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# Using Reader's Theatre in Science and the Effects on Students' Content Knowledge, Fluency, and Comprehension

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Using Reader's Theatre in Science and the Effects on Students' Content  
Knowledge, Fluency, and Comprehension

by

James Guzielek

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

It was the third day in a row in which I had been asked the same question from the same group of students: “Mr. Guzielek, are we going to have science today?”

Unfortunately, this group of students was unaware of the school’s recent push for more ELA and math instruction in place of the content area instruction. I could not tell my students that science was not as important as ELA and math; although that was the message I was receiving from administration. Feeling their frustration, I knew that I had to work to implement content-based curriculum into our newly adopted routines. At this time, I decided that I would need to implement a reading strategy that targeted literacy goals and science curriculum goals.

### **Problem Statement**

When I began my teaching career five years ago, we were encouraged to schedule forty-five minutes per day to cover either the content in science or social studies. As each year passed, the amount of time that we were told to schedule for content-area instruction significantly decreased to a minimum of twenty-five minutes for content-area instruction within the school day. Although I understand and agree with the need for more instruction in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics, teachers were also being asked to integrate literacy instruction into their content times without the necessary resources. The Common Core learning standards have changed the instructional practices in schools throughout the country, demanding higher expectations and rigor, specifically in math and language arts (New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, 2010). According to the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy (2010), teachers should



instruct students to read purposefully and listen attentively, to increase discipline-specific knowledge within the content areas. Under this guide, teachers should utilize content area time as yet another opportunity to teach language arts skills, specifically reading and writing. The goal of common standards is to create consistency between classrooms. However, the lack of training for educators, as well as a lack in resources, resulted in inconsistent implementation and frustrated teachers. During the year of my study, my building was expected to roll out the standards with full execution. Teachers needed resources and instructional strategies to effectively integrate literacy into their content time and adhere to the Common Core Learning Standards. This was more apparent for me that year as I had changed grade levels and was covering new content. I struggled to find resources to benefit students' literacy growth, while also teaching the necessary content in social studies and science.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Many of the textbooks and other reading materials that I used to teach social studies and science were outdated, above the students' reading levels or not engaging for students. In order to understand the important information and master comprehension of these content-related texts, students often needed to re-read the texts multiple times. Re-reading is a reading strategy commonly used to promote fluency but was not best practice for ensuring higher-level comprehension. Presenting students with outdated and difficult resources led to frustration and certainly presented as an impossible task for a struggling readers who were still trying to decode unfamiliar words as they read.

According to Samuels (2006), educators want their students to understand what they have read. Students who struggle with decoding are presented with issues that

adversely affect their overall reading comprehension. For example, not having mastery of grade-level words or content-area vocabulary disrupts the fluency of the reader. This disruption to the flow of reading can interrupt a student's ability to maintain focus on the material and utilize reading comprehension strategies. Pressley, Gaskins and Fingeret (2006) point out that in order for meaningful comprehension to occur, readers need to be able to relate prior knowledge, summarize and interpret an author's ideas and reflect on what they are reading. Meaning is created when students engage in deep thinking while reading (Pressley, Gaskins and Fingeret). If a student can read words correctly, but does not know the meaning of the words, he or she will not understand what was read. According to Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2005), many students can appear to be reading in classrooms but are not actually reading. This was a common occurrence in my classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study and Study Approach**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of Reader's Theatre as an instructional strategy to promote fluency. Within their studies, Worthy and Prater (2002) and Martinez, Roser and Stecker (1999) discussed the impact Reader's Theatre had on students' fluency development and motivation to read. Readers' Theatre had a positive effect on both fluency and motivation in my classroom, yet the reading of the scripts required mastery of more than just those two skills. Neither Worthy and Prater or Martinez, Roser and Stecker measured reading comprehension in correlation to Readers' Theatre. Rasinski and Hamman (2010) discussed how reading fluency has become a speed-reading contest, divorced from the essences of reading comprehension. I wanted to

discover if there are more benefits to using Reader's Theatre than just increasing fluency and motivation. Therefore, in my study I focused on the following question:

What observable effect does including Reader's Theatre in science have on the content knowledge, fluency, and overall comprehension of five fifth grade students?

I investigated the areas of content knowledge, fluency, and overall comprehension by using Reader's Theatre to support my science curriculum. As I stated earlier in this chapter, students need to read for meaning to have an overall understanding of what is being read, which is why I included comprehension in my study. Most of the articles that I found on Reader's Theatre only briefly mentioned comprehension, such as the study by Young and Rasinski (2009), which only discussed student achievement on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Dowhower (1987) and Pikulski (2005) both found a direct relationship that exists between fluency and comprehension, finding that without accurate and automatic word reading, the reader is unable to decipher the author's intended message. Thus, I included fluency in my study, despite the vast amount of research that indicated an increase in fluency as a result of utilizing Reader's Theatre. Rasinski and Hamman (2010) concluded that since the norm reading rate has dramatically increased from 2004 to 2009, fluency instruction has been focused on speed of reading rate and not making meaning of the text. Therefore, I explored the connection between reading rate and comprehension. Through my study, I measured students' fluency and comprehension of science related texts, including Reader's Theatre.

During my study I used the Curriculum-Based Reader's Theatre (CBRT) method in which scripts were created based on curriculum topics and had an emphasis on informing and entertaining through dialogue (Flynn, 2005). Flynn (2005) discussed the

process of the rehearsal for Reader's Theatre as an equation that I tested through my own research. The equation consists of reading + recitation + repetition + review = retention (Flynn, 2005, p. 362). By using this process I was able to observe the effects on the students' content knowledge and comprehension of what they were reading. To obtain the students' baseline information, prior to teaching the unit, I conducted pre-assessments of their content knowledge and then again assessed this knowledge at the end of the unit. The assessment included the readings of Reader's Theatre scripts. When I used the CBRT method, I incorporated a writing component into this unit by having students write a Reader's Theatre script to present information to the rest of the students. I included this so that this unit could align with the Common Core Standards of incorporating both reading and writing into the curriculum areas. For my data collection methods, I used a rubric to measure the students' fluency, which was based on the six dimensions of fluency that Fountas and Pinnell have noted as important components leading to fluent reading (Fountas and Pinnell, 2007). I also used a second rubric that was modified from the book *Mosaic of Thought*, and focused on each student's overall comprehension of the Reader's Theatre script they read (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997).

For my study, I used this method with the whole class but only reported my findings on a small selection of students from my classroom. Of the five students I included in the study, I selected two students who were struggling readers, two on-grade-level readers who struggled with content understanding, and one student who was an above-grade-level reader yet had difficulty with fluent reading.

**Rationale**

This was an important study to conduct because of the need to integrate the content areas with reading and writing applications. I have used Reader's Theatre in the past for both reading instruction and I have also used Reader's Theatre during our writing workshop time. I have had great success with the implementation of this instructional strategy and have noticed a growth in the students' fluency and motivation. Students who enjoy drama and the content areas also enjoyed participating in Reader's Theatre activities. In addition, I wanted to see if Reader's Theatre had any observable effects on students' comprehension and content knowledge and whether this instructional strategy was something I wanted to continue implementing in my content instruction.

Reader's Theatre was a strategy that I wanted to learn more about and integrate into my content time. Reader's Theatre is meaningful, authentic reading that requires repeated readings of literature for the purpose of conveying meaning to an audience (Casey and Chamberlain, 2006). Rehearsing and performing scripts for peers provides an authentic purpose for reading (Hudson, Lane and Pullen, 2005). Since our outdated textbooks did not provide authentic reading experiences, I was eager to use Reader's Theatre to make content more engaging and significant. Instead of using props or costumes to portray a story, the message was conveyed through the readers' expression and intonation. According to Samuels (2006), Reader's Theatre gives students a "real-life" reason to do repeated readings. By using this strategy, I found that students wanted to do repeated readings, which in turn increased their fluency and overall content knowledge of the text.

**Summary**

At the time of the study, teachers were being asked to find new and creative ways to integrate more reading and writing activities into their content instruction. The combination of the content and literacy has been discussed for many years, but was really coming into play with the new Common Core Standards that were and continue to be implemented in New York State and throughout the country. Rasiniski (2000) called Reader's Theatre a "natural and authentic way to promote repeated readings" (p. 148). These repeated readings were necessary for students to fully understand the content they were reading and learning about. This study served as an opportunity to assess if incorporating Reader's Theatre into a science curriculum had any observable effects on a student's content knowledge, fluency, and overall comprehension. The study offered students a chance to read, practice, perform, review new information and retain more of the content being taught.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Throughout my five years of teaching and the time I have spent working on my Master's in childhood literacy, I have been able to experience true praxis, as I implement the theories I have read about in the my own classroom. Both the College at Brockport and my school district have highly regarded the research of particular authors, encouraging us to adopt their theories or strategies as part of our classroom practices. This continuity between my master's education and my school district's philosophies on literacy education has allowed me to grow in my understanding of literacy development through my first hand experiences in my daily classroom instruction.

This study is an investigation of the use of Reader's Theatre within a science curriculum. I will review literature on four main subsections, which include Reader's Theatre, fluency, content area literacy, and comprehension. In each of these subsections I will discuss current research and findings.

### **Reader's Theatre**

Reader's Theatre is an instructional strategy, where students rehearse a poem, joke, story, script, or any appropriate text so they may perform it fluently in front of an audience (Worthy and Prater, 2002). Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) reported on different studies, indicating that rehearsing and performing scripts for peers provided an authentic purpose for reading. Instead of using props or costumes to portray a story, the message is conveyed only through the reader's expression and intonation.

Reader's Theatre provides children with the repetitive practice, which is an important part of increasing fluency (Worthy and Prater, 2002). Repetition results in less

processing time for decoding words and helps support comprehension (Rasinski, 2004). Kuhn suggests that readers need practice because those who have to spend a significant amount of time decoding will not pay close attention to comprehension (2004/2005). Pressley (2000) agreed with Kuhn and stated the more effort required to decode a word, the less likely the child will be able to comprehend. Rinehart (1999) reported on a study, conducted by graduate students, which focused on the benefits of using reader's theater with elementary students facing serious reading problems. The graduate students developed methods for introducing, creating, practicing and performing reader's theater scripts. Students participated in the selection process, as well as writing the scripts, based on familiar stories. Students practiced by reading the scripts repeatedly, before performing them in front of an audience. The findings concluded that even beginning readers are able to read at higher levels of fluency on targeted text, when exposed to reader's theater, especially when support and practice are part of the routine. The researchers also found that several children were able to orally read beyond their previously determined instructional levels (Rinehart, 1999).

Reader's Theatre is an instructional strategy that is effective for all students, if opportunities are given for modeling, repeated practice, and independent practice (Worthy and Prater, 2002). Reader's Theatre allows students to hear what fluent reading should sound like and is an authentic assessment of a child's ability to read fluently. Garrett and O'Conner (2010) studied the implementation of reader's theater in three elementary schools, across four classroom settings, to assess if special education teachers perceived reader's theater as an effective reading intervention strategy. One kindergarten teacher implemented Reader's Theater in her inclusive classroom as an enrichment-



activity during center-time, where students participated in practice sessions everyday for ten minutes. In other self-contained classrooms, teachers needed to provide targeted Reader's Theater instruction, as well as differentiated scripts and objectives to accommodate readers of varying levels. The study used benchmark data from initial reading, fluency and comprehension scores to see if there was improvement after receiving exposure to Reader's Theatre. The average gain in overall reading performance was 8 levels. The approximate performance for students without disabilities is 10 to 12 levels, within the course of a school year. Exposure to Reader's Theater also yielded a year's growth in fluency and reading comprehension in the students assessed during the study. Reader's Theater is an opportunity for all students to participate in authentic literacy experiences that can lead to successful reading experiences (Garrett and O'Conner, 2010).

