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The Effects of Readers’ Theater on Motivation and Reading Fluency

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The Effects of Readers' Theater on Motivation and Reading Fluency

by

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May 2008

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
The Effects of Readers' Theater on Motivation and Reading Fluency

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reading is a critical skill for early elementary students as it is generally integrated into every subject area. Subjects including social studies, math, and science can be dependent on the ability to read and comprehend text. In the elementary classroom there may be a large span of reading ability levels. Primary students' abilities may vary from working on the mastery of basic letter/sound relationships to the competent reading of lengthy chapter books. Morra and Tracey (2006) described competent reading as consisting of decoding, fluency, and comprehension. They stated that fluency takes the focus off of decoding which allows the students to concentrate more on comprehending the meaning of text. In the typical classroom, there may be a number of students reading below grade level. Those students are often hesitant about reading in front of their peers. Increased fluency may make them more confident and motivated readers.

Researchers have described reading fluency as having three components (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). They are decoding accuracy, automaticity of word recognition, and the prosodic features of stress, pitch, and phrasing. There are a number of known interventions to improve student fluency. Begeny and Silber (2006) performed a study of group based fluency interventions and found fluency to be an essential part of reading instruction. They used three interventions, including repeated readings of text, listening to adults read the text orally prior to reading independently, and training the students in word lists. Kuhn (2005) also conducted a
study to find an effective fluency intervention where echo, choral, and repeated readings were used. Corcoran and Davis (2005) used Readers’ Theater to find the impact of the program on the fluency of students. Readers’ Theater is a program in which students practice and perform a script. The focus of the play is not on the acting, as the students do not need to memorize lines or use props. Instead, the students focus on reading fluently. Since Readers’ Theater links repeated readings with other forms of fluency instruction, the researchers thought that it may be a way to build interest in reading as well as fluency.

Kuhn (2005) stated that the purpose of reading is to construct meaning from text. It is thought that fluency may contribute to a student’s comprehension of text. This is because fluent reading takes the focus off of decoding and allows the student to concentrate on the creation of meaning (Morra & Tracey, 2006). In addition, Schwanenflugel and Hamilton (2004) found that there was a relationship between decoding speed and reading comprehension. An intervention used to improve fluency may impact comprehension for students.

Statement of the Problem

Research by Corcoran and Davis (2005) showed that students who are not reading well by third grade will continue to struggle with reading into their adult lives. Although it is quite common to provide direct instruction in comprehension and decoding, fluency can be an overlooked subject in the classroom. Begeny and Silber (2006) discussed a number of studies that worked with individuals, but stated that there were an inadequate number of studies that dealt with group interventions.
The overall purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using Readers’ Theater to improve motivation and reading fluency.

Significance of the Problem

There are many students, as well as adults, who are uncomfortable reading orally. This may be due to the lack of instruction in reading fluency. I believe that instructing students in fluent reading will help to alleviate this problem. I utilized an intervention that directly instructed students in reading fluency as it is an area that I believe all students may benefit from. Speece and Ritchey (2005) found few studies that researched the growth of fluency development from an early age. Since fluency is a component of competent reading, the measurement of student progress may prove to be beneficial to growth in reading.

I have often thought of fluency as a characteristic that experienced readers possess. Speece and Ritchey (2005) conducted research on the relation of fluency to other factors in primary students. They concluded that fluency may be a skill that develops as early reading skills are learned as opposed to being a result of skilled reading. It can be concluded that fluency instruction is crucial to the reading education of early elementary students.

Rationale

I focused this study on increasing reading fluency because it is a topic that is often overlooked in early elementary classrooms. Since fluency may be linked to comprehension, I feel as though teachers are professionally obligated to give students direct instruction in this area. There are a number of fluency interventions to choose
from however I sought to use one that may also increase the motivation of learners in my classroom. Readers’ Theater is a multifaceted approach to fluency instruction that has the potential to influence both the motivation and fluency of students participating in the program.

Readers’ Theater is a program which targets a number of learning styles. In Readers’ Theater, the students are moving and active, which reaches the bodily-kinesthetic learners. Interpersonal instruction is given as the groups work together, but the intrapersonal learners are reached during independent practice times. Linguistic learners benefit from the reading of words and the auditory stimulation. At times, musical learners may be encouraged to participate, depending on the script and parts given. In addition to reaching a number of learning styles, Readers’ Theater can be differentiated to the levels of each member of the classroom. During my intervention, the students worked in their guided reading groups and read a script at their independent reading level. This design ensured that each student was reading appropriate material.

I assessed the students by taking a pre and post assessment of the words read correctly per minute on the first read of a passage at their independent reading level. Speece and Ritchey (2005) conducted research and concluded that students who were already at-risk of reading failure improved fluency at a slower rate than students who were not at-risk of reading failure. In my research, I considered, as these researchers did, the level of the reader in accordance with fluency. I not only assessed the whole
group fluency scores, but also looked at patterns in student achievement by reading level. This is information that could influence recommendations for future research.

Although fluency has a number of components, I did not look at prosodic features, which include stress, pitch, and phrasing. Schwanenflugel and Hamilton (2004) discussed that prosodic features may be gained with exposure to language. If language exposure is a factor, assessing prosody in early elementary students may be irrelevant to their ability to read fluently. I therefore defined fluency as words read correctly per minute with no emphasis on prosody.

This study has greatly contributed to my knowledge as an educator. I designed the intervention to be feasible for daily use in the elementary classroom. It can be used as an ongoing activity that recognizes the time constraints seen by today’s teachers. These plans may be shared with other teachers and my administration through presentations and professional development.

