

Analyzing the Effects Readers' Theater can have on Fluency

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Abstract

Readers' Theater is a popular instructional strategy that many researchers advocate can improve student reading fluency when incorporated into a reading curriculum. The purpose of this action research project was to explore whether implementing Readers' Theater will enhance the oral reading fluency of second grade students regardless of their reading ability. The research questions that were addressed throughout this study focusing on reading fluency were: (a) To what extent does Readers' Theater enhance the reading fluency (focusing specifically on accuracy and automaticity) of second grade students with varied reading abilities? (b) To what extent does Readers' Theater improve reading prosody in second grade students with varied reading abilities? The study was implemented for six weeks. Data collected consisted of oral reading fluency assessment, multidimensional assessments measuring student prosodic reading, and researcher observations. Six students with various reading abilities were chosen to participate in this action research project. The data from this study along with student test scores reveal that students who participated in Readers' Theater made significant progress and growth in both their reading rate and prosodic reading.

Analyzing the Effects Readers' Theater can have on Fluency

Research indicates when students are not reading fluently, they are spending too much time trying to decode the words and comprehension of the text is hindered. When this occurs, students are unable to construct meaning from the text which is the ultimate goal of reading. Undeniably, reading is one of the most important skills that needs to be mastered to ensure future success. If students do not learn and develop strong reading skills at an early age, they will likely struggle throughout their educational careers and are very unlikely to enjoy reading.

Many teachers, including myself, find reading instruction or interventions that focus explicitly on fluency to be enormously time consuming. Fluency instruction typically consists of repeated readings of specific passages, keeping running records, and the teacher administering timed fluency assessments for each student. Since all of these assessments necessitate valuable instructional time, it makes this type of fluency instruction difficult to incorporate into the classroom. Therefore, many elementary teachers tend to commit most of the reading instruction to word identification, main idea, vocabulary, and other reading comprehension skills, neglecting to implement interventions aimed at helping students become more fluent readers.

I currently teach second grade in a rural elementary school in central Illinois which has a student population of 427 elementary students. From those students 42.6% are from low income families. The participants of this action research project were students who are enrolled in my second grade classroom for the 2013-2014 school year. My classroom students' age range is 7 to 8 years of age. There are 16 students, six females and ten males. This class consists of 15 Caucasian and one multi-racial student.

Teaching reading and math instruction takes up a majority of my day. Reading instruction occurs daily for approximately 100 minutes. During this time, students participate in

guided reading groups, buddy groups, and receive individual group instruction. Math takes up approximately 70 minutes of my classroom instruction. Grammar, phonics, writing, science, and social studies consume the remaining instructional time.

Being an elementary teacher for over 14 years, I have listened to many students read aloud. While some second grade students are able to read fluently, it has been my observation that most struggle when asked to read a passage or text aloud. Most of the time they read in a very robotic, monotone voice with very little expression. They tend to ignore punctuation that is found throughout the reading passage and pause only when they need to take a breath. Often times their reading rate is very slow and their words sound very choppy, unlike their normal speaking voice.

This study was conducted over a time period lasting for six weeks and focused directly on (a) to what extent does Readers' Theater enhance the reading fluency (focusing specifically on accuracy and automaticity) of second grade students with varied reading abilities? (b) To what extent does Readers' Theater improve reading prosody in second grade students with varied reading abilities? While all the students in my class were active participants in Readers' Theater, I targeted six students to closely monitor, analyze, and record their data for my case study.

The hypotheses for this action research project is that incorporating Readers' Theater into my elementary reading curriculum for six weeks will have a positive impact on my students' reading rate, fluency, and prosody. This will be evident as their overall Oral Reading Fluency and Multidimensional Fluency Scale scores increase.

Literature Review

To further investigate whether Readers' Theater would have a positive impact on fluency, I looked for literature related to fluency and how implementing Readers' Theater would impact

reading fluency. The articles I found defined the various aspects and elements of fluency and many provided various methods and schedules of how to implement Readers' Theater within an elementary classroom.

Need for Fluency Instruction

In 2010, The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted with the intention to clearly communicate and provide educators with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at specific grade levels. Under the English Language Arts Standards for Second Grade is the Reading Foundational Skills Standard RF.2.4. This standard requires second grade students to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support reading comprehension. Many students are unable to become fluent readers on their own, thus explicit reading instruction targeting fluency needs to be implemented with elementary classrooms (Reading Rockets, 2010). One of the most convincing reasons elementary teachers should incorporate explicit instruction on the three components of fluency is the strong connection between reading fluency and reading comprehension. Many researchers believe that fluency is the bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005).