Incorporating Reader's Theatre into a literacy framework can be motivating for all students, including those who are shy or resistant to reading. According to Samuels (2006) Reader's Theatre gives students a "real-life" reason to do repeated readings. Using Reader's Theatre allows any child to perform including those who are rarely given opportunities to read aloud. Due to the varying levels and lengths of parts, children are given some choice in selecting a part that they will feel comfortable practicing and performing in front of their peers. Children are able to work in a cooperative setting where they can interact with each other and actively participate. This may ease their anxiety level and build a positive attitude about reading. Vygotsky (1978) discusses the theory of social interaction, suggesting that children not only *develop*, but are *developed* by others.

According to Samuels (2006) Reader's Theatre gives students a "real-life" reason to do repeated re-readings. Tyler and Chard (2002) argued Reader's Theatre is more interactive and engaging than using repeated re-readings of narrative text. Tyler and Chard also stated that some children feel reading short passages to be "tedious, lonely, and laborious" (p. 166) especially for struggling readers. Worthy and Broaddus (2001/2002) agreed with Tyler and Chard and stated children could get the impression that reading is all about saying the words correctly and not about making meaning or understanding the information within the Reader's Theatre.

Reader's Theatre in a content area can motivate young children. Students who enjoy drama and the content areas may also enjoy Reader's Theatre (Worthy and Prater, 2002/Flynn, 2005). Curriculum-Based Reader's Theatre provides students with the opportunity to learn content areas such as math, science, and social studies (Flynn, 2005). Students are able to use their own background knowledge as they increase fluency, comprehension, and content understandings. Such activities supplement conceptual knowledge while incorporating a student's interests.

When including Reader's Theatre into the content areas, the teacher is providing the students with an authentic task to learn about the new content being presented. Parsons and Ward (2011) stated that a well-designed task will build productive understandings of what content literacy is and why it is useful. Another reason to include Reader's Theatre is the explicit use of content vocabulary within the script being presented. The students will be using the words to convey meaning to the audience, while also learning the meaning of each important vocabulary word. Gee (2004) declared academic vocabulary is best understood when meaning is created through experience.

Teachers can help students create meaning through authentic tasks that encourage content understanding because students are using academic language in a meaningful way.

Many students with various reading abilities would benefit by using Reader's Theatre in their classroom. Research has supported the use of Reader's Theatre as an instructional strategy for improving many different aspects of the reading process. This strategy provides repetition for students and also motivates and engages students within a cooperative setting.

### **Fluency**

Fluency is an essential aspect of reading (Worthy and Prater, 2002, Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, and Fountas, 2005, and Hudson, Lane, and Pullen, 2005). Nevertheless, a common definition of fluency has yet to be established. Corcoran (2005) described fluency as the ability to read a text with speed and accuracy. This definition does not capture aspects that other authors have found necessary to become a fluent reader. Young and Rasinski (2009) take the above definition and apply other key vocabulary terms that are prevalent when discussing fluency instruction. These authors imply that that automaticity and prosody are interregal features to fluent reading. Young and Rasinski use automaticity to refer to the ability of a proficient reader to read words in a text correctly and effortlessly so that they can attend to the meaning while reading. They also include prosody in their definition of fluency, as the ability to read text with appropriate expression and phrasing. In other words, fluency should simply sound like natural speech. The major difference between these two definitions of fluency is pace. Corcoran (2005) focused on students reading through the passage fast and accurately, while Young and Rasinski (2009) stressed the importance of students reading the text at

an appropriate pace so that they could interact and understand the text. A third definition of fluency encompasses what the other authors were saying,

Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody, which taken together, facilitate the reader's construction of meaning. It is demonstrated during oral reading through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing, and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit and support comprehension. (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Messinger, Levy, Rasinski, 2010).

The authors describe the process it takes to become a fluent reader and emphasize the purpose of any type of reading is to make meaning and understanding of the text.

A fluent reader is one who is not easily distracted and reads in an effortless or flowing manner (Worthy and Prater, 2002). Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) agree with Worthy and Prater and point out a fluent reader can sustain reading for longer periods of time, retain skills after a period of not practicing, and transfer fluency across text. A number of core components to reading are included within the fluency process, making fluency a valuable and significant reading skill. (Worthy and Broaddus, 2001/2002).

The core components in fluent reading include pitch, stress, juncture, natural intonation, and phrasing, which are all areas of prosody and support comprehension (Richards, 2000). Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) state prosody is the "music" of oral language. Reading phrases that represent meaning instead of reading word-by word is an important part of being a prosodic reader (Dowhower, 1987). For example a student who has poor prosody may read a sentence as follows:

"The/smart/boy/liked/to/read/books/about/cars." A student who has good prosody would read the same sentence in a more fluent way. For example; "The smart boy/liked to read

books/about cars.” In this case, the reader may read words in clumps, instead of phrases, without intonation or variations in voice. Allington (2006) stated this sounds “awkward” and it is important for the teacher to make prosodic reading a necessary part of instruction.

Young and Rasinki (2009) conducted action research on using Reader's Theater as part of a balanced literacy program in a second grade classroom with a wide-variety of reading levels. District and state reading assessments were used to determine and measure reading levels, including the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) that measured accuracy and comprehension along with automaticity and prosody. Young and Rasinki also used the Texas Primary Reading Inventory to measure reading rate and prosody. One on-grade level reading passage was used as a pre and post assessment at the beginning and end of the school year. He taught mini-lesson on reader's theater, in addition to a balanced literacy program and had daily activities to accompany reader's theater goals throughout the week. For example, on Monday students familiarized themselves with a new reader's theater script and had no defined roles. On Tuesday, students chose their roles and practiced reading their scripts. On Wednesday students dissected the text to interpret meaning and understanding of unfamiliar words. Students also participated in coral reading on Wednesday. Students rehearsed the scripts on Thursday, with teacher coaching. On Friday, students performed their reader's theatre script. Friday was called, “Fluency Friday” (Young and Rasinski, 2009). The results of Young using reader's theatre in his classroom showed that students gained an average of 64 words per minute, while speed was not an initial goal, students in his classroom clearly showed gains in automaticity. His students also showed a 20 percent overall

improvement in prosody and made gains in their DRA level, at an average of 11 levels. Readers' theatre, as part of the literacy program had an impact on this improvement, specifically through the use of repeated readings.

Rasinski and Hamman (2010) refer to a survey completed by reading experts which found that reading fluency is "Not Hot," even though the same people surveyed recognized fluency as a critical element in successful reading instruction. Rasinski and Hamman concluded that since the norm reading rate has drastically increased from 2004 to 2009, fluency instruction has been focused on speed of reading rate and not making meaning of the text. Therefore, fluency instruction should remain a "Not Hot" topic until the goal of a fluent reader becomes reading at an appropriate rate, with prosody and comprehension.

Although, fluency instruction is not a "hot topic," fluency assessment continues to be a part of many standardized reading assessments. Samuels (2006) suggests that poor decoding and vocabulary knowledge are the leading factors that disrupt the fluency of reading. Therefore, Samuels supports decoding and vocabulary instruction as a means to increasing fluency. One assessment that is prevalent now is the Fountas and Pinnell *Benchmark Assessment System* (2007). Using this kit, the teacher is supposed to rate the students on a one to three scale, based on the fluency-scoring key that is provided. One benefit of the Fountas and Pinnell kit is that teachers are allowed to make judgments on whether to include a reading rate, which is calculated by timing the students during reading. Fountas and Pinnell have created an assessment that incorporates the entire reading process, with the main focus on comprehension of the text. More assessments

that maintain focus on the whole reading process are needed, opposed to assessments that only measure reading speed.

When thinking about fluency instruction in the classroom a teacher should consider that although fluency instruction can be effective, motivation to engage the students is usually low for both the students and teacher (Worthy and Prater, 2002). The teacher is responsible for getting the students engaged in meaningful ways to practice their reading fluency. Garrett and O'Connor (2010) suggest that one way to motivate students is to provide them with authentic participation in re-reading texts-in contrast to the traditional skill and drill approaches. One way to engage students, while developing their fluency growth, is through the use of Reader's Theatre.

### **Content Area Literacy**

Integrating targeted reading instruction within science content is an effective and efficient way to support both reading and science curriculum (McDonald et al, 2010). Moss (2005) discussed that a push for more content literacy comes from standards based education, an emphasis on standardized test performance and technology. The Common Core Standards (CCS) began implementation in New York State during the 2012-2013 school year. As I mentioned in chapter one of this study, a shift in the standards means teacher must focus more of their content time on reading, writing, listening and speaking to gain discipline-expertise. Proponents of the CCS have stated that the focus on developing reading skills and building fluency with narrative texts needs to move more towards reading and writing to gain knowledge and express new understandings with informational text (Brozo, 2010). This shift has also affected the pressure that has been put on teachers to raise standardized test scores. With more focus placed on

informational texts in the standardized tests, the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (2003) collected data stating as much as 50% of state assessments involved reading of informational texts, teachers have had to spend more time and place a great emphasis on informational text in their teaching. The third point that Moss made about the content literacy push being made has to do with technology. Students using the Internet must move through a lot of information quickly while being able to understand what they are reading, with most of the text being in the form of expository genre.

The amount of exposure to expository literature our students have both in and out of school, has required another shift in the definition of content area literacy, which used to be referred to as content area reading. This term previously focused only on the reading aspect of content and the idea of reading to learn (McKenna and Robinson, 1990). The term then changed to content area literacy because it was focused on both reading and writing to learn. Content area literacy also refers to all literacies, including internet sites, e-mail, and messaging (Moss, 2005). Reed and Vaughn (2012) propose teaching reading comprehension in all content areas. The authors argue that a different set of comprehension skills is necessary to effectively interpret text in math, science and social studies. In addition, the authors urge content area teachers to adapt reading comprehension strategies and incorporate them into their content-related lessons. For example, teachers should explicitly teach content vocabulary, provide comprehension skill instruction and increase the number of extended discussions about words and texts (p. 30).

McDonald et. al (2010) conducted a four-month study to explore whether integrating comprehension strategies within science content could be an effective way to



support student achievement in science and literacy. The researchers studied the individualized instruction of eighty-seven students within five second grade classrooms in Florida. Students were presented with a six science units that included a series of five lessons, with each lesson lasting three to six days. The lessons were structured to support inquiry-based instruction, class discussions, and the use of expository text. The students were placed in flexible groups to best meet all of their needs, particularly those students needing additional scaffolding. Teachers agreed that it made the most sense to place students in groups with peers with similar reading comprehension and oral reading fluency. Reading material for each group was differentiated and came from the Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading curriculum (McDonald et. al, 2010). All students recorded observations and stored resource materials within a scientist notebook. Students had explicit teaching in how to read expository text, specifically attending to features of non-fiction. In addition, teachers taught decoding strategies through the use of these texts. Each lesson format followed the following structure: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluation. Students were assessed using a science knowledge unit test that followed each of the six units taught during the study. The test consisted of 12 multiple choice questions and three open-ended response questions. Through their research, they found a 30% increase in the science content questions answered correctly following the implementation of this intervention. In addition, students made gains in their science understanding, as measured by the open-ended response questions for the units taught during the intervention. Overall, students who began the units with weaker science and literacy skills made gains in both science and literacy that were comparable to students with stronger skills at the beginning of the units.

The Common Core Standards suggest that proficient reading and writing can only be achieved through a curriculum that is “coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades” (CCS, 2010, p. 10). Brozo (2010) describes the shift as a transformation from the development of reading skills to gaining knowledge and building cognition through reading. Hall (2005) conducted a year-long case study, which examined the effects of implementing direct reading instruction within content-related classes at the middle school level. The results of the study suggest that a student’s level of engagement with content-related texts is influenced by the way in which the student perceives themselves as a reader. Hall (2005) determined that struggling readers are more likely to experience difficulties in content-area classes because of their struggles with reading comprehension. In the end, they discovered that none of the students improved as readers of content-area texts in the classroom in which they were tested. This lack of growth is linked to how each student saw themselves as a reader. The study suggests that in order for students to be competent in content-related texts in elementary school and beyond, they need to have adequate reading comprehension skills and confidence in themselves to read content-related texts. Perhaps the students within this study did not demonstrate growth in content-based curriculum because this study mostly examined their perceptions of themselves as readers and neglected to look at other aspects of reading, specifically targeted areas of reading comprehension.

