004, p.4). “He raises his punctuation when he was asking the questions” (14003, p. 8).

Additionally when listening to the recordings, teachers identified fluent readers as those who corrected their mistakes or re-read to clarify punctuation. “She did those re-reads and went back to where she made some errors I think she has fairly good comprehension of the text” (14003, p. 3). “They seem to attend to punctuation so if it was a question, their voice sounded questioning, they even added in some different voices to try and mimic what the characters might sound like” (14004, p.1).

As follows, I found that teachers identified readers who read word-by-word and without proper attention to punctuation as less fluent readers. “He seemed to be a little less fluent and didn’t pay attention to punctuation” (14007, p.2). “ There were a couple of spots where he read through punctuation. Read through a period and didn’t pause greatly but it’s coming along. A little bit lower than the grade level expectations I would think” (14005, p.3). Lack of attention to punctuation during reading aloud was attributed to disfluency and at times below grade level expectations. All the teachers expected junior readers to read with proper attention to punctuation, pausing and less word-by-word as this is something that they would have learned in the primary grades when they were learning to read. “I would consider [this reader] to be a little less fluent. Just that she was reading a little bit more word-by-word. She wasn’t necessarily pausing for the punctuation. Although sometimes her breaths would come during the punctuation...that leads me to believe that she is not paying as close attention to the punctuation as she could to help her with the understanding of the text she was reading” (14004, p. 3).

### *Expression*

During initial discussions about reading fluency all except one teacher described expression as a characteristic of fluent reading. “When I see the word fluent I think of oral reading. So I think about things like pace, speed, smoothness, expression” (14005, p.1), and “a student who’s reading fluently is well-paced, they’re pausing at punctuation and if there’s dialogue, they are using some expression” (14007, p.1). Expression was considered as an important indicator of comprehension when reading aloud because it communicated that the student understood the text to the point where he or she could begin adding in intonation and a variety of voices when dialogue was present. A fluent,

expressive reader was described as one whom could “read beautifully, pronounce all the words and it came out with wonderful expression” (14003, p.1). All teachers associated a reader’s use of expression as an indicator of comprehension and understanding. “She does seem to understand because of the different voices, she knows there’s two characters and she did use expression when it came to the question marks, she paused at the end of sentences. So, she is a fluently reader” (14007, p.5). “I think that the comprehension is there. They’re uplifting with the expression, with the question mark and it sounds like they are understanding [the passage]” (14001, p.4). Overall, teachers conceptualized expression as necessary for reading comprehension and important for reading aloud.

### *Reading Speed*

Upon examining teachers’ characteristics of reading fluency, a prominent connection between reading fluency and reading speed emerged. All of the teachers interviewed conceptualized reading fluency with reading speed and pace. “So a student who’s reading fluently is well-paced... So, speed mostly I’d say, paying attention to punctuation and expression” (14007, p.1). Reading speed was a characteristic described using a variety of words such as rate, pace and smoothness. “When I see the word fluent I think of oral reading. So I think about things like pace, speed, smoothness, expression” (14005, p.1). And “I look for students that are able to read at a good pace” (14004, p.1). Reading fluency and speed were also associated with the ability to use intonation and expression in a reading. Teachers conceptualized the ability to monitor pace when reading with proper expression as essential when reading aloud. “I see fluency as being the rate. The speed. But as you’re reading I should hear intonation in the reading” (14003, p.1). Additionally, speed was associated with a reader’s ability to monitor for

understanding as they read aloud. “Sometimes the speed determines on what you’re reading. If that student is reading with a character’s voice, in the way a character might then the fluency would change. So, it wouldn’t necessarily be, it wouldn’t have to be the flow but there is far more to it. More of the comprehension part as they’re reading” (14002, p. 1). Teachers were found to characterize fluency as primarily reading speed, where the presence of attention to pace or speed during a read aloud was found to be indicative of fluent reader.

### **Teaching Fluency Through Exposure to Texts**

According to all teachers interviewed, improvement in fluency was attributed to the amount of time a reader spent reading and listening to fluent readers. “Exposure to text mainly would be my advice...exposure to listening...also exposure to trying out and having good advice given to them about how to become a better reader” (14007, p.5). When teachers were asked if fluency should be taught explicitly? All teachers said yes; however, teaching reading comprehension was important. When asked how to teach reading fluency, all teachers said that exposure to texts was the best way to teach reading fluency. “Exposure to text mainly would be my advice... you could explicitly teach them [fluency] if they really needed it because at the lower levels they are often quite good at decoding but it is usually their comprehension that you need to work on” (14001, p.8).

Teachers described exposure to texts as a way to teach fluency; however, this instruction involved providing students with books to read silently and at times with a teacher, peers or buddies. “If you do theatre or we do buddies, kindergarten buddy systems where you go in and the kindergartens read to them and they read to the buddy.

They are getting the experience of their audience and listening to themselves read out loud. Not everybody can do oral reading” (14002, p. 15).