Key Elements of Reading Fluency

Reading fluency involves much more than how many words a student can read in one minute. According to many researchers, reading fluency is defined as the effortless or automatic reading of text in which the reader is able to group words into meaningful phrases quickly and effortlessly (Corcoran, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, 2004; Rasinski, 2004). Fluent readers are able to read text aloud with good expression or prosody. Accuracy, automaticity, and prosody are the three crucial elements that must be present for fluent reading and comprehension

to occur (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010; Moran, 2006; Rasinski, 2006; Young & Rasinski, 2009). These three elements of reading fluency are important as they impact the students' reading proficiency (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Word-reading accuracy refers to the reader's ability to read or decode the words within the text with few errors in pronunciation. The reader must be able to accurately decode words, blend sounds together, and recognize a large number of high frequency words. If the reader struggles with accurate word reading, he/she will most likely misunderstand the intended meaning of the text and the author's message. Poor word decoding skills slows down the reading process and makes reading laborious. If reading is difficult, a child is more apt to give up than continue to try. This can lead to gaps in reading and make the student dislike reading.

Automaticity is the second element which must be present for fluent reading to occur. The reader is able to read the text correctly and effortlessly, focusing their attention on text meaning rather than on word decoding. A fluent reader must be able to immediately recognize most of the words they encounter within the text. This is significant given that readers who spend a lot of time trying to decode words often times are unable to focus their attention to the meaning of the text (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Hudson et al., 2005; Kuhn, 2004). According to Rasinski (2012), readers have a limited amount of time and attention that can be spent on cognitive energy. "If they have to use too much of that cognitive energy to decode the words in the text, they have little remaining for the more important tasks in reading- comprehension" (Rasinski, 2012, p. 517). Many students who struggle with automaticity have the capacity to comprehend the text if it were read to them.

Prosody, the third element of reading fluency, refers to the effortless or natural way the reader uses volume and expression, phrasing, smoothness, and pace when reading aloud. The

expressive reading of the text helps create the question, surprise, and excitement found within the story (Hudson et al., 2005). Prosodic readers use their voice to convey feeling, emotion, and meaning through their oral interpretation of the story. Readers who have yet to achieve expressive reading tend to read at a very slow and laborious rate. Often times, they are monotone or word-by-word readers, and show little attention to punctuation or phrasing. The way in which the text is read sounds very choppy and different from natural conversation. If a reader is able to combine the key elements of prosodic reading, the oral reading will sound much like natural spoken language (Kuhn, 2004; Rasinski, 2004; Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Developing Reading Fluency through Reader's Theater

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was established in 1997 to evaluate the effectiveness of different methods and approaches used to teach children to fluency including modeled reading, assisted reading, and repeated readings (Moran, 2006; Young & Rasinski, 2009). According to the NRP (2000), guided repeated reading practice has the most significant and positive influence on word automaticity, fluency, and reading comprehension. Students must be exposed to repeated reading which involves the reader rereading a short passage repeatedly, silently or aloud, receiving assistance with word decoding or correcting reading errors. While there are many different ways to incorporate repeated rereading into the reading curriculum, Reader's Theater is thought by many to be a fun and effective approach to help students become fluent readers (Corcoran, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Readers' Theater is an engaging oral reading activity that incorporates repeated readings. Reader's Theater incorporates teacher modeling, group work, and independent student practice to help prepare the students for the performance (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Corcoran, 2005). Students are assigned a script or a part to repeatedly read or "rehearse" for the

performance that occurred later in the week in front of an audience. The rereading of the scripts helps increase student's reading rate, automaticity, and prosody while motivating those students who are reluctant to reread texts (Moran, 2006). Children become more motivated to practice and rehearse their lines when they know that they will be performing for an audience (Rasinski, 2012; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Since the lines of their script are not memorized, the students must use expressive reading to gain the audience's attention, create the drama through their voices, and carry the message of the written script (Clark et al., 2009; Young & Rasinski, 2009). This type of repeated reading, "provides students with diverse learning needs an opportunity for authentic participation in rereading texts- in contrast to the traditional skill and drill approach of rereading text by teacher direction" (Garrett & Connor, 2010, p. 7). The purpose of Reader's Theater is not to increase students' reading speed, but rather to use repeated readings as a way for students to find deeper meaning of text while making significant gains in expressive reading (Rasinski, 2012). Readers' Theater is unlike most theatrical performances in that it does not require costumes, props, or special scenery. Implementing this type of fluency instruction into the elementary classroom makes it more manageable, less expensive, and far less time consuming for the teacher.

