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Improving Reading Fluency of Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities Through Reader's Theater

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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EdS, Walden University, 2011

MS, National University, 1995

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Elementary teachers in a school district in a western state expressed concerns about the reading achievement of students with disabilities (SWDs). SWDs were not developing decoding, comprehension, and fluency skills to become proficient readers. Without mastering these skills, SWDs will experience diminished academic attainment in their school career. To address this problem, teachers in elementary learning centers (LCs) within the district implemented Reader's Theater (RT), an evidenced-based reading approach that incorporates repeated readings using drama-based activities. The purpose of this qualitative bounded case study was to explore elementary LC teachers' use and implementation of RT to improve reading performance with SWDs. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences served as the conceptual framework for this study. A purposeful sample of 2 LC teachers who implemented RT with SWDs volunteered to participate in semistructured interviews. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using open coding. The 2 LC teachers noted that RT was useful to increase SWDs' willingness to read, reading fluency, and student investment by integrating repeated reading opportunities in drama-based activities. Based on the research findings, a 3-day RT professional development workshop was developed to assist elementary LC teachers in the district to teach early reading skills to SWDs. This endeavor may contribute to positive social change by providing LC teachers with knowledge about RT that is useful in improving SWDs' fluency, decoding, and comprehension skills and, ultimately, enhancing their reading achievement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Kevin, who has been my rock and source of strength. Kevin, you convinced me that I could finish this doctoral study even when I felt like giving up. Your patience and friendship carried me through this journey. This is also dedicated to our sons, Brett and Ryan for being great pillars of support. The completion of this work would not have been possible without their love and encouragement.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

At an elementary school in a western state, teachers expressed concerns about the reading achievement of SWDs. The teachers felt that the students were not developing skills to become proficient readers, specifically decoding, comprehension, and fluency. To address the concerns, Reader's Theater, an instructional strategy designed to increase student skills in decoding, comprehension, and fluency, was implemented at the school site in the spring of 2013 for SWDs. This project study explored the teachers' perceptions related to the students' reading fluency following the implementation of Reader's Theater. This study is important because it provides insight not only into the learning center teachers' experiences regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater, but also into the perceived impact of the strategy on their students' reading fluency.

Reader's Theater is an evidenced-based approach to reading instruction that incorporates repeated readings in drama-based activities (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2009). It is generally incorporated in classroom instruction to promote reading skills and support literacy development (Moran, 2006). Reader's Theater incorporates movement and recurrent readings; the combination of these instructional strategies has been found to be effective in enhancing student engagement and achievement (Peebles, 2007). Researchers have established that Reader's Theater increases students' desire to read, which ultimately strengthens students' fluency (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Kabilan & Kamaruddim, 2010; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Reader's Theater also has

been successful in supporting students by addressing different learning styles and providing an atmosphere that promotes learning (Cueva, Dignan, & Kuhnley, 2012).

It is not only important for educators to implement effective strategies to help SWDs master reading; it is also imperative that reading instruction begin early (Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer, & Lane, 2000). Educators and researchers have recognized the importance of children mastering reading skills early in their education (Enright & Lin, 2010; Hernandez, 2011). Snowling (2013) asserted that students, especially those with learning disabilities, who are not provided interventions early are not able to gain adequate reading skills to overcome their learning challenges; they suffer academically throughout their educational careers. Cortiella (2013) confirmed that supporting students who are nonproficient readers early in their academic career has a direct impact on the students' future opportunities. On the other hand, the loss of early educational opportunities impacts academic attainment, thereby diminishing personal health and resulting in lower wages in adulthood. Furthermore, researchers have found that once a sense of academic failure has set in for SWDs, the students have difficulty acquiring the reading skills they need to become successful students and earn a high school diploma (Hernandez, 2011; Snowling, 2013).

Relatively few SWDs earn high school diplomas. In 2011, 68% of SWDs earned regular high school diplomas; this figure is in contrast to the 80% of the overall student population earning a high school diploma (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2013; National Governors Association, 2012). Nineteen percent of SWDs drop out

before earning a diploma, 12% earn a certificate of completion, and 1% age out or die before earning a high school diploma (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2013).

Students who have learning disabilities and have not mastered the skills of reading make up a large majority of students who have learning disabilities and receive special education services (Kirk, Gallagher, & Anastasiow, 2012). Hernandez (2011) established that 88% of students who do not receive a diploma struggle with reading throughout their educational careers. Van Roekel (2008) stated that often, SWDs who could have earned a regular diploma either drop out of high school or receive a certificate of attendance or a nonstandard diploma. Van Roekel stressed that all SWDs should be furnished with the opportunity and skills to earn a high school diploma. Cortiella (2013) noted that nationally one of every four SWDs drops out of high school and four out of every 10 graduate with a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma. As a result, the unemployment rate of adults with learning disabilities is often twice as high as for the general population.

In the school district under study, 24% of the students are not proficient readers per the California standardized tests (source withheld to preserve confidentiality, 2012). At the school site selected for this case study, 67% of the third- through fifth-grade SWDs are not proficient readers per the California standardized tests (Special Education Information Systems, 2013). The students' lack of skill will ultimately impact their ability to become contributing members of society, limiting their chances of obtaining gainful employment for competitive pay (Pyle & Wexler, 2011).

Many students, including those with learning disabilities have been found deficient in reading skills not only at the local level, but at the state and national levels as well. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that 33% of U.S. fourth-grade students achieved below the basic reading level in 2011 and, although 25% of fourth-grade students read at or above basic level, they were below the proficient level; only 34% of fourth graders read at or above proficient and 8% scored in the advanced range for reading. The center also noted that 66% of fourth graders with learning disabilities scored below basic in reading and 20% fell in the basic range. Only 12% read in the proficient range, and merely 2% of SWDs in the fourth grade were advanced readers.

Students, both with and without learning disabilities, who read below proficient levels will continue to struggle, may ultimately fail to receive a high school diploma, and eventually be unable to participate in today's highly literate world (Goldstein, 2011; Hernandez, 2011). The California Special Education Reading Task Force (1999) demonstrated that young adults who have poor reading skills are restricted in postsecondary school and employment options. This information means that SWDs who are nonproficient readers may not be able to access employment opportunities and will have diminished earnings over their lifetimes. The California Special Education Reading Task Force recommended that students in every grade be given additional instructional time in reading through their educational careers until they have mastered reading. Hernandez (2011) agreed that increased efforts are needed to help young students master

basic reading skills to reduce dropout rates and support nonproficient readers to become proficient.

The most common learning challenge children encounter in the school setting is learning to read. Students identified as having learning disabilities are predominately impaired in reading (Kirk et al., 2012). Kirk et al. (2012) found that becoming a skilled reader is so important in modern society that an unskilled reader is at a great disadvantage in school and ultimately in the work place. Literacy is vital for securing a stable future and is crucial for success (Pyle & Wexler, 2011). The academic and long-term outcomes for SWDs who struggle with reading are poor unless successful and targeted reading interventions are put in place early (Hernandez, 2011; Juel, 1988; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007).

Allor and Chard (2011) observed that reading issues become increasingly difficult to remediate and affect all areas of learning, and called for early intervention for those identified as SWDs. Well-implemented, meaningful, and comprehensive reading instruction has resulted in increased reading participation from SWDs; increased participation in reading, in turn, provides gains for the students. These gains in reading offer access to a wide variety of information and opportunities in a highly literate world (Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Cheatham, & Champlin, 2010; Goldstein, 2011).

Furthermore, SWDs respond positively to early and effective interventions that provide targeted teaching with fidelity (Rafdal, McMaster, McConnell, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2011; Vaughn et al., 2011; Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fletcher, 2011). Targeted and meaningful reading instruction has been shown to produce gains for students with

different types of disabilities (Benner, Nelson, Ralston, & Mooney, 2010; Denton,

Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). It is important that educators do not hold the

viewpoint that some children will inevitably fail and become someone else's

responsibility. Providing early reading instruction that includes best practices with

fidelity provides opportunities for SWDs to increase their reading skills while also

encouraging teachers to be part of the learning process (Benner et al.; Pyle & Wexler,

2011). Providing effective reading instruction to SWDs enhances competence for

educators while meeting the needs of children (Pyle &Wexler, 2011).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The district in which the study was conducted had adopted performance goals to

guide assessment practice, delineate funding, and define responsibilities with regard to

student performance. Performance Goal 1 was: "All students will reach high standards,

at a minimum, attaining proficiency or better in Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics,

Science, and History/Social Science by 2013-2014" (source withheld to preserve

confidentiality, 2012, p. 2). One subgoal in 2012 was written for all students to reach

81.1% proficiency in English/Language Arts on the California standardized tests (CSTs).

The rationale for this case study was based upon evidence at the study site that SWDs

were not meeting the proficiency goal on English/Language Arts CSTs.

According to district performance data, SWDs did not reach the proficiency

specified in the English/Language Arts subgoals during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

school years (source withheld to preserve confidentiality, 2012). Furthermore, the

problem of SWDs not meeting English/Language Arts proficiency goals is present at both the district level and the school level. At the school site selected for this case study, 67% of the third-through fifth-grade SWDs scored below the proficient level for English/Language Arts in 2012 despite the efforts of the learning center staff to raise their scores (Special Education Information Systems, 2013). This percentage is in contrast to the overall school population, in which 21% of the third- through fifth-grade students scored below proficient for English/Language Arts (source withheld to preserve confidentiality, 2013).

The specific areas that generally keep students from achieving proficiency are word analysis and vocabulary, reading comprehension, and literary response and analysis (Special Education Information Systems, 2013). Until the spring of 2013, teachers at the study site were not using effective reading strategies with SWDs to improve these areas of English/Language Arts. According to an informal discussion I conducted with the learning center teachers in June 2012, the teachers noted that despite their efforts to implement different reading and language arts programs and strategies, a large percentage of their SWDs continued to lack proficiency on the CTSs.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Embedding performing arts strategies in the literacy curriculum may support active student engagement in the reading process to increase reading skills (Brinda, 2008). Teachers incorporating performing arts in the classroom invite their students to assume roles of characters in the literature, to dialogue with others, to voice insights, and to critique and analyze texts (Peck & Virkler, 2006). Further, students who participated

in performing arts instruction that integrated repeated reading activities on a daily basis,

like Reader's Theater, increased their reading fluency (Alspach, 2010; Palumbo &

Sanacore, 2009). Keehn, Harmon, and Shoho (2008) established that not only did

Reader's Theater strengthen reading fluency; the strategy increased all of the students'

comprehension and vocabulary.

It is imperative that SWDs become proficient readers because a nonproficient

reader is at a great disadvantage in school and ultimately in the work place (Kirk,

Gallagher, & Anastasiow, 2012). Pyle and Wexler (2011) stressed that literacy is vital to

secure a stable future and is essential for success in the modern world. The long term

outcome for SWDs who are not proficient in reading is poor unless targeted and effective

reading interventions are in place early (Hernandez, 2011; Juel, 1988; Wanzek &

Vaughn, 2007). This case study focused on the perceptions and experiences of two

special education teachers implementing Reader's Theater in the learning center since the

spring of 2013 and its impact on their students' fluency skills. Performing arts strategies,

specifically Reader's Theater, have been found to be a powerful, analytical, and

educational tool that enhances literacy skills (Moran, 2006; Slade, 2012). Brooks and

Nahmias (2009) also established that when teachers use the Reader's Theater strategy

students who are not proficient readers increased their active engagement with the texts.

Definitions of Terms

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: The ability to skillfully handle objects and control

one's body movements (Gardner, 2004).

Existential intelligence: The capacity and sensitivity to tackle deep questions about human existence (Gardner, 2004).

Individual Education Program (IEP): A written statement of an educational plan for a child with a disability; it is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting attended by various people who have parts in implementing the program. This plan identifies goals, specific services the child will receive, the staff who will carry out the services, the standards and timelines for evaluating progress, and the amount and degree to which the child will participate in the general education setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004, p. 853).

Interpersonal intelligence: The capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the motivations, dispositions, and needs of others (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Intrapersonal intelligence: The capability to be self-aware and in tune with one's inner feelings, values, and beliefs (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Logical-mathematical intelligence: The ability to think abstractly and conceptually and have the capacity to discern logical and numerical patterns (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Musical intelligence: The skill to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch, and timbre (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Naturalist intelligence: The ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals, and other objects in the environment (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Reader's Theater: A performance of a written script that demands repeated and assisted reading that is focused on delivering meaning to an audience. Reader's Theater

uses no acting, props, costumes, or scenery; readers must use their voices to carry the meaning of the characters' lines in the script (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 5).

Spatial-visual intelligence: The capacity to think in pictures and images, to visualize abstractly and accurately (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Special education: Specially designed instruction delivered to children at no cost to their parents to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004, p. 849).

Verbal-linguistic intelligence: Characterized by well-developed verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds and rhythms of words and their meanings (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6).

Significance of the Study

Successful readers have access to literacy opportunities that will benefit them in the highly literate modern world (Allor et al., 2010; Goldstein, 2011). However, many students leave high school without the reading and writing skills they need to succeed in a career or postsecondary education. Many of the 1.2 million students who drop out of high school each year have low literacy skills (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Editorial Projects in Education, 2011). It is critical that all students obtain advanced literacy skills because these skills are essential for their success in the modern world (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Pyle & Wexler, 2011).

Reading difficulties have a negative impact on all areas of learning and are difficult to remediate as students grow older (Hernandez, 2011; Mercer et al., 2000). The negative impact of reading difficulties is especially evident for SWDs (Allor & Chard,

2011, p. 2). Early intervention is essential for the success of students who have been identified as having a disability (Allor & Chard, 2011). For SWDs, timely, meaningful, and effective reading instruction increases classroom participation, which has been found to produce gains in reading.

Fifty-eight percent of students in the upper elementary grades are unable to read at a basic level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Children who are poor readers in the early grades typically continue to struggle with reading throughout their educational careers; unfortunately, reading issues are exacerbated as students advance through the grades and are exposed to increasingly more complex concepts (Lyon et al., 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Nearly three-quarters of students who are poor readers in the early grades never achieve average reading skills, and the ramifications are lifelong (Torgesen et al., 2007). Barnes (2007) stressed that it is crucial that high quality intervention programs are implemented in the primary grades for SWDs to close the reading achievement gap between typical students and students with special needs.

Guiding Research Questions and Hypotheses

Many studies were conducted on the use of performing arts instruction, and specifically Reader's Theater, in the classroom. These studies established that drama-based instruction increase reading achievement in students with and without learning disabilities. The learning center at the study site did not utilize performing arts instruction before spring 2013. In fact, no effective strategies to increase special education students' decoding and comprehension skills and reading fluency had been

implemented. Of the third- through fifth-grade SWDs at the site, 67% were below the

proficient level for English/Language Arts in 2012. To improve the students' reading

proficiency, a Reader's Theater strategy was implemented in the learning center in spring

2013. This study was conducted to explore teachers' use and perceptions of Reader's

Theater. The following two research questions were formulated to elicit answers to the

primary research question:

Research Question 1: How did the teachers use the Reader's Theater strategy to

improve reading fluency in SWDs?

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of

the Reader's Theater strategy relative to their students' reading fluency?

Review of the Literature

This literature review presents a discussion of Howard Gardner's theory of

multiple intelligences and notes its application for learning for all students. Gardner's

multiple intelligences theory can be used to help teachers differentiate instruction for

SWDs. This review provides evidence that explains why Gardner's theory was

incorporated into this project.

The literature reviewed for this study also describes the challenges SWDs face in

developing reading skills in a school setting. Studies in this literature review provided

information regarding reading interventions and activities that have been shown to

improve reading fluency in the special education population. Some of the studies offer

findings that support performing arts approaches in the classroom, describing their

success in increasing students' academic performance, developing their cognitive

capacities, improving their social behaviors, and raising their motivational levels. Finally, this literature review demonstrates that Reader's Theater is an effective, arts-based strategy that has been used across grade levels with numerous student populations, including SWDs and students at risk for academic failure.

The studies examined in this literature review were located through conventional and electronic searches. Textbooks from local libraries, bookstores, and family resources centers were located through the use of Google internet searches via my iPhone and computer. These locations were selected because they offered the largest selections that could be obtained through conventional search methods. Online databases were used to gather a wide range of electronic information through scholarly journals and electronic books. Online databases included: Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education: a SAGE full-text database, ProQuest Central, Teacher Reference Center, Digital Dissertations, Google Scholar, and Google Scholar Advanced Scholar Search. The keywords and phrases used were: *Howard Gardner, multiple intelligence, dramatic arts, performing arts, drama-based instruction, teaching strategies, students at-risk instruction, special education instruction, reading fluency special education, reading SWDs, reading intellectually disabled, literacy special education, motivation special education, self-esteem at-risk students, fluency instruction, Reader's Theater benefits, Reader's Theater at-risk students,* and *Reader's Theater special education.*

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1993) suggested there are numerous opportunities for teachers to facilitate learning through the use of the multiple intelligences theory, especially for

students who struggle with proficiency in mathematics or language arts. Educators of exceptional learners, including gifted/talented and learning disabled, were the first group of educators to incorporate the multiple intelligences theory into their classrooms (Gardner, 1993). When Gardner's theory was published in the early 1990s, teachers applied the theory in designing and delivering instruction in kindergarten through college classrooms and across disciplinary fields (Gardner, 1995b). It has been used with students from diverse cultural backgrounds representing a wide range of intellectual strengths and distinctive profiles (Gardner, 2004). Educators incorporating the multiple intelligences theory to support SWDs found the students improved in reading, mathematics, motor activities, and perspective taking.

Armstrong (1994) noted that incorporating multiple intelligences theory in the classroom can promote sensitivity to different kinds of learners, especially those with learning disabilities or behavior problems. Because it emphasizes student strengths, Gardner promotes increased self-esteem and academic achievement in SWDs and promotes success across a broad community of learners. Furthermore, incorporating multiple intelligences theory in schools fosters increased understanding and appreciation of students with special needs (Armstrong, 1994).

The theory of multiple intelligences offers an understanding of how students learn and how teachers can design instruction. Gardner (2000b) suggested that there are better ways of thinking than traditional understandings and a number of different approaches to learning and teaching. He proposed a host of interesting and motivating activities that promote independent and creative thinking in learners. Teachers using the multiple

intelligences theory are encouraged to delve deep and find creative ways to educate

students using the students' different strengths and intelligences. If a student is

struggling with a particular lesson or concept, educators using Gardner's theory can

facilitate learning for that student by incorporating an activity that is infused with one or

more of the many intelligences with the expectation that the strategy will connect with

the student's strengths. Gardner (2000b) believed educators need to approach an

educational concept in a variety of ways. In addition, Gardner (1995a) recommended

that education be personalized for each student and that differences among students be

taken seriously. Materials should be presented in a variety of ways that maximize the

opportunity for each student to master the materials and show others what they have

learned (Gardner, 1995a, p. 16). The theory of multiple intelligences, based on the idea

that children learn through diverse avenues and different modes of instruction, offers

access to learning that is motivational.

Gardner (2000b), through the theory of multiple intelligences, posited that

introducing alternative activities may facilitate learning and maximize educational benefit

for students. The multiple intelligences theory, which encompasses nine distinct learning

styles, is appropriate for this study because performing arts activities use a number of the

intelligences Gardner (2000b) identified, specifically, linguistic, interpersonal,

intrapersonal, existential, music, bodily-kinesthetic, and spatial. By employing these

intelligences in the learning environment, Gardner (2000b) offered avenues for students

to learn using the intelligence most effective for them. In the classroom, teachers who

apply the theory of multiple intelligences offer opportunities to incorporate different

learning strengths and styles to personalize instruction for individual students (Gardner, 2000b).

Arts-based instruction integrates many of Gardner's learning styles. The language in dramatic arts uses linguistic intelligence and also taps into interpersonal intelligence by supporting individuals who are strong communicators. Performing arts instruction combines intrapersonal intelligence and existential intelligence, enabling students who are aware of their own feelings to delve into the meaning of life and find learning success. Also, classroom teachers who integrate music and movement in the performing arts activities provide an avenue for students to learn through music intelligence and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Furthermore, educators who include spatial intelligence activities in their classrooms support students through the use of visual instruction. Multiple intelligences can be incorporated in performing arts; integrating this theory may provide access to the curriculum for many students who may have difficulty accessing the instruction through traditional methods of teaching.

Gardner's principles of multiple intelligences can be used with various student groups from preschool to adult. However, acceptance of Gardner's theory varies among psychologists and educators. According to Smith (2008):

> Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences has not been readily accepted within academic psychology. However, it has met with strongly positive responses from many educators. It has been embraced by a range of educational theorists and, significantly, applied by teachers and policymakers to the problems of schooling. A number of schools in North America have looked to structure

curricula according to the intelligences, and to design classrooms and even whole schools to reflect the understandings that Howard Gardner develops. (p. 5)

Gardner identified different means for engaging students, focusing on nine styles of learning to optimize student learning. To incorporate Gardner's theory into their instruction, teachers must promote student involvement in learning through motivational activities. These activities can be as varied as presentations using different forms of visual media and lessons in a naturalistic format presented outdoors (Lane, 2009). Teachers in many schools have incorporated Gardner's theory by designing activities that support the multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2006; Jing, 2013). Nurturing the nine intelligences facilitates active learning, and active learners become successful students (Smith, 2008).

Incorporating multiple intelligences theory in the classroom leads to increased comprehension and improved reading performance in students. In a quantitative study, Owolabi and Okebukola (2009) demonstrated that incorporating multiple intelligences into classroom activities fosters student interactions and improves reading skills. The researchers used standardized assessments and a Likert-type questionnaire to measure changes in reading ability, improved interactions with reading materials, and increases in student relations.

Including activities that use multiple intelligences can improve reading skills in children. In a mixed methods study, Jing (2013) found that applying multiple intelligences theory in classroom instruction aroused reading interest and increased literacy proficiency in primary students. The study incorporated quantitative assessments

along with teacher and student interviews. Jing found that using multiple intelligences allowed teachers to adapt to meet each student's unique and changing needs.

Presenting activities using multiple intelligences can increase reading comprehension, understanding of academic concepts, and recall of knowledge and produce an overall strengthening of student achievement. In a quantitative study, Ozdemir, Guneysu, and Tekkaya, (2006) showed that using lessons incorporating multiple intelligences theory raised comprehension levels in primary students. The researchers observed that strategies that incorporate multiple intelligences can increase understanding of lesson concepts and general knowledge.

Students who participate in lessons that enable them to use multiple intelligences may improve their reading performance and heighten peer relations in the process. Heidari and Khorasaniha (2013) observed that implementing multiple intelligences theory in the classroom had an impact on reading proficiency. The quantitative study used a 90-item questionnaire with a Likert-like scale and a standardized reading assessment that consisted of four reading passages and 49 questions. The researchers found a link between increased student reading proficiency scores and the implementation of instruction using multiple intelligences.

Gardner provides a theoretical base for facilitating success in diverse learners. To foster learning and achievement for all students, including those with disabilities, educators must actively engage students using curricula and strategies that support different intelligences (Onika, Smith, & Reese-Durham, 2008). Using performing arts activities in the classroom incorporates many areas of intelligence and therefore provides

avenues for increasing student achievement. To use this theory, educators must center lessons on Gardner's learning styles. Incorporating multiple intelligence theory fosters active participation in their learning.

Researchers support using performing arts activities, including Reader's Theater, to increase the reading achievement of learning disabled students. Ododo (2010) conducted a case study to establish the benefits of performing arts activities for 17 SWDs. Through interviews and observations, Ododo demonstrated that a disability need not be a barrier to performance; the disabled students felt empowered and proud of their academic and theatrical accomplishments. Dramatic arts activities inspired the students, built their confidence, and helped them look beyond their disabilities. The positive and confident individuals, who participated in the study, helped others look beyond superficial perceptions and focus on the human being. Ododo noted that the visual medium was so powerful that in this educational setting, it significantly lowered disability-related stereotypes. Moreover, providing performing arts instruction to students with special needs not only creates environments conducive to learning, but also equips students to face challenges they encounter after school.

Garrett and O'Connor (2010) studied the implementation of Reader's Theater in four special education self-contained classrooms in three schools. The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of RT relative to their students' reading fluency. The four special education classrooms contained 46 students from kindergarten through fifth grade with varying disabilities and reading levels. Most of the students in the mixed-methods study had learning disabilities

or developmental delay in the area of reading. Quantitative information was obtained from benchmark assessments and qualitative data were collected through student and teacher interviews. Teachers participating in the study reported that Reader's Theater helped students build fluency skills and encouraged students to speak in front of others. The program built self-esteem and engaged the students in the reading process. Teachers used Reader's Theater activities to promote excitement about reading and encouraged students to take ownership of their own learning. Students who participated in Reader's Theater made progress on letter recognition; emergent readers made an average gain of 38 upper- and lower-case letters. Participants had an average gain of eight levels of text, an average change in fluency level of .9, and a .95 gain in comprehension. Based on these data, the researchers reported improvements in letter recognition, fluency, and comprehension for all participants. Reader's Theater can provide SWDs an opportunity to successfully take part in an enjoyable literacy experience and at the same time increase reading achievement.

Teachers' use performance-based instruction, including Reader's Theater, promotes growth in vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, written language, motivation, and understanding of ethnic diversity (Michaels, 2009; Tuisku, 2010; Walker, Tabone, & Weltsek, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Increases in risk taking, cooperative learning, personal growth, self-esteem, and multiculturalism were also noted (Brooks & Nahmias, 2009; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Tsou, 2011). Koralek (2010) and Williamson and Zimmerman (2009) found that dramatic arts instruction facilitated independent thinking skills and promoted positive social outcomes for students.