Teachers described reading fluency instructional practices as exposing readers to a variety of texts and opportunities to read both silently and aloud. “I believe that children should be able to read easier, fun-type stories just to hook them in and get them really involved with reading. I think that it’s really important for them to listen to good readers as well, so being read to by the teacher, the modeling that they get from the teacher or peers that read well and parents” (14004, p. 6-7). Additionally, teachers described exposing students to texts to improve fluency involved listening to good readers who could model proper reading fluency techniques. “Normally it’s silent reading for a period of time and then sometimes I’ll allow them some time to share with a buddy. But I usually pull kids during that independent reading time to read one on one with me” (14004, p. 6-7). Teachers’ beliefs about exposure to texts included the use of instructional tools such as whisper phones, which could encourage fluent reading. “I make sure in my classroom that I carve out some time in that language block to make sure that they get to do some independent reading... usually silent [reading]. I do have whisper phones in the classroom so that they can whisper and they can hear. They don’t use that as much in the junior grades I find but every once in a while they will” (14004, p. 6-7). Additionally, instructional methods such as readers’ theatre and poetry were suggested as the primary ways to teach reading with expression and fluency as students could be taught to use their voices in a variety of ways when using these texts. “I tend to use a lot of poetry because we can do a lot with our voices and expressions that way. But I also do it with short

reader's theatres scripts. The children can do that with their parts and they have a chance to practice them" (14005, p.4).

Teachers were asked to think about next steps with a reader and often times more reading, practice and a different level of text was suggested in order to improve reading proficiency. The level of text or variety of texts suggested by teachers were usually dependent on how they thought a reader was understanding "Frog and Toad" based on their use of expression and punctuation. "They're uplifting with the expression, with the question mark and it sounds like they are understanding it [the passage]. But I wouldn't have a big concern... I'd be hesitant to give them a harder [text]" (14001, p. 4).

Four teachers interviewed spoke of practice through "just right" reading strategies for students. "Just right" reading strategies are a way to teach young readers about choosing the right book for their individual reading abilities. "Definitely practice ... daily practice. Making sure that they're reading books at their "just right" level. So a quick test that I use in the classroom is the five-finger rule. Where they read a page and they count on their fingers if they made five errors or had five difficulties on that page that book is probably not quite right for them yet" (14004, p. 6).

In addition to practicing a text, deriving meaning and understanding from a assortment of texts in a variety of ways was described as the overall goal for junior readers. "They need to get meaning from as much text as possible and there's different ways of doing that" (14003, p. 15). Therefore, although exposure to texts was described as an explicit way to teach reading fluency, acquiring meaning and comprehension from readings is the primary focus of junior classrooms. As one participant said, "What's fluency about and what's reading about? It's about comprehension. And I guess the

biggest thing I always felt about the junior grades compared to the primary grades is you're reading to learn" (14001, p.6). All teachers were found to focus on the importance of reading to learn in grades four and five. Reading to learn, reading for comprehension, understanding and meaning were all key reading objectives when exposing junior students to texts.

### **Comprehension: The focus for junior readers**

This study found that teachers believe that the focus for junior readers should be comprehension. As one teacher said, "mostly, it's comprehension that we're working on in grade four" (14007, p. 6). Teachers were found to focus instruction on comprehension and had limited conceptions of fluency for "in grade four I didn't talk about [fluency] very much because [the students] know this already" (14006, p.11). There was an overall sense from teachers that teaching students good comprehension skills was far more important than teaching and discussing reading fluency. "It's still important to be able to read out loud but comprehension is more important... I don't typically use the word fluency at all" (14007, p. 6), and "[fluency] doesn't mean you can't make mistakes, but it means maybe you understand what you're reading" (14006, p.11).

The importance of comprehension prevailed during all discussions about explicit reading fluency instruction. All teachers interviewed discussed the importance of comprehension in reading instruction and reading proficiency. "I do teach fluency explicitly...but I don't put as much time into it as I would for comprehension. For inferring and for connecting and for all of those things, so, it does need to be taught. It does need to be...they need to get that sense that they need to read with expression, with

phrasing, and to get that natural feeling for the language. So, that's done explicitly but it's done sort of in small bits throughout the year" (14005, p. 7).

One teacher stated that fluency was something that could be defined by an individual on a case-by-case basis. "[This reader] doesn't sound, initially, as fluent [as the other readers] but it depends on the smoothness, because she has to go back and she has to go back and it depends again on what your definition of fluency is. If your definition includes comprehension then she's demonstrating that she's got a level of comprehension" (14003, p.10).

### *Inferences*

This study found that all teachers used inference as an indication of comprehension, understanding and fluency. Four of the seven teachers made comments about the use of word substitution, inferences and deletion of text as an indication of a reader's ability to draw inferences and understanding from the text: "[A fluent reader] can interchange words so if they don't like the way the text is, they can put words in that still make sense with the text but that's maybe not written in there" (14006, p.1). Four teachers viewed a reader's ability to substitute single words as an indication of comprehension and fluency. Including the ability to substitute "it" for a noun "the house" during an initial read through. "I think [her] comprehension is going to be fine and one of the clues that I'm getting is where she said 'the house looked empty', where the first time she read it she said 'it looked empty'. She is making substitutions that are contextually correct. And that tells me that she understands what she's reading. So, I think she did that a couple times but that's the obvious one that I picked up. So comprehension wise, I don't think there would be a lot of problems there" (14005, p. 3).

Additionally, four teachers were found to attribute substitutions and deletions as a natural habit children develop as they learn to read fluently. “They missed a little section there. And that’s a really natural thing. Kid’s eyes jump, our eyes jump over the page all the time... My guess is that it didn’t just take away from their comprehension. So I would almost be reluctant to go back and to interfere with that child, I think that child has got it. You know...I wouldn’t be the least bit concerned. I mean maybe if they went to answer questions and they didn’t have it I would be really concerned but a child like that who is reading like that, I would say would have a very high level of fluency” (14001, p. 1-2).

