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# The Effects of Readers' Theater on the Fluency and Comprehension of Students Reading Below Grade Level

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by

Melinda E. Faatz

August 2009

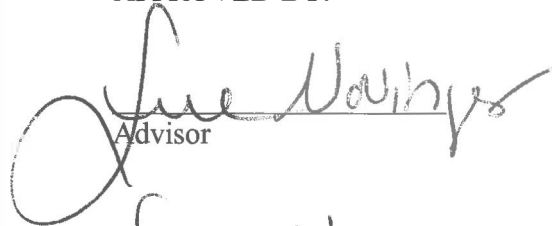
A thesis submitted to the  
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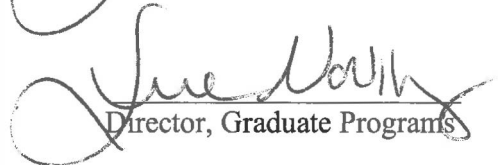
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Students reading below grade level often demonstrate difficulty in their ability to read fluently and comprehend what they are reading. Research indicates that fluency plays a critical role in reading proficiency and has been found to have a reciprocal relationship with reading comprehension (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). A significant amount of energy and attention is placed on reading in schools; thus reading instruction in the areas of fluency and comprehension are essential for all students (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Altwerger, Jordan, & Shelton, 2007). Presently, much more research has been done regarding reading comprehension; while less research has been done on fluency. At this time, there is no single definition of fluency. While some researchers believe fluency to be solely a person's reading rate (Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski & Lenhart, 2007), others describe fluency as reading effectively and automatically, using proper intonation to group words into phrases (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). However, for the purposes of this study, fluency is described as "the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression" (Rasinski, 2003 p. 26 as cited in Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

Reading comprehension can be described as the process of constructing meaning which involves one's knowledge, experience, thinking, and teaching (Fielding & Pearson, 1994, as cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). The ultimate goal of reading should be to construct meaning. "If the purpose for reading is anything other than understanding, why read at all?" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007 p. 13).

Furthermore, specific strategies and techniques are necessary to effectively teach and model reading fluently as well as comprehension strategies. Readers' theater is one instructional technique that can be used to address student motivation, fluency, and comprehension (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

#### Research Question

I was interested in finding ways to improve the reading comprehension and fluency of students reading below grade level. In this study, I explored how the instructional technique of reader's theater affected the reading comprehension and fluency of all students, but more specifically students reading below grade level. I designed this research question: 1) How might using readers' theater affect the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level?

#### Rationale

I was interested in how readers' theater might affect the reading fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level because of my own professional experience as a 12:1:1 special education teacher. My students were all reading below grade level and struggled in their ability to read fluently and comprehend a text. As an educator, I am always eager to find new ways to effectively help and teach students about strategies to improve their fluency and reading comprehension. In addition, my students showed an interest in readers' theater and were motivated to reread and perform their part in a script. I took a different approach in this study as I researched how readers' theater might impact the fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level. The majority of the research at this time has been done on how readers' theater affects the

comprehension and fluency of students in the general education classroom or how readers' theater affects the motivation of students (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Zutell & Rasinski, 2001).

### Definitions

There is no sole definition of reading fluency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). However, for the purposes of this study, fluency was described as "the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression" (Rasinski, 2003 p. 26 as cited in Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

As stated previously, reading comprehension can be described as the process of constructing meaning, involving one's knowledge, experience, thinking, and teaching (Fielding & Pearson, 1994, as cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Readers' theater can be defined as "a meaningful, authentic, reading event that requires repeated readings of literature for the purpose of conveying meaning to an audience" (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006 p. 17). Readers' theater is one instructional technique that encompasses student motivation, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

A 12:1:1 classroom can be defined as a classroom with up to twelve students with disabilities, one special education teacher, and one classroom aide. The four students in this study were part of the 12:1:1 class that I was teaching during the 2008-2009 school year.

Retelling is defined instructional strategy that involves the verbal recreation of information in a text. An interaction between the text and the reader is an essential component of a retelling (Gambrell, Kapinus, & Koskinen, 1991).



## Study Approach

This qualitative study documented how readers' theater impacted the reading fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level. In this study I gathered data from a variety of sources, adding to its triangulation. I analyzed video recordings of students orally reading and took running reading records which included an oral retelling of the story. I also took notes on my observations of students participating in readers' theater activities and gathered results obtained through assessments using Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001) and the Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling (Beaver, 2006).

This observational study took place in a 12:1:1 classroom with four students. These observations took place throughout the course of the five week study and allowed me to gather and interpret data on how readers' theater might affect the reading fluency and comprehension of these four participants reading below grade level.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Fluency and reading comprehension are two key components of reading proficiency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Altwerger, Jordan, & Shelton, 2007). It is essential that students receive explicit instruction on fluency and reading comprehension to aid in their success in school and in the real world. Although there are a variety of instructional techniques that can be used to help students improve upon their reading fluency and comprehension, readers' theater is a unique instructional technique that incorporates the strategy of repeated readings in combination with active engagement and motivation. To determine the effectiveness of readers' theater on the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level an assessment piece must occur.

The question is, how might readers' theater impact the fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level? Various studies and research have helped us to explore this question further.

### Fluency

Fluency is seen as a key component of reading proficiency and instruction (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Altwerger, Jordan, & Shelton, 2007). With more attention placed on reading than on any other content area, school districts are demanding that teachers use specific reading programs, materials, and assessments that support the varying views of literacy instruction (Altwerger, et al. 2007). "Reading education and policy struggles in the United States today are a continuation of the historic struggles and conflicts amongst the multiple perspectives grounding our reading curricula. The ongoing disagreement about how teachers should teach

reading and the continued struggle to accommodate diverse learners creates tension” (Altwerger, et. al. 2007, p. 3). The definition of fluency including fluency instruction and assessment play a role in this struggle. Presently, educational research has not come up with one consensus on a definition of fluency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Rather, fluency has been defined in multiple ways, by numerous researchers who have varying viewpoints regarding reading fluency. Fluency is often narrowly defined in terms of reading rate (how fast someone reads) and automaticity. Thus, many teachers focus solely on improving students’ reading rate (Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski & Lenhart, 2007). For the purposes of this study, fluency is described as “the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression” (Rasinski, 2003 p. 26 as cited in Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

It is important to note that fluency does not include accurately reading words or reading comprehension, although these components have a reciprocal relationship with fluency (Zutell, & Rasinski, 2001). However the exact relationship between fluency and comprehension continues to be debated (Strecker, Roser, & Martinex, 1998 as cited in Worthy & Prater, 2002). Some theorists believe that fluency is the result of good comprehension (Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991 as cited in Tyler & Chard, 2000). Others state that good comprehension is the result of fluent reading (Stayer & Allington, as cited in Tyler & Chard, 2000). However, a significant amount of research supports the notion that being able to read fluently doesn’t necessarily make you a proficient reader (Rasinski, 2001; Altwerger, 2007). Pressley found that “children can often read with great speed and accuracy and yet recall few of the ideas

in the text they read” (as cited by Altwerger et al. 2007 p. vii). Being able to read fluently says nothing about a person’s “ability to construct meaning, monitor meaning, or comprehend what they read” (Altwerger et al.2007, p. 66). Thus, fluency instruction needs to be taught in combination with reading comprehension to truly help students become more proficient readers (Rasinski, 2001; Altwerger et al. 2007).

To further understand fluency it is often helpful to recognize the characteristics of non-fluent readers (Rasinski, 2006; Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). Many developing readers are not able to read fluently (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). For example, students struggling with reading may make a significant number of errors when reading a text. They may also take multiple attempts to figure out a single word. These students may put all their effort into decoding each word and reading it correctly, rather than focusing their cognitive resources on making meaning of the text. Or a student may read each word effortlessly but fail to string the words together into meaningful phrases using appropriate expression. As a listener, you may hear the student take long pauses during their reading that break up the flow of the text. They may read at a slow pace. In addition, students who experience difficulties reading fluently may ignore the punctuation in a text, creating run on sentences as they read aloud (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). More often than not, these students struggling with their reading fluency have difficulty comprehending the text, lack an enthusiasm for reading, and develop a sense of failure (Rasinski, 2006).

Therefore, in order to become fluent readers, students need opportunities to hear fluent reading, practice reading authentic literature, and need explicit instruction on reading fluency. Students need to hear fluent, expressive, and meaningful reading

from their teacher, parents, and peers. They need to understand what fluency is and have the opportunity to read a text multiple times. Lastly, opportunities need to be built into the school day for critical discussions of a text and meaningful performances of familiar texts in order to build upon fluent reading (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

### Fluency Instruction and Assessment

Before teachers can even begin fluency instruction, it's important that teachers review and/or collect data on students' reading levels, strengths, and weaknesses in order to teach to each child's instructional level (Roundy & Roundy, 2009). After determining the independent and instructional reading levels of all students, many teachers are uncertain as to where to begin in regard to fluency instruction. Often, this is due to teachers' lack of familiarity with the meaning of fluency and how to best teach it (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Perhaps this is because fluency is often not taught in many reading programs such as basal series and reading textbooks. Therefore many teachers may ignore the importance of fluency and focus on teaching students to read accurately instead (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991 as cited by Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Additionally, fluency is usually not a central focus in pre-service and in-service teaching training (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). Some teachers believe that fluent reading is reading a text with exact word by word matching, which encourages students to focus solely on accurately reading each word rather than attending to the meaning of the text (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). Others are trained to believe that fluency instruction involves helping students to become faster readers, to help improve their reading rate (Altwerger et al. 2007). Zutell and Rasinski (2001)

address the importance and need for all teachers to understand what oral reading fluency is and receive appropriate training on how to effectively attend to and assess students' oral reading behaviors. Most importantly, teachers need to understand that although fluent reading is a critical component of proficient reading, the primary goal of reading is comprehension (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009).

Furthermore, there are several ways to provide students with fluency instruction. Repeated readings are perhaps one of the best ways to develop and improve fluency. Repeated readings involve reading a text multiple times (Rasinski, 2006). This method of reading instruction has been around since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In many cultures this is the way that children learn to read, through re-readings (Samuels, 1979 as cited in Roundy & Roundy, 2009). Not only is repeated reading beneficial in improving student reading fluency, it helps improve reading comprehension as well. The benefits of repeated readings also carry over to unfamiliar texts (Worthy & Prater, 2002). Nonetheless, the instructional technique of repeated readings is often not engaging enough for all students (Rasinski, 2006).

Therefore, to truly meet the fluency needs of all students, an instructional technique that is engaging for students is necessary. Readers' theater may be the answer. Readers' theater is an instructional technique that addresses student motivation, fluency, and comprehension (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Fluency, like comprehension, can be assessed in a variety of ways. Fluency can be assessed by calculating a student's reading rate, or the percentage of words a student can accurately read on passage at his/her independent or instructional reading level in a certain amount of time. Students' reading fluency can also be assessed by

simply listening to them read a passage out loud and then to rate the quality of the reading by completing a fluency rubric such as Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Rasinski, 2004)

### Comprehension

The ultimate purpose of reading should always be to comprehend, or understand a text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Readers who make attempts to comprehend a text are building their knowledge and constructing new understandings, as they actively engage in reading. "Readers have to learn that reading is an interactive process involving decoding words and constructing meaning" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007 p. 23).

### Comprehension Instruction and Assessment

As educators, we cannot simply expect our students to independently comprehend a text. Students need explicit instruction on how to construct meaning from a text. Explicit instruction involves showing students how to comprehend a text. Merely telling students how to make meaning from a text is not enough (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). "We want readers to use comprehension strategies flexibly, seamlessly, and independently. No one envisions readers lying in bed with a great book and having to get up, find a pencil, and jot a question on a sticky note. All of our instruction is geared toward children's using these strategies independently and applying them if and when they enhance understanding" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007 p. 21).

