Using Readers' Theater as a Technique for Strengthening Fluency

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Using Readers' Theater as a Technique for Strengthening Fluency

by

Nicole Morris

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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
Using Readers’ Theater as a Technique for Strengthening Fluency

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Abstract

This study was conducted in an urban elementary school in Western New York. The researcher, who was an intern in a fourth grade classroom, was interested in determining if and how Readers' Theater might affect reading fluency in struggling readers. The students in the study exhibited a range of reading levels, but all struggled with fluency. Before beginning Readers' Theater, the researcher assessed the students for fluency. Specifically, students were tested for automaticity, accuracy and prosody. The researcher then implemented a Readers' Theater program for a total of ten weeks. The students participated in the program three days a week for one hour each time. They were assessed for fluency two more times during this ten-week period. The students showed improvement in both automaticity and prosody. Little improvement was shown in accuracy. Readers' Theater also appeared to be an engaging and motivating activity in the classroom and was favored by most students.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Fluency is an aspect of reading that has received much attention from classroom teachers and researchers. It is closely related to children’s ability to comprehend text, thus making it a key component for helping children to create meaning from what they read. This study will examine the effectiveness of one specific strategy, Readers’ Theater, in strengthening fluency in struggling readers.

Research Question

Is Readers’ Theater an effective strategy for strengthening fluency in struggling fourth grade readers?

Background

The research was conducted during the 2005-2006 school year in an urban setting in Western New York. The researcher was a graduate student completing a Master’s Degree in childhood education. The study took place in a fourth grade classroom where the researcher taught 15 hours per week in an internship program under the auspices of a mentor teacher. The setting was a general education classroom with consultant teacher services. The make up of the class included 21 students. Six of the students were boys and fifteen were girls. The ethnic background was as follows: ten African American, six Caucasian, and five Hispanic. Six students had individualized education plans (IEP’s). Characteristics of the school include high rates of poverty and single parent families.
The research took place during a specific timeframe devoted to Reader’s Workshop each morning. The researcher and her mentor teacher taught with a neighboring teacher and the classes were combined to create two reading groups. The group involved in the study consisted of 21 students that were considered reading below a fourth grade level based on diagnostic reading assessments. Because of the reading challenges these students faced, and because of the important role literacy plays in an individual’s potential for future success, the researcher was interested in finding effective strategies for increasing the students’ ability to read fluently.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to this one fourth grade classroom and should not be generalized to other fourth grade classrooms. The sample size in this study is too small to generalize to other struggling fourth grade readers. In addition, the demographics of the students such as race, gender, and socio-economic status are factors that may influence findings. Finally, the extent to which Readers’ Theater might be the sole cause of fluency growth is not measurable. Other on-going reading activities in the classroom such as independent, partner, and guided reading may have played a part in any growth in reading a student demonstrated. Therefore, the results of the study should not be generalized to all fourth grade students or struggling readers.
Definitions

Fluency: In this study fluency will be defined as the combination of three components: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody.

Automaticity: The ability to read words quickly and without effort.

Prosody: The use of expressive elements in reading such as stress, pitch, intonation and appropriate phrasing.

Accuracy: The extent to which words are read correctly.

Readers' Theater: An activity that involves individuals reading scripts to present literature. Memorization, the use of props, and acting is not required. Readers use their voices as the primary tools for presentation.

Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA): An assessment that determines a child's general reading level. This assessment combines scores of a child's comprehension, accuracy, reflective skills, and fluency in order to assign a reading level.

America's Choice: America's Choice is a school reform program designed to improve student performance. Part of the program includes developing lessons guided by a structured format, rituals, and routines.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Reading is a complex task that requires a combination of abilities. The ability to read fluently is an important quality to have in reading. It is closely related to a reader's ability to comprehend text. For this reason, activities that strengthen reading fluency are used in elementary classrooms. Readers' Theater is a great example of a technique used in classrooms to strengthen fluency in struggling readers.

What is Reading Fluency?

Reading fluency is an aspect of literacy that can make a significant difference in a student's success as a reader (Allington, 2006). There is no single definition of fluency in the research literature, although it is clearly more than just rapid decoding of words (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Oakley (2005) argues that fluency is comprised of reading rate; accuracy, automaticity of word recognition, smoothness and appropriate phrasing, expressiveness, prosody, and even comprehension. However, many researchers define fluency as the combination of three components: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody (Caldwell, 2002; McKenna & Stahl, 2003; Morrow, Gambrell, and Pressley, 2003; Sample, 2005).

Automaticity is the ability to read words without effort. Reading rate, or speed, is influenced by the ability to automatically recognize words. Fluent readers do not need to stop at each word in a sentence to decode. Instead, words are recognized quickly and automatically (McKenha & Stahl, 2003). Readers who struggle with
fluency spend more time stumbling over and sounding out each word. Often, this prevents them from understanding what they are reading.

The second component, accuracy, is also critical to fluency. Not only should reading be automatic; but it also needs to be accurate in order to be considered fluent. Accuracy does not necessarily have to be perfect. Students can read with 95% accuracy (misreading 5 words out of 100) and still be considered fluent (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; McKenna & Stahl, 2003).

Prosody, the third component of fluency, includes elements such as stress, pitch, intonation (reading at an appropriate rhythm and speed), and suitable phrasing (Caldwell, 2002; McKenna & Stahl, 2003; Morrow et al., 2003). These are all factors that influence the expressiveness of the reading. Fluent readers understand that without expression and prosody, speed and accuracy mean little. Prosody is an especially important component of fluency because it shows that the reader has grasped meaning behind conventions of text such as punctuation. It also indicates that the reader comprehends the text because proper expression and phrasing can only be applied when the reader understands the material and the message the author is trying to convey (Morrow et al., 2003).

The Importance of Fluency

Many researchers agree that fluency has not been given nearly enough attention as it should in reading instruction. Its importance is usually overlooked because many teachers feel that comprehension and decoding should be the main area of focus (Morrow et al., 2003; Oakley, 2005). The link between fluency and comprehension is
still unclear. Oakley (2005) claims that many researchers believe that fluency leads to comprehension, whereas others think that when a text is comprehended, fluency improves. What is clear though is that there is a connection between the two. In general, students who are more fluent readers are better at comprehending text (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; McKenna, 2002; Oakley, 2005). After examining a study of students’ oral reading fluency by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Hiebert and Fisher (2005) stated that, “by fourth grade, all but a small percentage of U.S. schoolchildren can recognize the words in a fourth-grade text with reasonable accuracy. However, approximately two-thirds of these students recognize words slowly enough to jeopardize their comprehension (p. 443).” The reason for this is that students have a limited amount of energy and attention to devote as they read. Nonfluent readers focus most of their attention on decoding sentences word by word, often in a slow and choppy manner, which in turn, leaves no attention left for comprehension (Allington, 2006; Caldwell, 2002; McKenna & Stahl, 2003; Morrow et al., 2003; Oakley, 2005). Since comprehension is the goal of reading, it is safe to say that building fluency is a worthwhile and often critical component to reading instruction.