Just as deletions were found to be natural indications of reading fluency and comprehension, all teachers made comments about slow reading, drawing inference from pictures and the insertion of words as indications of fluency and comprehension. “He was slowing down at places where I’d be, if I were looking for pictures or looking for confirmation of what’s really going on” (14003, p. 6). Slower reading speed was described by teachers as indicative of a student trying to understand and derive meaning and inference from the text. “ Their reading is a little bit slow but they pretty much got all the words correct and they self-corrected themselves by inserting a word that would have made sense either way. Like he said ‘behind the fence’ vs. ‘behind a fence’ ... it would have still made sense if he had continued on reading” (14006, p. 2). It was found that all teachers perceive the use of inference as an indicator of a reader’s overall understanding. And teachers used inference in a variety of ways in order to provide reasoning as to why a student would or would not be a fluent and/or a comprehensive reader.

### *Expression*

A strong conceptualization between reading with expression and comprehension was found. Although initially described as a characteristic of reading fluency, all teachers were found to attribute proper use of expression to a reader who read well aloud and had a good understanding of the text. Furthermore, poor expression was associated with a poor understanding of a text. “He actually used expression for that part...He probably had a decent understanding of what was going on...because you could tell that he was pausing and saying it sort of slowly. He didn’t seem so focused on just decoding. But the second part, I’d be surprised if he had a really good understanding of anything. I mean, many students wouldn’t have good understanding after one read anyways. They’re focused more on how they’re pronouncing words” (14007, p.2-3).

All teachers reinforced comprehension as more important than fluency. “It’s still important to be able to read out loud but comprehension is more important” (14007, p.6). Even though intonation, speed and the ability to change one's voice had initially been described as characteristics of reading fluency, teachers were found to associate these characteristics with good comprehension. “As you’re reading I should hear intonation in the reading. So that I know that they understand what is happening and sometimes the speed determines on what you’re reading. If that student is reading with a character’s voice, in the way a character might then the fluency would change. So, it wouldn’t necessarily be, it wouldn’t have to be the flow but there is far more to it. More of the comprehension part as they’re reading” (14003, p.1).

Participants explained that a reader’s use of minimal expression was an indicator of a student who was having difficulty understanding what they were reading.

Additionally, if a reader worked on improving their use of expression when reading aloud, their understanding of the text would increase both with practice and by exposure to text. “I think they use lots of expression. You could see when they were reading a sentence at a time... it didn’t take away from their comprehension. So I would almost be reluctant to go back and to interfere with that child, I think that child has got it. You know...I wouldn’t be the least bit concerned. I mean maybe if they went to answer questions and they didn’t have it I would be really concerned but a child like that who is reading like that, I would say would have a very high level of fluency... I don’t think there is any harm in doing [practicing] the same passage because they become more confident with it” (14001, p.2).

### *Decoding*

Five teachers described decoding as an important skill for both reading fluency and for reading comprehension. Decoding was among the list of characteristics three teachers initially identified as necessary for fluent reading: “I think fluency is affected major if they [students] have to stop and constantly decode words. That affects their fluency. The first thing they need to do is master the decoding. You can’t be decoding words as you’re reading and read fluently at the same time. So, that needs to come first” (14003, p.1).

Although three teachers associated decoding with fluency, decoding was primarily associated with good understanding of a text by five teachers and this finding is best summarized in the following statement: “Would saying ‘X’ take away from comprehension? I don’t think so. And that’s basically what you have to remember. What’s fluency about and what’s reading about, it’s about comprehension” (14001, p.4).

Another teacher stated, “reading is made up of the decoding and the comprehension” (14005, p.1).

Five teachers’ expressed opinions that good readers could decode accurately and effortlessly and that struggling readers would read more word-by-word. Decoding and comprehension were described by five teachers as a form of reading that could be easily measured through running records, mis-cue analysis or simply by counting the number of errors in 100 words read. During this study, five teachers interviewed employed these methods of measurement when listening to the recordings of children reading by opting to use a running-record and mis-cue type analyses to assess the readers’ proficiency. These methods were used to make suggestions about areas of improvement, fluency vs. disfluency and comprehension of the readers.

Decoding was described as an important skill that junior readers were still required to learn by five teachers: “If a child is not fluent, I think you have to look and see what’s the reason why they are not fluent, okay? Everything that comes to my mind is the sight vocabulary. Do they have their decoding skills? I think junior aged children still need to be taught all of those decoding skills” (14001, p. 10).

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which teachers conceptualize reading fluency. Reading fluency is a multifaceted, complex process and teachers were found to characterize reading fluency in a variety of ways; however, teachers tended to primarily associate reading fluency and speed. Teachers' describe that the exposure of students to a variety of texts and time to practice silent and oral reading will improve fluency. Although, reading with expression was initially associated with

fluency as the interviews progressed teachers were found to associate expression with understanding. This study found that teachers place particular importance on teaching students to understand and comprehend what they read because junior students should be reading to learn not learning to read.

