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Reading intervention : using self-assessment to increase fluency and comprehension for struggling readers

Paula L. Ganzeveld
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

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The students created a self-assessment rubric that they used during the practice sessions. According to pre- and post-intervention reading inventories, all students increased in oral reading fluency. A correlation to increased reading comprehension was also found. Student motivation and self-confidence were also measured, and increases were noted by the students and classroom teachers. The results indicate that an intervention focused on fluency through wide reading and self-assessments may increase students' reading fluency and also influence reading comprehension.

READING INTERVENTION:
USING SELF-ASSESSMENT TO INCREASE FLUENCY AND COMPREHENSION
FOR STRUGGLING READERS

A Graduate Article
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Paula L. Ganzeveld
May, 2007

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a fluency intervention on students' reading fluency and comprehension. The students in the study were six third graders that were reading below grade level expectations. During the intervention, the students received instruction in reading rate and prosody. The intervention consisted of mini-lessons and opportunities for students to practice through the use of wide reading. The students created a self-assessment rubric that they used during the practice sessions. According to pre and post intervention reading inventories, all students increased in oral reading fluency. A correlation to increased reading comprehension was also found. Student motivation and self-confidence were also measured, and increases were noted by the students and classroom teachers. The results indicate that an intervention focused on fluency through wide reading and self-assessments may increase students' reading fluency and also influence reading comprehension.

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INTRODUCTION

I have been working with struggling readers for over ten years. Through this time, I have learned more about the reading process and the impact that quality reading instruction can have on students' overall achievement. I also strongly believe in making students aware of the purpose and rationale of the instruction they receive. In this study, I combined components of quality reading instruction into a reading intervention for struggling third grade students. The intervention focused on fluency instruction. I explicitly taught the student the aspects of fluency and the importance of reading with appropriate fluency through mini-lessons. The students were also given time during every session to practice the strategies modeled during the mini-lessons using a self-assessment rubric. I wanted to do this study to measure the effectiveness of an intervention that focused on fluency instruction on students' fluency and overall reading achievement. I also wanted to observe how students' motivation changed throughout this intervention.

After I designed my research study, implemented the instruction, and began to analyze the results, I decided to complete the journal article option. I chose this option because my study is distinctive. Fluency has been identified by many districts as an area in need of improvement. Teachers are in need of activities and lessons that address fluency. I believe that teachers would be able to implement the strategies described in my study, and the professional journal would be an avenue through which I could reach a large audience.

METHODOLOGY

Once I chose fluency instruction as my topic, I needed to design my research study. With my advisor, Dr. Penny Beed, I designed the research study as an intervention for struggling readers. The design included interviews, pre-assessments, and post-assessments. With the assistance of Dr. Beed, I wrote a proposal for the Internal Review Board (IRB) to gain permission to do research with human participants. Following the approval from the IRB, I proceeded to start implementing the study in my classroom.

As I analyzed research literature related to fluency instruction for my literature review, I did not locate any studies that incorporated the components that were present in my study. At that time, I realized that my study was unique. After I completed the research in my classroom and had promising results, I decided that this was a topic that I needed to pursue further than the research study. I consulted with Dr. Beed and read many different articles to examine journal article formats to develop my article manuscript.

I chose *The Reading Teacher* as the journal for my submission. The journal has requirements for submission. Text needs be double-spaced throughout in a twelve point font. The reference lists and text citations must be according to the fifth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. *The Reading Teacher* also requires a cover letter and an abstract as part of the submission.

RESULTS

April 20, 2007

Managing Editor, *The Reading Teacher*
International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139 USA

Dear Editors:

Enclosed is a paper entitled "Reading Intervention: Using Self-Assessment to Increase Fluency and Comprehension for Struggling Readers." Please accept it as a candidate for publication in *The Reading Teacher*. The manuscript has not been submitted to any other publication.

This paper describes an intervention I completed in my classroom with third grade students. The intervention focused on teaching students the basic components of reading fluency and offered continuous practice. This paper found that an intervention focused on fluency may increase students' fluency and comprehension achievement. This paper is distinctive because students used a self-assessment rubric throughout the intervention.

I look forward to the response of the reviewers. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula Ganzeveld

Reading Intervention:

Using Self-Assessment to Increase Fluency and Comprehension for Struggling Readers

Paula L. Ganzeveld

University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a fluency intervention on students' reading fluency and comprehension. The students in the study were six third graders that were reading below grade level expectations. During the intervention, the students received instruction in reading rate and prosody. The intervention consisted of mini-lessons and opportunities for students to practice through the use of wide reading. The students created a self-assessment rubric that they used during the practice sessions. According to pre and post intervention reading inventories, all students increased in oral reading fluency. A correlation to increased reading comprehension was also found. Student motivation and self-confidence were also measured, and increases were noted by the students and classroom teachers. The results indicate that an intervention focused on fluency through wide reading and self-assessments may increase students' reading fluency and also influence reading comprehension.

Reading Intervention: Using Self-Assessment to Increase Fluency and Comprehension for Struggling Readers

“I don’t care too much about fluency. As long as my students can read accurately and can answer questions, I don’t think how fast they read is really that important.”

Those were words I spoke in regards to fluency only a few years ago. The struggling readers in my classroom were so overwhelmed by the reading process my main focus was to teach them word identification skills. Once they were proficient in reading words, we focused on sentence and then paragraph comprehension. I was naïve enough to believe that if my students could read a short passage accurately with adequate comprehension (as measured by the district’s informal reading assessments), they would become proficient readers. Eventually I had students that could read accurately and answer questions on grade level passages. However, they were still struggling readers. They had difficulty reading their grade level textbooks and continued to score poorly on standardized tests. My students were not making reading automatic for themselves. When presented with a lengthy text, their comprehension suffered because they had to focus so hard on reading the individual words. I finally began to realize that low reading fluency was detrimental to their progress in reading. To address the issue of low reading fluency with struggling readers, I decided to design an intervention focused primarily on teaching fluency. The purpose of this article is to discuss an intervention in reading fluency and to describe the effects it had on struggling readers’ fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.

The students in my classroom were part of a larger group of struggling readers. As in my school, recent statistics continue to show that many students have difficulty

acquiring basic reading skills to reach expected reading levels. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2004) 37% of children in fourth grade read below the basic level. Additionally, approximately 75% of students who are poor readers in third grade continue to be lower achieving readers in ninth grade (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). These difficulties have caused the educational community to reevaluate how to teach basic and higher order reading skills (Therrien, 2004). In 2000, a report from the National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000) outlined the five necessary components of quality reading instruction. The five areas identified were phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction, text comprehension strategies, and reading fluency.

