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Connection between fluency and comprehension through the use of readers' theater

Laura L. Johnson

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The Connection Between Fluency and Comprehension

Through the use of Readers' Theater

By

Laura L. Johnson

A Graduate Field Experience

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ABSTRACT

Throughout my teaching career I have been curious as to why some students are able to comprehend a reading passage with greater ease than other students. I have taught first, second, and third grade and in all three grades I observed similar issues with the students who have difficulty with comprehending a reading passage. Most of the students I worked with who had difficulty with comprehension also had a hard time reading fluently. This made me wonder if reading fluency had an impact on reading comprehension. A fluent reader is one who can orally read at an appropriate rate and use expression to show the reader understands the meaning of the text (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). After discussing this thought with many other teachers and reading research articles, I wondered if using Readers' Theaters in the classroom to improve students' reading fluency would in turn improve students' reading comprehension. Due in part to my collaboration and research I explored the following research question, "Does student fluency through the use of Reader's Theater increase the student's comprehension?"

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Throughout my teaching career I have been curious as to why some students are able to comprehend a reading passage with greater ease than other students. I have taught first, second, and third grade and in all three grades I observed similar issues with the students who have difficulty with comprehending a reading passage. Most of the students I worked with who had difficulty with comprehension also had a hard time reading fluently. This made me wonder if reading fluency had an impact on reading comprehension. A fluent reader is one who can orally read at an appropriate rate and use expression to show the reader understands the meaning of the text (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). After discussing this thought with many other teachers and reading research articles, I wondered if using Readers' Theaters in the classroom to improve students' reading fluency would in turn improve students' reading comprehension. Due in part to my collaboration and research I explored the following research question, "Does student fluency through the use of Reader's Theater increase the student's comprehension?"

Readers' Theaters are similar to plays, but the students do not dress up in costumes and they are allowed to use their scripts. Students do not dress up in costumes because the students should be using their voices to indicate what their character is like; for example using a low scratchy voice for an elderly man. One of the main purposes of Readers' Theaters is to get students to use expression so when they are reading orally they are better at keeping the audiences' attention. Another main purpose in using Readers' Theater is to increase students' fluency. The students are able to increase their fluency through repeatedly reading the same passage. The idea is that each time a reader reads a passage the reader becomes more familiar with it so the reader should be able to read the passage a little more fluently each time. Students

should keep their script even if they feel as if they have memorized their parts, because without the security of the script they may stumble through parts and become embarrassed which is not the purpose of using Readers' Theaters. The final purpose for using Readers' Theater is to increase students' comprehension. When students are able to orally read with expression they generally have better comprehension when they are reading to themselves (Young & Rasinski, 2009). This would be the ultimate benefit of using Readers' Theater, because the goal of reading is comprehension. The purposes of using Readers' Theaters are to increase students' reading fluency, reading comprehension, and improve their confidence in reading orally.

In my experience of teaching three different grade levels where reading instruction is very different, the same problem of reading fluency continued to show up. In first grade many students are still mastering the art of reading the words on the page and very little effort if any is being put into comprehending what has been read. In third grade the roles switch, students are now expected to be able to read using little effort so they can comprehend everything they have read. However, for many students in the third grade, fluency has not been mastered, so as the texts get more difficult comprehension continues to get harder and harder. I decided to implement Readers' Theaters into my classroom to see if an increase in fluency would have an effect on reading comprehension. I hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between the implementation of Readers' Theater and fluency and comprehension test results from the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008).

To test my hypothesis of the affects of fluency on comprehension, I decided to implement Readers' Theater in my classroom during the Language Arts time over a five week period; the actual study took seven weeks to implement. The first week of the study consisted of testing the students using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell,

2008) and having the students complete the Student Fluency Survey to find a baseline for the data. Weeks two through six would consist of the implementation of the Readers' Theaters into the classroom. The seventh week of the study was used to retest the students using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) and having the students complete the Student Fluency Survey again to show growth in their fluency and comprehension skills. In completing this study, I used all the students in my third grade classroom, but I only used the data found from the students whose parents consented to let me share the findings. The study sample consisted of six girls and eight boys none of the students in the study sample received special education services and all are native English speaking students.

According to the Common Core Standards (2011) students should be able to read with enough fluency so they can accurately comprehend a text. For students to be successful they need to be able to read with purpose and understanding. This can only happen when students are exposed to a variety of different types of texts and are given the opportunity to repeatedly read them to increase their fluency. Once students are able to read fluently with expression and are able to comprehend the meaning of the text they will be more likely to self-correct their reading errors. Through the implementation of Readers' Theater students should improve their oral reading fluency and improve their oral and silent reading comprehension.

Thus, incorporating specific reading techniques to improve reading fluency and the implementation of Readers' Theaters into the regular Language Arts time was the focus of this research study. These techniques were implemented over a five week study in order to determine whether their collective use would align with the findings of recent research in the area of reading fluency and reading comprehension. The following chapter will present reviews of research studies which were focused on improving students' fluency.

Key Terms

Fluency: the ability to read with smoothness and accuracy.

Common Core Standards: the standards set for students to be ready for further schooling.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Reading is a monumental task to perfect which encompasses many different facets, one of which is fluency. Fluency is the doorway a reader must pass through to go from being a reader who decodes, to a reader who comprehends (Nicholas, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009). Being a fluent reader indicates the student has comprehended the text. This is evident because if there was not comprehension the student would not be able to use appropriate expression and prosody. Fluency is an aspect which has been studied using many different approaches. Readers' Theater is a fluency program in which students are given a piece of text to practice reading and then they read the piece to an audience using appropriate expression and prosody. Readers' Theater has been a useful avenue for improving fluency and thus comprehension skills in both regular education students and students with special needs. Through the implementation of fluency programs students have been able to increase their fluency and in turn increase their reading comprehension (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Fluency Building Programs

Four fluency building programs which have been researched and have data to indicate an increase in fluency and comprehension were an after school fluency program, a wide reading program intervention, Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) (Stahl & Heubach, 2005) and a secondary reading intervention of dramatic oral reading practice. The following studies were conducted because many students lack the necessary skills to be fluent readers; thus they were unable to effectively comprehend. These studies indicate that when a child is able to read fluently it lessens the burden on their working memory making it easier to comprehend the text (Martens et.al, 2006).

Schwanenflugel et.al (2009) predicted that the use of a wide reading approach (Kuhn et.al, 2006) would yield a greater increase in fluency when compared to Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) (Stahl & Heubach, 2005). The purpose of this study was to compare short term and long term effects of using two different fluency strategies on second graders, a wide reading approach and FORI. This study consisted of a control group, a group which received the wide reading approach treatment, and a group which received FORI treatment.

The student sample was from two highly populated states on the East coast. The northern East coast schools were in suburban areas where forty percent of its students received free or reduced price lunch. The southern East coast schools were in urban and rural working class and high poverty schools where about seventy-seven percent of its students received free or reduced price lunch. Students who received English language support were not included in the results of this study. There were 537 students in all who participated in this study from forty-two different second grade classrooms. Of these students forty-eight percent were African American, twenty-eight percent were Latino American, nineteen percent were European American, three percent Asian American, and three percent were unknown. Ten classrooms received the wide reading approach treatment, twenty classrooms received the FORI treatment, and there were twelve control classes.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variables were the implementation of the two different fluency programs, wide reading approach and FORI. The dependent variables consisted of students' scores for word reading efficiency on the TOWRE, oral reading fluency on the Gray Oral Reading Test-Fourth Edition (GORT 4) (Wiederholt & Bryant, 2004), reading comprehension using the Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) (The Psychological Corporation, 1992), and the Motivation to Read Profile.

This study on different fluency programs ran the length of one school year. At the beginning of second grade each student in the study was tested using the TOWRE, GORT 4 (2004), WIAT (1992), and the Motivation to Read Profile and then assessed again at the end of the second grade year to demonstrate growth. All teachers who participated in this study were either trained on how to implement FORI or the wide reading program. The basic weekly plan for implementing FORI on Monday was to introduce the weekly story by having the teacher read it to the class with expression and then asked comprehension questions, went over difficult vocabulary, and completed a graphic organizer. On Tuesday the class would echo read the weekly story and then have the story assigned to be read again as homework. On Wednesday the class choral read the story and either read the weekly story or a text of their choice for homework. On Thursday the teacher assigned students partners to read with and for homework they either read the weekly story or a text of their choice. On Friday teachers implemented extension activities, vocabulary review activities, and completed running records with the students. The wide reading program weekly plan was similar to the FORI but focused on three texts instead of just one text. The teacher introduced the text on Monday and discussed comprehension, and new vocabulary. On Tuesday the class echo read the story and if time allotted the students partner read the text. On Wednesday the class completed extension activities related to the text which was introduced on Monday. On Thursday and Friday the students echo read and discussed a second and third text. The main difference between the two programs is that FORI focused more on repetition of one text and the wide reading program focused on more texts and less repetition. The control groups continued to use the reading program their school had already implemented. The one consistent factor between the three groups was they all had the same amount of reading instructional time each day.

As a result of their research, Schwanenflugel et.al (2009) concluded that the wide reading program had a greater impact when compared to the control groups than did the FORI group when compared to the control groups. The control groups' mean fall scores were all lower than their spring scores on the TOWRE, GORT 4, and WIAT, their mean score on the MPR-SC decrease by two tenths of a point, which is an insignificant decrease. The wide reading program's mean fall scores were all lower than their spring scores on the TOWRE, GORT 4, WIAT, and MPR-SC. The FORI mean fall scores were lower than the spring scores for the TOWRE and GORT 4. There was a significant decrease on their mean score for the WIAT, the mean score decreased by ninety-six points. The FORI group also had a decrease in mean score on the MPR-SC of three tenths which is not a significant decrease. As a result, the researchers concluded that the wide reading program intervention was more successful than the FORI intervention.

Both the FORI and the wide reading program intervention helped with reading fluency, but the wide reading program intervention yielded a greater increase in fluency than the FORI when used with second grade students. The next study will show the effect that an after school fluency program had on second and third grade students.

Martens et.al (2006) predicted using a fluency based after-school program would increase fluency and improve students' ability to read an untrained passage. An untrained passage is a text a child has not yet read. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of a fluency-based, after-school reading program that combined empirically-supported intervention components with a sample of second and third grade students. This study consisted of a control group and an intervention group. The intervention group received training and the control group received regular classroom instruction.

The student sample was from an urban K-6 elementary school in the northeast. The sample consisted of ten second grade students, seven female and three male, and twenty third grade students, thirteen female and seven male. One student in the study was Latino/Hispanic and the rest were African American. All of the students received either free or reduced lunch. Half of the students were selected at random to be part of the control group and the other half would receive the experimental treatment. The thirty students in the sample were chosen from the 72 students who were participating in the after-school program already. The students were chosen using the following criteria; a standard Phonological Awareness Composite score of 65 or higher on the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP; Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1999), and reading below instructional level on grade-level Curriculum-Based Measurement probes in Reading (CBM-R; Shinn, 1998).

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of an after-school fluency program group. The dependent variables consisted of students' scores for Words Read Correctly per Minute (WRCM). WRCM was calculated for same day retention and for two days later retention. The child's WRCM was calculated on day one and then the child's WRCM was assessed again two days later.

