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How Fluency is Impacted for Struggling Readers Through Decoding, Rereading, and Word Study

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How Fluency is Impacted for Struggling Readers Through Decoding, Rereading, and Word Study

By

Andrea Michele King

August 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of the
State University of New York College at Brockport
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How Fluency is Impacted for Struggling Readers Through Decoding, Rereading, and Word Study

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August 2007

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HOW FLUENCY IS IMPACTED FOR STRUGGLING READERS THROUGH DECODING, REREADING, AND WORD STUDY

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State University of New York, College at Brockport, 2007

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate what happens to the fluency of struggling readers when the decoding of new or unfamiliar words were taught during small group reading instruction.

Three females and two male first and second grade students provided usable data for this study. Research was collected over a three-month period and was taken during small reading groups. The elements of fluency that were addressed in the study were expression, accuracy, rate, and smoothness. Components that were used to increase fluency were the Dolch sight words, rereading, and word study. The students were tested three different times throughout the study on the Dolch sight words and on their reading rate with the rereading of four different books. The results indicated that these three measures combined created fluent readers in the small reading groups.

An analysis on the reading rate was done for every student on four different books of their choice at their own reading level. Students were timed on the reading three different times and the time it took was converted into a reading rate. The reading rate was calculated by the number of words read correctly divided by the number of seconds it took to read multiplied by 60. The results indicated that rereading books in the small reading groups increased fluency with each student. These results supported the idea that readers get better with practice and improve in their accuracy and speed.
An analysis of the Dolch sight words was taken below and on grade level for each student. The number of correct words was recorded and students practiced with unknown words throughout the research period. Results indicated that drill and practice and multi-sensory approaches to sight words increased the number of words learned and known automatically.

The word study approach was a supplemental activity used in guided reading to help students recognize common features in words. Students were taught word families, digraphs, blends, and beginning consonants. Based on observations, students applied the knowledge of these learned words to their reading, which helped them to become fluent readers.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Have you ever thought to yourself that practice makes perfect? In reading that does apply, especially when you are a beginning reader. The more you read and have practice with it, the better you will become. The more practice you have with reading familiar and unfamiliar words, the better you will get at noticing words in and out of texts. Once you are able to read words automatically, you can spend more time on reading the text at a good and steady pace, versus concentrating on decoding the words. Being able to recognize and decode words is a critical factor when building fluency. As you become a more fluent reader, comprehension becomes easier when you are reading. Think about how fluency and word recognition can relate to driving. The more practice you having driving, the more automatic it becomes and the better we get at it. We don’t have to consciously think about every decision when driving. This is the same with reading. The more automatic it becomes, the less time we need to devote to decoding and more energy can be spent on comprehending. The more time we spend on reading and rereading texts allows our students to become fluent and knowledgeable readers.

In this thesis, I explain how to build upon students’ word recognition skills through practicing sight words and unfamiliar words daily, engaging in word study, and rereading texts. According to Clay (2005),

“The more children use words (that is, the more they read them, write them, play with them, or talk about them), the more likely they will be to develop the understanding and flexibility necessary to take words apart while reading or construct words for writing,” (p. 170).
Problem statement

According to Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (1996), “being able to recognize words without slowing down helps maintain fluent processing. Fluent readers also recognize features of words that they know and use these features to get to words that are unknown,” (p. 151).
Efficient word recognition is key for fluent reading and fluent reading is a critical link between decoding and comprehension. The objective of my research was to investigate what happens to the fluency of struggling readers when the decoding of new or unfamiliar words were taught during small group reading instruction.

Significance

This research is important because it may illustrate how increased word knowledge could help to improve fluency for struggling readers. When students become fluent readers, they recognize words more quickly and can comprehend at the same time. Direct instruction is a type of teaching where the teacher is the facilitator and the teacher has control of what is being taught to the students. Another type of instruction is indirect. Both are valid forms of teaching yet, for this research, direct instruction is a better choice simply because data is more easily identified and collected. I will be able to observe and collect data on words that students do not know and will take this data and use it for direct instruction purposes.

It is important that students are exposed to word study, word flash cards, and repeated readings, so that they can improve upon their fluency. It is important for students to reread books because the more familiar they are with a book, the more likely their reading accuracy, phrasing, and pace will improve. Students who read and reread passages orally or silently become better readers. Continued reading practice helps word recognition become more automatic, rapid, and
effortless. Also, with the support of sight word flash cards and through practice of unknown words from reading texts will help to build upon fluent reading for students. This research is important because as a teacher you want to know if your students are reading smoothly, at a steady pace, and accurately as the year progresses and it is hoped that the suggestions in this thesis can make that possible.

One issue that teachers of reading face daily is that many students are unsure of what to do when they get to unknown words and have not learned the strategies for decoding unknown words. Teachers do not always model reading strategies to students and are unaware of how to build up students’ knowledge of words; so more time in reading is spent on decoding instead of comprehension. Students become frustrated when they cannot solve unknown words in a text, which often leads to a feeling of failure in reading. In reality, teachers cannot work with students on a one-on-one basis daily, so they need to teach students how to become effective readers and what strategies will help them. What needs to be done is that teachers need to have students read books over and over again, so that students build up a word bank and become more familiar with known words in texts. The goal is for students to transfer that knowledge of words into new stories and to use what they know to help them solve unknown words. By providing students with opportunities of rereading, practicing words both in and out of isolation, and word study, students can become fluent readers.

The stakeholders who will be impacted by this research are the students I am currently working with and their teachers. The goal at the end of this research period is to have these students become and be aware that they are fluent readers. These students will know more words and have higher word knowledge, will be knowledgeable about strategies when coming to unknown words in texts, and will know the components of what makes a fluent reader. These
students should be reading a higher text level at the end of this research period and should feel like confident readers. The students will see how reading can be enjoyable and that their time will be spent on understanding the story and not on decoding the words. I will explain my research to the classroom teachers, so they become aware of how to implement fluency into their reading curriculum. They will see the importance of fluency on their struggling readers and how it can impact their ability to become better readers. The teachers will gain research knowledge and become aware of the effectiveness of fluency in their reading instruction. These stakeholders should benefit from this research and improve in either his/her learning or teaching.