Fluency Mini Lessons

Reader's Theater gives students an enjoyable opportunity to practice reading fluency and can be an effective teaching tool for teachers to use when implementing fluency instruction and coaching within their literacy program. Along with giving students the opportunity to repeatedly reread text, teachers must model and provide guidance on what fluent and prosodic reading sounds like. Mini-lessons focusing on the pausing, rate, intonation, stress, phrasing, and integration need to be taught to young readers in a small group setting. Students are then able to

take their acquired knowledge and apply it when reading their individual reading scripts (Clark et al., 2009). During these small group mini-lessons, the teacher can teach and demonstrate how expressive reading can express a character's feelings and emotions through inflection all while modeling good fluent reading.

Conclusion

There are many components that make up the process of reading. Reading fluency is a key element that affects students' ability to understand text meaning, author's purpose, and comprehend text. The key elements of reading fluency; accuracy, automaticity, and prosody must be carefully taught and practiced within the classroom. Students must learn what fluency entails and teachers must realize that fast reading is not the focus or goal of reading fluency. Readers' Theater can be highly beneficial to all students regardless of their reading abilities. It allows the students to hear what fluent and expressive reading sounds like and provides them the opportunity to practice prosodic reading. Implementing Reader's Theater is an enjoyable way to help students become fluent and expressive readers.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this action research project were selected from my students who are in my second grade classroom for the 2013-2014 school year. The subject population age range is 7 to 8 years of age. There are 16 students, six females and ten males. Six students (two who scored the highest, two who scored closest to the average and two who scored the lowest) with various reading abilities were chosen to participate in this action research project based on their fluency baseline assessment and teacher observation. Of the six participants, four were female

and two were male. Each student selected to participate in the study was assigned a code letter to ensure data confidentiality.

Data Collection Tools

For my action research project, I used three different assessment tools through the six weeks study (See Appendix A for schedule) to measure students' fluency and reading prosody. All of the data collected was analyzed to determine the effect Readers' Theater has on reading fluency. The three assessment tools include an Oral Reading Fluency Assessment (see Appendix B), a Multidimensional Fluency Scale (see Appendix G), and a Fluency Observation Data Chart (see Appendix H).

For this study, I used the *Reading A-Z* website to determine individual reading levels. *Reading A-Z* is an on-line resource for educators. This site helps teachers determine students' instructional levels by assessing their reading skills with developmentally appropriate texts and assesses their readiness to progress to the next level. For this study, I plan to use Readers' Theater scripts to improve reading fluency.

The first data collection tool used was an Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Assessment (see Appendix B) which is designed to measure the readers' accuracy and automaticity when orally reading a reading passage (see Appendix C, D, E). This baseline assessment was given to establish each student's individual reading levels and word count per minute (WCPM). Each student was asked to read a passage for one minute. This passage was a cold read, so he/she had never seen or heard the passage before. After the one minute was up, I counted how many words he/she read correctly in the one minute time frame. This determined the word count per minute of each student. Each student was given an oral fluency test every two weeks to

determine if there had been an increase in automaticity and in his/her reading rate. The results were graphed to show the growth in each student's fluency (see Appendix F).

The second assessment tool I used was the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (see Appendix G). This (MFS) assessment was used to assess each student's oral reading volume, expression, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. I gave this assessment to each student prior to implementing Readers' Theater, rating him/her on a 1-4 scale in the four areas. I assessed the students using the MFS at the beginning of the study, at week three, and then at the conclusion of the 6 week study. The three scores were added together to find an overall fluency rating the student's overall fluency growth.

Along with these assessments, I took anecdotal notes using a Fluency Observation Data Chart, (see Appendix H). This chart was used as an assessment tool to measure student's fluency. The chart targeted the six areas of fluency: pausing, phrasing, stress, notation, rate, and integration. I utilized this form during guided reading groups and when listening to students read orally during individual reading conference time. With the data collected, I gained insight into each student's fluency strengths and weaknesses and become more aware of how to individualize student instruction. Anecdotal notes were taken throughout the week, and students were scored on the six areas of fluency every two weeks during the readers' Theater performances.