Fluency Development

How Fluency Develops

One of the most essential components to fluency growth is practice (Allington, 2006; McKenna, 2002). Children cannot improve their rate, accuracy, and expression if they do not have constant exposure to reading. Also, the more students read, the
more their word recognition improves, enabling them to shift their required attention from decoding to comprehension (Morrow et al., 2003). Caldwell (2002) calls a vocabulary of words that children should be able to recognize automatically “sight words.” The more words that children can add to their sight-word vocabulary, the more fluently they are able to read through each word. Proficient readers have much larger sight word vocabularies than struggling readers do. Caldwell also emphasized that the reader should have efficient strategies for analyzing new and unfamiliar words. Modeling is also critical. When teachers model appropriate reading, students are better equipped to recognize the difference between fluent reading and poor reading (McKenna, 2002).

There is some controversy about the appropriate level of text students should read in order to maximize fluency development. Many researchers agree that children need to read text that is at their independent level in order to become more fluent (Allington, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Oakley, 2005). However, McKenna and Stahl (2003) found that children have benefited from reading material that was slightly above their instructional level when given support.

What Happens When Fluency Does Not Develop?

Children who are poor readers lack important skills needed to develop fluency. Many do not have the phonemic awareness necessary for decoding. Others have poorly developed skills in chunking words into syntactically appropriate phrases (Oakley, 2005). Primarily, strategies and skills like these that promote fluent reading are focused on during second and third grade. After that, comprehension becomes the
primary focus: Many teachers dealing with large class sizes, time constraints and state test mandates are often unable to accommodate the diverse needs of all their students. (Morrow et al., 2003). Poor readers end up receiving less of the reading instruction appropriate for their needs, leaving them struggling behind other readers. It appears that nonfluent readers receive fewer opportunities over time to build their fluency. They often are exposed to less modeling because they are placed with other poor readers during partner and group activities forcing them to listen to their peers stumble and struggle through the text just like them (Caldwell; 2002). Also, Allington (2006) discovered that during round robin reading activities, teachers were more likely to interrupt lower readers than the higher ones regardless of the quality of errors. The lower readers in turn received less wait time and fewer opportunities to self monitor or correct their own errors. Poor readers eventually notice their difficulties and begin to avoid reading altogether, thus limiting them from improvement.

**How Fluency is Assessed**

There are many strategies teachers can use to determine the fluency level of their students. When assessing fluency, the teacher should provide the student with a reading passage that is very close to his or her independent level. Caldwell (2002) suggests trying to imagine ourselves attempting to read insurance policies or tax forms with ease. When a text is used that is at the reader’s level of frustration, all readers are bound to be nonfluent.
Many teachers administer Informal Reading Inventories (IRI's) as a means of determining reading level. This method is best used to determine the accuracy of a child's reading, which is only a part of fluency (Caldwell, 2002). Because of fluency's important role in the reading process; there are other assessments designed to address other parts of fluency that can be given along with reading inventories.

One popular tool comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and addresses phrasing, smoothness, pace and expression using a four-point scale. The NAEP rubric is a great method for quickly assessing a student's general level of fluency. Teachers may want to tape record the child reading, then go back and listen to the tape so that they can look at each of the different aspects (Morrow et al., 2003).

Since the NAEP rubric is rather general, teachers can more precisely assess the speed (automaticity) of reading simply by timing the amount of words a child reads per minute (wpm). There are several scales that have been developed that show the average rate that students should be reading at for each grade level based on standards. Reading-A-Z.com provides a chart listing the rate recommendations of Rasinski, Manzo, and Harris and Sipay (Reading-a-z.com, 2006).

Although helpful, it is not always easy to find the time to assess a classroom full of students. Caldwell (2002) notes that it is relatively easy to recognize students who are struggling with fluency simply by sitting down and listening to them read orally for a few minutes. The teacher can then determine if the student could benefit from additional instruction that focuses on fluency.
Strategies for Improving Fluency

In order for teachers to help struggling readers become more fluent, they must ensure that students are exposed to reading as much as possible. There are many activities and techniques that are especially beneficial for fluency growth. Most of them are based on procedures where oral reading or repetition is present.

Timed Repeated Readings

Timed Repeated reading is one of the most popular methods of improving fluency. The student or teacher selects a passage from a text that is near the student’s independent level. The student then reads the passage over and over, each time marking his or her time on a chart. While the student is reading, the teacher marks miscues made by the student. The student continues reading the passage until it can be read fluently and accurately. Timed repeated reading is designed to improve speed and accuracy, but not necessarily prosody (Sample, 2005).

Paired Reading

During paired reading (also called partner reading), students read a story with a partner. The two partners take turns reading. The partner who listens can give the reader feedback and help when it is needed. Many students enjoy partner reading. However, teachers should be aware of how partners are paired. Two children who are struggling readers are less likely to be able to help each other improve (Caldwell, 2002).
Paired Repeated Reading

Paired repeated reading is a twist on timed repeated readings. Two students follow the procedure for the timed passage reading, but instead of the teacher marking errors, the readers take turns reading and taking over the responsibilities of marking errors and acting as the teacher role or coach. It is important that before students take part in this activity, that they are taught how to monitor others' reading and give positive feedback (Morrow et al., 2003).

Taped Readings

During taped reading, the teacher records herself reading a story. Students then listen to the story, reading along with the words as they are spoken. Students read along until they are able to read it fluently. The teacher will listen to students read the story aloud, to see if it was read with accuracy, speed and expression. During taped reading, it is important that students are reading along and not simply listening to the tape, otherwise it is not beneficial (McKenna & Stahl, 2003).

Choral Reading and Echo Reading

Choral reading involves several individuals, often a whole class, reading a piece of text together out loud. First the teacher reads the text while the students listen. Next the students read it together, sometimes more than once, until they are satisfied that they are reading it fluently. Echo reading is a variation of choral reading that involves the same procedure, but instead of reading the whole passage at once, the
teacher will read only a small part, modeling appropriate fluency. The students follow, trying to mimic the same rate and expression (Yopp & Yopp, 2003).

Many of these strategies have been proven to be effective in the classroom in improving fluency. However, there are a few downfalls. Many of the strategies include one on one interaction between the teacher and the students. This can be difficult because teachers do not have the time to work with every student individually while monitoring the rest of the class (Morrow et al., 2003). Also, many students are not motivated by these strategies. They do not enjoy them because the activities lack meaning and purpose for the student (Tyler & Chard, 2000).

Readers' Theater

Readers' Theater is another strategy used to improve fluency. Essentially, it is a variation of repeated reading. However, there are many qualities that set it apart. Developed originally as a way to present literature in dramatic form, Readers' Theater was popular in colleges and universities. Now though, it is also used in the elementary classroom because it has been seen as a technique used to create interest and skill in reading (Shepard, 1996).

