

2013

Using readers theaters to help students develop reading fluency

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Graduate Research Papers. 41.

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Abstract

This study examines how Readers Theater can support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency. The study was done over two school years, each time focusing on four students with the lowest fluency scores. The study focuses on using Readers Theater to increase student's fluency. The first year fiction Readers Theater was used, while the second year the focus was on using nonfiction Readers Theater. The results indicate that using Readers Theater has a positive impact on increasing student's fluency and disposition towards reading. The study showed an increase in students' WCPM from their baseline reading to the final nine weeks. According to the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, students' attitude and motivation towards reading improved. Measured by one assessment, McCall-Crabbs three minute comprehension assessment, students' scores remained the same or showed a slight decrease.

USING READERS THEATERS TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP READING FLUENCY

A Graduate Action Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Adrianna D. Cavanaugh

May, 2013

This Action Research Paper by: Adrianna D. Cavanaugh

Titled: Using Readers Theater to Help Students Develop Reading Fluency

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

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This study examines how Readers Theater can support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency. The study was done over two school years, each time focusing on four students with the lowest fluency scores. The study focuses on using Readers Theater to increase student's fluency. The first year fiction Readers Theater was used, while the second year the focus was on using nonfiction Readers Theater. The results indicate that using Readers Theater has a positive impact on increasing student's fluency and disposition towards reading. The study showed an increase in students' WCPM from their baseline reading to the final nine weeks. According to the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, students' attitude and motivation towards reading improved. Measured by one assessment, McCall-Crabbs three minute comprehension assessment, students' scores remained the same or showed a slight decrease.

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INTRODUCTION

From someone who saw reading as a struggle growing up, I find great pleasure in opening the doors and excitement of reading to my students. I was the student who never wanted to read in front of the class and hated being called on. If we had to read out loud I would count ahead and read my sentence over and over making sure I knew all the words. Even knowing all the words I was still terrified to be reading aloud with my classmates listening, feeling my face getting warm and turning red. If I did not know the words it seemed even worse, I remember thinking, “Now people will know I’m a slow, bad reader!” I always wondered what my classmates thought.

I now have found a love for reading and want to instill and share this love with my students. I have made it my goal, to do my best, to turn all of my students into comfortable and confident readers. I want them to be able to get up in front of the class and take pride in what they have accomplished. I want reading to be a positive experience for my students, not an item to check off their daily list. I want them to read outside of school and not just because they have to. I do not want any of my students to feel the same way about reading as I did as a child.

I have struggling readers in my third grade classroom. They are below the third grade expectation of 115 words correct per minute (WCPM), on a grade level text, according to the school district. I feel this is holding them back from becoming efficient effective readers. They are losing meaning because they are spending so much time decoding words. I am hoping by improving their fluency it will make reading easier for these students. I also hope that when the text becomes easier for the students to read, it will be easier for them to comprehend. I find these students tend to think of reading as a struggle and they do not enjoy it. I want students to

enjoy reading, and hopefully the better readers they become the more they will enjoy it. I want my students to leave third grade feeling comfortable and confident in their reading ability.

Statement of the Problem

Fluency is the ability to read a text with speed and accuracy, recognizing each word effortlessly and beginning to construct meaning from each word and group of words as they are read. Without the attainment of fluency there is an inability to master vocabulary and a gap in the ability to focus to comprehend texts (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Kuhn, & Stahl, 2003). Slow reading requires readers to invest considerably greater amounts of time in the reading task than classmates who are reading at a rate appropriate for their grade level. These readers read fewer words per given amount of time than fluent readers. Thus, just to keep up with their classmates in the amount of reading done, these slower readers have to invest considerably more time and energy in their reading. For example, a 60 minute reading assignment for a fluent reader can take a non-fluent reader two hours or more (Rasinski, 2002).

I see students in my classroom who get frustrated because they want to read what their classmates are reading, but they are unable to. The text is too hard and they aren't able to comprehend what they are reading. They feel embarrassed to read the books that are at their appropriate level, most of the time these books are childish and below grade level.

Every morning my students are required to work in their grade level appropriate reading packet, which consists of reading a short passage and answer four to six questions testing their comprehension. The students whose fluency rate is below grade level, this task takes them much longer than their classmates. They then just stop reading and start circle answers to be finished like everyone else. They feel frustrated and tend to give up on reading. It is hard for the students to enjoy something that is so hard and confusing to them.

Reading rate, efficiency, or fluency can be developed through instructional activities such as repeated readings, especially authentic ways, such as practicing poetry, or scripts for a later performance, and supported reading when done in activities where the reader reads an authentic texts but is supported by a more fluent partner (Rasinski, 2002). Readers Theater is a very natural and authentic way to promote repeated readings. Readers Theater does not rely on costumes, movement, props, or scenery to express meaning- just the performers and their voices as they face their audience with script in hand. For students to perform a Readers Theater script in a meaningful and engaging manner, they need to practice the script beforehand (Rasinski, 2002). I want to use Readers Theater to increase the fluency rate of students in my classroom. The following research is structured around the succeeding questions:

1. How can Readers Theater support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency?
2. How will students reading comprehension improve by increasing their fluency skills?
3. How will improving students' fluency impact their disposition towards reading activities?

Terms

There are some terms that will be used throughout this article, and therefore need to be defined.

1. WCPM- Words Correct Per Minute. This is determined by giving the DIBELS assessment, a one-minute fluency check. According to the WCSD a third grade student should be reading 115 WCPM by the end of the school year.
2. DORF- DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency. This is a one-minute oral reading standardized test. This test is individually administered followed by a retell comprehension check. The measure is intended for children from mid- first grade through third grade. (Good, Kaminski, Smith, Liamon, & Dill, 2001).

3. TORF- Test of Oral Reading Fluency. This test is administered individually and is designed for children in mid-first grade through sixth grade. Students read passage aloud for one minute. The test is divided into four reading levels from first to sixth grade, with eighteen passages per level to allow for regular monitoring (Vaughn, & Linan-Thompson, 2004).
4. Fluency- Fluent reading comprises three key elements: *accurate* reading of connected text at a conversational *rate* with appropriate *prosody or expression*. A fluent reader can maintain this performance for long periods of time, can retain the skill after long periods of no practice, and can generalize across texts. A fluent reader is also not easily distracted and reads in an effortless, flowing matter (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005).
5. Prosody- is a linguistic term to describe the rhythmic and tonal aspects of speech: the “music” of oral language. Prosodic features are variations in pitch (intonation), stress patterns (syllable prominence), and duration (length of time) that contribute to expressive reading of a text (Allington, 1983).
6. Readers Theater- Readers Theater is a strategy that can be used to help increase and work on fluency. Readers Theater uses guidance, modeling, and independent student practice. Students can use a poem, play, speech, or other appropriate text to rehearse. Students should practice their text until they are able to perform it fluently, and with expression for an audience (Corcoran, 2005). Students perform their Readers Theater with their script in hand (Rasinski, 2000).
7. CBRT- Curriculum-Based Readers Theatre differs from traditional Readers Theater in that its script topics come directly from classroom curriculum content, not from published scripts or stories (Flynn, 2004).

8. Comprehension – comprehension is a process regulated by cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and social experiences. When individuals read, they apply a range of comprehending strategies to monitor and sustain their meaning. Comprehending involves interpreting and synthesizing ideas in ways that influence the readers mind. The mind stores and processes information at two levels of comprehension: surface and deep. Surface level comprehension is a literal level of understanding represented by the ability to recall factual information from the text. Deep level comprehension is a conceptual level of understanding that results from the reader’s ability to think beyond the text Dorn & Soffos, 2005).
9. McCall-Crabbs Comprehension Assessment- this is a three- minute comprehension assessment. The students silently read the passage to themselves and then answer eight comprehension questions (McCall-Crabbs, 1979).
10. DRA2- Developmental Reading Assessment 2nd Edition. This is a reading assessment that measure students’ disposition, fluency and comprehension by Person (www.pearsonschool.com).

Significance of Review

The development of reading fluency has been linked to successful reading since the early research on the psychology of reading (Chard, Tyler, Vaughn, 2002). Most children develop into fluent readers by third grade. Approximately 75 percent of students who are poor readers in third grade continue to be lower achieving readers in ninth grade and, in essence, do not recover their reading abilities even into adulthood. Thus the assessment of student progress in fluency has become an integral part of reading instruction (Corcoran, 2005, p.1).

With my research I want to explore the strategy of Readers Theater to see if it positively affects fluency, which will then positively affect comprehension, motivation, and enjoyment of reading. Students who leave third grade with a low fluency rate can have lifetime consequences affecting their reading. Knowing these statistics I want to find powerful, beneficial, strategies to help my students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading is a complex performance that requires simultaneous coordination across many tasks. To achieve simultaneous coordination across tasks, instantaneous execution of component skills is required. With instantaneous execution, reading fluency is achieved so that performance is speeded, seemingly effortless, autonomous, and achieved without much consciousness or awareness (Logan, 1997).

This review will help its readers understand fluency and why it is such an important piece to a student's reading ability. It explains a variety of ways to assess and monitor fluency growth. It gives a variety of strategies to use to increase fluency, and hones in on the specific strategy of Readers Theater. The review discusses how beneficial Readers Theater can be in regards to fluency as well as other areas, such as motivation and confidence. It also explains how fluency is an important skill to master to gain full comprehension.