Definition of Terms

**Automaticity**-The ability to read quickly without pausing to decode words.

**Comprehension**-Demonstrating an understanding of text.

**Fluency**-For the purpose of this study, fluency is defined as the number words read correctly per minute.

**Motivation**-A student’s interest in an area, furthering his or her want to be successful.

**Readers’ Theater**-A program in which students practice and perform a script. The focus is on reading the script fluently.
Fluent reading has been described as having three essential components. They are accuracy in decoding, automatic word recognition, and prosodic reading in which correct pitch, stress, and phrasing is used (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). Rasinski (2004) has stated that these three components must be utilized simultaneously. Quick and accurate reading without prosodic features does not constitute fluent reading as it interferes with the meaning of a text. Corcoran and Davis (2005) discussed the necessity of fluency for struggling students as fluent reading allows them to process and understand words as they read. Rasinski (2006) referred to these components as a "...gateway to comprehension" (p. 704).

The definition of fluency has a large impact on the increasing importance of its instruction in the classroom (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). According to Pikulski and Chard (2005) fluency was once thought of as an act that solely occurred during oral reading. Oral reading comprehension is of far less importance than that of silent reading comprehension. It is therefore crucial that the definition of reading fluency be furthered to include silent reading comprehension. Harris and Hodges (1995) authored a definition which states that fluency is “freedom from word identification problems that may hinder comprehension” (as cited in Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510).

Kuhn (2005) identified the major goal of reading as the construction of
meaning from text, concluding that fluency has a key role in the development of reading comprehension. His hypothesis was defended by generally accepted reading theories. The automaticity theory stated that since there is a limited amount of attention available to complete a task, less attention must be given to decoding in order to increase the attention that can be given to comprehension.

According to Rasinski (2000), one of the most common reading problems seen in his university reading clinic is slow, disfluent reading, even in students who are comprehending the text. He continued to state that students who are fluent readers read more frequently both in and out of school than their less fluent peers. Reading progress is dependent on practice, and these less fluent readers are practicing less. Cairney (1989, as cited in Moller, 1999) found that many students related success in reading to the amount of reading accomplished, without a necessity for meaning. Since fluency is often defined as how many words a student can read in a minute, the focus for many educators is not on the comprehension of text, but instead on a number score to be recorded. Rasinski (2006) stressed the need for teachers to help students understand that the overarching goal of reading should be to gain an understanding of text, not to read a certain number of words in a minute.

Speece and Ritchey (2005) stated that there were few studies which researched the growth of fluency development from an early age. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, and Jenkins (2001) conducted research and concluded that the largest amount of growth in reading rate occurs in the primary grades. Wright and Cleary (2006) furthered this claim by stating students who were already reading at a faster rate grew
in their oral reading rate more slowly than students who were reading less fluently. Many teachers and educators have assumed that increasing the amount of reading that occurs for students will result in an increase in fluency (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Although some students may benefit from this, there are many students that are in need of direct fluency instruction and interventions to increase their ability to read text fluently. They continued to state that “...fluency without accompanying high levels of reading comprehension is of very limited value” (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 518).

Readers’ Theater as a Fluency Intervention

Rasinski (2006) stated that repeated readings are a beneficial fluency intervention. Repeated readings, although known to increase fluency, are not an authentic use of reading. He stated that these readings should be completed in such a way that oral reading becomes expressive and meaningful. One of the suggestions that he gave was to have students participate in a Readers’ Theater program. He cited a study by Martines, Roser, and Strecker which documented that students who participated in a Readers’ Theater program made twice the gain in reading rate than a control group of their peers.

Tyler and Chard (2000) wrote that repeated readings, where a student reads the same text multiple times, have improved oral reading rate of the participants. They also stated that the use of repeated readings has shown benefits in texts that have never been read. These researchers stated that many low readers who would benefit most from this activity are not motivated because rereading a text can be
viewed as a tedious and unrewarding task. Readers' Theater may be a solution to this problem, as it is an authentic task that creates the opportunity for repeated readings as a part of the program. Students may even eventually choose to create and perform their own Readers' Theater scripts, furthering their motivation to participate in the activity. Since the students work cooperatively with peers during Readers' Theater, they are often encouraged by its social nature.

Corcoran and Davis (2005) studied the implementation of a Readers' Theater program in order to measure the growth of students' interest, confidence, and fluency in reading. As defined in the study, Readers' Theater uses repeated readings paired with other forms of fluency instruction to increase both fluency and motivation. The participants in the study were students in a second and third grade self-contained classroom. The researchers found that there was an increase in comfort level among all participants. Ninety percent of the students said that they would like to do Readers' Theater each week. In oral reading fluency, all students made an increase in scores and every student in the classroom reached a score that was considered to be on-grade level. The researchers concluded that the special education students in this study did benefit from the implementation of a Readers' Theater program.

Comparison of Fluency Interventions

As seen in the study by Corcoran and Davis (2005), students can benefit from instruction in fluency. This instruction may come in a variety of ways. Corcoran and Davis sought to improve both interest level and fluency and cited that they did not use typical fluency interventions because there was no evidence that they would increase
motivation. Other fluency interventions include repeated readings, echo readings, and choral readings. There is a great amount of research that presents a comparison of multiple fluency interventions in order to find the most beneficial ones.