Procedures

Each Readers' Theater script was used for a two week period. My entire class, along with the participants of this study, were divided into various groups and given different Readers' Theater scripts depending on their individual reading level. This study lasted for 6 weeks and followed the weekly reading fluency schedule below.

Reading Fluency Schedule
Week 1

Monday	<p>Break into guided reading groups and assign parts from the Readers' Theater script.</p> <p>Students had approximately fifteen minutes to look over the script, make predictions about the story and characters, discuss vocabulary words, or ask group members for assistance with reading unknown words.</p> <p>Student then follow along as I read the script to them modeling what expressive oral language should sound like.</p> <p>Students do a read through of the script together, each reading their own assigned part.</p>
Tuesday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Pausing (Where do students pause while reading? Are they appropriate to the text? Do students pause or stop at appropriate punctuation?)</p> <p>Guided Reading Group Discussion: Group members discuss the main idea, plot, and vocabulary of their script. Teacher read script modeling good prosodic reading. Students then choral read the script along with me, focusing on reading with good volume, rate, smoothness, and expression. The script were read whole group with each member reading his/her own part.</p> <p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with a buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p>
Wednesday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Rate (Does student read at appropriate rate, slow down or pause at inappropriate spots? Does reader pause for extended time to decode words? Does student read too fast?)</p> <p>Guided Reading Group Discussion: Group members discuss the main idea, plot, and vocabulary of their script. Teacher read script modeling good prosodic reading. Students then choral read the script along with me, focusing on reading with good volume, rate, smoothness, and expression. The script were read whole group with each member reading his/her own part.</p> <p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with a buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p> <p>On Wednesday night, the scripts were sent home for them to practice reading as a homework assignment.</p>

Thursday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Intonation (Does the student read with appropriate expression? Does the student's tone change?)</p>
	<p>Guided Reading Group Discussion: Group members discuss the main idea, plot, and vocabulary of their script. Teacher read script modeling good prosodic reading. Students then choral read the script along with me, focusing on reading with good volume, rate, smoothness, and expression. The script were read whole group with each member reading his/her own part.</p>
	<p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with a buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p>
Friday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Stress (Do students change their voice level at appropriate words to add to meaning? Do they read words louder or softer to affect meaning?)</p>
	<p>Lessons/activities covering this specific element of fluency were completed</p>
	<p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with the teacher or buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p>
<p>Reading Fluency Schedule Week 2</p>	
Monday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Phrasing (How are students putting words together? Does it sound like oral language? Are students putting words in appropriate groups?)</p>
	<p>Lessons/activities covering this specific element of fluency were completed</p>
	<p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with the teacher or buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p>
Tuesday	<p>Whole Group Targeted Fluency Skill: Integration (Does the student sound smooth and read phrases and sentences appropriately? Does the student read orally in a way that shows evidence of understanding the text?)</p>
	<p>Lessons/activities covering this specific element of fluency were completed</p>
	<p>Independent Practice: Students were given the opportunity to practice their lines independently, with the teacher or buddy, or in their Readers' Theater group.</p>

Wednesday	<p>Reader's Theater Performance Day- Students were given 15 minutes to meet with their group members to reread their scripts before performing the play for the class or other audiences. After each performance, students in the audience discussed the performance talking about what they liked or ways the performers could improve for the next performance.</p>
Thursday	<p>Readers' Theater Coaching Time- I meet with the 3 groups and discussed the group's performance.</p> <p>Students reflected on personal performance (ie. expression, tone, volume, and rate). Areas of strengths and weaknesses were discussed and where improvements could be made.</p> <p>Independent Practice: Various activities were available for students to complete either independently, with a partner or in small groups focusing on one of the 6 elements of fluency.</p>
Friday	<p>Individual Conference Time- I used my anecdotal notes to conference with students who struggled with various targeted fluency skills. Students received further fluency instruction.</p> <p>Independent Practice: Various activities were available for students to complete either independently, with a partner or in small groups focusing on one of the 6 elements of fluency.</p>

After each performance, students in the audience completed a Readers' Theater performance critique sheet. This allowed the audience member to write down their thoughts about the performance, what he/she felt the performer did well or ways the performer could improve for the next performance. I feel using the critique sheet was a great opportunity for students to provide positive feedback while peer-reviewing their classmates. I also feel that my students become more conscientious when reading their own part in their group's performance after critiquing their classmates.