Fluency in the area of reading has been defined in many different ways. A basic way to define fluency is the speed and accuracy with which someone orally reads material (Speece & Ritchey, 2005) or accurate and rapid reading of connected text (Begeny & Martens, 2006). This is the way fluency is typically recorded on reading assessments. A more advanced definition integrates the effect fluency has in the reading process. Corcoran and Davis (2005) refer to fluency as 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 read. Pikulski and Chart (2005) suggest combining many previous definitions. Their suggestion is that reading fluency refers to efficient, effective word-recognition skills that allow the readers to construct the meaning of text. Fluency is then manifested in accurate, rapid, expressive oral reading and makes silent reading comprehension possible. Kuhn and Stahl (2003) refer to these definitions as the automaticity theory. This theory accounts for the accurate and effortless

decoding that characterizes fluent readers; however it also accounts for the role of prosody. Pitch or intonation, stress or loudness, and duration or timing are all prosodic cues that lead to expressive reading. Melanie Kuhn (2006) integrates the automaticity and prosodic theories into one definition. Fluent readers can recognize words both automatically and accurately and are able to read texts with expression or prosody. The combination of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody makes reading sound like spoken language.

Research suggests that skilled readers are able to identify words accurately and instantly (Kuhn, 2005). Rasinski (2005) identified automatic processing as a component of reading fluency. Readers need to be able to read words automatically to be able to attend to comprehension (Begency & Martens, 2006; Kuhn, 2005; Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005; Rasinski, 2005; Reutzal & Hollingsworth, 1993; Stewart, 2004). Instant, accurate, and automatic access to all dimensions of reading allows readers to focus attention on comprehension instead of decoding (Pikulski & Chard, 2005).

Why Fluency? Why Now?

In the past, dedicated fluency instruction was rarely found in classrooms or intervention programs (National Reading Panel, 2000; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Speece & Ritchey, 2005; Worthy & Broaddas, 2002). The National Reading Panel even referred to reading fluency as the “neglected” aspect of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). Since the publication of their report, reading fluency has been included in discussions of student reading success and effective instruction. However, in recent years it has been found that many teacher education and teacher inservice programs continue to give little attention to reading fluency (Rasinski, 2004). Despite this, The National Reading Panel

(National Reading Panel, 2000) concluded that classroom practices that include guided oral reading procedures may lead to meaningful improvements in reading expertise for both accomplished and struggling readers.

The Fluency Intervention

I transferred to a new school this year as a learning strategist. One of my responsibilities is to provide interventions to struggling learners that do not qualify for special education services. These areas include reading, math, writing, and behavior. The intervention may last from two weeks to an entire school year. One opportunity I had was to create a new instructional plan to assist struggling readers in third grade. As I thought about the plan, I wanted to put a focus on fluency instruction that I had not had previously with third graders. I wanted to incorporate what I had learned about fluency instruction into an intervention plan to increase fluency and measure the effects it had on comprehension.

To assess reading strengths and weaknesses our district uses the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) (Johns, 2001). The reading inventory is given to most students at the beginning of the year, after Winter Break, and at the end of the school year. After the fall assessment, I sat down with the third grade teachers to determine which students needed additional instruction. We looked at the current assessments and previous assessment information and instructional interventions attempted in first and second grade. We identified six students who we thought would profit from an intervention focused on fluency and who did not qualify for special education services in the area of reading. All of the students were reading at least one year below grade level on the BRI. Their reading rates ranged from 40-62 words per minute. The district expectation for that time of the

year was 80 words per minute. The students identified for this intervention had received Title I services in first and second grade. They had received direct instruction in decoding, sight words, and comprehension strategies. According to their classroom teachers and the BRI results, these students had adequate comprehension on short passages, but struggled in understanding grade level material that was longer in length. We decided to meet for 20 minutes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays for 10 weeks. Three consecutive days were chosen to maximize the continuity between sessions.

After the six students were chosen, I conducted pre-intervention interviews. I wanted to understand the students' views about reading, what their reading interests were, and how they viewed themselves as readers. When I asked Timothy (all names are pseudonyms) to describe a good reader, he paused for a long time to develop an answer. Finally he responded.

Timothy: Where you don't make mistakes and read fast.

Mitch also had a difficult time describing a good reader.

Paula: Describe a good reader.

Mitch: (No response)

Paula: Can you think of some things good readers do?

Mitch: (long pause) Read a lot

Paula: Can you think of anything else?

Mitch: (long pause, shakes his head)

Paula: Do you think you are a good reader?

Mitch: (nods his head yes)

Paula: Why?

Mitch: (long pause) Because I read a lot.

Jenna and Tammy both described reading in terms of word identification. This showed me that they have experienced a lot of strategy instruction in this area, but they have over-generalized it into all aspects of reading.

Jenna: If they don't know a word they try to sound it out. Or they will try and find a way to find out what the word is.

Tammy: They sound out words, skip and go back to it, ask a friend, or sound it out using fingers.

When I asked the students to define fluency, five of the students said, "I don't know," or "I have never heard of it." Michelle responded, "Put your head into it." This indicated to me that the students had not had regular contact with the word fluency through previous instruction. The students were also not able to define comprehension. I decided I needed to give opportunities for these students to become more aware of their instruction and understand why they complete certain activities and the impact that will have on their overall reading.

In the next three sections, I describe the intervention plan that I created and implemented with the six children. First I describe the implementation of the two phases in the intervention plan. The children moved from a focus on reading rate to a focus on reading prosody to increase their overall understanding of reading fluency and, in turn, increase their reading achievement. Then I discuss the results of the intervention through assessment data, student interviews, and teacher interviews. Last I explore implications of this research on classroom practices.

Phase One: A Focus on Reading Rate

The first part of the plan was to address reading rate. I wanted my students to be aware of the reading rate expectations and experience fluent reading. I decided to use repeated readings for this phase. Repeated readings are the most widely used instructional strategy to increase fluency for upper elementary and middle school students (Worthy & Broaddas, 2001). Repeated reading strategies have been shown to be effective, improving word recognition, speed, accuracy and comprehension (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Worthy & Broaddas, 2001). Repeated readings provide students with the ability to automatically decode a passage, and the improved accuracy and fluency result in improved comprehension (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Therrian, 2004). The challenging task is to see if the increased fluency on the selected passages transfers to unknown passages.