A study by O'Connor, White, and Swanson (2007) compared repeated reading with a less repetitive alternative. In this study the researchers used repeated oral reading of a text, as well as oral reading of a multitude of texts. They also used a control group which received only instruction that would be regularly provided by the school. The results showed that students in both fluency intervention groups made greater growth in comprehension and fluency than the control group. There was not a significant difference in the results seen by students in either intervention group. The researchers also concluded that the gains seen by poor readers in this study would not have been possible without an intervention different from instruction seen in the regular classroom setting. This stressed the importance of direct fluency instruction, especially for low level readers.

Begeny and Silber (2006) stated that a number of fluency studies were completed on individuals, but there was an inadequate number of studies that dealt with group interventions. These researchers sought to find a group-based fluency intervention that could be easily implemented in a classroom. They used repeated readings (RR) where the students read a text multiple times, listening passage preview (LPP) in which an adults read the text orally while students followed along before reading independently, and word list training (WLT) where the students were presented with a list of words that were read chorally. The students in the study were
given four instructional packages, which were WLT+LPP+RR, WLT+LPP, LPP+RR, and WLT+RR. The researchers found that most students showed the most immediate and retained word per minute growth from the WLT+LPP+RR intervention. They concluded that this intervention would be the most effective to complete and only took approximately 12 minutes per session, which is a viable amount of time to dedicate to reading fluency in a classroom.

Kuhn (2005) also conducted a study to compare group-based fluency interventions. Instead of creating instructional packages, the researcher used single interventions with small groups of students. The interventions used were repeated reading, echo or choral reading where the students either echoed lines read by a teacher or read together chorally, and listening in which the students only listened to fluent reading by a teacher. The researcher found that the first two groups benefited most in word recognition, prosodic reading, and words per minute in context. This may be due to their interaction with the text, as opposed to the listening only group who did not participate in any active engagement with the text.

Instead of working with groups of students, Morra and Tracey (2006) conducted a study to examine the effect of direct fluency instruction on a single third grade student. The fluency strategies that were used during the sessions were choral reading, echo reading, repeated reading, audio book modeling, and teacher modeling. According to the results of the study, individual fluency instruction did increase the student’s fluency, however no particular intervention was found to be more beneficial than another.
In contrast, Charfouleas, Martens, Dobson, Weinstein and Gardner (2004) categorized fluency interventions into two types: skill-based strategies and performance-based strategies. Skill-based strategies are those that use teaching procedures prior to assessing. Some of these interventions include repeated readings, listening previews, and modeling. Performance-based interventions are strategies that have a consequence for fluent reading. For example, a reward may be contingent on reaching a previously set fluency goal. These researchers found that the addition of a performance-based intervention was not as effective as a skill-based intervention; therefore, a contingent reward did not significantly affect the gains in fluency for any participant. The direct instruction in fluency resulted in the greatest gain in fluent reading.

Thaler, Ebner, Heinz, and Landerl (2004) conducted a study using an uncommon fluency intervention. The objective of the study was aimed at creating orthographic representations in the minds of second, third, and fourth grade students in order to increase their reading fluency. Orthographic representations refer to the layout and visual design of the word. The researchers also sought to find whether the gains made in fluency could be generalized to words not included in the study and if the achievement would remain over an extended time period. They explained that repeated reading is the most commonly used fluency intervention, but that it is often considered to be pedagogically unsound to practice words in isolation. They defended their study by explaining that an orthographic representation would assist the reader in creating a visual cue between the structure of the letters and the
associated sound. The reader could then recall the sound quickly and accurately.

The results of the study showed that there was a significant increase in the reading rate of the words that the students were trained to read. There was also an increase in reading rate for untrained words, however it was not nearly as significant. The students were given another test five weeks after the end of the study to see if the learning had been retained. The reading rate had decreased from the day the study had ended. Though there was a decrease, there was still an overall increase in reading rate from the baseline before any intervention.

Wright and Cleary (2006) created a cross-age peer-tutoring program in order to assess the impact on reading fluency in both tutors and tutees. They cited the necessity for a study of this type through the use of a government study on reading. This study reported that in 2003 nearly 40 percent of fourth grade students scored below grade level in reading. In order to improve reading skills, it was stated that fluency must first be addressed, as higher level comprehension is dependent on the ability to read fluently. The researchers explained that although there are a number of known fluency interventions, many are unable to be used in a classroom setting. They hoped that this study would help to bridge the gap between research and applicable classroom interventions.

In the study, tutors and tutees worked together to read a text at the tutees' instructional reading level. The tutors modeled fluent reading and assisted with words when needed. The results indicated that both the tutors and tutees improved in reading rate at the close of the study, however the tutees improved at a faster rate than
the tutors. This could be due to the claim that students with strong accuracy in word recognition generally have a faster reading rate (Rasinski, 1999). Therefore the tutors were likely reading at a faster rate before the study began.

It is crucial to note that a number of researchers connect fluency and comprehension. The automaticity theory was discussed by a number of researchers including Kuhn (2005), Chafouleas et al. (2004), and Morra and Tracey (2006). Only a few studies truly focused on interventions that would be feasible in a classroom setting. Kuhn (2005) and Begeny and Silber (2006) created interventions that were meant for the purpose of classroom application. All researchers that were cited agreed that interventions in fluent reading had a positive impact on the reading rate of participants.