Comprehension strategy instruction means showing the students how to construct meaning while reading. The following reading comprehension strategies

serve as tools to help make meaning of a text: monitoring comprehension, activating and connecting to background knowledge; questioning; visualizing and inferring; determining importance in text; summarizing and synthesizing information (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Readers often experience significant improvements in their reading comprehension when taught comprehension strategies (Walczyk, Griffith-Ross, 2007).

Harvey and Goudvis (2007) outline the qualities and components of effective comprehension instruction. They describe modeling, guided practice, and independent practice using a gradual release of responsibility to be extremely effective in teaching reading comprehension strategies to students. Teachers should be modeling the reading comprehension strategies that they use while reading (e.g. thinking aloud, sharing questions, sharing inferences, and so forth). They also need to provide students with ample time for guided and independent practice using a variety of texts. Students need to see how these comprehension strategies can apply to a variety of texts. Lastly, effective instruction is driven by assessment results of both student work and discussions. These are among the many components of quality instruction on reading comprehension strategies (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Students reading comprehension can be assessed using a variety of measures. Students can orally answer questions about a story or provide their responses in writing (Gambrell, Kapinus, & Koskinen, 1991). More open ended assessment opportunities can be utilized such as oral or written retellings of a story (Gambrell, Kapinus, & Koskinen, 1991; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Gambrell, Kapinus, & Koskinen (1991) found oral retellings to be the most straightforward and effective



assessment in order to better understand how a reader comprehends texts. Anecdotal notes and/or retelling rubrics can be used to help measure students' oral and/or written retellings (Beaver, 2004).

### Reader's Theater

“Readers’ Theater is a meaningful, authentic, reading event that requires repeated readings of literature for the purpose of conveying meaning to an audience” (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006 p. 17). Judy Freeman shares that, “If you want to get your kids reading with comprehension, expression, fluency, and joy, there’s nothing more effective than Reader’s Theater” (Prescott, J.O., & Lewis, M., 2003, p. 2). Readers’ theater is less demanding and much easier to implement than an actual play production. (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Prescott, J. & Lewis, M., 2003). Students are expected to use their voices alone to create meaning as they read their lines off of a script. It is most successful when students are given scripts or are reading parts at their independent reading level so that they can build upon their fluency and comprehension (Prescott, J.O., & Lewis, M., 2003). The production does not need to involve any props, scenery, costumes, or staging/movement (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Readers’ theater is truly a social, cooperative activity that is appropriate for all readers at any grade level and across any subject area (Tyler & Chard, 2000; Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

Utilizing readers’ theater in the classroom is a highly motivating social experience that helps build students’ confidence as readers and encourages active participation from all (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Reading in cooperative groups has been found to increase students’ cognitive engagement

(Walczyk & Griffith- Ross, 2007). Reading can appear to be a less daunting task when using reader's theater because a child doesn't feel as isolated and alone in his/her reading. He/she is reading a part of a story that has been written out in the form of a script—several characters must read together to allow for the oral reading of the story to make sense (Tyler & Chard, 2000). Even the most reluctant readers are eager to participate in readers' theater (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). "Reader's Theater motivates reluctant readers and provides fluent readers the opportunity to explore genre and characterization." (Bafie, 2005 readingrockets.org, p. 6).

Readers' theater is also fairly easy to implement. Adaptations can be easily made for higher and lower level readers. For example, stories can be rewritten in a play form, students can create their own reader's theater scripts, or teachers could create a rebus script using clipart for emergent readers (Prescott & Lewis, 2003; Moran, 2006). Furthermore, non-readers and emergent readers can be successful using reader's theater by doing an activity similar to choral reading. They can echo read, or repeat words and phrases recited by the narrator (a more proficient reader). In addition, prompt cards can be used as a visual aide (ex: holding up a picture of a cat with the word cat underneath it). The narrator would hold up the prompt card when it is that child's turn to read (Moran, 2006). Students get an opportunity to not only practice their oral reading skills but have the chance to hear their peers model fluent, prosodic reading, building upon their listening, reading, and speaking skills (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Prescott, J.O., & Lewis, M., 2003).

Before implementing readers' theater in the classroom, it is best to come up with a plan (Prescott & Lewis, 2003). Many researchers have followed a five day

plan that involves practice, mini lessons on fluency and comprehension, ending with a final readers' theater production of the play (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). It is suggested that you introduce readers' theater using a shorter script, then gradually work your way up to longer, more sophisticated texts at the students' independent reading levels. Gradually incorporate rules and procedures for readers' theater into your classroom (Prescott & Lewis, 2003).

Prior to the start of Day 1, the teacher and/or students need to select a story or write a readers' theater script. It is important to consider student motivation, interest, and reading levels when looking for or creating a script. On the first day of the week long readers' theater experience, it is suggested that the teacher read the story out loud to the class, to familiarize them with the content of the story. Students may also be given the option of reading the story independently or with a partner. They may even be encouraged to take home the script and practice reading all the parts. On the second, third, and fourth day of the week, the students should take turns reading different parts and practice giving one another compliments and suggestions. They may talk about how the character may be feeling in the story and what that feeling should sound like when the student reads out loud (Casey & Chamberlain, 2001).

These three days should also include mini lessons prepared by the teacher to address several components of fluency and comprehension such as phrasing, punctuation, intonation, and summarizing. Children need to know how the human voice can be used to convey meaning—thus teacher modeling of fluent reading is essential (Moran, 2006). The teacher should be closely observing his/her students as they build upon their fluency and reading comprehension through reading their parts

out loud. Any key findings or areas that the students struggle with can be turned into teachable moments, otherwise known as coaching. Coaching involves teaching students mini lessons on fluency or comprehension, giving constructive criticism, and feedback based on students' needs. For example, if a group of students is ignoring the punctuation as they read out loud, the teacher would coach them on how to notice and respond to punctuation marks in a text. Thus, teacher modeling and support is key (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

Additionally, the students should continue experimenting with different roles to get a feel for the characters' emotions and personalities. Then they should begin selecting roles that they feel would suit them the best. This gives students a sense of ownership. It is important to encourage the students to practice reading their scripts out loud. Reading out loud helps individuals to overcome distractions, elicits comprehension monitoring, and enhances auditory feedback (Bereiter & Bird, 1985 as cited in Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007). After much practice reading the script out loud, the students can then perform their interpretation of the play to an audience (Tyler & Chard, 2000). Corcoran suggests that students be the ones to decide when they are ready to perform their play, rather than stick to a set schedule. This may further increase student confidence and motivation (Corcoran, 2005).

Some researchers have found that the best texts to use for readers' theater are ones that are meant to be performed (Rasinski, 2006; Prescott & Lewis, 2003). Examples of such texts are poetry, songs, chants, plays, monologues, dialogues, and letters). Not only are these great texts to utilize for reader's theater but these genres are often the ones that are left out of academic curriculums (Rasinski, 2006). Other

researchers have shared that readers' theater can be adapted and used for any type of text (Kinniburgh & Shaw, Jr., 2007). Casey and Chamberlain (2006) found that basal books, content area literature, picture books, and poems to be great resources for readers' theater scripts. Stories like *CLICK, CLACK, MOO: Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin (2000) or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone, 2006) are some examples of authentic literature to adapt and use for a readers' theater script (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). When choosing books or scripts, Prescott and Lewis (2003) suggest that you select books with dialogue, action, humor, lively narration, and enough parts for all kids. There are already many scripts online to download or purchase on websites such as [storycart.com](http://storycart.com), [aarounshep.com](http://aarounshep.com), or [readinglady.com](http://readinglady.com) (Prescott & Lewis, 2003).

However, despite the advantages that using readers' theater in the classroom has on the motivation and reading proficiency of all readers, others feel differently (McMaster, 1998; Roundy & Roundy, 2009). Many teachers do not use readers' theater in their classrooms because they feel it is a time consuming and tedious process (McMaster, 1998). Others feel that due to time constraints and curriculum guidelines, repeated readings are something that can't be implemented on a daily basis (Roundy & Roundy, 2009).

### Studies and Findings

Multiple studies have already been done on how readers' theater affects the fluency and comprehension of primary aged students (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Roundy & Round, 2009). In a study done on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, the students were placed into four different readers'

theater groups based upon their reading levels. A portion of the study included comparing and contrasting examples of fluent and non-fluent reading. The students also watched videos of themselves practicing and performing readers' theater scripts. They were instructed to comment on two things that they did well and two areas in need of improvement in regards to reading fluency (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). Results of this study indicate that the readers' theater program had a positive impact on attitudes and confidence levels of the second and third grade students. Also, the students made improved upon their fluency scores as a result of the study (Corcoran & Davis, 2005).

Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, as cited by Rasinski (1999) found in their study that students doing repeated readings in their readers' theater groups made twice the gains in reading rate than students in the comparison group. In addition, the readers' theater group made significant gains on an informal reading inventory which assessed comprehension and fluency. On average these students made a gain of 17 words per minute; a gain that you might expect to see at the end of an entire school year. Researchers found readers' theater was an especially helpful and motivating approach to use with struggling readers (Rasinski, 1999).

Casey and Chamberlain (2006) discovered that although some students were nervous to perform in a readers' theater production, no one wanted to be left out of this opportunity. The students were most successful when they had the opportunity to write their own scripts. Even more important, students began to carry the skills they learned in readers' theater over to their everyday reading. Casey and Chamberlain (2006) found that 68% of students improved upon their reading rate. All but three

students showed gains in fluency as measured using Rasinski's four-point Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Anecdotal notes also revealed an increase in student's oral reading fluency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006).

In another study, Title 1 students made a 2.5 grade level increase in their reading comprehension after using readers' theater for a year. Despite the familiarity that the students had with readers' theater, it did not appear to lose its fascination (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). In a study done by McKenna & Kear as cited in Corcoran & Davis (2005) 90% of the students involved reported that they wanted to participate in readers' theater again, while the other 10% shared that they wanted to do it only a few times a year. Students also reflected upon the most effective strategies that helped them with their oral reading fluency during fluency mini lessons. The majority of the students (49%) reported that watching and critiquing themselves on a video was the most effective strategy to help with their oral reading fluency. Only 1% of the class stated that reading their scripts silently was most effective (Corcoran & Davis, 2005)

Furthermore, researchers have found that all readers, even the most resistant readers, show an increased interest for reading after using readers' theater in their classroom (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Prescott & Lewis, 2003). One student said to his peer during a guided reading group, "Let's read that part again, only this time like Readers' Theatre" (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004 p. 130). Readers' theater motivates students to want to read and to reread a passage or a text simply for the pure please of reading (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Fluency and comprehension instruction that is engaging and effective in

helping students to become proficient readers are essential components to reading success in present day society. Although there is no one consensus on the definition of fluency, researchers have found several techniques that can be used to teach and build upon fluency skills (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Readers' theater has been found to be one valuable technique that addresses student motivation, fluency, and comprehension (Worthy & Prater, 2002). After participating in readers' theater, students attitudes and motivation toward reading has improved as well as overall fluency and comprehension scores (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Thus, readers' theater is an effective instructional technique used to help improve the comprehension and fluency of elementary students (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Prescott & Lewis, 2003).



## CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

### Introduction

This study has been designed to explore the impact that readers' theater has on the reading fluency and comprehension of students who are reading below grade level.

### Question

How might using readers' theatre affect the reading fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level?