This study on fluency lasted seven weeks for the second grade students and eight weeks for the third grade students. Pre and post test CBM-R and CTOPP assessments were given for each student which required a two week time period to conduct both pre and post assessments. The researchers met with students on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for the duration of the study. The following three items were conducted in each training session. First there was a pre-training assessment. There was training on the passage on which the 100 WRCM retention criterion was not met. Lastly, a post-training assessment was administered. During the pre-

assessment all students were administered the CBM-R and the CTOPP to determine a starting point in the curriculum. Students started at the grade level indicated based on the words read correctly in a minute according to the CBM-R. The same CBM-R was administered for post test analysis on an untrained passage to see gains in fluency. Only at the end of the study was the Academic Competency section of the Academic Competency and Intervention Acceptability Assessment (ACIAA; Eckert, Ardoin, Daly, & Martens, 2002) administered to both groups.

The experimental group received fluency-based training while the control group received the regular after-school support from the supervisors in charge of the program. For each day of training students would be pulled from the after-school program to work with a researcher trained in CBM-R administration. The goal for each student was to read 100 WRCM. The student would read the passage orally while the researcher scored the passage using CBM-R administration and scoring procedures. If the student read 100 WRCM then the student was administered the next passage. If the student did not reach the goal of 100 WRCM then the researcher would administer the student the necessary fluency training which was predetermined by the pre-training assessment. The training sessions were conducted either individually or in small groups. The training sessions consisted of one of the following techniques; phrase drill error correction, listening passage preview, and repeated readings. Phase drill error correction consisted of the researcher correctly pronouncing the error word and the child repeating the word three times. Once the fluency training session was completed for the session the student could exchange tickets earned from reading for a prize. The control group was required to stay in the after-school program which consisted of worksheet activities in language arts and a snack. The data collected from the CBM-R, CTOPP, training passages, and ACIAA were analyzed to

determine whether or not the after-school fluency-based program improved the reading fluency of the students in the program compared to the control group.

As a result of their research, Martens et.al (2006) concluded that the after-school fluency-based program had a positive effect on the fluency levels of the second and third graders. Students in the experimental group made significant gains in fluency while the students in the control group made gains they were not as significant as the experimental group as measured by CBR-M. The data collected from the WRCM showed second graders in the experimental group improved their WRCM for same day training by 22.76 words and two-day retention training by 21.55 words. The third graders improved their WRCM for same day training by an average of 24.52 words and two-day retention training by 26.4 words. Data collected from the training sessions indicated that students coming in at a higher fluency level did not benefit as much as students who were at a lower fluency level. Students in the experimental group enjoyed reading slightly more than the control group when surveyed about how they felt about reading. The results of the survey on a scale of 1 – 5 the experimental group averaged 4.8 and the control group average 4.3. As a result, the researchers concluded the fluency-based after-school program interventions increased the fluency abilities of the second and third graders in the experimental group when compared to the control group.

The after school fluency program increased both the second and third graders abilities in fluency and comprehension. The next study involves high school students and how a dramatic oral reading program has affected those students' fluency and comprehension. This study switches the focus from elementary students to secondary; therefore, having a different perspective than the previous study due to the fact that secondary students have a different outlook on oral reading (Goering & Baker, 2010).

Goering and Baker (2010) predicted that the participation of high school students in a dramatic oral reading intervention would increase the students' comprehension and fluency skills. The purpose of this study was designed to determine how participation in a dramatic oral reading intervention affected high school students' reading fluency and comprehension abilities. This study also examined how the social context of a literacy intervention classroom in a high school promoted or hindered the participation in dramatic oral readings.

The students in this study were from a high school in a mid-sized town in the Mid-South. The teacher in this study was an English teacher in his first year of teaching and was working on becoming a "Literacy Interventionist." This was also the first year the school was implementing a literacy intervention program for students in the tenth grade. There were 42 students who were eligible to participate in the study; however only twenty-five students returned consent forms to be in the study. Even though students did not return consent forms they still participated in the intervention activities, but were not interviewed and were not tested as part of the study. Of the twenty-five students included in the study seventeen were still in the school district at the end of the study for post assessments. Seven of those seventeen students were English Language Learners and three received special education services.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of a literacy intervention classroom in a high school where dramatic oral readings were put into practice. The dependent variables were the standard scores from the Gray Oral Reading Test 4 (GORT 4; Wiederholt & Bryant, 2007). A speech-language pathologist administered the GORT 4 to the seventeen students to determine a baseline for fluency and comprehension data. All the participants were assessed before the intervention and after the intervention was completed.

In this study each student was assessed using the Gray Oral Reading Test 4 (GORT 4) before receiving any intervention instruction. Students participated in a twenty-four day study over a seven month period broken up into six sections which consisted of four days each. Every one of the sections focused on a different genre. The different genres used in this study were, excerpts from young adult novels, nonfiction news broadcasts, open microphone events where students read their own writing, and two poetry sections. In the intervention classroom students would practice reading their piece of text and receive constructive feedback from their peers to help improve their oral reading ability. Day one consisted of the researcher and teacher modeling exemplary and inadequate oral reading for the particular genre. Students would also pick the text they would like to focus on as their dramatic reading piece. On day two students participated in repeated readings, where they evaluated themselves and others and gave constructive feedback. The students rotated partners to become more comfortable with reading expressively in front of others. The third day was used to practice with a small group to improve the students' ability to share with a group. On the fourth day the students reorganized the room so it was conducive for them to share and they shared their dramatic piece of text. Once the six sections were completed the researcher conducted interviews with students individually, reviewed field notes, and compared fluency assessment scores.

Students were provided with instruction on how to effectively read a piece of text to a group of people to keep the audience engaged. They were also provided with instruction on how to give constructive feedback to help their peers improve on their oral dramatic reading abilities. Students were administered the tools to be able to know how to evaluate themselves and others. Students also viewed examples of a well read and poorly read dramatic piece of text, to help them to understand the importance of fluency when reading orally.

Each student was assessed using the Gray Oral Reading Test 4 (GORT 4) before the intervention and after the intervention was completed. Each student was also interviewed individually to see if the intervention class promoted or reduced the student's willingness to read orally. The researchers examined the results from the GORT 4 and were able to determine that the students improved their fluency, comprehension, and composite scores.

As a result of the research Goering and Baker (2010) concluded that the implementation of a literacy intervention class at the tenth grade level improved students' fluency and comprehension. The results from the Gray Oral Reading Test 4 (GORT 4) demonstrated an increase in all areas assessed. In terms of fluency the mean increased by seventy-nine hundredths from the pretest to the posttest. The students' average standard deviation for fluency increased fifty-one hundredths from the pretest to the posttest. Pretest scores for comprehension on the GORT 4 increased one and six hundredths of a point on the posttest. The standard deviation for comprehension increased three hundredths of a point on the posttest mean. The students mean composite score increased six and eighty-eight hundredths of a point from pretest to and the standard deviation increased two and twenty-one hundredths of a point from pretest to posttest. As a result, the researchers concluded the implementation of a literacy intervention classroom in a tenth grade class increased the students' fluency and comprehension.

As one can see all of the above fluency programs yielded some success regardless of the program which was implemented. These studies also indicated that fluency and comprehension can be increased at any age level and that fluency is crucial to the comprehension of a reading passage. The next two studies will demonstrate the effect that Readers' Theaters had on students' fluency and comprehension.

Effects of Readers' Theater

As indicated from the previous two studies the implementation of fluency programs increased students' ability to read fluently and thus have increased comprehension. The next two studies are studies which indicated the effects of Readers' Theater on elementary students' fluency and comprehension. As students leave the emergent stage of reading they are required to be able to read fluently to become successful readers, the implementation of Readers' Theater is a way to improve students' fluency and comprehension (Keehn, 2003).

Keehn (2003) predicted the use of a Readers' Theatre intervention would improve the fluency of second grade students. The purpose of this study was to measure and describe the effects of different instructional treatments on the acquisition of oral reading fluency in second graders at different levels of reading ability. The study consisted of four groups, two groups received the intervention and two groups were considered control groups.

The student sample was from a rural school district in the central United States. Four second grade classrooms in the district were selected at random to participate in the study. There were sixty-six students in all who participated in the study. Of those sixty-six students fifty percent were Hispanic, thirty-five percent Anglo, ten percent Afro-American, and five percent Asian. The teachers in the four classrooms ranged in experience from five to ten years.

The research method was quantitative. The independent variables were the implementation of Readers' Theater and specific fluency instruction (Treatment one) and just the implementation of Readers' Theater without specific fluency instruction (Treatment two). The dependent variables were rate, accuracy, retelling, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fluidity, phrasing, expressiveness, word ID from Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI; Leslie & Caldwell, 1990), and Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT; Wiederholt & Bryant, 2007).

This study was completed over a nine week time period using four second grade classrooms. The study took place during the third quarter of the school year. All four classes received the benefit of having Readers' Theater implemented in their classroom. Two out of the four classrooms were randomly chosen to receive further intervention along with Readers' Theater. The two classes chosen who received further intervention were part of Treatment one. The other two classes which did not receive further intervention were part of Treatment two. The classes in Treatment one benefited from further intervention of specific instruction on the improvement of fluency, through weekly mini-lessons and individualized coaching.

The teachers in Treatment one received training on how to effectively incorporate Readers' Theater into their classroom from the researcher prior to beginning of the study. These teachers also received weekly training on administering students explicit instruction to improve their fluency ability. Treatment one was implemented using a five day schedule and every day the class would devote 40 minutes to their Readers' Theater performances. On day one the teacher would give a mini-lesson and then read the three books which would be used for the Readers' Theater that week. When the teacher read the books she would use the oral reading habits which she wanted her student to emulate. After the teacher read the books she would put the books in the classroom library. The students would receive a copy of the text which they would be practicing for their performance that week. Upon receiving their script the students could practice reading the script silently or orally with another student. On day two the students met in their groups and were provided with master scripts with a highlighted part. The group read through the script, reading their highlighted part. After reading through the script the students would pass the scripts so they were reading a different part. They would continue to read and pass the scripts until every student had read every part. As the students were reading the

scripts the teacher would move from group to group offering feedback on their Readers' Theater performance. Day three had a similar set up to day two, the only difference was the students picked which part they would like to read for their performance on Friday. On day four the students met in their groups and practiced their Readers' Theater, reading only their part. The teacher circulated amongst groups and provided specific recommendations to improve their fluency. During the final minutes of day four the students decided where they would stand, how to introduce the story, and how to identify the characters. On day five each group performed their Readers' Theater for an audience. When the performance was over the audience was asked to offer positive feedback.

The teachers in Treatment two were trained how to implement Readers' Theater in their classroom. However, these teachers were not instructed to give mini-lessons or to coach the students to improve their fluency. Instead the teachers in Treatment two were instructed to monitor the students. Other than the mini-lessons and the specific coaching of fluency, Treatment two was conducted in the same method as Treatment one.

All the students in the study were assessed prior to the start of the Readers' Theater intervention and then assessed once the nine week intervention was completed. During the pre- and post-assessments the students were assessed on the following measures; reading rate, accuracy, story retelling, scores from the Gray Oral Reading Tests, the identification portion of the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), the Oral Reading Fluency Scale from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and the fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness using the Diagnostic Fluency Assessment (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). All the information collected was put into paired t-tests for analysis.

Results of the study indicated both Treatment one and Treatment two students made significant gains in their oral reading fluency using Readers' Theater over the nine week intervention. Students in Treatment one received explicit instruction to improve their reading fluency; however, this instruction did not prove to show greater benefits than only using Readers' Theater. Students in Treatment one and Treatment two had similar growth in rate, accuracy, retelling, fluidity, phrasing, expressiveness, and overall reading ability regardless of the explicit instruction students in Treatment one received. All students in Treatment one and Treatment two made significant growth in all areas regardless of their reading ability prior to the nine week intervention. Finally, the researchers concluded that the use of Readers' Theater increased a students' rate, accuracy, retelling, fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness whether students received explicit instruction on these areas or not.