**Fluency in Relation to Other Aspects of Reading**

Schwanenflugel and Hamilton (2004) conducted research to determine how reading prosody is related to decoding and reading comprehension. Prosodic reading is an element of fluency that includes reading with emotion. The researchers cited that most studies gauged fluency solely on speed in decoding. They stated that there was a lack of research that used prosody as a measure of fluency, concluding that a possible reason for this is that it is technically difficult to measure prosody. Instead of direct prosody measurements, scales or rubrics have often been used. These scales are useful, however they cannot separate prosodic reading from decoding speed as accurately as computer programs which create spectrographic representations of speech.
At the close of the study, the researchers found that there was a relationship between decoding speed and reading comprehension. They also found a relationship between decoding speed and reading prosody. However, the researchers concluded that there was no relation between prosodic reading and reading comprehension. In addition to these conclusions, the researchers stated that prosodic reading may be related to language experience. Therefore young children may not understand the use of prosody in oral language. The researchers hypothesized that this may make prosody irrelevant to fluent reading in young children.

Speece and Ritchey (2005) conducted a study that related fluency to more factors than comprehension and speed of decoding as in the study by Schwanenflugel and Hamilton (2004). They wanted to find predictors of growth in fluency for children who were at risk of reading failure. They also sought to discover the patterns of growth in oral reading fluency for students who were at risk and not at risk for reading failure.

In this study, the students were first graders who were tracked over the course of two years. The at-risk readers were those that performed in the bottom twenty-fifth percentile of their class in a letter-sound fluency assessment. Following their identification, the students were assessed on a number of factors, including letter-sound fluency, oral reading fluency, rapid automatized letter naming, phonological awareness, word reading efficiency, IQ, teacher ratings of classroom behavior, basic reading skills, socioeconomic status, and age. The researchers sought to find out if any of these areas were correlated to the at-risk status. The students were also
assessed in fluency throughout the two years. The researchers compiled data and concluded that there were only certain factors that could be predictors of fluency growth over the two years. These were letter-sound fluency, oral reading fluency, and teacher ratings of classroom behavior. All other assessed factors were not correlated to fluency growth.

The second part of the study was to find patterns of growth in at-risk and not at-risk students. The data compiled by the researchers showed a large difference in initial fluency rates and a difference in rates of growth. The not at-risk readers started with more fluent reading and continued to improve at a more rapid rate. The researchers concluded that oral reading fluency may be a beneficial skill to directly teach as early as students are learning word-attack skills. The authors hypothesized that if early reading instruction included fluent word recognition, the difference in ability and rates of these groups may be minimized. The researchers concluded that fluency may be a skill that develops as early reading skills are developed as opposed to being a result of skilled reading.

Nes Ferrara (2005) studied an individual student to determine how a fluency intervention would influence other factors in reading, including word accuracy and comprehension. This study also looked at the student’s self-perceptions and experience with reading problems. These aspects of the study will be discussed in the next section. The researcher used paired reading, where a more-skilled reader (the researcher) guided the less-skilled reader through a text by modeling and providing support where needed. The results showed that the student did increase in oral
reading fluency, which was defined by the study to include prosody. The researcher stated that the effects on the student’s comprehension were inconclusive. She was unable to determine whether the student’s comprehension had benefited from the fluency intervention, however many theories support the idea that an increase in fluency will in turn increase comprehension.

The link between comprehension and fluency is often debated in research. According to Pikulski and Chard (2005), fluency typically reflects comprehension however, fluent reading is not enough to ensure reading success. The generally accepted automaticity theory is often credited to LaBerge and Samuels (Fuchs et al., 2001). This theory, along with the verbal efficiency theory, explained that since there is limited brain function available, when fluent, automatic reading occurs students are able to better comprehend text (Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007). Due to this theory, researchers have stated that higher level comprehension is dependent on the ability to read fluently (Wright & Cleary, 2006). Researchers have cited that since reading speed may change due to the need for inflection and pausing in different types of literature as students progress to older grades, the correlation between comprehension and fluency is stronger in younger students (Fuchs et al., 2001).

**Factors Affecting Reading Progress**

There are many factors that may affect a child’s progress in reading. Two researchers studied reading progress and discovered that having productive, fully-implemented reading programs could have an effect on student achievement. Wright and Cleary (2006) discussed the necessity of an intervention that was fitted for
classroom use. They cited limited time, lack of material, and disagreements among teachers as major issues when selecting an intervention for use in the classroom.

In addition to this, Au and Carroll (1997) observed the full implementation of a social constructivist approach to literacy instruction. The program was the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) which moved from teacher-directed to student-centered instruction. After the implementation of the program, it was found that two-thirds of the students were scoring below grade level in a number of areas in reading.

Due to these poor numbers, the researchers analyzed the potential barriers in implementation that resulted in a lack of success. They created the Demonstration Classroom project to assist in fully implementing the KEEP program and dissolve the problems encountered in the previous implementation. They used interventions which kept the school staff accountable for their work, including having the consultants work in close cooperation with the teachers and using classroom implementation checklists to identify items that were necessary for implementation. These interventions allowed for the complete implementation of the KEEP program. The researchers found that there was an increase in the number of students at or above grade level by the end of the full implementation. The authors concluded that the full implementation of the program was crucial to the success of the students.

The implementation discussed by Au and Carroll (1997) showed that teacher facilitation of the program was an important factor in student achievement in reading. In addition to implementing productive reading programs, it is important for teachers
to be aware of their students' feelings about reading. Moller (1999) worked with five
students to discuss their attitudes and self-perceptions about reading. She worked
with them to find their motivations and thoughts about reading in order to better reach
those students who did not enjoy reading or see themselves as good readers. The
researcher stated that gaining this knowledge about the students and their purposes
and perceptions about reading could help the teacher to guide the students along a
path to becoming better readers by building on their knowledge and interests.
According to Moller (1999), "We lose a valuable resource if we fail to listen to the
insights of the children. It is through such insights that individuals and groups can
create new knowledge and develop a feeling of agency and empowerment about their
learning" (p. 257).