With this transformation and use of more informational texts, teachers need to remember and focus their instruction by using authentic tasks during content. Dewey (1938) suggests that students should be active participants in academic work. In other words, students need to understand the importance of content area literacy to not only

comprehend the text they are reading but also to show them content literacy is a worthwhile task (Parsons and Ward, 2011) Incorporating Reader's Theatre into content area literacy sets a purpose for reading about the content.

### **Comprehension**

The purpose of reading is to understand. Researchers have varying definitions of comprehension and different ideas on how to approach teaching reading comprehension skills. Pressley, Gaskins, Fingeret (2006) assert that for meaningful comprehension to occur, readers need to be able to relate prior knowledge, summarize and interpret an author's idea, and reflect on what is being read. In order to ensure adequate comprehension, Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, and Fountas (2005) described that learning to comprehend is an ongoing process that expands across different texts, in different ways, for different purposes. They also mention that students do not first learn to decode and then become readers; they must be engaged in reading, thinking about and discussing interesting texts from the beginning. Reading comprehension encompasses other fundamental skills that need to be addressed within a comprehensive comprehension framework. For example, Keehn, Harmon & Shoho (2008) stress the importance of vocabulary and fluency in promoting reading comprehension meaning across a variety of texts.

In their study, Keehn et al. (2008) investigated the use of Reader's Theater among struggling readers in middle school to determine if this strategy had any effect on reading comprehension. Thirty-six eighth grade students participated in the six-week study that occurred in two reading classes taught by the same instructor. The researcher and the classroom teacher collaborated to select six short stories that could be formatted in a

Reader's Theatre and aligned with student interest. The researchers developed the Reader's Theatre scripts, based on the short stories and targeted vocabulary words were italicized in the scripts. The teacher followed a weekly plan for Reader's Theater intervention. A vocabulary pre-test was administered on the first day and the teacher modeled expressive reading of the story and discussed vocabulary. On the second, third and fourth days, students practiced reading the scripts while the teacher coached and monitored time on task. The fifth day consisted of a vocabulary post test and performance of the script. Comprehension was measured with the Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory. The study revealed major findings in regard to reading level, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Specific to comprehension, the researchers determined that students that received the Reader's Theatre intervention demonstrated higher levels of comprehension than the comparison. The results were almost double that of the comparison group in the area of comprehension. According to the results of this study, students that participate in Reader's Theatre show increases in their overall reading growth. The researches attribute this growth to the increased time on task, specifically devoted to the reading of a text an extended period of time.

A growing body of research suggests that explicit reading instruction, specifically in the area of reading comprehension, should occur past the elementary level. (Trabasso and Bouchard (2002) assert that effective strategic reading instruction for middle school students can prompt students to activate prior knowledge and monitor their comprehension of text (as cited in Radcliffe, Caverly, Hand & Franke, 2008). Radcliffe et al. (2008) conducted a five-month study to assess the effectiveness of introducing a targeted reading comprehension strategy into a sixth grade science classroom. The

researchers investigated the PLAN (predict, locate, add, note) approach as a means for determining if implementing this strategy had any direct effects on helping students learn science. The study included pretests and posttests to evaluate learning and the perceptions of students that used the PLAN strategy compared to students who did not learn to use PLAN. 50 sixth-grade students participated in the study, including a science teacher with over 30 years of experience. The researchers used teacher interviews and questionnaires as a means for assessing the instructor's perceptions of the effectiveness of the PLAN strategy. The PLAN strategy was introduced to the science classes in place of the silent reading strategy. There were three phases of the study, which included the preparation stage, implementation state and the adaptation state. According to the comprehension posttest scores, students that received instruction on the PLAN approach outperformed their peers that did not receive this targeted instruction. The instructor reported that students who participated in the PLAN approach became more independent as readers and were able to complete more of the reading as homework. In addition, the instructor indicated that the PLAN strategy was a useful tool for students to use so that they are better able to understand the science text.

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) and Harvey and Goudvis (2000) recommend that each strategy, such as Reader's Theatre, should be taught until students use them independently and flexibly. One note that should be made about teaching explicit strategies is the teacher needs to be continually re-emphasizing the use of other strategies that have been taught and how they are using the new strategy along with the others they have previously learned about. Alvermann, Swafford, and Montero (2004) mention that learning to use comprehension strategies is not an all or nothing proposition and that

strategic readers continue to develop their use of strategies more efficient and effectively throughout their lives.

### **Summary**

In this literature review, I discussed four main elements (Reader's Theatre, Fluency, Content Literacy and Comprehension) that are important to find current research to help guide my study for the following research question: What observable effects does including Reader's Theatre in science have on the fluency, content knowledge, and overall comprehension of five fifth grade students? Each of these areas has plays a significant role in literacy instruction. I believe that including each of these important literacy elements into my current research will be beneficial to not only completing my study, but these elements will be useful for my students to use on a regular basis. I am looking forward to completing this research study into my science curriculum.

### **Chapter 3: Study Design**

Content-area time can be a valuable resource for providing instruction that supports literacy skills. Literacy development occurs across the curriculum and can be cultivated in various ways, even during science instruction.

This study took place during my 30-minute science instructional block. I incorporated Reader's Theatre by practicing, reviewing, and performing Reader's Theatre scripts based on the unit of study we covered in science. Students had an opportunity to read the scripts, pull out important content information, and perform scripts to show their understanding of the content knowledge. The participants were four fifth grade students from a public school and the study was conducted over a five-week period. Multiple measures were used during data collection to assess fluency, comprehension and content knowledge within a science unit of study.

#### **Research Question**

My methods and procedures were constructed to answer the following research question:

- What observable effect does including Reader's Theatre in science have on the content knowledge, fluency, and overall comprehension of five fifth grade students?

#### **Participants and Context**

The study was conducted in my fifth grade classroom, within a suburban school district in western New York State. This Title I school had a diverse population of students, in regard to both racial background and socio-economic status. Many of the students received free or reduced lunch.

During the study, there were 19 students in my classroom, which included twelve girls and seven boys. The study was conducted using Reader's Theatre with the entire classroom, but I self-selected a sample of five students from the larger group after receiving parental consent. The selected students were asked for their assent before data collection began. The sample included two readers who were below grade level, two readers that were reading at grade level, and one student who was reading above grade level.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

At the time of the study, I had been teaching for five years in the district and school in which I conducted the study. Throughout my time at the school, I was a third, fourth and fifth grade classroom teacher. In addition to teaching, I was completing my master's degree at SUNY College at Brockport in childhood literacy during the time of the study.

### **Procedures of the Study**

Upon approval from administration and parental consent, I randomly selected five students from a selection of sixteen. Prior to selecting the five students, the class had been placed in three reading groups based on reading ability. The selection of students for the study included two students from the below level reading group, two students from the on-level reading group and one from the above-level group.

Prior to beginning the study, each participant completed a multiple-choice pretest with ten questions related to the science unit. This assessment measured their science content knowledge. I also collected data by using a rubric that measured fluency and one that measured comprehension. I took anecdotal notes and used multiple-choice quizzes.



Each week, students read a specific content-based Reader's Theater passage, which I scored using the fluency and comprehension rubrics. In addition, each student was assigned to a group, where they were given roles in a reader's theatre script. I observed these groups throughout the week, listening to students read aloud. During these times, I would write notes regarding their oral reading. At the end of the week, I analyzed the students' final reading of the Reader's Theatre script and their re-reading of the passage presented at the beginning of the week. Rubrics were used at the end of the week to track progress of oral reading on the reading passage and Reader's Theatre script as well as comprehension. Comprehension of the content knowledge was also assessed through a multiple-choice quiz, given at the end of the week.

To integrate Reader's Theatre, students read pre-made scripts based on the unit we were studying and practiced their parts to learn their specific lines. The participants then used the scripts to pull out important information about the unit. At the end of the week, they performed these scripts for each other.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

During this study, I used several data collection techniques to investigate the research question. I gathered data from rubrics, observations and summative assessments. One of the rubrics assessed oral fluency. This was used when students read a Reader's Theater script aloud. The other rubric measured comprehension of a content specific passage and was scored based on the student's understanding of the passage. At the beginning of the study, students took a pre-assessment of content that was going to be taught. The students also completed a weekly quiz based on the content that was taught

throughout the week, along with a final assessment of all the material covered during the five-week unit.

### **Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Kit**

I used the *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment kit* (Fountas and Pinnell 2007) to assess the reading levels of all students in the classroom. I then selected participants to use for the study, based on their reading results. I tested each student individually. After each student read a text, we engaged in a comprehension conversation. I asked students specific questions that were located in the book and questions that required them to use inferential thinking skills. The conversation was broken up into the different sections that I discussed with each student. Post conversation, I selected a score based on their responses and understanding of the text. The students were scored in three areas: within the text, beyond the text and about the text. I first asked students to provide a summary, including specific details from the text. Next, I prompted students with questions that required them to connect their background knowledge with what they had read within the text. Finally, students were asked to discuss the text layout and I asked students questions about the choices the author made in constructing the text. Each session lasted between 20 to 40 minutes for one student. At the end of a conversation, I assigned points for each of the three sections, with a possible total of nine points. The score indicated if the student had excellent, proficient, limited, or no understanding of the text. Within this assessment, the students also received a self-correction rate, which measured their ability to monitor their reading. In addition to measuring their comprehension, I assigned a fluency score for each text. The fluency score was based on their oral reading and the scores ranged from one to three.

The kit provided rubrics for all scores, which included detailed descriptions of the indicators needed to achieve specific scores. I used this kit as a measure for assessing comprehension levels.

### **Six Dimensions Fluency Rubric**

I used a Fountas and Pinnell fluency rubric, named “Six Dimensions Fluency Rubric” to measure pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate and integration of oral reading. Students read a content-related Reader’s Theatre passage at the beginning of the week and I used the rubric to assess their abilities in each category. The scores ranged from one to four within each category, one was the lowest score and indicated the most need for intensive teaching and four was the highest score on the rubric. A score of a four in any of the six categories showed mastery of that particular fluency sub-skill. The rubric was used at the beginning and the end of the week to analyze the oral reading fluency of the same passage. I circled the score on each student’s individual rubric and stored the rubrics in their assessment folder. While looking closely at their fluency rubrics, I choose to focus on phrasing, intonation and integration because these sub skills relate more to skills necessary for reading Reader’s Theatre. Phrasing refers to way readers put words together in groups, intonation is the way readers change the tone, pitch and volume of their voice to reflect meaning and integration involves the way a reader consistently orchestrates rate, intonation and stress (Fountas and Pinnell, 2007).

### **Comprehension Rubric**

I used the “Comprehension Rubric” from *Mosaic of Thought* (1997) to measure visualization, inferring, determining what is important in the text and synthesizing. The rubric was developed with a one to five rating scale, where one is the lowest and five is

the highest score a student can receive in each category. I choose three sub-categories to closely examine within my study, which included inferring, determining what is important in the text and synthesizing. I chose these areas because they are considered to be higher-level comprehension skills that are often assessed in fifth grade to determine mastery of the content. At the beginning of each week, I asked students questions about the passage that they read aloud. I used the same passage to assess fluency and comprehension. For each passage, I asked each participant the same questions and assessed their oral responses, using the Comprehension Rubric. The assessment was more conversational, similar to the Fountas and Pinnel benchmark assessment that students were already familiar with. The questions were developed to elicit responses that could be assessed by using the skills outlined in the Comprehension Rubric.