Data Analysis

The data for this study was collected using a variety of fluency assessment tools including an Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Assessment, Multidimensional Fluency Assessments

and recording anecdotal notes for my entire class. The data from the initial (ORF) Assessment established the student's baseline fluency rate score (word count per minute). Additional ORF assessments were given at Week two, Week four, and finally at Week six. These assessments allowed me to document increases in each of the participant's oral reading fluency rate.

Data from a Multidimensional Fluency Scale was used to assess each student's oral reading in the four major categories: expression and volume, accuracy and phrasing, smoothness, and pace. This assessment was administered to each student individually after he/she read a fluency passage at his/her independent reading level. Students were scored in each category using a 1-4 scale, with four as the highest score possible. The score from each of the categories were added together determining the student's overall fluency score. I assessed the students using the MFS at the beginning of the study to determine a baseline score, and then again at week three and at the conclusion of the study. The three scores were analyzed and graphed to show each participant's overall fluency growth.

Teacher observation was the third method in which student reading fluency data was collected and analyzed. As the researcher, I took notes focusing specifically on the six areas of fluency: pausing, phrasing, stress, notation, rate, and integration. Each component was scored using 1-4 scale, with four being the highest score possible in each category. I utilized this form during guided reading groups, individual reading conference time, and during the student's performance of the Readers' Theater script. Along with these scores, detailed notes were taken regarding each participant's oral reading. Analyzing the anecdotal notes, along with the data collected, gave me great insight into each student's fluency strengths and weaknesses. I was then able to graph this information to show student fluency growth.

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if implementing Readers' Theater would help students become more fluent readers by increasing their words read per minute, and develop into more "expressive" or prosodic readers. The data was collected using an Oral Reading Fluency Assessment, Multidimensional Fluency Scale, and researcher anecdotal notes. These tests results were scored, analyzed, and graphed displaying student's individual growth in each specific area. Six students, with varying reading abilities, were selected to participate and assigned a letter code to ensure participant confidentiality. Students A and B scored the lowest on their initial oral fluency assessment and seem to struggle in the area of reading. Students C and D scored on-level when given a baseline fluency assessment with Students E and F scoring above-level.

To determine each participants baseline oral reading fluency score, the researcher used a one-minute reading fluency passage from the website Reading A to Z. Each assessment given was at the student's independent reading level. As indicated on the Oral Reading Fluency graph (see figure 1), all students made gains from their baseline scores; increasing the number of words read per minute on each assessment. (Figure 1) illustrates the changes in the participant's oral reading fluency levels prior to, during, and after the implementation of Readers' Theater. Student B experienced the largest change in her Oral Reading Fluency score increasing words read per minute from 36 to 108. This was an increase of 72 words read per minute over a six week period. Students A and F all made substantial growth increasing their (wcpm) by 50 words. Student E, who recorded the highest baseline oral reading fluency score made the least amount of growth increasing his (wcpm) by only 23 words. Comparing this student's score to the Oral Reading Fluency Target Rate Norms (see Appendix B), he is currently well above what is expected of an average second grade student.

