

How to Build Fluency in Reading, Math, and Writing: An Overview

Kent R. Johnson

(Summarized from presenter's handouts by Claudia E. McDade)

For over a decade, Morningside Academy in Seattle, WA has been developing a generative instructional program with remarkable results for both child and adult learners. Generative Instruction focuses upon students' establishing key component skills and their prerequisite tool skills to fluency. Skills developed at Morningside include the basics of mathematics computation and problem

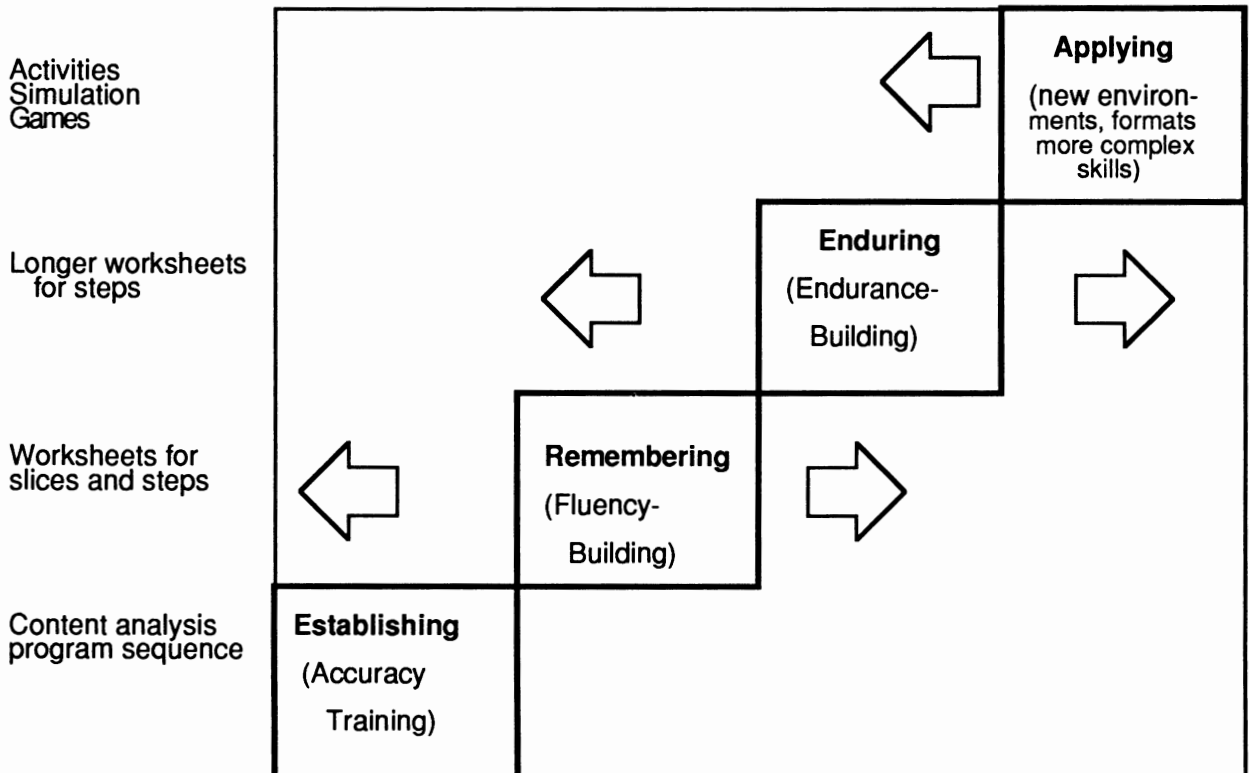
solving, reading comprehension, grammar, spelling, writing, and critical thinking. Typical academic gains in the basic skills are two grade levels per month.

The Morningside Model of Generative Instruction represents a model of true mastery, regardless of the skill taught. Teachers must be certain students establish

The Morningside Model of Generative Instruction

Instructional Design

True Mastery



accurate associations at the Establishing level. Direct Instruction procedures are utilized at Morningside with emphasis on effective instructional design based on content analysis and programmed sequences. Fluency building and endurance building procedures are a major aspect of the Morningside program--the very areas most of education ignores. Not only must the student be able to apply the skills taught and perform them with persistence, the student must also be able to apply the skills in various contexts.

Regardless of the skill taught, some basic fluency/endurance building procedures that really work include....

Clearly state each task by channel set, conditions, and movements!

Set aims that predict remembering, enduring, and application!

Practice tasks DAILY!

Practice in a variety of channels and formats!

The learning team of teacher and student mutually determines a daily aim.

Mark the place in the instructional materials the student should reach to make a x2 improvement!

Set a maximum frequency aim for the day; increase the aim by x2/week!

Encourage a variety of timings--self, peer, teacher!

In the beginning, heavily coach practice intervals!

Schedule practice intervals of no more than 30 minutes, interspersed with Direct Instruction!

Schedule energetic stretch breaks during practice intervals!

Discourage slow, correct performance!

Encourage simultaneous form and speed improvement!

Don't wait for accuracy to be perfect before increasing fluency (i.e., differentiate responses while building fluency)!

Require mutual student/teacher consultation on phase changes when improvement is less than x2!

Step up when performance is in aim range!

Raise the record floor with sprints for endurance difficulties!

When student pace is erratic, verbally prompt a smoother pace with short bursts and pauses!

Use strong channels for prompting the pace of weaker channels--tapping for reading, remembering by singing, composing by typing!

These fluency building and endurance building procedures should be used to develop students' tool and component skills to very high rates--much higher than they appear to need in daily life. For academic skills to be truly established, however, very high rates are mandatory. The Morningside model will prepare students to integrate their skills into more complex skills at the application level where true mastery is seen.