The study by Nes Ferrara (2005), discussed in the previous section, also
looked at the self-perceptions, motivations, and experiences of the below grade level
reader who was participating in the fluency intervention. An important factor for the
student in the study was the ability to set a realistic goal and track it with concrete
evidence. The researcher stated that the achievement of fluency goals served as
reinforcement and motivation for the student. The student was involved, not only in
choosing her own reading materials, but also in setting her own goals. At the close of
the study, the student's self-perceptions had changed. When the study began, the
student felt anxious about reading orally in front of others. Even though she enjoyed
the act of reading, she did not like to read orally in front of her peers. She was
concerned about how the other students would view her as a reader. By the end of the
study, the student felt that she did read faster and saw success in the increase of her reading speed, however she still did not enjoy reading publicly.

Oldfather and Dahl (1994, as cited in Moller, 1999) discussed the idea that literacy learning is interconnected to a student’s motivation. This clearly relates to the view expressed by Padak, Vacca, and Stewart (1993, as cited in Moller, 1999) who stated that the views children hold about reading may affect how they act as readers. They stated that developing a good attitude about reading is important to the growth and progress of readers. In addition, teachers often cite that student motivation is a large issue (Edmunds and Bauserman, 2006). According to Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) motivation in the classroom is crucial. They gave five suggestions to teachers looking to increase student motivation. These suggestions were self-selection, attention to characteristics of books, personal interests, access to books, and active involvement of other people. Rasinski (2006) also expressed a view that students need to be motivated in order to reach success. Repeated readings to increase fluency are important however, students should be motivated to read using techniques such as Readers' Theater and poetry reads.

Conclusion

The research on reading fluency has shown that it is beneficial for students to receive direct instruction in fluency in order to increase their speed in reading. Since many researchers described a link between fluency and comprehension, it is an important skill that cannot be ignored. As stated by Speece and Ritchey (2005), fluency may be a skill that develops while learning to read instead of being a
characteristic of experienced readers.

This information has important implications for teachers, as instruction in fluency may further the overall reading ability of students. Although research cites a number of fluency interventions as being beneficial to growth in reading speed, there are not many which are known to raise the interest level of students (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). Readers' Theater has been cited in research by Corcoran and Davis (2005) as a positive way to increase student interest and confidence, as well as fluency.
Chapter 3

Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using Readers’ Theater as an intervention to improve motivation and fluency in reading. This intervention was designed to be used with an entire classroom. It was differentiated in order to engage each student with material at his/her own reading level. The intervention occurred four days each week for five weeks and lasted no more than ten minutes per session. The results of this study helped to influence ideas about the importance of direct fluency instruction in the early elementary classroom.

Participants

The participants in this study were second grade students in a rural town located approximately 20 miles south of Rochester, NY. The district services about 1,100 students. There were 16 regular education students involved in the study. The researcher served as their classroom teacher. Within the second grade classroom, there were six children who receive Academic Intervention Services as a result of not reaching benchmarks at the end of first grade. There are no students with individualized education plans.

Procedures of Study

All students in the classroom were involved in the study. Informed consent was orally given by students after hearing a description of the study using child
friendly language. Consent was collected from the parents or guardians by sending home a detailed letter explaining the study. (See Appendix A).

After collecting informed consent forms and receiving oral consent from the students, the data collection process began. Data was collected for two purposes: to record the effects on student motivation and to record the effects on fluency. Baseline data was collected in both of these areas. The students were given a pre survey to assess their motivation to read. Fluency was assessed by collecting a count of the number of words read correctly per minute on a passage at the students’ independent reading level. Both assessments were completed before the beginning of the intervention.

The students worked in their guided reading groups which were leveled by reading ability as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and teacher observations. The students were given a Readers’ Theater script at their independent reading level. The independent reading level is text that the students are able to read without assistance, generally meaning that they are reading at or above 94 percent accuracy. The independent level was used in order to allow the students to give attention to fluency without a focus on decoding unknown words.

The students rehearsed each script for three days for five to seven minutes per day. The first day allowed for an introduction to the text, followed by a period for independent practice. On the second and third days, the students practiced the script orally in their groups while the teacher moved through the room to provide assistance where needed. On the fourth day the students performed the script for their peers.
The students performed five scripts throughout the course of the study. At the close of the study, the students completed a post survey to assess their motivation to read. They were also timed reading a different passage at their independent reading level where the results were recorded in words read correctly per minute.

**Instruments for Study**

Prior to the start of the study, the Developmental Reading Assessment was administered to each student. The purpose of this assessment was to identify strengths, weaknesses, and the appropriate reading level for each student. It is a tool to allow teachers to place students in appropriate guided reading groups. The students were given pre and post fluency assessments. They were asked to read an unfamiliar passage at their independent reading level. These passage readings were timed and the results were recorded in words read correctly per minute.

The word per minute counts that were taken before and after the intervention were used to run a t-test. The data was also used to find the percentage of words per minute that each student increased. After comparing the counts for the entire class, the data was analyzed for each guided reading group. The analysis of this data showed whether the effectiveness of the intervention was dependent on the reading level of the student.