If the overall goal is to improve students' overall comprehension and fluency, then a repeated reading intervention should include three components. The passages should be read aloud to an adult, corrective feedback should be given, and passages should be read until a performance criterion is met (Therrian, 2004).

Past uses of repeated readings. I had used repeated readings with students in the past with mixed results. For most students with minor fluency difficulties, repeated readings were beneficial. However, they did not prove to be as beneficial for students who had more significant reading difficulties. My first concern was with their engagement. The students would read the passage until they reached a certain criteria, and then they would move on to the next passage. They were motivated in the beginning.

They enjoyed charting their scores and seeing their growth, but eventually many of my students lost interest in this activity. Worthy and Broaddas (2001) also found that repeated readings may be beneficial for some students' reading achievement, and it may not increase student motivation or interest in reading for all students. To address this issue, I wanted to use authentic readings for repeated readings, as opposed to published materials. One of the best ways to increase automaticity and fluency is to spend a lot of time reading (Stewart, 2004). Wide reading, when students independently read a variety of materials, is a concept that I have incorporated into my classrooms in the past with success. I wanted to continue it in this intervention.

In a study that compared repeated readings of connected texts and wide reading of many different texts, Melanie Kuhn (2005) found that both groups increased overall fluency, but the wide reading group also increased comprehension on informal reading assessments. Similarly, Marian Jean Dreher (1999) found that fourth graders who reported reading not only stories but magazines and nonfiction books, had the highest achievement when compared to students that only read fiction. Not only is there a connection between wide reading and reading comprehension, wide reading also increases students' vocabulary and general knowledge.

Students should be given as much opportunity and encouragement as possible to practice their reading (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). My other concern from past experiences was transfer. For many of my students, I did not see the growth from repeated readings that I did from explicit instruction. They would increase their fluency on the repeated passage, but I did not see much of an increase onto new passages. To address my

concerns about transfer, I decided to incorporate more modeling and teacher feedback into the use of repeated readings.

Repeated reading procedures. The first four weeks of the intervention the students focused primarily on using repeated readings to increase reading rate. Each session had a similar format. It began with a mini-lesson on reading rate and usually included some modeling of fluent reading that related to the lesson. Afterward, students were given time to participate in repeated readings. By the end of the session, each student completed a one-minute timing from any of the materials he or she had read that day and also completed a log.

Mini-lessons. During the mini-lessons, I wanted to emphasize the importance of reading rate and fluent reading. I introduced the reading rate expectations for the district and orally read different materials at different rates so the students could hear how reading sounded at different rates. I also taught the students the role of reading rate in their overall reading and the connection it had to comprehension. I used various modeling and instructional practices to give students opportunities to engage in assisted readings. These procedures emphasize the improvement of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody along with comprehension while providing students with a model of fluent reading (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Choral reading and echo reading are activities that can be used to increase fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000). In choral reading, a small or large group reads a passage together with or without the teacher. I introduced choral reading by using poems. I orally read aloud, and the students were instructed to “keep up.” At the beginning, the students responded that it was difficult to read with me. However, after additional readings they remarked that it was getting easier. Many of the

students chose to also read from these poems during their independent practice time. I also used echo reading. I used echo reading by reading one or two sentences of text and then had the students “echo” it. I used a variety of texts for this procedure including poems, books, monologues and jokes. Each student needed a copy of the text. I also used echo reading with choral reading if there was a particular section of text that was difficult for the students to read chorally. I would model fluent reading of that section, have them echo it, and then choral read it again.

Student practice. Students were able to choose the material they wanted to read for their daily practice readings. When students are provided time to choose what they read, motivation to read increases (Dreher, 1999). I filled a basket full of various reading materials that were at independent levels for the students. These included high-interest fiction and nonfiction books, poetry books, and magazines. Students were also given individual poems and leveled passages in a folder that they could also use for reading practice. Immediately, the students formed opinions about which materials they preferred.

Timothy: My favorite thing to read is “Jumping In” (leveled passage)

Paula: Why?

Timothy: I have read it lots of times, so I am really good at it. When I read it I sound like a fast reader. I usually don’t sound that way.

Mitch: I like to read that with Timothy. I almost have the story memorized.

Michelle: I like to read all sorts of different things, like poems and books.

To give the students a focus during the practice sessions, I gave them a rubric to determine their fluency levels (see Figure 1) on a scale ranging from 1 to 4. At this time of the year, the district had determined students should read at 80-90 words per minute on an initial reading. My expectation was that students repeatedly would read a passage until they were able to reach a 4 (90-100 WPM) on the fluency scale. The students were each given a timer to use for their practice session. Students could work in partners or independently. I circulated throughout the room listening to the students read and listened to the interactions between partners. After a determined amount of time to practice (5-10 minutes) the students completed a one-minute timing. They graphed their reading rate and recorded information from the one-minute reading on a log. (see Figure 2) On the log they recorded the date, the text they read, the type of selection it was, and the fluency score they earned on the self-assessment rubric. In post-intervention interviews, all six students responded that this student application piece was their favorite part of the sessions. As the students increased their reading rates through repeated readings, their self-confidence was increased. Some of the students also became self-motivated.

Jenna: I like the end of group. It is fun to use the timers.

Paula: Do you set goals for yourself?

Jenna: Yeah. I always want to read faster, but not too fast.

Jennifer: I like to graph my score. I like to see it go up.

Timothy: Sometimes I only get a 1 on my first reading. That's okay because I know it will always go up.

Assessment of fluency after repeated readings phase. Little research exists on how fluency should be assessed and what criteria should be applied to determine if a student is

proficient in the area of fluency. The National Reading Panel (2001) identified a number of informal procedures that can be used to assess fluency: informal reading inventories, miscue analysis, pausing indices, and reading speed calculations. To determine fluency using these measures, students must read aloud a selected text. Most schools (mine included) assess their students' fluency three times a year using one of these measures (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). Typically, students read a short passage, and fluency is measured in words per minute (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Rasinski, 2004; Reutzel & Hollingworth, 1993).

For students that receive interventions, my district requires regular assessments to measure progress. As a part of my intervention plan and to provide ongoing feedback, I used DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (Good, Kaminski, & Dills, 2002) passages at the third grade level. DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency is a standardized, individually administered test of accuracy and fluency with connected text. The standardized passages are designed to identify children who may need additional instructional support, and monitor progress toward instructional goals. Student performance is measured by having students read a passage aloud for one minute. Words omitted, substituted, and hesitations of more than three seconds are scored as errors. The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency rate.