Reading Fluency

What is fluency? Fluency is a vital dimension of reading. Reading fluency is needed to be a successful reader (Welsch, 2006, p.180). Fluency is directly linked to memory capacity, specifically the reader's ability to hold meaningful chunks of information in memory (Dorn, & Soffos, 2005). Fluency consists of three interrelated elements: speed, rhythm, and flexibility (See Appendix A). Speed relates to retrieval rate, while rhythm relates to phrasing and

orchestration. Flexibility implies that the reader understands how to self-regulate, or pace, his or her reading according to changing purposes and needs. This pacing can be heard in the reader's voice. For example, slowing down to determine the meaning of a passage, speeding up to cluster ideas or phrases, and using tone of voice to express meaning (Dorn, & Soffos, 2005).

Fluency is reading like you talk, not too fast and not too slow, with expression and no sounding out (Cahill, & Gregory, 2011, p. 128). Fluency is the accurate and rapid naming or reading of letters, sounds, words, sentences, or passages. When students can perform reading and reading-related tasks quickly and accurately, they are on the path to fluency, an essential element of comprehension and mature reading. To become fluent readers, students need to learn to decode words rapidly and accurately, in isolation as well as in connected text, and to increase reading speed while maintaining accuracy (Vaughn, & Thompson-Linan, 2004). The development of reading fluency has been linked to successful reading since the early research on the psychology of reading (Chard, Tyler, & Vaughn, 2002, p.1).

Word-reading accuracy refers to the ability to recognize or decode words correctly. Strong understanding of the alphabetic principle, the ability to blend sounds together, and knowledge of a large bank of high-frequency words are required for word-reading accuracy. Poor word reading accuracy has a negative effect on reading comprehension and fluency. A reader who reads words incorrectly is unlikely to understand the author's meaning, and can lead to misinterpretation of the text (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2000).

When words cannot be read accurately from memory as sight words, they must be analyzed. Thus it is important to teach word-identification strategies, such as decoding and the use of analogy to figure out unknown words. Decoding is a sequentially executed process where the reader blends sounds to form words from their parts. This can take place by blending

individual phonemes or phonograms. In order to accurately decode words, readers must be able to accurately identify the sounds represented by the letters or letter combinations, blend phonemes, read phonograms, and use both letter-sound and meaning cues to determine exact pronunciation and meaning of the words in the text. Instruction in all of these sub-processes is necessary for the first part of reading fluency: accurate word identification (Ehri, 2002).

Reading rate compromises both word-level automaticity and the speed and fluidity with which a reader moves through the text. Automaticity is quick and effortless identification of words in and out of context (Kuhn, & Stahl, 2003). The automaticity with which a reader can decode or recognize is almost as important as word –reading accuracy. It is not enough to get the word right if a great deal of cognitive effort is required to do so; automaticity frees up cognitive resources that can be devoted to text comprehension (LaBerge, & Samuels, 1974).

Importance of fluency. The scientific basis for emphasis on word reading fluency can be partially traced to automaticity theory (AT) (LaBerge, & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, & Flor, 1997) and verbal efficiency theory (VET) (Perfetti, 1985, 1999). Both theories highlight the harmful effects of inefficient skills on comprehension and maintain that if word reading demands too much attention, little remains for higher level comprehension. According to both, beginning readers first concentrate on word reading and gradually shift attention to understand what they read (LaBerge, & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, & Flor, 1997; Perfetti, 1985). Repeated practice makes word recognition automatic and frees attention for comprehension. AT and VET has shown that fluent reading helps comprehension.

All readers have occasions that challenge their skills. These cases create “confusions”: instances of reader uncertainty over the meaning of a word, phrase, or another part of the text. Confusion can result from poor word reading, an unfamiliar word, a small verbal working

memory capacity, or other sources (Walczyk, & Griffith-Ross, 2007). To overcome confusion, readers can employ “compensations”: reader actions that help automatic reading to succeed or that provide information to working memory by an alternative means when automatic reading fails. In other words, readers can take action to help their skills succeed (Walczyk, & Griffith-Ross, 2007). The following are the most frequently used compensations.

As readers become more skilled, their control over reading rate increases. Slowing reading helps to prevent much confusion allowing inefficient readers to read text at a pace that their skills can handle (Baker, & Brown, 1984). Less skilled readers pause longer and more often than do skilled readers. A pause is compensatory if it is an uncommonly long delay that allows an inefficient reading subcomponent sufficient time to succeed (Perfetti, 1985).

Looking back occurs when readers briefly glance back to previously read text. Looking back is compensatory when it resolves confusion by restoring information forgotten from working memory or providing information overlooked on the first pass through the text (Cataldo, & Oakhill, 2000). Reading aloud often occurs spontaneously to difficult text or noisy reading environments, suggesting that it is compensatory. Reading aloud helps focus attention when readers are tired or bored and facilitates comprehension monitoring. It also helps automatic reading to succeed by drowning out distractions (Chall, J.S., 1996).

Ehri (1994) described four ways children read words. When skills are fluent or words are familiar, (1) reading by sight is possible. Words frequently encountered are eventually recognized as whole units that activate sounds and meaning quickly from memory. The remaining three are compensatory and are backups when automatic word reading fails. (2) Phonological recording (sounding out) is using the rules of phonics to match a letter string to a spoken word in memory. (3) Analogizing to known sight words occurs when readers look at a

word's spelling and bring to mind similarly spelled words to cue its meaning. (4) Contextual guessing is using surrounding text to infer an unknown word's meaning.

Another way of dealing with word reading confusion can be added to the three mentioned previously. If readers conclude that an unfamiliar word or other confusion involves a minor detail, or that resolving it can take too much time, they can jump over it (Walczyk, J. & Griffith- Ross, D., 2007). Rereading is compensatory when it resolves confusion noted on an earlier pass through text but is more disruptive of reading than the preceding compensations. With each rereading, readers become more familiar with words, phrases, and their meanings and can focus more attention on comprehension (Walczyk, J. & Griffith- Ross, D., 2007).

For most children, slow reading is associated with poor comprehension and poor overall reading performance. Faster readers tend to have better comprehension and tend to be overall more proficient readers. A slow reader has to devote so much time into decoding the words resulting in a reduced pace. This then takes more cognitive resources to focus on decoding and less on comprehending the text. Reading at a slower rate makes it difficult to keep track of ideas developing across the page. This leads to students reading less, which will then cause slower reading progress than the students who are reading at a normal rate for their age (Rasinski, 2000).

Along with increasing fluency checking for student's understanding of the text is also important. One way to confidently assess student's comprehension is to have them share their thinking. Readers reveal their comprehension by responding to the text, not by answering literal question at the end of their reading. Personal responses to reading allow us to see inside the student's mind (Harvey, & Goudvis, 2000).

LaBerge and Samuels (1974) suggest that there is a limited capacity of attention and working memory in cognitive processing and learning one aspect of reading (word identification) to a criterion of automaticity frees the processing space for higher order thinking, like comprehension. Student's mental capacity is limited, so more resources for comprehension are available if word identification becomes an automatic process. Since comprehension requires higher order processes it does not become automatic, this is why word identification needs to be the automatic process. Quick and effortless word identification is important because when one can read words automatically, one's limited cognitive resources can be used for comprehension. Many times the differences in comprehension between good and poor readers can be attributed to differences in the level of automatic decoding (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2000).

Fluency teaching strategies. Fluency is a vital dimension of reading. Reading fluency is needed to be a successful reader (Welsh, 2006). Students need to be exposed to a variety of fluency strategies. The following strategies have been effective to increase oral reading fluency.

One strategy that can be used is repeated readings. In this approach learners practice reading one passage, at an appropriate instructional level, until some predetermined level of fluency is attained. Each reading is timed, and then the level of fluency is charted, often by the students. A specific number of repetitions are often specified (Mastropieri, Leinart, & Scruggs, 1999).

Another way to use repeated readings is with a teacher model. One procedure for enhancing fluency is for teachers to model fluent reading by reading aloud to students. This listening preview provides an opportunity for the learner to listen to a selection or passage prior to instruction. Previewing increases the time a student interacts with the reading material and

exposes students to the vocabulary, phrasing, and context before reading the text themselves (O'Donnell, McLaughlin, & Weber, 2003).

A third way to use repeated readings is with modeling by a more proficient peer. In the context of the ongoing classroom organization, peers can be used to model reading by reading aloud to target students. Skilled readers can provide rich oral reading models of appropriate reading rates and phrasal organization. Peers can be effective in providing the preview of the material before the student reads independently (Gut, Bishop-Goforth, & Farmer, 2004). Finally, you can use repeated readings by modeling with an audiotape or CD. Providing an audiotape or CD preview of the text to be read by the student improves reading fluency. The student listens to the model, and then reads the passage independently (Daly, & Martens, 1994).

The prepractice preview is another way to increase oral reading fluency. This method of previewing allows the student to read (aloud or silently) the assigned selection to themselves before the lesson. This pre-exposer allows the student to become aware of text vocabulary, context, and features (Welsh, 2006). Using paired reading can also increase fluency. This read-along procedure is exemplified when the teacher, or another fluent reader, and the student read the text together. Read-along approaches would involve the learner spending more time actively engaged in oral reading (Nes, 2003).

Choral reading can also increase fluency. This is another reading along procedure in which several students orally read the same passage in unison (Welsh, 2006). Shared reading has also shown fluency growth. In this strategy the teacher introduces the student to the text and reads it to them. Then the student reads the text to the teacher. This is followed by the student reading the text over successive trials to others. In essence, the student shares the reading with many listeners (Welsh, 2006).