### Participants and Context

This study took place in a rural community in Western New York. As of census data in the year 2000, there were 1,802 people residing in the village. 92% of the population is white, 3% is African American, and 5% of the population was Hispanic or Latino (New York State Testing and Accountability Reporting Tool, [nystart.gov](http://nystart.gov), 2006-2007).

There was one elementary school located in this rural community, the site of the present study. There were 579 students, grades K-6<sup>th</sup>, enrolled in this elementary school; 15.7% of the student body was students with disabilities.

This study was conducted in 12:1:1 self contained special education classroom a rural elementary school in Western New York. The students ranged in grades from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>.

The classroom was a relatively large, spacious room, ideal for putting on reader's theater performances. There was a reading rug, desks, and tables, allowing

ample room for the students to practice their reader's theater scripts individually or in small groups.

There were four students in this classroom. There were three males and one female in grades 3-6. They each had a disability, as indicated on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The students came from low income households and were performing significantly below grade level in all academic areas.

As a teacher researcher I was a participant in the study. I taught mini-lessons on fluency and comprehension and assessed students' fluency and oral retellings using rubrics. In addition I provided students with feedback on their oral reading and retelling and gathered scripts and other materials necessary for reader's theater.

Due to the small numbers of students in the classroom, all four students in my class were the focus group of this study. The study was explained to them and parental consent and student assent was granted.

I gathered parental consent through a letter sent home to the parents. (Appendix A).

To ensure the confidentiality of participants I locked up field notes, audio tapes, and video recordings in my classroom. Also, the participants were not discussed with anyone other than my classroom paraprofessional, students' parents, and my thesis advisor.

#### Data Collection Instruments

I collected data through a variety of measures. I observed and took notes on a daily basis using an Observation Form (Appendix B) of students reading out loud and practicing and/or performing readers' theater scripts. I also collected data on a bi-

weekly basis using running reading records. A tape recorder was used as the student read a story aloud. Students' reading comprehension was assessed at the end of week one, three, and five, a total of three times throughout the study using a comprehension rubric for oral retellings that was adapted from the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 2006, Appendix C). Students' fluency was assessed using Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale as they orally read a story out loud (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001, Appendix D). Lastly, I video taped readers' theater performances and took field notes on student comments and observable behaviors during video recorded sessions and daily practice sessions.

#### Procedures

This study took place over the course of five weeks. The students put on readers' theater performances for one another several times throughout the course of the study. They spent 10-30 minutes per day learning about reading fluency and comprehension through teacher led mini lessons and/or practiced their readers' theater scripts during center work and/or language arts blocks.

The five week study began with mini lessons and examples of readers' theater, fluency, and comprehension. These mini lessons included teacher modeling and explanations of the meaning of reading fluency and comprehension. At the end of the first, third, and fifth week, I assessed the students' fluency and comprehension using a running reading record as each student orally read a text at his/her independent reading level. To ensure that my field notes, fluency rubric scores, and running reading record analyses are accurate, I also audio taped the student as he/she read the text aloud. Next, students were asked to orally retell the story as part of their

running reading record. I audio taped his/her retelling to ensure that I scored his/her retelling as accurately as possible on the comprehension rubric. I wanted to measure students overall reading comprehension over time.

Throughout the course of the five week study I continued conducting mini lessons on fluency and reading comprehension using readers' theater. Mini lessons included discussions about the definition of fluency, fluent reading was modeled, and students compared and contrasted examples of non-fluent and fluent reading, and/or echo reading (imitating teacher reading). The comprehension strategies of predicting and inferring, visualizing, and summarizing were also modeled using readers' theater scripts and picture books. Students had guided and independent practice opportunities, where they could apply their new knowledge of fluency and comprehension as they practiced and performed readers' theater scripts throughout the week. As stated previously, students' fluency and comprehension were assessed at the end of the first, third, and fifth week of the five week study, a total of three times.

During the first week of the study I asked the students about what types of scripts (stories or poems) they would like to perform and practice. I wanted to ensure that I was meeting their academic needs and touching upon their interests as well. Throughout week one of the study, the students were introduced to their first reader's theater script. I selected two short poems for the students, went over each part, and allowed students to self-select their part. The students were reading at various reading levels therefore split them into two groups of two based up academic need. One group a familiar nursery rhyme out loud while the more advanced group read a

poem entitled, “My New Pet.” by Lansky (1999 Appendix E). Each script was a short, high interest poem that I converted into a reader’s theater script. Every student was given a script with their part highlighted. They read the script out loud with their partner as the classroom paraprofessional and I observed and assisted as needed. The next day, they practiced reading their parts again and I conducted a mini lesson on the meaning of fluency and what fluent readers sound like. The students practiced reading their poems again, focusing on reading fluently, or reading how we speak, as I described it to them. I video taped them practicing their scripts and at the end of week one assessed their fluency and comprehension using the rubrics. After, two weeks of practice the students performed their reader’s theater scripts for each other in the non obtrusive setting of our classroom.

#### Limitations

I was a participant in this study that took place in my 12:1:1 self contained special education class. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the entire elementary school population. In addition, the four students in my classroom had a range of disabilities and were all reading at different levels (some were farther behind grade level than others). I was not able to conduct the study five days a week for a six week period of time as I had hoped to due to end of year celebrations, field trips, and other assessments. Therefore, the study took place over a shorter period of time (four days a week for five weeks).

#### Data Analysis

Throughout my analysis, I kept a daily observation log in which I included field notes, reflections, and questions that arose. In addition, as I assessed students’

fluency and comprehension through the use of running reading records, a Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001), and a comprehension rubric (Beaver, 2006), I created tables that included individual student results as well as whole group scores on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001) and comprehension rubric (Beaver, 2006, see Figures 1-10). Each week, data was added to the table to visually show student progress.

To assess students' oral reading fluency I used Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). The students' oral readings of a text in the reader's theater forum were videotaped. I cataloged findings and observations in the video recordings and transcribed sections that were helpful for the purposes of my study. I looked and listened for student expression and volume, phrasing and intonation, smoothness, and pace. I also took notes in my research journal about my observations. Students received a score of 1-4 for each of the four sections included on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (expression and volume, phrasing and intonation, smoothness, and pace) (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). The total score as well as the scores on each subsection were added to the tables for each student at the end of the first, third, and fifth week of the study.

I used a similar approach in assessing the students' oral retellings of a story read aloud. Although I analyzed the quality and quantity of the miscues students were making while reading aloud, I paid closest attention to the retelling portion of the running reading record. After the students read a text at his/her instructional level I asked him/her to close the book and retell the story to me. I took notes and used a comprehension rubric to help assess each student's comprehension of the story. Each

student's retelling was also audio-taped. I went back and listened to, took more notes, and transcribed sections of the audiotape to ensure that I accurately was able to complete the comprehension rubric. I closely examined each component of the rubric to determine which areas students excelled in and which areas they would need additional instruction on. These results helped to guide my instruction. The students' overall numerical score on the comprehension rubric (1-24) and his/her score on each subsection of this rubric was graphed at the end of each week.

I frequently did a constant comparison of each student over the course of the five week study. For example, I looked to see the areas on the table where Billy had made progress, showed regression, or showed no growth at all. I wrote down any new questions that arose as I compared my data in my research notebook. In addition, I did constant comparisons of all four of my students as a group. I asked myself questions such as: What patterns am I seeing in terms of the quality of student miscues during oral readings? What subsection on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale are students the weakest in? This reflective approach helped guide my instruction as we continued our work on fluency using reader's theater.

By doing constant comparisons several times throughout the study, I was able to eventually begin to code my data for themes as they emerged. These patterns and codes are included in the results section of my thesis.

Furthermore, I used a variety of methods to collect my data, allowing for triangulation. I used field notes, video and audio recordings, running reading records, and scores from fluency and comprehension rubrics to attempt to answer my research question.

## Time Schedule

As stated previously, students participated in mini lessons on reading fluency and comprehension and received multiple opportunities to practice their readers' theater scripts independently, with peers, and with the group. They spent 10-30 minutes per day, four days a week, for a five week period of time on readers' theater instruction and/or independent practice during our English Language Arts block.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Research Results

The purpose of the study was to determine how readers' theater might impact the reading fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level. As an elementary special education teacher, I am frequently researching best practices to use with students to help improve their fluency and comprehension. Without the ability to read fluently and comprehend a text, students will struggle in becoming proficient readers. In this study, I wanted to find out if using the research based technique of readers' theater would impact students' reading comprehension and fluency in their everyday reading.

Four students participated in this study, making up the focus group. These four students were part of the 12:1:1 special education class in which I teach, and were all reading below grade level. The four students were given different names, to ensure student confidentiality. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the four participants will be identified as Suzy, Billy, Brad, and Chris. Three boys and one girl participated in this study ranging from 8 to 11 years of age. All four students are functioning significantly below grade level in all subject areas and have a variety of disabilities according to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). They are all instructed using a modified curriculum at their current levels of functioning.

Suzy is a nine year old, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian student in the 12:1:1 classroom. Suzy is reading at a beginning 1st grade reading level. She has attended four different schools throughout her elementary school career this far. However, the entire 2008-2009 school year was spent at the current district. This year Suzy had perfect

attendance. She was eager to come to school each day and participate in the daily activities. Suzy's family was of low Socioeconomic Status (SES). Suzy resided with her mother, and two younger sisters. According to her IEP, Suzy is classified as having multiple disabilities.

Billy was an eleven year old, Mexican-American 6<sup>th</sup> grade student with Downs Syndrome. He was a very social and outgoing individual with a love of learning. Billy was reading at a beginning Kindergarten level according to scores on his Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). He displayed many impulsive behaviors and had difficulty attending to lessons for long periods of time. Billy was functioning both socially and academically approximately five years below grade level. He resided with his adopted father in an apartment within walking distance of the school. Billy also had perfect attendance during the 2008-2009 school year. Like Suzy, Billy comes from a family of low SES.

Brad was an eight year old, Caucasian 3<sup>rd</sup> grader classified with an emotional disability. Brad was reading at an early 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. Brad was reading closest to grade level compared to the other students in his class. However, Brad was still reading approximately a grade level and a half below his current grade level. The 2008-2009 school year was Brad's first full year enrolled as a student at this particular elementary school. He attended school here as a Kindergartener for the first several months of the school year, however, due to behavioral problems was sent to a different school. Brad made a smooth transition from his former district to the current school district. Although very shy at first, Brad became more social with adults and peers in the school district as he got to know them. Brad appeared to be

eager to learn and displayed excellent effort in his school work. Brad also came from a family with low SES. He lived with his mother, father, brother, and sister.

Chris was an eleven year old, Caucasian 6<sup>th</sup> grader in the class. He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and ADHD, and was classified as having multiple disabilities according to his IEP. Chris took medication outside of school. Chris was reading at an early 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. He was an extroverted, artistic, and imaginative student. However, he became frustrated by many demand activities, thus schoolwork was often a challenge for him. Like Brad, Chris attended this school district for the first time since Kindergarten. He was removed from the district as a Kindergarten student due to the intensity of his behaviors. Chris was brought back to the district as a sixth grader. Chris' parents are divorced: his mother and father share joint custody of him. In addition, to splitting time with his mother and father, Chris also has built relationships with both his step father and step mother. This year, Chris became a brother. Both his mother and step mother had a baby this year. Chris came from a middle class family.

One research question was investigated in this study: How might using readers' theater affect the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level? The focus of this study was to measure students' overall reading comprehension and fluency over time. Although they often practiced readers' theater scripts and stories multiple times, I was not looking to see whether or not they displayed growth in their ability to comprehend or fluently read a specific story over time. I studied how using readers' theater might influence students' overall fluency and comprehension over a five week period of time on a broader spectrum.