Fluency should be included in instruction because too often students are not fluent readers. A nonfluent reader is a problem because fluency should be a key element in reading programs, but often it is not a significant aspect of them. Many teachers have not been taught in their teacher training programs how to teach fluency, which is why it is not part of their implemented reading curriculum. Teachers may feel that they have a lack of familiarity with the topic, which could be why they do not see the true importance of teaching students to become fluent readers. Teachers focus on word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension as the goals for reading instruction and fluency is viewed as the outcome of these goals. Fluency is finally a literacy topic that is becoming more popular and known. More research is being conducted to show the importance of fluency in the classroom and how it can help to improve students’ ability to read. Integrating fluency with the reading curriculum may seem difficult for teachers, but it is something that can be done on a small or whole group basis. Once teachers become knowledgeable of how to implement fluency, then the decoding ability should increase with struggling readers. One reason this problem has developed is because teachers in the past taught students to read through round robin reading. This approach to reading is not effective for
struggling readers because they are most likely reading material that is too difficult for them, are asked to read aloud and then interrupted when they miscall a word, and often resort to the reading strategy of sounding it out. These texts more than likely do not get revisited and students feel more pressure when decoding. This approach to reading has mainly been replaced by guided reading, or direct small group instruction, which provides students more opportunities to read on their own. When teachers model reading strategies and have students apply them to their reading, then they can become more independent readers. Through modeling and support, students can become successful fluent readers. Another reason this problem has developed is because fluent silent reading has usually been the goal of reading instruction. The emphasis needs to be placed on oral reading as well, especially for students in the primary grades. Children need to hear themselves read and be provided with feedback from their teacher or peers in order to monitor their reading progress.

As the researcher, I believe that I will have an impact on my own teaching and students. Both the students that I am working with now and my future students will be exposed to fluency in their reading curriculum. Using repeated readings, partner reading, word study, and word flashcards should help these students make gains in their reading abilities. By exposing my future students to this and having it a part of my yearly curriculum will help them to see how reading can be made fun and help to take the pressure off when reading. My own teaching will be affected because I will be more aware and knowledgeable of how to implement fluency into my reading curriculum. I will have seen how effective it can be for students, especially struggling readers and will use this research in my own teaching practices. I have always believed that students are capable of becoming successful readers, but they have needed to be provided with plenty of reading opportunities. I have also become aware of the importance of
modeling and how it can help students to become independent readers when they know how to do it on their own. By providing students with multiple opportunities to build up their word knowledge, it will help them to become more accurate and automatic readers.

Rationale

Decoding, fluency, and comprehension are all integrated with one another. For a person to be a fluent reader, he/she must be able to decode the text. I decided to do this research because I believe that fluency is often ignored in the reading curriculum. I believe that teachers need to be aware of the benefits of implementing fluency with students and using the variety of methods to teach it. Once teachers are able to see the benefits it has to readers, then hopefully they will see how easily they can implement it in the curriculum. If the book is at the appropriate and instructional level for the student, then he/she should be able to read it without too many problems. Building upon a student’s word knowledge through daily practice with word flashcards and word study should lead to fluency for that student. The more words a student is able to recognize, especially if they are recognized automatically, the better the pace of reading will be as well as the expression while reading. If a student is spending more time with focusing on the story line and what it is about, then they will be reading for meaning. When students have to focus on figuring out what the words are, then it takes away from what the story is about. Students cannot concentrate on what the story is about because they are struggling too much with what the text says. When students are able to focus their attention on the meaning of the story, then they can become more fluent readers and are able to comprehend stories. In the simplest terms, decoding leads to fluency, which leads to comprehension. All three components are
necessary to get from one to another and teachers hope that their students can comprehend and read fluently.

I am very interested in this problem that I am researching because I feel that it is a problem that is neglected in the reading curriculum. I have worked with struggling readers in the past and was unaware of effective practices that I could use to help them become better readers. I was unaware of fluency and how it could help readers focus more on comprehension. Becoming more knowledgeable of fluency practices and seeing the results it has on these readers will change my future teaching practices. Too often students are unaware of how to decode unknown words on their own and teachers just give the word to them, which does not teach these students to apply reading strategies on their own. Students need to become independent readers and this will not happen unless modeling and repetition is in place by the teacher. I hope to show teachers the effectiveness of fluency in the reading curriculum and the growth that readers can make through these varied fluency practices.

Definitions

**Guided reading groups**: Flexible reading groups in which the teacher guides students who are similar in reading levels through the reading of the text of story for a meaningful reading experience and provides necessary support and modeling along the way.

**Fluency**: Using the components of phrasing, pace, accuracy, smoothness, and expression while reading.

**Decoding/Word Recognition**: Being able to decipher the word and say it correctly.
Word study: Allows students to see and experience how letters and words work and the similarities with patterns in words. Students become problem solvers and come to new understandings with applying knowledge to new words.

Sight words: Words recognized by sight without a need for analysis.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Decoding/Comprehension

When readers focus their attention on decoding the words, it leaves little capacity for the demanding process of comprehension. Fluency is a critical component of reading and it fosters comprehension. If a student has not yet developed fluency, the process of decoding words becomes the focus and that attention is not available for constructing the meaning of texts. Fluency has been the neglected aspect of reading and is important in helping students decode words quicker and more accurately. Fluency is necessary for reading achievement because it depends upon and reflects comprehension.

Another way to become more familiar with words is through sight word reading. With practice, words come to be read automatically by sight, which can be an efficient way to read words in text. When sight words are known well enough, readers can recognize them and pronounce them without hesitation or effort when sounding out letters. Any word that is read automatically becomes a sight word that is read from memory. Building a sight word vocabulary is crucial for achieving reading skills. Sight word learning is accomplished through forming connections that link spellings of written words to their pronunciations and meanings within memory. These connections are formed out of the students’ knowledge of the alphabetic system. The alphabetic system includes knowledge of grapheme-phoneme relations, phonemic awareness, and knowledge of spelling patterns that occur in words. The alphabetic system includes the knowledge of the alphabet and an understanding of the letter symbols and sounds in language. As readers learn more about spelling patterns that occur in words, they help students to form connections to remember words. When readers acquire more knowledge about the alphabetic system, they are able to learn sight words quickly and remember them long term.
According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), “Comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language,” (p. 272). The more background knowledge a reader has with a given text, the more likely that reader will make sense of what is being read. Background knowledge is an important factor for creating meaning and teachers should help students in activating prior knowledge before reading a new text. As readers connect known knowledge to new information that takes place in a story, they are able to make connections. Students can make text-to-self connections, text-to-text connections, or text-to-word connections. This known knowledge that students bring to a text is referred to as schema. Every student has a different schema and it depends on the background knowledge that they each have. Readers vary in the knowledge, culture, and cognitive development and these factors will bring different experiences for readers in texts. By building and activating background knowledge, the teacher will help the students find a purpose for reading each text. This knowledge will help the readers make sense of the story and they will be more likely to understand the text.

Teachers need to help students become good readers by teaching them how to use the comprehension strategies. These strategies include monitoring, predicting, inferring, questioning, connecting, summarizing, visualizing, and organizing. Teachers should model these strategies, which can be done effectively through a think aloud. Students need to be provided with numerous opportunities to practice and apply these strategies.

Gradually, teachers should release responsibility of comprehension to the students. Teachers scaffold students by creating opportunities within a student’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Scaffolding is a technique that teachers use when modeling a desired task or strategy, then gradually releases the responsibility over to the student. Lev Vygotsky created
this theory. According to Soderman, Gregory, & McCarty (2005), the ZPD entails having a range of social interaction between an adult and a child. Within that range, the child can perform, but with assistance from an adult. The child performs skills and concepts that he/she is learning, but can only emerge from them if they are given appropriate support. Proximal development ends when the child can function independently. Teachers need to model and provide support to students when developing comprehension skills, until they can do it independently. Comprehension can be a difficult process for students, but is a skill that students need to develop if they are to be successful readers.