Readers Theater is an example of a strategy that is shown to improve fluency. Readers Theater uses guidance, modeling, and independent student practice. Students can use a poem, play, speech, or other appropriate text to rehearse. Students should practice their text until they are able to perform it fluently, and with expression for an audience (Corcoran, 2005). Kieff (2003) describes Readers Theater as the oral presentation of drama, prose, or poetry by two or more readers. Productions can be informal or even spontaneous. There is minimal use of props, costumes, and action because the interpretation of the literature is done through voice and facial expressions.

According to Young and Vardell (1993), there are numerous benefits for students who use Readers Theater. Students can improve their reading ability and attitudes toward reading through participating in Readers Theater because of the repetition of exposure to the material. Readers have the opportunity to practice oral reading and engage in reading the text several times as they prepare their performance. This helps students develop larger sight-word vocabularies, increases reading rate, and improved reading fluency. Additionally comprehension may improve since the reading experience is one of dramatic participation with the focus on interpretation rather than performance.

Assessing fluency. Teachers need to listen to students read aloud to make judgments about their progress in reading fluency (Zutell, & Rasinski, 1991). Observations help assess student progress and determine instructional needs. When teachers observe students oral reading they should consider each aspect of fluent reading: word- reading accuracy, rate, and prosody (Hudson, Lane, H.B., & Pullen, 2000).

The fluency scale from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Rasinski, 2003) is helpful when studying change in reading fluency over time.

This scale measures fluency according to three elements: (1) grouping or phrasing of words as revealed through intonation, stressing, and pauses exhibited by readers; (2) adherence to author's syntax; and (3) expressiveness- whether the reader interjects a sense of feeling, anticipation, or characterization when reading aloud. Students' fluency is measured on a scale of one to four: students at levels one and two are nonfluent; those at levels three and four are generally considered fluent (p. 40).

Level one students read 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. Level two readers primarily read in two-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. Level three readers use three or four word phrases. Some smaller groupings may be present. The majority of the phrasing seems appropriate and preserves syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present. Level four readers primarily read in large, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from the text may be present, they do not 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.

Fluency can be measured or monitored by using DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF). This is a one-minute oral reading standardized test. This test is individually administered followed by a retell comprehension check. The measure is intended for children from mid- first grade through third grade. The test is given in the fall, winter, and spring. Materials include student and examiner copies of grade-level passages. Students read a grade-level passage aloud for one minute, and teacher marks errors such as omitted or substituted

words and hesitations of more than three seconds on their copy of the test. Students then retell the passage in their own words while teacher tallies the number of words they produce (Good, Kaminski, Smith, Liamon, & Dill, 2001).

Another way to monitor and measure fluency is using Test of Oral Reading Fluency (TORF). This test is administered individually and is designed for children in mid-first grade through sixth grade. Students read passage aloud for one minute. As in the DORF measure, teachers mark errors while students read to determine their oral reading scores. The test is divided into four reading levels from first to sixth grade, with eighteen passages per level to allow for regular monitoring (Vaughn, & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

Readers Theater

Types of readers theater. For Readers Theater the teacher creates scripts from children's literature that has a rich dialogue. The teacher begins by reading aloud the story on which the script is based and leads a discussion of the characters' emotions and how they might sound throughout the story. Students then practice reading the entire script before roles are assigned. Rehearsing and performing for their peers provides an authentic purpose for reading the text numerous times. Readers Theater can help students develop accuracy, rate, and prosody (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2000).

Young and Vardell (1993) state how the use nonfiction texts can be more beneficial than textbooks. Including nonfiction texts into your curriculum is an excellent opportunity to link reading for pleasure with reading for information in the content areas. Quality nonfiction texts should be used in primary grades to prepare students for upper elementary and beyond. Often textbook are poorly written and difficult for students to understand so the use of trade books can be beneficial. (Young, & Vardell, 1993).

There are a variety of benefits gained by incorporating nonfiction literature into content study. First, there are a variety of different topic areas. Also the trade books also provide a range of reading abilities to differentiate for all the students in your class, whereas the textbooks are on grade level. Second, trade books are often more appealing than textbooks. They are more inviting and student friendly. Third, nonfiction trade books allow students to study topics in greater depth than do textbooks. Finally, trade books enable students to read material that is as up-to-date and accurate as possible (Young, & Vardell, 1993).

Transforming nonfiction trade books into Readers Theater is a great way to enhance content areas. First, you need to provide students with an opportunity to read or skim potential non-fiction book of a topic of interest. Then, choose a portion of the text the student(s) find interesting, approximately 2-5 pages. Thirdly, delete or cross out less critical information to the topic, just look for the facts. Next, split the text among a small group and label parts. After that, add a prologue to introduce the script. Finally, allow time for students to practice and then present (Young, & Vardell, 1993). According to Young and Vardell, when the process is complete, students are often interested in going beyond the excerpt to read the rest of the book or another book by the same author.

Curriculum-Based Readers Theater uses scripts that come directly from classroom content. They are informing and entertaining and can address many of the national standards of learning. Curriculum-Based Readers Theater differs from traditional Readers Theater in that its script topics come directly from classroom curriculum content, not from published scripts or stories. Curriculum Based Readers Theater (CBRT) scripts are based on curriculum topics and are written to address prescribed standards of learning. They can focus on, but are not limited to, stories and literature. CBRT's written emphasis is on informing and entertaining through

dialogue. Because the playwrights are teachers and students, CBRT scripts concern precisely the topics of study particular to the class that writes and performs the script (Flynn, 2004).

Readers theater outcomes. In a study done by Corcoran (2005), Readers Theater had a positive impact on the students. A pre and post survey was done. The first six questions were designed to elicit the student's comfort levels with reading in different contexts and situations. Each question was given a numerical value, with a point scale of one through four. Comfort levels with the first six questions on the pre and post surveys showed a two percent to 16 percent increase. While all questions increased in comfort, the most significant difference was found in the questions: "How do you feel about reading aloud in school?" And "How do you feel when it's time for Readers Theater?" The pre-survey findings showed a comfort level of 81 percent in how Readers Theater made them feel. The post-survey finding showed 95 percent of students feeling the best about Readers Theater. In reading out loud at school 52 percent felt comfortable in the pre-survey and in the post 68 percent felt comfortable.

The seventh question asked students to write what they felt was their favorite subject or part of the day. On the pre-survey 45 percent of students selected mathematics, eighteen percent chose reading, and nobody selected Readers Theater. The post-survey findings showed 37 percent choosing Readers Theater as their favorite and only 27 percent of students selected mathematics. When asked if they would like to do Readers Theater again 90 percent of students said they would like to do it on a weekly basis, while only ten percent wanted to do it only a couple times a year.

The study done by Corcoran, (2005), was conducted between January and April. Oral fluency scores were conducted twice during this time, winter and spring. The number of words read correctly per minute increased overall as a class by an increase of 17 additional words read

correctly from winter to spring. Individual increases ranged from the lowest of three WCPM to the highest increase of 41 additional words read correctly. This data from this study suggests that low achieving students did benefit from a Reader's Theater program.

In a study done by Rinehart (1999), Readers Theater had positive impacts on the students. The findings suggest that Readers Theater potentially offers exposure, support, and practice so that even beginning readers can read at higher levels of fluency on targeted text. It was found that the reading performance of several children was extended beyond their traditionally-determined instructional levels. Their reading of targeted text was not only accurate but expressive, a characteristic indicating higher levels of oral reading. For some students, their Readers Theater event provided a rare opportunity for the less-skilled reader to be on equal footings with better readers. The children enjoyed the activities and were motivated to do more.

Positive changes in attitudes about Readers Theater for many of the students emerged as they became successful through the event. Many of the less-skilled readers were boosting with confidence after performing their Readers Theater. Rinehart noted many students were proud of themselves when they could perform their Readers Theater in front of their peers. Prior to the study many of these students wouldn't even attempted to get in front of their peers and now they were excited to perform. Allowing the students to decide when they were ready to perform had a huge impact on their confidence. By allowing them to decide when they were ready gave them ownership and motivation. By the end of the study students who never saw themselves as readers, were more willing and confident than ever. They were excited to be able to perform in front of their peers.

Increasing student motivation and building confidence with readers theater. Using Readers Theater can help increase student's interest and motivation to read. Readers Theater

uses guidance, modeling, and independent student practice. Students rehearse until they feel ready to perform it fluently and with expression for an audience. This is different from other form of theater because students are not asked to memorize or act out their role; instead the focus is on fluently conveying meaning and intonation (Worthy, & Pratter, 2002). Student's attitudes, confidence, oral fluency, and sight word recognition improve when Readers Theater is used with low-achieving students (Rinehart, 1999).

Readers Theater permits students, who are rarely given the opportunity to read aloud in dramatic performances, a chance to read, practice, and successfully perform. It is recommended that students be allowed to determine when they feel ready to perform. When the students decide when they feel confident, there is a dramatic increase in their success rate of reading aloud. This will cause a noticeable rise in the student's self-confidence, oral fluency, and motivation to read aloud (Worthy, & Pratter, 2002).

Readers Theater also improves low-achieving student attitudes, confidence, oral fluency, and sight word recognition (Corcoran, 2005). Repeated reading of familiar text will allow students to be able to read something successfully in front of a group of peers. Readers Theater benefits students who were otherwise lacking opportunities to feel successful in front of their peers (Rinehart, 1999).

