



## Glean Education's Research to Practice Podcast Episode #5 - Jan Hasbrouck

Jessica Hamman: Hi, and welcome to Glean Education's Research to Practice Podcast, where we talk to education experts from around the world about their latest work and bring their fascinating findings out from the journal pages and into your classroom.

Jessica Hamman: I'm Jessica Hamman, founder of Glean Education. And today we'll be talking with Jan Hasbrouck, nationally recognized researcher and expert in the area of reading fluency. Back in 1992, and then again in 2006, Jan Hasbrouck, along with researcher, Gerald Tindal from University of Oregon compiled the first nationwide oral reading fluency norms that teachers could use to compare student reading fluency with their grade level peers. They've just published a revision of these norms that she'll be sharing with us today. Jan, thank you so much for joining us. I'd love to get started by asking you to tell us a bit about yourself and the focus interest of your research.

Jan Hasbrouck: This was in the mid 80s. The potential of this powerful tool called words correct per minute, really intrigued me, but I was concerned that there were no national norms. At that time, the recommendation was that schools create their own norms for their students and find out what the 50th percentile is for their own school. And back then, I was still working in classrooms as a reading coach and mentioned that I thought this was not a good practice



because there are many schools, including all the schools I worked in, were schools where the children came from poverty. They were low performing schools. It made no sense to me to have norms for a low performing school. And Jerry supported that notion and helped me do our initial study and the two subsequent studies that we've done.

Jessica Hamman: And the reason that felt unfair was that basically the schools were comparing themselves to themselves as opposed to the national norms. And so they really couldn't get a accurate pulse on how their students were doing.

Jan Hasbrouck: That's right. They would then perhaps have low expectations for their students because they would identify their 50th percentile or 75th percentile for performance and be happy when their students achieve that without understanding that those scores might be significantly lower than kids who were achieving closer to more typical or higher gains.

Jessica Hamman: So before we get to talking more in depth about the norms chart you created and the revision of the norms chart, can you just quickly tell us a little bit about reading fluency, what it is and why teachers should incorporate it into their reading instruction?

Jan Hasbrouck: Yes. I would be happy to do that because this gives me a chance to separate the research that Jerry Tindal and I have done on compiling those oral reading fluency norms and the skill of reading fluency. It seems that that is a topic that has a lot of confusion. And it's understandable because of the name, the title that that



assessment was given. So first let me talk about the skill of reading fluency, which it sounds simple in its component pieces. It has to do with establishing students' ability to read accurately, at an appropriate rate that facilitates comprehension and expression. Some people talk about prosody as being the third component of fluency. It sounds simple on its face. Every teacher who works with challenge readers know how complex it is to establish in our students. There is a misunderstanding these days that reading fluency is all about reading fast.

Jan Hasbrouck: There's a misunderstanding of the role that fluency plays in comprehension. What most researchers strongly believe is that reading fluency as this skill is essential for skillful comprehension and motivation. I always say I have yet to find a student who struggles with fluency who's also a motivated reader. If you're not fluent, you're not motivated, you read less, your fluency continues to fall behind. We understand fluency as this skill that has a foundation of accuracy upon which we layer rate, but not as fast as possible, but simply appropriate rate. Sometimes reading faster is better. Sometimes reading slower is really appropriate, but most of the time we want students to be able to read so fluidly, so effortlessly, so automatically that it sounds like speech, which then allows the cognitive efforts to be devoted to thinking about what's being read, enjoying what's being read, being motivated by what's being read rather than thinking about the word.

Jessica Hamman: And comprehending what's being read.



Jan Hasbrouck: And comprehending. Yes. Absolutely.

Jessica Hamman: And that's such a difficult misconception to break in schools today because sometimes schools and districts interpret the rate as a benchmark, which the students should go past and they should be reading faster. And that indicates their reading proficiency, but all of your work indicates that's not the only thing. In fact, it's important to say that reading fast could be at the detriment of reading proficiency.

Jan Hasbrouck: Yeah, it absolutely could. And it's that juxtaposition, I guess, it's a nice segue, Jessica, that you've brought up so that I can talk about oral reading fluency as a measure. And I have come to the belief that measure should never have been named oral reading fluency. It complicates things because it is not a measure of the complex skill of fluency. To determine whether a student is really a fluent reader in terms of the skill of fluency, first of all, you can't do that in 60 seconds. They need to read more text. You need to hear their expression. You need to watch how they make corrections, the types of errors they're making. But there are some of my colleagues, John [inaudible 00:07:26] being one who has said, let's think of this as something different. Perhaps what we're really measuring with words correct per minute, we're certainly not measuring fluency. There's agreement about that.