Multiple instruments were used throughout the study. I took running reading records and audio taped recordings of students orally reading texts at their independent and instructional reading levels. The running reading records were taken at the end of the first, third, and fifth week of the study using texts that corresponded to each student's DRA level. The students did a cold read of a different text as a part of the running reading record. During this initial reading, I assessed their fluency using results from their running reading record in combination with Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Rubric (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). After reading the story out loud, they were instructed to orally retell the story. I focused in on the oral retelling portion of the running reading record as a way to assess their reading comprehension using the Comprehension Rubric for Story Retellings (Beaver, 2006). The students used the comprehension strategies and fluency techniques that they were taught during mini lessons and had practiced during readers' theater sessions to help them in fluently reading and comprehending texts. In addition, students were video taped orally reading readers' theater scripts on a weekly basis. Again, the video taped recordings helped the students and I assess their reading comprehension and fluency. These instruments were used to provide triangulation. Several themes were uncovered during the course of the five week study.

#### *Theme 1: Reader's Theater Can be Motivating*

One theme that came across was how truly motivating readers' theater was for the focus group of students. From day 1, the students expressed an eagerness to read their very own part on the readers' theater script. They smiled and laughed as they read their part to one another as the video camera recorded their every word. Each

role, or line in the script, was highlighted. This provided the students with a visual of where to begin reading and informed them of what lines they would need to read.

When Suzy and Brad performed in front of the class on June 3, their pride and intense focus on reading their part was evident. After reading a script multiple times Brad confidently said, "I want to get on stage now."

Another day, during small group work, Suzy and Billy were reading a readers' theater emergent reader script about a chick and a duck. After Suzy had read the part of the duck and Billy read his part, the chick, Suzy asked if they could switch parts and read the script again. Billy eagerly agreed to read the part of the duck this time. The students themselves wanted to reread the text and experience another character's role! What a motivating experience this was becoming for them!

The students' desire and motivation to participate in readers' theater did not lose its fascination as the five week study progressed. For example, Billy's excitement and motivation to participate in readers' theater was evident when he repeatedly asked if we could watch the video of him reading with the entire class. Chris too began to eagerly give compliments to his peers about things that they did well when reading their scripts. All four students eagerly walked to the front of the class when it came time to perform their readers' theater scripts to their teachers and classmates.

At times, however, the students seemed uninterested in practicing a script for a second or third time. When told to practice reading a line in the script again, Chris responded by saying, "I don't want to." Suzy complained when she was given a script of a poem, "I Like I Can" (Appendix F) that she had practiced just yesterday.

Perhaps repeated readings were unmotivating at times because the students weren't interested in the text. The choice component of reading was removed in this situation: rather they were told what they would be reading. They also may have found certain text structures to be more difficult to read and therefore may have been frustrated and unmotivated to participate.

During the first week of the study Chris was very silly and off task when the purpose of the study was explained to him. When given his first readers' theater script he giggled throughout the majority of the script, didn't pay attention to when Brad was reading, and frequently lost his place. At the end of the practice session Chris asked me when it was time to go outside to play. This first week was especially challenging and unmotivating for Chris. Nonetheless, despite the student's occasional grimaces and challenges, the students appeared overall to be motivated to read using the instructional technique of readers' theater.

Although student motivation was not directly measured in this study, overall, readers' theater appeared to motivate the students in the focus group to want to read. Not only were students motivated to read a variety of texts at their independent and instructional reading levels, but they often were eager to read these texts repeatedly. On occasion, readers' theater seemed to a less appealing and unmotivating task, however, most instances it was quite the opposite. Thus it can be assumed that readers' theater was a motivating instructional technique for these struggling readers.

*Theme 2: To Read Well Means That You Must Read Each Word Perfectly*

Three of the four students in the study were very focused on reading each and every word in their script accurately. Although they never explicitly shared with me

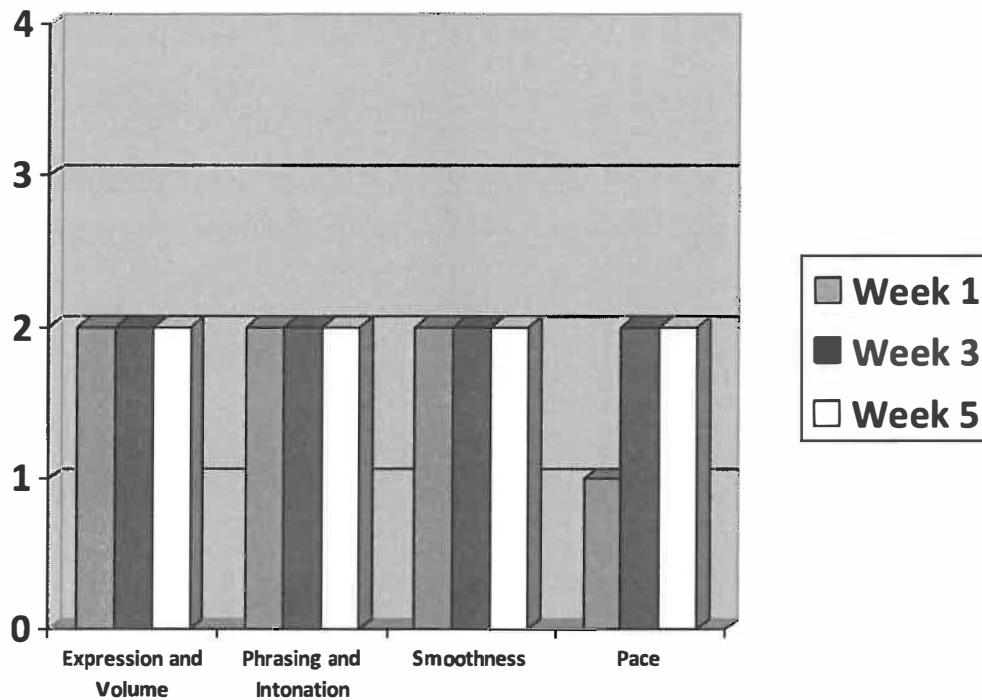
that they wanted to read each word perfectly, it was evident in their actions and underlying statements. For example, when Suzy was being tape recorded for the first time on May 14, she was extremely hesitant to even attempt to read a word that she was unsure of in the story. When she came to a word she didn't know she quietly whispered, "What's this word?" It appeared as if she didn't want to make any mistakes when reading a loud on tape. As she read through the story, she gained more confidence and became more comfortable. Suzy paused frequently throughout the reading of a text and focused on reading each word correctly. I provided her with positive encouragement by saying, "What word would make sense there?" or "Look at the beginning letters in that word." She knew she had made several mistakes when reading a text at her independent level and did not want to listen to herself read the story on tape. However, despite her focus on reading each word accurately, she was making self corrections that made sense. Therefore, she had some understanding that these words on the pages of books are full of meaning.

As the study progressed, both Suzy and Brad became less and less anxious when being audio recorded. Suzy apologized while reading a script with Billy. "I'm sorry I messed up on two," she said. Suzy continued to read word by word, while Brad almost immediately began reading in longer phrases .

The results presented in Figure 1 support my findings. Suzy's overall fluency scores remained stable over time. She improved slightly in the pace in which she was reading from week 1 to week 3 and remained the same at the end of week 5. However there is not enough evidence to be able to describe Suzy as a fluent reader.

It appears that she used the majority of her cognitive resources to read the text word for word, rather than on reading the text fluently.

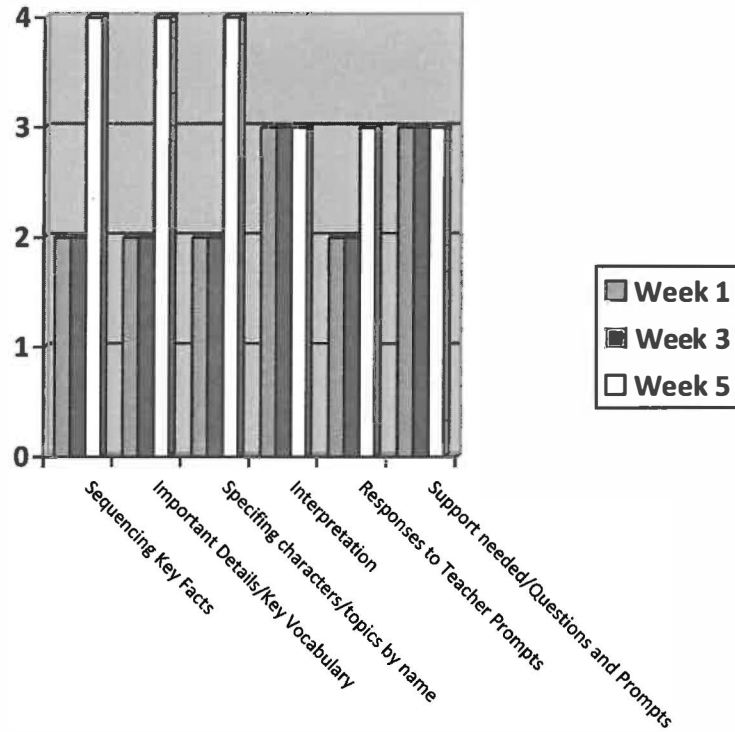
*Figure 1.* Suzy's Multidimensional Fluency Scale Results (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001)



Nonetheless, although the effects that readers' theater had on Suzy's fluency are inconclusive, it does appear that readers' theater may have had an impact on Suzy's comprehension. Suzy's comprehension scores, as measured by the Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling (Beaver, 2006), increased over time, as seen on Figure 2. There was a noticeable increase in her ability to sequence key facts, include important details and key vocabulary, and specify characters and/or topics by name. There was also a slight improvement in Suzy's responses to teacher prompts. Her interpretation and support needed through the use of questions and/or prompts remained constant throughout the study.



**Figure 2.** Suzy’s Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling Results (Beaver, 2006)



Billy too was very focused on making sure he read each and every sight word correctly. He pointed to each word in the text to help him track the print. He would spend five seconds or more attempting to read an unfamiliar word in his readers’ theater scripts. For example, in the script “I Like, I Can”, Billy was determined to read the word pink correctly in his line, “I like pink.” He finger pointed as he read the words I like and then paused for five seconds and stared at the word pink. After five seconds when he made no attempts at figuring out the word, I asked him, “What color word could that be?” “What sound does the word start with?” Again even after I pointed to the word pink, he had no guesses. I told him the word and he repeated, “pink”. Rather than going back and reading the entire sentence all together he read on. Often I would ask him to go back and read the sentence all together so that it

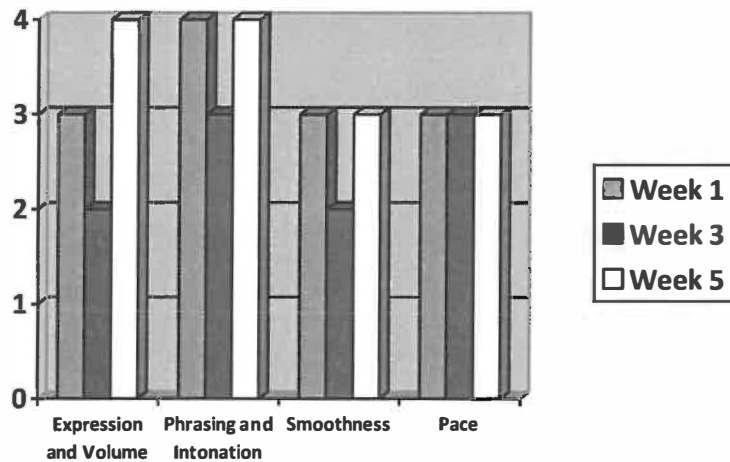
would make sense. These examples show how truly focused Billy was on reading each and every word accurately.