Impact of Disabilities on Reading

Researchers have found that students who have learning disabilities benefit from the early implementation of meaningful and motivating instruction targeted to a specific skill deficit (Allor et al., 2010; Ari, 2011; Goldstein, 2011; Kim, Samson, Fitzgerald, & Harty, 2010). Incorporating an active and structured reading approach in daily instruction improved reading fluency and comprehension and created an atmosphere that is rewarding for SWDs (Alfassi, Weiss, & Lifshitz, 2009; Allor & Chard, 2011; Morris & Gaffney, 2011).

Steady progress had been made in teaching the skills to prevent reading problems in the younger student population, with particular attention on at-risk students. Goldstein (2011) predicted the challenge over the next two decades will be to develop effective literacy practices for teaching students with intellectual delay and developmental learning disabilities. In addition, Goldstein stated that if the challenge of educating SWDs is not met, this issue could have a negative impact and implications for preparing all students for success in today's highly literate world. Furthermore, Goldstein proposed that teachers continue to educate themselves on new and emerging strategies for teaching reading and promote early literacy development in all children, especially those with disabilities. He stressed that early childhood special educators need to understand what early literacy skills should be targeted to increase reading skills.

Kim et al. (2010) examined effects of a mixed-methods literacy intervention on word reading efficiency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, and oral reading fluency. The researchers also explored the impact of print exposure among students on

reading scores. The reading intervention was implemented to support struggling readers in the 4th through 12th grades. Although the reading intervention did not adequately address and compensate for multiple years of reading failure in the students, when literacy instruction was combined with computer-assisted learning and teacher-directed instruction literacy skills did improve for struggling readers.

Ari (2011) established that two forms of reading fluency, wide reading and repeated readings, were successful in increasing reading rates in developmental readers. The wide reading group gained 56 words per minute; whereas, the repeated reading group gained 40 words per minute. In Ari's study teachers incorporated instructional strategies that supported the fluency programs and contributed to the gains in fluency of the developing readers. Furthermore, fluency interventions had the same positive effects on younger readers as on the emerging readers. Rereading texts and reading a greater amount of text enabled the students to analyze words for meaning while reading.

Direct instruction in reading fluency can impact reading achievement in learning-disabled students. Morris and Gaffney (2011) found that incorporating reading fluency intervention into the curriculum improved the reading rate of a learning-disabled eighth grader by approximately 33%. Prior to intervention, this student read at a third- through fourth-grade level and at approximately 75 words per minute. After one year of participating in the treatment, this student's oral reading rate rose to approximately 100 words per minute. Building reading fluency was a key component of the student's success. The fluency instruction consisted of daily guided reading, repeated readings, and taped readings. In addition, regular charting of the student's progress provided

performance feedback. Encouraging students to read and reread the same printed words in a meaningful context promoted fluency development.

Allor et al. (2010) reported that students with intellectual delays responded positively to comprehensive reading interventions and made significant progress when interventions were implemented with fidelity. The elementary students with mild to moderate intellectual delays demonstrated the ability to process the internal structure of printed and spoken words. The students made progress in identifying real words in lists and in passages. The researchers predicted that the treatment group would be able to read 44 words per minute after participating in the intervention. More than half of the students receiving intervention met or almost met the benchmark score of 40 words per minutes on ending first-grade-level passages. However, the control and treatment groups performed similarly in reading comprehension.

The effectiveness of reciprocal teaching for fostering reading comprehension in students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities who did not have a history of maladaptive behaviors was examined by Alfassi et al. (2009).   The instructional strategy consisted of 12 weeks of shared verbal interchanges. Participants were asked to create dialogue questions in response to texts, condense what was read, identify words they found difficult, and make predications. This strategy instruction is more effective in promoting reading comprehension with this population than traditional methods of skills attainment. The authors observed that "the findings challenged the common perception that literacy is an organic impossibility for people defined as intellectually disabled" (p. 291). Furthermore, there was a need to alter conventional forms of reading instruction

and to rethink the comprehension process and its instruction for students with intellectual disabilities. Students with learning disabilities can develop reading skills when presented with programs that use an active and structured approach.

Students who do not read fluently struggle to comprehend what they have read. Allor and Chard (2011) showed that accurate and efficient decoding of words is directly related to comprehension. When SWDs struggle to decode words fluently, they have difficulty comprehending what they read. In addition, because students with multiple disabilities have a number of deficits, the authors recommended that educators approach teaching reading to students with multiple disabilities strategically and in a comprehensive manner. Students with both learning and intellectual disabilities may have challenges with decoding and language skills; therefore, instruction for either disability should include meaningful language and some form of instructional activity that incorporates a motivational reward (Allor & Chard).

Using a structured early literacy curriculum with SWDs can increase reading achievement. Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, and Flowers (2008) conducted an experimental study using an early literacy curriculum with students with developmental disabilities. Students with significant learning disabilities as well as overall developmental disabilities benefited from the instruction and made significant gains on the assessments indicators. Twenty-three intellectually disabled students in kindergarten through fourth grade attending a self-contained special education classroom participated in this study. The researchers randomly assigned students to either a treatment or a control group. The treatment group gained significantly more skills in the

reading activities than the control group. The students made significant gains in

phonemic awareness. Most of the students mastered only one or two levels of the five in

the reading curriculum; however, the researchers considered their growth noteworthy.

Based on their findings, the authors suggested that reading achievement, specifically

acquisition of critical decoding skills, may be possible for students with significant

disabilities through structured reading programs implemented early in the students'

education.

     Guided fluency instruction may enhance reading rates and improve

comprehension skills in SWDs. Snellings, Van der Leij, de Jong, and Blok (2009)

researched whether the use of computerized independent silent reading training could

improve comprehension and reading rates of students with reading disabilities. The

quantitative study compared 35 students who were non-disabled readers with 24 students

who were reading disabled from 14 different schools. Participants' reading rates

increased significantly after the use of the computerized independent silent reading

training. The main problems impacting the students with reading disabilities were the

lack of fluency intervention and ineffective daily instruction. More importantly, the

participants' reading rate increase did not impact reading comprehension negatively.

Fluency of the SWDs increased, along with their group reading comprehension score.

     SWDs, including intellectually delayed students, have made substantial gains in

many areas when provided daily structured and active instruction (Alfassi et al., 2009;

Ari, 2011; Morris & Gaffney, 2011). For SWDs, meaningful and systematically

implemented reading activities can improve language acquisition and vocabulary skills

(Allor & Chard, 2011; Kim et al., 2010). Early and targeted reading instruction increases fluency, decoding, comprehension, and phonemic awareness in SWDs (Allor et al., 2010; Browder et al., 2008).

Benefits of Performing Arts Activities

Many classrooms lack effective strategies that support SWDs. Researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2005) reported that classrooms include diverse learners, advanced learners, and learners with disabilities, all with different life experiences, personal interests and learning preferences. Skoning (2010) observed that although classrooms are comprised of diverse learners, many schools do not integrate differentiated instruction into the curriculum. Teachers who use differentiated instruction promote a positive learning environment that targets a number of learning styles, interests, and performance. Integrating unique teaching approaches and changing the way instruction is designed and delivered can benefit diverse learners, including children with learning disabilities (McMahon, Rose, & Parks, 2004). Using more than one way of learning reinforces comprehension, metacognition, and engagement in students who have varied learning needs (Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008; Ozdemir et al., 2006). McMahon, Rose, and Parks (2003) and Smith (2008) demonstrated that incorporating creative instruction and targeting unique learning styles increases academic achievement for SWDs.

One form of creative instruction that targets several learning styles is embedding performing arts strategies, specifically Reader's Theater, into the curriculum. Teachers who use this form of instruction promote active and meaningful student engagement and

support differentiation of instruction for SWDs (Brinda, 2008). SWDs have difficulties

in many academic areas, including reading fluency (Snellings et al., 2009). Incorporating

performing arts activities into classroom instruction can raise reading fluency and boost

achievement in other areas as well (Michaels 2009; Tuisku, 2010; Walker et al., 2011).

Teachers who have implemented performing arts activities in their classrooms have

reported improved standardized reading scores, both immediately after implementation

and for sustained periods (Walker et al., 2011). Teachers who incorporate performing

arts activities in the classroom promotes develop higher order thinking skills and gain in

written language, reading comprehension, and reading fluency through heightened

engagement in the lessons (Calo, 2011; Certo & Brinda, 2011; Gullat, 2008; Michaels,

2009; Williamson & Zimmerman, 2009).

To examine the effect of performing arts activities on language arts performance,

Walker et al. (2011) investigated a program in which the Educational Arts Team used

dramatic arts to teach social studies and language arts to middle school students. The

quantitative study used a treatment group comprised of 14 teachers and 540 students from

14 classrooms and a control group of 14 teachers and 480 students from 14 classrooms.

The Educational Arts Team delivered a series of theater-based lessons aligned with the

state reading and literacy standards to allow students to develop a higher level of

comprehension of the texts students read. In addition, using this instruction supported

students in expressing themselves in a confident and clear manner in writing. Students’

standardized achievement test scores of students rose significantly. Approximately 56%

of participants in the treatment group passed the statewide standardized assessments in

English/Language Arts in comparison to 43% of students in the control group. Learners who were involved in the theater-based classrooms had fewer absences than students in the control group, although the difference was not statistically significant. Integrating performing arts into instruction had immediate and sustained academic benefits.

Gullat (2008) showed that visual, dramatic, and musical programs enrich teaching instruction and student learning in Pre-K- through Grade-12 school settings. In these programs students could become participants in their own learning. Higher order thinking and reinforced aesthetic qualities in students were a feature of these programs. They encouraged collaboration and improved communication among participating students. Teachers who incorporated arts-based curriculum encouraged a multi-sensory approach that enhanced instruction and learning and encouraged diversity and multiculturalism, opening doors to learning about world cultures. Moreover, Gullat found that participating in the arts allowed students to more deeply understand the perspectives of others by becoming more involved in the learning process.

Theater-based instruction coupled with literacy support can increase reading comprehension and enjoyment in struggling readers. Certo and Brinda (2011) conducted a qualitative study in two sixth-grade middle school classrooms in a low-income urban area in Pennsylvania. The purpose of the study was to support teachers by addressing literacy in an engaging manner through novels; instructional support was designed to engage and meet literacy challenges within the population. The urban middle school partnered with Prime Stage, a semiprofessional theater company, to provide literature adaptations and create curriculum materials to address the reading challenges of

struggling readers. One challenge noted by a teacher was that "student struggles become embarrassments that create anxieties" (p. 22). To increase decoding skills in students, particularly in urban schools, teachers must implement programs that not only meet the learning needs of the population, but also target students' interests. Certo and Brinda demonstrated that the coupling of dramatic arts instruction with literature evoked an aesthetic and emotional response in students that reading the literature alone did not.

Another critical outcome of the Certo and Brinda (2011) study was that teachers saw the ease and value in integrating theater-based experiences into their curriculum. Educators participating in the study noted that students were more engaged by the dramatic activities and were able to look at books in a new manner. Teachers commented that exposure to theater and involving students in performing arts instruction improved engagement, comprehension, and reading enjoyment.

Incorporating drama-based instruction into the curriculum can facilitate student learning in a productive and positive environment. Williamson and Zimmerman (2009) conducted a case study at an elementary school that offered a curriculum that integrated visual and performing arts in all classrooms. The well-rounded curriculum demonstrated the benefits of performance-based activities for teaching and student learning. Over 260 students in kindergarten through sixth grade and 32 staff members participated in the program that incorporated dramatic activities into the curriculum. The dramatic arts teacher integrated the arts processes to create an environment that was challenging and exciting for students. She adapted the instruction to increase student engagement, create meaningful learning activities, and elicit incredible responses from the students. After

experiencing this instruction, the other educators involved in the study were able to use these performing arts activities and become their own facilitators in the teaching process. For many teachers, this meant a change in their educational practices. The students participating in this program found success in all areas of language arts. Participants reported confidence with infusing performing arts instruction in the classroom would enable them to achieve their goal of meeting their students' needs and that the most challenged students would enjoy school as much as their peers.

Using arts-based instruction in the classroom creates a positive setting that is conducive to early childhood learning. Koralek (2010) conducted interviews with a long-time early childhood educator and teacher trainer who was an advocate for incorporating the arts into all areas of the school curriculum. The interviewee explained that children are inherent connectors and can use the performing arts as part of any activity. Children who are engaged in visual arts instruction learn language, experience emotion, rejoice in music and movement, and ultimately enhance their comprehension of literature. Koralek noted that children's reading skills and problem solving can be enhanced by having music and movement incorporated into classroom instruction. Reading and problem solving involve language and pattering and can be enhanced with movement-based activities. The key finding of this research was that arts instruction in the classroom facilitates closeness between the teacher and students, and closeness encourages an environment that is friendly and enjoyable and thus promotes student learning.

Michaels (2009) found that students who participated in visual and performing arts projects became stronger readers and writers. The 26-week, qualitative study

incorporated opened-ended and thought provoking questions about language arts and performing arts activities in which the students participated. The students made gains in reading and written language, including a rise in thinking about literature in an in-depth way. To elicit the gains from students, educators incorporated dramatic arts activities into their written language and literature-based lessons. These activities included poetry, stories, and scenes from plays. Michaels observed that the project director emphasized that all writing is "creative" and encouraged students to mix genres and work in various media. Students who contributed to the information presented in the study reported that after participating in the projects their understanding of the literature was strengthened and the literature had new dimension for them.

Using visual arts in the classroom can increase students' reading fluency and improve their written language skills. Calo (2011) found that teachers who use visual arts enable students to comprehend words on the page by giving them visual representations of pictures and words. Graphic poetry was used to engage the imagination of students and to teach higher level literacy concepts. Teachers who employed visual arts enhanced the meaning of text through visual images and poetry. The key to successful graphic poetry is to provide opportunities to explore and critique the images and narratives within the text. Using this type of visual art promotes discussion and allows students to reflect upon the deeper meaning of what was read. Furthermore, graphic poetry supports comprehension strategies, such as, connecting ideas from prior knowledge, making inferences, drawing conclusions through narrative details, and condensing information. In addition, graphic poetry can be used to develop students'

reading fluency and to promote written language. Furthermore, this form of visual art encourages participants to reflect upon and respond to what they read and helps students be critical readers. Calo noted that incorporating this strategy into the curriculum is a useful way to encourage students and give them the means to access learning.

Brinda (2008) researched whether a program combining visualization with reading could enhance comprehension and visualization skills in 16 early adolescent students. The researcher also sought to determine if participants' experienced an increased enjoyment of reading. The mixed-methods study used quantitative data from unit reading tests and qualitative data from teacher interviews and observations. Brinda found that students connected with the characters in reading through the actions of the characters as well as through the literature's sounds, setting, and words. Teachers reported that they observed improvements in the students' willingness to read and participate in the curriculum. The teachers also noted improvements in the students' grades after participating in the study. Of the 16 student participants, 14 passed a unit test with proficient scores and reported a satisfaction in reading the assigned literature. Twelve of the students read additional books and 10 improved their reading grades. One participating educator commented, "The experience has enriched their lives as well as mine" (p. 495). Implementing theater experiences enabled participants, even reluctant readers, to discover that reading literature can be meaningful and enjoyable. As a result of the study, the participants' motivation to read was strengthened.

Visual-arts based learning can engage reluctant readers and improve reading skills. Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) conducted a study that incorporated the use of

Image Theatre and literacy with low-achieving eighth-grade readers. The purpose of the study was to. Critical literacy is built on a number of principles about the relationship between the author and the reader:

> Critical literacy focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action. … Critical literacy focuses on the problem and its complexity. … Techniques that promote critical literacy are dynamic and adapt to the contexts in which they are used … [and] examining multiple perspectives is an important aspect of critical literacy. (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 54)

Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) used two eighth-grade reading classes of low achieving students. A large majority of the students were from low-income African American families. The researchers documented the activities on videotapes, which were later transcribed. Rozansky and Aagesen noted that administrators in the district did not expect the low-achieving readers to become proficient in literacy. However, the dramatic arts participation provided students with an avenue through which to explore various perspectives on issues, and they were engaged in critical literacy after their participation in the curriculum. The use of Image Theatre supported unsuccessful readers by providing them the opportunity to engage in complex and critical texts. Furthermore, racially diverse students who were identified as less able readers demonstrated critical literacy after their participation in the study by showing the researchers that they could respond to literature in an analytical manner.

Researchers have established that when performing arts strategies are incorporated in the classroom, students become engaged and interact with the lessons and

one another. Low performing readers who take part in performing arts lessons can increase their critical thinking skills and improve their reading comprehension (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). Integrating performing arts lessons in the classroom cultivates an atmosphere that is conducive for learning in ways that conventional teaching methods cannot (Koralek, 2010). Thus use of performing arts activities can enhance students' reading skills and allow them to become critical readers (Calo, 2011).

Impact of Reader's Theater

Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) noted that reading fluency is typically obtained by most children by third grade. However, approximately 75% of students who are non-proficient readers in third grade continue to be poor readers in the ninth grade and ultimately do not gain the skills to become proficient readers in adulthood (Mercer et al., 2000). Students who habitually struggle with academic texts often lack self-efficiency and motivation to engage in reading and writing (Clark et al., 2009; Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010; Tsou, 2011).

Embedding drama in the literacy curriculum is one way to support active and meaningful student engagement in the reading process, which leads to improvement in reading skills (Brinda, 2008). Performing arts in the classroom invites students to assume roles of characters in the literature, to dialogue with others, to voice insights, and to critique and interpret texts (Peck & Virkler, 2006). Further, students who participate in performing arts instruction that integrates repeated reading activities on a daily basis increase their reading fluency (Alspach, 2010).

Reader's Theater is one approach to instruction that incorporates repeated reading into performance activities (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2009). Reader's Theater combines recurrent readings with movement, two activities that have been found to increase student achievement and engagement. Research has shown that Reader's Theater promotes reading attainment over other methods of performing arts due to the fact that it is both performance- and text-based (Moran, 2006). The most widely accepted and well researched reason for using Reader's Theater in the educational arena is to enhance literacy skills (Moran, 2006).

Reading Fluency

Virtually all the research on Reader's Theater shows that the strategy is effective in improving reading fluency. A mixed-methods study conducted by Clark et al. (2009) examined the fluency development of fourth-grade readers using Reader's Theater as an intervention. The three participants in the study were at varying reading levels, selected on the bases of the number of words they read correctly per minute on two standardized reading measures. During the 8-week intervention, Reader's Theater was incorporated in the classroom instruction to increase fluency through repeated readings. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through student observations and interviews, analysis of participants' reports, and weekly scores from the two standardized reading measures.

The three students with differing oral reading abilities were motivated by Reader's Theater, participated in the heterogeneous activities, and were successful in reading (Clark et al., 2009). The Reader's Theater intervention not only benefited struggling readers, but challenged higher level readers as well. Clark et al. noted that

readers expected success as they practiced the scripts and performed for their peers. The activities provided opportunities for repeated readings. The repetition motivated the students to practice reading the texts numerous times without experiencing the monotony of reading and rereading the same book. This practice gave the participants confidence and self-assurance that enabled them to perform in front of their peers. The audience presence supported students and gave them "motivation to continue to practice reading and rereading their scripts" (p. 381); the repetition increased the student's oral reading performance. In addition, the Reader's Theater experience increased the students' ability and desire to read more frequently.

Vasinda and McLeod (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study to determine if adding podcasting to Reader's Theater would lead to increased reading performance for 100 second- and third-grade students in three elementary schools in a North Texas suburb. Two of the schools were comprised of English learners and 35 participants were identified as struggling readers. The combination of podcasting and Reader's Theater produced significant gains in reading skills after the 10-week intervention (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). The participants gained the grade level equivalency of 1.13 years. A primary theme that immerged from the qualitative data was that podcasting coupled with Reader's Theater produced a learning environment that was challenging yet satisfying.

One of the reasons use of Reader's Theater improves reading fluency may be its incorporation of movement. Peebles (2007) found that using instructional fluency strategies involving movement were motivational and effective with primary-grade readers. Incorporating literacy instruction with movement held the key to connecting non-

proficient readers to the skills needed for reading fluently. Reader's Theater was used with both general education students and students with reading difficulties in Grades 1 through 6. She noted that the program's activities orchestrated the vital components of reading instruction while also providing engaging material for students to read and reread. Incorporating movement into reading instruction motivated the students to read over and over again, improving reading fluency as well as comprehension.

Comprehension and Vocabulary

Students who participate in Reader's Theater activities can increase their overall reading performance, which means improving in comprehension and vocabulary as well as fluency. Keehn et al. (2008) compared overall reading performance of eighth-grade students receiving instruction using Reader's Theater and like-ability students who received conventional reading instruction. Students who participated in the Reader's Theater activities made significant gains in fluency and oral reading when measured against the students in the comparison group. Keehn et al. also found that the Reader's Theater participants' increased their vocabulary by almost 50% over the control group.

Reader's Theater has been shown to help students master difficult concepts and vocabulary and become fluent readers of academic material. Kinniburgh and Shaw (2007) found that students using Reader's Theater could uncover the meanings of science vocabulary words as they read and composed scripts to be performed. The students also discussed difficult concepts and expanded on science theories as they developed the scripts. Students participating in Reader's Theater activities expressed that the vocabulary became more meaningful and the scripts were more motivating than merely

reading science textbooks. While reading scripts, students added their individual personalities to the parts through use of voice intonation and expression. They summarized their findings as follows: "This became fluent reading and even the most struggling readers feel success because of the rehearsals that take place prior to the performance" (p. 19). The participants developed a love for the subject of science over time and ultimately enjoyed reading the content information in both scripts and textbooks. Kinniburgh concluded that incorporating Reader's Theater into the science curriculum enables students to experience increased enjoyment while improving their reading skills and adding to their content knowledge.

Motivation

Improved fluency and comprehension often lead to higher motivation. In a mixed-methods study, Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010) examined the use of Reader's Theater to enhance middle school learners' comprehension of literature and to increase their motivation and interest in learning narrative texts. The experiment used questionnaires, interviews, and teacher observations to gather information on the impact of Reader's Theater on the participants. The study incorporated pedagogical approaches that were learner-based and aligned with the learners' interests.

An increase in comprehension and a rise in motivation and interest in learning literature were the overall outcomes of the study (Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010). Students' mean score after participating in the experiment was nearly double the pre-test score. The use of Reader's Theater raised the students' understanding, interest, and motivation to read.   Students stated that they enjoyed when their peers performed

because the story came alive. The participants noted that the stories were entertaining,

funny, and held their attention more than traditional books. The participants also

remarked that they looked forward to Reader's Theater.

The participants' teachers commented on the students' enthusiasm. One teacher

said:

> They came early to the hall to watch the presentation, excited and eager to see the
>
> novel presented through Reader's Theater. … I never seen them (the learners) like
>
> this. … They were an attentive and riveted audience, so involved in the
>
> presentation. (Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010, p. 149)

The use of Reader's Theater not only generated enthusiasm from the students; it also

enhanced their creativity, critical thinking skills, and collaboration with peers and

teachers.

Reader's Theaters activities can be used to motivate struggling adolescent readers

in addition to increasing their reading confidence. After the Reader's Theater

intervention, students' reading levels, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary increased.

Because teachers who implemented Reader's Theater required repeated readings,

students' motivational levels rose. Students more on-task behavior during the study's 50-

minute observation periods compared to the nontreatment group. Based on these findings,

it may be assumed that a correlation between Reader's Theater and increase in motivation

and reading confidence exists for struggling adolescent readers.

Writing Skills

Reader's Theater has been used to increase writing proficiency as well as reading in English-language learners. Tsou (2011) implemented the strategy with fifth-grade students whose English proficiency levels were between beginning and low-intermediate. Participants were students in two fifth grade classes; 31 students in the control group and 29 students in the treatment group. Quantitative data were gathered to assess reading and writing levels. Qualitative information was gathered through small group interviews with participants. Tsou triangulated both qualitative and quantitative data for validation of findings and to better address the research problem. Tsou established that participation in Reader's Theater had a significant impact on the participants' reading proficiency, writing proficiency, and motivation. When Reader's Theater was implemented, students' peer communication increased and they engaged in meaningful interactions in reading and writing.

In a study focusing on writing skills, Brooks and Nahmias (2009) incorporated Reader's Theater into middle school written language lessons by having students turn novels into scripts and perform the scripts. The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of RT relative to their students' reading fluency. Having the students write the script addressed important reading and written language skills such as comprehension, summarization, ascertaining the main ideas, and visualization of the written word. Student self-assessments indicated that the students relished the opportunity for social and active engagement with the texts.

Regarding the writing goal, scores on written language rubrics indicated that the students were successful in the script writing tasks (Brooks & Nahmias, (2009). On the vocabulary goal, student scores on vocabulary assessments after completing the assignments were high across all levels.

Group Cooperation

Because Reader's Theater activities often culminate in a student presentation, teachers can facilitate collaboration within a group setting. Emert (2010) conducted a study to determine if using Reader's Theater with middle school students increased student collaboration as well as reading fluency and comprehension. At the request of the Carnegie Center for Literacy, Emert designed a Reader's Theater project in which middle school participants worked as a team to produce a final. Emert wanted the texts used for the performance to be written by the students for students. Reader's Theater was chosen as the instructional method because of its reliance on oral repetition of text during rehearsals, which encourages reading comprehension and fluency. Students had opportunities to engage in stimulating texts, promoted interesting dialogues among participants, encouraged collaboration, and deepened understanding of the texts.