The concepts of decoding and comprehension are important to this research because these components must be in place for fluency to occur. Before anything else, a student must learn how to decode words effectively through automatic and accurate processing. Once a student is able to possess this ability, then comprehension and fluency will come more naturally.

**Word Study**

Being literate depends on fast, accurate recognition of words in texts and focusing attention on making meaning. Word study is one way to make this happen for students in the classroom. Word study is centered on individual needs of students and is a conceptual approach to instruction in phonics, spelling, and word recognition. According to Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston (2004), there are two purposes of word study. The first purpose is to allow active exploration because it teaches students to look at words and discover regularities, patterns, and conventions needed to read and spell. Secondly, word study increases specific knowledge of words including both the spelling and meaning of individual words. Word study
helps students master the recognition, spelling, and meaning of specific words. According to Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston (2004),

“Students need hands-on opportunities to manipulate word features in a way that allows them to generalize beyond isolated, individual examples to entire groups of words that are spelled the same way. The best way to develop fast and accurate perception of word features is to engage in meaningful reading and writing, and to have multiple opportunities to examine those same words out of context,” (p. 4).

Word study can take place at the end of a guided reading lesson and should take no longer than 10 to 15 minutes. Word study is developmental in the sense that it matches the level of word knowledge of each learner. The specific features of words must match the needs of the child.

Word study focuses on experiences that will help teach students the way letters and words work. Word study also teaches students a process or strategy when thinking about the words as they read and write. Students become problem solvers and come to new understandings when applying knowledge to new words. Word study is important because it encourages students to think about words and not just memorize them. Building up word recognition skills through word study allows students to focus on reading texts fluently.

Word study can easily be implemented into small guided reading groups. Students that learn how to work with words are able to analyze words by breaking them into meaningful patterns. Learning words through analogy needs to be modeled and scaffolded for students, especially struggling readers. One way to promote this linking is to highlight common rimes on word walls, which shows students that this is a pattern that can be applied to reading. Rimes are the endings of words. For example a common rime at the end of a word would be –at and
students could see this pattern in the words cat, mat, hat, that, rat, and sat. The –at ending would be one example of a word family. Teaching students how to use rimes in words allows students to learn words based on word families.

According to Routman (2000), word study can be done through word sorting and word work with tiles. Word sorts require students to group words into different categories. Word sorts require students to think about how words are alike or different and how to make discoveries on how words work. Word sorts help students organize what they know about words and to form generalizations that can be applied to new words encountered in reading. One example of a word sort could be blends. Students could look at different blends such as st, cl, and gr. Words that students could make include stop, stir, start, clean, clip, clap, green, grab, and ground. After students sort these different words, they could make generalizations about what they notice with all of the words made. When students sort words, they are engaged in a process of searching, comparing, contrasting, and analyzing. According to Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston (2004),

"Word sorting offers the best of both constructivist learning and teacher-directed instruction. The teacher begins by “stacking the deck” with words that can be contrasted by sound, pattern, or meaning. In the process of sorting, students have an opportunity to make their own discoveries and form their own generalizations about how the English spelling system works” (p. 61).

Words used in word study should be taken from familiar stories that students are reading, so that students will strengthen their knowledge of the words by seeing it in a variety of contexts. As a teacher, you can create sorts for rimes, patterns, and generalizations that you want your students to know.
Word work with tiles allows students to work with patterns or rules that they have been learning about. In small guided reading groups, having students write and manipulate letters helps to facilitate word learning. For example, the teacher could model how to spell the word ‘all’ and then have the students make the word ‘all’ with their tiles. Then the teacher could ask the students to make the word ‘tall’ and ask what letter they would need. Finally, the teacher could ask what letter would I need to change that word to ‘hall’? The teacher should have the students run their finger under each new word made, so that they are connecting the visual with the sounds. Using these two activities as components of word study helps students to discover the patterns in words in an active and engaging way.

Word study is important in this research because it is one strategy that teachers can use in their classrooms to help students become effective decoders in reading. If students are aware of patterns in words, then they can apply that knowledge to new and unknown words. By implementing word study in the reading curriculum a teacher can help students understand the way words work. This strategy will facilitate learning when reading, especially when it comes to decoding unknown words in text.

**Fluency**

According to Rasinski (2004), "Reading fluency refers to the reader’s ability to develop control over surface-level text processing so that he or she can focus on understanding the deeper levels of meaning embedded in the text," (p. 46). The three aspects of fluency are accuracy in word decoding, automatic processing, and prosodic reading. Prosodic reading refers to the pitch, stress, places that you pause, and expression that one uses while reading. Students need to recognize words automatically and accurately or else they will spend a significant portion of time
identifying individual words and not have enough attention left over for comprehending the text. Not only do students need to read quickly and accurately, they need to read with expression and in phrases. This is the ability to make oral reading sound like spoken language. Students who have not yet become fluent readers often read word-by-word or group words in ways that do not sound like spoken language. This ability develops as students listen to and read along with models that know how to read expressively. Modeling fluency is key, especially for struggling readers. Due to how reading groups are put together, struggling readers learning fluency only have poor readers as their models to listen to. Students need to hear what fluent reading sounds like and how fluent readers interpret the text with their own voices. Providing students with opportunities to read aloud and listen to read alouds can be a great strategy for improving fluency and comprehension.

Teachers tend to define reading fluency incorrectly by focusing mainly on reading rate. Students often feel that they have to beat their previous times on readings, which puts an emphasis on speed over meaning. If teachers feel that speed is more important over prosodic and meaningful reading, then students will become fast readers that understand little of what has been read. Students’ reading rates will improve, as they become more confident and efficient in their ability to decode words. Reading fluency is an important factor in reading and should be part of a comprehensive and effective reading curriculum.

According to Allington (2001), struggling readers appear to have difficulty with reading fluently because they often read texts word-by-word. During oral reading, struggling readers appear to get stopped more often because they have difficulty decoding words. This word-by-word reading behavior can also be the result of students’ pausing after each word to make sure that they are reading each word correctly. These students are often the ones who only read when
they are asked to because they fear reading aloud. Word-by-word reading does not provide personal fulfillment for these students because this reading behavior leads to limited comprehension. If students do not comprehend the texts, then they do not see the purpose of reading. These struggling readers need to be provided with multiple opportunities to develop self-monitoring skills and reading strategies. Working to develop fluent reading is crucial for these struggling readers and teachers need to become aware of the variety of approaches that can be easily implemented into their reading curriculum.