Brad, who was reading at a late first grade level, began pointing to each and every word with his finger, something many emergent readers do. His eyes were focused in on each and every word on the pages of his book. In fact, he often neglected to use picture clues to help him make meaning of the text. On the first day that he was being audio taped he read each sentence as if he was reading a question. The pitch of his voice rose as he reached the end of the sentence and he would look up at me. It was as if he wanted to say, "Did I read all those words correctly?" He appeared to be very nervous to make a mistake while being audio taped. I smiled and gently encouraged him to go on and told him that he was doing a wonderful job. Because he was so focused on reading each word, Brad used very little expression when reading the story out loud, as the majority of his attention was placed on word recognition.

Although Brad too was focused on reading each word perfectly the first time he was tape recorded, by the end of week 1 he was more comfortable taking risks in his reading. For example, he would attempt to read unfamiliar words whether or not they were correct. When reading a story in his guided reading group, Brad substituted the word lift for lifted. He substituted the word work for walked and rowed for roared, but ended up self correcting both of these words using semantic and graphophonic cues. He relied heavily on the visual or graphophonic cues of the text to help him read. However, results from his reading records showed that he was more comfortable attempting to read words. He no longer appealed for help, but rather

used his reading strategies and graphophonic cueing systems to help him read the text. Figure 3 depicts Brad's fluency scores over time.

**Figure 3.** Brad's Multidimensional Fluency Scale Results (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).



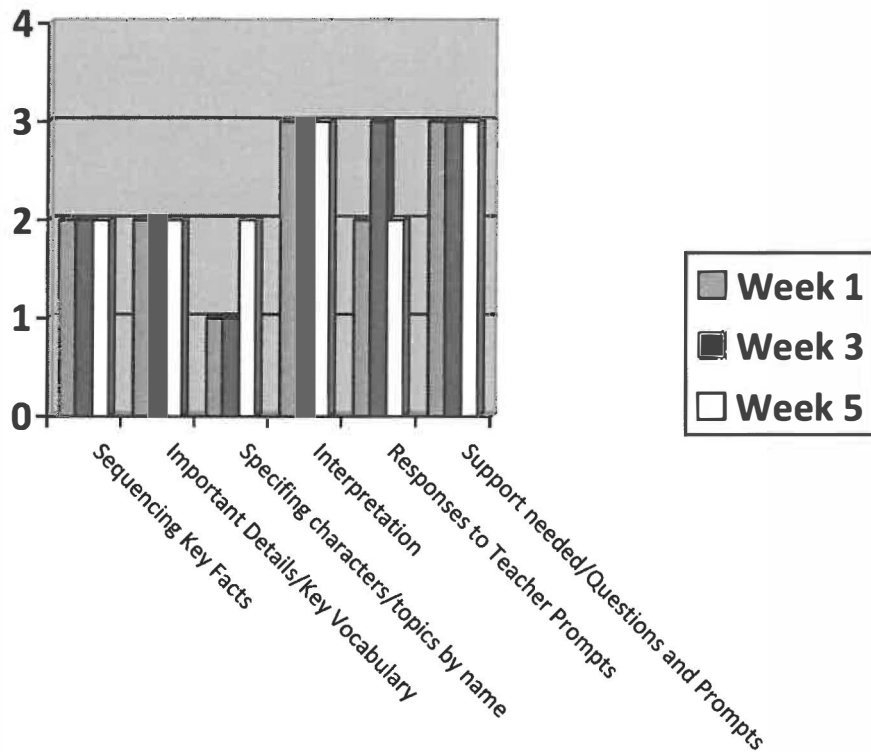
Again, although slight progress was made, the findings in this study are inconclusive. Brad's scores varied over the five week period of time and decreased at the end of week 3 in the study. Brad appeared less focused on reading the text when he was assessed at the end of week 3. It seemed like he just wanted to get his reading done and over with. The effort and time he usually takes to read a story was not evident on this particular Friday. Perhaps this is why his fluency scores dropped slightly at the end of week 3.

Brad's scores also varied slightly over time according to results from his comprehension rubric as measured through his oral retelling of the story (see Figure 4). Perhaps noticeable gains in comprehension would have been made if Brad focused less on reading the text word for word and more on attempting to create meaning of the text. Although his fluency scores at the end of week 3 dropped slightly, his comprehension scores remained relatively stable. He actually made a

small improvement in his ability to respond to teacher prompts about a story.

Nonetheless, the findings remain inconclusive.

**Figure 4.** Brad's Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling Results (Beaver 2006)



Video and audio taped recordings of students reading aloud as well as classroom observations indicated that the students believed that in order to be a good reader you must read each word perfectly. Although only three of the four students demonstrated the desire and need to accurately read each and every word in a text, this is still seen as a major theme of this study.

*Theme 3: The Importance of Punctuation Marks and Other Text Features for Fluent Reading and Comprehension*

The importance and role of text features and punctuation marks necessary for fluent reading as well as comprehension were also significant themes in this study. In order for readers' theater to be successful and for the reading to make sense, the students recognized that scripts of reading material such as plays (or reader's theater material) were organized in a special format. The students also recognized that the punctuation marks could give them clues about the meaning of the story and would provide them with hints on how they should sound when reading certain portions of a text out loud.

For example, on the second day of the study, Suzy looked at the format of her first readers' theater script and started practicing her part. She recognized that the portion of the text that was highlighted was the part that she was supposed to read. She also knew that each line began with the name of the character-- this served as a signal for the readers indicating that it was that particular character's turn to read. Brad helped Chris become familiar with his part on the script by saying, "You read the parts that are highlighted," and pointed to Chris' part. Initially Chris didn't understand this and benefited from Brad's explanation. Brad, Suzy, and Billy followed along silently in their script when it wasn't their turn to read a part. Their actions implied that they knew they had to read the lines in their script in sequential order, just like they would read a book. This helps individuals comprehend the text. In addition, they understood that readers should listen and follow along silently when reading a text in order to understand it.

Furthermore, during small group work on June 8, Billy and I were reading a readers' theater script for two people. I handed him a copy of the script with his part

highlighted. Immediately he started scanning the page to see where he would read. “This is my part right here,” Billy said. “How do you know?” I asked him. Billy responded by saying, “It’s orange.” He used text features and the highlighted portion of the script to help him determine where to read. Billy recognized that using these text features would help him understand the story better. Two days later when we read another script, Billy pointed out my part and his part on the script prior to reading it aloud. Again, Billy recognized that there are features in a text that can be helpful to the readers in making meaning of the story.

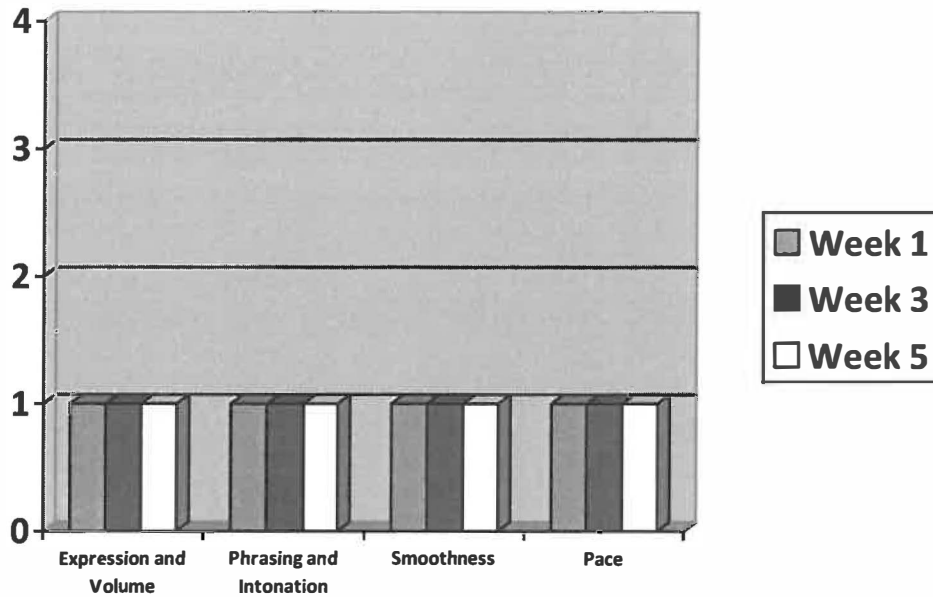
Moreover, several of the students recognized that punctuation marks are just as important in their readers’ theater scripts as they are in all types of literature. Through the use of teacher questioning, I realized that the students needed several mini- lessons or refreshers on the purpose of certain punctuation marks. The students soon learned that these punctuation marks served as clues for the readers. For example, Suzy read the reader’s theater poem, “Five Little Monkeys” (Christelow, 1989, Appendix G). She read a line ending with an exclamation mark with very little expression and intonation. I stopped her and asked, “What does it mean when we come across this punctuation mark in our reading?” as I pointed to the exclamation point at the end of the sentence. She shrugged her shoulders. I realized that I needed to do a mini lesson on the purpose and use of exclamation marks. A week later Suzy read another sentence in a script that ended with an exclamation mark. Again, she read it with very little expression. I pointed out the exclamation mark and asked her what that punctuation mark meant. “It’s exciting!” she said and she went back and reread her sentence with much more expression and emotion.

Another script, "My Doggy Ate My Homework," (Crawley, 2004, Appendix H) had quotation marks around the portion of the text where characters were talking. This particular script was imbedded with quotation marks. The students did not make any comments about this so I pointed the quotation marks out to them. I asked them if they had any idea if they knew what quotation marks could tell us. Chris responded by saying, "They tell you to read with excitement or something like that." I complimented him on his prediction, although incorrect and took several moments to talk about the purpose of quotation marks. A week later, Brandon saw quotation marks around the portion of the text where his character was speaking. He identified these as commas but said that he knew they meant that someone was talking. Throughout the course of the study, it became evident that the students were becoming more familiar with the text features in a script and were learning even more about the importance of punctuation marks in a text. The students were learning about how useful text features and punctuation marks were for helping them comprehend and read a text with fluency.

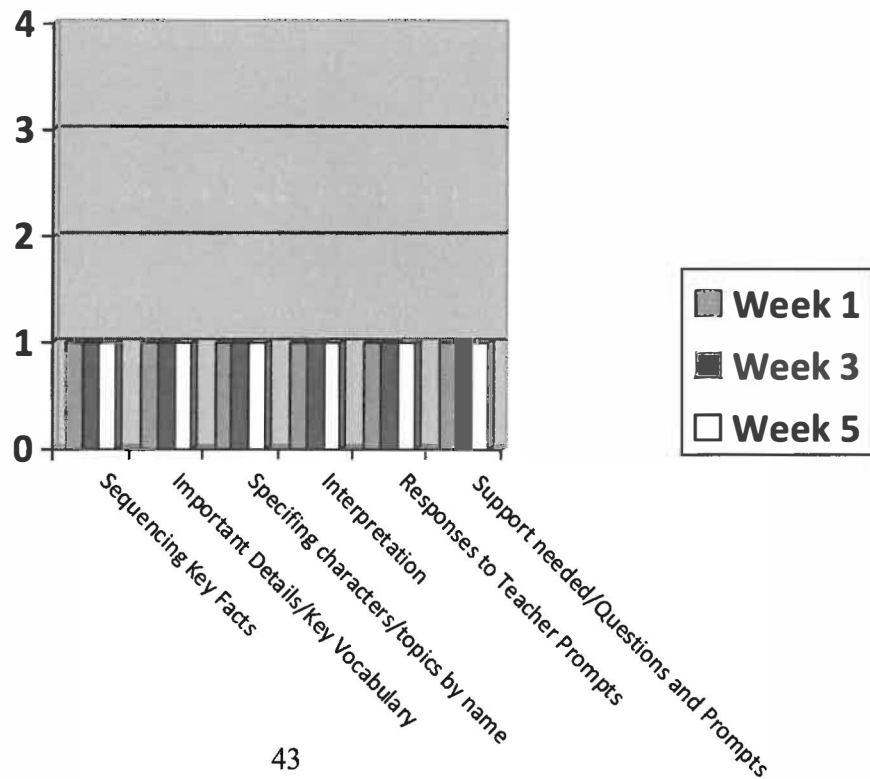
Nonetheless, the fluency and comprehension rubric scores did not provide significant evidence on whether the mini lessons on text features and punctuation marks (two helpful components of readers' theater) affected the students' fluency and comprehension. For example, the mini lessons did not appear to help Suzy with her fluency as shown on Figure 1. However, they may have helped her in comprehending the text, as her comprehension scores increased over time as indicated on Figure 2. Billy on the other hand scored a 1 out of 4 on each section of the comprehension

rubric and fluency rubric. His scores remained the same over time as displayed on Figure 5 and Figure 6.