Classroom cooperation has been seen as a benefit of Reader's Theater among students as early as second grade. Peck and Virkler (2006) merged Reader's Theater and shadow-puppet theater to provide opportunities for students to practice literacy skills in meaningful and engaging ways and to include cooperative learning as a goal of the project. The students' improvement in fluency, comprehension, and oral reading confidence was a result of repeated readings of the scripts. Participants also increased

their productivity in academic activities. However, the most beneficial gains came in the area of social negotiation between students. Students developed problem solving skills and made gains in cooperative learning and compromise after engaging in the study.

Effective for All Students

Reader's Theater can provide opportunities for success for all students, including very young children and students who struggle with language and learning as well as reading. Moran (2006) incorporated Reader's Theater into a preschool class comprised of emergent, struggling, and advanced readers. Reader's Theater was used to help young children with expressiveness, prosody of fluent reading, expressive reading. Much like the retelling of stories and dramatic play, Reader's Theater offered non-proficient readers effective reading activities and access to appropriate literature. Moran observed that teachers who used Reader's Theater allowed students of varying reading levels, from emergent to advanced, to participate in the same dramatic performance. These performances provided participants with the feeling of reading accomplishment and success. Also, Moran concluded that students taking part in Reader's Theater activities were exposed to repeated readings which can increase literacy skills.

Reader's Theater can improve reading skills for many students including those who struggle with the language as well as students who are learning disabled. Young and Rasinski (2009) examined the impact of Reader's Theater on 29 second-grade students (8 girls and 21 boys), 9 of whom were English-language learners with a wide variety of reading levels, including some with learning disabilities. The students made significant gains in automaticity with regard to reading. The average student reading rate increased

by approximately 65 words per minute. The average gain in the class was close to double the normal gain of a classroom that did not include a large percentage of English-language learners and SWDs. In addition, the Reader's Theater program had a positive impact on student motivation to read. The students commented that they enjoyed practicing and performing the scripts. The school counselor was "impressed by the high level of engagement of struggling readers and enthusiasm displayed by the Reader's Theater participants" (p. 11). The school administrator remarked that the program was extremely beneficial in motivating readers who had been reluctant to participate in reading activities.

In summary, implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom has been found to improve skills in decoding, comprehension, written language, and vocabulary through meaningful lessons that engage students (Clark et al., 2009; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007; Tsou, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009). When teachers implement Reader's Theater activities, they foster collaboration and promote a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons (Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010). In addition, teachers who implement daily Reader's Theater activities in their classrooms report improvements in reading fluency in SWDs and low achieving readers as well as confident readers (Keehn et al., 2008; Moran, 2006; Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Activities aligned with the theory of multiple intelligences are useful in creating a learning environment that is beneficial to SWDs. These benefits provide avenues for improved learning across many academic and behavioral areas for students who struggle in a school setting. Findings of the studies in this literature review support the use of

multiple performing arts strategies for improving academic, social, behavioral, and motivational levels in students with and without disabilities. Researchers support the use of Reader's Theater's across grade levels with diverse student populations to increase reading and fluency skills.

Implications

Despite the fact that the literature indicates the value of Reader's Theater in developing language arts skills and reading fluency, the study site is one of many educational settings in which this strategy has not been implemented. The project I designed is a 3-day professional development session for elementary learning center teachers describing the research, purpose, benefits, and strategies for the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Summary

Students with disabilities face unique challenges learning to read and teachers find it challenging to meet the individual learning needs of each child. Reader's Theater is one strategy that can be used to provide SWDs an opportunity to participate in instruction that is motivating and beneficial. Reader's Theater is an effective instructional approach for incorporating repeated readings into guided reading routines and benefits lower level readers. Reader's Theater has positively impacted students' attitudes towards reading and increased their overall fluency rate.

This qualitative case study explored teachers' perceptions and experiences with regard to the implementation of Reader's Theater and their perceptions of Reader's Theater relative to their students' reading fluency. I conducted interviews with the

learning center teachers implementing the Reader's Theater activities. The methodology supporting this project study is addressed in Section 2 along with ethical concerns with regard to the study. The research design, data collection and data analysis are also presented.

The methodology section contains a discussion of research design, setting, the study's participants and the ethical protection of those participants. Section 2 also contains information pertaining to the study's instrumentation and materials, data collection, data analysis and the study's findings and themes. In addition, the methodology section includes information regarding the study's evidence of quality and its outcomes. Section 3 contains a description of the project along with its goals and a rational of why the genre was chosen. Section 3 includes a review of the literature supporting the content of the project. Implications of the project are noted in Section 3 along with the importance for social change for local stakeholders and in the larger context. Section 4 includes information addressing the project's strengths, limitations and recommendations for ways to address the problem differently based upon the study findings. A discussion also is provided regarding what I learned as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer relating to the project. Finally, Section 4 notes the implications, application and directions for future research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored teachers' perceptions and experiences implementing Reader's Theater and their perceptions of Reader's Theater relative to reading fluency of their elementary students' with disabilities. Section 2 provides a discussion of the research design, the methodology and findings of this project study. Section 2 is comprised of the following sections: (a) research design, (b) methodology, (c) role of the researcher, (d) setting, (e) participant selection, (f) protection of participants, (g) data collection, (h) data analysis, (i) results, (j) findings related to research question, (k) findings regarding guiding question, (l) validation and reliability, (m) outcome, and (n) summary.

Research Design

I selected a case study design because this approach enables the researcher to determine how things are, describing one or more characteristics of a population within a study, and presenting a complete description of the phenomenon within its context (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Yin, 2003). The case study approach was appropriate because it provides a detailed and comprehensive representation of an event while in progress. Additionally, a case study approach allowed me to use information I collected without changing the environment in the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this study, I collected in-depth descriptions of the teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater.

The design I selected was a qualitative design; I gathered qualitative data to fully describe the phenomenon being studied through semistructured teacher interviews. Qualitative research is "used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, typically to describe and understand phenomena from the participants' point of view" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 210). In qualitative studies, researchers summarize their findings through narration and written description. They gather qualitative data from a number of different sources, such as interviews, observations of participants, and document analysis. All of the data collected are summarized through descriptive means (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research characteristically uses interviews that are open-ended; researchers often report actual words of participants. The data obtained from the interviews can provide different perspectives on the topic being studied (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative approach was appropriate because participant interviews yielded descriptive data and qualitative methods allow for reporting of dual perspectives from the participants.

Other methodologies—specifically quantitative and several types of mixed methods,—were considered for this study but deemed inappropriate. Quantitative research is "used to answer questions about relationships among variables with the intent of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 210). Quantitative approaches summarize the results of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed and provide valuable information to describe trends regarding a large number of people (Creswell, 2012). This type of data does not lend itself to providing a detailed

description of experiences and perceptions; therefore, quantitative research designs were rejected.

Mixed-methods research is used to collect, analyze, and mix both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. This method is used to understand a research problem better. A mixed-method design can provide a greater amount of information and thus permit a more thorough understanding of a problem than a single method (Creswell, 2012). A mixed-methods design may be sequential, concurrent, or transformative.

Use of sequential mixed methods enables elaboration on the findings, beginning with findings from one method and adding findings from another method. For example, qualitative interviews might be conducted with a small sample for exploratory purposes and followed up with a quantitative survey of a larger sample of participants for the purpose of generalizing the results across a greater population. Alternatively, a sequential approach may use a quantitative method at the start of the study to test a concept and follow-up research could be done with a qualitative technique that explores individual cases (Creswell, 2009).

Concurrent mixed methods converges qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. These data are integrated to analyze the research problem and interpret the overall results (Creswell, 2009). In a concurrent mixed-method design, the researcher may introduce a small form of data into a larger collection of data to answer the research questions; for instance, the qualitative data provide information regarding the process and the quantitative data give details with regard to the study's outcomes.

A transformative mixed-method typically involves advancing the researcher's advocacy issue at the beginning of the study and then using either sequential or concurrent methods as a means of organizing the study's content (Creswell, 2009). Creswell noted that this type of approach may incorporate an agenda for reform that has developed as a result of the research. The intent of the method is to address a social issue for an underrepresented or marginalized group of individuals and bring about change. The typical frameworks found in this method are feminist, ethnic, racial, disability, and gay or lesbian perspectives. A transformative mixed-methods design was not appropriate approach for this project study because the study did not seek to gain the perspectives of the SWDs who participated.

Furthermore, this project study did not expand findings as found in a sequential mixed-methods study, nor did it embed quantities of data to address a process or the outcome as in a concurrent mixed-method approach. This study did not present an issue for reform through the perspectives of those with learning disabilities as in a transformative mixed-methods study. Therefore, no mixed methods approach was appropriate for this study.

An ethnographic design was also considered for this study. The ethnographic design uses qualitative information "to describe, analyze and interpret a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develops over time" (Creswell, 2012, p. 462). Central to this design is the cultural aspect of the group, which includes language, rituals, life stages, communication, interactions, and economic and political structures. The ethnographic researcher spends a considerable amount of time

when researching a culture-sharing group. To understand this type of group, the researcher must gather documents and interview and observe the group members. Information is collected and analyzed to understand the group's language, behaviors, and cultural beliefs (Creswell, 2012). An ethnographic case study design was not appropriate for this study because I did not observe or gather information with regard to the participants' cultural rituals, language, behaviors, or economic and political structures.

A case study was the appropriate research design because I wanted to obtain teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of Reader's Theater as a reading intervention for SWDs who were not proficient in reading. Yin (2003) reported that "a case study is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred" (p. 5). In this research, the intervention or phenomenon was Reader's Theater and the context was the learning center.

A descriptive case study can also be used to describe a specific group of individuals (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) noted that a case study may be used when the researcher wants to establish the nature of how things subsist and may describe one or more characteristics of a population. A descriptive approach covers the case being examined both in scope and in depth; it does not express a cause-effect relationship (Yin, 2003). This study provides a detailed description of the teachers' experiences and perceptions with regard to the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) described three approaches to case study research: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. An exploratory case study explores a situation

that involves an evaluation of an intervention that has no single clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). An explanatory design seeks to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between events and their outcomes. Neither of these designs was suited for the research question. A descriptive case study is conducted to answer a series of questions and yield a rich and in-depth description of a case within its context (Yin, 2003). This approach was appropriate for this research because it could provide information that addressed the research questions and could also furnish a detailed and vivid picture of the case being examined. A single-case study approach was used for the project study; that is, the research examined a single case rather than multiple cases. It did not examine cases that replicated one another nor did it explore similarities and differences in cases (Tolson, Fleming, & Schartau, 2002; Yin, 2003).

Methodology

A case study approach was chosen for this study. According to Yin (2003), a case study can use qualitative methods to obtain data that are "hard-nosed, data-driven, outcome-oriented, and truly scientific" (p. 33). Yin noted that "qualitative data cannot readily be converted to numerical values, but can be represented by categorical data, perceptual and attitudinal aspects and by real-life events" (p. 33). Furthermore, gathering qualitative information from a single type of source avoids the unproductive debate between using both qualitative and quantitative measures in one study. This study used only one source of data: qualitative information gathered from semistructured interviews. The qualitative information was adequate for answering the research questions of this study. The research questions called for qualitative data that would help explain the

phenomenon under investigation (the impact of Reader's Theater on reading fluency) from the participants' (teachers') point of view (Leedy & Ormod, 2001).

Role of Researcher

My role as researcher was to obtain access to the participants; using student reading scores and interviews with the site's learning center teachers. As the researcher for this case study, I maintained a positive and constructive relationship with both participants to collect the most reliable and valid information. I worked to minimize bias, either intentional or unconscious, by calculating and examining qualitative and quantitative data toward the end of the 12-week study. Waiting to calculate the information helped to decrease any expectations regarding the outcomes (Lodico, et al., 2010).

As a special education program specialist, I am not a school administrator. I do not write evaluations and I do not have the authority to discipline teachers or any other school staff. I do not make decisions for the students in the learning centers nor do I have a relationship or make decisions with regard to the teacher participants. Data collection and analysis were not affected by any relationships or roles I had with the participants. Furthermore, I had not had any experiences at the school site or with the participants that would create any bias toward the research topic, the setting, or the participants.

Setting

The setting selected for this case study was a kindergarten-through fifth-grade elementary school in a highly populated urban city located in a coastal state in North America. The target site had a total enrollment of 555 students. The ethnicity of the

student population in the 2013-2014 school year was as follows: 37% Hispanic/Latino, 22% White, 7% African American, and 18% Asian. In addition, 1% of the school's population participated in the Gifted and Talented Education program and 25% of the students were English-language learners. Fifty percent of the students were eligible for free/reduced-price lunch and 14% received special education services (source withheld to preserve confidentiality, 2013). Four percent of the student population participated in Reader's Theater via a reading goal in their individualized education programs; they had scored below proficient in the CSTs in English/Language Arts. The faculty at the school site at the time of the study consisted of 16 kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers and 2 credentialed special education staff. In addition, the school employed 29 support staff personnel (source withheld to preserve confidentiality, 2013).

Participant Selection

After receiving conditional approval from Walden IRB to conduct the study (approval #08-06-14-0184550), I obtained approval from my community partner through a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix B). I received final approval from Walden IRB on September 12th, 2014, via email.

The participants for this study were the two special education teachers who implemented the Reader's Theater activities in their learning centers during the 2013-2014 school year. One learning center teacher taught the kindergarten through second-grade special education students, and the other teacher taught students in third through fifth grades; both instructors had used Reader's Theater. These two instructors were the

only special education teachers at the school site. They were the only learning center teachers in the district implementing Reader's Theater.

Purposeful sampling was used to select these participants. This type of sampling identifies participants who can provide information that is vital to the study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for studies soliciting pertinent information through interviews. Patton (1990) explained:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (p. 169)

The learning center teachers were selected for participation because they had specific knowledge about the topic being researched and could provide insight into the intervention being studied (Lodico et al., 2010).

I contacted the identified special education teachers via email prior to initiating the study in September 2014. In the email I explained the purpose of the study, described what their involvement would be, and requested a time and date to meet with them. The teachers replied by email, indicating their willingness to meet. We met and the teachers provided preliminary consent to be participants in the study. A follow-up email was sent to the participants 2 days later to schedule separate meetings at the school site during non-instructional time.

I met with the two learning center teachers to explain the study's purpose and procedures and secure their written consent for participation in the study. I assured the

teachers that participation was voluntary and that could withdraw from the study at any

time prior to data analysis. I also informed them that all data obtained from the study

would remain confidential but the possibility existed that some individuals from the study

site or elsewhere in the district might be able to deduce what they said in the study

because the study had only two participants. I reviewed the Teacher Consent Form for

Research (Appendix C), answered questions, and obtained their written consent to

participate in the study.

      The consent form contained the purpose of the study, gave background

information on the researcher, described the study procedures, affirmed that participation

in the study was voluntary, stated that no compensation would be given for participation,

listed the risks and benefits of the study, assured that the study was private and

confidential, gave the researcher's contact information, and asked participants to state

their consent. The consent form included information regarding confidentiality issues and

risks associated with having only two participants in the study.

Protection of Participants

      The participants were treated in an ethical and professional manner. The learning

center teachers interviewed in this study were each assigned an alpha code to protect their

identities. One teacher was coded as Teacher A and the other as Teacher B. The

principal was not given any information with regard to which teacher was coded as

Teacher A or B; this information was kept strictly confidential. In addition, the data

collected and the outcomes were reported as overall themes and trends.

In addition to the informed consent form, a Post-Interview Confidentiality Form (Appendix F) was used to give the participants an opportunity to restrict the use of the data they provided. On the form participants could specify particular pieces of their data that they wished to remain confidential. The Post-Interview Confidentiality Form was adapted from suggestions in the article "Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research" (Kaiser, 2010).

In reporting results of the case study, I took the following precautions to ensure protection of the participants:

1. Participants were identified by alpha code.

2. No specific demographic information was included that could identify the participants.

3. The principal's name did not appear in the final report nor did any other name or explicit research information that would identify the participants.

4. No specific data described by the participants in the post-interview confidentiality form was included in the final report.

5. No information that would disclose the specific location of the school that could be used to identify the participants was included.

6. A password protected computer was used for transferring and archiving raw data.

7. Paper documents containing data were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home, to which I alone had access. All data related this study will be retained for 5 years and then destroyed.

Data Collection

Data were collected exclusively from semistructured, one-on-one interviews with each teacher participant. This method of data collection was appropriate because interviews provide information that pertains to one or a few central issues and enable the researcher to establish connections with participants. This rapport typically yields good response from the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Using the semistructured interview approach allowed me to probe beyond the protocol and build rapport with the participants (Lodico et al., 2010). The interview questions focused on the teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms, specifically on their perceptions of the impact of Reader's Theater on the special education students' reading fluency.

I gathered data through an interview protocol containing open-ended questions (Appendix D). The interviews were conducted after school hours so they did not interfere with instructional time. The digitally recorded interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and I transcribed the digital recordings by hand into a Word document. An example of a transcribed interview is given in Appendix E. No technology or software was used to transcribe the data.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in September 2014. In October 2014, I met with the participants separately after school hours and the teachers reviewed their transcripts to confirm their accuracy. They were then invited to fill out the Post-Interview Confidentiality Form to specify particular pieces of their data they wished to remain confidential.

Data Analysis

An inductive approach was used to analyze the data obtained from the teacher interviews. When using an inductive approach, the researcher strives to make a connection between the outcomes of the study and its objectives, resulting in a summary that is driven by the data (Thomas, 2003). An inductive approach is employed by qualitative researchers who wish to have the participants in a study elaborate on their experiences. The researcher seeks to allow the main, most common, and major themes to emerge from the qualitative data (Thomas, 2003). An inductive approach was appropriate for this case study because I wanted to develop a descriptive representation of the teachers' experiences and perceptions with regard to their use of Reader's Theater. I developed a summary that was driven by the study's objectives and outcomes. Furthermore, use of the inductive approach allowed the recurrent, central, and important themes to emerge from the qualitative data from the teacher interviews.

I read through the interview transcripts for patterns and coded the information into broad categories to identify commonalities (Creswell, 2012). The coded data were drawn from meaningful segments that were coded by category names. Within each category, subtopics, new insights, and contradictory points of view were identified along with quotes that were appropriate to convey the theme or core essence of the category (Thomas, 2003). The coded data or categories were not predetermined; they emerged as the data were segmented. All the information obtained was reexamined and sorted by hand into fewer categories with new codes. This information was hand coded by descriptions and major and minor themes were identified.

To develop the coding system, I read the transcribed data, line by line, and divided the data into meaningful units. The segmented data were coded into categories. Similar codes were combined to form major ideas for a database. Major and minor themes represented the main ideas and the minor, secondary ideas in the database. Because the study involved only two teacher participants, more emphasis was placed on developing codes and extracting themes than establishing relationships between one or more of the codes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). When I found perceptions and experiences that differed between the participants, I included the information in the codes and, based on the collective information, included the differing information within the themes. I noted discrepancies cases in my report of the findings.

Member checking was conducted after the data were analyzed; I met with the participants to confirm my interpretation of the findings. I met with the teachers separately, and they were not able to view the other's data. The participants could view and provide feedback regarding my interpretation of the findings and themes that emerged from the data. The participants were encouraged to contribute new and additional perspectives if my interpretation did not align with their data. In each interview, any information that could have been specifically traced to the other participant was redacted.

Baxter and Jack (2008) described member checking in a case study as having study participants analyze the researcher's interpretations of the findings to determine whether the researcher interpreted their intent accurately. Member checking was conducted in October 2014. No new information was added by either participant and

neither participant changed any data that were reviewed. Following member checking, the participants signed the Post-Interview Confidentiality Form. The teachers indicated on the form that all of their data could be shared in publications and presentations.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

The problem addressed in this study was that teachers at the school site had expressed concerns about the reading achievement of SWDs. Teachers were concerned that the SWDs were not developing decoding, comprehension, and fluency skills to become proficient readers. Reader's Theater was implemented at the school site for SWDs. The purpose of this case study was to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences related to their students' reading fluency following the implementation of Reader's Theater. Based on these findings, I conclude that Reader's Theater could be used as a strategy for increasing reading fluency in SWDs. A single-case study approach was used for the research. Themes were identified through analysis of the transcribed data. I read through the transcripts looking for patterns, coded the data for specific commonalities, and established that the findings aligned with themes that addressed the research questions. Several findings emerged from the data that provided information pertinent to the two questions that guided this research.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How did the teachers use the Reader's Theater strategy to improve reading fluency for SWDs? The key findings related to this question were that the participants (a) implemented Reader's Theater on a daily basis with leveled reading groups, (b) used Readers' Theater to increase their students willingness to read, (c)

incorporated Reader's Theater to build recognition and reading of text features and, (d) rotated students through different characters in each Reader's Theater script to increase reading opportunities.

Finding 1. The teachers recognized a need for an effective intervention and implemented Reader's Theater on a daily basis with their preexisting leveled reading groups. Teacher B reported using Reader's Theater on a daily basis whereas Teacher A reported using the scripts on a regular basis with established reading groups. The participants said the students were grouped by ability and they selected scripts that matched their instructional reading levels. Teacher B stated, "Not all script reading levels match the students' instructional reading levels, but we tried to pick scripts for the groups that were somewhat challenging and at the students' instructional reading levels."

Finding 2. Teachers A and B both used Readers' Theater to increase their students' willingness to read. Both participants stated that Reader's Theater was engaging and motivating to their students, which lead the students to be more willing to practice reading in small groups and in front of audiences. This willingness to participate in the Reader's Theater activities led students to reread scripts and thereby helped to promote fluency. Teacher B noted, "We wanted to use the strategy on a daily basis; we wanted to provide a strategy that was motivating and interesting for the kids while also building their reading skills." The teachers commented that Reader's Theater builds fluency through repetitive reading more than any other reading strategy they had implemented.

The participants suggested that the students were invested in their reading when an audience was involved. The students were interested in reading their scripts to improve their reading performance. They wanted to improve their performances by reading more fluently. Teacher B observed, "The audience and reading for a purpose have really helped to build fluency. They are working as a group and the investment of reading together for a purpose has helped to increase the students' oral reading." Teacher B further noted that Reader's Theater fostered the reading of familiar text that built reading fluency.

Finding 3. The participants employed Reader's Theater as a strategy for fostering reading fluency by building recognition of text features. The teachers noted that Reader's Theater can teach readers to be cognizant of text features when reading for correct intonation and pacing. Teacher B stated, "[Reader's Theater] is a great way to show that authors use punctuation or authors use all caps in a word to signal that readers need to raise their voices." Reader's Theater helps with expression, intonation, and recognizing the author's meaning through punctuation.

Finding 4. Students were rotated through different characters in each script to increase reading opportunities. Teacher B stated that rotating students through different parts in the script gives them additional reading opportunities and fosters student engagement. Teacher B noted, "We try and change the characters up so that each student has more lines and more to read; because, if we really want them reading they need to practice." Teacher A reported that her students were also rotated through the various

parts within the Reader's Theater scripts to enhance reading opportunities. It has been established that providing reading opportunities increases reading fluency in SWDs.

Subthemes in Research Question 1. The theme I found from the analysis of the data related to Research Question 1 was that teachers implemented Reader's Theater primarily to improve their students' reading fluency. Three subthemes contributed to the larger theme: (a) Reader's Theater was implemented frequently, usually daily; (b) Reader's Theater was a motivational tool; and (c) Reader's Theater facilitated reading practice. Figure 1 illustrates how the participants' responses were categorized to arrive at the main theme and the three subthemes.

The first subtheme involved frequency of implementation. The teachers researched Reader's Theater through a number of sources, seeking an instructional method they could use daily with their leveled reading groups. Kuhn et al. (2006) established that to build reading fluency teachers must provide students with frequent reading opportunities to read texts at their individual reading levels. The participants sought reading strategies that could be implemented daily. Frequency of implementation was crucial for encouraging students to read through repeated opportunities. Teachers who implement Reader's Theater activities on a daily basis observed improvements in reading fluency in SWDs and non-proficient readers (Keehn et al., 2008; Moran, 2006; Young & Rasinski, 2009). The teachers in the case study purposefully selected reoccurring reading opportunities. This practice aligns with the findings of Mraz et al. (2013), who established that for optimum fluency, reading practice must be incorporated on a daily basis.
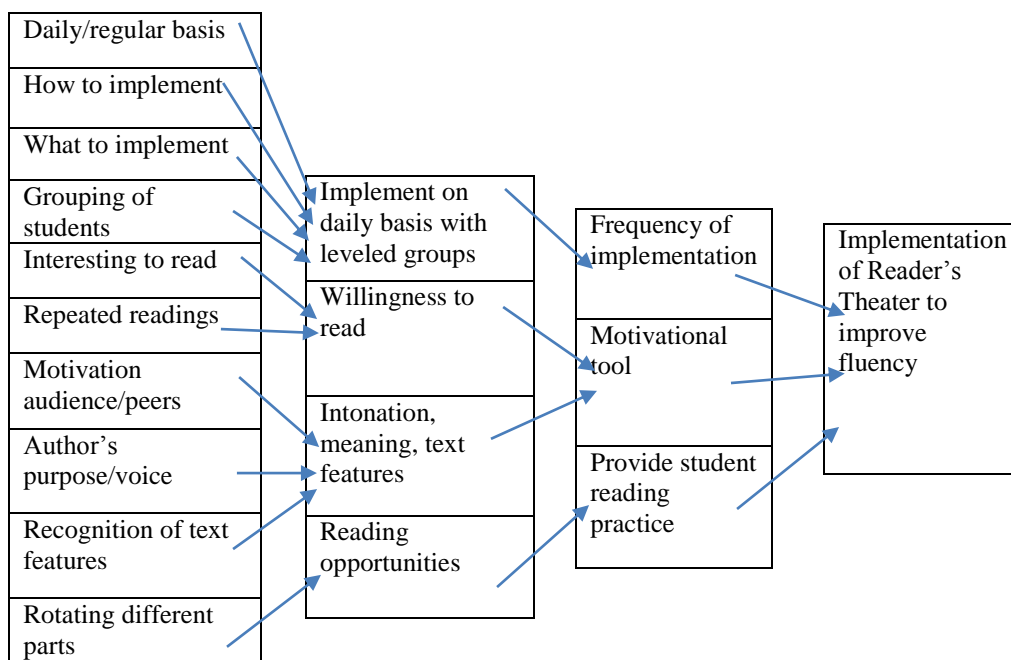
Daily/regular basis

How to implement

What to implement

Grouping of students

Interesting to read

Repeated readings

Motivation audience/peers

Author's purpose/voice

Recognition of text features

Rotating different parts

Implement on daily basis with leveled groups

Willingness to read

Intonation, meaning, text features

Reading opportunities

Frequency of implementation

Motivational tool

Provide student reading practice

Implementation of Reader's Theater to improve fluency

Figure 1. Response categories combined to form theme and subthemes for Research Question 1.