Shirlee Sloyer (1982) states:

So begins: Readers Theatre: It is not a play. There are no stage sets, no elaborate costumes, no memorized lines. It is not ordinary reading with dull, word-by-word reciting. Readers' Theatre is an interpretive reading activity for all the children in a classroom. Readers bring characters to life through their voices and gestures. Listeners are captivated by the vitalized stories and complete the activity by imagining the details of scene and action (p. 3).
Readers' Theater is a technique that can be implemented into a reading program in any grade. In Readers' Theater, students read scripts much like actors do in dramatic theater. The difference is that in Readers' Theater, there does not need to be a stage, acting, props, or even a performance. No memorization is required, because the students read directly from the script. The emphasis is on the material that the students are reading rather than the students themselves.

One of the reasons it can be implemented into the classroom is its simplicity. All that is needed are scripts, two or more readers, space, and imagination. There are various books and websites that contain scripts that can be duplicated for classroom use. Teachers can also create scripts using popular children's books and stories.

There is no single correct method for implementing Readers' Theater into a reading curriculum. Fredericks (2000) gives several suggestions for successful readings. Teachers should duplicate a copy of the script for each child. Highlighting the speaking parts of the student's character is also helpful. In addition, before beginning, it is a good idea to teach students about Readers' Theater and its purpose. Students should understand that memorization is not the goal. The rehearsal is meant to promote performance and interpretation through reading. When starting with a new script, it is helpful to read it as a whole class in order to discuss pronunciation of words and the meaning of the text. Teachers can also model fluency by reading parts of the script and discussing the importance of expression to give characters personalities. Finally, students should be given ample time to practice and rehearse scripts before performing for an audience. These suggestions are a blueprint for
implementing Readers' Theater, as there are many ways to adjust this activity to meet the unique needs of different classrooms.

**How Readers' Theater Helps Readers' Fluency**

Readers' Theater has been studied and found to be an effective strategy in improving student reading performance. Martinez, Roser, and Streckérl (1999) implemented the program in two classes of second grade students, 30 minutes a day for 10 weeks, and found that the students' reading rate improved dramatically. In another study by Corcoran and Davis (2005), Readers' Theater was found to be effective in improving the overall fluency in second and third grade special-education students during an eight-week period.

Readers' Theater requires students to focus on tasks that build fluency. One of the tasks includes repeatedly reading the same script. The reason for this is not to memorize the script, but to become proficient at reading each part, so that when the students perform for an audience, they will be able to read it fluently and the audience will enjoy listening. This promotes automatic word recognition and accuracy. Readers' Theater also requires students to use expression. Since they do not move around and use props, the students are aware that their voices become the most important tool for creating interest in the story being told (Morrow et al., 2003).

**Struggling Readers and Readers' Theater**

Many students, who need the most practice with fluency and comprehension, are also the ones who most strongly resist repeated reading activities because of their lack of motivation. Reading is a daunting task for struggling readers. Being asked to read
over and over again without a purpose causes many to avoid reading even more. Readers’ Theater gives a purpose for reading the same text over and over. Instead of repeatedly reading, the students view their practice as rehearsing. They find more value in rehearsing because they want to give a great performance and they do not want to let their peers down with a character that lacks expression and speed (Tyler & Chard, 2000).

Another reason Readers’ Theater is great for struggling readers is that by participating in large groups, the students have a chance to see their peers as positive models of language use. They see other students doing more than simply decoding sentences word by word. They witness proficient readers bring language to life through expression (Fredericks, 2000). And since students’ rehearse until they are reading their parts fluently, it is an opportunity for even the most challenged readers to give a great performance and shine in front of their peers (Prater & Worthy, 2002; McKenna & Stahl, 2003).

Finally, finding enjoyable reading activities is something that is crucial for classrooms with struggling readers. Many children truly enjoy participating in Readers’ Theater. It is informal and relaxed (Fredericks, 2000). Because of the nature of the activity, students do not feel as though they are taking part in yet another reading task that lacks meaning for them. Performing for peers in a relaxing environment provides a motive for students to want to improve.
Summary

Prater and Worthy (2002) reported that when speaking with teachers about Readers’ Theater, time after time their response was that it was the most motivating and effective reading activity that they had used in their classroom. There are many strategies designed to improve fluency in struggling readers. However, few have the ability to capture students’ attention, create motivation and enjoyment in the classroom, and improve performance at the same time. Readers’ Theater is a technique that has been researched and proven to be effective at doing just that in classrooms all over the country.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Introduction

This study was designed to investigate the use of Readers’ Theater as a technique for increasing fluency in struggling readers. Fluency building activities are important to include in an elementary reading curriculum because research shows that fluency is closely correlated with comprehension, making it an important component of reading.

Subjects

The research took place in a fourth grade general education classroom with consultant teacher services in an urban school district in Western New York. The researcher was an intern in the building and collaborated with the head classroom teacher and the special educator to design and implement the classroom’s reading curriculum. The researcher and her mentor also team taught with a neighboring fourth grade teacher. The two classes combined contained 40 students who were divided into two reading groups. Group A consisted of the highest 19 readers out of the 40. Group B consisted of the lower 21 readers.

The study was conducted with Group B. These 21 students were at various reading levels ranging from first through fourth grade based on Diagnostic Reading Assessments (DRAs) that determine a child’s general reading level. These assessments combine scores of a child’s comprehension, accuracy, reflective skills, and fluency. Although the students’ DRA levels differed, their fluency scores were all considered below a fourth grade level. All 21 students in the classroom
participated in Readers' Theater. However, data was only collected on 14 of the students. These subjects were chosen because they remained in the classroom for the entire timeframe of Readers' Workshop. The other seven students participated in Readers' Theater also, but were occasionally pulled from the classroom for special services. Therefore, data was not collected on these students in order to keep the consistency of exposure to Reader's Theater equal for all subjects. Of the 14 subjects, five were boys and nine were girls. Two of the subjects were ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) students. Eight of the subjects were African American, four were Hispanic, and two were Caucasian. All subjects qualified for free lunch.

Implementation of Readers' Theater

The research was conducted in an America's Choice school. America’s Choice is a school reform program designed to improve student performance. Part of the program includes developing lessons guided by a structured format, rituals, and routines. Readers’ Theater took place during the Readers’ Workshop time block. Therefore, the implementation of Readers’ Theater was structured to fit the routines and procedures of the Readers’ Workshop timeframe, which took place for one hour each morning. In Readers’ Workshop, the first 10-15 minutes was devoted to the mini-lesson, which was guided by one essential question or objective for the lesson. Following the mini-lesson was the work period where students became actively involved in the reading activity connected with the mini-lesson. The work period lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The last 10-15 minutes was called the closure.
During this time, the students joined as a group to share what they read, discuss their reading, and review the essential question.

Readers' Theater occurred on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week. The researchèr began with mini-lessons to familiarize the students with Readers' Theater. Some essential questions from the mini-lessons included:

- What is Readers' Theater?
- What are the rules for Readers' Theater?
- What is a script?
- What does great reading sound like?
- What is fluent reading?
- How do I improve my reading?
- What is constructive criticism?
- How do I make my character come alive?