### **Content-Related Quizzes**

I created and administered weekly multiple-choice quizzes based on the science content covered throughout the week. The quizzes consisted of seven questions and one written response. Each question was worth one point. The quiz was given to each participant and the other students in the class. The questions assessed content knowledge and comprehension of all reading material they had been exposed to throughout the week.

### **Anecdotal Records and Observations**

Throughout the study, I kept detailed notes on each of the participants. I met with each student two times per week to listen to them read the script and wrote notes on their fluency. I also recorded notes on their level of engagement, enthusiasm and comprehension. I shared these notes with the students so that they could monitor their progress and determine goals for the next week. These notes helped inform my

instruction for each student and gave each of them guidance on the areas to focus on while they were practicing their scripts or other readings.

### **Trustworthiness**

There has been a lot of research conducted on Reader's Theatre and the affects it has on fluency. Most studies indicate that growth in fluency is an effect of Reader's Theatre, yet much of the research neglects to incorporate comprehension. Since I conducted my study in the area of science, I focused on each participant's comprehension of the information presented and their overall content knowledge. The outcomes of this study have proven useful to my practice, as we are being asked to integrate more reading and writing activities into the different content areas. Flynn used this Curriculum Based Design of Reader's Theatre and had much success, but she was more focused on the process of using it and I collected actual data around this strategy to see either the benefits or limitations of using such a technique. I used data collection methods that came from prominent figures in the literacy community. Fountas and Pinnell have published many books, articles, and resources that are very beneficial to learning about literacy and helping teachers with resources that are useful in the classroom. Rasinski has published many articles pertaining to fluency and has stated the positive effects that Reader's Theatre has on student's fluency growth. Keene and Zimmerman published a book called Mosaic of Thought, which has many different strategies and resources pertaining to comprehension instruction.

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study, which include the difficulty of determining the influence of Reader's Theatre when other factors contributed to each participant's growth in comprehension and fluency. Since I used this strategy in the content areas, I did not teach comprehension and fluency strategies in isolation. It was hard to determine whether growth in fluency and comprehension could be attributed to the work completed during content area times, language arts time or a combination of the two.

### **Summary**

During my 30-minute content block, I implemented Reader's Theatre to integrate reading and writing into a science unit. Through the procedures and data collection methods mentioned above, I studied the effects of using this teaching technique on each participant's content knowledge, fluency development, and overall comprehension. From this study, I determined that that this technique is something I want to continue using in the future, along with gathering essential data, which will help guide my instruction.

### Chapter 4: Findings

Within a five-week time span, I introduced twenty students to a non-fiction Reader's Theatre based on current science-related subject matter; they rehearsed and performed these scripts; and I analyzed the fluency and comprehension of five students. The purpose of this research was to observe the effectiveness of implementing Reader's Theatre into science as a means to increasing content knowledge, fluency and comprehension. I targeted fluency, comprehension and content knowledge through various instructional procedures, including modeling, small group instruction and independent practice, as described in Chapter 3.

The study occurred in my fifth grade classroom, where I am the primary instructor for all subject areas. I was the sole researcher in this study. I investigated the following research question:

- What observable effects does including Reader's Theater in science have on the content knowledge, fluency and overall comprehension of five fifth grade students?

On May 7, 2012, following the approval of each participant's parents and school administration, I implemented Reader's Theater in science instruction and collected data over a five week period.

Reader's Theatre allowed students to find an authentic purpose for practicing their oral reading, and I discovered that students took a more active interest in the science content. One interesting finding was that students that were previously reluctant to read aloud were eager to practice and perform Reader's theatre in front of peers. The addition of the Reader's Theatre performance piece appealed to some students, offering an

alternate modality to reading aloud. Two students in the study chose to write their own Reader's Theatre script, based on the content in science. Five students in the class, but not participants in the study, began writing Reader's Theatre scripts across disciplines and without prompting.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

#### **Fluency Rubric**

I used a Fountas and Pinnell fluency rubric, named "Six Dimensions Fluency Rubric" to measure pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate and integration of oral reading. When students read a content-related Reader's Theatre passage at the beginning of the week, I used the rubric to assess their abilities in each category. Scores ranged from one to four within each category, one was the lowest score and indicated the most need for intensive teaching and four was the highest score on the rubric. A score of a four in any of the six categories showed mastery of that particular fluency sub-skill. The rubric was used at the beginning and the end of the week to analyze the oral reading fluency of the same passage. I circled the score on each student's individual rubric and stored the rubrics in their assessment folder. While looking closely at their fluency rubrics, I chose to focus on phrasing, intonation and integration because these sub skills relate more to skills necessary for reading Reader's Theatre. The other sections of the rubric measure pausing, stress and rate, which were not areas I wanted to assess during the analysis of the study. Phrasing refers to way readers put words together in groups, intonation is the way readers change the tone, pitch and volume of their voice to reflect meaning and integration involves the way a reader consistently orchestrates rate, intonation and stress (Fountas and Pinnell, 2007). These combined skills reflect what



fluent readers do when they read aloud and these areas were my choice for analysis during the study.

The initial readings indicated that most of the students needed instruction in all three categories, yet phrasing was a significant weakness. Since phrasing is an important skill when reading Reader's Theatre scripts, I deemed focus on this area necessary. At the beginning of the study, three out of the four students received a two on the fluency rubric and needed explicit teaching in this area. A common error was reading without recognizing punctuation. Students often read without taking breaths at periods or paused at unnecessary times. Students knew to pause at periods and commas, once prompted. It is also noted that most of the students did not chunk words together, impacting the meaning of the sentence.

#### **Anecdotal Notes from Reader's Theatre**

During the bi-weekly readings of the reader's theatre passage and while the students were performing the scripts, I wrote notes indicating students' areas of strength and areas of weakness tied to these tasks. I shared these notes with the students to help inform them of their progress and we set goals to focus on during the week. These notes helped inform my instruction for each student, while giving them areas to focus on while they were practicing their scripts or other readings. I used the anecdotal notes for each student when describing the results of the fluency rubric and comprehension conversations that were completed. I also used the notes to describe each student's interactions with the Reader's Theatre scripts.

**Findings:**

The participants in the study included three girls and two boys. Student A and Student B are girls who were not meeting grade-level reading standards. Student C and Student E are boys who were meeting grade-level reading standards and Student D is a girl who was exceeding grade-level reading standards.

***Student A Profile.*** Student A was randomly selected from the sub selection group consisting of six students who were not meeting reading standards, according to the district expectations using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System #2. This student entered the classroom in December, as a new entrant to the district. During initial reading assessments of both fiction and non-fiction texts, she displayed characteristics of a reader who lacked confidence in her oral reading and she had minimal ability to answer questions requiring her to think beyond the text. Student A was also not meeting standards in writing, social studies and science, according to her third quarter report card. She was struggling with reading and understanding content related materials. When completing the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, using the nonfiction texts, Student A was not summarizing the passage with supporting details contained within the reading. While completing the oral reading section of the Fountas and Pinnell Assessment, I had a difficult time hearing her because the volume of her voice was soft and she used little expression. I prompted her increase the volume of her voice so that I could record her oral reading record.

***Fountas and Pinnell Fluency Rubric.*** According to the oral reading of the Reader's Theater passage during the first week, Student A needed intensive instruction in three out of the six areas being assessed. This student showed deficits in intonation,

stress, and integration. Student A expressed nervousness while reading aloud and she explained that she had never been taught strategies to make reading sound fluent. During the first week, Student A showed improvement in some of the rubric areas and seemed more confident to read to me one on one. Student A was receptive to the feedback and tried to implement strategies to make the reading more exciting to listen to, especially since it would be performed in front of the other students. Student A practiced throughout the first week, focusing on projection of voice and varying the tone of her voice to make the script more engaging to listen to. This was a major breakthrough because just a few months prior, Student A appeared to be too shy or scared to read one on one, let alone read in front of a group of peers.

During the second week, the focus of instruction shifted from projecting her voice to the audience to using phrasing as a means for making the text sound more like spoken language. Student A needed explicit teaching on how to utilize punctuation in the text to take pauses or breaks during oral reading. She stated that this was something she had learned to do while reading in her head, yet indicated that she did not always apply the skill to her oral reading. As indicated in Figure 4.1, during the first two weeks of this study she continued to receive two points out of the four points in the phrasing category on the rubric and would require frequent prompts to pause at commas and other punctuation marks. The prompting became less frequent as the study went on over the next three weeks. She improved her score in the area of phrasing to a level three and maintained that score throughout the rest of the study. Moreover, she received a level four during the second reading of week four's passage. By the end of the study, she needed few reminders to slow down and use the punctuations marks as guides. Overall,

phrasing was an area of growth and became strength for her when assessing her oral fluency.

|           | Intonation |        |     | Phrasing |        |     | Integration |        |     |
|-----------|------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
|           | Initial    | Middle | End | Initial  | Middle | End | Initial     | Middle | End |
| Student A | 1          | 2      | 3   | 2        | 3      | 3   | 1           | 3      | 3   |

*Figure 4.1:* This figure illustrates the Six Dimension Fluency Rubric for Student A

(Points 1: Needs Intensive Teaching, 2: Needs Explicit Prompting, 3: Needs Prompting and Reinforcing, 4: Teaching is not needed)

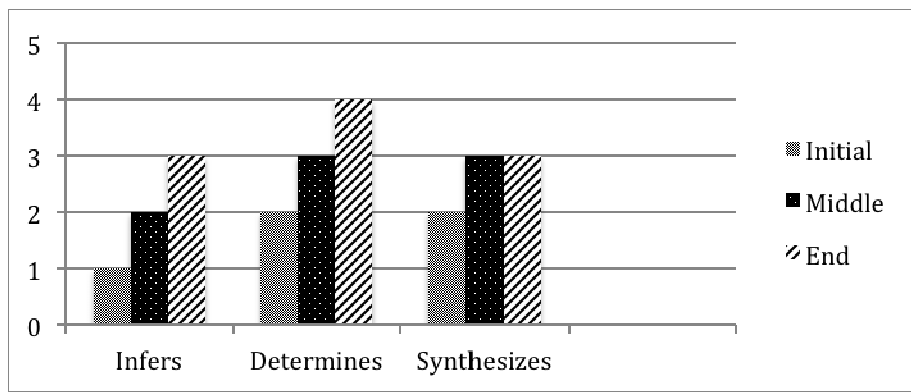
Lastly, I assessed Student A’s integration of various oral reading skills, including rate, phrasing, pausing, intonation and stress. Consistent with other areas I have reported on for this student, Student A was not fluent and in need of intensive instruction during the first week of the study. Student A received either a score of a one or a two for the first four weeks of the study. While she did show improvements in individual areas on the fluency rubric, she was not consistently integrating all of the areas mentioned above along with rate and stress in order to receive a score that indicated fluent reading.

According to the fluency rubric, her overall reading was not fluent in the area of integration and my notes indicated that her reading was choppy. In the beginning of the study, these results signaled that she would need intensive teaching on integration in order to read aloud fluently. She was able to finish the last two weeks with a rubric score of a three, which means that most of the reading is fluent, but still requires prompting and reinforcing.

Although Student A showed overall growth, according to the fluency rubric, she was not consistent in all categories assessed by the rubric. She showed growth from the initial to the end of the assessment period in all three categories, yet did not make growth

from the middle to the end in phrasing and integration. This meant that she needed more prompting and reinforcing in those areas. Overall, the addition of Reader's Theatre did improve her fluency over the course of the study, especially from the beginning to the end.

**Comprehension Rubric.** Student A read the nonfiction passage each week during the five week study and showed growth or a better understanding from the first to second readings of the text. While she did show growth from the first to second readings each week, she regressed or she stayed the same in many of the areas assessed on the Comprehension Rubric throughout the entire study. This can be seen in Figure 4.2.