Jan Hasbrouck: But we could say instead we're measuring automaticity, the ability of a student to read unpracticed text accurately, and at a rate that has been [inaudible 00:07:48] to indicate automaticity or progress



toward. We don't expect first graders to read at the same level of automaticity as well established sixth graders, but we can watch our norms allow progress for that. The idea of once you put out a chart, like our chart of norms, and there are scores of students at the 90th percentile, so many people, well-meaning, caring educators and administrators, specialists, look at that and say, well, that's what we want for our students. We want our students to be as high as possible. So we're going to push them toward the 75th and 90th percentile. And in this case, that is not a good decision.

Jessica Hamman:

Yeah, because it sets up an unrealistic expectation for these students who are struggling learners to begin with. Correct?

Jan Hasbrouck: Well, partly that. We have these 25 years of studies that document that yeah, some kids are at the 90th percentile. The problem is we just don't have any evidence that those kids are better readers.

Jessica Hamman: Interesting.

Jan Hasbrouck: They are faster, but the evidence about the quality of reading, what did those numbers really indicate about good reading, the ability to read and comprehend what you're reading, takes us back down toward the 50th percentile. Around that area between the 50th and 75th percentile is optimal rate or automaticity for comprehension. So it's not just that it's a hard benchmark or level of achievement to



accomplish. It's that there's no value in it. There's just no evidence that faster is better past the 50th percentile.

Jessica Hamman: So interesting.

Jan Hasbrouck: We do know that students who are below the 50th percentile are going to struggle. If they're more than 10 words below the 50th percentile on a correctly administered measure of oral reading fluency. There's lots of research to validate that that's an indication that something is not right. Their fluency skill could be weakened. It often is, but there's often, especially with our younger students, underlying concerns. So we look at the ORF score as an indicator of, are you on track and doing well, or are you perhaps not? Once we found a student who is performing below the 50th percentile, we always recommend following up with some quick diagnostic assessments to check out their phonemic awareness, their advanced phonic skills like morphology. What's in the way of them not being at the 50th percentile in words correct per minute?

Jessica Hamman: Tell me a bit about how you went about the gargantuan task of compiling nationwide norms. Yeah, I'd like to hear more about that.

Jan Hasbrouck: Well, it's been a very, very different process. I mean that first study in 1992, first of all, there were very, very few people using. It was essentially a brand new assessment. And if you didn't have direct contact with folks out of the University of Minnesota, you didn't



even know about it. You weren't doing it. So we had very limited data. We didn't have computers. This was in the late 80s. So that was literally going through computer dusty. I can tell you. Computer printouts with a ruler and writing down kids' scores and hand tabulating it. And even that very small study, it has never been done before, that we had any indication of the correct rate or words correct per minute for students. It was widely cited and very popular. And so for years we got requests to expand it because that was only second grade through fifth grade.

Jan Hasbrouck: And it was a very small sample. So by 2006, Jerry Tindal and I talked to our friends and colleagues and school districts where we had been doing research before and asked people if they would share student data with us, where they had collected and used different measures. That's really the important part of our second and third study is that now with the commercialization of ORF, with DIBELS and easyCBM and aimsweb and Fast and other measures, each of those assessments have created their own norms and benchmarks. The purpose of ours, it's always been an external, bigger picture, compilation of norms to use alongside either using aimsweb. You could use the Hasbrouck and Tindal norms alongside the aimsweb norms or the easyCBM norms or the DIBELS norms. The 2006 study, we compiled about a quarter of a million student scores from around the country, which we felt was sufficiently representative and created the chart.

Jan Hasbrouck: And at that time we had scores from the middle of first grade, through eighth grade and published those in the Reading Teacher. And that's not known as a research journal, but we wanted exposure. We wanted this to get into the hands of as many reading



professionals as possible. And then over the years, we got many more requests to update those norms. There's a lot of people, especially assessment people, school psychologists, special educators, who are always told you can only use norms that are fairly current. You can't use outdated norms. Especially people who took their assessments seriously, they were anxious for an updated set of norms. We also were hearing Tim Rasinski and his colleague in 2010 wrote an article that said, students' fluency rates are getting faster and faster. Well, we were curious about whether they were in fact or not.

Jessica Hamman: And did you find that they changed?

Jan Hasbrouck: We would not say they went up in any significant way. Slightly higher at some grade levels, but exactly the same at most grade levels. The biggest change is when we looked by percentiles. It's very interesting that in first grade, the biggest gains were in the higher percentiles, but in every other grade, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth, the biggest gains, statistically significant gains in most cases, we're in the lowest percentile, the 10th percentile, which indicated to us and the folks who reviewed our study, that that probably means there's been a lot more attention on the skill of fluency, that people are paying attention to the fact that rate does matter along with accuracy, obviously, but it could mean that these lower performing kids are getting more instruction and getting that instruction earlier, which is all really good news.