The students were then divided into three groups based on their DRA reading levels. Each group was given a different script to rehearse. Each script was rehearsed for two weeks (six Readers' Theater days) resulting in a performance on the final day. Students' rehearsed during the 40-minute work period. The students followed a routine during the two weeks, which started over with each new script.

The routine consisted of the following:

**Day 1 (Monday)** – Students received their new script (sample in Appendix A). All students read the script silently, circling words with which they were unfamiliar. Once everyone finished reading, the class divided into three script groups. The researcher, special educator, and the head classroom teacher each worked with one group. The students and the teacher sat in a circle, reading the script out loud round robin style. The groups stopped as needed to work on decoding or comprehension of the script.
Day 2 (Wednesday)- Students joined in their groups. Character roles were assigned (at first by teachers and eventually by students). Students used highlighters to highlight their character's parts. The groups rehearsed the script, each student reading his/her assigned parts. When they finished, they would rehearse again, each time trying to improve their reading. Students also brainstormed ideas of simple props that they could bring in to enhance their performance.

Day 3 (Friday)- Students rehearsed in their groups. The researcher videotaped each group rehearsing their script together.

Day 4 (Monday)- The students gathered as a whole class and watched the three videotaped rehearsals. Students were encouraged to critique themselves by noticing what they did well and what they wanted to improve in their reading. Students gave each other feedback and constructive criticism on one another's reading.

Day 5 (Wednesday)- Students rehearsed the scripts in their groups again; each time, trying to improve their expression, speed, and accuracy. Students were encouraged to use their videotape critique to set goals for improvement. Students made character name cards out of index cards and string to wear around their necks on performance day.

Day 6 (Friday)- This day was called "Friday Festival." Students performed their scripts for an audience. The readers sat on chairs in the front of the room. They read from their scripts and incorporated hand gestures and simple props. Each student also wore his/her character's name around his/her neck. Before the performance, students stood up and introduced their character. After the performance ended, students
bowed and answered audience questions and took positive comments. Each ‘Friday Festival’, the students invited a new audience to watch their performance. Group A and several younger classes in the school came to watch.

Data Collection

In this study, fluency was defined as the accuracy, prosody, and automaticity of reading. Therefore, the researcher used these three components as the data being collected. In order to collect the data, the researcher created assessments designed to test for each component. Data was collected for ten weeks. The subjects were assessed a total of three times during the research. The researcher completed the assessment process once before Readers’ Theater was implemented and three more times in the ten week period when Readers’ Theater was underway.

The researcher tested for automaticity and accuracy using a fluency assessment passage taken from Reading a-z.com (Appendix B). The researcher used the same fourth grade passage with all subjects. The student read a copy of the passage while the researcher took notes on a separate copy. The researcher used an audiotape to record the reading. The reading was timed for one minute. As the student read, the researcher marked the errors made. Errors included skipped words, mispronounced words, word substitutions, words in the wrong order, and struggling that led to a teacher prompt (Reading a-z.com, 2006). After one minute, the researcher circled the last word read by the student. The researcher counted the number of words read in that minute (wpm) and marked it on the number line at the bottom of the page. The student’s wpm determined automaticity.
Next, the researcher divided the number of words read correctly (without error) by the number of words read total. That number was then multiplied by 100. This number determined the percentage of accuracy.

Once automaticity and accuracy were recorded, the researcher listened to the reading on the audiotape. As she listened this time, she used the NAEP's oral reading fluency scale to determine the phrasing and expression used as the student read (Appendix C). The researcher circled the level that most closely represented the student's reading. This determined the child's prosody.

In addition to these assessments, the researcher took field notes each day during Readers' Theater. The researcher recorded notes of day to day observations and occurrences that she felt were important. The notes were used to recognize patterns, characteristics and changes in the students' reading as a whole group.

The researcher was also interested in the students' motivation and their general attitudes shown toward Readers' Theater. Field notes were used to record observations reflecting motivation and attitudes. The students were also given a student attitude survey. The survey was designed to measure Readers' Theater's popularity compared to other reading activities and also to gain a better idea of what qualities students like or dislike about Readers' Theater. The survey included two parts: an attitude scale and response section. (See Appendix D). The scale was designed to measure how students feel about Readers' Theater in relation to the other activities that took place during the Reader's Workshop timeframe.

The following table shows the triangulation of data.
To analyze the data, the researcher looked at each subject's assessments individually. First, she compared the subject's four wpm scores to check for improvement. Next, she looked for improvement in percentage of accuracy. Finally, she looked for growth in expression and prosody by comparing scores from the oral reading scale. The researcher followed this procedure with each subject. Once all scores were compared, the researcher was able to determine, based on the three assessments, how many subjects improved and to what extent in each of the three areas being tested.

In addition, the researcher compared her field notes with the findings in her numerical data to see if the notes coincided with the extent of improvement shown. From these two pieces of information, generalizations were made about the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Automaticity</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Prosody</th>
<th>Motivation and Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency Assessment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Passage</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Reading Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Review of the Data**

To analyze the data, the researcher looked at each subject's assessments individually. First, she compared the subject's four wpm scores to check for improvement. Next, she looked for improvement in percentage of accuracy. Finally, she looked for growth in expression and prosody by comparing scores from the oral reading scale. The researcher followed this procedure with each subject. Once all scores were compared, the researcher was able to determine, based on the three assessments, how many subjects improved and to what extent in each of the three areas being tested.

In addition, the researcher compared her field notes with the findings in her numerical data to see if the notes coincided with the extent of improvement shown. From these two pieces of information, generalizations were made about the
effectiveness that Readers' Theater had on improving fluency in struggling readers. The researcher also analyzed the student surveys. To analyze the scale, the scores for each activity were added up. The activity with the lowest score was the one that the majority of students viewed as their favorite. From this, the researcher was able to recognize if Readers' Theater was the most enjoyable activity in the class. The students then used the scale to explain how they felt about Readers' Theater in the following question. What was it about the activity that they enjoyed or did not enjoy? The answers to this question were intended to explain how students feel about Readers' Theater in more detail. After reviewing the responses, the researcher created categories based on themes she saw arising from the answers. Responses were placed in each category. By doing this, the researcher determined which qualities of Readers' Theater were desirable or undesirable to students. This would give evidence to support that motivation and attitudes were affected by Readers' Theater.

The amount of growth that this group showed may or may not be the same for another group of fourth graders using Readers' Theater. The data gathered are valid and reliable for one fourth grade classroom in an urban elementary school. However, the data is not generalizable to other fourth grade readers at similar reading levels (Hubbard & Power, 2003).
Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The researcher used multiple methods to collect and analyze data to determine what, if any, effect Readers' Theater has on reading fluency in struggling readers. Fluency assessment passages, oral reading scales, field notes, and student attitude surveys all assisted in determining the impact of Readers' Theater on reading fluency and student attitudes toward reading. The data collected were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively for individual students and for the group as a whole, and the results are described in the generalizations below.