This study found that there is a gap in teachers' understanding about the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension. Research has found that reading fluency leads to reading for meaning and overall reading comprehension. This study found that teachers understand reading fluency and reading comprehension as separate entities and that the ways in which good reading fluency leads to the meaningful comprehension of text is an area of reading instruction that requires professional development.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Discussion*

The present study explored the ways Ontario teachers conceptualize reading fluency. Previous research has found that fluency is a central component of skilled reading and a skill that should be a driving force in the literacy curriculum (Kuhn et al. 2010). Fluency does not play a prominent role in the resources available to Ontario teachers and its importance for overall reading proficiency is rarely discussed. The current study aimed to discover and unpack Ontario teachers' perceptions of reading fluency in order to understand where to begin when educating in-service and pre-service teachers about fluency instruction.

In this chapter, I share interpretations of teachers' characterizations of fluency and beliefs about how exposure to texts will improve fluency. This study found that teachers perceive comprehension as the literacy goal for junior readers. This perception has developed without a clear understanding of the relationship that exists between reading fluency and comprehension. From learning to decode to automatic sight word reading to prosodic reading, the evolution of reading fluency is a complex process in which teachers play a significant role. Reading fluency is a multi-faceted process and this study found that teachers find the concept difficult to explain to students. How can teachers help students become fluent readers if they do not have a clear understanding of reading fluency or the best ways to teach it? In order for fluency to become an instructional focus in Ontario, we must engage teachers in conversations about the importance of fluency and instructional practices for teaching fluency.

## *Interpretation of Results*

### *The characteristics of reading fluency: Reading speed*

This study found that fluency is not a word that teachers use with junior students. Instead, teachers tended to discuss the characteristics of fluent reading rather than the term fluency. The word fluency is overlooked in favour of other literacy terms such as comprehension, decoding and expression. I found that teachers and researchers identify some of the same characteristics associated with fluent reading; however, as Zutell et al. (1991) also found, there was variation in teachers' responses to the term fluent reading and variability amongst teachers when it comes to the meaning and term fluent reading. This study found that teachers perceive fluency as difficult to explain and words like comprehension, expression and punctuation were found to be easier to define and communicate to students. Although the teachers characterized fluency in a variety of ways, two common characteristics emerged among all of them: attention to punctuation and speed/pace. Additionally six of the seven teachers interviewed initially characterized expression as an indicator of reading fluency. This contrasts with reading researchers who argue that fluent reading is comprised of three parts: accuracy when reading connected text, reading at a conversational rate and reading with appropriate prosody (expression). (Hudson et al., 2000; Hudson et al., 2009; Rasinski et al., 2011; Kuhn et al., 2010). The one characteristic that prevailed in teachers' characterizations of fluency was speed/pace. All teachers interviewed were found to conceptualize fluency as primarily reading speed. Words such as rate, pace and speed were used to describe and characterize fluency. Although pace is important for fluent reading, speed when reading is not a skill teachers want to reinforce because children should not be taught to focus on being fast

readers. As discussed in my literature review, other studies have found that teachers have a tendency to associate fluency and reading speed. Previous research has found that classroom teachers need to understand the importance of reading fluency and the need for teaching prosody and accuracy, not speed. “Children will not be able to read both very quickly and with proper prosody, so directing them to read passages quickly and accurately will have the perverse effect of having them read less expressively” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 234). Additionally, research emphasizes that the goal of reading is reading fluently, not reading quickly (Kuhn et al., 2010; Rasinski, 2004).

Perhaps this association between speed and fluency may have led to teachers minimizing the importance of reading fluency as an instructional focus in the classroom for fear of creating readers who focus on speed when reading rather than comprehension. All teachers were found to view a reader’s ability to derive meaning from text as the instructional goal for junior readers. In this study, all seven teachers associated fluency with speed and spoke of avoiding using the word fluency with junior students. Deriving meaning and comprehension was seen as the instructional focus for junior readers.

A focus on comprehension could be seen throughout teachers’ characterizations of reading fluency. Although five of the seven teachers initially identified decoding among the list of characteristics for fluent reading, they described decoding and comprehension as the sole two contributors to reading proficiency. Teachers’ interviewed explained that good readers could decode effortlessly and that struggling readers would read more word-by-word and would have difficulty decoding. Additionally, decoding was identified as an important skill that junior readers were still required to learn.

Decoding is described in the literature as word-reading accuracy (Rasinski, 2006).

Although research uses the term accuracy as a characteristic and indicator of fluent reading, five of the teachers referred to accuracy as decoding, while the other two teachers did not use either term decoding at all. The term decoding, rather than accuracy, is used more frequently in the resources available to teachers. The *Literacy for Learning* document (2004), a resource that supplements the Ontario curriculum (2006) includes decoding, comprehension and automaticity in their definition of fluency:

Fluency involves the ability to read texts quickly and automatically and at a good pace through longer texts. Fluency alone does not guarantee comprehension, but it is an essential condition for deep comprehension... Students need a bank of words that come to mind automatically, requiring no conscious effort, in order to manage difficult decoding and comprehension challenges. Automaticity is best developed when students read and re-read easy, familiar texts at their independent reading level. (p. 73)

The words decoding and comprehension are used often in this definition. This resource explains the relationship between fluency and comprehension to teachers; however, it is complicated and the term accuracy is not explained. In order for teachers to understand the importance of accuracy, at the word level and the context level, additional information and resources need to be accessible to teachers so the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension can be better understood.

This study found that teachers' could identify characteristics of reading fluency; however, there is difficulty understanding the complex process of reading fluency and how all the parts work together as a whole. As teachers listened to the readings they all associated expressive reading as an indication of good comprehension; however, some children, although theatrical in their reading, are more concerned with the theatrics and the expression than the accuracy. At times theatrical reading and a focus on expression could affect the reader's pace, fluency and overall understanding of the text.