Rinehart (1999), discusses the importance of Readers Theater and how it can help students gain fluency and confidence. In this study, the author describes how Readers Theater opportunities were included in a tutorial for elementary students facing serious reading problems. The results were positive and showing that Readers Theater can have a positive impact in the classroom. According to Rinehart (1999), teachers and students should choose the literature together. They should discuss the topic and then write the script together. Having students

involved in part of the process helps gain ownership and excitement for the project. The students need to practice and decide when they are ready to perform. It was also stated that it is important to discuss how the performance went.

Conclusion

Readers Theater is a great way to develop student's meaningful and fluent reading. Readers Theater is a strategy that combines reading practice and performing. Its goal is to enhance students reading skills and confidence by having them practice reading with a purpose. Readers Theater gives students a real reason to read aloud and an authentic form of repeated reading. (Bafile, 2005). Rasinski (2000) recommended using Readers Theater as a form of repeated readings to improve fluency. After interviewing educators and observing Readers Theater presentations, Bafile (2005) concluded that Readers Theater dramatically impacted student's reading fluency. Her studies also revealed a high level of student interest when using Readers Theater.

Certainly, research has identified fluency as an important part of the reading process. In addition, the use of repeated reading strategies to address students' oral reading fluency has been widely supported by many researchers. Readers Theater presents an interesting opportunity to provide students with repeated oral reading practice using an appealing and engaging format (Bafile, 2005)

METHODS

Overview of Study

This study involves teacher research (Hubbard & Powers, 2003) that focuses on improving student's fluency by using Readers Theater. The research specifically explores using Readers Theater to support struggling readers, especially in regards to fluency. There is also a

focus on the relationship between a student's comprehension and fluency. Student's disposition towards reading activities is additionally explored. As stated earlier, most children develop into fluent readers by third grade. Approximately 75 percent of students who are poor readers in third grade continue to be lower achieving readers in ninth grade and, in essence, do not recover their reading abilities even into adulthood. Thus, the assessment of student progress in fluency has become an integral part of reading instruction (Corcoran, 2005, p.1). I am a third grade teacher who has students who struggle with fluency. It is my goal to have these students leave third grade feeling comfortable and confident in their reading ability. My hope is that by improving the student's fluency reading will become easier for them. In turn, when the text becomes easier for the students to read, comprehension will increase. I want kids to enjoy reading, and hopefully the better readers they become the more they will enjoy it.

Study Setting/Participants

Panther Elementary, where the study took place, is located in a small Iowa town, but included in the same larger school district as the city next to it. This allows for a small town feel, but a big district atmosphere. The school serves 521 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, with 51.7% being female and 48.3% male. The student population consists of 83.1% Caucasian, 5% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. Panther Elementary School receives Title I funding and 58.7% of the student receive either free or reduced lunch. Seventeen point eight percent of the students receive special needs services. Panther Elementary School is considered to be a school in need of assistance (SINA), meaning we are not meeting the yearly growth according to the Iowa Assessments and the State of Iowa.

The study took place in a third grade classroom across two academic years. The first year there were 27 students, 12 boys and 15 girls. The classroom was mostly Caucasian

consisting of only one student who was African American. The class had seven students who were identified having special needs in the area of math, reading, and writing. The second year the class contained 21 students, 7 boys and 14 girls. The demographics consisted again of mostly Caucasian students with three African American students. The class contained five students that were identified as having special needs.

The participants for the study consisted of eight students, four from year one and four from year two. Both years there were three females and one male. These students scored the lowest in the class when given a DIBELS one-minute grade level fluency probe. Their score fell below the expected 115 WCPM, according to the school district. It is expected that third grade students be reading at 115 WCPM by the end of third grade. Being compared to their classmates these students were significantly much lower. Many of the other students scored at 100-115 WCPM at the beginning of the year.

Description of the Project

This research took place over two school years. Each year I focused on the four students with the lowest fluency score. Their fluency was calculated by using a grade level passage and timing each student for one minute. The entire class was tested and, the four students with the lowest words correct per minute (WCPM) were then selected for the study. I felt these students were the ones who would benefit most and I could get the most accurate fluency scores. For this study the students identified as having special needs were not included.

The first year was much more formal and focused on fiction Readers Theater, which were teacher selected. I worked with this group of students four days a week. We met for 20 minutes each session. During each session I focused our instruction on improving fluency by using Readers Theater. First, I began by modeling the text (I read, they followed along reading in their

heads). Then we choral read the text (all read together), followed by echo reading (I read, they read) the text. Finally, the students were assigned parts and practiced. We practiced during our daily 20 minute work time. The students also had the opportunity to present their Readers Theater to the class when they felt they were ready. During the first year the students presented their scripts to their classmates. During our session I would ask the class to take a break from their reading to be an audience for the Readers Theater group.

The second year was more informal, meeting once a week, allowing more ownership on the student's part. I focused on using non-fiction Readers Theater, allowing the students to pick out the scripts that interested them. When we met once a week it was set up very similar to year one. First, I began by modeling the text (I read, they follow along reading in their heads). Then we choral read the text (all read together), followed by echo reading (I read, they read) the text. Finally, the students were assigned parts and practiced. From there students practiced on their own time during Readers Workshop. I would check in on them weekly to see their progress, it was their responsibility to let me know when they were ready to present. The students also had the opportunity to present to an audience of their choice. They presented to their homeroom class, other third grade classes, second grade rooms, the principal, and even some fourth and fifth grade rooms.

Both years these two groups had a huge focus on Readers Theater. They were able to rehearse and work on different scripts throughout most of the school year. Other students in the class used Readers Theater every once in a while to practice improving their intonation and expression while reading. The focus groups had ongoing practice using Readers Theater, while the others in class used them a two or three times a year to practice specific skills.

Research Questions

The initial tentative research questions that I developed for the study were:

4. How can Readers Theater support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency?
5. Will improving student's fluency impact their interest in reading?
6. Will increasing student's fluency affect their feelings towards reading?
7. Will student's reading comprehension improve by increasing their fluency skills?

However, after discussing these questions and digging deeper into my research, I realized I could refine my questions. Question two, three, and four could be answered with a yes or no. I wanted and needed my questions to be more open-ended. Also, questions two and three were very similar and could be combined. After rearranging these questions I came up with the following questions, narrowing my research to three questions, leaving the first one the way it is.

1. How can Readers Theater support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency?
2. How will students reading comprehension improve by increasing their fluency skills?
3. How will improving students' fluency impact their disposition towards reading activities?

These three questions really narrowed and focused my research, helping me really target my findings and hone in on what I was really trying to answer.

Methods of Data Collection

The present study included four primary methods used to collect data. All types of data were collected in the classroom setting and are described in further detail below. The four

different methods of data were collected to examine student's fluency, comprehension, and disposition towards reading.

1. Weekly one minute DIBELS fluency probe

Each week students were given a one-minute fluency DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2007) probe. Student did a cold read on a grade level passage, while being timed for one-minute. After the minute students were told their score and graphed it. A discussion between the teacher and student took place talking about previous scores and areas for improvement. With fluency being the main focus in this study, this assessment monitored their weekly progress through the entire study.

2. Weekly McCall-Crabbs three minute comprehension probe

Each week students were given a three minute McCall-Crabbs (McCall & Crabbs, 1979) comprehension assessment. The students silently read a short grade level passage and then answer eight questions. Any questions not answered in the three minutes are counted incorrect. After the three minutes is up the teacher and the students go over the questions and the students graph their results. Since comprehension was a focus in the study this assessment measured their progress through the study.

3. Reading interest survey

Students were given the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Kear, 1990) at the beginning and end of the study. The ERAS was given (See Appendix B) to find baseline data for student's attitudes towards reading. At the end of the study a final ERAS was conducted. By using surveys it gives the teacher the opportunity to see insight into how the students feel and their attitude towards reading. Since the students were the main focus in the study it is important to fully understand their feeling towards reading.

4. Weekly conferences

A weekly one-on-one reading conference was conducted by the teacher with each student. The weekly conference really allowed me to see each student's likes and dislike about reading. It also allowed me to focus on each student's strengths as well as areas of concern. It was a time for me to coach the students and steer them in a positive direction. A reading conference is an opportunity for teachers to individually observe how students understand their reading and provide guidance that will lead students to think more deeply (Dorn Soffos, 2005). Reading conferences aid in highlighting problems students are having and the observations teachers make can be used to help plan meaningful instruction to support the students (Serafini, 2001). While conferencing with the students I was taking notes and making observations. This way I could answer questions and build upon them each week. I noted conversations, strengths, weaknesses, and work habits.

Methods of Data Analysis

I planned to focus my data collection around my three research questions. I wanted to know if student's fluency and comprehension would improve as well as their disposition towards reading when using Readers Theater. To analyze my data I used the constant comparison method (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). I began to analyze my data and look at my conference notes compared to my graphs and scores. This allowed me to see everything working together and making sense of the whole session.

I began by collecting all my data and looking it over finding different categories or themes throughout the research. I analyzed the graphs of both the DIBELS probes and the McCall-Crabbs comprehension assessment. I was looking for general themes or similarities

between the students as a group and as individuals. I was looking for increases in fluency scores or places where there was a drop. I looked at their comprehension graphs to find how many questions were being completed and general trends between the students. I made notes in each of the student's graphs highlighting similarities, differences, and data that stood out. These two sources of data collection would help me answer my first and second question.