Generalization #1

Readers' Theater is effective in improving automaticity and reading rate.

- Fluency passages were used to assess words read per minute (wpm) which in turn determined reading rate. Before the assessments began, all students in the class were reading with a fluency level below fourth grade standards. Students were assessed three times throughout the data collection period. Two students read fewer words per minute on the second assessment than on the first. However, all students included in the study showed improvements in words read per minute after the third assessment.

- The class average on the first assessment was 72 wpm. The average on the second assessment was 82 wpm. The average on the final assessment was 99
wpm. As a whole group, the students in the study read an average of 26 more words per minute on the final assessment than on the first.

- The largest growth in words read per minute was shown by student #14, who read 40 more words per minute on the final assessment than on the first. Student #3 showed the smallest growth in words read per minute, reading 10 more words per minute on the final assessment.

Table #1: Words per minute scores of each student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assessment #1</th>
<th>Assessment #2</th>
<th>Assessment #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>64 wpm</td>
<td>84 wpm</td>
<td>95 wpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>69 wpm</td>
<td>67 wpm</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>43 wpm</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>97 wpm</td>
<td>125 wpm</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>88 wpm</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>68 wpm</td>
<td>70 wpm</td>
<td>98 wpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>100 wpm</td>
<td>111 wpm</td>
<td>140 wpm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Words Per Minute (reading rate)](chart.png)
Generalization #2

Readers' Theater is effective in improving prosody.

- The primary tool used to collect data on prosody (expression and phrasing) was the NAEP oral reading scale. After listening to each student read a passage, they were given a score on a scale of 1-4, with 4 demonstrating all of the qualities of good reading in terms of phrasing and expression. Between the first and last assessment, a total of five students showed improvements in phrasing and expression. Nine students showed no change. Of students who showed improvements, scores increased by 1. No student improved by two levels during the data collection period. After the final assessment, five of the 14 students were reading at a level 4, whereas only one was after the first assessment. The table below contains assessment scores.

Table #2: Prosody (Phrasing and Expression) scores for each student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assessment #1</th>
<th>Assessment #2</th>
<th>Assessment #3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>14</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: most students should read at a level of 4 by fourth grade
Although results of the oral reading scale show small improvements, students demonstrated greater growth than the test data showed. The researcher's observations served as supporting evidence that students' phrasing and expression improved. After each Readers' Theater lesson, the researcher took field notes in a journal, recording observations regarding aspects of fluency, motivation, and student attitudes. After providing mini-lessons that taught students how to read with expression, and modeling expressive reading, the researcher observed students reading with more expression, adjusting the sound of their voices as they read, and attending to appropriate phrasing and punctuation as they rehearsed and performed their parts. Students appeared to understand that a successful Readers' Theater performance required engaging the audience through their own expressive reading. The following chart includes a handful of field note excerpts that support this generalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/6/06</td>
<td>First day of new scripts. Students were rehearsing The True Story of the Three Little Pigs. They used great expression. Better than in their first performance. They seemed more at ease than with the last script and were looking forward to it. They were more ready.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/06</td>
<td>It's funny seeing the students attempt expression. They try to change the pitch in their voice to sound higher and lower. Their rate actually seems to slow down because you can tell they are focusing so much on expression. Some students still have trouble with it though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17/06</td>
<td>Students performed for first graders. It went well. One student was very nervous because she is shy. I sat with her. She did well. Near the end, some of the students got more comfortable and took risks. They really used expression. Many noticed that the more expression they used, the more the audience laughed at their lines. This seemed to be motivating for the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3/06</td>
<td>I can't believe some of the great expression. Kids with all different levels were reading so expressively. I think they know that the younger students enjoy listening to them when they sound more interesting. It is giving them a purpose for focusing on how they read.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the two methods of assessment did not show the same results, it was clear that student expression improved. Reasons for the discrepancy may be that when rehearsing, it was more natural for students to remember to use expression. Perhaps when students are being assessed by a teacher individually, they are more focused on reading words correctly or reading at an appropriate pace. Another reason results varied may have been that when partaking in an activity like Readers' Theater, students have a clear purpose for reading with expression. Students want to give a good performance that is enjoyable. They do not have a clear purpose for reading expressively when asked to read a random passage out loud to a teacher.

**Generalization #3**

*Readers' Theater does not appear to have a strong effect on accuracy rate.*

- Between the first assessment and the final assessment, eight students showed an improvement in accuracy rate. The average increase was an improvement of 3%.

Student #10 showed the greatest improvement, with an increase of 8% between the first and the final assessment. Although eight students showed improvements, the other six students' accuracy rates actually decreased from the first to the final assessment. The growth shown by eight of the students was not significant enough to suggest that Readers' Theater was the cause of the improvement in accuracy. This mixture of results supports the generalization that Readers' Theater does not have a specific impact on accuracy rate. Table #3 shows accuracy rates of each student on all three assessments.
Generalization #4

*Readers’ Theater is an engaging and motivating literacy activity for students.*

- The researcher’s observations served as evidence that the students were motivated and engaged during Readers’ Theater. On days when students participated in Readers’ Theater, students appeared to enjoy themselves, cooperate with one another, remain on-task, and become actively engaged in the material more often than when they were participating in other reading activities.

- The researcher spent less time on behavior management on Readers’ Theater days because students were following directions and were involved in the activities.

- Students would often approach the researcher during the school day and ask when they would get to do Readers’ Theater again. They would also ask to add components to Readers’ Theater (i.e. props, specific movements, and requests for
specific scripts) during times when they weren’t even participating in it. This supports the generalization that students enjoyed the activity because they requested it and spoke positively about it throughout the school day. The following chart includes a handful of field note excerpts that support this generalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/15/06</td>
<td>Rehearsals went well today. During bell-work this morning, two students came over to me and started asking questions about Readers’ Theater. “When do we get to start new scripts? Can you get funny ones? We like them.” It is nice to hear students talk so positively about reading!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17/06</td>
<td>Today the students did great. They incorporated a few simple props and basic hand and body movements to make their character come to life. They liked this. It seemed to make it more exciting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/6/06</td>
<td>Today I had to tell the students that Readers’ Theater was done for a while. One student who is a very low reader (1st grade), who really enjoys Readers’ Theater expressed her feelings about having to stop. She asked, “Can we perform the scripts we wrote? Why can’t we keep doing Readers’ Theater?” I also noticed that on the last performance day, she read like a pro. She sounded confident. She has really connected with this activity and so have many of the other students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Generalization #5**

_**Children enjoy participating in Readers’ Theater.**_

- The researcher distributed a student attitude survey to learn more about the students’ feelings toward Readers’ Theater (Appendix D). Results from the attitude scale show that Readers’ Theater is the most popular reading activity according to the students. Fifteen students completed the surveys. Ten out of the 15 chose Readers’ Theater as their favorite activity. No children picked it as their second choice. Five of the students gave it a score of three or four.
When the score for each activity was added up, Readers' Theater received a 27, followed by partner reading with a score of 33. The third most popular activity was guided reading with a score of 40. The least favorite activity was independent reading with a score of 50.