The second subtheme was the use of Reader's Theater as a motivational tool. The participants used Reader's Theater to achieve repetitive readings on a daily basis. They found that participation in Reader's Theater increased students' willingness to read and interest and excitement about reading, so they reread the scripts and thus gained in fluency. Using Reader's Theater fostered students' engagement and provided them with reading that was enjoyable. This finding aligns with the literature from other researchers who recommend that Reader's Theater can be used as a motivational tool in the classroom. Tsou (2011) found that Reader's Theater made an impact on students' reading skills, written language proficiency, and classroom participation during academic tasks. Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010) and Peebles (2007) showed that when Reader's

Theater was implemented children's interest in learning literature rose and students'

comprehension and fluency in reading narrative text increased. Reader's Theater is

unique in that teachers provide reading opportunities which can be performed in front of

an audience. The students who participated in Reader's Theater improved their oral

reading not only for their small reading groups, but also for larger audiences of their

peers.

The third subtheme was oral reading practice was a featured component of

Reader's Theater. The teachers rotated students through different characters in the scripts

to provide reading practice. This rotation allowed students opportunities to read more

lines and practice reading different parts in the scripts. This step was important because

providing readers with many oral reading opportunities increases literacy skills, including

fluency (Kuhn et al., 2006). The participants used Reader's Theater to expose students to

text features and practice scripts, while using intonation and inflection to improve reading

fluency. The teachers' experience supported the notion that daily reading using Reader's

Theater offers students opportunities to practice reading text orally (Thoermer &

Williams, 2012; Tindall, 2012).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of

the Reader's Theater strategy relative to their students' reading fluency? The key

findings related to this question was that Reader's Theater improved students' reading

fluency because of four elements of the strategy: (a) it generated student enjoyment of the

scripts over traditional books; (b) it fostered confidence and improved students oral

reading skills; (c) it provided instruction that promoted recognition of text features; and (d) it provided additional reading opportunities.

These findings were consistent with studies in the literature that showed that giving students repeated reading opportunities enables them to enhance their fluency and their ability to read more difficult text (Ardoin, Eckert, & Cole, 2008; Calo, Woolard-Ferguson, & Koitz, 2013; Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). When students participate in Reader's Theater activities, they take pleasure in reading the scripts, increase student engagement, and improve reading fluency (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; James, 2012).

Based on the findings from my study, participants revealed that Reader's Theater increased student enjoyment and engagement in learning. These findings are supported by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence. Gardner (2000a) stated that classroom lessons designed using multiple intelligences offer "meaningful learning experiences" that foster student engagement (p. 5). Gardner (1995b) further noted that educators who plan activities that incorporate multiple intelligences, specifically performance-based activities, encourage student participation that may be an enjoyable experience. When teachers incorporate multiple intelligence strategies into their lesson plans (Gardner, 1995b; Gardner, 2000a), it has been found that student engagement and enjoyment in learning increased (Abdulkader, Gundogdu, & Eissa, 2009; Al-Balhan, 2006; NAIRTL, 2011). Lunenburg and Lunenburg (2014) established that students who participate in lessons that target the different intelligences become active learners who are engaged and show a high level of interest in the topic being presented.

Finding 1. The teachers reported that reading the Reader's Theater scripts allowed students to build fluency through a means that was more enjoyable than reading traditional material, such as, novels and text books. Teacher A stated, "They loved the plays. The students would definitely like to read the Reader's Theater plays instead of reading a book numerous times." The teacher noted that the students often complained about reading the same book repeatedly, but never protested when rereading the scripts. Furthermore, Teacher A observed that the script format offered repeated reading opportunities that were more engaging to the students. Researchers have recognized that reading engagement through the use of Reader's Theater scripts fostered improved reading proficiencies (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006). Casey and Chamberlin (2006) found that SWDs who repeatedly took part in reading the scripts made significant gains in reading fluency because the material, although recurrent, was engaging.

Finding 2. The participants reported that their students built their confidence through the use of Reader's Theater which strengthened student fluency. Teacher B suggested, "It [Reader's Theater] also builds confidence too in the students." Teacher B further noted that Reader's Theater helps students feel "good" about their reading which develops self-assured more fluent readers. Researchers have found that students who participate in Reader's Theater develop a sense of ownership over their own reading attainment and find confidence in their ability to read (Clark et al., 2009). I suggest that Reader's Theater helped to increase fluency and provided the students with a sense of renewed confidence in their reading skills. Teacher B discovered that students who actively took part in performing the plays, their decoding became more natural and fluent

over time. The students' improved fluency helped them to become more self-assured readers decoding words and comprehending the text.

Finding 3. The teachers found that Reader's Theater provided instruction that fostered their students' recognition of text features. Teacher A noted that Reader's Theater scripts incorporate text features such as "bold words, punctuation, and characters." Teacher A reported that Reader's Theater promoted fluent reading, enabling students to recognize the features in traditional texts and novels. Teacher A stated, "When they read a regular book and they change their voices or lower or raise their voices, that is when we know what they have learned from the Reader's Theater is starting to carry over." Recognition of text features provides confirmation to the instructor that the student is becoming a fluent reader. Providing recurring reading opportunities for students, as is done in Reader's Theater, is important practice for reading and recognizing text features (Mong, Mong, Henington, & Doggett, 2012). Students who use text features as clues, become more fluent readers, make more accurate predictions, and comprehend the text being read (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010). Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2010) noted that text feature recognition leads to increased comprehension of more involved text. Educators who incorporate reading practice along with instruction in recognition of text features reported that students increased their reading fluency and generalized these skills to traditional novels (Ardoin et al., 2008; Calo et al., 2013; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010; Lo et al., 2011).

Finding 4. The participants noted that incorporating Reader's Theater activities into their reading instruction provided additional reading opportunities for students. To

increase the students' participation and allow them to practice reading, the teachers

rotated the students through the characters in the scripts. Teacher A observed, "Certain

parts have less lines and less reading so we have the students rotate through parts so that

everyone gets a chance to read more lines and play different characters." Teacher B also

rotated students through different parts in the plays to provide opportunities for them to

read several lines in the script and play diverse characters. Teacher B noted that offering

many reading opportunities by rotating students through characters provided the reading

repetition necessary to build fluent readers. The idea that offering many opportunities

builds fluency is supported by the literature. Cartledge and Lo (2006) found a correlation

between the number of reading opportunities provided to students and the level of

reading fluency. Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Schatschneider, and Underwood (2007)

established that to build reading fluency, educators must provide students with ample

reading opportunities.

       Subthemes in Research Question 2. In analyzing the data, the theme I

found related to Research Question 2 was that the teachers perceived Reader's

Theater as a strategy that, when implemented, helped to improve students'

reading fluency. Four subthemes contributed to the overall theme. When

teachers used Reader's Theater students were provided (a) engaging reading, (b)

repeated readings, (c) text feature recognition, and (d) additional reading

opportunities. In Figure 2 the participants' responses were categorized to derive

the main theme and the four subthemes. While coding the data I found no

discrepant data that did not provide answers to the questions. All information

collected from the teacher interviews was coded for commonalities and included in the findings.

The first subtheme was that the strategy improved reading fluency by supplying students with engaging reading. The teachers found that the Reader's Theater scripts were a better way for the students to connect with the reading than traditional books or novels. Students made connections with the characters and were interested in reading and rereading scripts. The repeated reading built fluency and comprehension. Teacher B commented that the design of Reader's Theater "forces the students to build their fluency through reading and rereading the scripts in a motivational way." Reader's Theater lessons are designed with an emphasis on repetition, which is achieved through rereading the scripts. When repetition is incorporated in reading instruction, students benefit in building their reading competencies (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006).
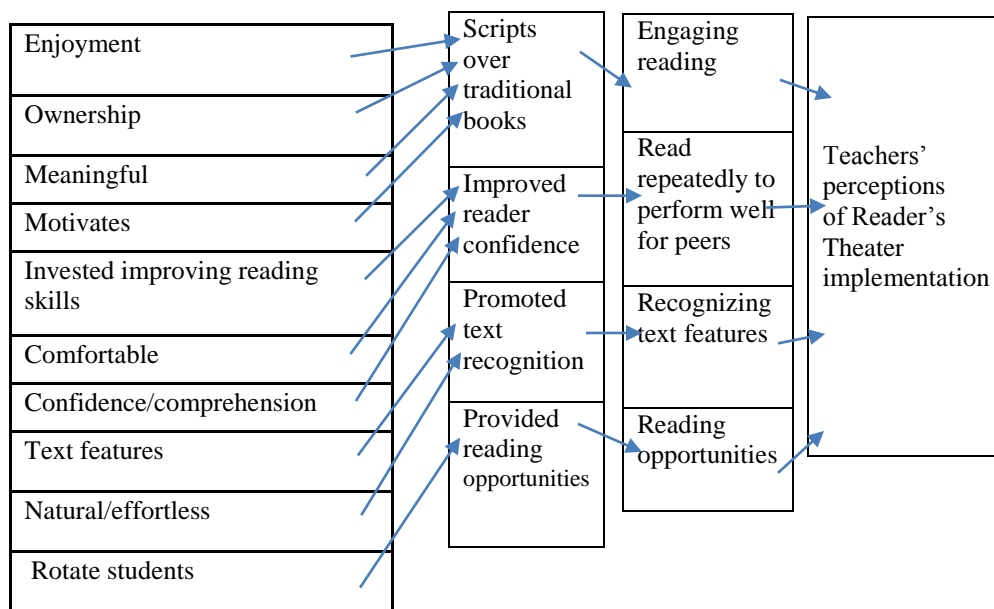
Figure 2. Response categories combined to form theme and subthemes for Research Question 2.

The second subtheme was that teachers who implemented Reader's Theater expressed that their students repeatedly read the scripts to read more fluently for the audience. The participants noted that when they used Reader's Theater their students were inspired to improve their fluency through repeatedly reading the scripts so that they performed well for their peers. Researchers have established that when students participating in Reader's Theater read and rehearsed scripts for an audience of their peers, their reading fluency increased (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; James, 2012).

The third subtheme was that Reader's Theater helped students recognize text features, which built fluency. The teachers found that students who

participated in Reader's Theater used the skills they learned in reading the scripts in other classroom reading. The teachers noted that when students recognized text features such as bold words and punctuation in novels or other conventional books, their reading became more fluent. Recognizing text features leads to enhanced fluency because format style and font size, such as italics, and changing to bold font alerts the reader to read these words fluently (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). According to Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2010) students who can readily read text features become more fluent readers.

The fourth subtheme was that in providing numerous reading opportunities Reader's Theater increased students' fluency. The teachers rotated the students through different characters in the scripts to provide a greater number of opportunities for students to read. The participants knew that some characters in the scripts had fewer lines than others, and rotating the students through the different characters maximized their opportunities to read and therefore fostered fluency. It has been established that reading instruction that incorporates numerous reading opportunities improves reading fluency in non-proficient readers (Killeen, 2014; Ruskey, 2011).

Findings Regarding the Guiding Question

The guiding question for this case study was: What are teachers' experiences and perceptions of the implementation of Reader's Theater in a learning center for elementary SWDs? The major finding was that the teachers perceived that students' reading fluency improved because of their participation in

daily Reader's Theater activities. Students participating in Reader's Theater were willing to read and reread scripts, creating repeated reading opportunities that benefited their reading skills. Furthermore, the teachers found Reader's Theater instruction to foster recognition of text features in their students' reading, which enhanced their reading fluency.

My findings are supported by the research and literature showing that Reader's Theater promotes reading fluency when daily reading opportunities are entertaining and engaging (Hong, Gray, Keith, Doran, & Dwyer, 2013) and that students are motivated to perform in front of an audience of their peers (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; James, 2012). My findings are supported by Lunenburg and Lunenburg's (2014) assertion that the use of multiple intelligences in the classroom, in keeping with Gardner's theory, involves students in the learning process through activities that target one or more of the intelligences. Reader's Theater is a strategy that incorporates several of the intelligences through the use of role playing, collaborative learning, and dramatization and have been observed to enhance fluency (Abdulkader, Gundogdu, & Eissa, 2009; James, 2012). Incorporating multiple intelligences, using Reader's Theater strategy can improve the educational experiences for students and results in improved reading fluency (Abdulkader, Gundogdu, & Eissa, 2009; Szpringer et al., 2014).

Students in the learning center classes preferred reading Reader's Theater scripts over books and novels. The participants reported that the strategy helped their students become confident and self-assured in their reading skills.

Additionally, teachers perceived that Reader's Theater enabled their students to recognize text features and this skill carried over to reading traditional texts and novels. Thus, the participants perceived Reader's Theater to be a strategy that helped to strengthen fluency through the recognition of text features. The general perception of the participants of the implementation of Reader's Theater in a learning center for elementary SWDs was that the strategy provided daily reading opportunities that contributed to improved reading fluency (Thoermer & Williams, 2012; Tindall, 2012).

Participants in my study revealed that Reader's Theater increased student enjoyment and engagement in learning. Gardner's theory aligns with my findings; teachers who design lessons that address multiple intelligences increase student participation and enjoyment in learning (Gardner, 1995b; Gardner, 2000a). Supporters of Gardner's theory suggest that effective lessons should include individual student intelligences to create engaging learning environments for students (Maftoon & Sarem, 2012). Educators implementing Reader's Theater target two intelligences; verbal-linguistic intelligence and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to improve fluency, while creating an atmosphere that is participatory and enjoyable (Owen, 2012). Verbal-linguistic intelligence is addressed through activities that involve reading stories, while bodily-kinesthetic intelligence activities focus on dramatization (Abdulkader, Gundogdu, & Eissa, 2009). Teachers who implement Reader's Theater into their learning center classrooms incorporate at least two of the multiple intelligences - verbal-linguistic

intelligence and bodily-kinesthetic. Reader's Theater strategies implemented by

teachers apply multiple intelligence theory by developing engaging activities

which include dramatization and reading stories (Owen, 2012). By incorporating

performance and oral reading activities in their lessons, educators facilitate the

intelligences of a reader to encourage multiple ways of understanding (Gardner,

1985; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study, I

recorded the interviews and transcribed the recordings line by line. I met with each

learning center teacher to review my findings with regard to the accuracy of their data.

Researchers may use participants' descriptive data to establish the trustworthiness of their

findings (Creswell, 2012). Guba (1981) proposed four criteria that should be considered

by qualitative researchers in the pursuit of a trustworthy study: (a) credibility, (b)

transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (p. 80). Guba stated that

credibility can be obtained in qualitative research by conducting member checks by

reviewing the study's findings in relation to the accuracy of the participants' data.

Transferability can be obtained by establishing an in-depth description of the

phenomenon being studied so similarities can be identified in other contexts or settings.

It is uncertain that my findings are transferable, due to the specific criteria and small

sample size used in this study. Guba asserted that dependability can be obtained by

providing detailed descriptions that allow the study to be replicated. Additionally,

dependability can be obtained through careful collection of the data, interpretation the

findings or in reporting the results that align with the research design (Trochim, 2006). Dependability of my study was achieved through detailed reporting of the case study processes, assuring future researchers that my work has been conducted in an ethical and researchable manner (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is obtained by providing "in-depth methodological descriptions to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized" (Guba, p. 87). I followed the case study approach in collecting and analyzing the participants' data to produce the findings. My findings are based on comprehensive and descriptive information.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, I addressed the accuracy of the analyzed data through member checking and in-depth descriptions. Qualitative studies use member checking to ensure quality, accuracy, credibility, and validity of the researcher's findings (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). After I transcribed and analyzed the interview data, I reviewed my interpretation of the findings with the participants with regard to the accuracy of their data. Both participants agreed with the interpreted findings. Using the information from the teacher interviews and the feedback from the participants, I compiled a report that incorporated in-depth descriptions of the teachers' experiences and perceptions with regard to their use of Reader's Theater. In-depth descriptions promote credibility and provide the reader with detailed information that helps to convey the actual situation being investigated and allows the findings to ring true (Shenton, 2004). Creswell (2012) noted that using descriptive information based on the data ensures quality of the findings.

Outcome

The problem at the school site in this study was the high percentage of SWDs who were not proficient readers. Themes identified through analysis of the data support the use of Reader's Theater as a strategy for increasing reading fluency for SWDs. Based on the findings, teachers used Reader's Theater with SWDs, by providing daily reading opportunities in leveled reading groups, as a motivational tool to build reading fluency and increase students' willingness to read. Teachers rotated readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities. Additionally, participants incorporated Reader's Theater scripts with their students to promote skill recognition of text features; generalizing this skill to traditional texts and novels helped to promote reading fluency.

The teachers observed that when students gained skills in recognizing text features they generalized these skills in reading scripts to traditional texts and novels.

Two themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) the implementation of Reader's Theater improves reading fluency and (b) the teachers perceived Reader's Theater as a strategy that, when implemented, helped to improve students' reading fluency. Subthemes established in the analysis of the data indicated that Reader's Theater activities generated student enjoyment, fostered student investment in reading, promoted recognition of text features, and allowed student rotation through parts of scripts, which increased opportunities for students to read the scripts numerous times. The participants reported that their students found Reader's Theater engaging and read repeatedly so that they could perform well for their peers. The teachers observed that when students gained

skills in recognizing text features they generalized these skills in reading scripts to

traditional texts and novels. Furthermore, the teachers used Reader's Theater to integrate

repeated reading opportunities in their reading groups by rotating the students through

parts and thus fostering fluency.

To serve students in a more efficient and productive manner, the district in which

the study was conducted adopted reading performance goals; however, SWDs continue to

be non-proficient readers. Evidence-based strategies used to increase reading fluency are

not being implemented across the district. Although SWDs receive reading interventions

at each school site, learning center teachers struggle to meet the district's performance

goals with regard to reading proficiency. Effective instructional techniques must be

identified to promote reading achievement for SWDs (Wanzek, Al Otaiba, & Petscher,

2014).

The literature reviewed for this case study contained research that supports the use

of Reader's Theater, specifically that Reader's Theater increases participants' desire to

read, which ultimately strengthens fluency (Clark et al., 2009; Kabilan & Kamaruddim,

2010; Young & Rasinski, 2009). I showed, through the results of my study, that

implementation of Reader's Theater with SWDs helped the students to increase their

reading fluency which could ultimately lead to improved reading proficiency. To

introduce this solution to the district, the district's elementary learning center teachers

need training on how to implement Reader's Theater in their classrooms. Increased

fluency and reading proficiency, which can be addressed in training teachers on the use

of Reader's Theater, would benefit special education teachers within the district.   Based

on my study's findings, information and activities presented during the professional development training could enhance teaching skills in the area of reading fluency and ultimately increase student learning outcomes.

Based on the findings relative to improved reading fluency in students participating in Reader's Theater, I developed 3 days of professional development training on Reader's Theater to provide special education teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement the strategy with their SWDs. This training addresses the gap in practice regarding effective strategies for increasing reading fluency in elementary SWDs. Fluency would help SWDs become proficient readers. Fluency is a vital reading skill and critical for reading comprehension (Hasbrouck, 2006; Tindal, 2006). Fluent readers concentrate on understanding what they are reading, unlike less fluent readers who struggle with remembering what is being read and have difficultly extracting the meaning of the text (Hasbrouck, 2006).

The district's performance goal in reading is centered on the proficiency levels of SWDs. Teachers participating in the PD may implement the strategy in their learning center classrooms to improve the reading fluency of their students to increase the reading proficiency of individual students. The training is presented in Section 3.

Summary

This research used a qualitative single-case study approach to research the problem of improving reading fluency in elementary SWDs. Gathering qualitative data for this case study provided an in-depth look at the experiences and perceptions of two teachers with regard to Reader's Theater as an instructional strategy and its impact on

their students' reading fluency. This single-case study was conducted with two learning center teachers at an elementary school. The semistructured interviews with the teachers provided an understanding of their experiences and perceptions in implementing Reader's Theater and their thoughts pertaining to their students' reading fluency.

To validate the findings, the participants reviewed transcriptions of their interviews and confirmed the accuracy of the transcribed data. Member checking was also conducted in order for participants to confirm the researcher's interpretation of their interview data. As an additional measure to ensure confidentiality, the participants signed a Post-interview Confidentiality Form following member checking. The findings of this study have been integrated into 3 days of professional development training for elementary learning center teachers in the district focused on the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This qualitative case study examined teachers' experiences and perceptions of the use of Reader's Theater, to increase the reading fluency of SWDs. Reader's Theater is an effective strategy to increase the reading fluency of SWDs. Teachers who implement Reader's Theater provide an environment where students are engaged in reading (Hong et al., 2013). Fostering a positive classroom climate through Reader's Theater contributes to the development of reading skills (Hong et al., 2013).

This project is a 3-day professional development (PD) training for learning center teachers in the district. The training slides contain information from the research that illustrates the benefits of implementing Reader's Theater. Providing this information to teachers is important because researchers have established that using the Reader's Theater strategy daily assists students in increasing their reading skills to achieve greater proficiency (Kennedy, 2011; Slade, 2012). Researchers have shown that teachers who implement Reader's Theater in their classrooms see their students' reading fluency improve (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006).

The PD training slides include general information about Reader's Theater and steps teachers can follow to implement the strategy in their classrooms. Descriptive information is incorporated in the training slides about the critical components of Reader's Theater implementation, Reader's Theater resources, and the steps for implementing the strategy with SWDs. The PD training consists of PowerPoint presentations and a variety of Reader's Theater activities.

Section 3 outlines the training and its goals and the rationale for developing a PD training. It includes a review of the literature on the use of PD in developing reading fluency. The steps for implementation, evaluation of the PD, and implications for social change are described in this section. Based on the research findings, a 3-day professional development workshop on implementing Reader's Theater was created for elementary learning center teachers. By learning effective ways to teach reading fluency, Reader's Theater workshop participants have the potential to develop SWDs' reading fluency, and thus, increasing school improvement and learning outcomes.

In the past 4 years the district has not met its goal of having all students proficient in reading. English/Language Arts subgoals have not been met for SWDs. A PD training focused on a strategy that may improve reading fluency supports the district's efforts to meet the district's reading performance goals. The 3-day PD training will be offered to the 26 elementary learning center teachers in the district and information in the PD will include research regarding Reader's Theater and instruction on the implementation of the strategy.

Description and Goals

The Professional Learning Association, together with a number of professional associations and educational organizations, have developed a set of standards for adult learning that outlines characteristics for PD trainings that promote effective teaching practices, promote supportive leadership, and enhance student achievement (Learning Forward, n.d.). The standards fall into seven areas: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes (para. 1). The

Professional Learning Association delineated the requirements in each area for

professional learning to increase educator effectiveness in teaching reading and foster

improved student results:

     1. Learning communities have educators who are collectively committed to

academic improvement through common goals.

     2. Leaders are skilled educators who advocate and create support systems that

facilitate learning.

     3. Resources for professional learning, which may be material, fiscal, human, and

technological, are appropriate and properly used.

     4. Data systems are used by educators and administrators to evaluate outcomes of

the professional learning for students.

     5. Learning designs include theory, research, and differentiation.

     6. Implementation is done in ways that support positive change based on research.

     7. Outcomes for students are aligned with professional and curricular standards.

     Professional development training focusing on Reader's Theater activities

benefits teachers and school staff by offering a strategy they can use to increase students'

reading fluency (Brinda, 2008; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007; Lin, 2010; Rozansky &

Aagesen, 2010; Taylor, 2008; Werry & Walseth, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009). PD

training on Reader's Theater may provide the support necessary for teachers to improve

reading performance in students. Kinnburgh and Shaw (2007) established that educators

who took part in Reader's Theater PD training and implemented this strategy in reading

instruction found that even the most struggling readers were engaged and experienced

reading success through the repeated readings that are part of the instructional method. Special education teachers who applied training in Reader's Theater with their SWDs reported that Reader's Theater activities helped their students take ownership of their learning, promoted excitement with regard to reading, and increased their students' reading fluency (Garrett & Connor, 2010).