Jessica Hamman: Great news. Great news. And any other interesting findings that you had when you went back to compile these for the second time?

Jan Hasbrouck: I think Jerry Tindal and I spent, of course, a lot of time talking about this and our conclusion really is that ORF is a measure we should be paying attention to. It is highly connected, closely connected, highly predictive of overall reading proficiency, including comprehension. And it is a stable measure. It's a measure like blood pressure or body temperature or cholesterol levels. The medical field doesn't need to re-norm body temperature every 10 to 20 years. Appropriate healthy body temperature was established back in the 1800s and it's a very stable behavioral level. And it appears oral reading fluency as measured in words correct per minute is a fairly stable measure as well as. Jerry and I are at the ends of our career. We will not be doing another study. I assume. That will be left for someone else.

Jessica Hamman: Well, it's very validating. It's very validating how stable they were then. So we can use these as predictable norms.

Jan Hasbrouck: There may be a researcher in the future for whatever reason it wants to replicate this. And that will be great. And it will be interesting, but for right now, I would strongly predict that they would only see slight changes.



Jessica Hamman: And what's so wonderful for school teachers in that you created these independent norms is that sometimes they have access to Fast or aimsweb or some of the other very expensive things that school district will afford them, but sometimes they don't, or they have a mixture of it, or don't fully understand how to use this. And you provide something that they can easily find and easily use with which to measure their student reading progress and get a temperature gauge on how they're doing. So it's really, really important that that teachers know about this as a tool.

Jan Hasbrouck: Yeah. That was my original motivation. When I sat in Jerry's classroom and heard him talk about this new tool, I knew instantly as a reading specialist and coach that this would be very useful for me personally. And so that really has been the motivation all along is to get this in the hands of practitioners because of its value as a tool. And I talk in my workshops and the books that I've written all the time about, we need to think of words correct per minute, as our thermometer. As educators that's our thermometer. Physicians have their thermometer where you can take someone's temperature and get a score that is the gold standard. It's reliable and valid. We get a consistent measure and it has validity. It has utility for us. We've got a measure and it's called words correct per minute.

Jan Hasbrouck: Just like a thermometer, in a few seconds, we can essentially take the temperature of our student. And it can tell us whether the student is probably, just based on temperature or just based on words correct per minute, that they're probably fine or that something is wrong. And then we treat that just like a thermometer. If we look at a student whose word correct per minute is where we want it to be,



but there's other things going on in their classroom. They have spelling issues. They have motivation issues. They're struggling with comprehension. Just like a thermometer, a patient can have a normal temperature and still have something seriously, seriously wrong.

Jessica Hamman: It's just one of the measures we can use to support their academic health, if you will. Yeah.

Jan Hasbrouck: Exactly. That's one tool. It's an important tool, a vital tool. It's a tool that takes very little time to do. To me thinking of it as a tool that should be treasured and honored and understood for what it tells us and what it doesn't. ORF is our thermometer.

Jessica Hamman: Great. And before we wrap up, I'd love to hear what you're working on right now and what you're excited about.

Jan Hasbrouck: Well, I am always excited. There's so much going on.

Jessica Hamman: That's very good.

Jan Hasbrouck: This fabulous profession and this fabulous area of reading, just to continue to follow the work of my colleagues out there who are



working in neuroscience and folks like David Kilpatrick, who are doing such an amazing job of synthesizing sometimes hard to find, and sometimes hard to interpret, researching, getting those findings out into the hands of teachers. So I'm continuing to do professional development with teachers and administrators around the country. And that always energizes me and gets me excited. I am revising the coaching books that I wrote several years ago when I became a coach and desperately myself needed some guidance. I wrote with a colleague a couple of handbooks for coaches, and those are out of print, but I'm working with a new colleague now, and we're in the process of updating those and hope to have those out for coaches soon.

Jessica Hamman: Excellent. Jan, thank you so much for joining us today on the podcast.

Jan Hasbrouck: You're very welcome, Jessica. Thank you for your interest in our work.

Jessica Hamman: If you'd like to learn more about Jan's work, you can find her at [gha-pd.com](http://gha-pd.com) or head to [gleaneducation.com/podcast](http://gleaneducation.com/podcast), and click on the link to Jan's work in the show notes. Thanks for listening to Glean's Research to Practice podcast. If you're interested in learning more, head over to [gleaneducation.com](http://gleaneducation.com) to listen to more episodes, access teacher resources, and join the movement to make in-service teacher education more dynamic and accessible. Bye for now.