During the first four weeks, I saw little improvement in oral fluency. My observations revealed that the students were beginning to read more accurately, but I did not see a dramatic increase in the fluency for most of the students' reading on the two reading probes I gave them after we started the intervention. Four of the students had made little to no increase in their reading rate. The two other students had increased their

reading rate by more significant measures, but their reading did not sound fluent; it was instead choppy and inconsistent. This was disappointing to me. I had seen my students become more enthusiastic about reading and they also seemed to be more cognizant of their reading rate. Just as before, I found that my students were not transferring their reading success of repeated readings to new texts. Experiencing fluent reading did not make them fluent readers. I needed to continue with the rest of my plan, to incorporate instruction on prosody into our intervention sessions.

Phase Two: Prosody

Reading with expression and phrasing (or prosody) is an important aspect of fluency. Even though my students were exposed to appropriate prosody throughout Phase One, I decided they needed to have explicit instruction in the areas of prosody. I had observed a lack of prosody in the reading of many struggling readers in the past. Even though I had seen this as a weakness, I had not made it a focus of my instruction. I would mention phrasing or expression as I gave students feedback on their oral reading, but I had not previously taught my students the benefits of strong prosody; I had not taught them *how* to be prosodic readers. When children are able to read at an appropriate pace, with appropriate expression and phrasing, they comprehend at improved rates (Morrow, 2007). Timothy Rasinski (2004) has created a multidimensional fluency scale that evaluates the four prosody components: expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and rate. When evaluating accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, assessments can provide teachers with a method for screening students, tracking progress, and identifying students that may require additional assessment and instruction. Students can be taught the different components of fluency and use self-assessment rubrics to evaluate their

performance. Students who feel in control of their learning and know why fluency is important are more engaged and will participate in repeated practice to increase their fluency (Worthy & Broaddas, 2002).

Phrasing. I began Phase 2 by introducing prosody and the importance of it in reading. We discussed how prosody impacts overall understanding of books and various texts. After an introduction to prosody, I introduced phrasing. If students read accurately and quickly, but ignore punctuation and word units, they are unlikely to fully understand the text (Rasinski, 2004). Students need to be able to parse or segment text into syntactically and semantically appropriate units. This was an area of extreme difficulty for the group, especially for Jennifer and Hailey. Both of these students recognized that they should not read word-by-word and recognized they needed to read more rapidly. Therefore, their reading rate had increased, but their phrasing was unacceptable. They read through periods and other punctuation, but then were forced to pause at inappropriate times to take a breath. They also did not recognize how certain words and phrases need to be read as a unit. The other four students were still having difficulty getting past the word-by-word level of reading.

We spent two weeks studying phrasing and implementing the concept into our repeated readings and self-assessment rubric. I introduced phrasing by reading a passage with adequate reading rate, but inappropriate phrasing. Timothy immediately responded, "I couldn't even understand what that was about." That sparked our discussion on the role that phrasing has on comprehension. We discussed places in text that should include pauses and words that cannot be disconnected. To practice phrasing, students were given phrase-cued passages (Blevins, 2002) and poems that were arranged in phrases. Parsing

or segmenting text into phrases can assist with phrasing, fluency, and ultimately comprehension. Modeling, choral reading, and partner reading were utilized to give students multiple exposures to phrasing. Eventually, students were given other passages without phrase-cues, and they were taught to use highlighters to make their own phrases. Jenna and Michelle commented that highlighting the phrases helped them read phrases easier. They also said that phrasing was an idea that they had never thought about, but that it was easy to do.

The students also added phrasing to their self-assessment rubric (see Figure 2), determining the descriptors through a group discussion. They were able to come up with the descriptors for Level 1 and Level 4 with relative ease, but they had more difficulty identifying the descriptors for Level 2 and Level 3. During the discussion I heard the students use the vocabulary words I had introduced: units, phrase, pause, choppy, and smooth. They were also concerned with having the descriptors clear to those that may not be as familiar with fluency as they were becoming.

Hailey: I think we need punctuation in it. It is important to pause at periods and commas.

Jenna: I think we need to say something about breathing. There are places you should take breaths while you read.

To assist students in understanding how to use their rubric, I read passages at various levels of reading rate and appropriate phrasing. We then worked together to identify my fluency and determine a score based on their rubric. Students practiced by assessing my reading, classmates' reading, and their own reading. Students often discussed their decisions and gave supporting details to justify their assessment. During

their independent practice, they were able to use any of the books and magazines, along with the poems and passages they had highlighted. As I listened to their conversations, I heard the students giving specific examples of how they phrased certain parts of text. They were also beginning to recognize what it sounded like when they did not recognize punctuation. At this point, partners were becoming helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Mitch: I think you should get a 3 for phrasing. You read pretty good, but sometimes you paused between words.

Timothy: Yeah. During this part (...) I got stuck and couldn't remember that word.

Expression. The other component of prosody we focused on was expression. We spent three weeks learning about the role of expression in our reading through performance activities. Reading performance tasks incorporate teacher instruction and feedback, both important aspects of fluency instruction (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Worthy & Broaddas, 2002). Reading performance encourages students to read at a rate appropriate for the text and performance, not just faster. When students read with expression, their comprehension improves. If students read through material, reading each word the same, not focusing on punctuation or mood, they miss out on the meaning of the text (Rasinski, 2004). Poetry, scripts or Readers Theatre, speeches, monologues, jokes, and riddles are appropriate texts for developing fluency and expression (Rasinski, 2004). Readers Theatre (performance of literature as a play without using props) also improves students' motivation and interest, and can also be used to

teach content and learn new concepts while building fluency (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Manning, 2004).

We used Readers Theatre scripts and poems to practice expression with teacher modeling and feedback. For Readers Theatre, students were given the chance to select their part, practice for a session with an opportunity to ask for assistance reading and understanding their part, then practice with the entire group before the final performance. We also spent time discussing how to project feeling in our voices, and how that impacts the extent to which one is able to understand content. I picked Readers Theatre scripts that encouraged this dialogue.

Paula: How does the husband feel?

Mitch: He's mad at his wife.

Paula: Then you need to read this like you are mad.

Mitch: Okay. (reads) Was that better?

Jennifer: Yeah. You can tell he's mad now.

Students were also exposed to more poetry that encouraged expression. Modeling, choral reading, and pair readings again were used to practice expression of these poems. The students also added *expression* to their rubric, again creating the descriptors with little teacher guidance (see Figure 2). Students continued to self-assess themselves throughout the sessions using the rubric and their recording sheets.