These benefits of Reader's Theater were confirmed by my research. I found that teachers used Reader's Theater on a daily basis as a motivational tool to build reading fluency in their SWDs and increase the students' willingness to read. I also found that teachers using Reader's Theater rotated readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities, promoting fluent reading and recognition of text features. I developed this 3-day PD training on Reader's Theater for elementary learning center teachers to enable other teachers and students to experience the same benefits.

The training goal is based on the findings from my study, namely that the implementation of Reader's Theater improves fluency by generating student enjoyment, fostering student investment in improving reading skills, providing instruction that promotes recognition of text features, and enabling teachers to rotate students through parts. The ultimate goal of the training is to increase teacher knowledge of the value of Reader's Theater and ways to implement it in the learning center classroom. The specific objectives are that the elementary learning center teachers will (a) learn and list ways Reader's Theater may increase reading fluency, (b) learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms, (c) learn about the available

resources that would help them use Reader's Theater in their classrooms, and (d) learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

These four objectives determined the organization and implementation of the training. Sugarman (2011) stated that prior to initiating a PD session the organizer should consider including several key components in the training. The PD facilitator should articulate the goals of the session, determine steps for reaching the goals, and set target dates for checking progress (Sugarman, 2011). The PD was developed with the ultimate goal of increasing teacher knowledge of the implementation of Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

The district has not met its overall goal regarding reading proficiency for all students nor its subgoals with regard to SWDs. My project goal aligns with the district goal; by presenting the PD, I will provide guidance and encourage the implementation of a strategy that has been shown to strengthen reading proficiency in SWDs. Due to the failure across the district to meet reading proficiency goals, the training will be offered to all district elementary learning center teachers.

The PD training takes 3 full days and consists of three PowerPoint presentations; agendas; and group activities using student and teacher worksheets and materials, including Reader's Theater scripts. Information included in the presentation is based on my study's findings regarding Reader's Theater. Outlined in the PowerPoint presentations are the purpose of Reader's Theater, the research supporting its use, and the benefits of Reader's Theater in relation to reading fluency. In addition, steps for implementing Reader's Theater with SWDs are given.

Participants will be provided with agendas for each training sessions that will include key points about Reader's Theater and implementation steps from the PowerPoint slides. I incorporated collaborative learning opportunities in small, face-to-face groups and hands-on activities throughout the trainings. These activities include the use of Reader's Theater scripts. Additional training materials direct participants to Reader's Theater scripts that are free to teachers.

Rationale

I chose PD training for my project as a means to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills in implementing Reader's Theater to improve student reading proficiency and fluency (Learning Forward, n.d.). This PD training was designed specifically in the area of reading to provide training participants with the knowledge and guidance on an effective reading fluency strategy. Providing PD training for teachers that makes available information regarding valuable reading strategies can increase educator effectiveness and increase students' reading fluency (Brinda, 2008; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007; Lin, 2010; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010; Taylor, 2008; Werry & Walseth, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Professional development training may improve teaching practices. Guskey (2010) found that teachers who participated in PD programs changed their beliefs about certain aspects of teaching and improved their instructional practices. Educators who participate in PD opportunities can implement new and effective instructional practices. Strengthening teaching practices by providing educators with information and implementation steps regarding researched-based strategies ultimately enhances learning

for students (Cannon, Tenuto, Kitchel, & Joki, 2013). Professional development opportunities should center on improving teaching practices by deepening the teacher's subject-matter and content skills through relevant learning activities that can be implemented in the classroom (Doran, 2014; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Guskey (2010) pointed out that PD programs need to meet the functional needs of teachers, increase their knowledge, and provide teachers with desired results in order for the program's information to be worthwhile. Effective professional development opportunities go beyond mere skill building. For PD to be effective, the training should allow teachers to critically reflect on their practices, their knowledge about content, their pedagogy, and their learners (Rizivi & Elliot, 2007).

I chose a face-to-face format for my PD training. A face-to-face format facilitates collaboration in a group and can foster familiarity among participants (McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, & Lundeberg, 2012). Teachers who participate in face-to-face PD sessions prefer this mode of learning over online training (Russell, Carey, Kleiman, & Venable, 2009). Meeting in person for PD training creates a sense of community among participants and promotes meaningful discussion, both of which are important for effective teacher learning (McConnell et al.). Additionally, face-to-face participants report being free from distractions and able to concentrate more intently on the PD topic being discussed (McConnell, et al.).

Review of the Literature

The information included in the training is based on a reading strategy for special education teachers that may increase reading fluency in SWDs. Electronic and

conventional methods were used to identify literature on this topic. I used the following resources from Walden University's library to locate empirical studies pertinent to professional development and specifically professional development in the area of reading instruction: ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education: a SAGE full-text database, ProQuest Central, Teacher Reference Center, and Digital Dissertations. As keywords, I used *Reader's Theater, reading fluency, literacy, reading instruction, reading fluency, reading learning disabilities, professional development, professional development reading, professional development Reader's Theater, adult learning, adult learning theory, Malcom Knowles,* and *andragogy.* Google Scholar and Google Scholar Advanced Search were used as search engines. The topics covered in this literature review are reading fluency, the impact of Reader's Theater on developing fluency, and professional development training.

Reading Fluency

The literacy level of an individual directly impacts that person's quality of life. According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (2010), reading fluency is foundational to successful reading competencies. Fluent readers free their working memory to focus more intently on the meaning of the text and not on painstakingly decoding each and every word. Therefore, the most important goal regarding reading instruction should be to train students to be fluent readers (Moreillan, 2007).

Children who have foundational skills in reading can become successful readers with effective supports and interventions. On the other hand, students who are not

afforded the opportunity to learn early through consistent practices and in an engaging manner often struggle with reading throughout their educational careers (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). As students progress through the grades the curriculum and requirements increase in difficulty, and unless students have a strong foundation with regard to accurate and efficient word recognition, they will struggle with the more difficult material. Instruction in the area of reading fluency is imperative even through the upper grades (Lingo, 2014; Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley, 2009).

Far too many classroom teachers do not incorporate strategies that promote fluency through engaging means (James, 2012). The Nation's Report Card, the most reliable assessment of American students' academic performance, gives U.S. fourth-grade students a failing grade in reading (Musti-Rao et al., 2009). Although educators express an urgency to prevent reading failure, educational institutions continue to be unresponsive in providing quality instruction to students who are non-proficient readers (Musti-Rao et al.). Targeted reading instruction in fluency is missing from many of today's classrooms (Cartledge & Lo, 2006).

Targeted instruction in reading fluency is particularly important for students with reading disabilities. Historically, reading difficulty has been the most common reason students receive special education services (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2013). It is crucial to understand and support the literacy development of all students, and especially those with learning disabilities. Many SWDs begin their school careers with low reading aptitudes (Al Otaiba, Kim, Wanzek, Petscher, & Wagner, 2014). Individuals with reading disabilities not only experience academic difficulties, but also

earn less as adults and have lower educational attainment (Moreillan, 2007; Savolainen, Ahonen, Aro, Tolvanen, & Holopainen, 2008).

Students with reading disabilities require more support than their typically developing peers through interventions that target reading fluency (Kiuru et al., 2013). Scholars have recognized that SWDs can increase their reading levels when teachers provide intensive and directed reading interventions (Edmonds et al., 2009; McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2004; Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, & Stuebing, 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Wanzek et al., 2013). Research suggests that intensive and early interventions are necessary elements of a comprehensive reading approach (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009).

Reader's Theater

As the environments and the classrooms in schools become more complex and the students' educational needs more diverse, teachers must identify and rely on effective interventions for teaching reading. Interventions must target fluency, one component of reading, in order for students to acquire the skills needed to learn how to successfully decode words. To build reading fluency teachers must provide students with adequate instructional reading opportunities (Connor et al., 2007). Providing students with repeated opportunities to practice reading enhances reading fluency and permits students to generalize their learning to new reading challenges (Ardoin et al., 2008; Calo et al., 2013; Lo et at., 2011). Teachers who implement Reader's Theater provide repeated opportunities for reading practice. In addition, educators who incorporate Reader's Theater in their classrooms provide an effective reading strategy in an environment that is collaborative and involves students in their own learning (Hong et al., 2013).

Reader's Theater is an intensive intervention that can be implemented early and across grade levels. Researchers have found that Reader's Theater improves students' reading skills. Casey and Chamberlin (2006) reported success in teaching fluency through Reader's Theater with lower elementary students. Pre- and posttest fluency assessments were used to determine the reading rates of students before and after practicing scripts and rehearsing in front of their peers on a daily basis for 12 weeks. They found significant gains in literacy skills, with 68% of the students showing an increase in reading fluency.

Other studies confirmed that Reader's Theater can help children improve in reading fluency and develop skills that make them adept readers (James, 2012; Killeen, 2014). James (2012) noted that students who participated in Reader's Theater activities showed a high level of student engagement that led to an increase in fluency skills. Teachers in James's study stressed the importance of using Reader's Theater to appropriately model pronunciation and prosody for students; this modeling assured targeted teaching of fluency skills.

Students taking part in Reader's Theater activities have opportunities to hear other readers who are fluent models (James, 2012). The modeling of fluent readers gives students the exposure to fluency elements necessary for increasing proficiency in reading fluency (Thoermer & Williams, 2012; Tindall, 2012). Accuracy, automaticity, and prosody are essential components of reading, and struggling readers need exposure to these elements to improve their reading skills.

Professional Development Training

For teachers to help their students improve their reading performance, they must be trained in how to implement effective reading strategies (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010). This training is generally received in PD settings. Quality education depends on quality teachers, and teachers maintain and improve their quality through regular PD training. Professional development is a process of enhancing capabilities of staff with regard to content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Khan & Chishti, 2012). Adults participating in PD develop teaching methods, concepts, and new knowledge in the educational field, which ultimately have positive impacts on students (Khan & Chishti). Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014) observed that PD facilitates growth in foundational understanding and instructional competencies with regard to the topic being presented. Educators who participate in PD gain skills and knowledge that enable them to foster student learning (Abdi, 2008; Bean, et al. 2010; Mizell, 2010; Shanahan, 2008). Teachers who participate in PD understand and meet their students' needs through instructional adaptations and differentiated instruction (Ladd & Fiske, 2008).

With appropriate PD training in the area of reading, teachers can raise students' proficiency in reading and decrease the number of students at risk for academic failure (Bean et al., 2010). Teacher training that is focused on improving student outcomes can facilitate an atmosphere that emphasizes positive changes in reading attainment. When teachers incorporate interventions and instructional opportunities for struggling students they learned in PD sessions, they generally see improvements in their students' reading

skills (Abdi, 2008; Bean, et al., 2010; Mizell, 2010; Shanahan, 2008). Professional development trainings in reading fluency often have positive implications for teacher effectiveness and student achievement, enabling teachers to improve their reading instruction, provide higher-quality interventions, and raise the reading scores of their students (Shanahan, 2008).

One reason PD is effective is that PD facilitators provide an avenue through which teachers can problem solve and collaborate regarding the implementation of instructional strategies that meet the needs of students (Mizell, 2010). The success of PD requires teacher acceptance of the content and willingness to change instruction and strategies in their classrooms (Wilson, Grisham, & Smetana, 2009). Professional development can support teachers in making changes in their instructional strategies by allowing them to explore their pedagogical beliefs (Appleby, 2009).

Fisher and Hamer (2010) noted that change should be teacher-driven rather than led by school administration. However, administrative support is needed for PD to be successful; administrators must be willing to purchase materials and perhaps initiate a reward system for teachers who implement what they learn in PD sessions (Fisher & Hamer). Change in teaching methods can occur through PD sessions that consist of positive and meaningful content and experiences (Barlett & Rappaport, 2009).

Professional development should not be superficial, and trainers should not talk in generalities about education. Instead, content should be intellectually challenging and readily implemented in the classroom (Buehl & Moore, 2009). Wilson et al. (2009) noted that some PD sessions consist of little more than reading and discussing

professional literature. On the contrary, training facilitators should offer sessions that include multiple encounters with the content and targeted practice activities. Change can happen through PD if the training is experienced based and well designed (Barlett & Rappaport, 2009; Wilson et al.).

A number of models are available for PD training, such as face-to-face or online methods. Face-to-face PD is needed now more than ever as society is increasingly technical and isolated (Sturko & Gregson, 2009). The face-to-face model builds trust and strong interpersonal relationships among training participants (Tseng & Kuo, 2010), fostering collaborative learning that is effective in obtaining new strategies and ways of teaching (Sturko & Gregson; Tseng & Kuo). Face-to-face PD facilitates interactions among professionals that promote collaborative feedback and meaningful dialogue (Sturko & Gregson). Thus to improve teacher instruction and foster higher student achievement, training should consist of face-to-face interactions with participants (McConnell et al., 2012).

Teachers and students benefit from PD training that equips teachers with effective reading instruction practices. Pomerantz and Pierce (2013) conducted PD training that integrated information on literacy with instructional strategies such as co-teaching and coaching and found that the teachers who participate in training gained valuable information regarding developing lessons for their students.   In using that information, the participants were able to improve their ability to engage in and provide effective reading instruction for their students. Sailors and Price (2010) recommended that PD trainings be based on content goals, individual school and student needs, and teachers'

prior knowledge of literacy strategies. They found such PD trainings to be successful in increasing teachers' knowledge of how best to provide reading instruction for their students. They noted that when current research is integrated in PD trainings, teachers alter their teaching practices, and enhance the reading skills of their students.

To develop professionals, PD should have a lasting impact on teachers' instructional practices. For any PD training to be sustainable, teachers must take an active part in promoting and implementing a curriculum, strategy, or program over a period of time (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Richardson & Janusheva, 2010). In addition, Richardson and Janusheva (2010) reported that when teachers participate in effective PD, they are more likely to further explore the strategy on their own. Educators who participate in PD training targeting reading instruction to create engaging classroom environments have used these skills to motivate students to interact with the text, and thus, foster improved reading skills (Greenwell & Zygouris-Coe, 2012). Greenwell and Zygouris-Coe (2012) found that teachers participating in PD trainings created engaging classroom environments, applied their learning regarding effective reading instruction, and motivated students to interact with the text. These teachers saw increased student interaction with reading materials and improved reading skills.

In a study that examined the impact of PD trainings on elementary special education teachers, Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, and Haager (2011) discovered that teachers who participated in the trainings gained content knowledge and changed their instructional practices to serve as more effective educators. In addition, after participating in the PD sessions the teachers were motivated to enhance or modify the

curriculum used in their special education classrooms to better support their students. The authors noted that PD for special education teachers can enable teachers to make changes to their curriculum to make their instruction more responsive to student needs and bring about positive changes in the students.

The role of a teacher is that of change agent. Teachers facilitate the development of skills in students to become successful adults who contribute to society (Khan & Chishti, 2012). Porche, Pallante, and Snow (2012) demonstrated that educators have a significant impact on students' learning and acquisition of academic skills, including reading fluency. Professional development opportunities for teachers in the area of reading build on teachers' proficiencies and increase their knowledge. Professional development is a tool that builds quality teachers and leaders and competent students (Abdi, 2008).

Professional Development Rationale

A number of different types of PD avenues are available to educators: workshops/courses, conferences/seminars, qualification programs, observations/visitations to other schools/classrooms, network of teachers, individual or collaborative research, and mentoring or peer coaching (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2009). Workshops and courses often focus on methods or educationally related subject matter; whereas, conferences or seminars typically provide information via a researcher's findings and discussion of educational problems. Teachers who participate in qualification programs most often earn a degree or certificate for their involvement in the program. Professional development can consist

of visits to and observations of other teachers' classrooms or participation in teacher networks to gain information about and insight into effective teaching methods. Researching a topic of professional interest through individual or collaborative research may provide knowledge of successful teaching strategies. Finally, mentoring or peer coaching is a strategy that allows teachers to share their teaching experiences and methods with one another (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; OECD, 2009).

Other forms of PD are not as structured and are job embedded (DeMonte, 2013; OECD, 2009). Reading professional literature such as journals, peer reviewed articles, and thesis papers are examples of PD that is embedded in an educator's work day. In addition, participation in informational dialogues with peers can be another form of embedded PD and can address challenges that arise during the school day (DeMonte; OECD).

My project combines two types of PD: the workshops/courses model and conferences/seminars. The workshops/courses model was selected for my PD training because this model incorporates information for teachers on Reader's Theater, an educational strategy that can promote teacher effectiveness (Mraz et al., 2013). The PD also takes the form of conferences/seminars because it includes discussion of my study's findings along with information regarding the problem of helping SWDs develop reading skills.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), teachers are not receiving adequate training in teaching SWDs. Darling-Hammond et al. noted that, "more than two-thirds of

teachers nationally had not had even one day of training in supporting the learning of special education students" during the 3 years preceding their study (p. 6). Researchers have found a high need for teacher training in the area of educating SWDs. Supporting special needs students was rated the highest of all PD requested topics among teachers internationally (OECD, 2009). As the facilitator of my PD, I will encourage the use of a strategy that fosters improved reading fluency in students with special needs and enhances teacher success in this area. Incorporating the two types of PD, workshops/courses and conferences/seminars, is appropriate because I will be presenting information on a reading strategy through intensive discussions and engaging activities that may increase teacher effectiveness in the area of reading. In addition, my PD incorporates hands-on collaborative learning in small and face-to-face groups which may improve retaining training information (Porche et al, 2012).

Teachers participating in my PD may learn new instructional strategies through engaging, hands-on activities. Porche et al. (2012) established that teachers enjoy PD activities that integrate hands-on learning, which may lead to more effective instruction in the classroom. Combining the two types of PD allows me to present the research that supports the use of Reader's Theater along with the findings from my own project to show a connection between the strategy and improved reading fluency in SWDs. PD that incorporates these two models can be highly effective and can educate and support teachers in altering their own teaching practices (Stebick, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this PD project is guided by Malcolm Knowles' theory of adult learning, or andragogy. Andragogy is defined as "the art or science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children" (Knowles, 1980b, p. 43). Andragogy is the method and practice of teaching adult learners. Knowles' theory of andragogy fosters PD that is supportive and engaging to adult learners. Some educators see Knowles' theory as an approach, set of guidelines, or principles to follow for best educational practice and believe it has contributed greatly to educating adults (Chan, 2010). Knowles (1979) posited that adults learn differently from children and in most cases should be educated differently; instructional techniques should be implemented in a more experimental manner with children. Adults learn from their own experiences and through the analysis of those experiences (Knowles, 1979).

Knowles' adult learning theory recognizes that adults acquire knowledge when they are placed in a climate that is conducive to learning (Knowles, 1980b). According to Knowles' theory, adults learn in an environment in which they feel respected, valued, and supported and are not threated (Knowles, 1980a). Knowles (1979) noted that for adults to learn most effectively they must be actively engaged and learn through their own experiences as well as those of their colleagues.

Historically adults have learned within the context of trainings provided by supervisors who have often lacked the expertise in training content and knowledge (Knowles, 1980a). For successful learning to take place in adult education, training staff must have an awareness and familiarity with the topic being presented. PD facilitators

should serve as consultants to the group and have knowledge upon which they can draw

that will foster adult learning and increase comprehension of the topic being presented

(Knowles, 1979). Knowles (1979) further suggested that agencies benefit from bringing

in outside facilitators to conduct trainings, outsiders who have experience regarding the

subject matter and can use strategies that support the adult learning population.

Facilitators of adult learning must be friendly, take an interest in people, provide creative

teaching methods, and have knowledge of the training topic (Knowles, 1980b).

Knowles' theory of adult learning is based on six principles:

1. Adult learners are independent learners who are self-directed.

2. Adults learn by drawing from their past experiences.

3. Adults prepare themselves for what they need to learn.

4. Adult learning is not content driven but problem-centered.

5. Adults are interested in learning information that is useful and has relevance.

6. Adult learners respond positively to internal versus external motivators

   (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Facilitators of PD who place adults in successful learning environments provide

an atmosphere where participants feel comfortable taking part in group activities and

become involved in their own learning (Chan, 2010). Furthermore, implementing

Knowles' theory in adult learning opportunities, especially opportunities that involve

teachers, provides meaningful learning experiences that foster an engaging educational

environment in which adult learners can thrive and use their knowledge to support their

own students' learning (Chan, 2010).

Knowles' theory supports the PD project for this study, which provides an adult educational environment that is conducive to learning, an atmosphere that is supportive, engaging, and non-threatening. The project consists of PD training sessions that are problem centered and provide valuable information regarding a reading strategy that is relevant and useful to learning center teachers. The PD training involves teachers in hands-on activities that are meaningful to their daily instruction and can foster positive outcomes for teacher instruction as they impact student reading fluency.

Project Description

The project is a 3-day PD training on Reader's Theater. The training will be offered to all elementary learning center teachers in the district. Outlined within the PD are research findings, information, and a strategy to increase the reading fluency of SWDs. The content of the 3-day training aligns with the outcomes of my study. I found that teachers used Reader's Theater to build reading fluency in SWDs by (a) offering daily reading opportunities that increased the students' willingness to read and (b) rotating readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities and foster recognition of text features. The PD training was developed with the ultimate goal of increasing teacher knowledge of the implementation of Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

This project involves presentation of information, training, collaborative learning in small groups, and hands-on activities. Its objectives are that participants will learn (a) ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater (b) how to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom, (c) about resources that support the use of

Reader's Theater in the classroom, and (d) how to apply the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons. Learning center teachers who attend the training will gain knowledge regarding the purpose and benefits of using Reader's Theater in their classrooms. Participants also learn about resources that support the use of Reader's Theater, and they learn the steps needed to implement the strategy in their classrooms.

The Professional Development Project

The purpose of the project is to use Reader's Theater to address the problem SWDs have in reading fluency. On Day 1 of the training, I will provide information regarding the outcome of my study pertaining to participants' perceptions in relation to the implementation of Reader's Theater. Information presented on Days 2 and 3 include the findings of the study relating to the impact of Reader's Theater on improving fluency. This project is expected to strengthen teacher effectiveness in their instruction and, ultimately, to increase fluency in SWDs. The purpose of PD in schools is to strengthen educators' effectiveness throughout their careers by focusing on helping them meet the needs of their students (Mizell, 2010). The need in the district is to educate teachers on a strategy that may enhance teacher instruction and increase student reading fluency. Professional development training objectives are for teachers to (a) learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater (b) learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms, (c) learn about the resources available for the use of Reader's Theater in their classrooms, and (d) learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

Training Schedule

Day 1 of the training focuses on the definition and purpose of Reader's Theater. The participants discuss the need to implement the strategy early and consistently. The benefits of using Reader's Theater in the classroom are examined with the teachers as well. Participants explore the current literature and my study's findings supporting the use of Reader's Theater for increasing fluency, supporting motivation, and building confident readers. Based on the current literature, additional benefits that promote elements of reading and written language through the use of Reader's Theater are discussed.

Day 2 of the PD training centers on the implementation of Reader's Theater. Information is provided regarding how and where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. The group completes a vocabulary activity regarding Reader's Theater. In addition, participants learn the steps for implementing Reader' Theater. The group learns how to assign roles in the Reader's Theater scripts and implement character rotation. The participants review how to provide guidance for their students on reading techniques such as intonation and fluctuation and reading text features. Each group will summarize the implementation steps and present their summary to the larger group through a reporter.

Day 3 continues the focus on information and practice regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater. Using two free Reader's Theater scripts, the participants review the steps in implementing Reader's Theater. They create reading groups and assign roles based on reader traits and characteristics though a step-by-step process. The teachers act as students to carry out this activity. Using the Reader's

Theater implementation steps with teachers as students, small groups perform the Reader's Theater scripts for their colleagues. Two groups present their scripts in front of the larger audience. The participants create a Reader's Theater lesson plan and complete evaluations to obtain information regarding whether the PD goals were met.

Preparation

The PD training must have the approval of the school's director of special education. I will meet with the director either by phone or in person to discuss the training and obtain verbal approval. I created the materials needed for the training, which include a daily training agenda, student and teacher worksheets, and a PowerPoint presentation for each day of the training (Appendix A). I obtained the free Reader's Theater scripts that are also necessary. For the PD presentations, I will provide the projector, PowerPoints, agendas, worksheets, and scripts. The elementary learning center teachers in the district will be invited to participate in the Reader's Theater PD session.

Each elementary learning center teacher is allotted time to attend professional growth opportunities during the school year on student-free school days. This PD session will be offered in fall 2016. Teachers are typically given 2 days prior to the start of the school year and again in October to attend trainings. This existing support helps to provide the time needed for the training session.

One potential barrier to the success of the training may be reluctance among learning center teachers to participate in the cooperative learning activities. Some teachers may not want to participate fully in the collaborative and hands-on learning. Educators may shy away from presenting for a large audience or reading scripts out loud.

I will overcome this barrier by presenting the information and activities in a nonthreatening and straightforward manner. I will ask participants to volunteer for group leadership roles. These roles will not be assigned by myself or the participants, but will be filled by teacher volunteers. Additionally, agendas will be provided to PD participants so they know what is expected of them during the training. Knowles (1980a) recommended that adults learn in an environment in which they feel supported rather than threatened. Furthermore, adults learn more effectively if they are active participants in their own learning (Knowles, 1979). Active participation will be encouraged through the activities presented in my PD and through my facilitation, may promote teacher engagement and involvement.