Research defines reading fluency as “decoding and comprehending at the same time” (Samuels, 2006, p. 39); however, rate, accuracy, and prosody are indicators that this happening (Hudson et al., 2009). Teachers without a clear understanding of fluency, have difficulty explaining reading fluency to others. And, as elaborated on in the literature review, although comprehension is important and should be emphasized continually throughout a child’s school career, fluency is a key component in this process because as children become fluent readers they become better at comprehending what they read (Schwanenflugel et al., 2006, p.500; Rasinski, 2004; LaBerge et al., 1974; Lyon, 1995; Nicholson, 1999; Perfetti; 1985).

#### *Teaching Fluency Through Exposure to Texts*

Exposing students to a variety of texts was the primary method all teachers described to teach reading fluency. Additionally practice with a variety of texts was important to all teachers for reading proficiency and improvement in fluency and comprehension was attributed to the amount of time a reader spent reading and listening to fluent readers. When teachers were asked if fluency should be taught explicitly all teachers said yes; however, teaching reading comprehension was important. Teachers used the word explicit when discussing their use of exposure to texts in the classroom as a way to teach reading fluency; however, based on my discussions I believe teachers were using the word explicit because that is the word I used in my question. Although exposure to texts was identified as a method to teach fluency, their primary goal of this exposure was comprehension. Although all teachers described allowing time for independent, silent reading and comprehension, the use of whisper phones, peer reading and modeled reading were suggested methods to improve and practice oral reading

fluency. Research indicates that explicit reading fluency instruction would include the use of repeated readings and assisted readings through scaffolded instruction (Rasinski, 2004; Zutell et al., 1991). In contrast to research, teachers interviewed suggested whisper phones, poetry and reader's theatre as a way for students to practice reading aloud and on their own, this kind of teaching, although described by teachers' as explicit, is not explicitly teaching reading fluency. All teachers interviewed suggested peer reading and modeled reading to improve reading fluency and overall reading proficiency as the opportunity to practice with another person was described by all teachers as an important component of reading instruction. In addition to independent reading time, all teachers used readers' theatre and poetry as the primary ways to encourage reading with expression and fluency. These reading strategies were found to be important to teachers because they encouraged learning to read for pleasure and practice.

Teachers described exposing students to a variety of texts and opportunities to practice reading to be key in developing students' reading abilities; however, I found that the ways in which all teachers described exposing students to texts in order to improve fluency revealed that they need more guidance when it comes to fluency instruction. Research has shown that exposure to texts has an impact on fluency (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991); however, teachers' beliefs about exposure to texts placed emphasis on comprehension and teachers were found to require strategies to improve oral fluency instruction in the classroom.

Perhaps teachers perceive comprehension as the instructional focus for junior readers because it is prominent in professional education documents. The Ontario curriculum and *Literacy for Learning* document place emphasis on exposure to texts and

comprehension. “Students who are motivated to read will read more, and this exposure to more texts increases comprehension” (*Literacy for Learning*, 2004, p.62). This study found that teachers place particular importance on teaching students to understand and comprehend what they read because junior students should be reading to learn not learning to read.

*Comprehension: The focus for junior readers*

All teachers were found to view comprehension as the literacy instructional focus for junior readers. Four teachers perceived word substitution and deletion of text as an indication of junior students’ ability to read fluently and to draw inferences and understanding from the text. Although the process of reading involves the ability to draw inferences, or conclusions through stated and implied messages and to derive meaning and comprehension from a text, inferences are messages that are never clearly stated and require a reader to read between the lines in order to dig deeper into what they are reading and the meaning behind the words on the page.

Four teachers described inference as the ability to substitute one word for another; however, research has found that a reader who is using inference correctly will be able to infer purpose and intention from the text (Kispaal, A, 2008). Inference allows a reader to go beyond what is written on a page and derive deeper meaning and comprehension from what they are reading. Additionally, four teachers described inference as the ability to skip ahead because a reader was able to predict what words would be; however, just as the substitution of words is not indicative of a student with good fluency and comprehension, skipping ahead does not predict a fluent, comprehensive reader. The *Literacy for Learning* (2004) document advises teachers to use inferences to help their

students develop as thinkers by modeling open-ended questions and prompting inferences, building connections and understanding to think more deeply about what they are reading and thus improving their ability to comprehend what they are reading.

Drawing inferences is listed as a key strategy to support comprehension within the *Literacy for Learning* (2004) document; however, inference must be properly understood and used in order to aid one's ability to comprehend. All teachers perceive the use of inference as an indicator of a reader's overall understanding. And teachers used inference in a variety of ways in order to provide reasoning as to why a student would or would not be a fluent and/or a comprehensive reader.

Four teachers attributed substitutions and deletions as natural habits children develop as they learn to read fluently. The belief that these mistakes are small enough not to affect comprehension and fluency are inaccurate because research shows that good readers have the ability to recognize and interrupt their reading when they've realized that a mistake has been made or a line has been missed and this realization in error can be attributed to automaticity (Kuhn et al, 2010; Kuhn et al., 2003).