*Figure 4.2: Comprehension Rubric Bar Graph for Student A*  
 (Points 0: No Response, 1: Incorrect Response, 3: Some Correct Elements in Response, 4: Mostly Correct Response, 5: Correct Response)

The first targeted area of assessment on The Comprehension Rubric assessed inference skills based on teacher-student conversations post reading of a text. This was an area of weakness that was clearly evident, as she had no response when I asked her a question that required her to infer based on what she had read during the first reading. I even offered multiple prompts for the same question and she still replied, “I’m not really sure.” The class had received explicit instruction on inference skills throughout the year,

during guided reading and other mini-lessons, yet Student A was unable to apply these skills when reading a nonfiction passage. She started the study with a level one score, based on The Comprehension Rubric used to assess comprehension during conversations that occurred post reading of a specific reading passage. As indicated in Table 4.2, Student A's scores increased throughout the course of the study. She never received a score higher than a three throughout the entire study in the inferring category. By the end of the study, Student A was able to draw some conclusion and make predictions that were consistent with the text and her background knowledge, but she was never able to expand on these inferences or thoroughly explain her thinking.

The next rubric area assessed the ability to determine meaning and importance from what was read. For the first three weeks of this study, Student A was able to identify some elements that were important to the overall understanding of the text. Some of these passages had pictures within the text and she would often refer and rely on the pictures to help guide her responses. While this is a solid comprehension strategy, she was depending too much on the pictures and would not mention other important information that was found within the text. During the third week, she started to expand her thinking to include important facts or other pertinent information found within the text, which raised her rubric score to a three out of five. During the conversations I would prompt her frequently to try to expand upon her thinking. I finally saw her apply this skill during the final comprehension conversation we had. I did not prompt her during this final conversation and she was able to determine the important facts and details in the text and clearly explain her thinking. She was even able to articulate why

she chose that information, giving her a final score of a four on the rubric for this particular sub-section.

The final comprehension sub-skill that was assessed was the ability to synthesize information within a text to develop deeper comprehension or new thinking. This was an area that Student A struggled with throughout the entire five-week study. When having the conversations with Student A, she would tell events in the passage in random order and did not express ideas in a new or interesting way. She would often just tell facts that she remembered in random order and was not aware of sequencing her ideas as they were presented or in a logical order. She never scored higher than a level three out of five in this rubric section. Most of her scores in the section were at a level two. During our conversations it was difficult to get her to discuss her thinking and she would often answer by saying, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure." She had difficulty with the structure of how the nonfiction information was being presented, which in turn made it difficult for her to show a deeper understanding of the text.

Student A showed growth in comprehension throughout the study, but was never able to reach mastery in any of the comprehension sub-skills assessed. This finding suggests that Student A's overall comprehension did not improve significantly throughout the study, as result of implementing the Reader's Theatre. Instead, she made limited gains in each area, never demonstrating deeper understanding of the texts.

***Content-Related Quizzes.*** At the beginning of the study, Student A was administered the pre-assessment for the science unit on nutrition. According to Figure 4.3, she received three points out of a possible ten points on the initial assessment. In subsequent quizzes, she scored above the class average on Quiz 1, Quiz 3, Quiz 4 and on

Quiz 5. She was just below the class average on the final unit assessment that was administered at the end of the unit and study.

|               | Pre-Test | Quiz # 1 | Quiz # 2 | Quiz # 3 | Quiz # 4 | Quiz # 5 | Unit Assessment |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Student A     | 3        | 7        | 6        | 8        | 9        | 7        | 16              |
| Class Average | 3.55     | 6.95     | 6.25     | 7.4      | 7.65     | 7.2      | 16.65           |
| Total points  | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 20              |

*Figure 4.3: Content-Related Quizzes for Student A*  
 (Quiz 1: Food Pyramid/Plate, 2: Fats, 3: Sugars, 4: Food Labels, 5: Vitamins and Minerals)

Prior to the beginning the study, Student A was not meeting grade-level standards in science. With the incorporation of Reader’s Theatre, she made gains in science content, as assessed through weekly quizzes. She also demonstrated growth from the initial pre-assessment to the final unit assessment, which indicates that the use of Reader’s Theatre had positive effects on her learning the content in science.

*Anecdotal Notes from Reader’s Theatre.* When I first introduced the idea of performing Reader’s Theatre scripts to the whole class, I made a note that Student A seemed very nervous and apprehensive about performing a script in front of her peers. She was a shy individual to begin with and joining our class half way through the year made it difficult for Student A to become acclimated in our classroom.

During the first of five weekly performances, Student A seemed to hide behind her script. This was something she had not done during the practice sessions with other members of her group. I tried to cue her to lower the script during the performance but she did not understand my cue. After the performance we had a conversation centered on how to hold the script so that the audience is able to best understand the performer. We discussed the importance of projecting her voice to the back of the audience so that everyone could hear her.



Over the next four weeks of performances she improved the volume and clarity of her voice when reading her parts. Near the end of the study a classmate praised Student A, explaining how she used to be hard to hear when she performed the scripts, but now they could hear her clearly and they did not have to strain to hear what she was saying.

***Student A Summary.*** Throughout the course of the study, Student A made growth in fluency and in science knowledge. Her comprehension was still limited at the end of the study. This student made significant growth in fluency, based on the rubric scores she received. The Reader's Theatre focus helped to improve her oral fluency and had a positive impact on her because she was able to increase her overall confidence when reading aloud. She was a shy and timid reader at the beginning of the study and by the end of the study she was more confident in her abilities as a reader, including the ability to read in front of an audience. However, the results of the study show that the implementation of Reader's Theatre did not yield mastery of deeper comprehension skills, such synthesizing information and inferring in relation to science texts.

***Findings: Student B Profile.*** Like Student A, Student B was selected from the sub selection group consisting of students who were not meeting reading standards according to the district expectations using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System #2. This student started the school year not meeting the district reading expectations, but by the completion of this study she had raised her reading level with satisfactory comprehension to meet the benchmark level for the eight-month mark of the school year. While completing the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment with Student B, I observed that during the oral reading portion of this assessment, she would read through punctuation and her voice would trail off toward the end of each sentence.

Throughout the year Student B was struggling with content related materials and would require assistance when learning new content, especially when trying to learn content related vocabulary.

**Fountas and Pinnell Fluency Rubric.** Student B’s oral reading was assessed with the rubric and showed an explicit need for teaching in many of the areas being assessed, which can be seen in Figure 4.4. I will report on the findings in the following areas: phrasing, intonation, and integration. Student B had some instruction with her oral fluency prior to the study because she often took awkward pauses during her oral reading and always seemed to be short of breath. During the assessment, she was rushing through the passage and paid little attention to punctuation marks. She scored a level two out of four in the category of phrasing, mainly due to her lack of attention to punctuation and the awkward times she would take breaths in the middle of sentences. During the next few weeks of instruction, I had her highlight the punctuation marks in the text so that she could clearly see where she needed to take pauses or breaths. It took Student B two weeks to develop this skill and she did show improvement in the third week. During the third week and for the rest of the study she scored threes and fours on the rubric, indicating that she no longer needed intensive instruction on phrasing and almost all her reading was appropriately phrased.

|           | Intonation |        |     | Phrasing |        |     | Integration |        |     |
|-----------|------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
|           | Initial    | Middle | End | Initial  | Middle | End | Initial     | Middle | End |
| Student B | 2          | 4      | 4   | 2        | 3      | 4   | 2           | 3      | 4   |

*Figure 4.4:* This figure illustrates the Six Dimension Fluency Rubric for Student B

(Points 1: Needs Intensive Teaching, 2: Needs Explicit Prompting, 3: Needs Prompting and Reinforcing, 4: Teaching is not needed)

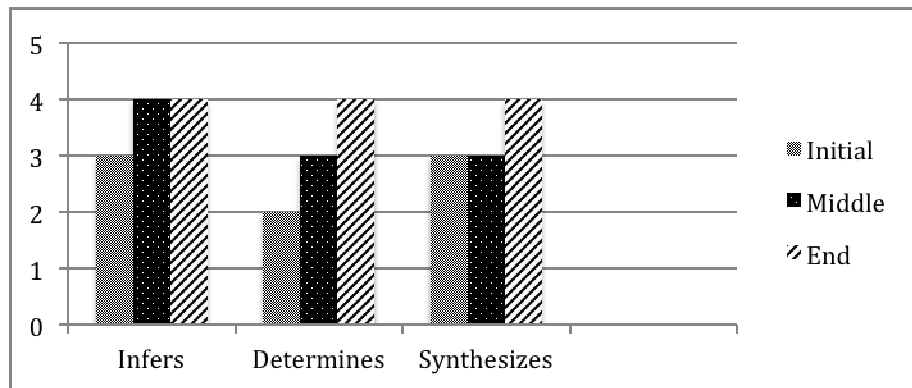
Student B read with a lot of excitement and varied her tone to make the oral reading come to life, but since she struggled with her phrasing, often times the intonation of her voice would reflect how the author intended the text to sound. She started at a level two based on the rubric because she needed explicit teaching on how to use the tone of her voice to reflect the meaning of the text. Student B needed to hear how the inflection and tone in her voice could change the meaning of the text. During the first two weeks, I focused my instruction on modeling good reading, using proper intonation to convey meaning. By the end of the second week, she had better control of this skill when reading aloud. At this time, she received a score of three on the rubric; meaning most of her reading reflected a varied tone and what the author had intended it to sound like. Throughout the remainder of the study, she raised her score to a four out of four and this skill became a strength for Student B in her oral reading. Targeted instruction was no longer needed.

Lastly, I assessed how well Student B consistently integrated all five areas of fluency in oral reading. She started the study at a level two out of four but with consistent growth in each of the categories, quickly raised her score to a level three in the second week and remained at a level three until moving to a rubric score of a four during the last two weeks of the study.

Student B showed consistent growth in her oral reading throughout the study and is now a fluent reader. She showed improvement in each area assessed over the course of the study and showed mastery in intonation, phrasing and integration. Based on the rubric scores, no further intensive teaching was needed with this student at the conclusion

of the study. Reader's Theatre proved to be a successful strategy for improving Student B's fluency when reading aloud.

**Comprehension Rubric.** Prior to this study, Student B was reading on grade level and meeting expectations but struggled with higher-level comprehension questions. Student B showed tremendous growth in her ability to infer, determine important ideas, and synthesize what she had read throughout the study, which is outlined in Figure 4.5.



*Figure 4.5:* Comprehension Rubric Bar Graph for Student B (Points 0: No Response, 1: Incorrect Response, 3: Some Correct Elements in Response, 4: Mostly Correct Response, 5: Correct Response)

Inferring is the first sub-skill assessed on the Comprehension Rubric and an area in which Student B showed consistent growth. Student B attempted to use an inference when discussing the text she had read to me during the first week. She was drawing conclusions that were consistent with the text and during the first week scored a three out of the five possible points on the rubric. In the fourth week of this study I started to notice that she would draw conclusions and make inferences, using evidence found in the text to back up what she was saying. She remained at a level four throughout the rest of the study. The main breakthrough with Student B came when she backed up the claims

and conclusions she was making with specific evidence from the passage she was reading.

Determining what was important in the text that Student B read was the next area I focused on. Over the first three weeks of the study, Student B seemed to struggle with identifying the most important ideas and details for the passage she read. She would often tell the important ideas but could not back them up with supporting details or explain why she had chosen these ideas. Her scores varied during the first three weeks, between levels two and three out of five. After receiving instruction, for three weeks on supporting her ideas with the necessary details to show her understanding, Student B's scores raised to a level four because she was able to expand on the main ideas of the text. Her scores consistently remained at a level four out of five for the remainder of the study.