Implementation Timetable

The district special education director has the authority to set training dates at the onset of the school year. Three full days are needed for the training. Ideally the professional training should be conducted in September to allow time for the teachers to implement the Reader's Theater and measure growth in reading fluency. Learning center teachers who decide to implement Reader's Theater in their classrooms are able to use the LLI benchmark assessment to measure growth in fluency. This benchmark assessment is currently being used in the learning center classrooms throughout the district.

To conduct the trainings, I will provide the PowerPoints with information regarding the research and step-by-step guidance regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater. Agendas will be used each day; they contain descriptions of the

training activities and topics scheduled by the hour. Participants will be provided with printed copies of each PowerPoint used in the training. Student and teacher worksheets will be used to facilitate the implementation of Reader's Theater activities. All these materials can be found in Appendix A. In addition to these materials, participants will be given Reader's Theater scripts.

The timetable for implementation, from obtaining approval through completion of the training is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Timetable for Implementation of the Professional Development Training

Activity	Date
Obtain approval from director of special education to conduct training.	August 2016
Schedule training dates with special education director	August 2016
Reserve training room	September 2016 and October 2016
Invite learning center teachers via email to attend the PD training	August 2016
Conduct training	September 2016 and October 2016

Roles and Responsibilities of Facilitator and Participants

As facilitator, my role is to direct the activities to meet the objectives set for the project. Those objectives are for participants to (a) learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater, (b) learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in

their learning center classrooms, (c) learn about the resources available for using Reader's Theater in their classrooms, and (d) learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons. I am responsible to adhere to the implementation plan, taking the steps needed to execute the 3-day PD training. I will work with the district's special education administrator in summer 2016 to calendar the PD session for the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. Once the session is calendared I will distribute a description of the training to the elementary learning center teachers via email prior to the start of the school year. Teachers will report to school in the fall prior to the training to receive this information via email.

For the 3-day PD training, I have developed daily training agendas, student and teacher worksheets, and three PowerPoint presentations describing the research, purpose, and benefits of Reader's Theater as well as steps for implementing the strategy in the classroom. I will incorporate Reader's Theater scripts into the training materials. Having these scripts will allow participants to experience Reader's Theater first-hand, perform the scripts, and learn in an engaging and hands-on manner how to implement Reader's Theater.

The last portion of the training includes an evaluation section. The training will be evaluated through two assessments: a form completed by participants and an assessment of the lesson plans created by participants during the training. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that both evaluations are conducted.

Project Evaluation

The evaluation process will be driven by the Evaluation Plan contained in the PD 3-day training materials (Appendix A). A Professional Growth Training Evaluation Form (Appendix F) will be used to evaluate teachers' knowledge of Reader's Theater following the training. Participant evaluations will provide information about whether the overall training goal as well as the specific objectives were met. The lesson plans developed by the participants will be evaluated to determine whether the participants learned the steps involved in the implementation of Reader's Theater. Lesson plans will be evaluated by comparing the implementation steps presented in the training with those in the lesson plans.

The use of a goal-based evaluation approach is appropriate for this project design. My goal for the training is specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-based, as recommended by Wade (2009). The evaluation measures the objectives to determine whether the overall training goal was met. The Professional Growth Training Evaluation Form requests specific and measurable data from the participants. Attainment of the objectives and overall goal is measured by participants' responses on the form and their ability to apply the steps involved in implementing Reader's Theater as demonstrated in the lesson plans they produce in the training.

Project Implications

The results of this study have implications for positive social change both in the local community and beyond. Participation in the PD training should have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness, and that impact should result in increased reading

fluency in SWDs. Improved reading fluency, in turn, may ultimately affect children's quality of life.

Implications for the Local Community

I showed, through the results of my study, that Reader's Theater, by providing motivational and repetitive reading opportunities on a consistent basis, improves reading fluency in SWDs. The study's participants stated that their students who read Reader's Theater scripts increased their willingness to read. The participants also noted that the improvement in their students' reading fluency in class transferred to other forms of literature. In addition, the study participants stated that Reader's Theater was an engaging strategy that should be implemented on a daily basis to provide additional reading opportunities.

Special education administrators have a responsibility to provide their learning center teachers with training on instructional strategies that are effective in improving outcomes for students. The implementation of Reader's Theater in learning center classrooms across the district would be an important step that is likely to improve reading fluency in SWDs. Implementing Reader's Theater may provide students with an avenue by which to become proficient readers.

The project may contribute to positive social change by educating learning center teachers on a strategy that has been shown to increase reading fluency. Improved reading fluency promotes academic achievement in elementary-level students. One positive social benefit for elementary SWDs is the possibility that the students become more

willing to read for their peers and read traditional texts, including novels (Casey &

Chamberlin, 2006; Killeen, 2014).

Stakeholders, including teachers, families, administrators, and the surrounding

community, would benefit from this project. Teachers would benefit from the PD by

learning about and how to implement a reading strategy used to increase the reading

fluency. Engaged students typically have fewer behavioral outbursts during class that

would detract from their learning and the learning of others. Families may benefit from

teachers using Reader's Theater in that their children may become proficient learners

through increased reading fluency. Researchers have established that students

participating in Reader's Theater activities improved their reading fluency and developed

skills to become proficient readers (James, 2012; Killeen, 2014). Proficient readers often

excel at school and are more successful students (Rutenberg, 2009). Administrators can

benefit from the project as they may see an increase in student reading scores on

benchmark reading assessments as well as on statewide testing.

Far-reaching Implications

Ultimately, participation in the PD may strengthen teacher skills in providing

instruction to increase student reading. The importance of the project lies in the

participating educator's ability to enhance their own effectiveness and consequently

increase student reading skills. Students who read fluently have enhanced

comprehension skills and, therefore, improved fluency raises a child's quality of life

(Moreillan, 2007; Rasinski, 2009). Teacher participation in the PD trainings may lead to

improved teacher effectiveness and positive outcomes for students in reading fluency and

proficiency. Developing good reading skills enables them to be successful throughout the remainder of their educational careers and ultimately contribute to society.

Summary

The PD training outlined in this section provides learning center teachers with information about the research, purpose, and benefits of Reader's Theater. The project offers strategies regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater with SWDs. At the conclusion of the PD training, a final evaluative step allows teachers to provide feedback on what they learned from the training. This project has local as well as far-reaching implications for SWDs. The Reader's Theater PD sessions provide opportunities for elementary learning center teachers to increase their knowledge of a strategy that can improve reading fluency through motivating and engaging activities. Reader's Theater, if implemented across the district by elementary learning center teachers, could increase students' reading fluency and help to develop proficient readers. If implemented across all grade levels, SWDs from Grades kindergarten through 12 would be exposed to an instructional method that gives them the opportunity to increase their reading skills and become proficient readers.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section identifies and describes the strengths and limitations of the project with regard to the problem and suggests other ways to address the problem. In addition, Section 4 contains a discussion and the researcher's reflections on the importance of this study and suggestions for directions for future research.

Project Strengths

A strength of this PD project is the collaborative and hands-on learning involved in the PD activities. According to Knowles (1979), adults flourish in an environment that is cooperative and learn most effectively when they are surrounded by their colleagues who can share their experiences and knowledge with the group. Collaboration in PD fosters growth in professionals and allows for opportunities for participants to learn from the proficiencies of others in their field (Sturko & Gregson, 2009). Hands-on learning has been shown to be successful through participants' active involvement in the PD process. Chan (2010) noted, "Learner-centered experiences enable adults to apply what they have learned" (p. 33). The PD project uses unique activities designed to foster collaborative learning. The hands-on lessons are also designed to provide participants information that would enable them to create and use their own Reader's Theater activities in their classrooms. This PD was designed to include activities that may increase educator skill levels in teaching reading, and thus, may improve the reading proficiency of SWDs. Through facilitated collaboration and hands-on activities incorporated into the PD, teachers may gain the knowledge needed to implement

Reader's Theater in their own learning center classrooms. Learning center teachers using

Reader's Theater with their students to teach fluency may observe an increase in reading

comprehension.

Project Limitations

Although Reader's Theater has been shown to be a positive, effective tool for

enhancing reading fluency for SWDs, some teachers do not implement Reader's Theater

in their learning center classrooms. Failure to implement Reader's Theater in learning

center classrooms deprives students of an engaging instructional strategy that increases

reading fluency. It is critical for SWDs to participate in reading activities that are

engaging. Engaging activities such as Reader's Theater improve reading skills of SWDs

who otherwise have been reluctant and unmotivated readers (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

The effectiveness of this project may be limited by the amount of time needed to

implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classrooms. As noted in the project

description, the outcomes of the study established that Reader's Theater should be

implemented on daily basis. Some educators might have difficulty implementing the

strategy every day due to the fact that students may not attend the learning center daily.

Teachers may also lack the planning time to generate the Reader's Theaters lessons on a

daily basis.

Another limitation is the lack of formal follow up regarding student reading

scores in the project. Learning center teachers may perceive themselves as more

effective educators after implementing Reader's Theater; however, no instrument is

included in the project that would determine if their higher effectiveness was associated

with increased reading fluency in their students. It is important to create structured sustained PD activities that train teachers to be effective and ultimately improve student learning (Wong, 2004).

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

To remedy the limitations with regard to inconsistent implementation and follow up regarding Reader's Theater, I recommend that follow-up meetings be held with teachers to support their implementation of Reader's Theater. The learning center teachers have one 2-hour meeting per month at the district office. In these district meetings, elementary learning center teachers discuss strategies, programs, and curricula that have been effective in supporting SWDs. Teachers could support one another in their implementation of Reader's Theater by asking and answering questions regarding the strategy at these meetings. Peer learning is a valuable way to educate adults. Boud (2001) stated, "Students learn a great deal by explaining their ideas to others and by participating in activities in which they can learn from their peers" (p. 2). Altering teacher practices in the classroom is at the heart of PD in education (Qazi, Rawat, & Khoso, 2008). Follow up after PD training can help teachers put what they have learned from the PD into practice. Qazi et al. (2008) established that supportive follow up is what makes teacher learning in the classroom possible, and teachers' learning ultimately benefits students. Supportive follow up of teachers enhances student learning through improved classroom management, better lesson planning, and reflective practices of the educator**.**

In the study school, the results of the case study indicated that a PD training on Reader's Theater was likely to improve reading fluency for SWDs. The best course of action appeared to be to educate the learning center teachers on the strategy. However, there is an alternate solution to the local need. Paraeducators who are working in the learning centers could be trained to implement Reader's Theater with SWDs. Within the district there are paraeducators who provide daily instructional support for students in special education. In the primary grades, the role of paraeducators is significant; they deliver learning activities and are viable resources providing support for teachers as well as services for students. Learning center paraeducators may be trained to use Reader's Theater with students who are non-proficient readers.

Reflections

While developing the project I found that importance in my work. Through PD training I can disseminate information about Reader's Theater to teachers so they may implement the strategy in their learning center classroom to improve student reading fluency. The information is of great relevance to teachers who work with students who struggle with reading development and who continue to be non-proficient readers. I came to the realization that the PD training is significant because it provides information that is valuable for teachers and is presented in a manner that is engaging and unique. The activities are original and present the information in a creative fashion.

To further develop the project, I examined and reflected upon research regarding PD and its impact on teacher effectiveness and student success. I gathered information from a number of theorists; however, I found that applying Knowles' theory of adult

learning could facilitate successful training and quality learning by fostering a climate of trust, respect, and safety (Knowles, 1980a, 1980b). I sought to incorporate elements of Knowles' theory of adult learning to provide PD training that was nonthreatening and supportive. Through the development of the project study and review of literature, I developed a deeper understanding of the process for implementing PD training with adult learners. I learned the importance of having a theory to guide the planning of the project.

In addition, in designing and developing the project I understood the importance of taking a step-by-step approach with clear goals to guide my project and evaluation measures to gauge its success. As a project developer, having clear outcomes was crucial. I needed to think clearly about the level of learning that was expected of participants and provide adequate information to meet the training objectives. While developing my evaluation guide, I learned that this document was an integral component of a successful PD. An evaluation protocol needed to be implemented to determine the level of attainment of the goals of the PD training.

Scholarship

After reviewing the data regarding the local problem, I was motivated to offer a PD training for learning center teachers that could increase reading fluency in SWDs. I chose to implement a project that offered research and outcomes to support the use of Reader's Theater with SWDs. I developed the project based on my experiences working with learning center teachers. I have found the learning center teachers open to learning about new strategies and techniques and willing to implement promising strategies to enhance students' reading fluency. Based on the outcomes of my study, I designed a

project that focused on Readers' Theater because the strategy has been shown to enhance reading fluency in SWDs.

Reviewing the research on the implementation of Reader's Theater was arduous. Making detailed notes of the research and developing a system for clear accounting of the articles and websites made the process easier. I read various articles and viewed websites and YouTube videos to gain insight into how to implement Reader's Theater in the classroom. In researching the literature on PD, I gained an awareness of practices that should be implemented to facilitate effective training. In addition, I learned that adults learn best in a safe and supportive environment. I relied on this information to design my PD training.

Project Development and Evaluation

In reviewing the literature for my project, I learned that PD training should be conducted over a significant amount of time and in a way that ensures that participants understand the material. Presenting trainings that are interesting and engaging helps teachers absorb information at a deeper level. I found that PD must meet the participants' needs. The teachers in the district in which my study was conducted expressed a need for strategies that could be implemented in the classroom. The outcomes of my study suggested the need for training focused on a strategy to enhance reading fluency. I used this information along with research to develop my project.

I also found that it is important to develop detailed plans that have clearly stated goals and descriptions of training activities. Implementation should include organizational steps and training barriers. I established that the PD evaluation plan

should include participants' expectations of what the PD will provide them. I learned it is important to have an annotated action plan that includes objectives, people responsible, timelines, and how goals will be measured. I found it was critical to develop goals that were measurable and link those goals to the outcomes of the case study. While developing the PD training, I struggled with creating an evaluation form that would obtain adequate responses from participants; these responses, together with an evaluation of participants' performance in creating lesson plans, would determine if the training goals had been met.

Leadership and Change

I learned that change occurs gradually and with the support from stakeholders, including teachers and administrators. In education, change must take place at all levels for transformation to occur, from administrators, teachers, and students. Successful leaders ask for feedback from participants and stakeholders to strengthen a project. Additionally, I learned how to be a leader through this doctoral process. I learned that leaders may need to request support from others in the educational community to be successful.

As a leader I found I could conduct PD training that can help teachers be change agents, increasing their effectiveness, improving student reading fluency, and developing reading strategies in learning center classrooms that create stimulating reading opportunities for students. My experience in working with students with special needs helped me share my vision of educating students through engaging means. Teachers who participate in the PD training will learn about the research, purpose, benefits, and

implementation steps of Reader's Theater. They will take part in collaborative learning and hands-on activities. I learned that it is my job as a leader to present this information in a manner that is beneficial to the participants, in a safe and trusting environment, with the hope that participants will use the information to improve the way they teach their students and thus become more effective educators.

Practitioner

While conducting research and developing my project, I learned that it is important to engage with others as a leader and practitioner in a proactive way to encourage teachers and administrators to use evidenced-based practices that increase student achievement. To this end, I will continue to advocate for the implementation of practices that promote teacher PD training and, in turn, increase student achievement across academic settings. As a practitioner in the education field, I learned that I will support the use of Reader's Theater to provide avenues through which students can participate in the curriculum in a motivational and engaging manner. As an educational professional, I am a proponent of providing teachers with time to attend trainings and workshops. In the process of creating the project, my views regarding effective PD were reinforced. I will continue to support and encourage my own school staff to participate in trainings they find interesting and promote student progress in all areas of academics, behavior, and daily living.

Project Developer

As I developed the project, I learned that it is critical to develop a plan that is well organized and detailed. The plan must include specific information regarding project

goals. Goals need to be specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-based in order for the effectiveness of the project to be effectively evaluated (Wade, 2009). While developing the project, I realized that a plan should include in-depth descriptions of outcomes, step-by-step implementation, and organization of material. After completing this project for one group of district learning center elementary teachers, I was empowered to believe that this PD training can be implemented with an even larger audience of educators. PD is needed at the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) level to encourage the use of strategies that increase student reading fluency. This process has inspired me to implement Reader's Theater in other special education centers or classrooms within our SELPA. Many teachers in the SELPA could benefit from PD training that offers a strategy that enhances students' reading fluency in an engaging manner. Providing this PD training at the SELPA level will give teachers within the SELPA access to Reader's Theater, giving them a tool that may help them develop adept readers. For future practice, I encourage the SELPA to offer Reader's Theater training as part of its PD calendar to provide teachers with the skills to implement Reader's Theater and thus increase reading fluency in SWDs.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The intent of this project was to provide teachers with a reading strategy to enhance teacher instruction and thus increase reading fluency skills in SWDs. Through the work of many researchers and in the process of creating my project, I learned it is crucial for teachers to make available engaging ways to educate students in reading. Teachers who take part in the PD training may increase their effectiveness in providing

reading instruction. Stronger reading skills improve opportunities for postsecondary learning and employment for individuals with disabilities (Conference Board, 2006). However, I have found through this process that reading achievement starts with early and consistent instruction. Hernandez (2011) established that 88% of students who do not receive a diploma struggle with reading throughout their educational careers. It is imperative that educators provide intensive reading instruction early in a student's educational career and provide it in a consistent and engaging manner. Moran (2006) demonstrated that incorporating Reader's Theater into the classroom can provide a motivating and engaging environment that promotes reading skills.

Above all, teachers need the tools to implement effective evidence-based strategies in their classrooms to continue to foster student reading progress. Evidence-based instruction is a collection of practices or programs that have a record of success (National Professional Development Center, 2014). As noted by the National Professional Development Center, "There is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence that when a strategy used, a student or group of students will make adequate gains in reading achievement" (National Professional Development Center, 2014, para 1). For teachers to incorporate evidence-based instruction in their classrooms, they must continue to develop and update their knowledge of these practices and implement them with fidelity. Educators participating in PD may improve their knowledge of effective strategies and implement activities that add value to teachers as productive educators (Carter & Wheldall, 2008). Carter and Wheldall suggested that teachers be required to participate in

PD opportunities to increase their expertise and skills, which could translate to success in their students.

There is importance in my work with regard to the project developed. The project contains information teachers can include in their repertoire of effective reading fluency strategies that may increase student literacy skills. As the project facilitator, I provided information regarding a strategy that is effective in improving reading skills in SWDs. This project is important because participants' may improve teaching reading skills which may result in higher student achievement in reading fluency. If Reader's Theater is implemented throughout a district in learning center classes, the district's reading proficiency scores for SWDs may rise. Providing this training may provide elementary learning center teachers with a valuable instructional strategy.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project has implications for district stakeholders; those stakeholders being teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Implications of the project include improved reading fluency in SWDs and a potential for a rise in standardized test scores measuring English/Language Arts proficiency. Stakeholders at the district level may see growth in Academic Performance Index scores that relate to proficiency in reading. The project has implications for parents as well; parents whose children participate in Reader's Theater activities in the learning center classrooms may see growth in their children's reading fluency. It is my experience that parents understand the importance of proficient reading and how it affects their children's success in their educational careers.

Students often take pleasure in reading text that is exciting or ignites their interest (Mascott, 2016). A direction for future research might include examining whether students enjoy reading scripts centered on topics of personal interest. Investigating what types of scripts students find enjoyable may provide teachers with information to promote positive student participation in reading.

Additionally, future research might replicate this case study with a larger sample of teachers. My sample was limited to two teachers. In future research, I would recommend interviewing additional learning center teachers across the district to gain more information regarding their experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater. More participants may provide additional insights into the impact of Reader's Theater on reading fluency.

Furthermore, future research could also include the implementation of Reader's Theater across middle and high school learning centers and special day classes for SWDs. The district in which the study was conducted struggled to meet its target English/Language Arts scores. Three out of eight middle schools and all four high schools did not meet their target scores. While reviewing the literature, I found that Reader's Theater is effective with middle and high school students; however, I did not find research that was conducted specifically with middle and high school SWDs in a learning center, resource room, or special day class setting. If the findings from middle and high school teachers are as positive toward the implementation of Reader's Theater as the findings from the elementary special education teachers in this case study, this

information would further support the use of the strategy as an engaging tool to increase

reading fluency in SWDs across grade levels.

Conclusion

Teachers experienced Reader's Theater as a motivational tool that increased their

students' willingness to read. In addition, I found that teachers perceived Reader's

Theater as a way to foster investment in reading from students as they desired to perform

well for their peers. Furthermore, the teachers perceived Reader's Theater to be an

engaging way to integrate repeated reading opportunities that gave their students

occasions to practice and promote fluency. In reflecting on the outcomes of my study, I

concluded that social change is attainable by providing a reading strategy to the district

that supports SWDs in an engaging manner and can increase their reading fluency. As a

project developer, I established that teachers who successfully participate in PD may

increase their own effectiveness to teach reading and ultimately, this instruction may help

students improve their achievement.

One strength of the PD project is its use of adult learning methods that are

collaborative and non-threatening. PD facilitators who promote a cooperative learning

environment provide a climate where adults may learn more efficiently by applying their

prior experiences to the new learning. This doctoral process has changed the way I view

adult learning, effective teaching, and the creation of professional development. I reflect

on a time when as an educator I thought I understood how adults acquire knowledge. It

was not until I embarked on this journey that I came to the understanding that there are

specific methods of creating PD sessions and serving as a successful program developer.

This experience will guide me as I continue as a leader in the education field and effect change in the way teachers interact with students. Far too many SWDs are not becoming proficient readers and lack the academic aptitude to graduate from high school. It is crucial that these students are given the chance to earn a diploma and become contributing members of the community. I recommend implementing Reader's Theater as a means of increasing reading fluency and fostering improved student outcomes for SWDs. Students with learning disabilities who are proficient readers have life-long opportunities to become successful in today's highly literature world.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Training Targets

Purpose:
The purpose of the professional develop training is to provide information of Reader's Theater to the learning center teachers. In addition, teachers will be provided information of the benefits and research findings of Reader's Theater. Additionally, learning center teachers will be guided through the implementation process, role assignment, and story and student rotation for Reader's Theater. Finally, teachers will be furnished with information pertaining to the implementation of Reader's Theater in a classroom and learn how the strategy can benefit SWDs.

Overall PD Training Goal:
Increase teacher knowledge of the implementation of Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

PD Training Objectives:
1. Learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater.
2. Learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms
3. Learn about the available resources for the use of Reader's Theater in their classrooms
4. Learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

Target Audience:
The target audience for the Professional Development Training is elementary learning center teaches in the district where my study was conducted. There are 26 elementary learning center teachers within the district.

Professional Development Training Purpose:
Day 1
The purpose of this professional development training is the following:
To review training session goal and how we will achieve the objectives.
Review a researched based definition and purpose of Reader's Theater to participants.
Discuss the urgency to implement reading support early and on a consistent basis.
Review the benefits of using performing arts and Reader's Theater in the classroom.
Explore the research supporting the use of Reader's theater to increase fluency, overall reading, and provide an engaging strategy to support motivation for students to increase reading skills.
Discuss additional benefits regarding Reader's Theater to promote decoding, comprehension, written language, vocabulary, and build confident readers.

Discuss the findings of my findings of my study regarding the teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding Reader's Theater.

Participants will take part in the Pictionary activity to report out on study results in small groups.

Day 2

The purpose of this professional development training is the following:

Discuss strategies regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Discuss where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. In small groups teachers complete and discuss vocabulary activity regarding Reader's Theater and how it can enhance learning in their students.

Discuss strategies regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Examine and learn how to assign roles and how to rotate students through the story rotations with regard to Reader's Theater.

Review how to provide guidance on reading techniques and watching for "text features" such as bold or italicized words when reading.

Day 3

The purpose of this professional development training is the following:

Participants are placed into small groups. Using free Reader's Theater scripts teachers will learn the steps in implementing Reader's Theater. With teachers as students, discuss how to create reading groups and assign roles based on reader traits and characteristics though a step-by-step process.

Perform and/or observe two groups present in front of the larger audience.

In small groups, review and discuss goals and examples with regard to the research, purpose, benefits and implementation strategies regarding Reader's Theater, each group shares out.

In small groups, review steps regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater.

Teachers create Reader's Theater lesson plan.

Complete evaluations to obtain information regarding whether the objectives and overall goal of the training was met.

<div align="center">

Professional Development Training Agenda
Day 1

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Purpose Day 1:

The purpose of this professional development training is the following:

To review the training session goal and how we will achieve training objectives.

Review the definition and purpose of Reader's Theater to participants

Discuss the urgency to implement reading support early and on a consistent basis.

Review the benefits of using performing arts and Reader's Theater in the classroom. Explore the research supporting the use of Reader's theater to increase fluency, overall reading, and provide an engaging strategy to support motivation for students to increase reading skills.

Discuss additional benefits regarding Reader's Theater to promote decoding, comprehension, written language, vocabulary, and build confident readers.

Outcome Day 1:
Teachers provide a description of Reader's Theater.
Teachers will demonstrate knowledge of the research, purpose, benefits and findings regarding Reader's Theater.

Hourly Agenda Day 1:
8:00-8:30- Introductions, review of training goal and objectives, discuss how we meet these goal and objectives, review definition of Reader's Theater.

- Participants will discuss and learn the details regarding training objectives 1-4, (a) list three ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater, (b) list three ways to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom, (c) list three resources to support the use of Reader's Theater in the classroom, and (d) apply the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.
- Participants will discuss and learn how goals will be met through review and discussing the professional literature and outcomes of my study.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater is a performance of a written script that requires repeated and assisted reading and is used to promote overall reading skills and promotes an environment that is conducive to learning.