Before implementing fluency instruction in the classroom, it is important that teachers are aware of why some students are more fluent readers than others are. According to Allington (1983), there are six hypotheses to explain this. 1) When children have models of fluent reading in their home, they learn that fluent reading is the goal when reading aloud. 2) Readers who are successful are encouraged to focus on expression, while poor readers are asked to focus on word recognition, phonics, and other skills that are in isolation. 3) Readers are provided more opportunities to read that demonstrate fluent oral reading and are able to further develop this skill. 4) Readers who can read fluently are often reading texts at their instructional or independent level. Students cannot read fluently when they are given texts at their frustration level because they are too difficult. 5) Good fluent readers have more time to read silently. 6) Good fluent readers understand that the ultimate goal of fluency is both accuracy and meaningful expression. In order for the classroom teacher to make all students fluent readers in their classroom, he/she must provide multiple opportunities both in small reading groups and during independent reading to practice fluency. Read alouds from the classroom teacher should also be implemented into the classroom, so that fluency is modeled for the students.
According to Griffith & Rasinski (2004), one strategy to improve fluency is through partner reading. Partner reading can take place during guided reading or self-selected reading time. By having partner reading during self-selected reading time, you can ensure that all students are actually reading and no students are “fake” reading. Students who “pretend” to read at this time are usually the readers who need the daily practice the most. Partner reading provides a way for all students to read and the opportunity for the teacher to observe. Interests, reading ability, reading rate, and social compatibility are the best ways to pair up partners in the classroom. Two students choose reading materials that interest them and read aloud together for 30 minutes, usually taking turns. The students can choose how they want to read, whether it is chorally, taking turns, or reading dialogue in parts. Prior to implementing partner reading, it must be modeled by the classroom teacher. He/she must show students how to monitor and extend his/her own reading comprehension. As a team, the students need to learn how to work together if something does not make sense. As the teacher observes, he/she should take notes on students’ reading progress and comprehension. Teachers can use this information to plan for mini-lessons or strategies that need to be taught or retaught to the students. At the end of the 30 minutes, the students should have provided feedback to one another. By working together, students are able to feel comfortable reading orally and are able to comprehend texts easier.

Fluency is a critical component in this research because it is the goal that I would like my students to reach. By implementing fluency instruction, students learn the different components of effective reading. Once students become fluent readers, comprehension becomes an easier aspect to accomplish and students begin to see the pleasure in reading. Fluent reading is a milestone that all readers should reach in their reading development if they are taught and able to practice the necessary components.
Repeated Reading

Repeated reading is one technique used to help students become fluent readers. Repeated reading is not used as much in the classroom because teachers are not aware of the benefits that it can have on their students. It is very beneficial for students who are significantly behind in their reading development and helps to bridge the gap between decoding and comprehension. This component of repeated reading helps students build up their word recognition skills. Repeated reading targets oral reading fluency and can be effective with any kind of student. According to Therrien & Kubina (2006), students need to have acquired foundational reading skills such as letter-sound correspondences and blending words before they can use the technique of repeated reading. Therrien and Kubina also believe that rereading should be used with students who are reading at an instructional first to third grade level. The goal of repeated reading is to develop fluency with both accuracy and speed.

Repeated reading has the potential to improve students’ reading fluency. According to Therrien (2004), “If the purpose of repeated reading is to enable students to read fluently and comprehend a particular passage, students should be provided with a cue, and the passage should be repeated three to four times,” (p. 257). Gains in comprehension seem to be greater after the passage has been read at least three times.

According to Richards (2000), there are three different ways to provide repeated reading in the classroom: direct instruction, independent learning approach, or cooperative repeated reading. When using direct instruction, the teacher is the one who models fluent reading of a selected text. He/she discusses new vocabulary and content and then has the class practice the text whole group, focusing on the prosodic features of the text. Lastly, the students read the text independently. The independent learning approach has students find a special place in the
classroom and students practice reading orally. An assisted method can be used as the child reads orally. This method includes using a tape recorder, the book, and the tape of the book. Students play the tape in the tape recorder and read along with the author on the tape. The student hears the book being read aloud and allows them to practice reading with a fluent reader. The last method known as the cooperative repeated reading has the teacher model fluency and provide opportunities to practice reading the text as well. Big books are a great form of text that can be used for these lessons. The teacher uses this book for a lesson over the period of a week. On the first read, the teacher models a fluent reading, which includes making predictions, discussing events in the story, and establishing the purpose of the book. Later in the week, the students are provided with their own copy of the text to read on their own.

According to Rasinski (2003), one strategy to use with repeated reading is using high-frequency words in phrases. Using high-frequency words in phrases can have a beneficial effect on student’s word recognition skills. This activity requires students read orally isolated words to the point where they recognize those words quickly and accurately. It is important to find texts that include these words or phrases, so that the students are practicing them both in and out of isolation. One word list to consider is Fry’s Instant Word List. According to Fry (1980), “These words make up approximately two-thirds of all the words students will encounter in their elementary school reading,” (p. 94). This technique teaches students to read in phrases, which is key to developing fluency. Both of these methods can be used to implement the strategy of repeated reading in your classroom and by using them they can help to improve students’ word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

According to Rasinski (2003), there are guidelines to implement repeated reading in the classroom. The teacher should set aside 15 to 30 minutes a day for repeated reading instruction.
The reading passages chosen should have between 50 and 500 words. The passages can come from a variety of sources such as basal readers, trade books, newspapers, or poetry samples. As the student rereads an instructional reading level passage, the teacher should sit next to the child in a comfortable location. Once again, a criterion reading rate should be achieved. To determine a student’s reading rate, you will need to take the number of words read correctly and divide it by the number of seconds it took the student to read. That number will need to be multiplied by 60, which will give you the reading rate in words correct per minute. A log should be kept to record the passages and the dates on which the student has mastered them.

According to Therrien & Kubina (2006), there are three essential instructional components to include in a repeated reading intervention. They include having students read passages aloud to a competent tutor, having corrective feedback provided, and having passages read until a performance criterion is reached. The appropriate performance criterion should be selected based on the student’s instructional reading level. Repeated reading can become a routine for students each day during their reading instruction and can be easily incorporated into the existing classroom routines. To conduct this intervention, the teacher or another student needs instructional level reading passages, a timer, and sheets to keep track of goals, words read, errors, and correct words. As the student reads, another student or the teacher needs to be the counter. The counter marks incorrect or missed words on the reading passage. After the student finishes, the counter should record the number of words read, errors, and correct words per minute on the data tracking sheet. By having this track sheet, students can make goals and see if they are improving in their word recognition skills. The most important thing is to end the repeated reading procedure on a positive note. This is one way to implement reading repeated in the reading curriculum.
By providing students multiple opportunities to practice oral reading through rereading will help to improve their decoding skills, which will lead to greater fluency. Practice through repeated readings helps students learn how to decode words accurately and automatically without much effort. Through repeated reading practice, a student’s decoding can become so fluent that it allows him/her to create meaning from the words encountered. Each time a student practices reading a passage, he/she should read with greater accuracy, speed, and comprehension. As with all things, you get better at it with practice. As students become more fluent in reading one passage, their word and sentence knowledge should transfer to another new reading passage.