Although a reader's eyes may jump ahead, good, fluent readers will be able to jump back to the part they have missed to clarify for overall understanding. The recordings used in this study featured children reading a text for the first time; however, the text was below grade level and should have been a straightforward read for a fluent reader. In cases where a student skipped over or deleted sections of a text, their comprehension may have been affected. The next steps for students who made these sorts of errors could have included direct instruction, modeling, and scaffolding and repeated readings to aid with comprehension and fluency. Overall, teachers focused on

comprehension as the literacy goal for junior readers as junior students should be reading to learn not learning to read. My discussions with teachers revealed the importance of comprehension and the difficulties teachers experience with reading fluency, as they are unsure of how to teach, assess and measure reading fluency.

### *Comprehension as a measurable outcome*

Conceivably, teachers' perceptions of comprehension as the instructional focus for junior readers can be attributed to comprehension being a measurable outcome. Comprehension is one aspect of reading proficiency that can be measured in a variety of ways. A teacher can measure a student's ability to read with comprehension by using an assortment of assessment tools including rubrics, direct questioning, inferential questioning and oral re-tell. Reading comprehension assessments are the most common type of reading assessment available (Carlson, Seipel, & McMaster, 2014).

Fluency is much more difficult to measure for teachers and researchers. Leading reading researchers have had difficulty finding a measure with which to assess fluency; however, there are two fluency scales (Zutell et al., 1991) that are available to both teachers and researchers. These scales have been used to provide a quick assessment of a student's ability to read aloud and include criteria such as expression/volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace. These scales are assessment tools that are quick to administer, include text samples and are good for students in grades two to five; however, they can be affected by bias (Zutell et al., 1991). Interestingly, one teacher interviewed had a copy of the multi-dimensional fluency scale (1991). The scale can be found in Scholastic's 3-Minute Reading Assessments (Rasinski & Padak, 2005). This book was published

especially for junior/intermediate teachers in order to quickly assess a student's word recognition, fluency rate and comprehension. When the teacher presented the book and the scale to me he explained how he had made copies of this scale and had tried to use the readings and the text with his students; however, he was unsure of how and when to use it for assessment during the year. He asked if using the scale for assessment at the beginning of the year would be sufficient or if he should use it all year. He asked if I had ever seen the scale before and if I knew how to use the scale. Reading fluency assessment is particularly difficult for teachers; however, understanding reading fluency is important when instructing and assessing students. This study found that this lack of training and information is contributing to simple beliefs about reading fluency instruction in Ontario.

### *Implications*

This study may have implications for Ontario teachers who are interested in acquiring a better understanding of reading fluency. In order to teach reading fluency to students correctly, teachers must be aware of the kinds of instruction students require. "Teachers who are concerned about meeting the needs of all students in their classrooms should consider whether they know who their disfluent readers are and what types of instruction they plan to provide for those readers" (Hudson et al., 2005, p.58).

This study found that teachers in Ontario have questions about fluency because it is complicated and multifaceted. The majority of the professional literature provided to teachers focuses on comprehension, and teachers are exposed to statements such as "Students can develop the skills necessary to become effective readers by applying a range of comprehension strategies as they read and by reading a wide variety of texts" (Ontario Curriculum, p.9). Teachers are interested in reading fluency and best practices

for teaching fluency. At the end of most of the interviews teachers asked me if they had described fluency adequately and would inquire if there was anything further they should know about fluency instruction that they had not mentioned. Teachers desire to have more information about fluency and how to help students with their reading fluency.

#### *Boundaries on the research*

The current study was an exploratory study and all data gathered was audio-recorded and self-reported. Audio-recording made participants nervous and the information gathered from teachers about their fluency instruction practices had to be taken at face value and cannot be independently verified to check for bias, such as exaggeration or selective memories. In the case of this exploratory study seven participants from Eastern Ontario gave insight into this issue; however, transferability of the findings may be enhanced by opportunities for more interviews in order to gather a greater scope.

#### *Directions for further research*

This exploratory study provides a unique contribution to education research in Ontario. Previous studies with similar methodology have been completed in the USA (Zutell et al., 1991; Bingham et al., 2011); however, it was the first time a study of this kind was completed with Ontario teachers. It was important to conduct interviews with Ontario teachers in order to document what teachers know about fluency in furtherance of next steps in classroom reading fluency instruction, such as professional development, future studies and instructional resources. This study found that teachers believe the instructional focus for junior readers is comprehension and teachers hold simple beliefs and perceptions of reading fluency. I predict that these findings are not unique to Ontario

teachers. For years reading research has seen the importance of reading fluency; however, regular classroom instruction has neglected its value and have focused attention on comprehension skills, vocabulary and word recognition at the expense of fluency (Zutell et al., 1991; Allington, 1983; Anderson 1980).

This study allowed a glimpse into the Ontario junior classroom that will inform future practice and implementation of fluency instruction for both teachers and researchers. Previous studies have found that fluency is a skill that must serve as a driving force in literacy curricula and that teachers must be taught how to teach good fluency skills and practices to others (Schwanenflugel et al., 2010, Rasinski et al., 1991).

Teachers can improve the ways in which they incorporate fluency as an instructional focus in the classroom through increased instruction and awareness of fluency. The reciprocal relationship between fluency and comprehension must be better understood in order for Ontario junior classroom instruction to shift its focus to incorporate the importance of fluency in the development of reading proficiency.

Further research should be completed to support teachers learn about the importance of fluency as well as the relationship between fluency and comprehension. This study found that teachers in Ontario have perceptions of fluency that are not aligned with the research evidence. These perceptions may stem from the resources available to teachers, including, the Ontario curriculum and *Literacy for Learning* document which place emphasis on comprehension.