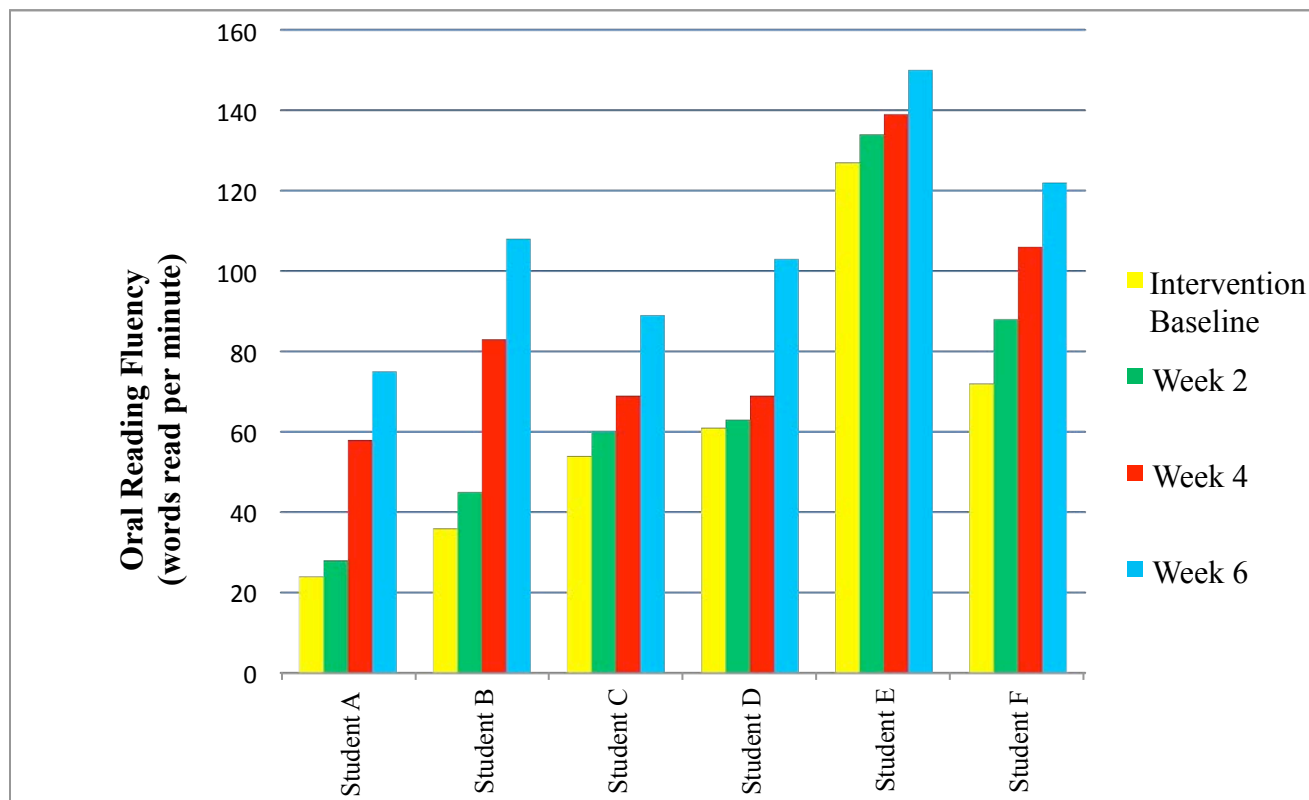


Figure 1. Comparison between Baseline and Final Average of Oral Reading Fluency Scores

The participants of this study were also scored on oral reading fluency using the modified Rasinski Multidimensional Fluency Scale. When analyzing this data, it was apparent that all students again made improvements in his/her oral reading fluency (see figure 2). The Multidimensional Scale rubric (see Appendix G) focuses on oral reading fluency targeting expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. The lowest score possible to receive is a four with the maximum score being a 16. For students to be making adequate fluency progress the reader must score a ten or above. At the baseline assessment, four out of the six participants scored below a ten indicating additional fluency instruction was needed. My two below-average readers and both on-level readers fell into this category. When looking at the overall growth of all the participants, the most progress was seen between Week three and when the final

assessment was given at Week six. Student B again made the greatest improvement scoring only a six on the baseline assessment yet ending this study with a solid score of 15. The two on-level readers made similar progress ending with an overall growth of 5 points. Every participant exhibited strong improvements in the area of reading fluency. Five out of six of the participants scored above a ten or above indicating they all were making adequate reading fluency growth.