Repeated readings have been shown to help both good and struggling readers recall facts from their reading. Improvements in comprehension are better when students are encouraged to reread for meaning, instead of speed. It also results in improved story comprehension and leads to higher level questioning when a text is presented as a repeated read aloud. Repeated reading promotes faster reading with greater word recognition and accuracy. It helps struggling readers break out of reading word-by-word and reading with more meaningful phrases.

Repeated readings are important to this research because it is an effective way that students can become fluent readers. By providing students opportunities to read text multiple times allows them to become more familiar with the words in the text and apply this knowledge to other texts. Repeated reading targets oral reading fluency and allows students to practice reading with accuracy and expression. By implementing this into a reading curriculum, the teacher can understand how this factor contributes to greater fluency with all students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Goal of Thesis

According to Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (1996), "being able to recognize words without slowing down helps maintain fluent processing. Fluent readers also recognize features of words that they know and use these features to get to words that are unknown" (p. 151). Efficient word recognition is critical for fluent reading and fluent reading is a critical link between decoding and comprehension. The objective of my research was to investigate what happens to the fluency of struggling readers when the decoding of new or unfamiliar words were taught during guided reading instruction. This goal was addressed through sight word practice, repeated readings, and word study. The students were assessed on the Dolch sight words and timed repeated readings three times throughout the research period. The word study approach was a supplemental activity used in guided reading to help students recognize common features in words. Through these various techniques, it was hoped that the students would be able to meet the desired objective.

Participants

The context in which I collected data took place at an elementary school in the suburb of a midsize city in western New York. The K-2 building was located in the city of Greece in New York and data was collected over the course of three months. The subjects that were selected are students that were in my small reading groups. The students that I worked with are considered AIS (Academic Intervention Services) students, which is why they were considered struggling readers. They were all reading below grade level and I worked with them 3-4 times a week. There were twelve students initially selected for the research, but only five students were included in the data collection. The reason that all participants were not included in the data collection...
collection was due to the fact that I only received five parent consent forms back from students. I sent out the parental consent form three different times and reminded students to have their parent or guardian look it over, sign, and return, but the forms were never returned. There were two boys and three girls included in the study. Both of the boys were in second grade and the three girls were in first grade. Two of the students were African American, one was Spanish, and the other two were Caucasian. The Spanish and Caucasian students worked together in a small reading group and the two African American students worked together in a separate reading group.

Measures

Dolch Sight Words

The first measure that I used in my research was testing on the Dolch sight words. The Dolch Word List is a list of commonly used English words that was originally compiled by Edward William Dolch, PhD and published in his 1948 book, "Problems in Reading". It consists of 220 words, excluding nouns (http://www.dolchsightwords.org/).

The participants were tested on the Dolch sight words below and at their grade level three times throughout the research period. After the first testing of the Dolch sight words, I recorded the sight words that each student still needed to learn. Based on that information, I taught the sight words to students in various ways such as drill and practice, rainbow writing, magnetic letters, and dry erase boards.

The Dolch sight words were valid because it measured what it said it would. Edward Dolch chose these 220 words because he looked at children's books and determined these were
the words that children needed to know in order to become fluent readers. Many of the 220 words in the Dolch list, can not be "sounded out", and hence must be learned by sight.

(http://www.dolchsightwords.org/) I was looking to see how many sight words each student knew below and on grade level and that is what it measured each time. Every effort was made to increase the reliability of the Dolch Sight Words measure. The sight words were given in the same environment at the same table each time.

When giving directions for the Dolch sight words I said to each individual student, “We are going to be looking at two different sets of words. Today we will look at one set and tomorrow we will look at the other set. If you do not know the word then you can just skip it. We will eventually learn these words, so it is okay to skip words that you do not know.”

Repeated Readings

The second measure that was used to increase fluency was repeated readings. Once again, the students were tested three times throughout the research period. Each student selected four different books at his/her reading level and he/she was timed on how quickly he/she read each book. A reading rate was determined each time after the student read the book. The reading rate was determined by taking the number of words read correctly and dividing it by the number of seconds it took the student to read. That number was then multiplied by 60, which showed the student’s reading rate in words correct per minute.

The repeated reading also showed validity. I was looking to see how fast the student could read the same book three different times over the course of the research period. Reading the same book is important to build fluency and a valid measure because students become familiar with the words in each story. As the student reads the story over and over again, the words
become more automatic and effortless as he/she becomes more familiar with the story line and what words they can expect to find when reading. If the student is reading a different book each time, then they cannot get the practice with the same words in the text, which does not allow reading to become an automatic process. With each reading of the same text, students begin to read with greater accuracy and speed, which helps to build fluency. Each time I took that time and calculated a reading rate. To determine a reading rate, I took the number of words read correctly, divided it by the number of seconds to read and multiplied that number by 60. This gave me the reading rate in words correct per minute. Because I used the same reading rate equation, the instrument was valid. The students read the same story three different times at the same location, so whoever was to time the reading would get the same results. By having the student in the same location each time, I was increasing the validity and reliability of both the instruments used.

When I gave directions for the reading rate used for the repeated readings, I said to the student, “I want to see how quickly you can read one of your books from your reading basket. I want you to choose four different books in your reading basket that you have read before in reading group and read it aloud to me. Over the next week, you will read a book to me each day. You will read these books three different times in the next few months aloud to me. I will be using a stopwatch to time you because I want to see how quickly you can read the book. If you get stuck on a word, just skip over it because I am more concerned on how much time it takes you to read the book. We will reread the book again after it has been timed and focus on getting all of the words right then. Whenever you are ready, you can start reading.”
Word Study

The third measure that was used to increase fluency was word study. This measure was used as a supplemental activity in guided reading. The students were given sorting mats, picture cards or word cards. For the picture cards, students worked on beginning consonants, digraphs, blends, and short and long vowels. The students would have four different sounds and then a variety of pictures. The students had to match up the pictures to the beginning sound (s). For the word cards, students were given cards that had word families on them. For example, the students were given the word family “-at” and had to find the words that ended with the sound “at”. Both the picture and word sorts were done so that students would learn and recognize more words, which built up their word recognition. This measure was given to students at least once a week as a supplemental activity to guided reading. This was a measure in fluency because it measured how many different words in each word family the students knew. I recorded how many words each student knew under each word family that we worked on and recorded it in a notebook. If students knew these words through the word study activities, then I wanted to make sure that they would recognize them in their reading as well.