The second part of the survey, which included the student responses, gave the researcher insight into what parts of Readers' Theater the students like or dislike. After reviewing each response, the researcher created categories based on the types of responses received. Major reasons students enjoyed Readers' Theater were that students like the socialization aspect of it, they enjoy using expression and characterization, and they like that it gives them choices in their learning. In addition, two categories were created for general responses and responses unique to Readers' Theater. The social aspect of Readers' Theater is what appears to be the leading reason why students enjoy it. This category included responses such as, “I like Readers' Theater because I get to read with other people”, “I like reading in groups”, and, “I like to perform in front of kindergartners and first
graders.” Another large category of responses included students expressing enjoyment in reading with expression. Many students wrote about how they like reading Readers’ Theater scripts because they get to use expression and act like their character.

- A complete description of categories and responses can be found in Appendix E. All of the responses were beneficial in helping the researcher determine which qualities of Readers’ Theater made it such an enjoyable activity for students. The students gave a wide variety of responses that support the generalization that Readers’ Theater is enjoyable to them.

- Readers’ Theater has been found to be a worthwhile literacy technique in this specific classroom. These generalizations support evidence gathered for a small group of students. The findings apply to these students only and may differ with other children.
Chapter 5

Implications

Introduction

Over the course of 10 weeks, the researcher implemented Readers’ Theater and assessed students on reading rate, accuracy, prosody, and attitudes. Readers’ Theater was found to be an effective strategy for improving reading rate and prosody in this group of students. It was also found to be an activity that was motivating and enjoyable for the students. The following implications are drawn from the findings reported in Chapter 4.

Implication #1

Strategies that improve fluency do not have to be boring. In fact, strategies that may appear to educators as “fun and play” can produce measurable gains in students’ reading fluency, perhaps because they are more mentally engaging and socially interactive.

- In general, students who are more fluent readers are able to comprehend text more easily because they expend less energy on decoding and more energy on extracting meaning from the text. This makes fluency-building activities a worthwhile use of class time. However, many commonly used fluency-building activities (timed repeated reading, taped reading, etc.) are neither interesting nor meaningful to children.
Readers' Theater, which has been shown to be effective in improving fluency in this study, is also a very enjoyable activity according to students. The students in this study preferred Readers' Theater to other reading activities.

The students found the activity to be meaningful because they had the opportunity to perform in front of a younger audience at the conclusion of each two-week script rehearsal.

**Implication #2**

*There appears to be a link between engaging, interactive curriculum in which students clearly see their own progress, and effective classroom management.*

Incorporating Readers' Theatre seemed to be as powerful a management tool as it was an instructional tool. Thus, novice teachers who are encouraged to focus closely on management, actually may benefit more from rethinking their instructional strategies.

- Teachers often go into their work day prepared with lessons, content and objectives to meet, only to be disrupted by management conflicts that steal time away from instruction. When students do not work with one another cooperatively, use their time efficiently, or show motivation for learning, time is lost that could have been spent on instruction.

- In this study, the researcher found that Readers' Theater was considered an enjoyable activity by the majority of the students in the class. When they were engaged in Readers' Theater lessons, they appeared more motivated to learn than when they were participating in other reading activities. They also cooperated
with their peers more. The students did not argue with one another or put each
other down. Instead, the researcher used the context of Readers' Theater to
promote constructive criticism and encouraging words among peers. In addition,
the researcher noticed that she spent less time trying to keep students on task.
Since the students were interested in Readers' Theater, they remained on task for
the majority of the lessons.

Implication #3

*Teacher observations are a valuable research and assessment tool in the classroom.*

*Carefully documenting what occurs in the classroom during instruction helps
teachers better understand, question, and use results from classroom tests. Teacher
observations may, in fact, enable a teacher to see valuable ways of tweaking
instruction to get the best results from learners at multiple levels.*

- The researcher took field notes daily to record observations of patterns,
  characteristics, and changes in the students' reading fluency as a whole group. In
  addition, she recorded observations of positive and negative behaviors, including
  motivation, cooperation, and on-task behavior. The rationale for this was to find
  out if students' attitudes and behaviors were different during Readers' Theater
  than other reading activities.

- The researcher used two assessments- an oral reading scale, and observations, to
determine if prosody (phrasing and expression) was affected by Readers' Theater.
The results of the reading scale show that the students did not show significant
improvements in prosody. However, when the students were engaged in Readers'
Theater, the researcher noticed almost every day that students were making attempts to improve their expression and reading style in order to make their performances more enjoyable for the audience. Most of the students showed improvements in expression when they were participating in Readers’ Theater, even when they showed no change from the reading scale assessment.

- A possible reason for this change could be that simple teacher observations may be a more authentic and accurate method of assessing students than other assessments. When students are engaged in a meaningful activity, they may be more likely to show their understanding of proper literacy components than when in a one on one assessment with the teacher.

**Summary**

This research was a small study that took place in an urban school district in Western New York. The results are unique to this group of children and may or may not be the same for other groups of children. There is no accurate way to determine the extent to which Readers’ Theater affected students’ fluency, as other reading activities may have also contributed to any growth shown. It would be beneficial to conduct a study on Readers’ Theater with a larger population of students and for a longer period of time under more controlled conditions. These findings would more accurately give an idea of how exactly Readers’ Theater affects fluency.

Despite limitations however, it is evident through this research that in the short period of time that Readers’ Theater took place, students’ fluency did improve at a rate faster than before the program was implemented. This is definitely worth taking
into consideration for any teacher striving to find ways to help his or her students succeed. Perhaps, what is even more important is that in this study, the researcher discovered a literacy strategy that the students genuinely enjoyed and showed motivation and interest in. Any educator would agree that this is all the evidence needed to use it in any elementary classroom.
References


APPENDICES
The Frog Prince...Continued
Story by Jon Scieszka

Characters:
- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Prince
- Princess
- Witch 1
- Witch 2
- Witch 3
- Fairy Godmother

Narrator 1: The story originally goes, "The Princess kissed the frog. He turned into a prince and they lived happily ever after..."

Narrator 2: Well, let’s just say they lived sort of happily for a long time.

Narrator 1: Okay, so they weren’t so happy. In fact, they were miserable.

Prince: (sticks tongue out at Princess).

Princess: Stop sticking your tongue out like that.

Prince: How come you never want to go down to the pond anymore?

Narrator 2: The prince and Princess were so unhappy. They didn’t know what to do.

Princess: I would prefer that you not hop around on the furniture. And it might be nice if you got out of the castle once in a while to slay a dragon or giant or whatever!
Narrator 1: The prince didn’t feel like going out and slaying anything. He just felt like running away. But then he reread his book. And it said right there at the end of his story...

