Triple R Teaching

Hello, it's Anna Geiger from Reach All Readers, and today I have an interview with

how you can use the results of Acadience Reading, which is a universal screener, to inform instruction.

Before we get into the episode, I would like to briefly explain Acadience's measures, just in case you're new to it, so this episode makes sense. You might be using a different screener like FastBridge or DIBELS, or maybe you're not using one at all.

If you're using one of those others, you can probably compare those measures to what we're talking about in today's episode. If you're not using a screener at all, this will show you how a screener is very useful for informing instruction.

A few weeks ago, I explained the four different types of assessment, and one of those is a screener. Acadience is a universal screener, that means that its job is to show you which students are on track to be adequate readers and which are not, which are at risk, in other words. If students score below benchmark, which is the lowest score they need to be on track to be okay at reading, we have to do something about that. We need to provide intervention.

So in this episode we talk through the different Acadience measures and specific things you can do if a student is scoring low in a particular area.

I just want to talk through those measures really quickly so you don't get lost if this is new to you.

First, there's First Sound Fluency (FSF) that's given in kindergarten where students have to say the first sound in a given word. If you say "sun," they have to say /s/.

Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) is when students have to break a word apart into

all its phonemes. You would say the word "hall" and they should say /h/ /ŏ/ /l/. That's given the middle of kindergarten through the end of first, whereas First Sound Fluency is just given in kindergarten.

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) is when students read nonsense CVC words. I didn't mention this, but in this and all the other measures, they have one minute to complete it. They read as many nonsense CVC words as they can in a single minute, and you measure their correct letter sounds as well as the number of whole words read. Whole words read means they read the word instantly without needing to sound it out. So if they saw the nonsense word "mip," and they read it as /m/ /ĭ/ /p/, they would get three for correct letter sounds, but zero for whole words read because they had to sound it out. If they saw "tup," and they said "tup," they would get three for correct letter sounds because they got all the sounds correct and one for whole words read because they read it instantly without having to sound it out. Nonsense Word Fluency is given in the middle of kindergarten through the beginning of second grade.

Oral reading fluency (ORF) is when students read aloud a grade level passage for one minute and you measure their words correct per minute as well as their accuracy. They also have one minute to do a retell of what they've read, and that's given starting in the middle of first grade through sixth grade.

If you're a regular classroom teacher, you would give the appropriate measures for your grade level three times a year: beginning, middle, and end. If a student scored below benchmark, you might give a diagnostic assessment to dive in deeper to figure out exactly what their needs are.

Rachel's situation is a little different because she teaches in a special education school, so she does something called Acadience Reading Survey which can be done any time you have students who are maybe a little bit older and struggling to figure out exactly where their point of need is.

What you're doing is you're testing students gradually in lower levels of materials until you find their instructional and progress monitoring level. In other words, you figure out exactly what you need to teach them and how you can measure their progress. So with Acadience Reading Survey, you would possibly start way up there at ORF, and then if a child doesn't do well at that, you would back up and you would test them on NWF, Nonsense Word Fluency. If they don't do well on that, you would back up and assess them on PSF, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency. If they don't do well on that, you might back up and do First Sound Fluency. Basically, you're trying to find the skill where they're successful so that you know that the next step is to move past that into the next skill in your instruction.

I hope that makes sense. We're going to move into the episode now, and in the show notes you'll find a kind of summary of the things we talk about, so you'll want to be sure to head over there after you listen.

Anna Geiger: Welcome, Rachel!

Rachel Beiswanger: Thank you! Thank you for having me!

Anna Geiger: Could you introduce yourself to us a little bit and explain how you got to where you are today?

Rachel Beiswanger: Sure! So my name is Rachel Beiswanger, and I am a K-12 reading specialist. I work at an all special education school in upstate New York. I kind of work partially as a literacy coach pushing into classrooms, and then the rest of my time I spend working one-on-one doing interventions with students. Then in my spare time, I am kind of in the Instagram world sharing resources and tips for implementing the science of reading in your classroom.

Anna Geiger: That's where I learned about you because you have a wonderful Instagram account with lots of really good information at _readingrachel_, right?

Rachel Beiswanger: It's _readingrachel_, yeah.