In order to assess motivation, the students were given a pre and post survey regarding their motivation to read (see Appendix B). The motivation surveys were analyzed to find an increase or decrease in positive responses to feelings about oral reading. A t-test was used to find out if the difference was statistically significant.
The students also completed three journal entries throughout the intervention. These journal entries were quick writes where the students wrote for four minutes without pausing. The prompt for these entries was: *How does Readers' Theater make you feel? Why?* The students' journals were read and analyzed to find any common ideas and feelings about reading throughout the study. The teacher kept a log throughout the intervention to observe motivational behavior. These behaviors were defined as following along, participating, and being on task. The motivational behaviors were observed on the first day that each script was introduced. The analysis involved looking for trends in the data that was collected. As the data was analyzed, observations that coincided with motivation and fluency assessments were noted.
Chapter 4

Results

Sixteen students participated in this study on reading fluency. In order to assess fluency the students read a passage orally before and after the intervention and the results were recorded in words read correctly per minute. Table 1 shows the results of this assessment for each student tested. The pretest and posttest scores can be found in columns two and three. The scores are shown in words per minute. The fourth column shows the difference between the pre and posttest in words per minute. The final column shows the difference as a percentage.

Students 1 through 4 were part of the red reading group that was reading independently at a level G. A level G is below grade level for a second grader and is the approximate equivalent of a mid-year first grade student according to the Avon Primary School’s reading standards. Students 5 through 10 were part of the blue reading group and were reading independently at a level L. These students were reading at a second grade level.

The final students, students 11 through 16, were part of the green reading group. This group was reading independently at a level P or Q, which is above second grade level according to the district’s standards. The students were leveled according to their progress on the Developmental Reading Assessment and teacher observations. The levels were given in accordance to the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system. In this system, books are leveled A through Z depending on the difficulty of the text.
Table 1

Comparison of Words Read Per Minute for Pre and Post Fluency Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pretest (wpm)</th>
<th>Posttest (wpm)</th>
<th>Difference (wpm)</th>
<th>Difference (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>187.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>309.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>145.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>63.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>62.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>112.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>-10.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>-6.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the data of the groups in Table 1 above, showed that the words per minute read by the blue group increased at a greater rate than the two other groups. The average increase of the red group was 37.25 words per minute. The average increase of the blue group was 42.67 words per minute. The average increase of the green group was one word per minute. Two of the students in this group decreased the words they read correctly per minute according to the pre and post fluency assessment. All of the students in the red and blue groups increased their fluency.

After collecting the data, a t-test was run to determine if the difference in the words read per minute was statistically significant. Overall, the p-value for all students was 0.0003. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the difference in the data sets was statistically significant. The data was also analyzed for each reading group.
to determine if the reading level was a factor in the effectiveness of the intervention. The p-value for the red group was 0.0223, meaning that the difference for this group was also statistically significant. The p-value for the blue group was the lowest of the three reading groups. This p-value was 0.00006. The data shows that the Readers’ Theater intervention was most effective in this group. The p-value for the green group was 0.4166. The results of the intervention were not statistically significant for this group.

Students were also assessed to determine the impact of Readers’ Theater on their motivation. The students were given a pre and post survey regarding their motivation to read. This survey consisted of five statements about reading and the students were asked to express their level of agreement with each statement. In order to evaluate these assessments quantitatively, each answer was equated with a number. The value “1” was given for the most negative feeling, which was expressed that the student felt bad or nervous about reading. The value of “2” was assigned to a neutral position. The value of “3” was given for the most positive statement, which expressed that the student felt great or confident about reading. The mean score was then found for each student. Table 2, found on the following page, shows the results of this part of the survey.
Table 2

Comparison of Results of Pre and Post Motivation Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pre Mean</th>
<th>Post Mean</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After finding the mean of the scores for the pre and post assessments, it was found that the motivation scores increased for nine of the 16 students tested. Three students had no change in score and the remaining four students decreased in their motivation score. In the post motivation assessment, none of the students felt that they were weak oral readers. All of the students chose either ok or good to rate their oral reading skills on that question.

In the post motivation survey, the students were given a series of statements preceded by the question: How did Readers’ Theater make you feel about reading? The students were told to check as many of the statements as applied to them. They were also told that they may check none of the statements. The results of this question are shown in Table 3.
Table 3

Statements Regarding Readers Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt confident reading in front of the class.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt nervous about reading in front of the class.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt excited about reading.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt bored by reading.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt happy to be working with other students.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt unhappy to be working with other students.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the students responded to statements that were associated with positive feelings regarding reading. Only one student was nervous about reading in front of the class. The students who responded to the negative statements were members of the red group. This group was reading below grade level. They also scored lowest on the teacher observation of motivational behavior, which is further explained below.

The final question on the post motivation survey asked the students how often they would like to do Readers' Theater in the future. Fifteen of the students stated that they would like to continue to do Readers' Theater each week. One student answered that he would not like to do it again. He was a member of the red group and defended this statement by citing that people in his group were not getting along.

The students were able to comment on their ratings for the motivation assessments. Their explanations held information regarding their feelings about
reading. The same student who in the pre assessment stated that “...I get scared a lot because I am scared of the kids” wrote that he feels proud when reading in front of the class “...because I like to talk to people.” Another student stated that he is a great oral reader because “...the other kids can help me if I am having a hard time on a word.” When writing about how often they would like to participate in Readers’ Theater in the future, one student stated that he would like it to take place each week “...because I love doing Readers’ Theater.” Another wrote that she would like to participate each week because she “really liked reading the silly parts.”