I compared the ERAS surveys from the beginning of the study to the end. I used the ERAS's scoring sheet to assess the recreational and academic areas of the survey. This allowed me to see areas that students scored high in which let me know these were areas of interest as well as areas that the students scored low in and little interest. By evaluating and analyzing the ERAS survey it allowed me to answer my third research question on my student's disposition towards reading.

Finally I analyzed the notes from the weekly one-on-one reading conferences. The weekly conference helped me answer all three of my question, but really hone in on the students likes and dislikes about reading. It allowed the students to open up in a one-on-one situation and be completely honest without anyone else listening in and judging them. It allowed me see common themes between the students in their feeling towards reading. It was also a chance for the students to read aloud to me in a less formal setting. I was also able to have conversations with each student about what they were reading so I could see how well they were understanding what they were reading.

I created graphs for each student in both fluency and comprehension. I added a trend line to each graph and began comparing and looking at each individual student. I compared my graphs to my conference notes. I would highlight similarities and difference to try and figure out why some weeks I saw a dip and other I saw a substantial increase.

Conclusion

The present study is considered an action research. It took place in a third grade classroom across two academic years, and sought to find the effects Readers Theater has on improving fluency. It also focused on comprehension and students disposition towards reading if their fluency improved. Four sources were used to collect data: fluency probes, comprehension probes, interest surveys, and reading conferences. All four data sources were solid measures in answering the research questions. The constant comparison method was used to analyze and describe the data. After analyzing the data the results of the questions were able to be answered.

RESULTS

Overview

Reinhart (1999) says student's attitudes, confidence, and fluency improve when using Readers Theater. Harvey & Goudvis (2000) further state that along with increasing fluency, checking for student's understanding of the text is also important. This teacher research uses Readers Theater to help increase fluency, comprehension, and student's disposition towards reading. The study measures these components through fluency and comprehension probes, as well as weekly conferences and observation notes.

Overall, I found that in using Readers Theater, fluency improved as well as student's disposition towards reading. However, based on student comprehension data from the McCall-Crabbs three minute comprehension probe, Readers Theater did not positively improve students reading comprehension, but rather a decrease in student's overall comprehension was found. The student's scores didn't seem to increase based on the finding from one particular assessment, the McCall-Crabbs comprehension probes. This was largely due to the three minutes time limit

set by McCall-Crabbs. The program states that any questions not finished in the three minutes are counted incorrect. The students were using strategies to be certain to answer questions accurately and correctly, instead of racing the clock.

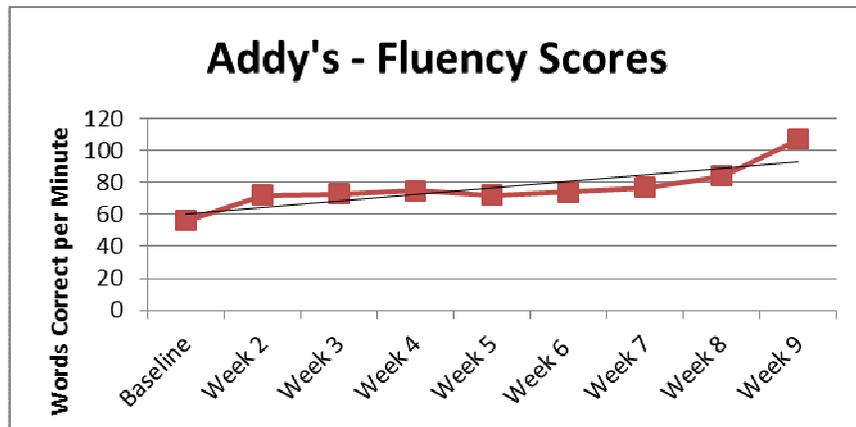
My results focus closely on two female students, Addy and Sarah. I have worked with these students using Non-fiction Readers Theater scripts to practice building their fluency. The study took place from the week of November 5th through January 18th. Both students fell below grade level, which is 115 WCPM, when measuring fluency. Their WCPM was measured using the DIBELS one minute fluency probe. By focusing my results on these two students it will illustrate the growth and development individual students like these two made during my research.

Findings

Fluency improves. Fluency consists of three interrelated elements: speed, rhythm, and flexibility (See Appendix A). Speed relates to retrieval rate, while rhythm relates to phrasing and orchestration. Flexibility implies that the reader understands how to self-regulate, or pace, his or her reading according to changing purposes and needs. This pacing can be heard in the reader's voice. For example, slowing down to determine the meaning of a passage, speeding up to cluster ideas or phrases, and using tone of voice to express meaning (Dorn, & Soffos, 2005).

When looking at the fluency scores as a whole every student had an increase from their baseline score to their final nine weeks score (See Appendix C) after our work with the Non-Fiction Readers Theater pieces. I measured student's fluency by using DIBELS one minute fluency probes. The same probe was given to each student weekly. I timed them for one minute; after the minute was up they graphed their WCPM. While practicing Readers Theater all week, I

would use Fridays of each week as an assessment day to stay consistent. While I was testing each student the others would be practicing their parts from the Readers Theater script.



One particular student named Addy serves as an example of a participant who started my teacher research below the expected 115 WCPM, based on school districts requirements.

According to our reading coach at Panther Elementary, the average third grade student should increase their WCPM by two words per week. Based on the DIBELS one minute fluency probes, Addy exceeded the two words per week substantially. She ended the research over 100 WCPM. In order to meet the norm she needed to be reading at 76 WCPM by the end of the study.

When looking back at my conference notes I see on week five that she was stuck on the word “grocery” which I read to her aloud after the three seconds DIBELS recommends (Conference Notes, 12-7-13). Adding the additional three seconds is why I feel I saw a dip in her score during week five. The sentence reads “We went to the grocery store and bought food and real flowers to make breakfast special.” She read “great” instead of “grocery.” At the end of the minute probe the student and I conferenced about the passage. It went as follows:

Mrs. C: Why did you say great for the word grocery?

Addy: Well I saw the first two letters and thought it was great.

Mrs. C: Does great make sense in that sentence?

Addy: I guess not.

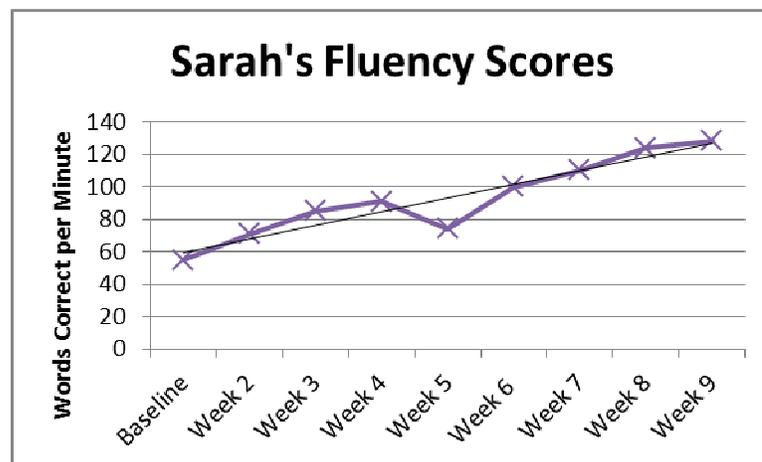
Mrs. C: Let me read this sentence to you and you listen to see if it makes sense. We went to the great store and bought food and real flowers to make the breakfast special.

Addy: Well I guess the store could be great, but grocery would make more sense.

Mrs. C: I just want you to remember to look through the whole word and stop to check for understanding, just like we are working on in reading (Student Conference, 12-7-13).

It is important to remind students about the reading strategies they are being taught and model for them how to use them in while reading any text.

I noticed after week five Addy paid more attention to her reading and would go back to check for understanding. One day when I introduced a new Readers Theater script she stopped me to inquire about several words. She wanted to understand her part and what the script was about (Conference Notes, 12-17-13). A couple days later she came up to me to show me in her own reading during workshop time where she did the same thing, she was so proud of herself because she went back and made the corrections. I told her how happy I was that she was paying attention to detail and using ideas we discussed in her reading conferences (Conference Notes, 12-20-13).



Another student named Sarah provides an example of a student who started my teacher research with a fluency score below 60 WCPM, which is also below the expected 115 WCPM

according to the school district. By the end of the nine weeks she was reading at over 120 WCPM. Her score is far above the expected two words per week. I was very impressed with Sarah and after our last fluency probe said, “Sarah I am so impressed with your reading score! Look at your graph; you are back on grade level! How do you think this happened?” Sarah replied, “Well I started practicing my scripts at home with my mom and dad, I wanted everyone to know what I was saying when I performed. Then we just continued reading every night together, I love taking turns reading out loud with my mom and dad.” I replied back, “I am so impressed that you made the effort to take this home and get your family involved. It shows me how responsible you are and that you care about becoming a better reader, and it worked, Great Job!” (Student Interview, 1-18-13) This conversation really helped me answer my question on if Readers Theater helps improve fluency. Sarah clearly states how she practiced her Readers Theater script at home to help her improve her fluency and practice with her family. Sarah’s graph over her one minute DIBELS fluency probes shows great gains from beginning to end in her WCPM.

When looking back at my conference notes and the graph I noticed a dip in her fluency during week five. The DIBELS passage we were using was called *Mother’s Day* and was 255 words long. Sarah got stuck on the word “surprised” right in the first sentence. After three seconds I told her the word. I could hear her sounding out the beginning blend “sur” but she could not get any further. After three seconds I told her the word, she repeated it, and then moved on. After we were finished we had a conference as follows:

Mrs. C: The word surprised gave you some trouble. I could hear you sounding out the beginning sound, but you seemed to get stuck after that.