8:30-9:00- Through the professional literature, discuss the urgency regarding reading performance, review benefits and research behind performing arts in the classroom.
- Participants will discuss and learn that there is a connection between students who habitually struggle with academic texts and a lack self-efficiency in reading and writing fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that students who participate in performing arts instruction which integrates repeated reading activities on a daily basis increased their reading fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that drama-based activities foster dialogue with peers, enhance understanding of text and to critique and interpret the scripts.

9:00-9:15- Break

9:15-9:45- Through the professional literature, discuss the benefits of Reader's Theater

- Participants will discuss and learn that incorporating Reader's Theater into the classroom can provide a motivating and engaging environment that promotes reading skills.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater has also been effective in increasing reading fluency skills.

9:45-10:15- Through the professional literature, review the benefits and purpose to support the use of Reader's Theater in relation to fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater provides a method of repeated readings which allows students to read and reread different texts
- Participants will discuss and learn that students who participate in Reader's Theater activities can increase their overall reading growth.

10:15-11:00- Through the professional literature, discuss benefits to support the use of Reader's Theater to improve other areas.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater activities provide an environment that increases collaboration and promotes a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater activities provide an environment that increases collaboration and promotes a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons.

11:00-12:00-Lunch

12:00-3:00- Through the outcomes of my study, review my study's findings regarding the research and benefits regarding Reader's Theater through Pictionary Activity.

- Pictionary Activity- Participants will be placed into small groups of 5-6. Each group is given the outcomes of my study. Each group assigns a recorder/artist and reporter. Groups discuss and illustrate the study's outcomes regarding Reader's Theater.
- Participants will discuss and learn that themes identified through analysis support the use of Reader's Theater as a strategy to increase reading fluency for SWDs.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers used Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to build reading fluency through daily reading opportunities with their leveled reading groups.
- Participants will discuss and learn that the teachers used Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to increase their students' willingness to read through repetitive readings.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers incorporated Reader's Theater through rotating readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities that fostered recognition of text features in their students which promoted fluent reading.

- Participants will discuss and learn that themes established in the analysis noted that the teachers incorporated Reader's Theater to provide fluency instruction that was engaging to students.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers perceived Reader's Theater as a way to foster investment from students to perform well for their peers.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers implemented Reader's Theater to incorporate a strategy that promoted text recognition in scripts that careered over to transitional texts.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers perceived Reader's Theater as a way to integrate repeated reading opportunities into their reading groups to provide practice and promote fluency.
- Closing Activity- Each group reports out on their illustrations for the larger group.

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

Professional Development Training Slides
Day 1

HOW WILL WE MEET THESE TRAINING GOALS?

- Through the professional literature we will review and discuss the benefits and research supporting the use of performing arts activities, including Reader's Theater.
- We will examine the findings of my study and discuss the advantages of incorporating Reader's Theater into the learning center classroom.
- In small groups, we will discuss how to implement Reader's Theater in the classroom. We will assign roles and read through Reader's Theater scripts and perform the scripts for the large group.
- We will reflect upon the research, benefits, purpose and implementation regarding Reader's Theater.

3

OBJECTIVES DAY 1

Training Objectives:
(1) Participants will learn ways Reader's Theater increases reading fluency
(2) Participants will learn how to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom
(3) Participants will learn about the resources to support the use of Reader's Theater in the classroom

4

DAY 1 TRAINING AGENDA

8:00-8:30- - Introductions, review of training goal, discuss how we meet the obejctives, review definition of Reader's Theater.
8:30-9:00- Through the professional literature, discuss the urgency regarding reading performance, review benefits and research behind performing arts in the classroom.
9:00-9:15- Break
9:15-9:45- Through the professional literature, discuss the benefits of Reader's Theater.
9:45-10:15- Through the professional literature, review the benefits and purpose to support the use of Reader's Theater in relation to fluency.
10:15-11:00- Through the professional literature, discuss benefits to support the use of Reader's Theater to improve other areas.
11:00-12:00-Lunch
12:00-3:00- Through the outcomes of my study, review my study's findings regarding the research and benefits regarding Reader's Theater through Pictionary activities activity.
3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

5

WHAT IS READER'S THEATER?

- Reader's Theater is a performance of a written script that requires repeated and assisted reading.

- There are no props, acting, costumes, or scenery used.

- Readers must use their voices to carry the meaning of the character's lines in the script.

WHAT IS READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

- The combination of movement and recurrent readings has been found to be successful in increasing student engagement and achievement.

- Reader's Theater is an evidenced based approach that incorporates repeated readings in drama-based activities.

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WHAT IS READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

- Reader's Theater has been used to promote overall reading skills and support literacy development.

- Reader's Theater has been effective in supporting students through addressing different learning styles, such Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. Reader's theater provides an environment that is conducive to learning. 8

WHY THE URGENCY?

Martinez, Roser and Strecker (1999) noted that most children develop into fluent readers by third grade. However, approximately 75% of students who are poor readers in third grade continue to be lower achieving readers in the ninth grade and ultimately do not recover their reading abilities even into adulthood (Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer & Lane, 2000).

9

WHY THE URGENCY??

There is a connection between students who habitually struggle with academic texts and a lack self-efficiency in reading and writing fluency.

10

PERFORMING ARTS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Performing arts in the classroom invites students to assume roles of characters in the literature.

- Drama-based activities foster dialogue with peers, allows to voice insights regarding the text and to critique and interpret the scripts.

- Embedding performing arts strategies in the literacy curriculum can support active and meaningful student engagement in the reading process which has been found to increase reading skills.

11

BENEFITS OF READER'S THEATER

- Students who participate in performing arts instruction which integrates repeated reading activities on a daily basis increased their reading fluency.

- Reader's Theater is one approach that incorporates repeated reading into performance activities.

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BENEFITS OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

- Reader's Theater is better suited for literacy development than other forms of drama because it is both performance and text based.
- Reader's Theater is incorporated to enhance literacy skills through its use of repeated reading opportunities.
- Incorporating Reader's Theater into the classroom can provide a motivating and engaging environment that promotes reading skills.

13

RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THE USE OF READER'S THEATER

Reader's Theater has also been effective in increasing reading fluency skills. A mixed methods study conducted by Clark et al. (2009) examined the process of fluency development of fourth grade readers of varying reading abilities using Reader's Theater as an intervention. It was shown that Reader's Theater not only benefited struggling readers but also challenged higher level readers as well.

14

INCREASE IN FLUENCY

Clark et al. (2009), found that Reader's Theater provided a method of repeated readings which allowed students to read and reread different texts. This practice gave readers the confidence to perform in front of their peers. The audience presence supported students and gave students motivation to continue to practice reading and rereading their scripts which in turn increased the student's reading ability. In addition, Reader's Theater provided students the motivation and the desire to read more frequently.

15

RISE IN OVERALL READING GROWTH

Students who participate in Reader's Theater activities can increase their overall reading growth. A study conducted in South Texas by Keehn, Harmon and Shoho (2008) used eighth grade students to investigate the impact of Reader's Theater on overall reading ability. Data indicated that Reader's Theaters activities motivated struggling adolescent readers and increased their reading confidence.

16

RISE IN OVERALL READING GROWTH CONTINUED

The majority of the students participating in the study were reading below grade level and showed little interest in reading. Data revealed an increase in students' reading levels, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. Students who participated in the Reader's Theater groups showed increases in their overall reading growth (Keehn et al. (2008).

17

PROVIDING MOTIVATIONAL INCENTIVE

Embedding Reader's Theater into the curriculum can improve reading fluency skills. Peebles (2007) found that using instructional fluency strategies involving movement were motivational and effective with primary grade readers. Reader's Theater was incorporated into primary classrooms from grades 1 through 6. The students participating in the study included both general education students and students with reading difficulties.

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TO SUMMARIZE THE BENEFITS

- Implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom has been found to increase decoding, comprehension written language and vocabulary through meaningful lessons that engage students.

- Reader's Theater activities provide an environment that increases collaboration and promotes a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons.

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TO SUMMARIZE THE BENEFITS CONTINUED

Teachers who implement daily Reader's Theater activities in their classrooms have noted an improvement in reading fluency and an increase in building confident readers in students with disabilities and low achieving readers.

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MY STUDY RESULTS SUMMARY

- Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to build reading fluency through daily reading opportunities with their leveled reading groups.

- Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to increase their students' willingness to read through repetitive readings.

- Reader's Theater through rotating readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities that fostered recognition of text features in their students which promoted fluent reading.

22

MY STUDY RESULTS SUMMARY CONTINUED

- Reader's Theater to provide fluency instruction that was engaging to students.

- Reader's Theater as a way to foster investment from students in order to perform well for their peers.

- Reader's Theater to incorporate a strategy that promoted text recognition in scripts that careered over to transitional texts.

- Reader's Theater as a way to integrate repeated reading opportunities into their reading groups to provide practice and promote fluency.

23

STUDY RESULTS FINDINGS

Research Subquestion 1: How did teachers use the Reader's Theater strategy to improve reading fluency for students with disabilities?

- The key findings: (a) implemented Reader's Theater on a daily basis with leveled reading groups, (b) provided Readers' Theater to increase their students willingness to read, (c) incorporated Reader's Theater build recognition and reading of text features and, (d) rotated students through different characters in each Reader's Theater script to increase reading opportunities.

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STUDY RESULTS THEMES

Subthemes of Research Question 1.

- I found three themes related to this question: (a) frequency of implementation, (b) motivational tool, and (c) practice.
- Overall theme: the implementation of Reader's Theater to improve fluency.

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STUDY RESULTS FINDINGS

Research Subquestion 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of Reader's Theater strategy relative to their students' reading fluency?

The key findings related to subquestion 2 were: (a) the students enjoyed the scripts over traditional books, (b) the students were invested in improving their reading skills, (c) Reader's Theater provided instruction that promoted recognition of text features, and (d) the need to rotate students through parts to provide students with additional reading opportunities.

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STUDY RESULTS THEMES

Subthemes of Research Question 2.

- I found three themes related to this question: (a) engaging reading (b) reading for peers, (c) recognizing text features, and (d) provide reading opportunities.

- Overall theme: the teachers' perceptions of Reader's Theater implementation.

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STUDY'S OUTCOME

- Motivational tool to build reading fluency through daily reading opportunities with their leveled reading groups.
- Motivational tool to increase their students' willingness to read through repetitive readings.
- Provided literacy opportunities that fostered recognition of text features in their students which promoted fluent reading.
- Provided fluency instruction that was engaging to students.
- Fosters investment from students in order to perform well for their peers.
- Promoted text recognition in scripts that careered over to transitional texts.
- Provide practice and promote fluency.

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Questions?

Reader's Theater

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Professional Development Training Agenda
Day 2

Purpose Day 2:
The purpose of this professional development training is the following:
Discuss where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. In small groups teachers complete and discuss vocabulary activity regarding Reader's Theater and how it can enhance learning in their students.
Discuss strategies regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater
Examine and learn how to assign roles and how to rotate students through the story rotations with regard to Reader's Theater.
Review how to provide guidance on reading techniques and watching for "clues" such as bold or italicized words when reading.
Discuss post-reading assessments that can be implemented to provide information to parents, administrators and/or stakeholders.
Group participants in closing activity with regard to the review of the implementation steps.

Outcome Day 2:
Teachers describe, discuss and demonstrate knowledge of the implementation strategies and take part in the implementation process of role assignment, story and student rotation for Reader's Theater.

Day 2
8:00-9:00- Answer questions/comments, review training goal.

9:00-10:00- Discuss where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. Opening Activity - complete vocabulary work sheet in small groups along with review of script, Dog Breath (Pilkey, 2014)

- Participants discuss and learn how to access free Reader's Theater scripts, they can be accessed through:
  Dr. Young's Reading Room - http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html
  Reader's Theater Editions - http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/RTE.html
  Whootie Owl - http://www.storiestogrowby.com/script.html

- Opening Activity - Participants are placed in small groups, each participant is given a script. In small groups, participants discuss vocabulary words using the Reader's Theater scripts for clues. One participant records information on sheet

and reports out on the definition of words based on participants' information gathered.

10:00-10:15- Break

10:15-11:00- Groups share out their own definitions of the words from the script.
- Each group shares out their definitions of the words using the Reader's Theater script, <u>Dog Breath</u>

11:00-11:45- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step 1-6)
- Step 1 – Participants select a Reader's Theater scripts from a selected source. Participants become familiar with the characters and story themes, identifying main roles, supporting roles, funny character, and other features that will be useful for role assignment.
- Step 2 – Participants prepare Student Information Sheet for reading group. Enter all students' names in the first column and any notes regarding reading level, personality train such as shy or outgoing, etc.
- Step 3 – Participants discuss and introduce Reader's Theater; provide examples of reading with expression, emotion, gestures, body language, acting flair, etc. Get the student excited about what they will be reading.
- Step 4 – Participants complete Student Questionnaire either in a group of individually.
- Step 5 – Participants discuss and learn how to use existing reading level measures (LLI, DRA, etc.) to determine reading levels of students.
- Step 6 – Participants prepare the Reader Assignment Sheet for the first script based on student reading level and reading traits.

11:45-12:45-Lunch

12:45-1:30- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step7-12)
- Step 7 – Participants will discuss and learn how to balance out the reading traits of students in each group.
- Step 8 – Participants review and discuss how to select reading groups. Do not let students pick their own roles.
- Step 9 – Participants review and discuss how students prepare reading scripts, Students to review their scripts and especially their characters text for any vocabulary they may need help with.
- Step 10 – Participants discuss and learn ways to read with expression, reading manners, etc.
- Step 11 – Participants review how to identify "text features" in black italic text and to not read them aloud or behavior rules you may wish to discuss. Motivate the students to be outstanding actors and portray their characters.

- Step 12 – Participants discuss how to walk around and stop to listen to each child as they read and portray their character. Participants learn how to note changes in reading behavior on the Student Information Sheet.

1:30-2:15- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step13-16)
- Step 13 – Participants will discuss and learn that each week a new script is implemented is for each group. It is recommended that each story be read at least 3-4 times per week before rotating onto the next story.
- Step 14 – Participants discuss and learn that each scripts is performed for the class and the end of the week.
- Step 15 – Participants discuss and learn that students can share out if they feel they have made improvements in their own reading and enjoyed reading for others.
- Step 16 – Participants discuss and learn that scripts can be performed in front of other classrooms or parents. Costumes and props may be added as well for the audience.
- Step 17 – Participants discuss and learn that the alternative assessments previously conducted can be repeated (LLI, DRA, etc.) to note pre and post reading levels. Participants discuss that positive results be shared with each students' parents, administrators or stakeholders.

2:15-3:00- Closing Activity

- In groups of 5-6 participants, each group is assigned either Step 1-6, Step 7-12 or Step 13-16. Each group assign a recorder and reporter. Each group summarizes their steps on large presentation paper and reports out for the larger group their summary.

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

Professional Development Training Slides
Day 2

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
DAY 2

Tami Dowgiewicz, Ed.S.

READER'S THEATER

1

OBJECTIVE/DAY 2

Objective 4: Participants will learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

DAY 2 TRAINING AGENDA

- 8:00-9:00- Answer questions/comments, review training goal.
- 9:00-10:00- Discuss where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. Opening Activity - complete vocabulary work sheet in small groups along with review of script, Dog Breath (Pilkey, n.d.)
- 10:00-10:15- Break
- 10:15-11:00- Groups share out their own definitions of the words from the script. Each group shares out their definitions of the words using the Reader's Theater script, Dog Breath
- 11:00-11:45- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step 1-6)
- 11:45-12:45-Lunch
- 12:45-1:30- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step7-12)
- 1:30-2:15- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step13-17)
- 2:15-3:00- Closing Activity
- 3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

3

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER

Step 1

Select and read a Reader's Theater scripts from a selected source for the reading level needed to become familiar with the characters and story themes, identifying main roles, supporting roles, funny character, and other features that will be useful for role assignment.

Step 2

Prepare Student Information Sheet for reading group. Enter all students' names in the first column and any notes on what you already know about them (reading level, any known tested reading level, personality train such as shy or outgoing, etc.). Use pencil on all forms so you can erase.

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 3

With your students introduce Reader's Theater (they should have participated in the LLI scripts previously). Devise your own introduction to Reader's Theater, provide examples of reading with expression, emotion, gestures, body language, acting flair, etc. Get the student excited about what they will be reading.

Step 4

With the group, ask the students each question (students raising hands) in order to fill in the Student Questionnaire. You may also have the students complete their own student questionnaire reading it through themselves.

5

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 5

Use your own reading level measure (LLI, DRA, etc.) to determine reading levels of students.

Step 6

Prepare the Reader Assignment Sheet for the first script. Enter the lower level students first into the columns for the easiest roles trying to match student reading level, gender and personality based on which roles are the main character or the supporting characters. Then enter the names of the next level readers into the corresponding columns in the same manner. Fill in the highest roles last.

6

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 6 continued:

If you have fewer students than parts, a student can read more than one role, or if there are too many students, the larger roles can be split (one student reads in the beginning of the script and the other toward the end).

Step 7

Review the combination of students in each group. Consider having different types of students in each group to spread out the extraverts and introverts, this will balance out the groups of readers.

7

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 8

On the first day with students, select reading groups. Do not let students pick their own roles. Place scripts on tables according group.

Step 9

Ask students to review their scripts and especially their characters text for any vocabulary they may need help with.

8

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 10

Discuss the ways to read with expression, reading manners, etc.

Step 11

Review with students how to identify "cues" in black italic text and to not read them aloud, and any other form information or behavior rules you may wish to discuss. Motivate the students to be outstanding actors and portray their characters.

9

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 12

Throughout the first week of reading, walk around and stop to listen to each child as they read and portray their character. Have they made improvements? If so, note that information on the Student Information Sheet.

Step 13

Continue each week with a new story for each group. It is recommended that each story be read at least 3-4 times per week before rotating onto the next story.

10

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 14

At the end of each week or when students complete each story, have a different group perform their story the rest of the groups.

Step 15

During the last week of story reading, ask the students if they feel they have made improvements in their own reading and enjoyed reading for others.

IMPLEMENTATION OF READER'S THEATER CONTINUED

Step 16

If you choose, you may pick scripts that can be performed in front of other classrooms or parents. Costumes and props may be added as well for the audience.

12

Vocabulary Worksheet

Reader's Theater

Group Members_____

Script: <u>Dog Breath</u> by Dav Pilkey

As a group, discuss each vocabulary word below. Use your scripts for clues as to what each vocabulary word means. Have someone in your group be the recorder. Get ready to share your ideas with the group!

HallyTosis:_____
_____
_____
_____

Horrible:_____
_____
_____
_____

Slurrrrp:_____
_____
_____
_____

Wonderful:_____
_____
_____
_____

Whispered:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

165

Reader's Theater

Student Name and #	Reading Level	Likes to Act	Likes to be Funny	Teacher Notes

Student Questionnaire
Reader's Theater

Name: _____

Directions: Read the questions below and circle "yes", "sometimes" or "no" to answer the questions.

1. Do you like to read out loud?   Yes   Sometimes   No

2. Do you like to act?   Yes   Sometimes   No

3. Do you like to have a big
    role and be a star?   Yes   Sometimes   No

4. Do you like to be funny?   Yes   Sometimes   No

5. Have you ever been in a play?   Yes   Sometimes   No

Reader Assignment Sheet

Reader's Theater

	Story Character	Group 1 Reader	Group 2 Reader	Group 3 Reader	Group 4 Reader
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Professional Development Training Agenda
Day 3

Purpose Day 3:
The purpose of this professional development training is the following:
Participants are placed into small groups. Using free Reader's Theater scripts teachers will learn the steps in implementing Reader's Theater. With teachers as students, discuss how to create reading groups and assign roles based on reader traits and characteristics though a step-by-step process.
Perform and/or observe two groups present in front of the larger audience.
In small groups, discuss goals and discuss examples with regard to the research, purpose, benefits and implementation strategies regarding Reader's Theater, each group shares out.
In small groups teachers discuss implementation steps. Teachers create and complete Reader's Theater lesson plan.
Complete evaluations to obtain information regarding whether the goals of the training we met.

Outcome Day 3:
Teachers will learn how to and participate in Reader's Theater scripts.
Through the evaluation and lesson plan demonstrate knowledge of the research, purpose, benefits and strategy implementation regarding Reader's Theater.

Day 3
8:00-8:30- Questions/Comments, review the steps of Reader's Theater implementation.

8:30-10:00- Group activity - Divide teachers into groups, distribute scripts - Arthur the Brave (Brown, n.d.). Discuss steps on how to implement Reader's Theater. Select roles and review Reader's Assignment Sheet.
- Learning center teachers are broken up into groups of six and participating as students. Out of the 26 teachers, two groups will have six teachers, and two groups will include seven teachers (one character from each group will share a role).
- Teachers given the free script Arthur the Brave, by Marc Brown and choose roles.
- Remind teachers that they would typically follow the protocol reviewed on Day 2 with regard to student assessments, character reader chart, etc.
- Six character roles are chosen. Shared roles are typically the narrator role due to the fact that he/she has the most lines (names are written on the Reader Assignment Sheet by teacher). Discuss intonation, character development, become the role as you read, have fun with Reader's Theater.

10:00-10:15- Break

10:15-11:00- Review Implementation of Reader's Theater in Steps 1-2. Distribute scripts, review scripts, participants select roles and review character's lines.
- Step 1 - Teachers review their character within the script. Review some of the lines to get a feel for your character. He/she is funny, old, etc.
- Step 2 - Review black italicized words, this is a "cue" to read that sentence with expression. Clues are not read out loud.

11:00-12:00- Groups read scripts through two times, one group is selected to perform in front of the larger group in Steps 3-4.
- Step 3 - Teachers may read the script through on their own or read just their own part. As the readers become better at the role, it becomes easier to express the character with more personality, be creative with your character!
- Step 4- Groups read the script through one time. Read the script through for a second time.
- Step 5 - Select one group to perform in front of groups.
- Discuss reflective questions with group, was there a change in the rate or expression with regard to the way you read your role? How would you have changed your character to make it more interesting for the listener? Did your expression or rate change the second time reading? Do you think this strategy would be beneficial for your students? Why?

12:00-1:00-Lunch

1:00-2:00- Repeat the implementation process with The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken (Lester, n.d.) in Steps 6-7. Group discusses the effectiveness of Reader's Theater and how and who the strategy could benefit in their own classrooms.
- In same groups, implement Steps 1-5 with the free script The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken (Lester, n.d.)
- Step 6 - Repeat the process for the script The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken, a free Reader's Theater script.
- Step 7 - Select a group to perform the script in front of the group.
- Discuss and reflect on questions with group, what do you think we could do as teachers to make this strategy even more effective for our students? How do you think Reader's Theater could benefit your students? Who do you think would benefit from Reader's Theater? What groups of students?

2:00-3:00- Group discusses benefits to students in learning center classrooms and how it could be implemented, review steps regarding implementation of Reader's Theater and complete lesson plan, review professional training goals, completion of evaluations.

- Group discusses the benefits to support the implementation of Reader's Theater.
- Group considers how and when Reader's Theater can be used in your learning center classrooms.
- Review steps regarding the implementation of Reader's Theater.
- Each teacher completes a lesson plan implementing Reader's Theater and using the scripts provided.
- Review of PD training goal and objectives.
- Each teacher please complete an evaluation with regard to the following: The implementation of Reader's Theater.

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

Professional Development Training Slides
Day 3

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Teachers are given the first script Arthur the Brave, by Marc Brown, free Reader's Theater script.
- Teachers are asked to choose roles. Remind teachers that they would typically follow the protocol reviewed on Day 2 with regard to student assessments, character reader chart, etc.
- Six character roles are chosen. Two of the groups will have to share a role. The narrator role would be the most appropriate due to the fact that he/she has the most lines (names are written on the Reader Assignment Sheet, typically by teacher).

5

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Discuss with your students:
- ✓ Become the character in the story as you read. This is a fun activity and we are going to explore the plot and learn what will happen next in the story. This is an exciting journey, you will discover that the story will pull you in as we read. You may want to read the story over and over again.

6

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Teachers, you are students for this exercise:
- Step 1:
- ✓ Look at the your character within the script. Review some of the lines to get a feel for your character. He/she is funny, old, etc.?
- Step 2:
- ✓ You may see black italicized words, this is a "cue" to read that sentence with expression. Cues are not read out loud.

7

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Step 3:
- ✓ You may read the script through on your own or read just your own part. As the readers become better at the role, it becomes easier to express the character with more personality, be creative with your character!
- Step 4:
- ✓ Read the script through one time. Read the script through for a second time.
- Step 5:
- ✓ Select one group to perform in front of groups.

8

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Questions to ask the group:
- ✓ Was there a change in the rate or expression with regard to the way you read your role?
- ✓ How would you have changed your character to make it more interesting for the listener?
- ✓ Did your expression or rate change the second time reading?
- ✓ Do you think this strategy would be beneficial for your students? Why?

9

IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Step 6:
- ✓ Repeat the process for the script The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken. by Helen Lester a free Reader's Theater script.
- Step 7:
- ✓ Select a group to perform the script in front of the group.
- Questions to ask the group:
- ✓ What do you think we could do as teachers to make this strategy even more effective for our students?
- ✓ How do you think Reader's Theater could benefit your students?
- ✓ Who do you think would benefit from Reader's Theater? What groups of students?