Narrator 2: “They lived happily ever after...The end.”

Narrator 1: So he stayed in the castle and drove the princess crazy.

Narrator 2: Then one day, the princess threw a perfectly awful fit.

Princess: First you keep me awake all night with your horrible, croaking snore. Now I find a lily pad in your pocket. I can’t believe I actually kissed your slimy frog lips. Sometimes I think we would both be better off if you were still a frog.

Narrator 1: That’s when the idea hit him.

Prince: Still a frog...Yes! That’s it!

Narrator 2: And he ran off into the forest, looking for a witch who could turn him back into a frog.

Narrator 1: The prince hadn’t gone far when he ran into just the person he was looking for.

Prince: Miss Witch... Miss Witch. Excuse me, Miss Witch. I wonder if you could help me?

Witch 1: Say... you’re not looking for a princess to kiss are you?

Prince: Oh, no. I’ve already been kissed. I’m the Frog Prince. Actually, I was hoping you could turn me back into a frog.
Witch 1: Are you sure you’re not looking for a beautiful sleeping princess to kiss and wake up?

Prince: No, no...I’m the Frog Prince.

Witch 1: That’s funny. You don’t look like a frog. Well, no matter. If you’re a prince, you’re a prince. And I’ll have to cast a nasty spell on you. I can’t have any princess waking up Sleeping Beauty before the hundred years are up.

Narrator 2: The prince didn’t stick around to see which nasty spell the witch had in mind. He ran deeper into the forest until he came to a tiny cottage where he saw another lady who might help him.

Prince: Miss Witch...Miss Witch. Excuse me, Miss Witch. I wonder if you could help me. I’m a prince and...

Witch 2: Eh? What did you say? Prince?

Prince: No. I mean, yes. I mean, no, I’m not the prince looking for Sleeping Beauty. But yes, I’m the Frog Prince. And I’m looking for a member of your profession who can turn me back into a frog so I can live happily ever after.

Witch 2: Frog Prince, you say? That’s funny. I thought frogs were little green guys with webbed feet. Well, no matter. If you’re a prince, you’re a prince. And I can’t have any princess rescuing Snow White. Here...eat the rest of this apple.

Narrator 1: The prince, who knew his fairy tales, and knew his poisoned apples when he saw one, didn’t even stay to say...

Prince: No thank you!
Narrator 2: He turned and ran deeper into the forest. Soon he came to a strange looking house with a witch inside.

Prince: *Ahem.* Miss Witch...Miss Witch. Excuse me, Miss Witch. I wonder if you could help me? I’m the Frog...

Witch 3: If you’re a frog, I’m the king of France.

Prince: No, I’m not a frog. I’m the Frog Prince. But I need a witch to turn me back into a frog so I can live happily ever after. Can you do it?

Narrator 1: The witch eyed the prince and licked her rather plump lips.

Witch 3: Why, of course, dearie. Come right in. Maybe I can fit you in for lunch.

Narrator 2: The prince stopped on the slightly gummy steps. Something about this house seemed very familiar. He broke off a corner of the windowsill and tasted it. Gingerbread.

Prince: I hope you don’t mind my asking, Miss Witch. But do you happen to know any children by the name of Hansel and Gretel?

Witch 3: Why yes, Prince Darling, I do. I’m expecting them for dinner.

Narrator 1: The prince, who, as we said before, knew his fairy tales, ran as fast as he could deeper into the forest. Soon he was completely lost.

Narrator 2: He saw someone standing next to a tree. The prince walked up to her, hoping she wasn’t a witch, for he’d quite had his fill of witches.
Prince: Madam. I am the Frog Prince. Could you help me?

Fairy Godmother: Gosh, do you need it? You are the worst-looking frog I’ve ever seen.

Prince: (getting annoyed) I am not a frog. I am the Frog Prince. And I need someone to turn me back into a frog so I can live happily ever after.

Fairy Godmother: Well, I’m on my way to see a girl in the village about going to a ball, but I suppose I could give it a try. I’ve never done frogs before, you know.

Narrator 1: And with that the Fairy Godmother waved her magic wand, and turned the prince into a beautiful...

Narrator 2: Carriage... The prince couldn’t believe his rotten luck.

Narrator 1: The sun went down. The forest got spookier. And the prince became more and more frightened.

Prince: Oh, what an idiot I’ve been. I could be sitting at home with the princess, living happily ever after. But instead, I’m stuck here in the middle of this stupid forest, turned into a stupid carriage. Now I’ll probably just rot and fall apart and live unhappily ever after.

Narrator 2: The prince thought these terrible, frightening kinds of thoughts (and a few worse...too awful to tell), until far away in the village, the clock struck midnight.

Narrator 1: The carriage instantly turned into his former prince self, and ran by the light of the moon until he was safe inside his own castle.
Princess: Where have you been? I’ve been worried sick. You’re seven hours late. Your dinner is cold. Your clothes are a mess.

Narrator 2: The prince looked at the princess who had believed him when no one else in the world had, the princess who had actually kissed his slimy frog lips. The princess who loved him.

Narrator 1: The prince kissed the princess. They both turned into frogs. And they hopped off happily ever after.

All: The End!
APPENDIX B
Mike and I snuck into the deserted fairgrounds after hours, slipping through a loose board in the fence. No rides moved and no lights flashed, but the smell of popcorn and cotton candy still hung in the air.

“Let’s see the racing pigs,” whispered Mike, so we tiptoed to the pigsty, but we heard voices and saw lights inside.

Suddenly, a heavy hand fell on my shoulder and a horrible voice growled, “What do you think you’re doing here?” I slowly turned my head and peered upward. Behind us was a man with one eye, three teeth, and a hook for a hand, looking like he had escaped from the pirate ship ride.

“Run!” screamed Mike, and he took off ahead of me. I ran as fast as I could, but I tripped and fell into a mound of discarded popcorn bags and leftover cotton-candy tubes.

“Round here, we feeds trespassers to the bears!” shouted the man, his thundering footsteps coming closer. I buried myself in the pile of trash, the stench of salt and sugar filling my nostrils.

“Where’d you go?” the man grumbled and snorted, but finally he gave up and went away, and I was able to sneak out without being detected.

To this day, the smell of popcorn and cotton candy still scares me.
APPENDIX C
### NAEP’s Integrated Reading Performance Record

**Oral Reading Fluency Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Reads primarily in large, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, these do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the story. Preservation of the author’s syntax is consistent. Some or most of the story is read with expressive interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups. Some smaller groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Reads primarily word by word. Occasional two-word or three-word phrases may occur—but these are infrequent and/or they do not preserve meaningful syntax.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 28-4. NAEP’s Scale for Assessing Oral Reading Fluency

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APPENDIX D
Student Attitude Survey

Directions: Rank the following reading activities in order by favorites. Put 1 for the activity you would consider your favorite, 2 for your second favorite, 3 for your third favorite, and 4 for your least favorite.