The implementation on Readers' Theater into an elementary school classroom had an increased effect on fluency and comprehension. Readers' Theater offers students the chance to reread and have multiple chances to do repeated readings on a text, with multiple weeks of exposure to Readers' Theater, students will transfer the skills which have been learned when reading new text (Keehn, 2003). The next study conducted by Young and Rasinski indicated Readers' Theater also had a positive outcome on fluency and comprehension.

Young and Rasinski (2009) predicted using Readers' Theatre would increase students' word recognition, automaticity, and prosody, which in turn they believed would increase reading comprehension. The purpose of their study was to determine if implementing a Readers' Theatre program into a second grade classroom would increase students' word recognition, automaticity, prosody, and comprehension.

The students involved in this study were from a Title 1 school in the south central part of the United States. The twenty-nine students in the study were in a monolingual second grade classroom. There were twenty-one boys and eight girls, nine of which were English Language Learners. The average reading level of the students was an end of first grade level, with students ranging as low as early kindergarten and as high as midyear third grade.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of a Readers' Theatre program on a second grade classroom. The dependent variables were, word recognition accuracy, rate/automaticity, prosody, and comprehension. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 2001) was used to measure growth of prosody, word recognition accuracy, automaticity, and comprehension. The Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) was used to measure growth in automaticity and prosody.

In this study the Readers' Theatre program was implemented the second week of school and was put into practice for the length of the school year. Readers' Theatre was a part of the reading curriculum everyday in this classroom; it was not just used to fill time as an extra activity. The Readers' Theatre scripts were introduced every Monday with a mini-lesson. On Tuesday through Thursday students were provided with approximately ten minutes to practice reading their scripts with their groups. The researchers noticed students were reading their scripts above and beyond the time which was required of them to practice during the regular reading time. On these days the mini-lessons were on other pertinent reading skills. On Friday each group had the opportunity to perform their Readers' Theatre for the class.

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) were used as sources of data collection to be analyzed. The DRA was administered to find growth in word recognition accuracy, word recognition automaticity,

prosody, and comprehension. The TPRI was administered to measure growth in automaticity and prosody. Prosody was measured using a rubric designed to find characteristics of a fluent reader. Both the DRA and TPRI were administered at the beginning of the year to find each student's starting point and at the end of the year to see the growth of each student.

The results from this study demonstrated great gains amongst these students. In the fall the students' word recognition accuracy average was 98.9% and in the spring it was 99.2% a 0.3% increase in accuracy. The students in the study began with proficient word recognition skills, but still demonstrated gains in this area. The fall scores indicated that the students' rate/automatic, Word Read Correct per Minute (WCPM) average was 67.2 and in the spring the students' average scores were 127.6 WCPM a growth of 64.9 words. Reading rate was not an emphasis; however, reading with expression for meaning was the goal in this classroom study, yet students increased their reading rate on average by 64.9 words. The students' average score in the fall was 2.2 and in the spring it was 3.0, an increase of 0.8 on a scale with a maximum of four. Students were able to increase their prosody and were able to continue to read at that level of prosody even though the text difficulty increased. In the fall the students' average DRA level was 19.4 and in the spring their average was 31.2, an increase of 11.8 DRA levels in one school year.

As a result of their research, Young and Rasinski (2009) concluded that the implementation of Readers' Theatre into a second grade classroom increased students' word recognition accuracy, rate/automaticity, prosody, and comprehension. The above results were compared to the previous school year when Readers' Theatre was not implemented. The average WCPM increase from the fall to the spring was 29.1 words and the average for the year the study was completed was 64.9 words. The prosody increase in the previous year students demonstrated

0.4 growth on a scale of four and in the study the students averaged a growth of 0.8 on the same scale. As a result, the researchers concluded the implementation of Readers' Theatre does increase word recognition accuracy, rate/automaticity, prosody, and comprehension.

Readers' Theater and Special Education

As reported in the previous two studies, Readers' Theater had the ideal outcome of increased fluency and comprehension on regular education students. The next study delves into whether Readers' Theater will have a positive outcome when implemented with students who have special education needs.

Davis (2003) predicted the use of Readers' Theater would improve the fluency and attitude toward reading of students with special needs. The purpose of this study was to provide the low achieving students' with opportunities to practice and then perform a Readers' Theater script to a group of pre-kindergarten students. The basis for using Readers' Theater instead of simply repeated readings was that students would be more motivated to practice the piece because they needed to perform it later.

The student sample was from a public school in a South Eastern town of approximately 20,000 people. The study consisted of twelve students with special needs who were in a self-contained second and third grade classroom for students with learning and emotional disabilities. One of the twelve students was African American, one Hispanic, one Pacific Islander and nine were Caucasian. Of the twelve students three had an emotional disability, one was receiving services for Aspergers Syndrome, and eight were considered learning disabled. Eight of the students were also diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder. This class was being instructed by a Reading Recovery trained, first year, exceptional education teacher who had taught for ten years at the elementary and collegiate levels.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable in this study was the implementation of a Reader's Theater program. The dependent variables were the use of the attitude survey and fluency measurements.

The teacher used a modified form of the Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) to gauge each student's attitude towards reading. The survey was administered at the beginning of the study and then again eight weeks later at the end of the study. During this time period pre and post fluency scores, field notes of observations, and student comments were also collected. At the end of the eight-week study the attitude survey and the fluency scores of the students were compared to determine if progress had been made.

In this study students were placed into three Reader's Theaters groups of four students based on reading levels. Each group had three males and one female. This Readers' Theater program had a consistent five day schedule which was the same every week for the eight week study. During the reading period students would rotate from independent reading, to group time with the teacher, to Readers' Theater with the researcher. The researcher would work individually with each group to improve their Readers' Theater performances. On the first day groups would receive their Readers' Theater scripts and read them silently and then read them orally as a group. The researcher would assign a part to each student before they were to read it orally. On the second day the researcher modeled how to use appropriate inflection and intonation and the group members tried to emulate how she sounded. On the third day the researcher read the Readers' Theater script orally for the group to hear. Then the group orally read through the script. The researcher pulled each student individually as a final activity on the third day and they echo read that student's part of the Readers' Theater. On the fourth day they followed a similar procedure as day three. On the fifth day the students performed their Readers'

Theater for a group of pre-kindergarten students. The researcher videotaped two of the performances for the groups in order to provide feedback.

Davis (2003) determined that students had improved attitude towards reading after implementing Readers' Theater. Using the information gathered from the survey conducted at the beginning and the end of the study students' attitudes improved on all of the survey questions. The study also demonstrated that the use of Readers' Theater increased the number of words read correctly in one minute. The class averaged an additional seventeen words read correctly in one minute. The scores ranged from an additional three words to an additional forty-one words read correctly in one minute. In conclusion, the researcher concluded the use of Readers' Theater improved the attitude of students towards reading and their fluency ability when reading a text.

As written in the previous pages, Readers' Theater had a positive effect on both regular education students and students with special education needs. The following research studies were conducted to observe if fluency and comprehension were connected.

Research on Reading Success

As presented in the previous studies fluency was increased when there was a fluency program implemented into the classroom. The following research article reviews will delve into other research which has been completed with the hopes of increasing fluency to increase comprehension.

Greenwood et.al (2003) predicted that multiyear teacher collaboration on evidence based reading practices, observation of students' reading behaviors at a young age, and instructional arrangements of one-on-one and small groups with peer tutors would decrease the rate of early reading failure when compared to students who did not receive the intervention. This study

consisted of three grade-level cohorts which were monitored over the three year span of the study. At the start of the study cohort one was in kindergarten, cohort two was in first grade, and cohort three was in second grade. Cohorts one and two received the early evidence based interventions while cohort three did not and was used as the control group in this study.

The student sample was from a small urban elementary school with a student body ranging from 335 to 350 students each year for kindergarten through fifth grade. Each grade level had two classes. The racial make-up of the elementary school was ninety percent Caucasian, seven percent Hispanic, and three percent African American. Forty-one percent of the students received free or reduced lunch. The school was using an inclusion approach for the majority of its students with special needs. There were thirty-six students in all who were chosen to be part of this study; six students from each of the two classes in each grade level were chosen. The method for choosing which students participated in the study are as follows: in each class two students who were considered at the lowest risk for reading failure were chosen, two students who were considered to be at an average risk for reading failure, and two students who were considered to be at the highest risk for reading failure were chosen. To be considered at the lowest risk for reading failure students could not have a disability and were high performing according to their classroom teacher. To be considered at the average risk for reading failure students could not have a disability and were average learners according to their teachers. To be considered a high risk for reading failure the student needed to have an Individual Education Program (IEP) or had limited English proficiency (LEP) and considered to be the lowest achieving according to their teacher.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variables were the risk for academic delay, and the use of cohorts over a multiyear span. The dependent variable

was the curriculum-based measurements (CBM) reading fluency assessments. All students were assessed using the CBM by November of the first year of the study and were assessed again every three months throughout the entirety of the study.

This study on early evidence-based reading failure lasted for three years. Over the three years teachers were in-serviced on the best reading strategies, small groups and one-on-one peer tutors were implemented into the classroom. Students were assessed every three months for reading fluency. For this assessment each student was pulled individually by one of the research staff and the student read a CBM reading passage. Students' reading fluency was based on the number of words read correctly from the text. Cohort one did not start assessing using the CBM reading passages until the students were in first grade due to the lack of reading ability.

This study was a longitudinal, sequential cohort design. It included both process and product measures of development. This research design was chosen because it was able to include repeated multiyear measurements. This design was important because this study dealt with students who were just learning to read. Each cohort received the appropriate interventions for their particular grade level.

As a result of their research Greenwood et.al (2003) concluded that when teachers implemented evidence-based practices early reading failure decreased. Over the entirety of the project teachers implemented thirteen different evidence-based strategies such as, partner reading and writer's workshop. The researchers also concluded that the use of one-on-one and small group reading arrangements with peer tutors decreased the risk of early reading failure. Once students were able to become comfortable reading aloud they became more proficient silent readers also. The use of CBM reading fluency assessments indicated substantial growth in reading fluency. Students averaged an increase between 0.05 and 3.1 words per month over the

three year study. As reported in the last study, the use of evidence-based reading strategies decreased early reading failure.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, evidence-based reading strategies had a positive effect on students' fluency and comprehension abilities to decrease early reading failure. The following study will show the effect of an early screening approach to target the students who were at the greatest risk of academic and behavioral failure.

Kamps et.al (2003) predicted that the use of an early screening approach to determine which students were at the greatest risk of academic or behavioral failure would ultimately increase academic and behavioral success. The purpose of this study was to provide early screening for behavioral and academic risks, with the use of early screening to provide students at risk with early interventions, and to observe student progress over a two to three year span.

The student sample was comprised from five different school districts from a large Midwestern city in an urban area. All five schools were schools considered "at risk" because of the large number of academic and behavioral issues. The schools in this study had students from families of low socioeconomic status, minority groups, and/or students had a history of poor academic performance. The student populations for the five different schools were as follows, 291, 151, 262, 574, and 312. Only the data from 383 of these students were included in this research because of lack of parent consent. Of the students who participated in the study 231 were boys and 170 were girls, 154 were African American, 130 European American, thirty Hispanic, twenty-five African immigrants, twenty-six Asian, and eighteen were missing racial information. From the 383 students, 146 were deemed typical learners while the other 237 were deemed to be at risk for behavioral problems, based on the screening process. From the screening

process 137 illustrated academic delays and sixty were determined to have both academic and behavioral problems.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of an early screener for academic and behavioral risk. The dependent variables consisted of students' scores from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good et.al, 1998) and the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD).