Sarah: I didn’t know what the rest of the word said, and sometimes when I don’t know a word I get nervous.

Mrs. C: What are some strategies you know that will help you with figuring out words you don't know?

Sarah: I could skip it in the sentence and try to fill in the blank by using the rest of the words as clues.

Mrs. C: You could do that, let's practice. Read the sentence again and leave out surprised.

Sarah: My stepfather and I _____ Mom on Mother's Day.

Mrs. C: What words make sense in the blank?

Sarah: called, called would make sense.

Mrs. C: Does called start with a sur? Remember what word you are trying to figure out.

Sarah: Well surprised makes the best sense.

Mrs. C: Ok, yes it does. I also want you to remember what we are learning during Word Work. Remember what that silent e at the ends of words can do.

Sarah: It makes the vowels say their name?

Mrs. C: Yes that is right, so let look back. Does the "i" say its name? Surprised.

Sarah: Yes!

Mrs. C: Remember to use these strategies when you are practicing your Readers Theater script. These are good things to figure out while you are practicing so you know all the words by the time you present to your audience (Conference Notes, 12-7-13).

This conference allowed me to see that this was a decoding issue. By using this assessment it brought the problem to light and allowed me to reteach and redirect the student.

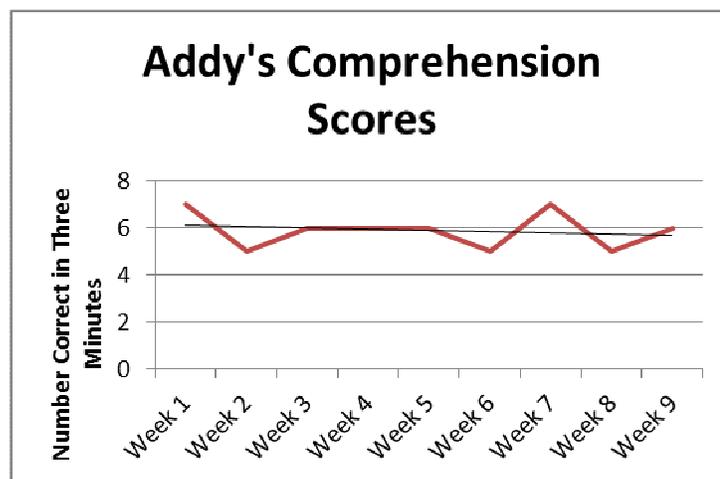
Successful decoding while practicing their parts of the Readers Theater allows students to feel comfortable when presenting to their audience. We would practice these strategies while they were rehearsing their part of the Readers Theater. This would ensure that they knew what all the words were and how to pronounce them. Knowing all the words gave them more confidence when presenting to their audience.

Based on my observation notes, I noticed Sarah paying more attention to the words after our conference in week five. She often does not like to say a word wrong and I feel this can prevent her from moving on in a passage. When we were practicing our Readers Theater scripts I watched her read ahead to all of her parts to make sure she knew all the words. If she came to one she did not know she would whisper to her neighbor to ask what it was. If her neighbor did not know she would ask me. I would remind her to stay with the group and that she needed to be following along. I told her we would use strategies when we got to those words she didn't know. I also reminded her that she was just practicing and not performing and that they would not present their Readers Theater until everyone in the group felt comfortable (Observation Notes, 12-13-13). I observed her trying to more successfully decode words in her script during our Reading Workshop. I listened to her go back to try different words in the sentence when she came to a word that she did not know. In this particular observation the sentence was "Then Cam sprinted through the door, tossed off his coat and ran to his bedroom." The word she was stuck on was "sprinted." I listened as she took the word out and tried other ones in its place. "Then Cam spied, no that doesn't make sense," "Then Cam sprite through the door, No." "I do not know. I overheard her saying," I watched as Sarah could not figure out the word, after trying she asked her neighbor what the word was (Observation Noted, 1-7-13). I was impressed she was going back and using her strategies. I feel it is important for students to have such strategies to use when they come to a word they do not know instead of always relying on someone else. In this case she needed to ask a neighbor, but I was pleased to see her first try to figure it out on her own.

Comprehension. When looking at the results from the McCall-Crabbs Comprehension Assessment (See Appendix D) I saw a decrease in comprehension among the students. The

comprehension assessment was given each week on Fridays. The students would practice their Readers Theater script all week and we would do testing every Friday. The students would all take the three minute comprehension assessment at the same time. When we were finished we would go over all the answers and students would graph their number correct during the three minutes. If they had questions they did not finish they were counted incorrect as this assessment demands.

Despite these findings, during reading conferences and observations I have noticed these students demonstrate strategies good readers use such as: monitoring comprehension, pausing to summarize, making connections, and asking questions. While having a conference with Sarah she read me a section of her book about horses. When she was finished she told me she made a connection with this book because her grandma has a horse and she likes to pet it, feed it, and ride it (Conference Notes, 11-14-13). While observing Addy work through the McCall-Crabbs comprehension assessment I noticed her pausing and thinking about what she was reading, she was trying to make sense of the passage (Observation Notes, 12-4-13). However, their using these strategies is holding them up from completing all of the questions, with the unanswered questions counted as incorrect according to the assessment.



When looking at Addy's graph I see a couple a couple of weeks where she scored high, such as weeks one and seven. Otherwise, her comprehension scores do not improve beyond four and six questions answered correctly during the three minute time frame. When looking at my conference notes on observations during the comprehension assessment I noticed a common theme regarding Addy. On weeks three, four, five, and six she was highlighting important information throughout the test. I saw her going back into the text after reading each question. On week six when the three- minutes were up I asked her a couple questions:

Mrs. C: Addy what were you doing during the assessment?

Addy: I was going back into the passage to make sure my answers were correct, that is what you tell us we should do.

Mrs. C: You are correct; I do ask you to go back. Why do I want you to do this?

Addy: To make sure I don't make a silly mistake and it is important to go back over your work.

Mrs. C: Very nice explanation, does it also help you get the question correct?

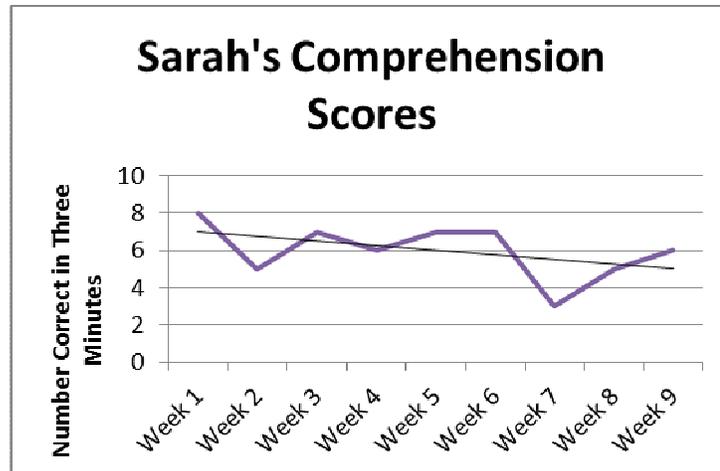
Addy: Yes

Mrs. C: What about the time limit?

Addy: Well I would rather get the questions right than just guess.

Mrs. C: I agree I would rather you are not just guessing (Student Interview, 12-12-13).

After conferencing with Addy it was clear to me that she was focused on using her strategies and getting the questions correct. Even though she was not finishing all the questions within the given three minutes, she was answering the questions that she finished correctly.



When looking at Sarah's comprehension graph I saw in week one she scored an eight out of eight, but otherwise I did not see an increase in her comprehension scores, instead I saw a drop in her scores across the weeks. She stayed consistent with on average four to six questions correct during the three minutes. When observing Sarah during the comprehension assessment I observed her using strategies that we have practiced in class. She was going back into the passage and rereading and using sticky notes to mark important parts of the text. She was monitoring her comprehension. While the students practice their Readers Theater scripts they use these types of reading strategies to figure out unfamiliar words and understand the text. I had a conversation with Sarah over what I was observing during the comprehension assessment:

Mrs. C: Why are you using the sticky notes?

Sarah: I am marking down information I want to remember, it helps me to answer the question.

Mrs. C: How?

Sarah: Because it is faster for me to use look back at my sticky notes than into the text, so I always check there first.

Mrs. C: What if you can't find the answer on your sticky notes?

Sarah: Then I have to go back into the text; I don't like it when that happens.

Mrs. C: Do you think this is why you aren't finishing during the three minutes?

Sarah: Probably, but I want to get all the answers right, can't you not time us?

Mrs. C: I would also like to give you more time, three minutes is pretty quick. Maybe we can do a timed and untimed score, how does that sound?

Sarah: I would like that a lot (Reading Conference, 1-16-13).

I started to let Sarah graph a timed and untimed score. She started scoring seven and eight questions correct each week. I noticed her feeling good about herself and gaining confidence. As quoted from my observation notes “Wow Sarah was really proud of herself today, she scored 8 correct and had a big smile when she was filling out her graph, (1-23-13).” It seemed that once the time limit pressure was taken off of her she was relieved and seem to do better. She was able to just focus on the questions and strategies she knows how to use and pay no attention to time.