Anna Geiger: Okay, got it. You have a really good way of talking about using assessments to inform instruction, so we're going to talk about that today. Maybe you could start with explaining how you give Acadience assessments to your students, and then what you decide to do with that screening data.

Rachel Beiswanger: Sure. So we use Acadience Reading Survey, and a Survey level assessment helps you to pinpoint a student's lowest skill deficit. Typically you use this with upper elementary students who you sense are significantly behind in reading, so that's why we use the Survey assessment.

You start with their chronological grade level, and each grade level has specific

measures in Acadience. If you have a first through a sixth grader, the measure is oral reading fluency, so typically you're going to give an oral reading fluency measure at that student's grade level to begin.

If you find from that measure that the students are below benchmark for their grade level, then you would drop down and give either the next grade level below, or if it was kind of really hard for them to access that passage and you know that they're much lower than you thought they were, you could drop down to Nonsense Word Fluency, NWF, which is the measure below first grade oral reading fluency.

Let's say, for example, I had a grade three student, and I gave them the oral reading fluency passage for grade three. They were below the benchmark, and I decided to drop down, as I just said, to Nonsense Word Fluency because they were struggling to even kind of get through that first sentence. They were sounding out every word, for example.

For the Nonsense Word Fluency measure, the students are timed for a minute and they read as many CVC nonsense words as they can in a minute. What this measure tells you is a lot about students' knowledge of the alphabetic principle and letter sound knowledge.

So as they're reading a nonsense word, let's say the nonsense word is something like "taf," and they say "/t/ /ă/ /f/, taf," then what you know from that is that the student is saying each letter sound correctly. That tells me one, that their letter sound knowledge is good and they're blending correctly, but they're not able to just look at taf and say taf. That's what we want them to be able to do. We want them to have that sight recognition and be able to read that word.

If that was a pattern on their assessment, I'm talking if they did that on several of the words, not just one, then that would be an indicator that in my instruction with that student, I really need to focus on moving them from sound by sound blending to reading words automatically. I would do blending strategies, things like successive or continuous blending.

I should also say that if when I gave that Nonsense Word Fluency, they were still below the benchmark in that measure, I would also drop below Nonsense Word Fluency to Phoneme Segmentation Fluency. That's the measure below Nonsense Word Fluency on Acadience, and that assesses the students' phonemic awareness.

I would want to check that also because when you're surveying a student, when you're kind of dropping back and dropping back, you want to find that point where they ARE at benchmark, where they are successful, because then you know that the next step up is where your instructional need is. That's where they need to work, if that makes sense.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and for some teachers it feels a little overwhelming because they have students with deficits in many different areas. So you're saying to take the lowest skill that they're not successful at, according to Acadience Survey, and start with that. Then do you recommend working on multiple things at once or just working on that one thing?

Rachel Beiswanger: Yeah, that's a really good question. So in this example that I just gave, if that student needed work on blending to get to the whole word, I would still likely open my lesson with that student with a segmenting and blending warmup.

Even though they were great at phonemic awareness, I would still kind of prime them for the lesson by giving them that blending and segmenting warmup. I wouldn't just isolate the Nonsense Word Fluency skills, however that would be my primary focus, if that makes sense.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. So in Acadience, there's FSF where they have to give you the first sound in a word that you say, and then there's the PSF where they break a word apart into its phonemes.

Let's say they're struggling all the way down at FSF. What do you do to remediate that?

Rachel Beiswanger: Yeah, so if they aren't able to isolate the first sound in a word, then that is what you're teaching toward, and sometimes you can just teach that. You can say, okay, the student doesn't have that skill, and that skill is really the stepping stone to being able to segment and blend.

You would start with words that begin with continuous sounds and you would model for students how to say that word. For instance: "Say sun."

"Sun."

"Okay, let's stretch out sun," and then they'd say it slowly. Then you'd ask them, "What's the first sound you hear in sssssun."

If they couldn't do it, then that's where you step in and you scaffold and you say, "Okay, listen to me. Ready, I'm going to show you that the first sound and sun is /s/. Did you hear me say /s/? Okay, now let's say sun together," and you just break it down like that.