This study on academic and behavioral risk was completed over a three year span using a longitudinal grade-cohort design. At the beginning of the study students in cohort one were in either kindergarten, first, or second grade and were followed for two to three years. The students in cohort two were also in either kindergarten, first, or second grade and started the study one year after cohort one started and were followed for two years. All of the students were assessed for academic and behavioral risk in January of the first year and again in late September of the other school years. In both cohorts students were assessed twice a year in the first year, four times in the second year, and three times in the third year.

The five different schools implemented different reading curriculum when using this intervention. Schools one and two were in the process of switching to a guided reading literature-based approach, school three was using the Reading Mastery curriculum (Reading Mastery, 1995), school four was in its first year of using Success for All (Success for All, 1999), and school five used a literature based program to teach reading.

As a result of their research, Kamps et.al (2003) concluded that the use of an early screening process for academic and behavioral success was crucial to the implementation of the correct interventions to prevent academic and behavior failure. DIBELS and SSBD scores over the three years indicated those students who were at behavioral risk were also the most likely to

be at academic risk. The importance of early screening allowed for the implementation of the appropriate academic and behavioral interventions which increased academic success.

The implementation of an early screener to detect students who may have academic or behavior failure at an early age had a positive effect on their academic and behavioral success. In the following study Mokhtari and Thompson researched the effects syntactic awareness had on students' fluency.

Mokhtari & Thompson (2006) predicted that students' with higher syntactic awareness would have a higher fluency and comprehension success. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of syntactic awareness as a prospective source of reading fluency and comprehension difficulty for students in the fifth grade. The researchers also wanted to examine if low levels of syntactic awareness would affect reading fluency and comprehension. Fluency has been deemed a critical aspect of reading success; however, the researchers believed that more research needed to be completed on syntax and semantics since fluency requires that a reader comprehend what he/she has read, one must be able to decipher the meaning of words while reading a text.

The student sample was comprised of thirty-two fifth grade students in a suburban school in the south central United States. The school in this study was a first through sixth grade school with 308 students. The school used a self-contained method for their fifth graders. Twenty of the students in this study were Caucasian, two were African American, three were Hispanic American, and seven were American Indian. All of the students were native English speakers and English was the primary language used in their homes. Students' backgrounds ranged from lower middle class to upper middle class and most of the students came from working class families. The classroom which was selected for this study was suspected of having several

students with language-related problems according to their teacher. This classroom used the Harcourt Reading Basal Trophies Series (2002). This particular reading program focuses on reading, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and writing based on state standards.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of the Harcourt Reading Basal Trophies Series (2002). The dependent variables consisted of the Test of Language Development – Intermediate (TOLD-II: 3) (Hammill & Newcomer, 1996), National Assessment of Educational Progress’s Integrated Reading Performance Record (IRPR) (Pinnell et.al, 1995), the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (MacGinitie & McGinite, 1989), and Oklahoma Criterion-Referenced Reading Test.

The students in this study participated in the implementation of the Harcourt Reading Basal Trophies Series (2002) to improve their reading, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and writing. The main purpose of implementing this reading series was to observe the affects it had on students’ syntactic abilities. Students were instructed using this reading series for the entire school year.

The students were assessed using the TOLD-II: 3, IRPR, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, and the Oklahoma Criterion-Referenced Reading Test at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year to indicate the progress made and to observe how syntax was connected to reading fluency and comprehension.

As a result of their research, Mokhtari and Thompson (2006) concluded that the higher the level of syntactic awareness the higher the level of reading fluency and comprehension. Also observed in this study was students with low levels of syntactic awareness had lower levels of reading fluency and comprehension. There was a significant correlation between students’ syntactic awareness and their reading comprehension when analyzing the data from the Gates-

MacGinitie Reading Test. There was a direct connection between syntactic abilities and reading fluency and comprehension.

Students with greater syntactic awareness were more fluent readers and thus were able to comprehend text at a higher level as demonstrated in the previous study. The next study delved into the idea of what was the best way to measure fluency.

Valencia et.al (2010) predicted that words correct per minute (wcpm) was not the best indicator of fluency difficulty. The researchers had four questions they wanted to answer by completing this study. The first question posed in this study was how does assessment of oral reading fluency using a metric of wcpm compared with a model that had separate measures for rate, accuracy, and prosody when predicting standardized test scores for comprehension. The second question was to evaluate the effect of changing the oral reading time from one minute to three minutes on a standardized comprehension score, wcpm, rate, and prosody. The third question was to assess the connection between rate, accuracy, and prosody when predicting comprehension and did this vary at different grade levels. The final question posed by the researchers was to weigh the consequences of using wcpm to identify students at risk and to make instructional decisions. Through the exploration of these questions the researchers wanted to delve into the issues of construct, criterion, and consequential validity of assessing oral reading fluency.

The student sample was from two school districts in the Northwest which had diverse student populations. The school demographics for the two school districts in participation were fifty-five percent students of color and forty-three percent received free or reduced lunch in the four elementary schools in participation. Fifty-one percent of students were students of color and forty-two percent received free or reduced lunch in the two middle schools in participation.

Approximately one third of all the students in the school district were considered to be English-language learners (ELL). Students from second, fourth, and sixth grades participated in the study. Students who received special education services and students scoring lower than a one on the state language proficiency test were not included in the data collected for this study. All of the students who participated in the study were expected to take the state and district tests without accommodations and in the required time frame according to No Child Left Behind. In total there were 279 students, ninety-three in second grade, ninety-one in fourth grade, and ninety-five in sixth grade.

The research method of this study was quantitative. The independent variable was student attendance which caused students to either be assessed one or two times. The dependent variables were Iowa Test of Basic Skills Battery (ITBS; Hoover, Dunbar, & Frisbie, 2001), a prosody rubric created by the researchers, a set of six reading passages, and correlating comprehension questions.

All students who participated in the study were assessed using the ITBS at the beginning of the school year between the months of October and December over two different days. On the first day of assessment the student read either a narrative or an expository text, and on the second day the student read which ever genre was not read the previous day. If students were absent for the second day of their testing they were only administered one reading passage which was taken into consideration when the data was analyzed. During the assessment students read orally to the evaluator and the evaluator indicated errors on a master copy of the passage. Once the student finished reading the passage the student was administered comprehension questions to determine the comprehension of the passage. All of the assessment sessions were recorded for later evaluation by two different evaluators.

As a result of their research Valencia et.al (2010) concluded that using separate indicators for fluency was more accurate than just wcpm for determining comprehension. The researchers also discovered that the wcpm were similar regardless of the time increase from one to three minutes. For consequential validity the researchers discovered that wcpm was a more useful indicator of reading failure in the younger grades than the older grades. Fluency can be measured in many different ways, yet it continues to be a critical factor for being a successful reader.

As read in the study above, words correct per minute was a better indicator of reading success for younger students than older students. This study also demonstrated that fluency does not need to just be measured in words correct per minute. In the following study the researchers looked into how fluency affected students' comprehension as they became older.

Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston (2009) predicted that as students progressed through the grades the relationship between fluency and reading comprehension would still exist but at less of an extreme. The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between fluency and reading comprehension, which was measured by prosody at grades three, five, and seven. The researchers specifically wanted to answer the following questions. "To what extent is prosody reading and a measure of prosody reading associated with overall reading proficiency as measured by a standardized test of reading comprehension? What is the magnitude of the relationship between measures of prosody reading fluency assessment and reading comprehension at grades three, five, and seven? To what extent does the magnitude of the relationship between prosody reading fluency and reading comprehension change as students progress through the grades?" (Rasinski, Rikli & Johnston, 2009)

The student sample was from a small urban school district in the Midwest consisting of ten elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school of approximately 6,100 students

in all. The school district was also a part of the Educational Service Unit #3 (ESU#3). This school district is one of eighteen other school districts participating in ESU#3. ESU#3 provides services for 61,000 students and 5,000 teachers in the Midwest. ESU#3 is a service which provides regional programs for teacher collaboration and custom services for districts.

The research method was qualitative. The researchers used students' readability levels using the Lexile (The Lexile Framework for Reading, 2008) and the Flesch-Kincaid readability formulae. Raters were trained to recognize the important features when using the scoring guide by using a set of anchor samples from each grade level. Students were administered the Stanford Achievement Test ninth edition (1977) (SAT9).

The researchers collected their data by using a Multi-Dimensional Fluency Scoring Guide (MFSG) (Rasinski, 2004), a recorded reading, and the standard text for each grade level. Each scorer independently scored each recording for the three fluency traits of, expression, smoothness, and pace. The test scores could range from three to twelve.

In this study students orally read a passage which was recorded for later scoring using the Multi-Dimensional Fluency Scoring Guide (2004). Each reading sample was scored by two different raters. The passages were only scored by a third rater if the first two raters' scores differed by more than one point. Aggregated fluency scores were then correlated to the SAT9 comprehension subtest scores. The normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores of the SAT9 reading comprehension subtest were used and the raw scores of the fluency assessment were used to measure fluency.

As a result of their research, Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston (2009) concluded that reading fluency at all three grade levels was associated with reading comprehension. The researchers believed that an increase in fluency would increase a student's comprehension. It is believed that

more instructional research needs to be completed to demonstrate the true affects prosody and automatic reading fluency has on comprehension.

The previous study demonstrated how fluency and comprehension are connected regardless of age level. However, the researchers felt that there needed to be more research completed to prove this idea. In the next study the researchers wanted to see the effects an enrichment reading program had on students reading fluency.

Reis et.al (2008) predicted that incorporating an enrichment reading block of time and an independent reading block of time along with the regular basal reading would improve reading fluency, reading comprehension, and students' attitudes towards reading. The purpose of this study was to compare two groups of students one which received the intervention of a Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R) and a control group which received just the basal reader instruction.

The student sample was from two different suburban elementary schools on the east coast. There were 313 students in the group who received the SEM-R intervention and 245 students in the control group. The students in the study ranged in grade levels from third to fifth grade. Students who were receiving special education services were included in the data collection for this study. At the time this study was conducted sixty-two percent of the fourth graders in this study scored at the mastery level on the state reading assessment.

The research method was quantitative. The independent variable was the implementation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R). The dependent variables were student post-assessment scores on Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measures, post-test scores on the reading comprehension section of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and post-assessment scores on

the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS). Reading fluency, reading comprehension, and attitude towards reading were pre-assessed using the above measures.

This study lasted for fourteen weeks in grades three, four, and five. There was a treatment and a control group at each grade level in both schools. The treatment group received reading instruction everyday for one hour using the basal reading series and one hour of SEM-R instruction. The control group received the regular two hours of language arts instruction using only the basal reading series. Teachers and classrooms were randomly chosen to either be the treatment or the control group.

The SEM-R intervention model is designed to have learning be an enjoyable experience, which has a focused plan and enrichment opportunities built in. Phase one of SEM-R is a “book hook” a teacher selected literature piece which can have higher order questioning included. This is different than the normal reading of a novel from cover to cover, the idea is to get the students interested in reading the text and then finish reading it themselves. At the beginning of the study this phase lasted about fifteen to twenty minutes, the length of time decreased as they continued to allow students to spend more time on phase two and three. Phase two of SEM-R was to teach students self regulation skills when reading independently. In this phase teachers coached students on how to become more proficient at reading independently. At the beginning of the study students could appropriately read independently for five to fifteen minutes. Teachers added one to two minutes each day to increase the independent reading time. By weeks three to four students were appropriately reading independently for thirty-five to forty-five minutes. The third phase of SEM-R teachers recommended that students chose self selected enrichment activities instead of teacher directed enrichment activities. These activities included but were not limited to exploring new technology, creative writing, buddy reading, creativity training in language arts,

learning centers, interest-based projects, continuation of self-selected reading, and book discussion groups. Teachers also focused on helping students to read critically during this phase of SEM-R.