Whenever we worked on a word study component, I would explain what we would be working on and model one example for them. For example, if we were working on the “-at” word family, I would start with a known word. If I knew that the students knew the word “cat”, then I would say, “You all know this word is ‘cat’, now we are going to make other words that have the same ‘-at’ ending. If I had you take off the c on the word cat and add the letter h, what word would it make?” The students would tell me “hat” and then I would have them make other words that had that same ending with their magnetic letters. If I were working on word study using the pictures or words with the sorting maps, then my directions would be different. If we
were working on beginning consonants such as m, c, b, and r, then I would say to the students, "We are going to put these four consonants on the top of our sorting maps. As we look at these pictures we are going to say the name of the picture and find the consonant that it begins with. We will put that picture under the right column. If you need help with identifying any of the pictures, then just ask me. For example, this picture is a ball, what column would we put a picture of a ball under?" Then the students would tell me column "b" and I would have each student place the picture of the ball under that column. The students would do the rest of the sorting individually. These were the relevant instructions that were provided to the students.

Procedure

In the first week of the study, I had each student choose four different books that they had read previously that was at their current reading level or one level below. Together we discussed the importance of rereading a book and how it makes you become a better reader. I asked each student if they thought they would read it quicker the first time or the third time. Most of them knew it would be the third time and we discussed how they would be more familiar with the words in the book, so they could read it quicker. As the student read the book, I timed them to see how long it took them to go from start to finish. I met with these students four times a week, so we did a new book everyday. Then, I calculated this time into a reading rate and recorded the data into a notebook. This information was also put onto a graph, so that I could see how the reading rate changed or stayed the same from the first to the third reading of the same book. Also, in the first week I tested each student on the Dolch sight words below and at their grade level. I took the words that each student did not know and recorded them into a notebook binder. I wanted to be aware of the sight words that the students still needed to learn, so that I could build up their word recognition. I knew that these were words that students could not use reading
strategies on because they were sight words and students need to just know sight words automatically, so they had to be directly taught to them through a variety of ways. In the second week, I reviewed the different reading strategies with each reading group. Most of the students could only remember “sound it out” so I knew that they had to be reviewed once again. The other reading strategies that we went over were look at the picture, skip the word and go back, reread, chunk it, and think about the overall meaning of the story. I gave each student a bookmark that had the different reading strategies on it to refer to when they were reading stories in our reading group and got stuck on a word.

By the third week, I introduced the concept of fluency. For each reading group, we took a piece of chart paper and made a graphic organizer on fluency. I recorded anything that students knew about fluency and taught them other things that could make them fluent readers. We discussed reading with expression, rate, reading in phrases, reading smoothly, sounding like talking, and paying attention to punctuation. I wanted students to be fluent readers by the end of the study, so they needed to know what that meant. By the fifth week, I retested students on both the Dolch sight words and recalculated their reading rate for the book they had chosen in the first week. In the ninth week, I tested students for the last time on the Dolch sight words and once again recalculated their reading rate.

During the weeks in between these assessments, we worked on word study based upon words that students did not know. These words came from the students’ reading books in guided reading. Through word study, the students were able to build up their word recognition and see how similar words can be with one another. The students matched pictures or words based on beginning consonants, digraphs, blends, and short and long vowel patterns. We also used word families (words with the same endings) in word study, but used magnetic letters to make and
break these words. In each week, I also took observations on the students' reading. Any time a student got to a word that they did not know and asked me to tell them, I recorded that word in a notebook. I knew that these were words that students needed to learn and it was taught to them through drill and practice or word study. In addition, every week I took observations in a notebook on every student regarding their fluency. I wrote down next to each student's name which components of fluency they were using in their reading. I wanted to see if they sounded more like a fluent reader, which is why we reviewed fluency and its components at the beginning of each week.

I used the different components of sight words, rereading, and word study to build upon fluency based on the literature that I had read regarding fluency. The literature that I read supported the ways that I was conducting my research to help make these struggling readers into fluent readers. According to the literature, sight words help students to become fluent readers because a student must learn how to decode words effectively through automatic and accurate processing, which is how sight words are learned. Also, through repeated readings, students are being constantly exposed to the same texts, which leads to automatic, effortless decoding of words. The literature also supports the idea that when students become aware of patterns in words through word study, then they can apply that knowledge to new and unknown words. My action plan was based upon triangulation of the data using observations, pre/post tests, and my literature review. These three components reflect one another and all are needed to successfully implement my study.
Data Analysis

When analyzing my observations, I looked at the words that students did not know while reading. I wrote down all of the words that were not known for each student and looked for any patterns or if the word was not known more than one time during the research period. My observations were also based on whether or not each student was becoming a fluent reader. I wrote down notes about each student every week as to what fluency components they were using while reading. These components included expression, accuracy, rate, and smoothness. If components were not being addressed, then we would discuss and review them the following week. If students were using them, then I would have them model those components for the reading group. My observations were analyzed on a weekly basis and I took that data into consideration when planning for lessons for the following week. When analyzing the Dolch sight words, I looked at how many words each student knew each time they were tested. After each testing, I wrote down the words that each student did not know. For each reading group, I compiled all of the words that the students did not know all together. We practiced these words weekly in a variety of formats. Each student was tested once a month and after the three-month period, I looked at how many more words the students knew from the beginning to the end of the research period. At the end of the research period, I made a graph for each student. I plotted how many words they knew at and below grade level for each testing done and graphed the differences. When analyzing the reading rate, I looked at how many correct words per minute each student knew from the first reading to the third reading of the same book. At the end of the three-month research period, I plotted the information onto a graph. My goal was to see a higher number of correct words per minute for each student. I hoped that repeated readings of the books used in reading groups would help to build up the students’ word banks because of the literature
that I had read that supported it. Through my observations, literature, and pre/post testing, I was able to analyze the data efficiently. All three of these components helped in configuring my data to get the results of the study.
Chapter 4: Results

Sight Words

The first methodology that was implemented was the Dolch sight words. Students were tested on these lists three times throughout the research period and all lists were at grade level. All students showed improvements from the first testing to the third testing. After the first testing, I recorded the words that each student did not know and we practiced these weekly on a one-on-one basis. We practiced the words through drill and practice and through other multisensory approaches including writing them with markers, using shaving cream, and writing with chalk. I did the same thing after I tested the students the second time. Through these different approaches, all students began to learn more of the Dolch sight words. Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 display the number of sight words each student knew for each of the three Dolch sight word tests. The Figures show the number of kindergarten Dolch sight words and the number of first grade Dolch sight words known for each testing. All five students knew more words at and below their grade level by the end of the research period. This data shows the increased word bank knowledge that each student gained throughout the three months.
Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2
Figure 1.3

Dolch Sight Words
Student #3

![Bar graph showing sight words known by student #3 across three tests for Kindergarten and First Grade.]  

Number of Times Tested:
- Test 1: Kindergarten 28, First Grade 14
- Test 2: Kindergarten 37, First Grade 22
- Test 3: Kindergarten 44, First Grade 31

Figure 1.4

Dolch Sight Words
Student #4

![Bar graph showing sight words known by student #4 across three tests for First Grade and Second Grade.]  