This study found that teachers would like to know about the best ways to teach reading fluency. And although reading fluency has not served as a driving force behind literacy instruction in junior-level Ontario classrooms, it is important that we educate

teachers, both in-service and pre-service, about the ways to improve fluency instruction in the classroom. As previous research has found, teachers can improve fluency instruction using a variety of instructional practices including repeated and assisted readings (Samuels, 1979; Chomsky, 1978; Heckelman, 1969 , 1986; Kuhn et al., 2003 ). Fluency instruction can be done individually with students and should be done with entire classes through modeled reading and fluency-oriented reading instruction (Stahl et al., 1997; Kuhn et al., 2003). Studies have shown that discussion and fluency instruction improves the ways in which teachers can become more accurate and reliable judges of oral reading fluency (Zutell et al., 1991;Kuhn et al., 2003).

*What can teachers do to improve reading fluency instruction?*

There are a variety of ways teachers can improve their students' reading fluency. In addition to the above-mentioned repeated readings where students are given a passage or a text that they can read and practice over and over again. Teachers can begin by assessing the student to ensure that word decoding or word recognition are not the reasons a student is struggling. Such assessment can be done through oral reading and running records. Next, teachers should time the student and calculate words-correct-per-minute regularly. By incorporating timed, repeated readings into reading fluency instructional practices teachers could have students chart their own improvement each time they complete a words-correct-per-minute reading task. In order to improve reading fluency, teachers can incorporate fluency instruction in to their lessons by explicitly teaching students how to pay attention to clues in the text (e.g., punctuation). A scaffolded approach to reading fluency will allow students to understand and identify the indicators in the text that provide information about how that text should be read. Echo

and choral reading can be used where the teacher can ask the student or students to match his or her voice to their own when reading aloud or using a tape recorded reading. The teacher could read a short passage aloud to the student and then have the student read the same passage back to them matching expression, accuracy and rate. Additionally, allowing students to practice reading a passage aloud with a particular emotion, such as excitement or sadness or anger, is another instructional method that can be used to emphasize the use of expression, intonation and accuracy.

In order for fluency to become more prominent in Ontario classrooms, research on reading fluency and best practices must be made available to teachers. Additionally, updating the Ontario curricula and resources with fluency instruction as a driving force in literacy would emphasize the importance and value of fluency as an instructional focus and improve the ways students learn to read fluently.

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## APPENDIX A

### Ethics Approval



December 19, 2013

Miss Lisa Massoud  
Master's Student  
Faculty of Education  
Queen's University  
Duncan McArthur Hall  
511 Union Street West  
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

**GREB Ref #: GEDUC-713-13; Romeo # 6011607**

**Title: "GEDUC-713-13 A Qualitative Study of Ontario Certified Grade Five Teachers' Understanding of Reading Fluency and Comprehension"**

Dear Miss Massoud:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-713-13 A Qualitative Study of Ontario Certified Grade Five Teachers' Understanding of Reading Fluency and Comprehension" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at [https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo\\_researcher/](https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/) and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at [https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo\\_researcher/](https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/) and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or [irvingg@queensu.ca](mailto:irvingg@queensu.ca) for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.  
Chair, General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Lealy Wade-Woolley, Faculty Supervisor  
Dr. Benjamin Bolden, Chair, Unit REB  
Ms. Erin Wickham, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research

## APPENDIX B

### Ethics Amendment Approval



March 17, 2014

Miss Lisa Massoud  
Master's Student  
Faculty of Education  
Queen's University  
Duncan McArthur Hall  
511 Union Street West  
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

Dear Miss Massoud:

RE: Amendment for your study entitled: **GEDUC-713-13 A Qualitative Study of Ontario Certified Grade Five Teachers' Understanding of Reading Fluency and Comprehension; ROMEO# 6011607**

Thank you for submitting your amendment requesting the following changes:

- 1) To meet with teachers one-on-one after school hours in a public location to conduct 30-40 minute interviews;
- 2) Letter of Information (v. March 17, 2014);
- 3) Consent Form (v. March 17, 2014).

By this letter you have ethics clearance for these changes.

Good luck with your research.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.  
Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Faculty Supervisor

## APPENDIX C

### Letter of Recruitment

Dear Teachers,

I am a graduate student at Queen's University Faculty of Education. I am looking for experienced teachers who have taught **grade 4** or **grade 5** for 3+ years over the past 10 years to take part in a **quick 30-40 minute interview** on junior students' reading fluency and comprehension abilities. I will come to you, after school or at your convenience. You get to listen to recordings of kids reading and contribute your thoughts and opinions on their reading fluency abilities. You get to contribute to research that has never been done before in Ontario.

**Need more information? Want to participate? Contact me: [7lsm1@queensu.ca](mailto:7lsm1@queensu.ca)**

**Not sure if you qualify to participate? Contact me:  
[7lsm1@queensu.ca](mailto:7lsm1@queensu.ca)**

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,  
Lisa Massoud, BAH, B.Ed, OCT

## APPENDIX D

### Letter of Information

Dear Teachers,

With this letter of information, I invite you to participate in my research project entitled “A Qualitative Study of Ontario Certified Teachers’ Conceptualizations of Reading Fluency and Comprehension” The research project has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Queen’s policies.

My name is Lisa Massoud and I am a Master of Education student at Queen’s University. To fulfill the requirements of my Master of Education thesis, I will be conducting research pertaining to grade four and five (junior) teachers’ understanding of reading fluency and comprehension.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of how teachers teach reading fluency and comprehension in their classrooms through discussion.