As a result of their research Reis et.al (2008) concluded that an enriched reading program produced higher reading scores than using only a traditional basal reading series. Reading fluency scores for the ITBS went up 7.44 points, which is a pronounced increase for fluency. The ERAS indicated only a slight increase in students' attitudes towards reading. This research indicated that when students are challenged to think above and beyond the normal everyday expectations the majority of students will make improvements.

Research has proven that fluency plays an integral role in how successful students may become as readers. From the preceding research the evidence has shown that it is not necessarily the intervention method implemented, but how the intervention was implemented, and the fact that a fluency intervention was implemented generally had a positive impact on the students' reading success.

The implementation of any fluency program had positive effects on the students' fluency and comprehension. The Martens et al. (2007) retention study indicated students needed less instruction on a text as time went on to be able to meet their goal. This indicated that students retained the necessary information to transfer what was learned from one text to another to increase their fluency and comprehension. In the Goering and Baker (2010) study on dramatic oral reading with secondary students, improved students' motivation to read orally. One of the crucial aspects of this study was building a common ground of respect amongst the students in the class. This was important to the success of this study because it allowed students to feel comfortable reading in front of their peers which is often an uncomfortable task for many

secondary students. The Keehn (2003) and the Young and Rasinski (2009) studies both demonstrated the benefits of the implementation of Readers' Theater in an elementary school setting. Keehn (2003) suggested Readers' Theater needed to be implemented for six to eight weeks before students would be able to carry what they had learned to new texts. The implementation of Readers' Theater allowed all students, whether a struggling reader or an advanced reader to have success and fun while reading (Young & Rasinski, 2009). The critical aspect here was that students had fun reading in front of their peers. If students were not having fun they would likely not put forth the effort required to be successful regardless of the task. As a teacher the main goal is to have students be successful readers and through Readers' Theater that is possible. The following chapter will explain the research study I completed using Readers' Theater to increase fluency and comprehension.

Key Terms

Decodes: the ability to sound out a word and find its meaning.

Expression: showing feeling or emotion through the use of one's voice.

Prosody: is the stress or intonation a reader puts on words when reading.

Graphic organizer: a visual which students can use to show what they know about a certain topic or concept.

Echo read: an experienced reader reads with appropriate expression, prosody, and rate orally and then the student rereads the same text trying to imitate appropriate reading.

Choral read: the entire group reads together while being lead by an experienced reader.

Running record: an assessment which examines a student's oral reading accuracy and the errors he or she makes.

Automaticity: the ability to be able to read words accurately without using a lot of thought.

English Language Learners: a person whose first language is not English.

Individual Education Program: a program which provides students with special education needs the resources they need to learn.

CHAPTER III

Implementation

Introduction

While I contemplated the issues of fluency and comprehension and how to more effectively instruct my students I decided to implement a Readers' Theater intervention into my classroom. Readers' Theater is a program used to increase fluency and comprehension. When students read fluently their comprehension generally is higher (Young & Rasinski, 2009). This research coincided with the Common Core Standards (2011) which stated that for students to be successful readers they needed to be able to read with purpose and understanding. For students to be able to accomplish this they need to be able to read fluently. Throughout my experience of teaching first, second and third grade, I have observed many students who lack fluency; therefore I decided to research how fluency through the use of Readers' Theater affects students' comprehension.

I chose to implement a Readers' Theater intervention, because it has been researched and studies have been completed using Readers' Theaters which have indicated positive results from the implementation of Readers' Theater. Positive results occur when students are able to reread a passage multiple times using Readers' Theater. Students eventually gained the ability to transfer over their fluency and comprehension skills to new reading passages (Keehn, 2003). This is a crucial aspect because if students are not able to transfer over what they have learned from an intervention, the intervention was not successful. Due to the exposure Readers' Theater provides to a student the transfer of fluency and comprehension skills is possible. Readers' Theater does not just provide students with more confidence in their reading skills but it also improves their attitudes toward reading (Davis, 2003). Once reading becomes easier and students

are able to understand what they have read, they will be more likely to read for enjoyment. As I researched fluency and comprehension I noticed that fluency was focused on much more in the lower grades as opposed to the the higher elementary grades due to the fact that many educators believed that fluency was a skill that needed to be learned in early elementary school. As a third grade teacher I believed third grade was probably the last grade for many of my students to gain confidence in their fluency to become better at comprehending different genres of text. It has been proven that for students to be able to leave the emergent stage of reading they need to be able to read fluently and Readers' Theater is a way to improve students' fluency and comprehension (Keehn, 2003). As students progressed through third grade it became obvious that not all students were able to read fluently, thus the need for the Readers' Theater intervention.

Through the implementation of Readers' Theater students have been able to increase their fluency and in turn increase their reading comprehension (Griffith & Rasiniski, 2004). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the participants, data collection, and procedures used to complete this Readers' Theater research study.

Participants

The participants in this study included eight boys and six girls in the third grade, all of which were Caucasian. All of the participants were enrolled in a public elementary school located in a small rural community in the Midwestern United States and were in my third grade Language Arts class. This elementary school was educating 435 students at the time that this study was conducted. While all the students in this study were Caucasian the elementary school's ethnic makeup was eighty percent Caucasian, eighteen percent Hispanic, and two percent African American. Seven percent of the students enrolled in this school received special

education services. Thirty-two percent of the students either received free or reduced price lunch. Eight percent of the students were not English proficient; Spanish was the dominant language spoken at home. All the students who participated in this study were already assigned to be in my third grade classroom. There were nineteen students in my class at the time of the study all nineteen participated in the Readers' Theater intervention, but data was only collected on fourteen students because of lack of parental permission. Of the five students who were not included in this study one was from a non-English speaking household and the other four students received special education services which required them to be pulled during parts of the designated Language Arts block of time which caused them to miss out on critical coaching strategies which the other participants received.

The students participated in the study during their normal Language Arts block of time each day for five weeks. I collaborated with the elementary school's reading specialist, other teachers, and research articles on how best to implement the Readers' Theater intervention and which coaching techniques would work best. Each student was assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) prior to the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention to find baseline data and to more appropriately compile Readers' Theaters groups. The Readers' Theaters groups were based on students' reading levels. The participants reading levels were determined by their accuracy, fluency, and comprehension on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment. The purpose of grouping the students this way was to make it easier to find a text which was appropriate for all the students in the group and for the students to feel the most successful.

Data Collection

The first point of data collection in this study was a pre-assessment of students' knowledge of fluency (Appendix A). This pre-assessment was a survey used to gain a better understanding of what the students knew about fluency so I could better instruct them on how to become more fluent. The second point of data collection in this study was a pre-assessment of students' fluency and comprehension using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) (Appendix B). This assessment kit provided an alphabetic letter which indicated their fluency and comprehension abilities, A being the lowest reading level and Z being the highest reading level. This assessment took into account the student's reading accuracy, words read correctly per minute, fluency and score on comprehension questions from the text which determined the alphabetic letter assigned to each student. For students to be considered instructional at a certain alphabetic letter they needed to have ninety percent reading accuracy, a two out of three on the fluency scale, and answered seven out ten comprehension questions correctly. At the culmination of the five week study the students once again completed both the reading fluency survey and the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) to demonstrate growth.

Procedures

This study took place during the third quarter of the school year. The duration of the study was seven weeks. Week one consisted of the pre-assessment of each student using the reading fluency survey and the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008), weeks two through six consisted of the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention, and week seven consisted of the post-assessment of each student using the above measures. The reading fluency survey was completed as a whole class activity,

where students answered the questions independently. The fluency survey consisted of four questions to determine if the participants understood what fluency was, who was a fluent reader and why they thought that person was a fluent reader, if they thought they were a fluent reading and why, and how to improve upon ones fluency, see appendix A. The Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessments required each student to be assessed individually in a distraction free area. This was an assessment piece which was required by the school district, which enabled me to have a substitute teacher in my classroom while I assessed each student in a distraction free area. Once all the pre-assessments had been completed I compiled groups according to reading levels determined from results of the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) and the reading fluency survey.

After the pre-assessments had been completed I began the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention. The implementation started in week two of this study. Each week was set up in a similar fashion. Every Monday, I would introduce each Readers' Theater piece to the class, reading it orally with proper expression, rate, and prosody. The purpose of reading each piece orally was to provide the students with the knowledge of how to appropriately read the piece to keep the audience engaged. On Tuesday, I worked individually with each group and coached them on proper oral reading techniques, expression, rate, and prosody. On Wednesday, the groups practiced their Readers' Theaters piece as a group while I observed and coached specific students on the above oral reading techniques. On Thursday, each group decided how they would introduce the piece to their audience and then they performed their Readers' Theater piece for their classmates. After the performance, their classmates provided constructive feedback on how to improve their Readers' Theater piece. On Friday, each Readers' Theater

group performed their piece in front of another class. The purpose of performing in front of an audience besides their classroom peers gave them a sense of urgency to want to perform better.

The procedures described above were generated from recent research conducted in the area of reading fluency and comprehension. The intervention lasted a total of seven weeks, but because of the need to pre-assess and post-assess each student the actual intervention only lasted five weeks. The participants performed five different Readers' Theater scripts over the duration of this study. Even though the study consisted of only seven weeks I collaborated with the elementary school reading specialist and other teachers who taught reading before I began my intervention on the best methods of implementation. During this collaboration time we determined which coaching strategies were the most critical for the improvement of fluency and comprehension. It was determined that expression, rate, and prosody were the three main areas to focus on to improve fluency and ultimately improve students' reading comprehension. The use of coaching students on expression, rate, and prosody through the use of Readers' Theater was the basis for this study to improve fluency and comprehension.

Summary

Research in the areas of fluency and comprehension indicated that there was a connection and a need for fluency interventions to be implemented. Based on research in the areas of fluency and comprehension, this five week study conducted using Readers' Theater was designed to look closely at how and if fluency affects students' reading comprehension. Students were placed in groups which did not change to increase their level of comfort with their group in the hopes of building more reading confidence. Fourteen students were used to analyze the connections between fluency and comprehension. The results of the procedures described above and the data collection are discussed in the next chapter.

Key Terms

Emergent stage of reading: the stage where readers mastering the concept of how to interpret the information on the page and learning that print carries a message.

English proficient: a person's ability to read, write, and understand the English language.

Baseline data: the information collection before an intervention is implemented.