10

Questions?

READER'S THEATER

11

REVIEW OF GOALS/EVALUATION PLAN

- Review of professional development training goals.
- Each teacher please complete an evaluation with regard to the following:
- The research, purpose, benefits that were discussed with regard to Reader's Theater in our training.
- Implementation strategies regarding Reader's Theater.

~ The evaluation sheets are provided for you ~

Thank you for your attendance and participation!

12

REFERENCES AND SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Brown, M. (n.d.). Arthur the brave. Retrieved from
http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html

Lester, H. (n.d.). The wizard, the fairy and the magic chicken. Retrieved from
http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html

13

READER'S THEATER TEACHER LESSON PLAN

Teacher Lesson Plan
Reader's Theater

Concept/Strand:

Objectives:

Materials:

Procedure:

Assessment:

Extended Learning Activities:

Teacher Lesson Plan

Reader's Theater

Concept to teach:

_____

_____

Objectives:

_____

_____

Materials:

_____

_____

Procedure:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Assessment:

_____

_____

Extended Learning Activities:

_____

_____

Implementation Plan

Introduction:
The professional development training is focused on Reader's Theater and its research, benefits and motivational opportunities in which the strategy can reach and be beneficial for SWDs. The training is offered for all district elementary learning center teachers. The professional development training is three full days and consists of information being presented through daily training agendas, student and teacher worksheets and three PowerPoint presentations by myself and collaborative learning and presentations using additional materials, which include Reader's Theater scripts for participants' use.

Purpose:
The purpose of the professional develop training is to provide information with regard to the description of Reader's Theater to the learning center teachers. In addition, teachers will be provided information with regard to the benefits and positive findings of Reader's Theater. Additionally, learning center teachers will be guided through the implementation process regarding assessment, role assignment, story and student rotation and behavioral observations with regard to Reader's Theater.

System Overview:
The system to be implemented is through oral presentations, computerized PowerPoint presentations, collaboration and group participant presentations. The systems are intended to support the teacher participants and presenter.

- **System Description:**
  A computer system is needed to support the PowerPoint presentations. A projector and screen are also required in order for the presentation to be clear and affective. A training room is required which can accommodate approximately 25 people. A room can be accessed through the district office, along with chairs and tables. I am able to provide the computer and projector for the presentation. Training room, projector screen, tables and chairs will be provided by the district.

- **System Organization:**
  Daily training agendas will be provided for organization and present summarized information from the PowerPoint presentations. Information will also be presented through student and teacher worksheets. Data will be presented through three PowerPoint presentations which run on Microsoft PowerPoint Non-commercial Use. The PowerPoint presentations will focus on information being presented in a narrative format highlighting the benefits, research and utilization of Reader's Theater. The laptop and projector run through a Dell computer software system.

Implementation Timetable	
Obtain approval from the director of special education to conduct the 3-day training.	August 2016
Schedule training dates with special education director.	August 2016
Reserve training room.	September 2016 and October 2016
Invite learning center teachers via email to attend the PD training.	August 2016
Conduct the 3-day professional training.	September 2016 and October 2016

Project References:

Clark, R., Morrison, T., & Wilcox, B. (2009). Reader's Theater: A process of developing fourth-graders' reading fluency. *Reading Psychology*. *30*, 359-385.

Keehn, S., Harmon, J., & Shoho, A. (2008). A study of Readers Theater in eighth grade: Issues of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*. *24*(4), 335-362.

Martinez, M., Roser, N., & Strecker, S. (1999). "I never thought I could be a star": A Readers Theatre ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher*. *52*(4), 326-334.

Mercer, C., Campbell, K., Miller, M., Mercer, K., & Lane, H. (2000). Effects of a reading fluency intervention for middle schoolers with specific learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Research and Practice*. *15*(4), 179–189

Moran, K. (2006). Nurturing emergent readers through Readers Theater. *Early Childhood Education. 33*(5), 317-323.

Palumbo, A., & Sanacore, J. (2009). Helping Struggling Middle School Literacy Learners Achieve Success. The Clearing House: *A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas. 82*(6), 275-280.

Peck, S., & Virkler, A. (2006). Reading in the shadows: Extending literacy skills through shadow-puppet theater. *The Reading Teacher*. *59*(8), 786-795.

Peebles, J. (2007). Incorporating movement with fluency instruction: A motivation for struggling readers. *The Reading Teacher*. *60(*6), 578-581.

Additional Sources:
Brown, M. (n.d.). Arthur the brave. Retrieved from
         http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html

Lester, H. (n.d.). The wizard, the fairy and the magic chicken. Retrieved from
         http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html

Pilkey, D. (2014). Dog breath. Retrieved from
         http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html

Glossary:
Reader's Theater. Reader's Theater is a performance of a written script that demands
repeated and assisted reading that is focused on delivering meaning to an audience. No
acting, props, costumes, or scenery are used; readers must use their voices to carry the
meaning of the character's lines in the script (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Barriers to Successful Implementation (actual or potential)
1. Approval from special education director to reserve three student free days for
professional development training.
2. Buy-in from learning center teachers.
3. Approval to use the district's large training room.

Implementation Steps
1. Obtain approval from the director of special education to conduct the 3-day training in
August 2016.
2. Schedule training dates with special education director in August 2016.
3. Reserve training room in September 2016 and then again in October 2016.Typically
the district offers two days of professional development training in September and then
one day in October.
4. Invite learning center teachers via email to attend the professional development
training in August 2016.
5. Conduct the 3-day professional training in September and October 2016.

Estimated Number of Hours for Implementation:
7.5 hours per day to conduct the training
22.5 hours total to conduct all 3 days of training

Performance Measures
As per the professional development evaluation, performance will be noted through
information provided through answers provided by the learning center teachers.

Questions were driven by the professional development objectives with to meet the overall training goal:

Overall PD Training Goal:
Increase teacher knowledge of the implementation of Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

PD Training Objectives:
1. Learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater
2. Learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms
3. Learn about the available resources for the use of Reader's Theater in their classrooms
4. Learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

Evaluation Plan

Project Evaluation- I will coordinate with the director of special education to conduct a 3-day professional growth training course for 26 elementary learning center teachers in the district. All elementary learning center teachers will be invited to attend. During the fall of 2015 the professional growth training will be conducted incorporating daily training agendas, student and teacher worksheets, and PowerPoint presentations. The training will include collaborative learning and presentations regarding the use and effectiveness of Reader's Theater. An evaluation form will be used to gain information pertaining to the course's value with regard to targeted goals.

Outcome Goal: Through the professional development training, to provide a strategy for learning center teachers that is effective in increasing reading fluency in SWDs and the teachers, in turn, having the desire to ultimately share the positive outcomes of Reader's Theater with other district stakeholders and parents.

Objective 1: Learn and list ways Reader's Theater may increase reading fluency

Objective	Responsible	Timeline	Evaluation Measure
Learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater	Professional Development Trainer (myself)	By October 2016	Information provided by training participants on the Professional Development Evaluation (questions 1)

Objective 2: Learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

Objective	Responsible	Timeline	Evaluation Measure

Learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom	Professional Development Trainer (myself)	By October 2016	Information provided by training participants on the Professional Development Evaluation (questions 2)

Objective 3: Learn and list available resources for the use of Reader's Theater lessons

Objective	Responsible	Timeline	Evaluation Measure
Learn and list available resources for the use of Reader's Theater lessons	Professional Development Trainer (myself)	By October 2016	Information provided by training participants on the Professional Development Evaluation (question 3)

Objective 4: Learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

Objective	Responsible	Timeline	Evaluation Measure
Learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.	Professional Development Trainer (myself)	By October 2016	Information provided in the teacher created lesson plan and Information provided by training participants on the Professional Development Evaluation (questions 4)

Overall PD Training Goal:
Increase teacher knowledge of the implementation of Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.

PD Training Objectives:
1. Learn and list ways to increase reading fluency using Reader's Theater
2. Learn and list ways to implement Reader's Theater in their learning center classrooms
3. Learn about the available resources for the use of Reader's Theater in their classrooms
4. Learn and use the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

Professional Growth Training Evaluation Form

Name (optional) _____School Site (optional) _____

1. List three ways Reader's Theater increases reading fluency.	2. List three ways to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.
3. List three resources to support the use of Reader's Theater in the classroom.	4. List the steps you would take to develop a Reader's Theater lesson.

Hour-by-hour Detail of Professional Growth Training

<u>**Day 1**</u>

8:00-8:30- Introductions, review of training goal, discuss how we meet the goal through training objectives, review definition of Reader's Theater.

- Participants will discuss and learn the details regarding training objective 1, training participants will be able to list three ways Reader's Theater increases reading fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn the details regarding training objective 2, training participants will be able to list three ways to implement Reader's Theater in the learning center classroom.
- Participants will discuss and learn the details regarding training objective 3, training participants will be able to list three resources to support the use of Reader's Theater in the classroom.
- Participants will discuss and learn how goals will be met through review and discussing the professional literature and outcomes of my study.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater is a performance of a written script that requires repeated and assisted reading and is used to promote overall reading skills and promotes an environment that is conducive to learning.

8:30-9:00- Through the professional literature, discuss the urgency regarding reading performance, review benefits and research behind performing arts in the classroom.
- Participants will discuss and learn that there is a connection between students who habitually struggle with academic texts and a lack self-efficiency in reading and writing fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that students who participate in performing arts instruction which integrates repeated reading activities on a daily basis increased their reading fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that drama-based activities foster dialogue with peers, allows to voice insights regarding the text and to critique and interpret the scripts.

9:00-9:15- Break

9:15-9:45- Through the professional literature, discuss the benefits of Reader's Theater.
- Participants will discuss and learn that incorporating Reader's Theater into the classroom can provide a motivating and engaging environment that promotes reading skills.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater has also been effective in increasing reading fluency skills.

9:45-10:15- Through the professional literature, review the benefits and purpose to support the use of Reader's Theater in relation to fluency.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater provides a method of repeated readings which allows students to read and reread different texts
- Participants will discuss and learn that students who participate in Reader's Theater activities can increase their overall reading growth.

10:15-11:00- Through the professional literature, discuss benefits to support the use of Reader's Theater to improve other areas.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater activities provide an environment that increases collaboration and promotes a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons.
- Participants will discuss and learn that Reader's Theater activities provide an environment that increases collaboration and promotes a communal atmosphere among students participating in the lessons.

11:00-12:00-Lunch

12:00-3:00- Through the outcomes of my study, review my study's findings regarding the research and benefits regarding Reader's Theater through Pictionary Activity.

- Pictionary Activity- Participants will be placed into small groups of 5-6. Each group is given the outcomes of my study. Each group assigns a recorder/artist and reporter. Groups discuss and illustrate the study's outcomes regarding Reader's Theater.
- Participants will discuss and learn that themes identified through analysis support the use of Reader's Theater as a strategy to increase reading fluency for SWDs.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers used Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to build reading fluency through daily reading opportunities with their leveled reading groups.
- Participants will discuss and learn that the teachers used Reader's Theater as a motivational tool to increase their students' willingness to read through repetitive readings.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers incorporated Reader's Theater through rotating readers through different parts of the scripts to provide literacy opportunities that fostered recognition of text features in their students which promoted fluent reading.
- Participants will discuss and learn that themes established in the analysis noted that the teachers incorporated Reader's Theater to provide fluency instruction that was engaging to students.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers perceived Reader's Theater as a way to foster investment from students to perform well for their peers.

- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers implemented Reader's Theater to incorporate a strategy that promoted text recognition in scripts that careered over to transitional texts.
- Participants will discuss and learn that teachers perceived Reader's Theater as a way to integrate repeated reading opportunities into their reading groups to provide practice and promote fluency.
- Closing of Activity- Each group reports out on their illustrations for the larger group.

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

Day 2

8:00-9:00- Answer questions/comments, review training goal.

- Participants will discuss and learn the details regarding training objective 4, participants will be able to apply the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.
- Apply the steps of the strategy to develop Reader's Theater lessons.

9:00-10:00- Discuss where to access free Reader's Theater scripts. Opening Activity - complete vocabulary work sheet in small groups along with review of script, Dog Breath (Pilkey, 2014)

- Participants discuss and learn how to access free Reader's Theater scripts, they can be accessed through:
  Dr. Young's Reading Room - http://www.thebestclass.org/index.html
  Reader's Theater Editions - http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/RTE.html
  Whootie Owl - http://www.storiestogrowby.com/script.html

- Opening Activity - Participants are placed in small groups, each participant is given a script. In small groups, participants discuss vocabulary words using the Reader's Theater scripts for clues. One participant records information on sheet and reports out on the definition of words based on participants' information gathered.

10:00-10:15- Break

10:15-11:00- Groups share out their own definitions of the words from the script.
- Each group shares out their definitions of the words using the Reader's Theater script, Dog Breath

11:00-11:45- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step 1-6)

- Step 1 – Participants select a Reader's Theater scripts from a selected source. Participants become familiar with the characters and story themes, identifying main roles, supporting roles, funny character, and other features that will be useful for role assignment.
- Step 2 – Participants prepare Student Information Sheet for reading group. Enter all students' names in the first column and any notes regarding reading level, personality train such as shy or outgoing, etc.
- Step 3 – Participants discuss and introduce Reader's Theater; provide examples of reading with expression, emotion, gestures, body language, acting flair, etc. Get the student excited about what they will be reading.
- Step 4 – Participants complete Student Questionnaire either in a group of individually.
- Step 5 – Participants discuss and learn how to use existing reading level measures (LLI, DRA, etc.) to determine reading levels of students.
- Step 6 – Participants prepare the Reader Assignment Sheet for the first script based on student reading level and reading traits.

11:45-12:45-Lunch

12:45-1:30- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step7-12)
- Step 7 – Participants will discuss and learn how to balance out the reading traits of students in each group.
- Step 8 – Participants review and discuss how to select reading groups. Do not let students pick their own roles.
- Step 9 – Participants review and discuss how students prepare reading scripts, Students to review their scripts and especially their characters text for any vocabulary they may need help with.
- Step 10 – Participants discuss and learn ways to read with expression, reading manners, etc.
- Step 11 – Participants review how to identify "text features" in black italic text and to not read them aloud or behavior rules you may wish to discuss. Motivate the students to be outstanding actors and portray their characters.
- Step 12 – Participants discuss how to walk around and stop to listen to each child as they read and portray their character. Participants learn how to note changes in reading behavior on the Student Information Sheet.

1:30-2:15- Review implementation steps regarding Reader's Theater (Step13-16)
- Step 13 – Participants will discuss and learn that each week a new script is implemented is for each group. It is recommended that each story be read at least 3-4 times per week before rotating onto the next story.
- Step 14 – Participants discuss and learn that each scripts is performed for the class and the end of the week.

- Step 15 – Participants discuss and learn that students can share out if they feel they have made improvements in their own reading and enjoyed reading for others.
- Step 16 – Participants discuss and learn that scripts can be performed in front of other classrooms or parents. Costumes and props may be added as well for the audience.

2:15-3:00- Closing Activity

- In groups of 5-6 participants, each group is assigned either Step 1-6, Step 7-12 or Step 13-16. Each group assigns a recorder and reporter. Each group summarizes their steps on large presentation paper and reports out for the larger group their summary.

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comments

Day 3

8:00-8:30- Questions/Comments, review of training goal.

8:30-10:00- Group activity - Divide teachers into groups, distribute scripts - Arthur the Brave (Brown, n.d.). Discuss steps on how to implement Reader's Theater. Select roles and review Reader's Assignment Sheet.
- Learning center teachers are broken up into groups of six and participating as students. Out of the 26 teachers, two groups will have six teachers, and two groups will include seven teachers (one character from each group will share a role).
- Teachers given the free script Arthur the Brave, by Marc Brown and choose roles.
- Remind teachers that they would typically follow the protocol reviewed on Day 2 with regard to student assessments, character reader chart, etc.
- Six character roles are chosen. Shared roles are typically the narrator role due to the fact that he/she has the most lines (names are written on the Reader Assignment Sheet by teacher). Discuss intonation, character development, become the role as you read, have fun with Reader's Theater.

10:00-10:15- Break

10:15-11:00- Review Implementation of Reader's Theater in Steps 1-2. Distribute scripts, review scripts, participants select roles and review character's lines.
- Step 1 - Teachers review their character within the script. Review some of the lines to get a feel for your character. He/she is funny, old, etc.

- Step 2 - Review black italicized words, this is a "cue" to read that sentence with expression. Clues are not read out loud.

11:00-12:00- Groups read scripts through two times, one group is selected to perform in front of the larger group in Steps 3-4.
- Step 3 - Teachers may read the script through on their own or read just their own part. As the readers become better at the role, it becomes easier to express the character with more personality, be creative with your character!
- Step 4- Groups read the script through one time and a second.
- Step 5 - Select one group to perform in front of groups.
- Discuss reflective questions with group, was there a change in the rate or expression with regard to the way you read your role? How would you have changed your character to make it more interesting for the listener? Did your expression or rate change the second time reading? Do you think this strategy would be beneficial for your students? Why?

12:00-1:00-Lunch

1:00-2:00- Repeat the implementation process with The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken (Lester, n.d.) in Steps 6-7. Group discusses the effectiveness of Reader's Theater and how and who the strategy could benefit in their own classrooms.
- In same groups, implement Steps 1-5 with the free script The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken (Lester, n.d.)
- Step 6 - Repeat the process for the script The Wizard, The Fairy and The Magic Chicken, a free Reader's Theater script.
- Step 7 - Select a group to perform the script in front of the group.
- Discuss and reflect on questions with group, what do you think we could do as teachers to make this strategy even more effective for our students? How do you think Reader's Theater could benefit your students? Who do you think would benefit from Reader's Theater? What groups of students?

2:00-3:00- Group discusses benefits to students in learning center classrooms and how it could be implemented, review steps regarding implementation of Reader's Theater and complete lesson plan, review professional training goals, completion of evaluations.
- Group discusses the benefits, implementation and how the strategy can be used in the learning center.
- Review steps for implementation of Reader's Theater.
- Teachers each create a lesson plan regarding Reader' Theater using steps discussed during training.
- Review of PD training goals.
- Each teacher please complete an evaluation with regard to the following:

3:00-3:30- Questions/Comment

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation from the District

August 12, 2014

Dear Tami Schoen-Dowgiewicz,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Improving Reading Fluency in Special Education Students through Reader's Theater within [   ] Elementary School in the [   ] Unified School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct the research described above using interviews. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: access to teachers for interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Unified School District

Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form for Research

You are invited to take part in a research study about improving reading fluency through performing arts, specifically Reader's Theater. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Tami Dowgiewicz, Ed.S. who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a Special Education Program Specialist employed with the⬜⬜⬜⬜Unified School District, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to obtain information on your experiences and perceptions on the effectiveness of the use of a reading strategy, Reader's Theater, to increase the reading fluency of students with learning disabilities. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have knowledge with regard to the implementation of Reader's Theater in your learning center classrooms with students with disabilities.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- You will take part in an interview for approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked about your experiences and perceptions with regard to the implementation of Reader's Theater. Questions will also be asked about your students' participating in Reader's Theater and its impact on reading fluency. At the end of the study, you will also be asked to provide feedback regarding the interpretations of the interview (member checking) and offer further guidance with regard to your data use (see Post-interview Confidentiality Form). The interviews will be recorded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: This study is voluntary. If you decide to consent now, you can still change your mind later. If you do not agree to take part in the study, there will be no negative implications.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: Being in this type of study involves some risk of discomfort, such as loss of personal time after school while participating in the interview. The results of the study will benefit the school district by helping to provide a better understanding of the impact of performing arts activities on students with learning disabilities' reading skills and your perceptions and experiences with Reader's Theater.

Payment: There will be no payment.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. However, with such a small sample size, it is not possible to provide you with complete

identity protection. For example, the other teacher may deduce what you have stated in your interview. In addition, other teachers in your school and in your district may have knowledge of who you are. Since you are one of two participants in this study, other teachers in the school and in the district may be able to deduce who you are. Following data collection you will have an opportunity to review the narrative analysis of the data you provided during your interview and indicate any information that you wish to remain confidential by signing a Post-interview Confidentiality form. The only time the researcher would need to share your name or information would be if the researcher learns about possible harm to you or someone else. Data will be kept secure by placing all documents in a locked cabinet within the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of five years, as required by the university

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 562-243-3396 or tami.schoen-dowgiewicz@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University staff member who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **08-06-14-0184550** and it expires on **August 5, 2015**.

The researcher will provide an extra copy of this form for you to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement this optional research project. By signing below I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant's Signature   _____

Date of Consent   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol Form

Teacher Name: _____

Date: _____

QUESTIONS:

Research Question 1

1.   What prompted you to select Reader's Theater as a strategy in your classroom?

2.   What professional reading did you do to learn about how to implement Reader's Theater?

3.   What other sources did you use to help you implement Reader's Theater?

4.   How did you select the reading material for Reader's theater scripts?

5.   Describe a reading lesson when you used Reader's Theater. What went well? What needed to be improved?

6.   What barriers did you encounter in implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom? How did you overcome them?

Research Question 2

7.   How did you use Reader's Theater to develop fluency?

8.   How did you know whether you met that objective?

9.   Describe how Reader's Theater influenced fluency for your students.

Appendix E: Sample Transcript

Question 1: What prompted you to select Reader's Theater as a strategy in your classroom?

Teacher A: We have Reader's Theater scripts in our LLI kits and we found that they were really effective in improving our students reading skills. The kids loved them and they really enjoyed reading the plays. We decided implement the scripts on a regular basis with our reading groups.

Question 2: What professional reading did you do to learn about how to implement Reader's Theater?

Teacher A: There are guided lessons in the LLI teacher's manual for the scripts and we researched scripts and instructions on the internet on our own when implementing additional Reader's Theater plays.

Question 3: What other sources did you use to help you implement Reader's Theater?

Teacher A: We looked on the internet for scripts and instructions on how to create lessons for Reader's Theater. Also, with my older students we used short novels and created scripts using those. The students definitely seem to like to read the novels more that way and they are much more interested in wanting to read in front of each other when the novel is turned into a Reader's Theater script.

Question 4: How did you select the reading material for Reader Theater scripts?

Teacher A: Our students are in reading groups by ability. We chose the scripts that were at their instructional reading level. We tried to select Reader's Theater scripts that would be exciting and motivating to the students. For the novels that we turned into scripts, we tried to choose novels that were more at their grade level or looked like something they would want to read.

Question 5: Describe a reading lesson when you used Reader's Theater. What went well? What needed to be improved?

Teacher A: Ok, well, they loved the plays. They loved to pick their parts and such; they get to pick their characters. They read better when they read the plays because they know they are more responsible for their characters. On their parts, I try and get them to use a different voice that go along with their characters. If you are going to be the giant you have to use a big hefty voice. It teaches the students that writers use different characters

for different reasons. The students would definitely like to read the Reader's Theater plays instead of reading a book numerous times. They will complain about that but, with the scripts they never complain about reading those over and over.

Question 6: What barriers did you encounter in implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom? How did you overcome them?

Teacher A: Just having certain parts have less lines and less reading. When we practice we rotate through the parts so everyone has a chance to be all of the parts. Everyone gets a chance to use different voices, rotating readers and reading the plays multiple times. There we no huge obstacles in implementing Reader's Theater. Sometimes you have a student that can be stubborn and does not want to read certain parts. So, it takes some coercing to get that student to read multiple parts other than the one that he wants to read.

Question 7: How did you use the Reader's Theater scripts to develop fluency?

Teacher A: By using voices and telling the students that you need to put yourself into this character's position. If you are the little pig and the wolf is at your door are you going to say "no thank you wolf" or are you really going to raise your voice and "say NO wolf you are NOT coming in"!! It is a great way to show that authors use punctuation or authors use all caps in a word that is a signal that the reader needs to raise their voice. Reader's theater helps with expression, intonation, and recognizing the author's meaning through their punctuation.

Question 8: How did you know whether you met that objective?

Teacher A: When their fluent reading starts to carry over into their regular reading of books. Those books will have bold words, punctuation and characters and when the students start to recognize those things and start to implement what they have learned when reading the scripts that is when we recognize that the students have started to meet their objectives of fluent reading. When they read a regular book when they start to change their voice or lower or raise their voice that is when we know that what they have learned from the Reader's Theater is starting to carry over. When they see those clues that means their fluent reading is starting to carry over.

Question 9: Describe how Reader's Theater influenced fluency for your students?

Teacher A: The Reader's Theater is more natural and more meaningful to the students this influences their fluency because it is more natural and meaningful than just reading and rereading the same book over and over again.

Appendix F: Post-Interview Confidentiality Form

It is my goal and responsibility to use the information that you have shared responsibility. Now that you have completed the interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to provide me with additional feedback on how you prefer to have your data handled. Please check one of the following statements:

_____You may share the information just as I provided it. No details need to be changed when using my data in publications or presentations. I realize that others might identify me based on the data, even though my name will not be used.

_____You may share the information just as I provided; however, please change details that might make me identifiable to others. In particular, it is my wish that the following specific pieces of my data not be shared without first altering the data so as to make me unidentifiable (describe this data in the space below):
_____
_____
_____

_____You may contact me if you have any questions about sharing my data with others. The best way to reach me is (provide phone number or email):_____

Respondent's signature _____
Date_____

Researcher's signature _____
Date_____

Adapted from "Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research"

(Kaiser, 2010)