The last area I will report on for Student B is the rubric section for synthesizing the information presented. Similar to the inferring section, she started at a level three out of five. She was able to tell the information she had learned in a proper sequence and was not just telling random facts that she had learned. Similar to other areas, Student B required repetition of this skill to start to enhance the meaning of what she had read. After the third week is when she began to incorporate her background knowledge on the subject, which helped with deeper understanding of the text she read. During the fourth week of the study, she started to score at a level four, mainly because she began feeling more comfortable with the nonfiction features that helped to enhance deeper comprehension. By the end of the study, she was consistently scoring at a level four in all of the areas of the comprehension rubric.

Student B made consistent comprehension growth throughout the study, yet like Student A, she never achieved mastery in any of the components of comprehension being assessed.

**Content-Related Quizzes.** At the beginning of the study, Student B was administered the pre-assessment for the science unit on nutrition. According to Figure 4.6, she received two points out of a possible ten points on the initial assessment. In subsequent quizzes, she scored above the class average on Quiz 1, Quiz 3, Quiz 4 and on Quiz 5. Like Student A, she was just below the class average on the final unit assessment that was administered at the end of the unit and study.

|               | Pre-Test | Quiz # 1 | Quiz # 2 | Quiz # 3 | Quiz # 4 | Quiz # 5 | Unit Assessment |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Student B     | 2        | 6        | 5        | 7        | 7        | 7        | 16              |
| Class Average | 3.55     | 6.95     | 6.25     | 7.4      | 7.65     | 7.2      | 16.65           |
| Total points  | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 20              |

*Figure 4.6: Content-Related Quizzes for Student B*  
(Quiz 1: Food Pyramid/Plate, 2: Fats, 3: Sugars, 4: Food Labels, 5: Vitamins and Minerals)

**Anecdotal Notes from Reader’s Theatre.** As mentioned in the fluency rubric section of my findings for Student B, she was a student who enjoyed reading out loud and tried her best to make the reading sound interesting to the audience. She thoroughly enjoyed practicing and performing the Reader’s Theatre scripts to the class. Student B deemed herself the “leader” of her group and would often ask for extra time to practice the scripts with her group members. She was offering advice and suggestions to the other group members along with encouraging them to try some of the strategies she was learning with me during targeted teaching time. She was a catalyst to the success of incorporating Reader’s Theatre in the science unit we were studying. When I first

discussed this unit with the students, there were a few students who were not very excited to be performing scripts in front of the other members of the class. After the first week some of these class members became more interested in the idea of this based on how well her group performed their script. She made the other students want to practice to try and have their group's scripts sound as good as Student B's group. Although it was in no way a contest, she raised the bar for the class expectations after the first week and most of the other students wanted to obtain her group's performance level.

***Student B Summary.*** Student B made the most amount of growth in fluency within the study's time frame. According to the Fluency Rubric, Student B demonstrated mastery of the skills assessed. Reader's Theatre was a strategy that yielded growth for this student's fluency. In regards to comprehension, Student B made growth in determining meaning and synthesizing during the study. Deeper understanding of the science text was never achieved, despite the growth in comprehension. Likewise, Student B did not receive the total number of points on any of the science unit quizzes and only scored sixteen total points out of twenty points on the final assessment for the unit. From these results, Student B needed more intensive teaching of strategies to improve comprehension.

***Findings: Student C Profile.*** Student C was selected from the sub selection group consisting of students who were meeting reading standards according to the district expectations using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System #2. This student was meeting reading standards set forth by the district. While completing the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment with Student C, I observed that during the oral reading portion of the assessment he read with little inflection in his voice and his

reading was often monotone. Student C enjoys reading non-fiction materials and this is his preferred genre to select for independent reading. He also thrives during content related lessons, demonstrating an interest in science. I did observe through the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments that Student C’s comprehension of non-fiction passages was higher than fiction texts. When reading a fiction text, he was able to respond to prompts for questions found within the text and about the text, but he struggled with questions that made him use higher-level comprehension skills to think beyond the text.

***Fountas and Pinnell Fluency Rubric.*** Student C’s first oral reading specified that he needed instruction in the areas of phrasing and intonation. He scored a two out of four on the rubric in this area, as indicated in Figure 4.7. These were areas in need of explicit instruction, and Student C only needed prompting or reinforcing in the other assessed areas.

|           | Intonation |        |     | Phrasing |        |     | Integration |        |     |
|-----------|------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
|           | Initial    | Middle | End | Initial  | Middle | End | Initial     | Middle | End |
| Student C | 2          | 2      | 3   | 3        | 3      | 3   | 3           | 3      | 3   |

*Figure 4.7:* This figure illustrates the Six Dimension Fluency Rubric for Student C

(Points 1: Needs Intensive Teaching, 2: Needs Explicit Prompting, 3: Needs Prompting and Reinforcing, 4: Teaching is not needed)

Student C’s phrasing during the first session was rushed and the pace was inconsistent. Student C seemed to just want to get done reading the material and was not concerned with how he sounded. After only a week of targeted instruction in this area, Student C had raised his phrasing score to a level three and just needed prompting or



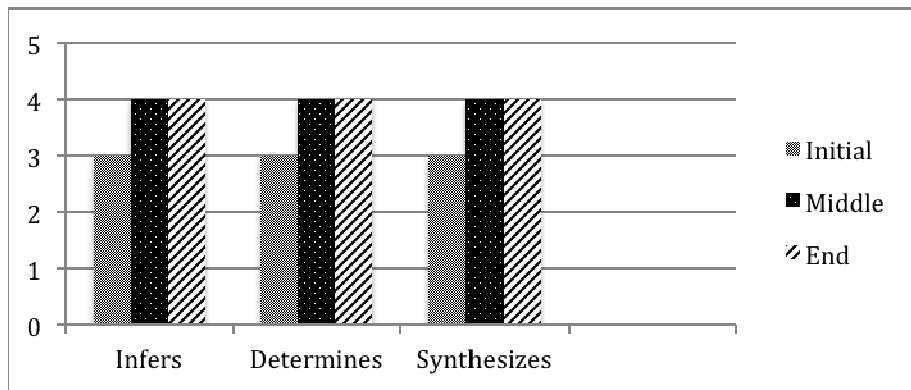
reminders to read at an appropriate pace. He maintained his rubric score of a three until the final two weeks of the study.

Student C needed explicit instruction on intonation. While completing this study and reporting data on Student C, this is the area that he needed to make the most growth in because his reading lacked variation in tone and he was unable to express what he was reading. Student C needed four weeks of specific instruction in this area before any growth was displayed. During the week, Student C read into a tape recorder and played the tape back so that he could hear what he sounded like reading aloud. After using this strategy for two weeks and hearing little to no difference in his oral reading, I decided to modify the approach to include a modeled recording. I recorded my voice, reading the same reading passage with varied pitch and expression, so this student had an exemplar to reference for this activity. Throughout the course of the study, he raised his score to a four out of four on the rubric before falling back down to a three out of four on the final assessment. He needed prompting at the end of the study and continued to receive instruction in this area to make his reading sound more like his oral language.

The last area being reported on from the Fountas and Pinnell Six Dimensions of Fluency Rubric is the integration of all the other five areas to consistently exhibit fluent reading. Student C started the study at a level three and remained there throughout the entire study. While he did manage to raise his scores in individual areas during the study, it seemed that during the weeks that growth was seen in some areas, others would go down on the rubric scale. His scores seemed to fluctuate around level three out of four. Student C needed prompting and reminders each time that he read aloud. Overall,

Student C was a mostly proficient fluent reader, but he did not obtain a perfect score on the rubric due to the need for prompting and reminders.

**Comprehension Rubric.** Throughout the five-week study, Student C showed consistent growth in the areas of inferring, determining what is important in the text, and synthesizing the information. This growth is outlined in Figure 4.8. I will discuss Student C's progress in these three areas in the following section.



*Figure 4.8: Comprehension Rubric Bar Graph for Student C*  
 (Points 0: No Response, 1: Incorrect Response, 3: Some Correct Elements in Response, 4: Mostly Correct Response, 5: Correct Response)

In the area of inferring, Student C scored a three out of five at the beginning of the study. Since Student C enjoyed reading non-fiction throughout the year, he was able to draw some conclusions based on what he had read along with incorporating his background knowledge on the content. During the third week of the study, Student C was able to raise the score in this area to a level four out of five because he started to explain his predictions and conclusions using information he had read within the text. Once he began to cite the text in response to the questions, he not only made gains for inferring, but also increased his rubric score in other areas assessed.

At the start of the study, Student C's ability to determine theme and central understandings was slightly below average for grade five. The rubric score for this subsection was a three out of the possible five points. After doing some further instruction on how to use the text to guide responses to the questions that were asked, Student C seemed more comfortable with his responses. He started to refer back to the text more often, which allowed him to expand upon his answers. Student C's responses during our discussions became more text based as he recounted the important ideas, which raised his score on the rubric to fours and fives after week three of this study. During our final conversation about what he had read, Student C was able to take information that he had learned in week five's passage, while also incorporating other information he had learned, to develop responses that were specific and relevant to the text.

The final section of The Comprehension Rubric assessed Student C's ability to synthesize a text. Student C was mostly competent in this area and able to recall events from a passage in a logical and sequential order. For this rubric section Student C varied throughout the entire study from either a three or a four out of five depending on if he used background knowledge to enhance understanding of the text. While he did identify key ideas, themes, and used his background knowledge, he never scored a five because he did not present any new thinking in conjunction with the text read.

*Content-Related Quizzes.* At the beginning of the study, Student C was administered the pre-assessment for the science unit on nutrition. According to Figure 4.9, he received five points out of a possible ten points on the initial assessment. In subsequent quizzes, he scored above the class average on all of the quizzes. Unlike Student A and Student B, he scored above the class average on the final unit assessment

that was administered at the end of the unit and study. These results show that Student C was able to make comprehension gains as a result of the implementation of Reader's Theatre in science.

|               | Pre-Test | Quiz # 1 | Quiz # 2 | Quiz # 3 | Quiz # 4 | Quiz # 5 | Unit Assessment |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Student C     | 5        | 8        | 7        | 10       | 9        | 8        | 18              |
| Class Average | 3.55     | 6.95     | 6.25     | 7.4      | 7.65     | 7.2      | 16.65           |
| Total points  | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 20              |

*Figure 4.9: Content-Related Quizzes for Student C*  
(Quiz 1: Food Pyramid/Plate, 2: Fats, 3: Sugars, 4: Food Labels, 5: Vitamins and Minerals)

***Anecdotal Notes from Reader's Theatre.*** Throughout the five-week study using non-fiction Reader's Theatre, Student C never showed a genuine interest in this strategy that was being used to promote further understanding of the content being taught. I noted that during the introduction of Reader's Theatre, Student C did not seem excited. Each week he would participate with his group and would practice his parts in the scripts, but he was not enthusiastic with his participation. Student C's deficits in the fluency rubric were consistent with his performances each week. He read in a monotone voice and sometimes would rush through his part to just get it done. I did have conversations about this with Student C. After our conversations within the first two weeks, his effort and willingness to participate did improve. Over the final three weeks of the study Student C's comfort level with the scripts developed and he showed slight improvements in his oral reading of the scripts. Student C is a hard worker and would strive to do his best so after our discussions regarding effort he began to try harder to improve his oral reading, specifically in front of his peers.

***Student C Summary.*** Student C made growth in fluency and comprehension within the study's time frame. According to the Fluency Rubric, Student C demonstrated mostly fluent reading in each category, needing some prompting and reinforcing to use intonation, phrasing and integration. Similar to Student A and Student B, Reader's Theatre was a strategy that yielded growth for this student's fluency. In regards to comprehension, Student C made growth in determining meaning and synthesizing during the study. Deeper understanding of the science text improved over the five weeks, as measured by the comprehension rubric and science assessments. Although, Student C did not receive the total number of points the science unit quizzes, he did consistently score above the class average. From these results, Reader's Theatre was a successful strategy for improving Student C's fluency and comprehension.