**Figure 5.** Billy's Multidimensional Fluency Scale Results (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991)



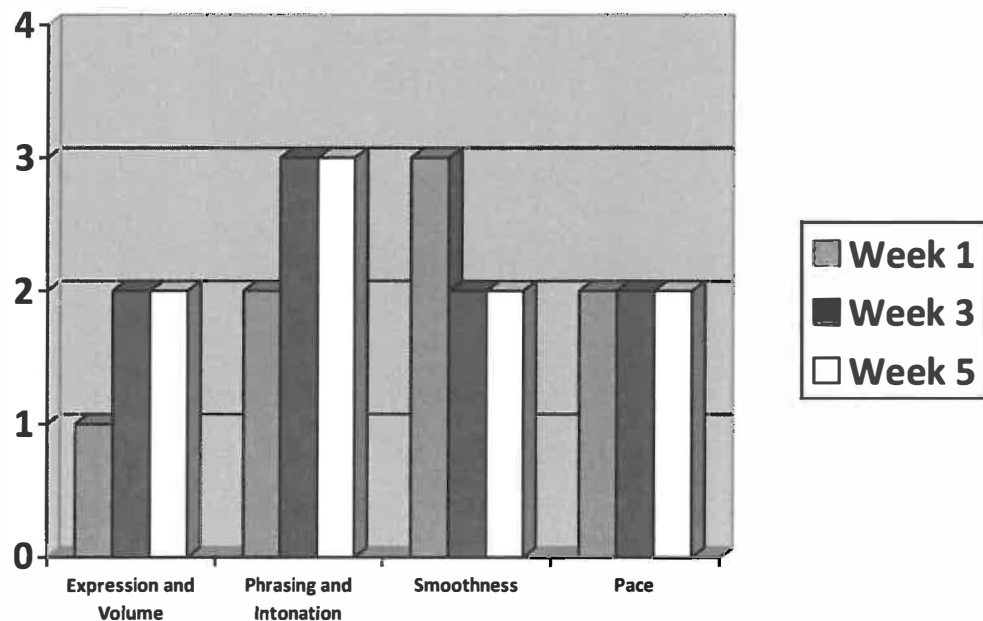
**Figure 6.** Billy's Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling Results (Beaver, 2006).





Chris' scores on the multidimensional fluency rubric were somewhat inconsistent from week to week as seen on Figure 6. For example, he improved in a few areas such as expression and volume, and phrasing and intonation. However, his scores dropped at the end of week 3 and week 5 in his ability to read with smoothness. The pace in which he read aloud remained the same. Oftentimes Chris ignored the punctuation marks in a text. For example, he would create run on sentences as he was reading aloud because he wasn't stopping when he came to certain punctuation marks, like a period. Chris often needed teacher prompts to go back and read that again, paying close attention to the punctuation marks that the author used. His fluency may have increased if he had paid closer attention to the punctuation marks in the text.

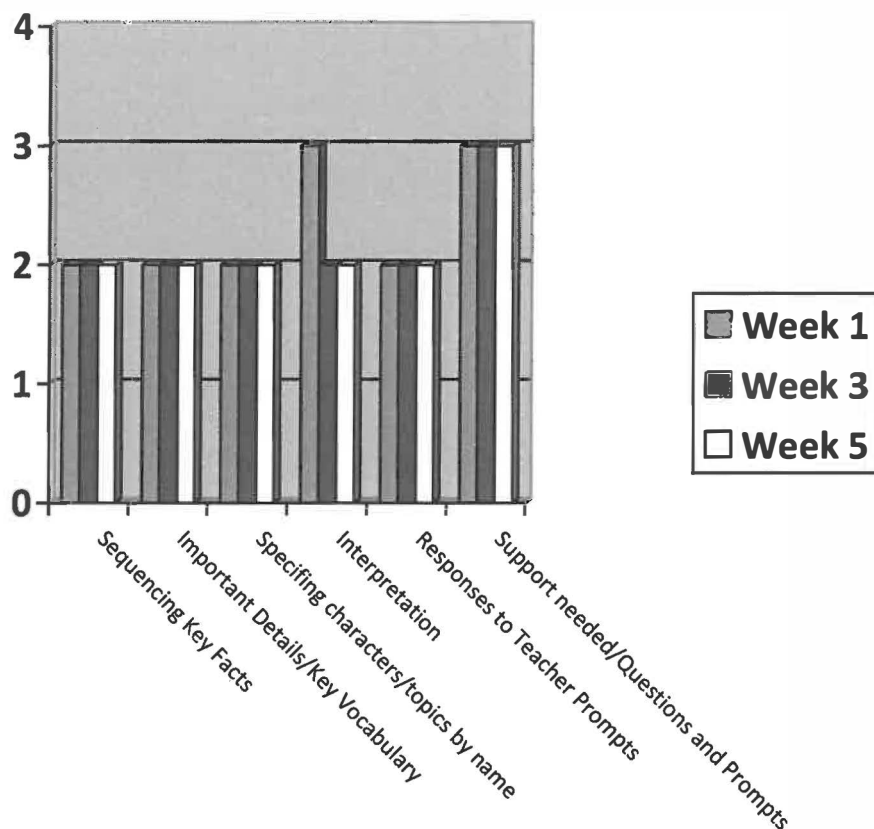
**Figure 7.** Chris's Multidimensional Fluency Scale Results (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991)



Chris' ability to comprehend an unfamiliar text was remained stable throughout the study as seen in Figure 7. However, as with his fluency scores, his

comprehension scores varied slightly from week to week in his ability to specify characters and/or topics by name as well as in his responses to teacher prompts (see Figure 8). Although a variety of factors may have impacted the results of this study, perhaps a better understanding and application of punctuation marks and text features would have helped Chris comprehend the text to a greater degree.

**Figure 8.** Chris's Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling Results (Beaver, 2006)



As you can see, all four students recognized the importance of text features and punctuation marks for fluent reading and comprehension. Although their knowledge and understanding of punctuation marks and text features varied from person to person, they all demonstrated some understanding. Fluency and comprehension rubric scores could possibly have increased if even more time was spent on explicitly teaching punctuation marks and other text features.

*Theme 4: Modeling and Explicit Instruction is Key in Order to Effectively Teach*

*Students How to Become Fluent Readers Who Comprehend Text*

A final theme that arose was the importance of modeling and explicitly instructing students in order to help them become proficient and fluent readers who utilize comprehension strategies to make meaning of a text. The students especially benefited from the technique of echo reading where I modeled what fluent reading sounded like. I read a line in a script and had the students echo, or repeat me, using the same pacing, intonation, and expression that I used. I modeled echo reading on the readers' theater script "I Like, I Can" (Reynolds, 2004 see Appendix F). All four students did an excellent job reading like the teacher and really listened to my voice as I modeled reading fluently. Billy especially benefited from echo reading, as he not only heard what fluent readers sounded like, but he also saw and heard me read sight words that he wasn't as familiar with, helping to increasing his sight word recognition.

During the first week of the study, the paraprofessional in my classroom and I each took a part in a two part script and modeled reading this aloud for the students from the book, *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You: Very Short Stories to Read Together* (Hoberman, 2001). Again, they were able to learn that fluent readers read like they would speak. As we read our parts it was similar to a conversation where we each took a turn, used our body and voice to express ourselves as we read out part. We also discussed the meaning of the poems in this book. We explained that by taking the time to understand the text could actually help us to read the text fluently.

I defined fluency to them and explained in kid friendly language that fluent readers read like they would speak. However, simply defining the term fluency wasn't enough. I realized early on the importance of explicitly instructing them the meaning of fluency. When working on complimenting one another after reading a script both Chris and Brad told a peer that they liked how they read their part fluently. This new vocabulary word, fluency, was being used fairly frequently by the students. However, when I asked the students what they meant by reading their parts fluently they couldn't model or explain what they meant. So I took the time to teach more mini lessons on fluency; I modeled fluent and non-fluent reading. The students had to compare and contrast fluent reading and non-fluent reading. For example, I read a poem out loud two times, once in a monotone voice and then a second time with fluency. The students and I talked about the ways in which the two readings were similar and different. Chris made the comment that I read the second part with expression. Suzy shared that I read it just like I would talk, implying that I read it using my speaking voice, with good expression.

In addition, the students also had the opportunity to watch and listen to themselves reading scripts after they were video recorded. I modeled giving specific feedback—first I focused on what the kids did well when they were reading and then we focused on areas that we could improve upon. For example, I made statements pertaining to their fluency such as, “I like how you read that sentence with expression.” Or, “You read that part nice and smooth.” I provided feedback on areas that they could improve upon by saying things such as, “Let's see if you can read that

part together.” Or, “Let’s work on reading your part a little bit louder, using your speaking voice.”

I also made statements addressing their comprehension. When informally assessing their comprehension of a script or story I said things such as, “I like how you identified each of the characters by their names in the story.” “Nice job including all the important events in the story!” I would end the discussion with a statement about an area that they could work on. I made comments such as, “Next time, I want you to really think about the story and see if you can tell me those important facts in the order that they happened.” Or, “Instead of saying the boy and the girl, let’s call them Tom and Kate, just like the author does in the story.”

For example, Suzy read a story about a large orange cat named Fat Cat. Rather than simply identifying him as the cat or the boy’s pet, she specifically identified him by his name, Fat Cat. I complimented her on being so specific in her retelling. In another instance, Brad required additional teacher prompts when retelling his story. He was leaving out important details. When prompted to tell me more, he shared many of the important details but told them out of order. I knew that next time, we would need to focus on making sure all those important events were in the order that they happened in the story.

However, despite my modeling, the students struggled with giving specific compliments to each other and finding areas that they needed to improve upon. Every once in awhile the students were able to come up with specific comments after being prompted to do so. For example, Chris told Brad that he read with expression. Suzy provided feedback when she told the group that she thought they should work

on reading the part together (she was referring to the parts when multiple readers needed to read a line simultaneously). Brad continued to say that he liked how the reader read their part fluently. All of their comments were directly related to fluency. Not one student complimented or provided feedback about the readers' comprehension. Billy was not able to come up with any comments for his peers even with teacher support. Although the students never once used the term comprehension, they continued to use the word fluency, but had trouble again describing this concept to me.

The importance of modeling and explicit instruction in order to effectively teach students how to become fluent readers who comprehend text was another theme of the study. The students benefited from being shown rather than simply told how to become fluent readers who comprehend texts. Although modeling and explicit instruction was embedded throughout the five week study, there were times when it was not always effective in helping the students become more fluent readers who comprehend what they are reading. Again, findings related to the themes in this study remain inconclusive.