Number of Times Tested:
- Test 1: First Grade 33, Second Grade 35
- Test 2: First Grade 37, Second Grade 38
- Test 3: First Grade 39, Second Grade 42

Figure 1.5

Dolch Sight Words
Student #5

![Bar graph showing sight words known by student #5 across three tests for First Grade and Second Grade.]  

Number of Times Tested:
- Test 1: First Grade 36, Second Grade 37
- Test 2: First Grade 39, Second Grade 40
- Test 3: First Grade 41, Second Grade 43
Rereading

The second methodology that was implemented was rereading four different books. I chose four different books because I wanted students to read at least one new book each month during the research period. By having four different books, it would help with the validity of the results because there would be four different instances that would support the results. Each book was read three times throughout the course of the research period and each time the book was read, a reading rate was calculated to measure fluency. After this methodology was implemented, students started to become more fluent readers. As I observed each student in their reading group and listened to them one-on-one, I could hear them using the different components of fluency in their reading. These components include using expression, a quicker reading rate, accurate reading, and reading smoothly. The students also became aware that they were reading more fluently and modeled pages being read fluently from their books to their fellow classmates. At the end of the three months, all students showed improvements from the first testing to the third testing in all four books. Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 display the reading rate for each student. The four different books are shown under each figure for each student.
Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2
Reading Rate
Student #3

Reading Rate
Student #4

Figure 2.3

Figure 2.4
Word Study

The third methodology that was implemented was word study. Word study was implemented two to four times a month in small reading groups or on a one-on-one basis. Students 1, 2, and 3 worked in the same reading group and students 4 and 5 worked in another reading group together. If there were patterns on words that students did not know, then they worked on the same words together. If the words were not similar to one another, then I took the student on a one-on-one basis.

Through word study, students created words with beginning consonants, digraphs, blends, and word families. At the end of each week, I looked at the words that each student did not know from their reading books and used that data for word study. These observations helped me as the researcher look for patterns in words that students did not know or words that were substituted for another word. Students used picture cards, put them under the correct category that they were working on, and put them on their sorting mat. For example, student 1 was not looking at the beginning sound when problem solving unknown words in reading group.
noticed that she was confusing the letters b and d, so I had her work on creating words with the beginning consonants of b and d. She told me the names of each picture card and then put it under either the b column or the d column. When using the picture cards, students had to identify the word and put it under the category that it matched. After each student finished, they would have to identify every word under each category to check their work. Students also used shaving cream, markers, and tiles to make words as part of word study. These other approaches helped the students learn these unknown words by actually seeing and manipulating each word. One session would be spent just on using picture cards and the next session would be spent on the same words but through using the other approaches of spelling out the word (shaving cream, markers, and tiles).

As I collected daily observations on words that each student did not know, it helped me to find appropriate books that could help students work on and learn words that they did not know previously. This information also informed our word study sessions. Students 1, 2, and 3 all worked on beginning consonants as part of their word study because they were emergent readers. They were just “guessing” at unknown words and were not looking at the word carefully. If I stopped any of them and asked them to tell me what the beginning letter was on the unknown word, then they could usually decode it. I wanted to gradually release this responsibility to them where they could decode it on their own without my support or reminders of looking at the beginning consonant. Beginning consonants that we worked on were b, d, t, g, n, p, c, h, and f. I chose these beginning consonants because they were the ones usually missed by all three students. By working on these beginning consonants, all three students began to use the beginning letter as a reading strategy when coming to and decoding unknown words in their reading groups. Observations were taken during reading groups throughout the research period.
By the end of the research period, students were able to express and show me that they looked at the beginning letter when coming to an unknown word.

I also worked with these three students on a one-on-one basis. Student 1 was also having difficulty with the -et, -eg, and -en word families. Words that she could not identify in her reading books included ten, wet, pen, when, leg, beg, and men. I gave her different picture cards of these words and other words that ended in these same word families and had her put them under each category. To help her learn and recognize the words in her reading group, she enjoyed using the tiles and rainbow markers. When I first started this with her, I would show her different note cards and tell her what the word was and then she would write it. A month into the research period, I had her and the other students tell me the words themselves versus me telling them the word on the note card. As the weeks went on, she was decoding more words on her own and began to recognize words with these word families automatically.

Student 2 was having difficulty with words that started with the s, t, and st blend sound. Words that she could not identify in her reading books included six, stir, tent, star, stamp, trunk, and top. I gave her different picture cards with these words on them and other words that started with this blend and had her identify each word and put it under the correct category. To help her learn and recognize the words in her reading group, she enjoyed using the shaving cream and rainbow markers. I showed her different note cards and she would tell me what the word was and then she would write it. Both approaches really helped her when coming to and decoding unknown words in her reading books because she was learning more words through the word study approach.

Student 3 was having difficulty with words that had the pl, sl, and bl blend beginning sound. Words that she did not know in her reading books were plate, slide, block, sleep, plum,
sleeve, and blanket. I gave her different pictures to identify these words and other words that started with these blends and then had her put these words under the correct category. She was learning the sounds in the words through the picture cards. In order for her to learn the word and recognize it, we used rainbow writing often because that was her favorite approach. I showed her words that had the bl, pl, and sl beginning blend that she did not know from her reading books on note cards and then had her rewrite the words using different markers. She was able to use this knowledge and apply it to other new blend sounds in her reading books.

Students 4 and 5 also worked in a reading group together. One pattern that I noticed that they both needed extra help with in word study was words that started with the cr, cl, fl, and fr blends. In their reading books, I noticed that they were both having trouble decoding or did not know the words cloud, climb, crown, crayon, float, flower, fruit, and freeze. Together they worked on these blends using the picture sorts. They would each tell me the different words and then put them under the different categories on their sorting maps. After they finished they would alternate the categories and identify each word that they had put under each category. As they would say the words, the other student checked his work. Both students took these words from word study and started to apply this knowledge into their reading. I could see a difference in their reading, especially when identifying words with these blends.

When I worked with student 4 one-on-one, we worked on words that started with the th and wh digraphs. Words that he did not know in his reading books were thumb, wheel, whistle, thirteen, that, and thermos. I gave him different pictures to identify these words and other words that started with these digraphs and then had him put these words under each category. In order for him to learn the word and recognize it during reading, we used tiles and shaving cream. I showed him words that had the th or wh digraph that he did not know from his reading books
and other words with this beginning on note cards and then had him rewrite the words using tiles or the shaving cream. Through various observations, he used this knowledge from word study and applied it to his reading when he did not know a new or unfamiliar word.

When I worked with student 5, we worked on words that started with the c, h, and ch digraphs. Words that he did not know or had difficulty decoding in his reading books included check, chimney, cherry, camera, category, house, and handle. I gave him different pictures to identify these words and other words that started with these digraphs and then had him put these words under each category. In order for him to learn the word and recognize it during reading, he liked to use the shaving cream. I showed him words that had the c, h, and ch digraphs that he did not know from his reading books and other words with this beginning on note cards and then had him rewrite the words using the shaving cream. Throughout the research period, he was looking more carefully at unknown words in his reading books and by the end was able to decode words on his own.