The research is important because findings will provide relevant information for:

- Clarifying how reading fluency and comprehension is being taught in the junior classroom through discussions with teachers who have feelings and thoughts on the ways reading fluency and comprehension is taught and yet have not had the opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Identifying contributory factors in reading fluency.
- Providing ways to identify and assist children who have difficulty learning to read.

**What will this study require?** This study requires Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) with **3+ years teaching full-time in a grade 4 or grade five classroom over the past 10 years**. If you agree to participate in this research you will be participating in an interview with a researcher from Queen’s University for a maximum of 40 minutes of your time. The interview will last a maximum of 40 minutes, and will be digitally recorded. Questions will be on the topic of reading fluency and comprehension. We will be listening to recordings of children reading and discussing their reading abilities as well as next steps for working with these children. For clarification purposes, I may request a follow-up phone call to clarify comments shared during the interview.

Protecting the privacy of the people who participate in our project is important to us. Here is how we will protect your privacy:

- No participant names will be used in the data or published work.
- The paper and computer data will be locked indefinitely in an office at Queen’s University. (Data will be retained indefinitely to enable secondary analysis related to prosody and reading.)

- Only the researchers and their trained students and assistants will have access to the data.
- Research Assistants will not leave data unattended.
- The data will only be used for research purposes and only group data, not individual data, will be reported.
- The data will not be used to evaluate you in any way.

**Your participation is voluntary** –choosing not to participate will not result in any adverse consequences. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Further, you are free to choose, without reason or consequence, to refuse to answer any questions that you may find objectionable. You may withdraw at any time; however, once recording begins any recordings will remain as part of the study; therefore, you will have to withdraw before the recording begins. If you choose to withdraw once the study has been completed or midway through the study you can choose to have your quotes removed from the transcription. You may withdraw from the study at any time, either in person or by phone or email, by contacting me or my supervisor, Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley.

There is no remuneration or compensation for participation in the interview.

The findings of the research will be published in academic and educational research journals and presented at professional conferences. In accordance with the Faculty of Education's policy, data from this study will be retained for a minimum of five years. After five years, data will be kept indefinitely. If the data are made available to other researchers for a new or different type of analysis, your identity will never be disclosed. A summary of the final report will be made available to you, upon request.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Lisa Massoud at [l.massoud@queensu.ca](mailto:l.massoud@queensu.ca) or my supervisor Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley at (613)-533-6000, ext. 77230; [wadewool@queensu.ca](mailto:wadewool@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Board at (613)-533-6081 or [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca)

**If you are interested in participating, please email: [l.massoud@queensu.ca](mailto:l.massoud@queensu.ca)**  
Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lisa Massoud, M.Ed Student  
Professor

Lesly Wade-Woolley, Ph.D.

## APPENDIX E

### Consent Form

Name (please print clearly): \_\_\_\_\_

1. I have read and retained the Letter of Information and consent form for Teachers and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I will be participating in the study called **A Qualitative Study of Ontario Certified Teachers' Understanding of Reading Fluency and Comprehension**. I understand the purpose of this research is to explore and to develop a deeper understanding of how teachers teach reading fluency and comprehension in their classrooms. I understand that participation in this study will entail a maximum of 40 minutes of my time involving a maximum of 40-minute digitally- recorded interview. I understand that for clarification purposes a phone call may be used to clarify my comments shared during the interview at a later date.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without adverse consequences; however, once recording begins any recordings will remain as part of the study; therefore, I will have to withdraw before the recording begins. If I choose to withdraw once the study has been completed or midway through the study I can choose to have my quotes removed from the transcription. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality to the extent possible now and in the future.
3. I am aware that any questions about the study participations or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Lisa Massoud at [l.massoud@queensu.ca](mailto:l.massoud@queensu.ca) or my supervisor Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley at (613)-533-6000, ext. 77230; [wadewool@queensu.ca](mailto:wadewool@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Board at (613)-533-6081 or [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca)

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study.

**Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Lisa Massoud. Retain the second copy for your records.**

Participant's Name (printed) : \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone number (where you can be reached for clarification purposes):  
\_\_\_\_\_

**If you would like a copy of the findings please leave your contact details below.**

Participants name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### Frog & Toad

Frog and Toad were happy, playful, adventurous animal friends. One afternoon near a pond in the forest Frog and Toad played together. They spotted a trail in the distance. “Where do you think it goes?” asked Frog. “Let’s find out,” said Toad. They started down the path. They came upon a cabin with a pretty, colourful, tidy garden hidden behind a fence. “Do you see anyone inside?” asked Toad. “No, I can’t see anything,” said Frog. The house looked empty. “Should we go over there and look?” asked Frog. “I don’t know. How do we get in?” asked Toad.

Frog and Toad wanted to look around. Nobody was home but it seemed that someone might live here. “Let’s wait to see if anyone comes home,” said Toad. “Good idea,” replied Frog. As they waited they could hear other animals at play.

Then a fluffy, fat and smiling rabbit came walking towards the house. Frog and Toad went to meet him. “What’s your name?” asked Frog. “Bunny” said the Rabbit. He could see them looking at his garden. “Would you like to see my garden?” asked Bunny. “We would like that very much,” said Toad. Bunny let Frog and Toad inside the garden. The garden had many beautiful flowers.