Phase 3: Connection to Accuracy and Comprehension

During the last week of the intervention, we reviewed the definitions of fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. I wanted the students to have some time to interact with the concepts. We discussed the importance of all three, and how they are related, and how

they are different. First, we discussed how fluency and accuracy are both part of oral reading. In a mini-lesson, I read a passage with insignificant accuracy errors, and we discussed what an effect that had on the fluency of the passage. I then read a passage with more significant accuracy errors. We discussed what an effect that would have on comprehension. Fluency and accuracy can be heard, but comprehension cannot. I introduced this idea by reading a passage, and then asking the students if I understood what I read. At first the students said that I understood the paragraph, but when I asked how they knew, they could not respond. We discussed that comprehension cannot be measured by oral reading, and students need to answer questions, retell, or summarize to demonstrate comprehension.

The students decided to add accuracy to the self-assessment rubric (see Figure 2), because they determined it was part of oral reading. When the students practiced their reading that week, they self-assessed themselves on the rubric, but also completed a comprehension activity. One day they completed a retell with a partner using a retell rubric. The students gave each other feedback on the components they included. The next day they wrote a summary, and again they evaluated it with a partner. On the last day they all read the same passage that had five comprehension questions to complete.

Results of the Intervention

Our intervention ended after ten weeks. To assess the effectiveness of this intervention, I used DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency passages (Good, Kaminski, & Dills, 2002), the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) (Johns, 2001), student interviews, teacher interviews, and anecdotal notes from our sessions. DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (Good, Kaminski, & Dills, 2002) passages were used to measure fluency on grade level passages

at biweekly intervals throughout the intervention. A comprehension component was not utilized during the intervention. However, the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) (Johns, 2001) was used to provide baseline and end point information on fluency and comprehension. Since this assessment is used with all third graders in the district, it gives a comparison to other students, and the district has established expectations for all students in relation to the reading inventory.

Progress Monitoring Results

Throughout the intervention, I continued to evaluate students' performance through progress monitoring using DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (Good, Kaminski, & Dills, 2002) passages. These passages only measured students' fluency in words correct per minute. The number of assessments that were given was related to the number of sessions students were able to attend. All of the students made progress toward the fluency expectation for the district (see Figures 3, 4, & 5) on these measures. The three students shown in Figure 3 made substantial progress from early assessments. Even though the three of them did not consistently meet the district expectation shown on the graph, they made steady growth toward the goal. By the last assessment, Mitch was just above the expectation at 91 words per minute. According to Figure 4, Michelle and Tammy's fluency began to increase above the expected line when the intervention included prosody instruction. Jennifer (see Figure 5) also made a substantial increase in fluency after prosody instruction was introduced.

The purpose of this intervention was not just to increase fluency, but to also increase comprehension on grade-level material. Since the progress monitoring assessments did not measure comprehension, I was excitedly awaiting district-wide

assessments to see if the students had also made gains in comprehension. The students had three weeks between the end of the fluency intervention and the administration of the assessments.

Fluency and Comprehension as Measured by the Basic Reading Inventory

On the BRI (Johns, 2001) assessment, the students performed at different levels (see Table 1). In our district, we categorize students as independent, instructional, or frustrational on grade level passages in the areas of fluency and comprehension. The criteria for independent level at this testing period was 90 words per minute. Before the intervention began all of the scores of the students in the study were categorized as frustrational in the area of fluency. After the intervention, Tammy and Mitch read at the independent level, with reading rates at 97 and 92 words per minute, respectively. Jennifer's reading rate of 86 and Michelle's reading rate of 87 put them at the instructional level, just below the 90 words per minute expectation. Jenna and Timothy stayed in the frustrational range, reading at 57 and 59 words per minute, respectively.

To be considered independent in the area of comprehension, students were expected to score at least 85% on the comprehension questions. Five out of six of the students ended the intervention at the independent range for comprehension. This is an increase from two out of six before the intervention began. Even though Jenna and Timothy scored in the frustrational range for fluency, they were both independent in the area of comprehension at the end. Michelle scored at the instructional level for comprehension, scoring at 80% accuracy on the comprehension questions.

Classroom Teachers' Perceptions

Test scores are just one piece of information. I was also curious to see if this intervention affected the students' reading performance and motivation in the classroom. Overall, the teachers commented that the students were more willing to read in class and had increased confidence. Tammy's teacher commented that she made the most dramatic transformation, "She now participates in guided reading and demonstrates strong comprehension skills. This was not the case at the beginning of the year." Michelle's teacher also saw a change in her self-confidence based on her increased reading performance, "One important change I have noted about Michelle is her increased self-confidence in what she is able to read. Early in the year she relied heavily on books with fewer words per page. She is now confident to read a variety of books in her reading range because she can read through a greater number of words with much improved expression and rate."

Timothy continues to struggle with reading, but his teacher has noticed that he is more aware of reading fluency. "Timothy has realized how much phrasing helps you to be a better reader. He also said during guided reading that you have shown him how to phrase, but it doesn't always sound like it supposed to when he reads. I told him with practice it would come," she said. Jenna had shown increased motivation and self-confidence in the intervention group, but her classroom teacher did not immediately see the transfer into the classroom. After her teacher implemented a similar repeated reading opportunity in her room, she noticed a difference. "In the last two weeks I've seen improvement in Jenna's overall fluency. She is becoming more confident in herself as a reader," she commented.

Student Interviews

When I interviewed students after the intervention, I found one overwhelming theme. Five out of the six students commented that they had possessed little knowledge of fluency before the intervention began, and that learning about fluency helped them become better readers.

Tammy: I learned about phrasing and expression. I learned how important they are.

Jenna: I didn't know what fluency meant. Now I need pauses at periods and commas. I learned to read with expression. I know this will help me read better.

Discussion

According to the informal inventory results on the BRI (Johns, 2001), this intervention was successful at increasing students' fluency and comprehension of grade level material. All students increased their fluency levels from the first assessment. All of the students scored above 80% comprehension, and five out of six of the students achieved the district comprehension goal. It is difficult to determine if the increased fluency caused the gains in comprehension, but there is a correlation between those two areas. It should also be noted also that the students increased their fluency at a greater rate as measured on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (Good, Kaminski, & Dills, 2002) when prosody instruction was introduced. As the students had a purpose for their reading and learned about the components of fluency, their reading rate increased.