The participants wrote three journal entries throughout the course of the intervention. They wrote one at the beginning of the intervention, one at the mid point, and one at the end of the intervention. After reading these journal entries, they were classified into three categories. The first category contained entries that contained negative feelings about Readers’ Theater. In these entries, words like nervous, bad, and scared were used to describe the students’ feelings about reading aloud in front of the class. The second group consisted of entries that contained positive feelings about Readers’ Theater. In these entries, words like good, excited, and happy were used to describe the students’ feelings. The last group contained entries that showed indifferent feelings. These entries did not contain words that could be associated with either negative or positive feelings or where the student stated that they felt both positive and negative.

At the beginning of the intervention, there were seven students that wrote about negative feelings regarding Readers’ Theater. There was one student who
shared indifferent feelings. The remaining eight students wrote positive journal entries about Readers’ Theater. By the mid point, there were no students who wrote negative feelings regarding Readers’ Theater. There were two students who showed indifference. The remaining 14 students wrote positive statements regarding Readers’ Theater. At the end of the intervention, there was only a single student who felt indifferent about the intervention. The other 15 students wrote positive feelings about Readers’ Theater.

Student 8 was one who began writing negatively and finally grew to have a positive outlook on reading orally. In his first entry, he stated that “...it is a little scary. I like to read but not in front of crowds...I am afraid of crowds!” An excerpt from his second journal entry reads “...I sort of like Readers’ Theater because it is fun to listen to the stories that are read...I like to hear the funny parts.” By the last entry, this student wrote “...I love Readers’ Theater because I like to do different parts. I also love Readers’ Theater because I sometimes get a great part in the script.” His last entry did not contain any fear of reading orally in front of the group.

Student 2 summed up his feelings about Readers’ Theater in his final journal entry. He stated “...At first when we started Readers’ Theater I felt nervous. When it got farther into Readers’ Theater I started to like it. It got really fun as the days passed.” Student 9 began the intervention stating that “...I feel a little bit nervous because it doesn’t feel right with me.” However, by the second journal entry, this same student wrote “...I feel proud about Readers’ Theater.” At the close of the intervention, he wrote “...I wish we could do more Readers’ Theater.” Student 14
stated "...I think I will feel nervous because I am not used to reading in front of the class. It makes me scared too." By the end of the intervention he wrote "...I like Readers’ Theater. It makes me feel excited because it is fun...I like theater."

The teacher observed the students to identify motivational behaviors defined as following along, participating, and being on task. Students were observed the first day that they worked on each new script. The vast majority of the class exhibited all three of these behaviors each time they were observed. The students who were a part of the blue and green groups, or those students reading at or above grade level, showed these behaviors 100 percent of the times that they were observed. However, students that belonged to the red group, or those students reading below grade level, often had trouble following along and staying on task, although all of those students participated each week.

Overall, the results of the fluency assessments showed that most students improved their oral reading fluency as measured by words read correctly per minute. The blue group, which was reading on grade level, showed the most growth. According to the motivation surveys, journal entries, and teacher observations of motivational behavior, the children mostly increased their positive feelings regarding oral reading. Each member of the red group increased in words read per minute, however they showed the least amount of growth in motivation.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using Readers’ Theater to improve motivation and fluency in reading. I designed this intervention to be feasible for daily use in a classroom. I have come to a number of conclusions following the completion of the intervention.

The students’ fluency was assessed using a word per minute count before and after the intervention. Growth in fluency was seen by all readers that were reading on or below grade level. Two of the six above grade level readers decreased in fluency rate. All others increased. After analyzing the data and fluency assessments used, I can draw several conclusions from this data.

First, there may be a reason for the marked difference between the students reading at or below grade level compared to the above grade level readers. The above grade level readers were reading advanced texts. Therefore, there may be some range in fluency levels depending on the type of text being read. For example, a student reading a narrative text may read more quickly than when reading an expository text. This may be because of the need for different inflection and speed depending on the text. Expository text also has more difficult and unfamiliar vocabulary. Since these advanced readers are beginning to understand unwritten prosodic cues more than most students their age, they may use inflection and pausing more appropriately, therefore changing their rate depending on the type of text. In this group, an
assessment of prosody may be coupled with the word per minute assessment to give a more accurate picture of change.

All but two of the students in the class saw an increase in the words they were able to read correctly per minute. I have concluded that the oral practicing of text gave the students a great amount of experience with reading aloud. In addition to their practice with oral reading, the students also heard their peers reading orally. As the students were listening, they were hearing demonstrations of fluent reading from their classmates. This oral modeling may have also improved their awareness and effort in fluent reading.

The Readers' Theater program seemed to have a positive effect on the students' speed in reading. The t-test that was run on the data showed that the difference between the pre and post fluency assessments was statistically significant. This means that the intervention being used was likely to be the cause of the change in words read per minute.

I believe that overall, the motivation assessments illustrated that Readers' Theater had a positive impact on the motivation of the students. The results of the comparison between the pre and post motivation assessments showed that the motivation scores for nine of the students increased, three remained the same, and four decreased in score. Since it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this data alone, I focused greatly on the three journal entries completed by the students to complement the quantitative data collected through the assessments. The student journals seemed to give greater insight into how the students felt about reading due to
Readers' Theater. The vagueness of the statements and agreement levels in the motivation assessments may be partially at fault for inconclusiveness of those results.