___ Independent Reading

___ Guided Reading

___ Partner Reading

___ Readers' Theater

Why did you give Readers' Theater the number that you chose? If you gave it a 1, explain why it is your favorite. If you gave it a 4, explain why it is your least favorite. If you gave it a two or three, explain what you like and don't like about it. This is your chance to tell me what you think about Readers' Theater compared to our other reading activities. Don't worry...There are no wrong answers!

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E
Survey Responses:
Why students like Readers’ Theater

They like the socialization aspect of Readers’ Theater
- I get to read with other people.
- I like working with other people.
- I like reading in groups.
- We read in groups and not alone or with a partner.
- I like to be with other people.
- I get to perform with students.
- You get to read with your teacher.
- I like to perform in front of kindergartners and first graders.
- You get to act it out in front of other classes.

They enjoy using expression and characterization
- I get to show everyone that I have really good expression.
- You can talk like the characters that you play.
- The first graders don’t know the story that you are reading and you can make up some stuff that goes with the story to make it sound funny.
- I learned how to put more expression in when I read my books.
- When I read, it sometimes sounds really funny to me and when I read it, I know who I want to be.

They enjoy it (non-specific responses)
- You are having fun and reading too.
- It is really fun.
- I don’t like it...I love it!
- It is fun.
- It’s a cool thing to do.
- Sometimes fun to do.

They Enjoy specific qualities unique to Readers’ Theater
- I like reading scripts.
- I like reading my part.
- I have to practice and practice and it keeps me busy.
- You have parts and it’s like you’re in a real story.

They like having a choice
- You get to use your own script.
- You get to choose and read whatever part you want.
- You can talk like the characters that you play.

Why students dislike Readers’ Theater

- I don’t like to read the script more than 2 or 3 times.
- It’s sometimes not so fun to do.
- I have to read in front of children and I am shy.
- Sometimes you get stuck with a bad part.
- I don’t like making mistakes in front of people.
- We shouldn’t just sit in a chair and act. We should get up and act. We should act more with our hands and entertain the little kids and we should get some costumes.
To: Nicole Morris  
From: Colleen Donaldson, Institutional Review Board Administrator  
Date: February 24, 2006  
Re: Project #: 2005-148

Project Title: Using Readers: Theater as a technique for strengthening fluency

Your proposal, “Using Readers: Theater as a technique for strengthening fluency” has been approved for one year from this date.

You must use only the approved consent form or informational letter and any applicable surveys or interview questions that have been approved by the IRB in conducting your project. If you desire to make any changes in these documents or the procedures that were approved by the IRB you must obtain approval from the IRB prior to implementing any changes.

If you wish to continue this project beyond one year, federal guidelines require IRB approval before the project can be approved for a second year. A reminder continuation letter will be send to you in eleven months with the specific information that you will need to submit for continued approval of your project. Please note also that if the project initially required a full meeting of the IRB (Category III proposal) for the first review, then continuation of the project after one year will again require full IRB review.

Please contact Colleen Donaldson, IRB Administrator, Office of Academic Affairs, at (585) 395-5118 or cdonalds@brockport.edu, immediately if:
- the project changes substantially,
- a subject is injured,
- the level of risk increases
- changes are needed in your consent document, survey or interview questions or other related materials.

Best wishes in conducting your research.
APPENDIX G
Dear Parent or Guardian of ________________,

Beginning soon, along with our daily routine in Readers’ Workshop, we will be doing Readers’ Theater. This is a fun and motivating activity where students read scripts together to work on their reading skills. Readers’ Theater has been used in classrooms for many years and is a great way to improve reading ability. This form describes a research study being conducted on Readers’ Theater. The purpose of the research is to see if Readers’ Theater has any effect on reading fluency (the speed and expression used in reading). I am doing this research as a graduate student in the Childhood Education program at SUNY College at Brockport as part of my Masters Thesis.

We will spend approximately four months doing Readers’ Theater during part of the Reader’s Workshop timeframe. It will not replace any of our existing reading activities. During this time, the students will rehearse scripts that are at their independent reading level in order to perform for classmates. I will be testing the students for fluency 5 times throughout the four months. This will include the students reading a passage out loud as I take note of their expression, reading rate and accuracy. I will be using an audiotape in order to help me accurately check for these three parts. As soon as I note their scores, the audiotape will be deleted.

A possible benefit of this research is that professionals may have a better understanding of Readers’ Theater as a strategy for improving fluency. Fluent readers are better at understanding what they read, which is very important. A possible risk in this study is that some students may be nervous about performing or reading aloud in front of peers. There are no other known risks.

Any information that I collect as I test the students for fluency will remain confidential and will be known only to myself. Except for this consent form, all other documents used will be given a code number instead of any names. The results will be shown in the form of graphs. No child’s name will be used.

Participation of your child is voluntary and you may choose not to have your child’s fluency scores used in the study. No penalties will arise if you decide at any time that you do not want your child to participate. Also, the results of this study will in no way affect your child’s grades or school standings.

Please return this form to school if you agree to let me use the results of your child’s work in my research. If you have any questions you may contact me at 585-381-5422. I appreciate your support and I am looking forward to beginning Readers’ Theater.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morris

I understand the information provided on this form and I agree to let my child’s work be used for research on Readers’ Theater.

Parent/ Guardian Signature  Date

__________________________________________________________________________  __________

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Statement of Oral consent for students:

_Student’s name_, beginning soon, as part of our daily routine in Readers’ Workshop, we are going to start doing an activity called Readers’ Theater. It is where students read scripts together like actors do on a stage, except we will not be performing. We will just be reading the plays. It is a very fun activity and many classes use Readers’ Theater all the time, but another reason is that I am doing a project for college and I want to see if Readers’ Theater helps students become better readers. In order for me to do this, I need to listen to your reading and taking notes just like when you do DRA’s each year. I will also record your reading on a tape recorder. This is just so that if I missed something, I can go back again and listen. No one else will hear it and I wouldn’t even use your name in my project, just what I find out by listening to your reading. By listening to everyone’s reading, I may be able to see if Readers’ Theater helps you become a better reader. Is it okay with you that I use my notes on your reading in my research?
When the score for each activity was added up, Readers’ Theater received a 27, followed by partner reading with a score of 33. The third most popular activity was guided reading with a score of 40. The least favorite activity was independent reading with a score of 50.

The second part of the survey, which included the student responses, gave the researcher insight into what parts of Readers’ Theater the students like or dislike. After reviewing each response, the researcher created categories based on the types of responses received. Major reasons students enjoyed Readers’ Theater were that students like the socialization aspect of it, they enjoy using expression and characterization, and they like that it gives them choices in their learning. In addition, two categories were created for general responses and responses unique to Readers’ Theater. The social aspect of Readers’ Theater is what appears to be the leading reason why students enjoy it. This category included responses such as, “I like Readers’ Theater because I get to read with other people”, “I like reading in groups”, and “I like to perform in front of kindergartners and first