Word study was another approach to help students when decoding new or unfamiliar words in their reading books during small reading group sessions and it reinforced the students’ fluency. By learning new and/or more words through word study, all students began to recognize words more automatically and frequently in their reading. All five students benefited from word study because they applied the knowledge of identifying words and writing words to their reading. By learning words by their consonants and through digraphs, blends, and word families, students took these patterns and used them with other words that were similar.
Analysis

By the end of the research period, all of the students had become fluent readers. Through daily observations, Dolch sight words, rereading, and word study, the students really progressed as readers in the three-month period. When approaching new or unfamiliar words in their reading books, all of the students used their reading strategies and applied their knowledge from the Dolch sight words and word study to their reading. By the end of the research period, all of the students could recognize most of the words automatically and read fluently. Students still had opportunities to problem solve and use their new knowledge from the different methodologies to decode new and unfamiliar words. Both myself as the researcher and the students could see a difference in their reading and knew that they had all become fluent readers.

As I looked at and analyzed the different data sources including the observations, Dolch sight words, reading rate from rereading books, and word study, it reinforced the idea that the students had become fluent readers over the research period. In all three methodologies, every student showed improvement and it was apparent through both quantitative and qualitative data. Because each method was done in the same format and in the same setting each time, the reliability of my research increased. I could be more certain that my results were not due to extraneous variables. My goal was that by using all three methodologies that it would help the students decode new and unfamiliar words in their reading and make them fluent readers. My data and results prove that this is what happened. The results are valid because they are supported through my own data and findings and match what the literature study also says about word study and fluency. I was able to get the desired results and all of the students became fluent readers by the end of the research period.
Chapter 5: Change and Implications

The objective of my research was to investigate what happens to the fluency of struggling readers when the decoding of new or unfamiliar words were taught during small group reading instruction. Through the implementation of the Dolch sight words, using a reading rate with rereading books, and word study, all of the students in the study became fluent readers. The daily observations that were taken of new and unfamiliar words were helpful because the students learned these words through different approaches. The students were able to build up their word recognition knowledge, which led to fluent reading. They implemented all of the components of fluency into their reading and now read with expression, at a quicker reading rate, smoother, and with more accuracy.

Prior to the implementation of the different methodologies, the students were not fluent readers because they had to spend a lot of time on decoding different words in the books that they were reading. As the students learned and discovered new and unfamiliar words through these different approaches, they were able to decode words in their reading books automatically and accurately. I believe that through the different and various approaches, students were able to build up their word bank knowledge, which helped them to become fluent readers. Students learned and practiced new and unfamiliar words in a variety of ways and applied these words that were in isolation to the reading books that they read. By the end of the research period, the students became confident in themselves as readers because they were able to read their reading books fluently.

The results of my research data are consistent with my literature review. In my literature review, it says that if a student has not yet developed fluency, the process of decoding words becomes the focus and that attention is not available to make meaning in the reading texts.
Before the research period began, the five students had difficulty in their reading texts and were not sure how to approach new and unfamiliar texts. They were reading below grade level, so their word bank was not as high as other students at their grade level. These students were able to become fluent readers because they could focus on meaning due to their higher word bank knowledge. By looking at the students’ Dolch Word Lists, it shows that all students knew more words at and below their grade level by the end of the research period. The literature supports the idea that rereading helps students to become more fluent readers. By providing students multiple opportunities to practice oral reading through rereading their decoding skills will improve, which will lead to greater fluency. Through repeated reading practice, a student’s decoding can become so fluent that it allows him/her to create meaning from the words encountered. The literature review also says that word study helps students master the recognition, spelling, and meaning of specific words, which is what happened in my study. The students learned new words through noticing patterns with beginning consonants, word families, blends, and digraphs. Students applied this knowledge of new words when they later encountered these words in their reading. The results of my research correspond to what the literature review says, which reinforces the validity of my data and results.

Based on the results from my data, this means that struggling readers can become fluent readers through these different methodologies. For educators, they should incorporate fluency and comprehension into their reading instruction, especially for struggling readers. Fluency is a component that is often not used in the reading curriculum because teachers do not see its importance or know how to implement it. Through this thesis, educators can learn the different ways to incorporate fluency and comprehension and the positive effects that it could have on their students. For students, this data means they can become fluent readers through practice and
the multiple methodologies mentioned. For struggling readers, comprehension is important because they can focus more on the meaning of the story when they become fluent readers and not on decoding each individual word. If it does not occur naturally, then it will need to be taught and monitored to the students. Word by word reading can turn into fluent reading for all readers through consistent practice of the various methodologies.

This study had both strengths and limitations. The strengths in this study included daily observations and a consistent environment to ensure validity. By taking daily observations, I was able to use this information to inform my instruction and choose appropriate books for students to help improve their fluency. These observations helped in informing both the books chosen for reading groups and the work done in word study. The consistent environment was crucial because the students felt comfortable with their surroundings, especially since it was in their own classroom. The students knew what to expect for each session and could engage themselves in a positive learning environment. The limitations of this study included a lack of participants, the fact that the researcher was not their classroom teacher, and the choice of books used. Before the study began, I had chosen 12 participants to be a part of the study, but I did not receive consent from their parents, so I could not use their information in my data. If I had more students in my study, then it would have added more validity to my research data. The more data and participants that you have, the more valid the results become. I only had 5 participants, which limited the research that I could include in my research data. The fact that I was not the classroom teacher of the students in my study was a limitation because the students may have responded differently in the reading groups if it had been their classroom teacher. Sometimes I felt that the students acted more reluctant with me because they knew that I was not their classroom teacher. The students may have responded differently with their own teacher because
they might have been more motivated to do the required tasks because they can earn recess sticks in reading group with their classroom teachers. I built up a positive and caring learning environment with the students and myself so that they felt comfortable participating and reading with me. I also was not with these students all day long, which would have provided me with more data for my research. I would have been able to see these students in a classroom setting for the entire day, which could have changed the results of my data. When the students chose their books for their reading rate, the books were at their current reading book level. The reason this is a limitation because word count can differ in the same level. The two boys in the study were both at the same level but the books that student 4 chose were shorter than the books that student 5 chose. By choosing shorter books, student 5 was able to get a higher reading rate because it was easier for him. Even though there were some limitations in this study, the data and results do show the success of these five students.

For future research, I would continue to use the same methodologies. I think that it would be beneficial to use this research into a whole classroom setting for the entire school year to see how it impacts an entire classroom of students. I think that all students can benefit from this study, especially primary and struggling students. Fluency is a critical component of reading and is something that all students should learn how to incorporate into their reading. If I was able to continue this research, I would look more into comprehension and how it is affected from the beginning of the study until the end once students become fluent readers. Comprehension and fluency are connected with one another and it would be interesting to focus on the effects that one has on the other.
References


Appendix
### Appendix A

**Dolch Word List**

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