One of my goals of this intervention was to have the students become more cognizant of their reading and their reading goals, and to connect the instruction they received to their reading achievement. I wanted the students to understand the reading process and to understand the components of fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. It was important that the student be able to connect accuracy and comprehension with their understanding of fluency. The self-assessment rubric that the students created served as a tool for them to explore these relationships and interact with the vocabulary in their own reading during the practice sessions.

Timothy and Jenna made tremendous progress in their reading rate through this intervention, but both students still require reading interventions. I believe this intervention was not as successful for these two students for two reasons. First, both students are continuing to increase their confidence in reading. Both students are reluctant to make errors, and are careful when they read. Even though this is an important aspect of reading, it does slow down their fluency. Secondly, both students continue to need instruction in decoding and word attack strategies. Since this intervention only focused on fluency, they did not receive any extra instruction in these areas during this time.

The progress these students made cannot be measured in just test scores. According to the student and teacher interviews, many of the students also increased their understanding of the reading process, their self-confidence, and their willingness to read independently. The long-lasting effects of this intervention cannot be known yet. If the changes in reading behavior are sustained, the long-term effects are significant.

Final Thoughts

This intervention showed how powerful a fluency intervention can be for struggling readers when multiple research-based fluency strategies are used in conjunction with wide reading. The results of the intervention indicate the impact that fluency instruction can have on students' reading performance. The students in this intervention struggled with the reading fluency that ultimately influenced their comprehension. It is important to teach all students about the reading process, and to give them a purpose for their learning. The students in this intervention developed knowledge of how the lessons and activities they complete in school affect their overall reading achievement. The self-assessment rubric that they created illustrated their understanding of the different fluency components and their interaction with the reading process.

Teachers generally use mini-lessons with modeling and guided practice in reading instruction. Although both of these elements were present in this intervention, the key to the students' progress was the time they were allowed to practice independently the skills, along with the use of a self-assessment rubric. Fluency instruction that incorporates these components can be accomplished in both large and small group settings. Nevertheless, the fact remains that fluency instruction is not traditionally a part of core literacy instruction (Worthy & Broaddas, 2002). This is true, regardless of the fact that fluency instruction benefits all readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). As teachers explore ways to increase comprehension and reading performance of their students, instruction that focuses on fluency should be strongly considered as an important part of the instructional plan.

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Table 1

Basic Reading Inventory Results for the Beginning and End of the 10-Week Fluency Intervention in Accuracy, Comprehension, and Fluency.

| | Accuracy | | Comprehension | | Fluency | |
|----------|-------------|-----|---------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| | (% correct) | | (% correct) | | (Words per minute) | |
| | Baseline | End | Baseline | End | Baseline | End |
| Mitch | 97 | 97 | 85 | 95 | 56 | 92 |
| Jenna | 90 | 94 | 80 | 85 | 45 | 57 |
| Timothy | 88 | 93 | 70 | 90 | 40 | 59 |
| Tammy | 92 | 99 | 80 | 95 | 55 | 97 |
| Jennifer | 91 | 91 | 90 | 90 | 53 | 86 |
| Michelle | 88 | 98 | 80 | 80 | 48 | 87 |

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Student-Created Self-Assessment Rubric For Fluency

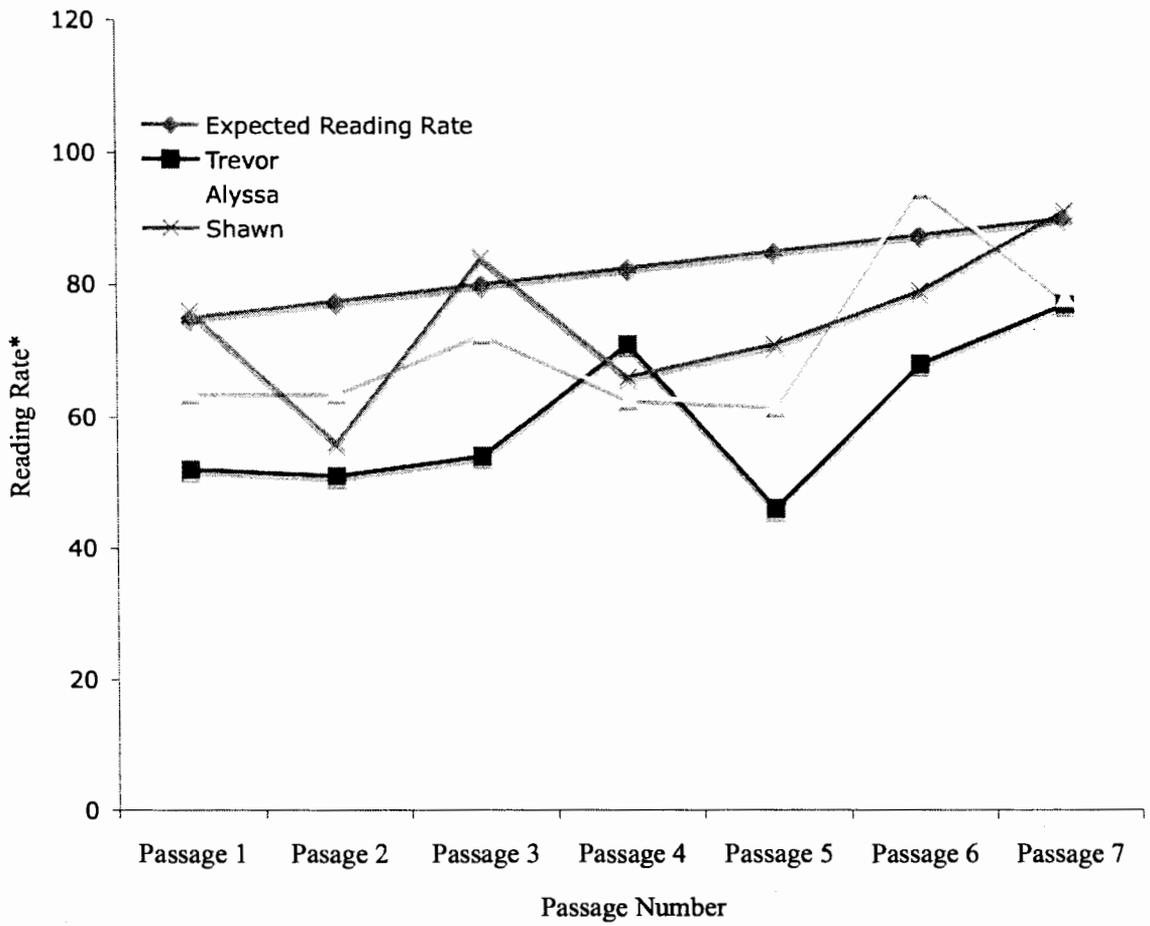
Figure 2. Reading Log Used to Record Reading Materials and Rubric Scores

Figure 3. Progress monitoring data showing reading rate for 7 passages read.