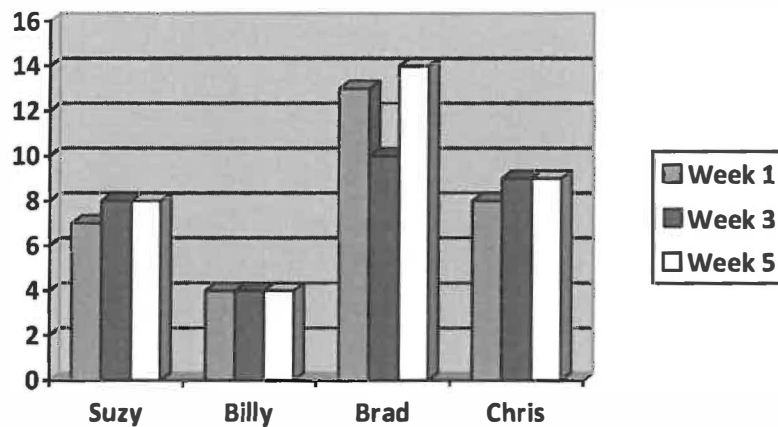
### Overall Findings

Does readers' theater impact the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level? The findings that emerged through the four major themes of the study are inconclusive and therefore do not help to answer the research question. Although some students made slight progress in their reading fluency or comprehension over the course of the five week study, there were no significant findings. The students overall fluency and comprehension scores on the

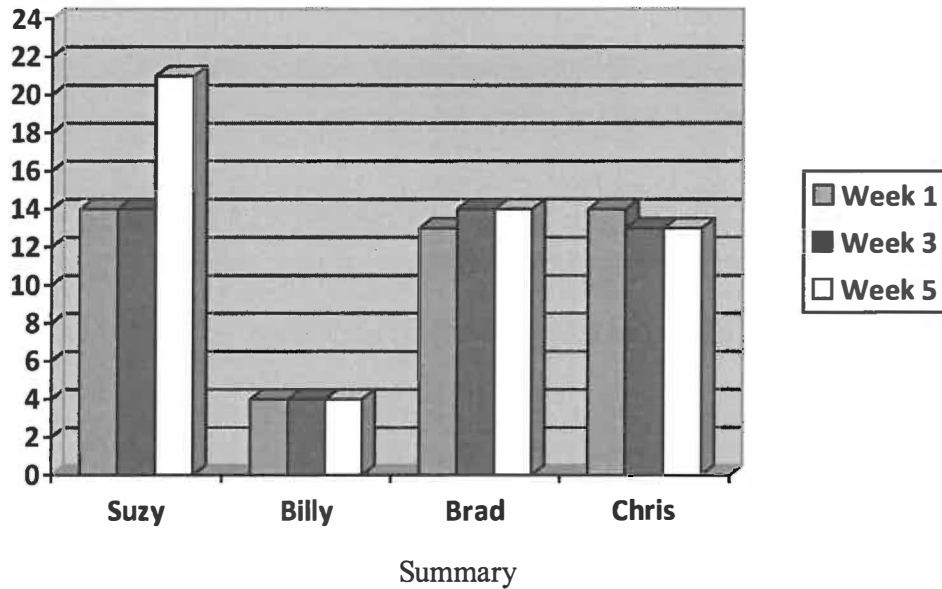
could read of a text at their DRA level are represented in Figure 9 and Figure 10.

These results support the inconclusive findings of the study. Overall, the students displayed stability or slight progress in their ability to read fluently over time. Other than Suzy, no other participants made significant gains in their reading comprehension as measured through their oral retellings. Therefore, at this time it cannot be determined if readers' theater impacted the reading fluency or comprehension of students reading below grade level.

**Figure 9.** Multidimensional Fluency Scale Scores (Zutell & Rasinski 2001)



*Figure 10.* Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling Results (Beaver, 2006)



After completing a five week study on the possible effects that using readers' theater has on the fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level, four major themes emerged. All themes were related to student motivation, comprehension, and/or fluency. The motivational aspect of readers' theater was seen, serving as a major theme of the study. Without the motivation to read, the chances of fluently reading and comprehending a text could be more challenging. A second theme of the study was the students' drive for perfection in their belief that reading well means that you must read each word perfectly. This belief probably influenced students reading fluency and comprehension throughout the study. In addition, the importance of punctuation marks and text features for fluent reading and comprehension served as a theme of the study. Lastly, the need for modeling and providing explicit instruction in order to effectively teach students how to become fluent readers who comprehend text was an important theme that emerged. Findings



and new understandings were uncovered in each theme pertaining to how readers' theater might impact the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECCOMENDATIONS

How does readers' theater impact the fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level? Overall, the findings of this study are inconclusive. Based upon the results of the present study I am uncertain as to whether or not readers' theater impacts the reading fluency and comprehension of students reading below grade level. Although some slight student progress was made in certain areas (e.g. moving from a 2 to a 3 on one subsection of the multidimensional fluency scale), not all students made progress in their ability to comprehend a text and read fluently according to Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001) and the Comprehension Rubric for Story Retellings (Beaver, 2006).

Many factors may have influenced results in the study. Perhaps a five week study was not a long enough time for students in the 12:1:1 self contained special education class to make any significant progress in the areas of fluency and comprehension. After all, time is necessary for student progress to occur. The results of the study may also have been impacted by the time of year that the study was conducted. The study began in the middle of May and ended at the beginning of June at the very end of the school year. Initially, the study was going to take place five days a week. However, the study was conducted four days a week due to school breaks such as Memorial Day weekend, end-of-year assemblies, picnics, and so forth. The students had a much more difficult time focusing on the mini-lessons taught pertaining to fluency and comprehension with the excitement of end-of-year celebrations and the coming of summer vacation.

The assessments used in the study may also have impacted results of the study. It's possible that analyzing students' oral retellings of a story is not the best way to assess reading comprehension. Perhaps I was too subjective when assessing students' fluency and comprehension using rubrics. Maybe the rubrics themselves were not appropriate assessment tools to use with students reading significantly below grade. It is possible that several of these factors may have impacted the results of the study.

Findings in this study led to the development of four major themes. For example, in one theme, I found that students were motivated to read using readers' theater scripts, just as other research suggested (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Tyler & Chard 2000). This implies that readers' theater may be a helpful instructional technique for reluctant readers, helping to build upon their confidence while encouraging active participation (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Tyler & Chard, 2000). It was extremely motivating for the shyest student in the focus group, Brad. He was very hesitant to participate in social situations and struggled with his self esteem. As Casey and Chamberlain (2006) found, even the most reluctant readers are eager to participate in the highly motivating social experience of readers' theater.

Findings from the second theme (to read you much read each word perfectly) imply that the students needed more explicit instruction on the purpose of reading. Zutell and Rasinski (2001) specifically stated that fluency does not involve accurately reading words. You can comprehend a text without reading each and every word correctly. Like many struggling readers, several students in the focus group put all their attention into decoding each word, therefore hardly any cognitive resources were

left to make meaning of the text (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001). As stated previously Suzy constantly focused on reading each word perfectly throughout the course of the five week study and her fluency may have suffered because of this. Suzy, along with the other participants in the study also took several attempts to determine a single word, another characteristic of struggling readers (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001).

Suzy, in particular seemed conditioned to read each and every word in a text perfectly. Perhaps this is partly due to the reading instruction she had received up to this point in her elementary school career. I, like many teachers, was not comfortable teaching students about fluency due to my unfamiliarity with the topic itself prior to the start of this study (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). It is possible that teachers may need additional training on the importance of reading fluency and comprehension, including explicit examples of how to teach both fluency and comprehension. With fluency not being the focus of many reading programs, teachers may tend to ignore the importance of fluency and focus on teaching students strategies to help them read each word accurately (Zutell & Rasinski, 2001 as cited by Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). However, as educators, we need to keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension—therefore reading comprehension should be the primary focus of our instruction (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

At the same time, educators can use some of the best research based strategies such as repeated readings and readers' theater to teach fluency and still not be successful teaching students how to comprehend a variety of texts (Rasinski, 2006). I have learned firsthand from this study that being able to read fluently doesn't make you a proficient reader (Rasinski, 2001; Altwerger et al., 2007). If your aim is to help

your students become proficient readers, then fluency instruction in combination with instruction on comprehension strategies must take place (Rasinski, 2001; Altwerger et al., 2007). In this study I don't think I provided enough explicit instruction on comprehension strategies. As Harvey and Goudvis (2007) found, effective explicit instruction on reading comprehension involves showing students how to make meaning from a text. I feel that in this study I overemphasized fluency at the expense of comprehension at times. In the future I would make a conscious effort to teach about fluency in combination with reading comprehension rather than focusing on fluency and comprehension as two separate entities.

Another major theme that I discovered was the importance of punctuation marks and other text features for fluent reading and comprehension. Both punctuation marks and other text features such as a script format can help readers comprehend a text and help them read fluently. For example, Suzy recognized that an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence might mean that the character is excited. This could help Suzy understand the text even more. As the students read a loud, more often than not, they stopped briefly after seeing a period, question mark, or exclamation mark. Their confusion about the purpose of several punctuation marks such as the exclamation mark and quotation marks implied that we as educators need to explicitly model and teach more about the purpose of punctuation. Rather than assuming that all students recognize the function of punctuation marks, we need to teach students about them and identify them in our reading and writing. "Readers can be taught the advantages of pausing briefly at phrase or sentence markers (e.g. a period, comma, or question mark) to integrate textual information" (Walczyk &

Griffith-Ross, 2007 p. 556). Helping the students to read and attend to punctuation marks and other text features may help them improve upon their reading comprehension and fluency.

A final theme that emerged was the importance of modeling and explicit instruction in order to effectively teach students to become fluent readers who comprehend text. Even after five weeks of modeling and explicit instruction on the meaning and purpose of fluency, including what fluent readers sound like, findings remained inconclusive. The same can be said about students' reading comprehension. No significant gains were made by any one student in the areas of reading fluency or comprehension as measured by the multidimensional fluency scale and comprehension rubric.

I felt that the weakest area in the study was the lack of explicit instruction that the students received on reading comprehension strategies. This may have impacted results of the study. Suzy was the only student who made any significant gains in reading comprehension throughout the five week study. She went from having some comprehension to having adequate comprehension according to her scores on the comprehension rubric for story retelling. Brad and Chris' comprehension remained the same overall; they demonstrated only some comprehension of the text. Billy exhibited very little comprehension all three times he was assessed. However, when given multiple choice options for comprehension questions, Billy did better. This implies that orally retelling the story may not always be the best method for assessing the reading comprehension for all students. If I were not conducting a formal study, I would have assessed Billy's comprehension using an alternative method. However,

for the purposes of this study, I wanted to keep all assessment tools and measurements consistent for all students in the focus group. I also felt that Brad could have scored higher on the reading comprehension rubric; however, he always appeared to give a quick and short oral retelling of the story. He seemed like he just wanted to get that part over with. Their scores on the comprehension rubric also indicate that I need to assess and reflect upon my own teaching and modeling of comprehension strategies.

The results of this study differed significantly from the results found in other studies (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski, 1999). Students in Rasinski's study (1999) made significant gains in the areas of comprehension and fluency after being assessed using an informal reading inventory. In a study done with elementary aged students, anecdotal notes and results from Rasinski's Multidimensional Fluency Scale indicate that almost each participant made gains in his/her ability to read fluently (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). In yet another study done by Griffith and Rasinski (2004), the students made significant gains in their reading comprehension over the course of the year long study. Unlike results from other studies, the findings pertaining to how readers' theater affects the fluency and reading comprehension of students reading below grade level remain inconclusive.