Sometimes that can be even still too abstract for some students, and so from there you would scaffold back and you would move to larger chunks like onset and rhyme. You would see if students could isolate the onset in the word.

Then you would go back even further if they couldn't do that, and you might see if they can isolate the first word in a compound word or the first syllable in a two syllable word.

Anna Geiger: Perfect. Okay.

Now let's say the issue that they have is that they are struggling with PSF, so they can't break a word apart into its phonemes or they break it apart into some phonemes, but not all the phonemes, maybe they can't split a blend up, for example. What are the things that you do to work on that?

Rachel Beiswanger: If the student is struggling with consonant blends, I really like to do word chaining with that student because I feel like that is one way where they can really deeply see the details in the word. I always think of Louisa Moats when I say that because she has always said students need to know the intricacies of the sounds in the words, right?

Anna Geiger: Mm-hmm.

Rachel Beiswanger: So when you're word chaining, you're giving students a word, and you're asking them to change out one sound. This is great because it's phonemic awareness, but it's also using letters, and so students are changing out one letter at a time, and that's what we know research supports with phonemic awareness practice. So teaching them how to do word chains is one thing.

Just in general, if they're having trouble segmenting three and four sound words, then you always want to scaffold back to two sound words and see if they can segment a word with two sounds. And again, the words with continuous sounds to start like, "so," "me," or "hi," those words are going to be easier to segment.

I will say too that working not just on those two-sound words, but three-sound words that students are familiar with, I've noticed, seems to click for some kids and help them figure that out when you bring in words that are already in their vocabulary. If they know the word "sun," but they don't really have the word "so" in their vocabulary, then "sun" might be easier for them to segment.

Anna Geiger: Have you found that using manipulatives helps a lot with this?

Rachel Beiswanger: Yes. Yeah, for sure. I just stick to traditional Elkonin boxes where I'm sliding chips or kids are sliding chips into boxes. That seems to work really well for kids. Then I defer to phoneme-grapheme mapping which is really beneficial because you're segmenting, sometimes with manipulatives, and then you're matching the letters right up to the sounds.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. So just for people who are listening who maybe are new to that, the idea is that you have a set of boxes for a word, and then you put a tile in for each box for each sound.

So if you say, "The word is swim. Repeat."

"Swim."

"Let's say the sounds of swim," and maybe they put a chip in each box for /s/ /w/ /ĩ/ /m/, and then you isolate each sound and help them spell it.

We know, we talked about this before in the podcast, that research shows that phonemic awareness instruction with letters is most effective, so we're combining phonemic awareness and phonics, and that can actually help kids learn phonemic awareness better than if it's just isolated oral activities.

So we've talked about Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, which is PSF, and then we've got the upper level after that is Nonsense Word Fluency, NWF.

Some people wonder about the use of nonsense words, and the point of that is so that we really know if they know their phonics knowledge because they could have memorized a word, if it's a real CVC word, but the Nonsense Word Fluency tells you a lot in terms of... For instance, I've given these assessments and the word might be "mip," so if they know their phonics knowledge, they would say "mip." but I've heard kids say "mipe," right?

Rachel Beiswanger: Right.

Anna Geiger: That really could not be a word because of what we know about phonics patterns and spelling patterns.

There are really multiple issues that could be at play if they're struggling with Nonsense Word Fluency. One that you mentioned was that they can sound it out, but they HAVE to sound it out. They haven't mapped it; they can't read it instantly. I hear this a lot from people like, "What do I do to get my kids to stop sounding out letter by letter? How do we get them to cross over?"

What are some things that you would suggest for that?

Rachel Beiswanger: Sure. So I suggest a few different things. Sometimes I think the issue is that students are just so used to sounding words out that they literally just need somebody to tell them to say the sounds in their mind and practice doing it that way. They can practice not saying the sounds out loud and just get in the habit of saying the sounds in their minds. That's one trick to try.

The other trick to try is successive blending, which I really like this strategy. With successive blending, let's say you have the CVC word "mat." You would model for the students how to touch and say /m/, and then you would say /ă/, the second sound. Then you would demonstrate what those two sounds sound like when they're blended together, so you would say, "mmmaaaa." Then you would add on the last sound and you would say "mmmaaaa-t." So you're going, "mmm, mmmmaaaa, mmmaaat," and then you would practice that with them, and then they would do that.