CHAPTER IV

Results

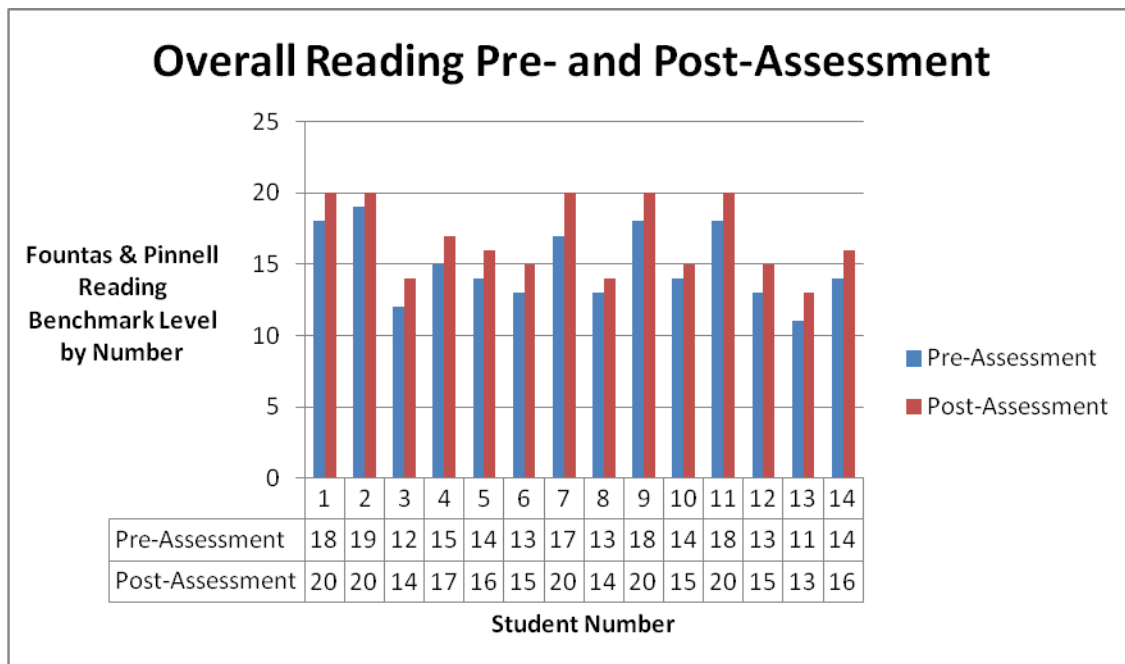
Introduction

This research study consisted of the implementation of a five week Readers' Theater intervention. During the five weeks the students were given a new Readers' Theater script each week which they performed with their group every Friday. On Monday I read through each script using appropriate expression, rate, and prosody. On Tuesday, I worked individually with each group and coached them on proper oral reading techniques, expression, rate, and prosody. On Wednesday, the groups practiced their Readers' Theaters piece as a group while I observed and coached specific students on the above oral reading techniques. On Thursday, each group decided how they would introduce their piece to their audience and then they performed their Readers' Theater piece for their classmates. Once they were done their classmates gave them constructive criticism on how to improve for their performance on Friday. On Friday, each Readers' Theater group performed their piece in front of another class. Preceding the Readers' Theater implementation I assessed all fourteen students' fluency and comprehension using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) and using a self created fluency survey I assessed their knowledge of what fluency was and how to become a more fluent reader. After the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention I assessed all the students again using the above measures. These results will indicate whether or not student fluency through the use of Reader's Theater increased the student's comprehension. The results of these assessments are in the next section of this chapter.

Data Analysis

The first item which was completed in this study was to assess each student individually using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). This assessment tool provided information showing the level at which the student was reading during week one of the study. To find the appropriate reading level each student’s reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension were considered before assigning an alphabetic letter which indicated where the student was reading on a scale with A being the lowest and Z being the highest reading level. Each alphabetic letter was given a corresponding number to make graphing the results easier. Letter A was matched with the number one and so on throughout the alphabet ending with Z which was matched with the number twenty-six. As I looked at overall reading levels two students moved one level higher, eleven students moved two levels higher, and one student moved three levels higher. These results can be seen in Graph 1.

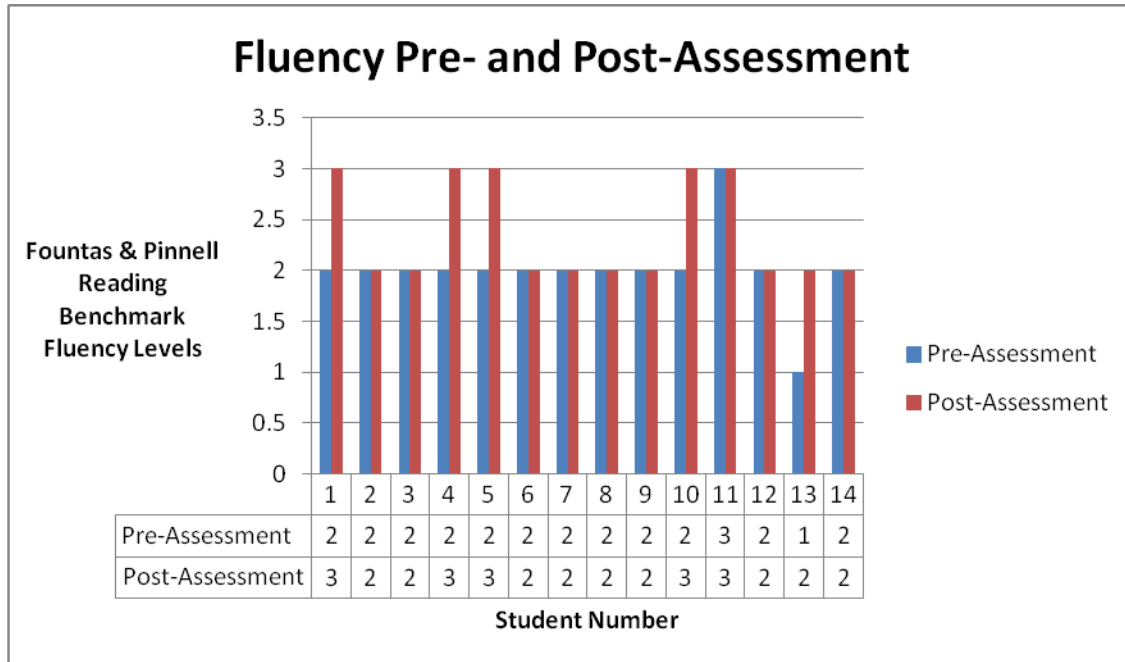
Graph 1



These results indicated that both fluency and comprehension had increased because to increase on the alphabetic scale one needed to improve in both areas.

As shown on the graph, all the students improved their overall reading abilities through the use of Readers' Theater. The following results will indicate how Readers' Theater affected their fluency abilities. Each student's fluency was assessed using the fluency scale of zero, one, two, or three on the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). A score of zero indicated that the student read primarily word-by-word, with no expression or smoothness, no use of punctuation, and without stress or inappropriate stress when reading. A score of one indicated that the student read primarily in two-word phrases, with an occasional four-word phrase, very little smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and used very little or no stress while reading. A score of two indicated that the student read in mostly three or four-word phrases with some smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and mostly used the appropriate stress while reading. A score of three indicated that the student read primarily in larger meaningful phrases with smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and appropriate stress on words while reading. On the pre-assessment one student scored a one, twelve students scored a two, and one student scored a three on the fluency scale on the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). On the post-assessment nine students scored a two and five students scored a three of the fluency scale of the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). These results can be seen in Graph 2.

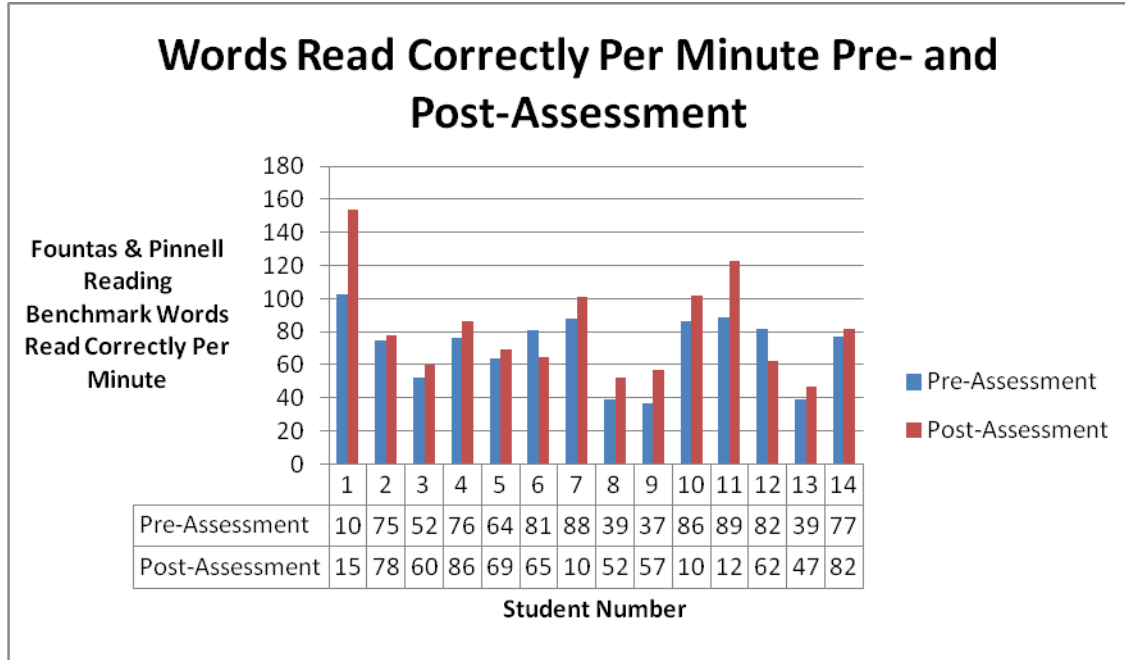
Graph 2



These results indicate that none of the students had a decrease in their fluency score, nine students’ fluency skills stayed at the same level, and five students’ fluency skills increased while the reading material became more difficult. The ability to maintain or even increase their fluency level while the reading material became more difficult indicated that the Readers’ Theater implementation had a positive effect on the students’ fluency abilities.

As discussed in Chapter Two the Valencia et.al (2010) study determined that words read correct per minute should not be the only information used to gage how fluently a student reads and is not the best indicator of fluent reading. However, it does provide some information to indicate how smoothly a student has read. Twelve of the fourteen students increased their words read correctly per minute while increasing the difficulty of the reading passage and two students decreased their words read correctly per minute but still increased the difficulty of their reading passage. The following results can be seen in Graph 3.

Graph 3

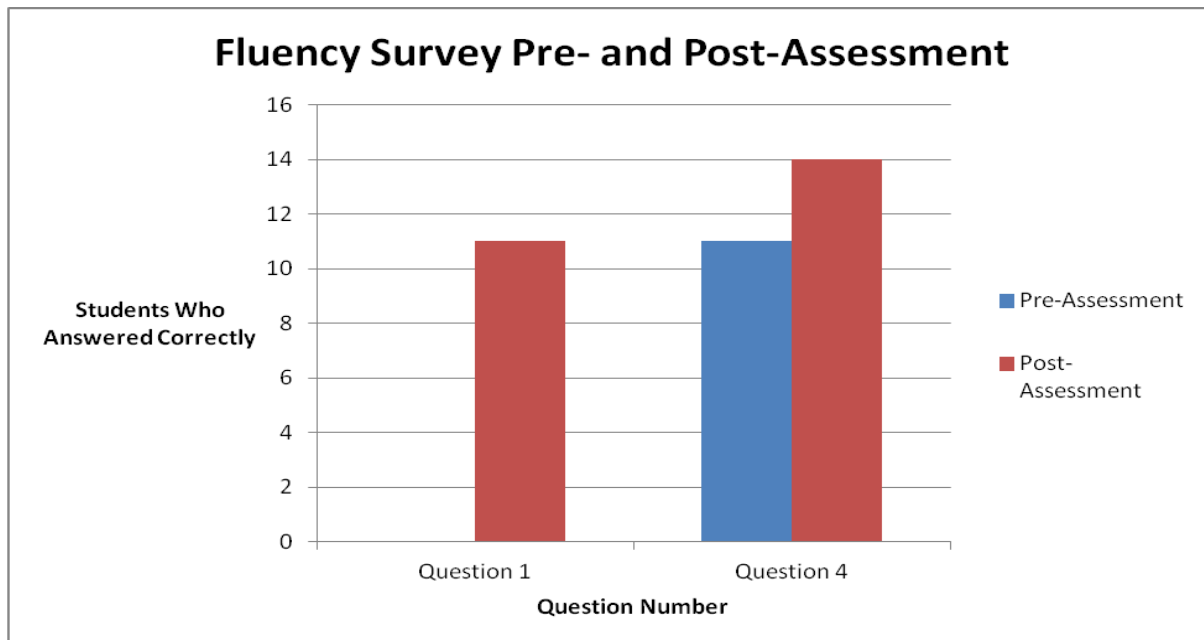


As shown on the graph above, twelve of the fourteen students increased their words read correctly per minute while increasing the difficulty of their reading passage. Of the students who increased their words read correctly per minute they averaged an increase of fifteen and a half words per minute more. The students who decreased their words read correctly per minute, decreased by an average of thirteen words per minute read correctly. As this seemed like a large decrease in words read correctly per minute, the main goal was not to increase words read correctly per minute but to increase fluency and comprehension which was still accomplished.