In the future, if I were to conduct this study again, I would extend the duration of the study from five weeks to ten weeks as stated previously. The students in my class require an ample amount of time, instruction, and guided practice in order for progress in any academic area to occur. I found Zutell and Rasinski's (2001) findings

to be accurate in that students reading below grade level already demonstrate difficulty in their ability to read fluently and to comprehend what they read. Therefore it may be helpful to give them extra time to learn how to do so. In general due to the nature and severity of the students' disabilities in my classroom, my students learn and work at a slower pace than their peers participating in the general education classrooms. I anticipate that results may have been different if the study were longer. However, by extending the length of the study students may lose their fascination and interest with readers' theater, just as Griffith and Rasinski found (2004). Despite this finding, I think extending the length of the study would be worth the risk for everyone.

Additionally, I would also like the opportunity to conduct this study in a general education setting with students with less severe disabilities. I am curious as to whether or not results would be different if a different population of students were my focus group.

Overall I think that this was a well designed study. If I were given the opportunity to conduct this study again I would make several more minor changes. First, I would conduct it in the beginning of the school year, perhaps sometime starting in October, when the students are feeling fresh and focused and when there are fewer disruptions in our daily schedule. Next time I would also provide the students with a kid-friendly rubric to help them self assess their fluency and reading comprehension. They seemed interested in learning about how I assessed them using the multidimensional fluency scale rubric and comprehension rubric for story retelling but didn't fully understand what each section of the rubric meant. In



addition, I would spend more time explicitly teaching comprehension strategies and model their usefulness in helping me to comprehend a text.

I also would have done some sort of pre-assessment with the students prior to the start of the study. Being their classroom teacher, I felt that I already knew their present levels of knowledge and abilities with fluency and comprehension. However, I was surprised to find that several things such as the purpose of using specific punctuation marks were being used but confused by the students. Next time I would orally survey the students or provide them with a KWL chart to help me better understand their present level of knowledge. However, even with a pre-assessment piece, it still may be difficult for the students to recall and share what they already know and/or demonstrate about reading due to the nature and severity of their disabilities.

Furthermore, future research should focus on what message readers' theater sends to students. For example, Suzy and Brad appeared to be very focused on reading their parts perfectly. Although they seemed more motivated to read using the instructional technique of readers' theater than other approaches such as guided reading, shared reading, and so forth, does using readers' theater truly teach students about the meaning of reading? Suzy especially never made the connection that reading is about fluency and comprehension, not word for word recognition. Was this because she wanted to perform her part perfectly? After all readers' theater involves using your voice to perform, or tell a story. Future research needs to focus on the message using readers' theater in your classroom truly says.

Future research should also focus on ways to explicitly teach students with disabilities how to improve upon their fluency and comprehension. More research needs to be done on how readers' theater affects the reading comprehension and fluency of students reading below grade level, especially students with disabilities. Most of the research I gathered involved students using readers' theater in the general education classroom (Casey & Chamberlain 2006; Prescott & Lewis, 2003; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Therefore it can be presumed that the students either were non-disabled or had milder disabilities such as learning disabilities or ADHD that allowed them to still be a successful and functioning member of an inclusive classroom. However, none of the articles I gathered specifically looked at how using readers theater in the self contained special education classroom affected students reading fluency and comprehension.

I strongly believe classroom teachers would benefit from using readers' theater in their classroom. Teachers would benefit from learning more about how easily readers' theater can be implemented in the classroom and the research benefits of utilizing this motivating instructional technique. McMaster (1998) found that some teachers avoid using readers' theater in their classrooms because they feel that it is a time consuming and tedious process. I completely disagree with this and feel that teachers should take the time to learn about the ease in which it can be implemented in the classroom.

Although the impact readers' theater has on fluency and comprehension was inconclusive in the present study, I encourage educators to learn more about readers' theater and take the opportunity to experiment with it in their classrooms. I

personally plan to use reader's theater next year with students in my classroom. I will have Suzy and Brad for another school year, in addition to three more students new to the classroom. I would like to extend my work with reader's theater and dig even deeper into my research question. Although I do not intend to conduct a formal study involving readers' theater, fluency, and comprehension again, I am interested in extending my work in this field.

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## Appendix A

### Consent for Observation of Student

This study has been designed to explore the impact reader's theatre has on the fluency of students reading below grade level. The individual conducting the study is a graduate student at SUNY Brockport. If consent to have your child participate in the study he/she will be observed reading during daily language arts sessions during a six week period of time.

Your informed consent is required in order for your child to participate in the study. You are asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the study. If you agree to have your child participate in the study and agree with the statements listed below, please provide your signature in the space below. You may change your mind at any point during the six week study and your child may leave the study without being penalized.

I understand that:

- a. My child's participation in this study is voluntary. S/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions. My child's grades and class standing will not be affected if choose not to grant consent for my child to participate in the study.
- b. My child's confidentiality is guaranteed. His/her name will not be included in any notes or on any student surveys or assessments. There will be no way to connect my child to this study. If any publication results from this research, my child will not be identified by name. Students will be identified using pseudonyms.
- c. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of my child's participation in the study.
- d. My child's participation involves reading texts at his/her independent and instructional reading levels and answering questions read out loud on a survey.
- e. The researcher will be observing my child reading books and reader's theatre scripts for approximately 10-30 minutes five times a week over the course of a six week period of time. The researcher will be taking notes, making video recordings of my child doing reader's theatre, and assessing the fluency and comprehension of my child as he/she reads out loud.
- f. Approximately four students will take part in the study, if parental consent is granted. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis paper by the primary researcher.
- g. Data from the observations will be kept locked in my child's classroom by the investigator. Data and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions, you may contact:

Primary Researcher:

Melinda Faatz

Signature of Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Sue Novinger

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix B

Observation Form

Date & Time	Student	Field Notes	Observer Comments/Interpretations

### Appendix C

Comprehension Rubric for Story Retelling (Beaver, 2006)				
	Very Little Comprehension	Some Comprehension	Adequate Comprehension	Very Good Comprehension
	Total: 6 7 8 9	10 11 12 13 14 15	16 17 18 19 20 21	22 23 24
Sequencing key facts	1 Tells 1 or 2 events of key facts	2 Tells some of the events or key facts	3 Tells many events in sequence for the most part, or tells many key facts	4 Tells most events in sequence or tells most key facts
Important details/ Key vocabulary	1 Includes few or no important details from text	2 Includes some important details from text	3 Includes many important details from text	4 Includes most important details and key language or vocabulary from text
Specifying characters/ topics by name	1 Refers to 1 or 2 characters or topics using pronouns (he, she, it, they)	2 Refers to 1 or 2 characters or topics by generic name or label (boy, girl, dog)	3 Refers to many characters or topics by name in text (Ben, Giant, Monkey, Otter)	4 Refers to all characters or topics by specific name (Old Ben Bailey, green turtle, Sammy Sosa)
Interpretation	1 Responds with incorrect information	2 Responds with some misinterpretation	3 Responds with literal interpretation	4 Responds with interpretation that shows higher level thinking
Responses to teacher prompts	1 Provides limited or no response to teacher questions and prompts	2 Provides some response to teacher questions and prompts	3 Provides adequate response to teacher questions and prompts	4 Provides insightful response to teacher questions or prompts
Support needed/ Questions and prompts	1 Requires many questions or prompts	2 Requires 4-5 questions or prompts	3 Requires 2-3 questions or prompts	4 Requires 1 or no questions or prompts

## Appendix D

### Multidimensional Fluency Scale Zutell & Rasinski, 1991

Rating	Expression & Volume	Phrasing & Intonation	Smoothness	Pace
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
1	Read words as if simply trying to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice.	Reads in monotone with little sense of phrase boundaries; frequently reads word-by-word.	Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.	Reads slowly and laboriously.
2	Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the words. Still reads in a quiet voice.	Frequently reads in two-and-three word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress of intonation fall to mark ends of sentences and clauses.	Experiences several "rough spots" in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive.	Reads moderately slowly or too quickly.
3	Makes text sound like natural language throughout the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some chopiness; reasonable stress and intonation.	Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.	Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.
4	Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.	Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units.	Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.	Consistently reads at conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.

Appendix E

My New Pet  
By B. Lansky (1999)

Child: I asked my father for a pet.  
He said:

Dad: "I'll take you shopping."

Child: My father took me to a store where animals were hopping.  
He asked me:

Dad: "Which one would you like?"

Child: So I picked out a puppy, a parakeet, a rabbit, plus a gerbil and a guppy  
I also picked a monkey and a yellow Siamese cat, a turtle, snake, and lizard,  
plus a very big white rat.  
My dad said:

Dad: "If you want a pet then you will have to feed it."

Child: Instead I picked a storybook, I cannot wait to read it.

## Appendix F

### I Like, I Can By Reynolds (2004)

Reader 1: I like pink

Reader 2: I like brown.

Reader 3: I can see a funny clown.

Reader 1: I like blue.

Reader 2: I like red.

Reader 3: I can jump upon my bed.

Reader 1: I like orange

Reader 2: I like gray.

Reader 3: I can fly my kite today.

Reader 1: I like green.

Reader 2: I like black.

Reader 3: I can eat up all my snack.

## Appendix G

### Five Little Monkeys By: Christelow (1989)

Reader 1: 5 little monkeys jumping on the bed

Reader 2: 1 fell off and bumped his head.  
Mama called the Doctor and the Doctor said,

Reader 1 & 2: “No more monkeys jumping on the bed!”

Reader 1: 4 little monkeys jumping on the bed,

Reader 2: 1 fell off and bumped her head.  
Papa called the Doctor and the Doctor said,

Reader 1 & 2: “No more monkeys jumping on the bed!”

Reader 1: 3 little monkeys jumping on the bed,

Reader 2: 1 fell off and bumped his head.  
Mama called the Doctor and the Doctor said,

Reader 1 & 2: “No more monkeys jumping on the bed!”

Reader 1: 2 little monkeys jumping on the bed,

Reader 2: 1 fell off and bumped her head.  
Papa called the Doctor and the Doctor said,

Reader 1 & 2: “No more monkeys jumping on the bed!”

Reader 1: 1 little monkey jumping on the bed.

Reader 2: He fell off and bumped his head.  
Mama called the Doctor and the Doctor said,

Reader 1 & 2: “Put those monkeys straight to bed!”

## Appendix H

### My Doggy Ate My Homework

By: Crawley (2004)

Student:

“My doggy ate my homework.  
He chewed it up,” I said.  
But when I offered my excuse  
My teacher shook her head.

I saw this wasn’t going well.  
I didn’t want to fail.  
Before she had a chance to talk,  
I added to the tale:

“Before he ate, he took my work  
And tossed it in a pot.  
He simmered it with succotash  
Till it was piping hot.”

“He scrambled up my science notes  
With eggs and bacon strips,  
Along with sautéed spelling words  
And baked potato chips.”

“He then took my arithmetic  
And had it gently fried.  
He broiled both my book reports  
With pickles on the side.”

“He wore a doggy apron  
As he cooked a notebook stew.  
He barked when I objected  
There was nothing I could do.”

Teacher:

“Did he wear a doggy chef hat?”

Student:

My teacher gave a scowl.  
He did,” I said. “And taking it  
Would only make him growl.”

My teacher frowned, but then I said  
As quickly as I could,

“He covered it with ketchup,  
And said it tasted good.”

Teacher:

“A talking dog who likes to cook?”

Student:

My teacher had a fit.  
She sent me to the office,  
And that is where I sit.

I guess I made a big mistake  
In telling her all that.  
‘Cause I don’t have a doggy.  
It was eaten by my cat.