Sometimes I think kids get stuck with a single sound, single sound, single sound, and sometimes just connecting those first two is a great way to do it.

Then let's say you've done that with a list of five words. Once you've had them practice that blending strategy, then have them go back and read those five words again because then you're building their sight word recognition, and that's when those words become orthographically mapped and they no longer have to sound them out.

Sometimes it really is about fluency and more exposures to those words, so don't be afraid to practice reading the same words every single day. I think sometimes that happens too, where we feel like we have to teach so many different words every day, which is important because we want to expose our kids to the words that they're going to need to be able to spell and that they're going to be seeing in text. But sometimes, for some kids, they just need to see those words again and again before they stick.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and I also believe that sometimes seeing those same word families at the end of words is helpful because they can start to map chunks. Those nonsense words aren't real words, so they haven't, I guess, technically mapped that word as it appears. But as they become more efficient readers, they know that I-F is "if," and they know that O-T is "ot" and so on.

So then we move up to ORF, which is oral reading fluency. Now most of the assessments I've given have been in the primary grades, so in third grade, does Acadience include any other assessments or is it just ORF?

Rachel Beiswanger: You can do another assessment. Acadience has another comprehension measure called Maze, which I'm not as familiar with, but I know that it's basically a passage that students read, and then they are supposed to fill in the correct word in certain blanks based on the meaning of the sentence.

Anna Geiger: And that one they do independently, you're not marking things down, you're just checking it.

Rachel Beiswanger: Yeah.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, I've seen that before where they have the sentences and then multiple words to choose from that would fit in the blank.

So ORF, oral reading fluency, is when usually you have them read three passages. You have them read for one minute, and there's also, in Acadience, a retelling measure where you just keep track of how many words they say. It sounds hard, but it's not because they talk kind of slow and you just mark the meaningful words they said. If they say, "I don't remember," you don't mark those words. If they repeat themselves, you don't mark those words.

Then down below there's a subjective measure where you say that they gave the main idea or they gave details in order or so on. So it's subjective, but I do find it's very useful.

ORF starts in middle of first grade, I believe, right?

Rachel Beiswanger: Yes, yes.

Anna Geiger: So let's say that their words per minute, their number of correct words because they also maybe have low accuracy, is below benchmark. Then what do you do first?

Rachel Beiswanger: Right. So ORF has the three scores, as you said: the retell score, the words correct per minute score, and the accuracy score. When you look at their results, you want to look at all three of those scores because each individual score gives you information on a specific skill, which is, in my opinion, the best part of Acadience. It's very informative in that way.

Let's say I have a student who did well on the retell, but they were, as you said, below benchmark on words correct per minute, and they were below benchmark on accuracy. Is that what you said?

Anna Geiger: Mm-hmm.

Rachel Beiswanger: Then I would give them a decoding diagnostic, because if their accuracy score is low, it's an indicator that there is a decoding issue. We're talking about how many words did they read correctly, and if they're reading words incorrectly,

then they're decoding incorrectly, right?

Anna Geiger: Mm-hmm.

Rachel Beiswanger: So that would be the next step there. But if that student had a good accuracy score, so they were reading words correctly and their words correct per minute score was still low, it wasn't where it should be, it was below benchmark, then that indicates to me that that student needs work on fluency. Then I would work on fluency in my instruction.

Then the last example would be if that student's accuracy score was great, their words correct per minute score was great, but their retell was kind of a struggle and below the benchmark, then that would indicate that I should work on reading comprehension. We would work on comprehension strategies, building knowledge, teaching vocabulary, and this kind of thing.

Anna Geiger: Okay, so let's go back to the accuracy one. You talked about a diagnostic, and when this podcast goes live, it'll be following some other episodes about that sort of thing, so people can refer back to that one. There will be an episode about different kinds of assessment.

Right now we're basically talking about a screener to figure out if children are on benchmark, which means are they meeting the minimum standard to be on track to be a good reader, but if they're below benchmark, then we need to figure out the problem and remediate that, so we have to dive in more deeply. The screener gives us basic information, but doesn't give us the details.