The final assessment piece which was used was a self created fluency survey (Appendix A). The students completed the same fluency survey before the implementation of the Readers’ Theater intervention and again after the implementation had been completed. Before the implementation of the Readers’ Theater intervention zero of the students knew what it meant to be a fluent reader (question one). Three of the students said a fluent reader was someone who was a good reader. This was not accepted as a correct answer because the opinion of what is

needed to be a good reader may vary from person to person. Eleven of the students did know that to increase their fluency they should either practice reading or read more which indicated that they knew it had something to do with reading, but did not necessarily know which strategies to use to improve their fluency (question four). After the implementation of Readers' Theater the students completed the fluency survey again, at that time eleven of the students knew what it meant to be a fluent reader. This was a seventy-nine percent increase in participant knowledge of fluency. The students described a fluent reader as one who reads smoothly with expression. All fourteen of the students knew that to improve their fluency they needed to practice their reading using expression and smoothness. These results can be seen in Graph 4.

Graph 4



As shown in the graph above, the students were able to gain a better understanding of what fluency is and how to improve their own fluency through the implementation of Readers' Theater. Improving fluency will more likely increase comprehension in a reader.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data collected from the fluency and comprehension research study which implemented Readers' Theater into the classroom, I found there was a positive correlation between the students' fluency abilities and their ability to correctly comprehend a reading passage. Of the fourteen students who participated in this study two students increased their overall reading level by one level, eleven students increased their overall reading level by two levels, and one student increased his reading level by three. All of the students either increased their score or maintained their fluency score on the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell). Twelve of the fourteen students increased their words read correctly per minute by an average of fifteen and a half words per minute. All of the students increased their knowledge of what it meant to be a fluent reader and how to become a more fluent reader. The implementation of Readers' Theater had a positive effect on students' fluency and comprehension who participated in this study. The next chapter is the conclusion to the action research question, "Does student fluency through the use of Reader's Theater increase the student's comprehension?"

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

Introduction

Does student fluency through the use of Reader's Theater increase the student's comprehension? The use of Readers' Theater to increase students' fluency and comprehension skills proved to have a positive effect. All participants in this study made gains in both their reading fluency skills and their reading comprehension skills. The students' enthusiasm to perform for other classes helped to increase their desire to improve their oral reading skills; however, I think it could have been increased even more if the timing of the study would have been different. Despite the fact that students lost some interest at the end of the study all of the students made gains in their fluency and comprehension skills.

Connections to Common Core Standards

In designing this study, the Common Core Standards (2011) were considered. According to the Common Core Standards (2011) students should be able to read with enough fluency so they can accurately comprehend a text. For students to be successful they need to be able to read with purpose and understanding. This can only happen when students are exposed to a variety of different types of texts and are given the opportunity to repeatedly read them to increase their fluency. Once students are able to read fluently with expression and are able to comprehend the meaning of the text they will be more likely to self-correct their reading errors. Through the implementation of Readers' Theater students should improve their oral reading fluency and improve their oral and silent reading comprehension and strategies to do this were all components that were included in this research design.

Connections to Existing Research

In addition to the Common Core Standards, recent research in the area of literacy skills dealing with fluency and comprehension and the use of Readers' Theater was studied prior to this study's design and implementation. There has been a vast amount of research completed on the effects of fluency on a student's ability to comprehend a reading passage. Schwanenflugel et.al (2009) compared the effects of using two different fluency strategy approaches, the wide reading approach method and the Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI). The researchers discovered that the wide reading approach had a greater impact on students fluency and comprehension due to the number of times students were able to reread a reading passage. The Martens et.al (2006) study goes a step further than the Schwanenflugel et.al (2009) study because they proved that when students are provided the opportunity to reread passages they will be able to transfer the skills they have learned from rereading to reading a new passage. This study provided students in an after school program with additional instruction on how to improve their fluency and comprehension while other students completed the normal after school activities. Schwanenflugel et.al (2009) and Martens et.al (2006) delved into the connection of fluency and comprehension when working with elementary school students. Goering and Baker (2010) took a different route and observed the affects a dramatic oral reading program had on high school students. Their research indicated that fluency can be improved even at the high school level. Schwanenflugel et.al (2009), Martens et.al (2006) and Goering and Baker (2010) all completed different fluency studies, yet all yielded positive results even though they were dealing with different age students. This is an indication that fluency can be increased at any age and that fluency is crucial to the student's comprehension while reading.

As indicated by the above researchers the implementation of fluency programs increased students' ability to read fluently and thus increased comprehension. Keehn (2003) implemented a Readers' Theater intervention with four different groups. Two of the groups received explicit instruction on how to improve their oral reading abilities while two groups did not receive this explicit instruction. Both groups made significant gains using Readers' Theater regardless of the explicit instruction. This indicated that when provided an opportunity to reread a passage for a purpose, for a later performance, students' fluency and comprehension increased regardless of any extra instruction. Young and Rasinski's (2009) study also indicated the use of Readers' Theater increased students' word recognition, automaticity, and prosody. Davis (2003) also implemented a Readers' Theater intervention, but with students who had special educational needs. Davis chose to implement a Readers' Theater intervention instead of simply using repeated readings for similar reasons as Keehn, students are more motivated to practice when they have a purpose, a performance later in the week. Davis determined that the use of Readers' Theater with students with special educational needs improved their attitudes towards reading and increased their words read correctly per minute. As one can see Readers' Theater had a positive effect on both regular education students and students with special educational needs.

The following researchers studied different strategies to increase students' fluency in the hopes of improving their overall reading abilities. Greenwood et.al (2003) researched how an early intervention program would affect the rate of early reading failure. This study proved that when evidence based interventions were implemented early on in a student's educational career the student was less likely to suffer from reading failure. Kamps et.al (2003) had a similar approach to Greenwood et.al (2003), but instead of just implementing interventions for reading Kamps et.al completed early screening for both academic and behavioral risks. They believed

that there was a connection between academics and behavior and if a student was at risk for failure in one of these areas they were more than likely to eventually have difficulty in both areas. They found that with the early screening they were able to implement the appropriate interventions to help prevent the failure from occurring. One reason that students may have been at risk for reading failure was their lack of syntactic awareness. Mokhtari and Thompson (2006) researched how syntactic awareness played into a student's fluency ability. They discovered that the greater a student's syntactic awareness was the more fluent of a reader they were. They did want to complete more research on this topic because of their lack of data on how syntax and semantics affects a reader's comprehension. Syntax and semantics can be an indicator of how well a student may be able to read orally; while words read correctly per minute can also indicate how well a student can read orally, neither may be the best indicator of fluency. Valencia et.al (2010) researched as to why words read correctly per minute was not the best method for determining the connection between fluency and comprehension. They discovered that the use of separate fluency indicators was a more accurate way of determining how fluently a student could read. Reis et.al (2008) researched how incorporating an enrichment block of time along with the regular basal reading series increased students' fluency and comprehension skills. This indicated that students benefit from additional instruction outside of the regular basal reading series. Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston (2009) researched the connection between fluency and comprehension on how the gap between the two would decrease over time eventually regardless of the reading instruction. However they discovered that the gap remained the same and that if fluency instruction was to be implemented the gap would decrease. As indicated from the previous research and the research completed in this study indicated that fluency and comprehension have a connection, but how to best measure that connection has not yet been

determined or how to best instruct students on how to improve their fluency was still a lingering question.

Explanation of Results

In fluency and comprehension skills, all participants made growth. All participants were pre- and post assessed for fluency, comprehension, and words read correctly per minute using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). Participants also completed a pre- and post fluency survey which indicated their knowledge of what fluency was and how to increase fluency. In the above areas all the participants made progress in at least one category if not all.

Participants' overall reading abilities were assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). Each participant was assessed individually in a distraction free area to yield the best results. The assessment kit had an alphabetical scale which indicated at which level the participant was reading. The alphabetical scale started at A as the lowest level and ended with Z as the highest level. To decipher a participant's highest instructional reading level I needed to take into consideration the participant's reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of the reading passage. All of the participants made progress in their overall reading abilities which was indicated by an increase in all of their reading levels. Two of the fourteen participants increased their reading level by one letter, eleven participants increased their reading level by two letters, and one participant increased his level by three letters. The increase in levels demonstrated that the participants were able to increase their fluency and comprehension skills through the use of Readers' Theater.

The participants' oral fluency was also assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). Each participant scored a zero, one, two,

or three on the Fountas and Pinnell fluency scale. A score of zero indicated that the student read primarily word-by-word, with no expression or smoothness, no use of punctuation, and without stress or inappropriate stress when reading. A score of one indicated that the student read primarily in two-word phrases, with an occasional four-word phrase, very little smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and used very little or no stress while reading. A score of two indicated that the student read in mostly three or four-word phrases with some smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and mostly used the appropriate stress while reading. A score of three indicated that the student read primarily in larger meaningful phrases with smoothness, expression, use of punctuation, and appropriate stress on words while reading. On the pre-assessment one student scored a one, twelve students scored a two, and one student scored a three on the fluency scale on the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). This part of the assessment is the most difficult to score because, what one person may consider a three another person may consider a two. The best way to keep fluency scoring consistent was to have the same person assess for fluency each time, which was how this assessment was completed. None of the participants had a decrease in their fluency level. Nine of the participants remained at the same fluency level and five of the participants increased their fluency level throughout the duration of the study. This indicated that Readers' Theater helped increase some participants' fluency abilities while it maintained the other participants' fluency abilities.

The Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment Kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) was also used to assess words read correctly per minute for each participant. This assessment was completed while the participant was orally reading the text. I needed to use the number of words in the text, the number of words read incorrectly and correctly, and the amount of time it

took to read the passage to determine the number of words read correctly per minute. Twelve of the fourteen students increased their words read correctly per minute while two students had a decrease in words read correctly per minute. The decrease in words read correctly per minute may have been due in part by the increase in difficulty of the text. Even though the two participants decreased their words read correctly per minute they still increased their overall reading ability. This indicated that the use of Readers' Theater was able to increase participants' overall reading ability even if it did not increase the rate of their reading.