***Findings: Student D Profile.*** Student D was selected from the sub selection group consisting of students who were exceeding reading standards according to the district expectations using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System #2. This student has been meeting the reading standard set forth by the district since the beginning of the year and recently exceeded the district benchmark. During the oral reading of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment she read in meaningful phrases, used appropriate stress and intonation to convey the author's meaning of the text. Student D has an understanding of the content materials being taught but often struggles with recalling information on quizzes, tests, or general discussions about the content.

***Fountas and Pinnell Fluency Rubric.*** Student D is a capable reader and the Six Dimensions of Fluency rubric showed that from the start of the study, she would not need

explicit instruction in any of the areas, but rather she would only need minimal prompting and reinforcing. Student D was mostly fluent in the areas of focus for this study.

According to the Fountas and Pinnell fluency rubric, Student D received a three out of four in the areas of phrasing, intonation, and integration, which is outlined in Figure 4.10.

|           | Intonation |        |     | Phrasing |        |     | Integration |        |     |
|-----------|------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
|           | Initial    | Middle | End | Initial  | Middle | End | Initial     | Middle | End |
| Student D | 3          | 4      | 4   | 3        | 3      | 4   | 3           | 3      | 4   |

*Figure 4.10:* This figure illustrates the Six Dimension Fluency Rubric for Student D

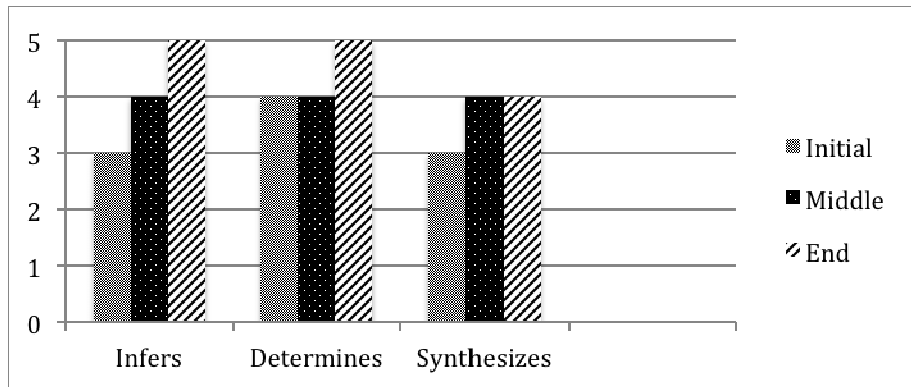
(Points 1: Needs Intensive Teaching, 2: Needs Explicit Prompting, 3: Needs Prompting and Reinforcing, 4: Teaching is not needed)

For the phrasing section of the rubric, Student D only needed prompting to pay closer attention to punctuation and in particular, use commas to help separate the phrases read. After two weeks of prompting her on how to pay closer attention to commas, she improved her rubric score in this area to a level four. Student D remained at this level through the completion of this study.

Student D enjoyed reading aloud and during my initial assessment for this study, the rubric showed that most of her reading had evidence of variation in her voice and she read with expression. However, when she first began the oral reading, her intonation always exhibited excitement and did not always match the author's intended meaning. Through a discussion, she informed me that she was taught to always read in this manner. After further explaining that oral reading should reflect the author's intention, she grasped this concept quickly and by the start of the third week had raised her rubric score in this area to a four out of four. Only once during the next few weeks of the study did she go back to a level three before completing the last reading receiving a level four.

For the category of integration there was an interesting trend during the first two weeks. For the first reading of the week she received a score of a three, indicating she needed prompting in reading and most of her reading was fluent. By the end of each of the first three weeks, she raised the score to a level four and almost all of Student D's reading was fluent. During the last two weeks of this study all of her reading was considered fluent and she received scores in each rubric area of a four.

**Comprehension Rubric.** Student D reads above grade level. Since Student D was reading above level at the beginning of the study, she answered higher-level comprehension questions with ease. Student D was able to show quick growth according to this rubric in the areas of inferring, determining important ideas, and synthesizing what she had read. Student D's progress in these area is represented in Figure 4.11.



*Figure 4.11: Comprehension Rubric Bar Graph for Student D*  
 (Points 0: No Response, 1: Incorrect Response, 3: Some Correct Elements in Response, 4: Mostly Correct Response, 5: Correct Response)

Student D received a score of three out of five at the beginning of the study in the inferring section because she was able to draw conclusions about what she had read, but did not use any text based evidence to back up her thinking. By the second week of the study, she had started to use the text to support her answers and received a four out of five for weeks two through four. During the last week of the study, she did increase this

score to a level five because she drew conclusions, used the text to support her answers and included her background knowledge.

Student D showed good understanding of determining the important ideas in the text over the course of the study. At the beginning of the study, Student D was unable to explain all of the important ideas from what she had read and explain why these ideas were important to the overall understanding of the text. During the first session, she received a level four out of five for this rubric area. At the end of the second week, Student D's score remained at a four out of five. Student D was able to raise this score throughout the remainder of the study. By the end of the study, she received a five out of five in this area because she was able to identify important ideas and support her ideas with evidence from the text.

Student D showed growth in the area of synthesizing. The growth in this area was seen after the first session and remained at that level throughout the study, which can be seen in Figure 4.12. She scored at a level three out of five to start the study and raised the score to a level four in the second week. During our comprehension conversations, she discussed her thinking and accurately sequenced her ideas. During the second week of the study, she incorporated her own knowledge into her responses. The main reason Student D was unable to reach a level five in this area was due to the fact that she did not display a deeper understanding of the content being discussed.

***Content-Related Quizzes.*** At the beginning of the study, Student D completed the pre-assessment for the science unit on nutrition, along with the other students in the class. According to Figure 4.12, she received three points out of a possible ten points on the initial assessment. In subsequent quizzes, she scored far above the class average on all of



the quizzes. Similar to Student C, she scored above the class average on the final unit assessment that was administered at the end of the unit and study. These results show that Student D was able to make significant comprehension gains as a result of the implementation of Reader’s Theatre in science.

|               | Pre-Test | Quiz # 1 | Quiz # 2 | Quiz # 3 | Quiz # 4 | Quiz # 5 | Unit Assessment |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Student D     | 3        | 9        | 7        | 9        | 9        | 8        | 19              |
| Class Average | 3.55     | 6.95     | 6.25     | 7.4      | 7.65     | 7.2      | 16.65           |
| Total points  | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 20              |

*Figure 4.12: Content-Related Quizzes for Student D*  
 (Quiz 1: Food Pyramid/Plate, 2: Fats, 3: Sugars, 4: Food Labels, 5: Vitamins and Minerals)

***Anecdotal Notes from Reader’s Theatre.*** Student D was thoroughly engaged in the Reader’s Theatre scripts right from the beginning of the study. She became a leader in her group and thrived on helping the other members of her group. Since the other students knew she enjoyed reading, especially aloud, they would turn to her for advice or suggestions. Student D would also try to encourage the other members to practice their parts of the script, including one time during the third week of the study. At that time, she organized the group of students she was working with to get together on the Thursday before the Friday performance. The group came to school excited to put their script into action because of the amount of time they had spent preparing. Student D was enthusiastic about participating in a Reader’s Theatre group and her excitement became contagious for the other members in her group. Student D’s group functioned the best and was most successful because of her leadership and the group’s desire and effort to perform.

***Student D Summary.*** Even though Student D began the study reading above grade level, she still made growth in fluency and comprehension within the study's time frame. According to the Fluency Rubric, Student C demonstrated mostly fluent reading in each category, needing some prompting and reinforcing to use phrasing and integration all skills. Similar to Student A, Student B and Student C, Reader's Theatre was a strategy that yielded growth for this student's fluency. In regards to comprehension, Student D made growth in inferring and determining meaning during the study. Similar to Student C, deeper understanding of the science text improved over the five weeks, as measured by the comprehension rubric and science assessments. Although Student D did not receive the total number of points on the science unit quizzes, she did consistently score far above the class average. From these results, Reader's Theatre was also a successful strategy for improving Student D's fluency and comprehension.

***Student E Profile.*** Student E was randomly selected from the sub selection group consisting of six students who were not meeting reading standards, according to the district expectations using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System #2. This student's attendance was inconsistent throughout the time of the study. During initial reading assessments of both fiction and non-fiction texts, he was not engaged and similar to Student A, demonstrated minimal ability to answer questions requiring him to think beyond the text. Student E was also not meeting standards in writing, social studies and science, according to his third quarter report card. Student E struggled with most reading tasks and lacked motivation to read aloud. When completing the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, using the nonfiction texts, Student E was not summarizing the passage with supporting details contained within the reading. While

completing the oral reading section of the Fountas and Pinnell Assessment, Student E read with little expression and enthusiasm.

***Fountas and Pinnell Fluency Rubric.*** According to the oral reading of the Reader’s Theater passage during the first week, Student E needed intensive instruction in three out of the six areas being assessed, which is represented in Figure 4.13. This student showed significant deficits in intonation, stress, and integration. During the first week, Student E showed minimal improvement in some of the rubric areas. Unlike Student A, Student E was not receptive to feedback and did not try to implement strategies to make the reading more exciting to listen to. Student E did not practice during the first weeks of the study yet was able to earn a two out of four in all categories at the half-way point of the study.

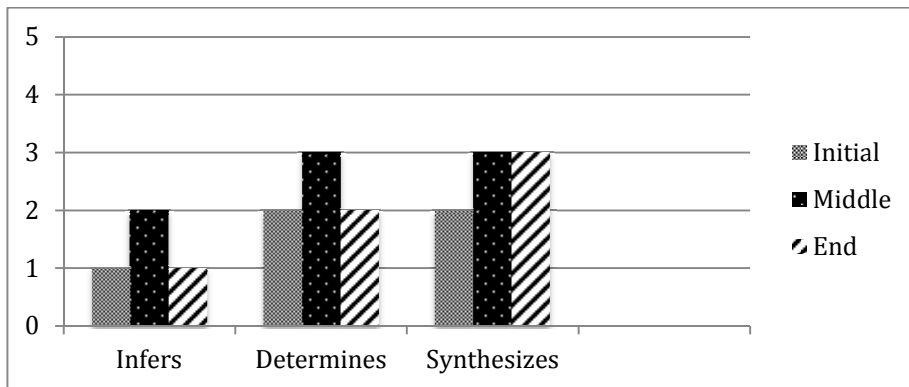
|           | Intonation |        |     | Phrasing |        |     | Integration |        |     |
|-----------|------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
|           | Initial    | Middle | End | Initial  | Middle | End | Initial     | Middle | End |
| Student E | 1          | 2      | 1   | 2        | 2      | 2   | 1           | 2      | 1   |

*Figure 4.13:* This figure illustrates the Six Dimension Fluency Rubric for Student E  
 (Points 1: Needs Intensive Teaching, 2: Needs Explicit Prompting, 3: Needs Prompting and Reinforcing, 4: Teaching is not needed)

Student E needed explicit teaching in phrasing. His reading was choppy and often was so fragmented that the meaning was unclear. Similar to Student A, Student E read without care for punctuation, which interrupted the flow of his oral reading. At the middle part of the study, he received two points out of the four points in the phrasing category on the rubric and required frequent prompts to pause at commas and other punctuation marks. Student E’s phrasing remained at a level two out of four for the duration of the study. This consistency in this area indicates that Student E needed

prompting and explicit teaching in this area throughout the study and no progress was made. Although Student E's score for phrasing did not decrease, this area was not an area of growth.

**Comprehension Rubric.** Student E read below grade level at the beginning of the study. Since Student E was reading below grade level at the beginning of the study, he struggled to answer comprehension questions about what he had read. Student E's comprehension progress was inconsistent. He made some growth in the inferring category and then fell back to a level one by the end of the study. There was some improvement in the determining meaning category and synthesizing happened to be area of strength for Student E. His scores in this area surpassed his scores in the other two areas assessed. Student E's progress in these area is represented in Figure 4.14.