When you mentioned the diagnostic, that would be a specific phonics assessment that shows you exactly where the breakdown is. Maybe they're good with CVC words, CCVC words, and CVCE, but then they're struggling with vowel teams, or whatever. That would show that you need to work on those specific vowel teams. I think that's an easy one in terms of what's next. We talk a lot about in this podcast and on my website about teaching phonics.

Let's go to the fluency one. Do you see that less often? I'm just curious to know.

Rachel Beiswanger: Yes.

Anna Geiger: So it's more often a word reading problem with decoding, but sometimes, maybe not as often, they can read the words, but they're reading very slowly. What are things you do for that?

Rachel Beiswanger: Yeah, so repeated reads are the gold standard that are recommended by the National Reading Panel and confirmed over time through research to be an effective practice for building fluency.

With my intervention students, the way that we do that is that when they read a new decodable text on, let's say it's Monday, then the next day, the next lesson, I'm having them read the same decodable text to open that lesson. Then I'm collecting their decodable passages in a decodable folder, and they're practicing reading those with a partner at centers. Ideally, I have a teaching assistant or whomever giving corrective feedback because that's a really big part of it. I ask them to give corrective feedback if students are making errors.

Part of fluency too is modeling how to read like you're talking, how to read like you're having a conversation, modeling that for kids, and then having them repeat it back to you. Some echo reading is really beneficial for fluency as well.

Anna Geiger: That moves us on to kids who... And I'm wondering if this at your school, I don't know, if this would be at a higher level than what most people would see. Do you find that there are a lot of kids who can read the words, are reading at a good rate, but can't explain what they read? Do you see a lot of that?

Rachel Beiswanger: I do, actually. I do. I think that those are the two camps for me in my experience. It's the students who really, really struggle with decoding, and so that's where we start, or the students who can decode anything and then when you ask them what they read about, they might relate it to something that happened in their lives, or they're kind of tangentially related to the passage. I do notice that a lot. I think it's really hard for students, especially ones with specific learning disabilities, to hold information in their working memory and to be able to retell it back to you. I do see that a lot.

Anna Geiger: It seems to me like that would be a harder thing to take care of because, as we know, comprehension is so complex. We don't have a nice easy scope and sequence like we do for phonics. So what are some things that you've found that have helped?

Rachel Beiswanger: It's definitely harder to remediate because it's not linear, and there are multiple things that go into reading comprehension so there are multiple things to try.

I'll say this first, Acadience does have a Comprehension, Fluency, & Oral Language diagnostic. It's called CFOL, and it's a comprehension diagnostic. That is one way you can kind of get to answering some questions like, is the students struggling with figurative language? Is it this, or that, or whatever?

But one of the things I think that works really well for students is teaching them how to pull the main idea from a paragraph. Modeling that is really helpful for kids, teaching them how to pull out who the paragraph is about, find the most important information from that paragraph, doing that throughout a passage, and then eventually combining that into a summary.

Then the other thing that I've noticed that I typically go right to as a starting point for me, just because it's common with a lot of the students that I work with, is checking their sentence level comprehension. Because if you think about it, if a student doesn't really know what's going on in a sentence, they're not going to know how to string a bunch of sentences together when they're reading. They're not going to be able to keep those ideas connecting as they're reading and connect ideas across sentences, let alone across paragraphs to get the whole gist of the passage.

So I like to just give them a sentence and say, "Okay, who's the person in the sentence? What are they doing? Why they doing it? How are they doing it?" Having them answer those basic function level questions is helpful.

Anna Geiger: Wonderful. Well, you've just given us a lot of stuff. I might just have to type this up in the show notes as a kind of an outline for people so they can see the specific things.

Where can people find you?

Rachel Beiswanger: I am most active on Instagram, and my Instagram name is _readingrachel_. Then I also have a blog, and that's readingrachel.com.

Anna Geiger: Wonderful! Well, thank you so much for taking time to share your wisdom with us today.

Rachel Beiswanger: Thanks for having me, Anna!

Anna Geiger: Thank you so much for listening. You can find the show notes at reachallreaders.com/episode149. Talk to you next time!

Closing: That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, reachallreaders.com, and join our teaching

episode of Triple R Teaching.