The final assessment piece which was completed by the participants was the reading fluency survey. This survey was used to let me know what the participants knew about fluency. Before the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention none of the participants were able to correctly define fluency. At the end of the intervention eleven of the fourteen participants were able to correctly define fluency. This increase in knowledge of what fluency was lets one know that the participants understood fluency and how to use it in their oral reading. The survey also provided insight into how the participants thought they could increase their fluency. On the pre intervention survey eleven of the fourteen thought they could just read more to increase their fluency. On the post intervention survey all fourteen students indicated they needed to practice reading with expression and smoothness to increase their fluency. Their knowledge of how to increase their fluency indicated that the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention succeeded in teaching the participants what fluency was and how to improve upon their own fluency.

In spite of the decrease in certain areas for some participants, the study confirms that using Readers' Theater to increase participants' fluency and comprehension was effective. When the participants were provided with a purpose for reading and the opportunity to reread a text

they were able to increase their fluency and comprehension abilities and over time transfer those skills over to other texts.

Strengths

Reflection on the research completed in this study revealed a number of strengths. First, the participants loved being in front of other classes of their peers to perform. As third graders they did not have the anxiety that some older participants may have had about performing for their peers. This motivation to perform increased their willingness to practice their parts multiple times. As the participants practiced their parts multiple times they became more fluent readers and more comfortable performing in front of other people. As the participants practiced their parts multiple times they became more fluent readers and more comfortable performing in front of other people.

Another strength of the study was the predictability of the schedule of events. The participants knew that they would receive a new script each Monday and would be expected to perform their script on Friday to the best of their ability. Oftentimes, Readers' Theater is used as an extra during reading time and there is no real time line set so the students do not practice as often and are not as motivated to learn the scripts. This is one of the main reasons why I felt this study had positive results.

The final strength of this study was that I was the researcher and the classroom teacher. This meant that I knew the best way to implement the Readers' Theater intervention, because of completed research and I knew the participant because I had already had the students in my class for two quarters of the school year. The fact that I knew the participants well helped me create the best possible Readers' Theater groups which made this a major strength.

Limitations

While the strengths of this study contributed to the outcomes that indicated its effectiveness, there were also a number of limitations. First, the duration of the intervention appeared to affect the participants' motivation at the end of the study. The participants really enjoyed and were excited about performing for their Readers' Theater pieces for their peers, but as the weeks went by the participants began to be less motivated to perform. One way to improve the motivation, I thought, would be to extend the length of the study to ten weeks and only do a new Readers' Theater every other week, which would provide the participants a week off every other week in hopes of improving their motivation.

Another limitation would be the lack of data collected before the pre-assessments were completed. This data could have indicated that the increase of reading levels was greater while implementing the Readers' Theater intervention than when the Readers' Theater intervention was not implemented. Since parental consent was not obtained before the October Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessments were completed, that data was not able to be included in this study. Being able to use this data could have reaffirmed the effectiveness of this intervention.

The third limitation was the lack of other class's knowledge of how to provide effective criticism. For this to occur the class audience would have needed to be instructed on how to provide effective criticism. Since Readers' Theater is not a school wide intervention in this school, not all of the audience members were knowledgeable of how to critique their classmates on how to improve.

The final limitation which was observed was the lack of a diverse population. All of the participants in the study were Caucasian and from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. To prove

the effectiveness of a Readers' Theater intervention there would have needed to be participants of other races and different socioeconomic backgrounds to indicate that it was a successful intervention for all students and not just Caucasian students. Even with these limitations the implementation of the Readers' Theater intervention still yielded positive results.

Recommendations for Further Research

While the results of this study appear encouraging, it is recommended that further research be conducted with a larger, more diverse sample. A larger more diverse sample would allow the results of the study to be generalized to the larger population and would offer more reliability. Also, implementing this study over a longer time period could potentially yield greater results.

Along with conducting more studies with more diverse participants and of a longer duration, further research might explore which age level this intervention would be most effective for. Would older or younger students benefit most from a Readers' Theater intervention? Would the coaching strategies change depending on the age level? Would the Readers' Theater scripts genres make a difference in the students' motivation to improve? The above questions would be viable questions to research to provide more data into the effectiveness of the implementation of a Readers' Theater intervention. Answers to the above questions would provide further insight to the effectiveness of Reader's Theater as an intervention for improving fluency and comprehension.

Finally, further research would need to be completed on the effectiveness of peer critics to prove the positive effects it could yield. Oftentimes, students are more motivated to make changes when a peer has provided the reason to change. However, this would require more than one classroom to implement Readers' Theater as an intervention and the students would need the

appropriate coaching on how to effectively critique their peers. Research into how to coach the students would be critical to the effectiveness of the results of this research.

Summary

Overall, the study confirmed that implementing a Readers' Theater intervention was an effective method to increase students' fluency and comprehension. While further research would be needed to confirm these findings across larger populations, the results are promising. Even though the study had noteworthy limitations, literacy instruction that incorporates the aforementioned instructional strategies has the potential to guide literacy teachers toward effectively instructing their students to increase their fluency and comprehension.

Appendix A

Student Fluency Survey

Name: _____

Directions: This is a survey to let me know how much you know about fluency. Answer the questions the best you can using complete sentences.

1. What is fluency?
2. Do you think you are a fluent reader? Why or why not?
3. Who do you think is a fluent reader? Why do you consider them a fluent reader?
4. What do you think you could do to make yourself a more fluent reader?

Appendix B

Recording Form

Student J. Johnson 3rd Date 1/4/12 Pre

Teacher L. Johnson School CES

Recording Form

Part One: Oral Reading

Place the book in front of the student. Read the title and introduction.

Introduction: Jill was running for class president. Read to find out what happened when she gave her campaign speech in the auditorium.

Instructional _____
 Fluency _____
 Accuracy _____
 Rate _____
 Self-Correction _____

Sources of Information Used

Page	Start Time ____ min. ____ sec.	The Election Level R, RW: 214	E	SC	E			SC				
					M	S	V	M	S	V		
1		Jill stood in front of her 6th grade class at King School, gazing out at a sea of faces. "As Abraham Lincoln once said," she began, and then her mind went completely blank. Her cheeks got hotter and hotter and she couldn't speak. As the audience stared at her, the walls seemed to swirl around and around. Jill squeezed her eyes shut to try to snap out of it. "Help!" she called out. "Jill? Honey? Are you all right?" Jill's mother asked, standing at the bedroom door.										
Subtotal												20

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Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2

Recording Form

The Election • LEVEL R • FICTION

Recording Forms

Part One: Oral Reading *continued*


Sources of Information Used

Page	Text	E	SC	E			SC		
				M	S	V	M	S	V
2	<p>Jill bolted upright in bed, feeling dazed.</p> <p>Jill nodded slowly. "I'm okay," ^{then} she said in an unconvincing voice.</p> <p>"What time is it?"</p> <p>"Time to get ready to deliver your speech for class president," her mother said, smiling.</p> <p>As the memory of her dream came flooding back, Jill felt a fresh wave of panic. "Mom, I don't know if I can do it. The thought of standing in front of all those people makes me feel sick!"</p> <p>Jill's mother sat <u>down</u> next to her and smiled. "You know, Jill, sometimes I have to give speeches at big meetings."</p> <p>Jill's mother was a heart surgeon, an</p>								
Subtotal				20					

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Part One: Oral Reading *continued*

Sources of Information Used

Page	Text	E	SC	E			SC		
				M	S	V	M	S	V
2 <i>cont.</i>	expert in her field. "I used to feel as frightened as you are now." Jill asked, "How did you get over your fears?"	1							
Subtotal		1	0						
 End Time 1 min. 23 sec.		Total	50						

Have the student finish reading the book silently.

Recording Form

The Election • LEVEL R • FICTION

Accuracy Rate	%	Below 95%	95%	96%	97%	98%	99%	100%
	Errors	12	10-11	8-9	6-7	4-5	1-3	0

Self-Corrections 0

Fluency Score 0 1 2 3

Fluency Scoring Key

- 0 Reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to author's meaning or punctuation; no stress or inappropriate stress, and slow rate.
- 1 Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- and four-word groups and some word-by-word reading; almost no smooth, expressive interpretation or pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; almost no stress or inappropriate stress, with slow rate most of the time.
- 2 Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups; some smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; mostly appropriate stress and rate with some slowdowns.
- 3 Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups; mostly smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns.

Reading Rate
(Optional)

End Time _____ min. _____ sec.
 Start Time _____ min. _____ sec.
 Total Time _____ min. _____ sec.
 Total Seconds _____

$(RW \times 60) \div \text{Total Seconds} = \text{Words Per Minute (WPM)}$
 $12,840 \div \underline{\hspace{1cm}} = \underline{154} \text{ WPM}$

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Part Two: Comprehension Conversation

Have a conversation with the student, noting the key understandings the student expresses. Use prompts as needed to stimulate discussion of understandings the student does not express. Score for evidence of all understandings expressed—with or without a prompt. Circle the number in the score column that reflects the level of understanding demonstrated.

Teacher: Talk about what happened in this story.

Comprehension Scoring Key

- 0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.
- 1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.
- 2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.
- 3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

Key Understandings	Prompts	Score
<p>Within the Text</p> <p>Tells 3–4 important events from the story, such as: <u>Jill was very nervous about her speech; her mom gave her the suggestion of looking at a friendly face; Jill imagined herself talking to her friend Eduardo; she got over being scared and gave a good speech.</u> <i>talked to a friend, dream + forget what to say</i></p> <p>Note any additional understandings:</p>	<p>What was Jill's problem in the story?</p> <p>How did she solve her problem?</p> <p>What else happened in the story?</p>	<p>0 1 2 3</p>
<p>Beyond the Text</p> <p>She was having nightmares because she was so scared of standing up in front of all of those people. <i>standing in front of people is scary</i></p> <p><u>Her mom could help because she had to learn to give speeches herself.</u></p> <p>Jill gave a good speech because she <u>looked at friendly faces</u> and also got excited about her ideas.</p> <p>Note any additional understandings:</p>	<p>Tell why Jill was scared.</p> <p>Why was her mom able to help her?</p> <p>What helped Jill give a good speech?</p>	<p>0 1 2 3</p>

Continued on next page.

Recording Form

Recording Forms

Part Two: Comprehension Conversation *continued*

Key Understandings	Prompts	Score
<p>About the Text</p> <p>The story started with Jill <u>having a dream</u> and then she woke up. It wasn't real. <u>about election - + forgot what to say</u></p> <p>Points out language like "<u>her cheeks got hotter and hotter</u>," or "a fresh wave of panic" to show how scared Jill was.</p> <p>The writer showed that Jill would be a good class president by giving details about her ideas for improvement.</p> <p><u>She tells them she will be a good class president</u></p> <p>Note any additional understandings:</p>	<p>Look at the beginning. What was happening in the first paragraph?</p> <p>Show a place in the book where the writer showed you how scared Jill was. How did this help you?</p> <p>How did the writer show you that Jill would be a good class president?</p>	<p>0 1 <u>2</u> 3</p>

Guide to Total Score
 9-10 Excellent Comprehension
 7-8 Satisfactory Comprehension
 5-6 Limited Comprehension
 0-4 Unsatisfactory Comprehension

Subtotal Score: 7 / 9

Add 1 for any additional understandings: 1

Total Score: 7 / 10

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Part Three: Writing About Reading *(optional)*

Read the writing/drawing prompt on the next page to the student. Specify the amount of time for the student to complete the task. (See *Assessment Guide* for more information.)

Writing About Reading

0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text.

1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text.

2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text.

3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text.

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