*Figure 4.14:* Comprehension Rubric Bar Graph for Student E  
 (Points 0: No Response, 1: Incorrect Response, 3: Some Correct Elements in Response, 4: Mostly Correct Response, 5: Correct Response)

Student E received a score of one out of five at the beginning of the study in the inferring section because he was unable to draw any conclusions about what he had read and he did not use the text in any way to back up his thinking. By the second week of the study, he demonstrated some improvement because he attempted to make predictions and

draw conclusions, but his responses were mostly inaccurate and were not supported by the text. During the last week of the study, his score fell to a level one because he failed to provide responses to the questions being asked.

Student E showed some understanding of determining the important ideas in the text over the course of the study. At the beginning of the study, Student E was unable to explain all of the important ideas from what he had read and explain why these ideas were important to the overall understanding of the text. During the first session, he received a level two out of five for this rubric area because his attempt to identify important elements was mostly inaccurate. At the end of the third week, Student E's score rose to a three out of five because he identified some of the central ideas and relevant events in the text. Student made some attempt to explain his thinking. From the middle of the study to the end, Student E's score fell back to a level two in this area because he was not engaged in the work that was taking place in class. He chose not to participate and this lack of practice was reflected in his final score.

Student E showed little growth in the area of synthesizing and displayed a plateau in this area from the middle of the study to the end of the study. The small amount of growth in this area was seen after the first session and remained at that level throughout the study, which can be seen in Figure 4.14. Student E scored at a level two out of five to start the study and slightly raised the score to a level three in the second and third week. During our comprehension conversations, he was not able to sequence his thoughts or provide accurate events from the text. During the second and third week of the study, he provided some awareness of event sequences but needed prompting. Student E's lack of effort also affected his scores in this section of the rubric.

**Content-Related Quizzes.** At the beginning of the study, Student E completed the pre-assessment for the science unit on nutrition, along with the other students in the class. According to Figure 4.15, he received two points out of a possible ten points on the initial assessment. In subsequent quizzes, he scored below the class average on all but one. Unlike the other students in the study, he scored three points below the class average on the final unit assessment that was administered at the end of the unit of study. These results show that Student E was unable to make significant comprehension gains as a result of the implementation of Reader’s Theatre in science. Student E did not prepare for the quizzes and his scores represent an inconsistency in his performance.

|               | Pre-Test | Quiz # 1 | Quiz # 2 | Quiz # 3 | Quiz # 4 | Quiz # 5 | Unit Assessment |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Student E     | 2        | 4        | 6        | 3        | 4        | 4        | 13              |
| Class Average | 3.55     | 6.95     | 6.25     | 7.4      | 7.65     | 7.2      | 16.65           |
| Total points  | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 10       | 20              |

*Figure 4.15: Content-Related Quizzes for Student E*  
 (Quiz 1: Food Pyramid/Plate, 2: Fats, 3: Sugars, 4: Food Labels, 5: Vitamins and Minerals)

**Anecdotal Notes from Reader’s Theatre.** Student E was reluctant to read the Reader’s Theatre scripts right from the beginning of the study. He refused to practice, even after multiple attempts to engage him in this work. Prompting and encouraging Student E did not yield positive results. In addition to his lack of engagement, Student E was frequently absent from school during the time of the study. He missed four out of ten days of instruction, during the last two weeks of the study. When he did read the scripts aloud to me, he would not pay attention to the scripts and, therefore, did not make the scripts understandable. He frequently read too quickly.

*Student E Summary.* Student E made little to no growth throughout the course of the study, due to frequent absences and lack of engagement in the Reader's Theatre process. According to the Fluency Rubric, Student E was not a fluent reader and required intensive intervention for progress to occur. Since Student E was not receptive to prompting and practicing oral reading, he made very little growth in his oral reading fluency. Unlike the other students in the study, Reader's Theatre was not a strategy that yielded growth for this student's fluency. In regards to comprehension, Student E made growth in inferring, determining meaning and synthesizing from the beginning of the study to the middle, but then regressed or stayed the same from the middle to the end of the study. Student E was unable to show any deeper understanding of the science text improved over the five weeks, as measured by the comprehension rubric and science assessments. Student E's absences and lack of motivation contributed to his low scores on all three rubrics used in the study. If Student E had put forth more effort or attended class for all of the days in the study, Reader Theatre could have been a successful strategy to improve his oral reading fluency and reading comprehension.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

This study investigated how Reader's Theatre affected fifth grade students' fluency, comprehension, and content knowledge during a science unit of study. In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions, the implications for student learning as well as my teaching, and I provide recommendations for future research. As a result of my research, three conclusions were found. First, Reader's Theatre is an effective strategy for increasing overall reading fluency. Second, content-based Reader's Theatre promotes increased content knowledge. Third, Reader's Theatre supports comprehension, yet it does not increase deeper understandings. The implications of this study on student learning include the need for increased focus on content understanding and engagement. Also, students experience an increased fluency rate. The implications of this study on my own practice include understanding how to develop and implement Reader's Theatre into science, developing ways to incorporate reading within science, developing routines for fluency practice and continuing to teach higher-level comprehension skills with content-related texts. Lastly, there are three recommendations for future research, which include utilizing Reader's Theater as a tool to promote cross-curricular learning and finding better ways to incorporate deeper comprehension strategies when using Reader's Theater. In addition, it would be helpful to know how rubrics could best be used to assess students' fluency and comprehension progress while participating in Reader's Theatre.

### Conclusions

According to the study, the first conclusion is that implementing Reader's Theatre is an effective method for increasing fluency. Throughout this study, each student made gains in overall reading fluency. The observations and Fountas and Pinnel (2007)



fluency assessment showed that most of the students in the study showed growth in reading with intonation, proper phrasing and integration of all reading skills. The students demonstrated the most growth from the beginning assessment to the middle assessment. Student B began the study, needing explicit teaching, prompting and reinforcement to read with intonation, phrasing and integration. By the end of the study, Student B independently read fluently, with appropriate phrasing and varying voice and pitch to reflect the meaning of the text. Likewise, Young and Rasinski (2009) and Garrett and O'Conner (2010) conducted studies that also found that Reader's Theatre increased overall reading fluency. According to Young and Rasinski (2009), students that participated in Reader's Theatre gained an average of 64 words per minute, improved prosody by 20 percent and made an average gain of 11 levels on the DRA reading assessment. Similar to my findings, the implementation of Reader's Theater yielded improvement in several areas of literacy.

The second conclusion from the study is that content-based Reader's Theatre promotes increased content knowledge. All five of the students in the study earned scores below the class average on the content-related pretests. However, on subsequent quizzes, four out of the five students in the study received scores at or above the class average. Student E was the only student in the study to score below the class average on quizzes and on the final assessment. Conner et al. (2010) conducted a study that measured the effectiveness of integrated comprehension strategies in science and similarly discovered that this focus improves science comprehension.

The third conclusion of this study is that despite an increase in reading comprehension, Reader's Theatre alone does not promote a deeper understanding of the

content. All of the students in the study were assessed using a comprehension rubric during comprehension conversations that occurred after reading a text aloud. Deeper understanding was assessed through the synthesizing section of the rubric. All students in the study never reached a top score of five points out of five for this synthesizing section because they struggled to incorporate background knowledge into their responses to the prompted questions. Student A showed the least amount of growth in the area, receiving just three points out of the possible five points at the end of the assessment period. Although Student D made growth in this area, this student never reached a total of five points because answers lacked deeper understanding of the content being assessed. Throughout the study, the students did not receive instruction on synthesizing science related content texts. Research suggests that in order to promote deeper understanding of content, specifically in science, strategic reading strategies should be used in place of silent reading (Radcliffe et al., 2008).

### **Implications**

One implication for teaching is that developing and implementing Reader's Theatre in the science curriculum can be a useful reading strategy to improve overall reading comprehension. Research has shown that as students advance in school, they still need targeted reading instruction embedded within the content areas (Radcliffe et al., 2008). With that said, teachers could use Reader's Theatre as a tool to engage students in repeated readings of texts and plan targeted reading lessons that focus on reading comprehension strategies. Keehn et al. (2008) confirmed that struggling readers at the middle school level demonstrated higher levels of reading comprehension when Reader's Theatre was used as a reading intervention.

A second implication that ties into the first implication suggests that reading activities should be embedded into the science curriculum. Since science content is rich in vocabulary, students need instruction that targets vocabulary acquisition and understanding through the reading of content-related texts. Scharer et al. (2005) expressed that comprehension is an ongoing process that should expand across different types of texts, in different ways and for different purposes. The use of Reader's Theatre scripts in science proved to be a successful technique and offered students an alternate modality for reading and comprehending science vocabulary and content.

The final implications for teaching include developing routines for effective fluency instruction and creating opportunities to teach deeper understanding of texts. Using authentic experiences is one way to develop a fluency routine. Reader's Theatre is an example of an authentic reading task that could be used as a weekly assignment during science class. This type of assignment is motivating and engaging for students. In addition, students should be encouraged to develop deeper understanding of texts. Garrett and O'Conner (2010) support the use of authentic participation in re-reading texts, such as Reader's Theater scripts, opposed to traditional skill and drill approaches to meet this goal. In order to teach deeper understanding of the texts, students should still participate in re-readings, but should then be prompted to engage with the text in a more sophisticated way. The Common Core Standards (2010) demand that students develop rich knowledge of content across grades and in order to do that must be exposed to texts multiple times to achieve proficiency.

### **Research Recommendations**

The results of this study reveal that Reader's Theatre is a successful strategy to improve reading fluency, content knowledge and basic reading comprehension. The following recommendations are based on the results of the study.

- Reader's Theatre in science should be studied for a longer duration of time.

Future research on incorporating Reader's Theatre in science needs to occur for a longer duration to measure the effect on comprehension skills. In this study, I only measured the effects over a five-week time span and a more effective strategy would be to examine the process over a longer period of time.

- Reader's Theatre and comprehension should be researched to determine the effectiveness of this strategy in promoting deeper understanding. Research on how Reader's Theatre could be utilized to teach lessons that support deeper comprehension and critical thinking in science would be helpful. Although students in this study made general reading comprehension growth, each student did not display higher-level comprehension of the texts.
- Reader's Theatre and the use of rubrics to assess comprehension and fluency should be further explored. Within this study, I used rubrics that were recommended through literacy trainings within my district, yet these rubrics did not prove to be the most effective measure for assessing these areas of reading, specifically in science.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of Reader's Theatre in teaching reading in science. The data collected within the study led me to conclude that Reader's

Theatre is an effective strategy for increasing overall reading fluency, content-based Reader's Theatre promotes increased content knowledge, and Reader's Theatre supports comprehension, but does not increase deeper understandings. The following implications were also found as a result of the study. Teachers need an understanding of how to develop and implement Reader's Theatre into content areas, ways to develop and incorporate reading within content, to establish routines for fluency practice and to continue teaching higher-level comprehension skills within science texts. Finally, further research is needed on using Reader's Theatre as a reading strategy in science, developing higher-level comprehension strategies when reading science texts and Reader's Theatre, and how rubrics can be more effectively used to measure student achievement in reading comprehension and fluency.

With shifts in the expectations for teaching and learning, mainly based on the adoption of the Common Core Learning Standards, teachers need to find ways to integrate literacy skills within the content areas. As a result of the study, I now know that students need to continue building on their reading comprehension skills in order to comprehend the material in science. There is a need for targeted reading instruction within the science curriculum and Reader's Theatre is a motivating strategy that promotes reading fluency and comprehension.

As an elementary school teacher who strived to meet the curricular demands in each and every subject area, I became interested in exploring the use of a reading strategy, mainly Reader's Theatre, within the science curriculum. Through this investigation, I have gained knowledge on the topic and will be able to apply what I have learned to toward the improvement of my teaching practice.

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