After viewing the students' journal entries there is a trend that can be seen. Before the start of the intervention, seven of the 16 students wrote negatively about Readers' Theater. Most of the feelings that were regarded as negativity were apprehension about speaking in front of their peers. By the end of the intervention there was an increase in the number of students who wrote positively about the intervention. None of the students expressed negative or apprehensive feelings. This data shows that the students' motivation to read had increased because of their participation in the Readers' Theater intervention.

Furthermore, in the post motivation assessment the students were given the option to check statements that reflected their feelings about themselves as readers after participating in the intervention. Each positive statement received a response from approximately 75 percent of the students. The negative statements were only responded to by either one or two students. The data from these statements indicated that the majority of students in the class saw Readers' Theater as a positive part of their day. This conclusion is further backed by the fact that 15 of the 16 students stated that they would like to continue to participate in Readers' Theater each week.

Students in the red group were the only members of the class that did not perform well in the teacher observation portion of the motivation assessment. These students were not demonstrating the motivational behaviors of following along and staying on task. The red group was comprised of students who were reading below
grade level. Several of the members of this group also have behavior issues. I inferred that the behavior problems may account for the lack of motivational behaviors. This group often needed reminders to stay on task during other work times during the day. The members of this group may require additional reminders for their work in all areas. All but one of these students wrote in their journal entries that they enjoyed Readers’ Theater. The other student stated that he did not enjoy Readers’ Theater because his group members did not get along.

After completing the study I have several recommendations for the future. First, when implementing the Readers’ Theater program for regular use in the classroom, it may be helpful to partner with other teachers. When doing this, the students could perform for other classes at times which would keep the activity exciting and new.

In a future study, it may be helpful to add an assessment of word accuracy with the fluency rate. This would tell the researcher if fluent reading is assisting the student with decoding. The word accuracy rate could be taken while the student completes their pre and post fluency assessments. The data would give the researcher more information about the implications of direct fluency instruction.

In the future, to keep students engaged and excited about Readers’ Theater, I may make some changes to the program as it currently exists. In order to allow the students ownership of the materials, they might be able to write and perform their own scripts. They could base their scripts on favorite books. Script writing could even turn into a literacy center where they would use the book currently being read in
their guided reading group as a basis for a script. Also, I might allow for a greater amount of self-reflection. The students in the study reflected on their motivation, but never directly on their growth in fluency. I may consider making a student-friendly rubric where the students could assess their oral reading skills weekly.

With the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) needing to be in place in all New York State districts by 2010, Readers’ Theater would be a beneficial intervention for teachers. RTI is a state-mandated program where teachers are responsible for intervening and tracking the progress of below grade level students. There is a great amount of research to verify the benefits of Readers’ Theater. The program would be an excellent tool for use with students who are in need of an intervention.

Overall, I have found that Readers’ Theater is a beneficial tool to improve student motivation and reading fluency. It is a viable intervention to be included in daily classroom activities. In addition, the enthusiasm and excitement for the program was a great motivator for the students. They were no longer nervous about reading in front of their peers. Instead, the classroom turned into a supportive audience that was there to listen to and encourage each other. I plan to share the results of this intervention with the staff at my school so that more classrooms may benefit from the use of this program.
References


Appendices
Appendix A:

Parent Letter
Dear Parent/Guardian,

As a part of my master's degree program at SUNY Brockport, I will be completing a research project this year. This project involves the use of a program called readers' theater. In readers' theater the students are placed into small groups and assigned roles in a play. They practice reading their parts and eventually perform their play for the entire class. The purpose of my study is to determine how fluency and motivation to read will be affected by daily use of readers' theater. It is my hope that this will help the students in becoming more confident oral readers. I do not anticipate any foreseeable risks to your child as a participant in the study. Our class will use readers' theater throughout the year, however I will only be collecting data for my research project for four weeks.

While I am collecting data for my research, all information will be confidential. No actual names will be shared in the research project. All assessments will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and shredded at the close of the study.

You are being asked whether or not you will permit your child to be a part of this study. Although all students will participate in readers' theater, your child's participation in the data collection is purely voluntary. Your child's grade will not be affected by participation. You and your child are free to change your mind at any time during the study. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study please sign below and return the bottom portion of this form to school.

Thank you for your support. I have included my contact information as well as that of my university supervisor. Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information about this study.

Dawn Graves

Thomas Allen
SUNY Brockport

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

Child's Name ________________________________

Parent Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________
Appendix B:

Motivation Assessment
Name _____________________ Date ______________ 

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes you. Then explain why you chose it.

1. I like to read

Never  Once in a while  Daily

Explain: __________________________________________________________

2. I like to

Be read to  Read silently  Read to someone else

Explain: __________________________________________________________

3. When I read in front of the class, I feel

Nervous  Ok  Proud

Explain: __________________________________________________________

4. When I read silently, I am a ________ reader.

Bad  Ok  Great

Explain: __________________________________________________________
5. When I read out loud, I am a _________ reader.

Bad          Ok          Great

Explain:

6. What is your favorite part of reading time?

Working on centers          Reading to yourself
Reading with a partner       Reading to Miss Graves
Reading in front of the class

Explain:
Name __________________________ Date __________________

Post Survey Follow Up Questions:

How did Readers’ Theater make you feel about reading?
(check as many as you need to)

I felt:

☐ confident reading in front of the class.

☐ nervous about reading in front of the class.

☐ excited about reading.

☐ bored by reading.

☐ happy to be working with other students.

☐ unhappy to be working with other students.

How often do you want to do Readers’ Theater?

Never again  A few more times  Every week

Explain:

_________________________