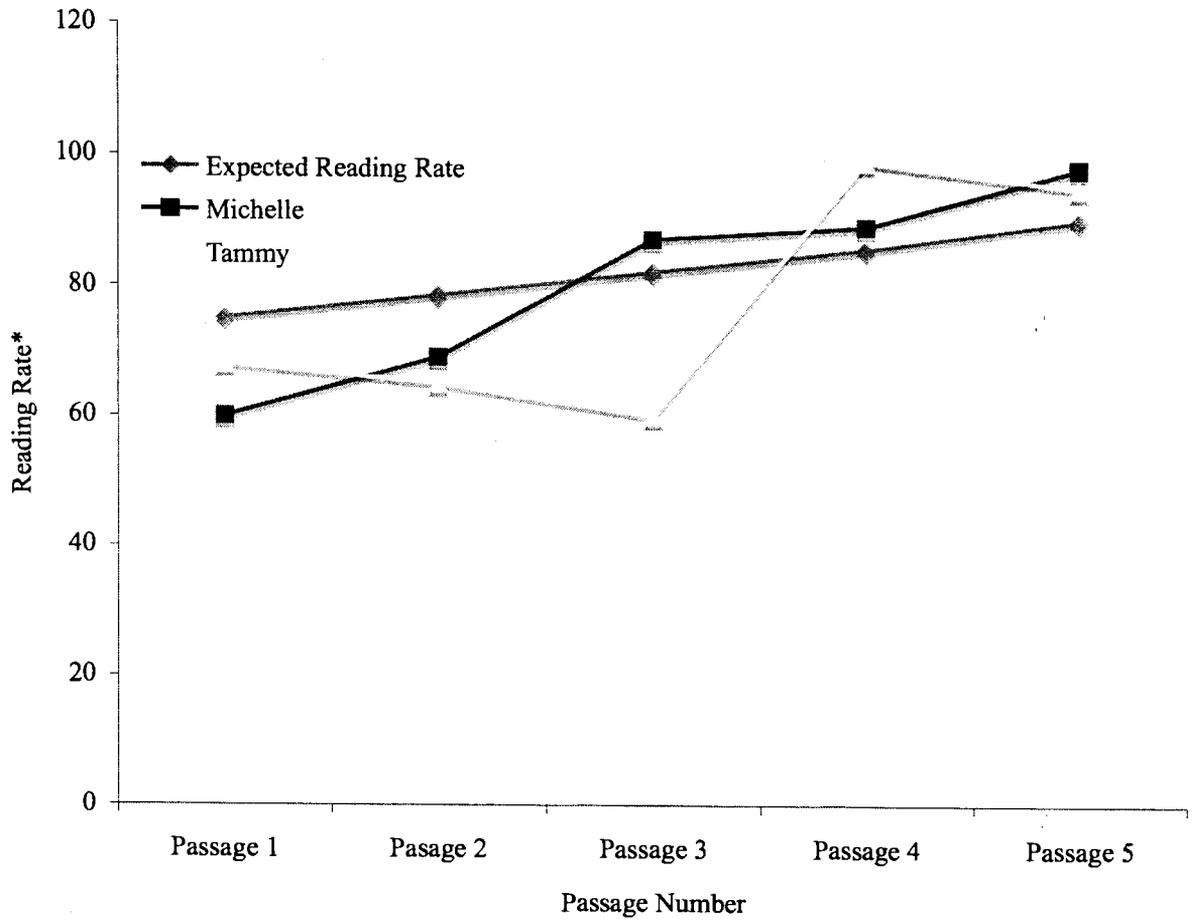
Figure 4. Progress monitoring data showing reading rate for 5 passages read.

Figure 5. Progress monitoring data showing reading rate for 6 passages read.

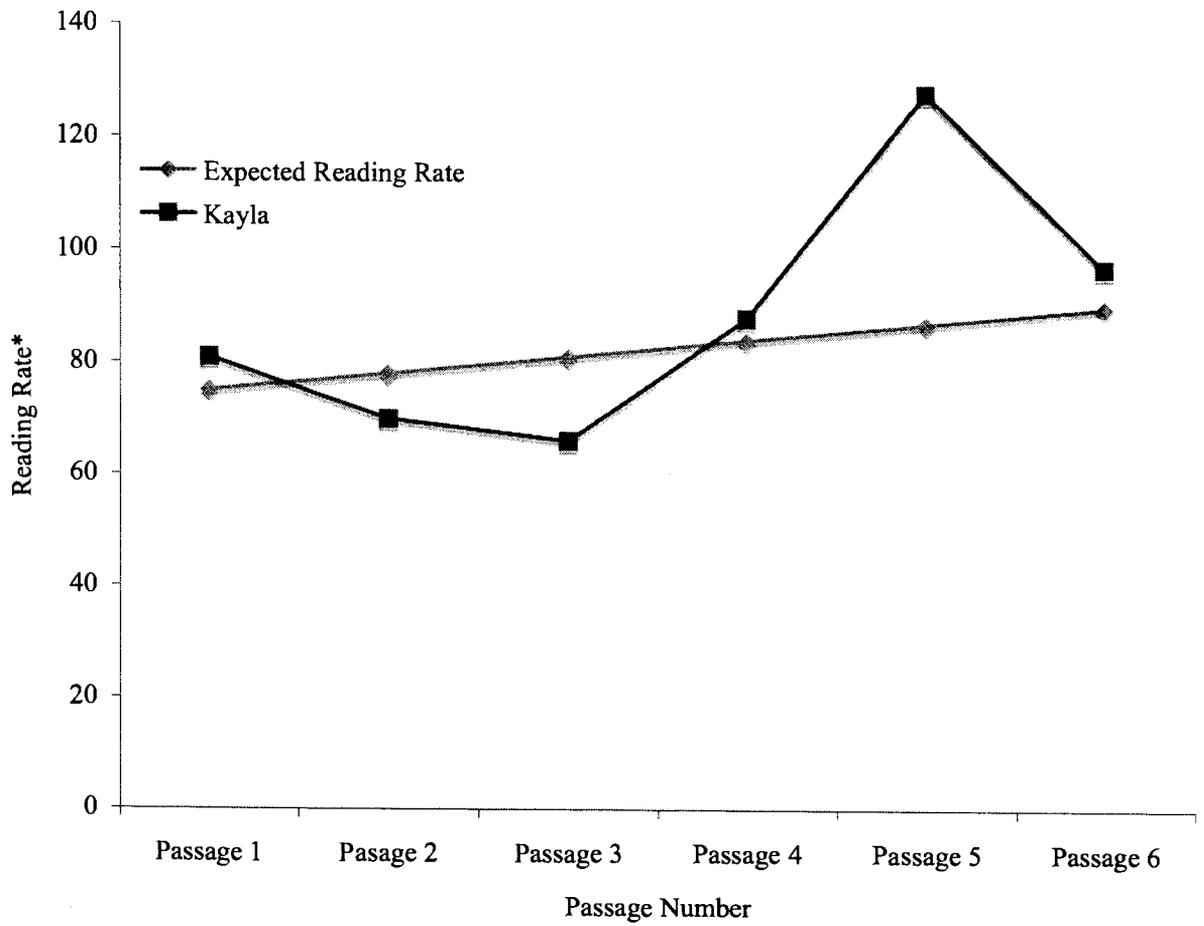
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Phrasing | Reads word by word and pauses throughout sentences | Chunks only 2 words at a time. Pauses within phrases or does not pause at punctuation. | Chunks words into phrases and breathes at punctuation most of the time. | Reads all phrases and sentences as a unit. Always pauses and breathes at punctuation. |
| Expression | Reads with no expression. Monotone voice throughout. | Uses some expression to show meaning. | Uses expression and pays attention to punctuation throughout most of the time. | Uses expression throughout. Expression shows mood and feelings. Reads dialogue with expression. |
| Rate | 50-64 words per minute | 65-79 words per minute | 80-89 words per minute | 90-100+ words per minute |
| Accuracy | Makes many mistakes: 5 or more in 1 minute | Makes some mistakes: 3-4 and does not self-correct | Makes some mistakes: 3-4, but self-corrects. | Makes few mistakes: 1-2, and self-corrects. |