During the comprehension testing I noticed that Addy and Sarah were not finishing all the questions in the given amount of time. Even though their scores were lower, their answered questions were typically correct. They were just not finishing in the three minutes. As Addy and Sarah worked on the assessment they began highlighting and underlining the text and going back to reread to better understand the text. They were spending their time making sense of the text which prevented them from finishing all the questions. Due to the fact that all questions were not answered students comprehension score were unable to improve. Based on this finding I am curious if using a different comprehension assessment would be more beneficial, something without a time limit. This way the students could rely on their strategies and I could get an accurate read of their comprehension.

Reading dispositions. The chart below shows the results from the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (See Appendix B) for Addy and Sarah. The survey was given at the beginning and end of the research study. Overall, in both recreational and academic reading I saw an increase. They were more excited to read, they would select reading during free time (Student

Observation, 1-9-13). I also observed Addy and Sarah interested in writing reports, reading non-fiction book to find information (Student Observation, 12-20-13). The survey suggests that students who score high in recreational enjoy reading for fun and students who score high in academic enjoy reading for learning. Addy and Sarah repeatedly scored higher on four questions throughout the survey; the first two came from recreation and the second two from academic:

1. How do you feel about during summer vacation?
2. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
3. How do you feel when you read aloud in class?
4. How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?

I was pleased to see their responses to these questions. These findings informed me that my students' attitudes and feelings towards reading were improving. I conferenced with Addy and Sarah over their responses to the questions:

Mrs. C: Addy I noticed you answered higher at the end of our study then you did at the beginning on the question "How do you feel when you read aloud in class?"

Addy: Yes because before I didn't like it, it made me nervous and I hated everyone staring at me.

Mrs. C: Well what changed why don't you mind it now?

Addy: Because now I know if I just practice and have confidence, reading out loud is not scary. I kind of like it now. I like changing my voice that makes it fun!

Mrs. C: Well good I am so glad you feel better about reading in front of others; I think you do a very nice job! I hope you continue to do it!

Mrs. C: Sarah I noticed you scored higher at the end over the question "How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?" Why do you think that is, what has changed?

Sarah: Well now I know what to write about. I am excited to meet with you because I have things to say.

Mrs. C: Why didn't you before?

Sarah: I don't know, I just didn't.

Mrs. C: Did you like reading before, were you reading like you do now?

Sarah: Oh no I didn't like when we had to read, but now it seem a little easier so I kind of like it more, but I really like conferencing with you. It makes it more fun (Student Interview, 1-23-13).

After conferencing with my students I realized they were gaining more confidence and enjoying becoming better readers. They wanted to do it more since it was becoming easier and not such a chore. I feel Readers Theater can be a positive way to increase fluency and students' confidence and motivation to read. The table shows their recreational and academic scores from the beginning of the study and after. The table also gives an overall score as well as a percentile rank for each category.

	Recreational Raw Score	Academic Raw Score	Full Scale Raw Score	Recreational Percentile	Academic Percentile	Full Scale Percentile
Addy	35	33	68	81	79	81
	36	37	73	87	93	92
Sarah	36	33	69	87	79	84
	37	34	71	90	83	89

ERAS Key

Shaded	Initial test
Unshaded	Final test

The table shows an increase in both Addy and Sarah in recreational and academic reading. Addy had an overall increase of 11% and Sarah increased 5%. This shows me that both students had an increase in reading for fun and learning which I think can be attributed to our work with Readers Theater.

Conclusion

My findings showed an increase in overall fluency scores (See Appendix C) from the beginning to the end of my teacher research. Student's comprehension scores, however, showed a decrease (See Appendix D). When analyzing my conference and observation notes I saw

students using strategies and answering questions correctly, they just were not finishing during the given three minutes. The ERAS survey showed an increase in student's recreational and academic reading scores showing that student's disposition towards reading is improving. The survey allowed me to see growth in both reading for fun and reading for academic purposes or learning.

I felt my data sources were appropriate for the information I was looking for in order to know if Readers Theater improved fluency scores and student's disposition towards reading. However, I felt an alternative comprehension assessment could be used to get a more accurate read about student's comprehension. I felt the time limit held them back and was not giving me an accurate read on their true comprehension. We were using reading strategies such as monitoring comprehension, making connections, and asking questions when practicing the Readers Theater scripts and this carried through into their comprehension assessment. This resulted in them using strategies to ensure they were answering the questions correctly and not focused on doing it in a certain amount of time. The reading conferences and observation notes allowed me to look more in depth at each of the areas; it was helpful to look back at them to put everything together. The notes allowed me to see and understand where the students were coming from. It gave me the opportunity to focus on specific aspects of each student. Conference and observation notes helped me answer questions and come up with themes throughout my data. It gave me a clear picture that Readers Theater has a positive impact on students reading.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary

Reading rate, efficiency, or fluency can be developed through instructional activities such as repeated readings, especially authentic ways, such as practicing poetry, or scripts for a later performance, and support reading when done in activities where the reader reads an authentic texts but is supported by a more fluent partner (Rasinski, 2002). Readers Theater is a very natural and authentic way to promote repeated readings. Readers Theater does not rely on costumes, movement, props, or scenery to express meaning- just the performers and their voices as they face their audience with script in hand. For students to perform a Readers Theater script in a meaningful and engaging manner, they need to practice the script beforehand (Rasinski, 2002). I conducted research over using Readers Theater to increase the fluency rate of students in my classroom. The research was structured around the succeeding questions:

1. How can Readers Theater support the literacy development of struggling readers, especially in regards to improving fluency?
2. How will students reading comprehension improve by increasing their fluency skills?
3. How will improving students' fluency impact their disposition towards reading activities?

The teacher research was done over two school years, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013, and each year focused on four students with the lowest fluency score. Their WCPM was measured using DIBELS one minute fluency probes. Each week students graphed and kept track of their own progress. We practiced building fluency by using Readers Theater. During year one I used fiction Readers Theater scripts, while year two I focused on non-fiction.

During year one I met with the group of four 20 minutes a day, four days a week. I selected all of the scripts and we followed a structured format. Day one we introduced and I modeled the text. I would also have the students echo read the script after I modeled it. On day two we would choral read the text and select parts. Day three was for practice and on day four they

would read it to the class and we would assess fluency and comprehension. I used McCall Crabbs three- minute comprehension probes to assess comprehension. Year two was less formal and much of the practice was left up to the students. We would introduce it on day one and echo read the text. The students would get together during workshop time to practice, they also picked the scripts on topic of interest. They informed me when they were ready to perform and to whom they would like to present. We would test on Fridays, and I used DIBELS one- minute fluency probes to evaluate their fluency and McCall-Crabbs compression three minute probes to evaluate their comprehension.

My findings showed an increase in overall fluency scores (See Appendix C) from the beginning to the end of my teacher research. However, based on students comprehension data from the McCall-Crabbs three minute comprehension probe, Readers Theater did not positively improve students reading comprehension, but rather a decrease in students overall comprehension was found (See Appendix D). When analyzing my conference and observation notes I saw students using strategies and answering questions correctly, they just were not finishing during the given three minutes. The ERAS survey showed an increase in student's recreational and academic reading scores showing that student's disposition towards reading is improving. The survey allowed me to see growth in both reading for fun and reading for academic purposes or learning. My conference and observation notes allowed me to look back over my whole study making themes come forward from my research. Overall, my research shows that Readers Theater has a positive impact on students reading.

Conclusions

The findings from this research show Readers Theater as being a successful strategy to use to develop students' fluency. As stated in the literature review, fluency is reading like you

talk, not too fast and not too slow, with expression and no sounding out (Cahill, & Gregory, 2011, p. 128). Readers Theater gave students the opportunity to practice their fluency, in this way. They had to be ready to present, knowing all the words and using expression. The development of reading fluency has been linked to successful reading since the early research on the psychology of reading (Chard, Tyler, Vaughn, 2002). Most children develop into fluent readers by third grade. Approximately 75 percent of students who are poor readers in third grade continue to be lower achieving readers in ninth grade and, in essence, do not recover their reading abilities even into adulthood. Thus the assessment of student progress in fluency has become an integral part of reading instruction (Corcoran, 2005, p.1). Being a third grade teacher I want to make sure my students are leaving third grade fluent readers. I want them to have confidence and know they are a good reader.

Readers Theater has a positive impact on students' disposition towards reading. This research shows that students were excited about reading and enjoyed performing their Readers Theater scripts. Such findings support several studies explored in my literature review. Specifically, Students can improve their reading ability and attitudes toward reading through participating in Readers Theater because of the repetition of exposure to the material. This helps students develop larger sight-word vocabularies, increases reading rate, and improved reading fluency (Young, & Vardell 1993). For students to perform a Readers Theater script in a meaningful and engaging manner, they need to practice the script beforehand (Rasinski, 2002). My students enjoyed becoming the part by changing their voices and adding in little actions. They would get everything just right in practice and then perform for their audience. They always wanted to perform for someone else; they gained so much confidence from doing so.

Fluency is directly linked to memory capacity, specifically the reader's ability to hold meaningful chunks of information in memory (Dorn, & Soffos, 2005). With the comprehension assessment, McCall-Crabbs three minute probes, I selected to track comprehension progress I did not see and increase, and in fact there was an overall decrease. However this was due to the time limit. Knowing the correlation between fluency and comprehension I would use a variety of ways to assess the students' comprehension. These students were answering the questions correctly just not finishing within the three minutes. These students were using their strategies they were taught throughout the week to ensure they were answering correctly. They should not be penalized or made to feel like failures just because they were not finishing during the given amount of time. In future research I would compare my data from a variety of comprehension assessments to get a more accurate read.