*Reading rate indicates words read correctly in one minute



*Reading rate indicates words read correctly in one minute



*Reading rate indicates words read correctly in one minute

CONCLUSIONS

The process of conducting research in my classroom and then writing a manuscript has influenced me as a teacher, a classroom researcher, and a professional. As a teacher, I have infused new teaching practices into my lessons and intervention plans based on the research I completed. I have begun to use a similar approach of mini-lessons with modeling and guided practice with other intervention groups I teach. Immediately following the mini-lesson, the students have time to practice the strategy using a wide variety of reading materials of their choice. I have used this approach to teach comprehension and decoding strategies. I have also incorporated more self-assessment rubrics into students' independent work.

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting research in my classroom. I am used to constantly assessing my students based on their response to my instruction. However, this process put more emphasis on my instruction by creating the instructional design, materials, and assessment before the instruction began. The results of the research were then proof if the instruction was effective, not if the students fit into the instruction provided. Now, when I begin new interventions, I complete a similar design process. I am excited about completing more action research in my classroom.

The last step in this process was writing the manuscript. This was the most daunting aspect of this project. Over the past twelve years, I have read countless journal articles, but it was surprising to me that I could do the same thing. I did learn that the process is difficult, but not unattainable. A journal article is different from a research paper. In a research paper, the literature review and classroom research are two different sections. In a journal article, the research literature is infused throughout the story of the

classroom research. Reading many journal articles helped me through this process. It was helpful to see how other authors had infused these two components. As a professional, I feel much more comfortable discussing research related to classroom practice. I also have the confidence to continue revising this manuscript to eventually submit it for publication.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW

Students will be interviewed one-on-one. The following questions will be asked, and responses will be written under each question.

Name:

Describe a good reader.

Do you believe you are a good reader?
Why/Why not?

Do you like to read?
Why/Why not?

What kind of books do you like to read?

What are other things do you like to read?

What is comprehension?

What does reading accuracy mean?

What is fluency?

What are the different parts of fluency?

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL PERMISSION

Dear Parents:

My name is Paula Ganzeveld, and I am a strategist at Prairie Ridge Elementary. I have been providing additional support for your son/daughter in the area of reading. I am also a graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa. I would like to include your child's assessment data in my research study, *Reading Intervention: Using self-assessment to increase fluency and comprehension for struggling readers*. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to allow your child's data to be shared in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

I am collecting data on my teaching methods. The intervention focuses on fluency instruction. Fluency describes not only how fast someone reads, it also involves expression, phrasing, and smoothness. Fluent reading is associated with good comprehension. Students have used a self-assessment rubric to monitor their own reading that describes different aspects of a fluent reader. I have collected student data from all students receiving instruction on the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to measure growth.

Your child has completed a taped interview that demonstrates their growth of knowledge throughout the intervention. The tapes will not be shared with anyone, and are only for my reference. Your child's name will not be included in anything that I write about the study and his/her identity will be kept confidential outside of the school. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

The participation to share information is voluntary. Signatures may be placed on the following page and returned along with this letter. The extra copy of this letter is for your reference. I have also included a form for your child to sign, giving his or her consent to participate in the study. Please review this with them before they sign it.

If you would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me at Prairie Ridge at (319) 848-5121. You may also contact my advisor at UNI, Dr. Penny Beed, at (319)273-2070 or the UNI Office of the Human Subjects Coordinator at (319)273-6148 for answers to any questions you may have about participation in research.

Paula Ganzeveld
Strategist, Prairie Ridge Elementary
401 76th Ave. SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to allow my son/daughter to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

(Signature of parent/legal guardian)

(Date)

(Printed name of parent/legal guardian)

(Printed name of child participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date)

APPENDIX B (cont.)

Student Assent Form

Project Title: Reading Intervention: Using self-assessment to increase fluency and comprehension for struggling readers

Name of Principal Investigator: Paula Ganzeveld

I, _____, have been told that one of my parents/guardians has given his/her permission for me to participate in a project about reading. I understand that Mrs. Ganzeveld will look at some of the work I do with her, and some of my testing information so she can show my progress following my work with her. I also understand that she will ask me some questions in an interview.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I have been told that my information can be withheld from the study at any time. If I choose to not participate, nothing bad will happen to me. My grades will not be affected in any way.

Name

Date