Studies explored in the literature review suggest that Rereading is compensatory when it resolves confusion noted on an earlier pass through text but is more disruptive of reading than the preceding compensations. With each rereading, readers become more familiar with words, phrases, and their meanings and can focus more attention on comprehension (Walczyk, J. & Griffith-Ross, D., 2007). This was apparent to me during this research. Students were going back over the paragraph during the three-minute McCall-Crabbs comprehension assessment. The students were going back into the passage to become more familiar with the text to better comprehend the questions.

Another assessment I would consider using in the future is the Developmental Reading Assessment 2nd edition (DRA2), by Pearson. For this assessment the students are timed during the fluency part to determine if the text is at an appropriate level, however, the comprehension section is done on their own by taking the book and questions to complete on their own.

Students are asked to make predictions, write a summary, and answer comprehension questions over the book. This fluency would be a great resource for all three areas: disposition, fluency, and comprehension. It is recommended that a student survey is done before each time you test; you have to assess their fluency before they complete the comprehension section, which is untimed. I would also include a comprehension check into my reading conferences. I will question the students about the book they are reading. Stated in the Literature review, one way to confidently assess student's comprehension is to have them share their thinking. Readers reveal their comprehension by responding to the text, not by answering literal question at the end of their reading. Personal responses to reading allow us to see inside the student's mind (Harvey, & Goudvis, 2000).

Recommendations for Future Research & Practice

As an educator I will continue to use Readers Theater as a tool to help build fluency in my classroom. Readers Theater was shown to improve fluency scores as well as students' disposition towards reading. The students really enjoyed this type of practice. Quoted from Addy, "I love Readers Theater, it doesn't even feel like school work and I'm getting better at reading! (Conference Notes 1-11-13)" I want to use this strategy with more than just students struggling with fluency, I feel every student in my class can benefit from this strategy.

According to Young and Vardell (1993), there are numerous benefits for students who use Readers Theater. Students can improve their reading ability and attitudes toward reading through participating in Readers Theater. Readers have the opportunity to practice oral reading and engage in reading the text several times as they prepare their performance. Some students may have fluency but are scared to be in front of others, I feel there are all types of readers in my room and Readers Theater can benefit everyone low to high.

For future research I would suggest comparing data from a variety of different sources. I focused on one assessment for fluency, comprehension, and disposition. I feel using a variety will help paint the picture of your research. It would give you the opportunity to compare scores over more than one data type. I feel it would give a more accurate picture of how the strategy affects the reader.

As an educator I loved following the progress of my students and watching them grow as readers over the year. It is so rewarding to watch my students become better readers. I will continue researching ways to help my students become better readers in all areas: disposition, fluency and comprehension. Also sharing my findings and encourage others to conduct research in their classrooms is important to me. We can learn a lot from our colleagues and gain great feedback on our own research. Reading conferences and observations about my students will continue. I found my conference and observation notes gave me such an insight into my students as readers. It built a great and positive relationship between the students and myself. I feel the research process is important as an educator. I am always looking for ways to become a better teacher for my students. I think it is important to stay current and updated on teacher practices and strategies.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Three Elements of Fluency

Speed	Rhythm	Flexibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed of retrieval • Rapid word recognition • Fast decoding • Automaticity of item knowledge • Subroutine processes free working memory space for new information • Accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, meaningful groups of words • Intonation, stress, pitch, and expressive interpretation • Knowledge of book language • Knowledge of oral language structures • Meaning-driven responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not context dependent • Able to transfer across different situations • Can apply similar strategies on range of material • Varies reading rate according to purpose • Displays depth of knowledge at highest level

**Appendix B: Elementary Reading Attitude Survey
(ERAS)**

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School _____ Grade _____ Name _____

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1.	How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?			
				
2.	How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?			
				
3.	How do you feel about reading for fun at home?			
				
4.	How do you feel about getting a book for a present?			
				

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5.	How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?				
6.	How do you feel about starting a new book?				
7.	How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?				
8.	How do you feel about reading instead of playing?				

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9.	How do you feel about going to a bookstore?				
10.	How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?				
11.	How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?				
12.	How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?				

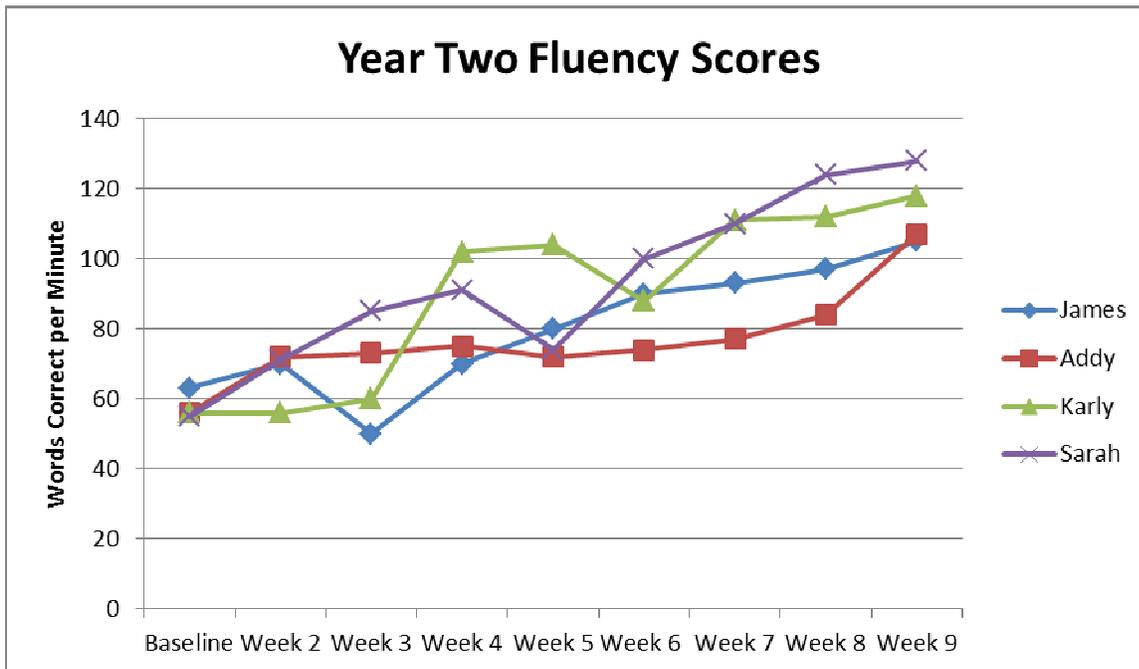
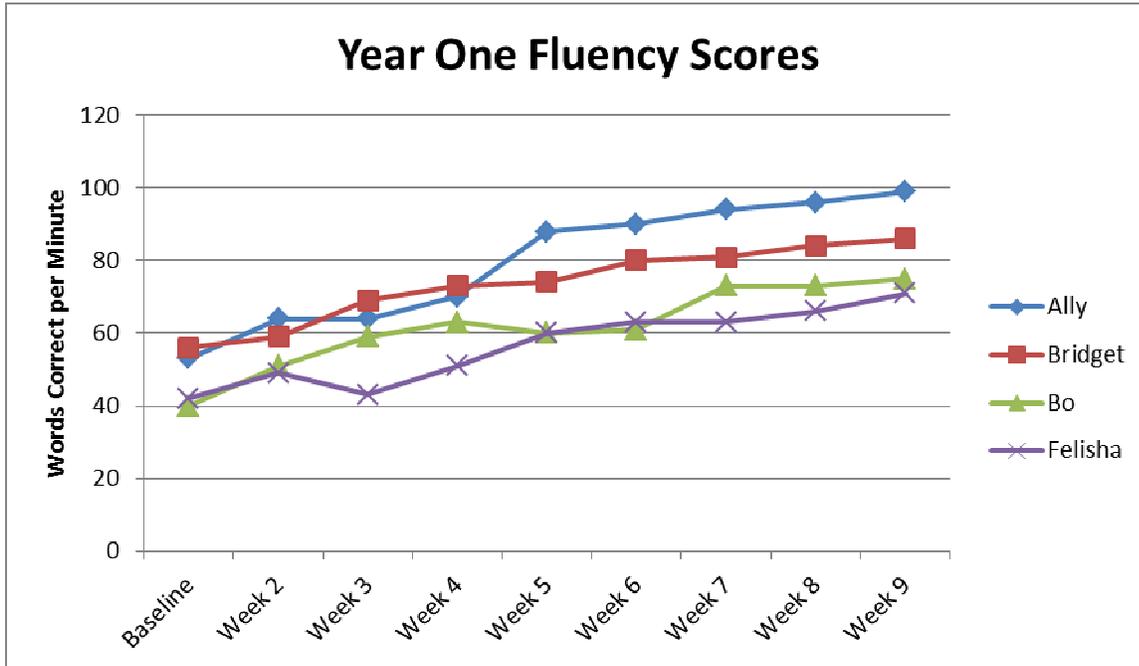
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

13.	How do you feel about reading in school?			
				
14.	How do you feel about reading your school books?			
				
15.	How do you feel about learning from a book?			
				
16.	How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?			
				

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

17.	How do you feel about stories you read in reading class?				
18.	How do you feel when you read out loud in class?				
19.	How do you feel about using a dictionary?				
20.	How do you feel about taking a reading test?				

Appendix C: Fluency Graphs



Appendix D: Comprehension Graphs