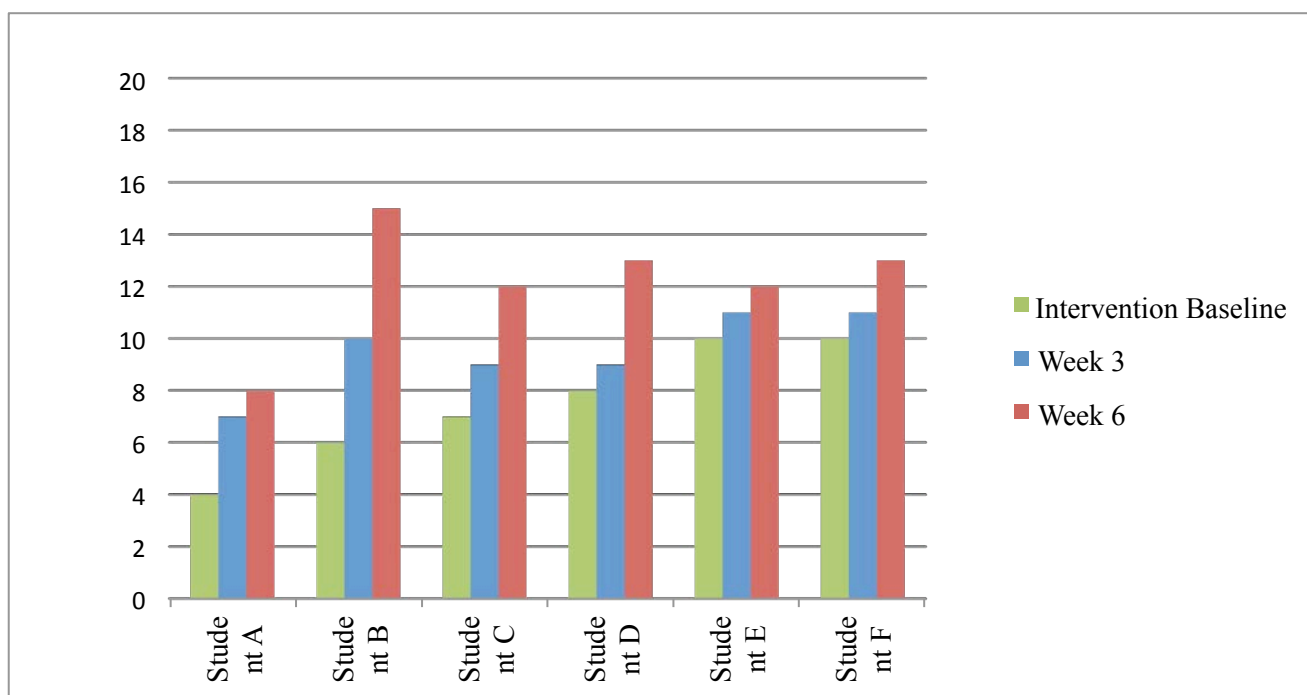


Figure 2. Comparison of Students Baseline and Final Oral Reading Multidimensional Fluency Scores

The last form of data collected and analyzed came from the fluency scores and the anecdotal notes that I recorded and scored on the Fluency Observation Data Chart. Throughout the study, I used detailed observations regarding each participant's oral reading habits. A score was given in each of the six areas of fluency: pausing, phrasing, stress, notation, rate, and integration. Each component was scored using 1-4 scale, with four being the highest score possible. When adding the points for from the different categories, the lowest score a student

could earn would be a six, and the highest is twenty-four. All participants made adequate growth in the six areas of fluency, each increasing his/her score. The most growth in these six areas was seen with Students B and F. Student E made the least amount of growth adding only three points to his initial score of 12. The data collected from this fluency chart was analyzed and recorded within the table below (see table 1). The anecdotal notes will be used to further guide reading fluency instruction.

Table 1

Data Collected From the Fluency Observation Data Chart

Student	Baseline	Week 2	Week 4	Week 6	Change
A	6	9	10	11	+5
B	8	9	13	15	+7
C	8	10	12	13	+5
D	9	12	12	15	+6
E	12	13	13	15	+3
F	11	14	13	18	+7

Discussion

The purpose of the action research study was to determine if implementing Readers' Theater would enhance the reading fluency (focusing specifically on accuracy and automaticity) and improve reading prosody in second grade students with varied reading abilities. The data collected indicates that using Readers' Theater can help all students make gains in reading fluency and increase the readers' word count per minute regardless of his/her reading ability. Readers' Theater help students develop into more expressive and prosodic oral readers, making reading a more enjoyable and meaningful experience.

All students made an increase in the number of words read per minute and as noted earlier, Student B who was considered below-level in terms of words read per minute started with an intervention baseline score of only 36 words read per minute. This participant's final score was a 108 (wcpm). Within a six week time period, the student's score had increased 72 words per minutes. Readers' Theater provides students with the opportunity for repeated readings which help in word recognition. Students build a strong sight word base which helps their oral reading fluency rate increase. This makes reading less laborious, make reading a more enjoyable experience.

The data results conclusively show an increase in student's Multidimensional Fluency Scores which focus on the key elements of prosodic oral reading. While it was encouraging to see the increase in students' oral reading fluency rate, the most positive change I observed came from the more expressive and prosodic reading that I noticed when students were asked to read aloud. Prior to implementing Readers' Theater, most of my students had a tendency to ignore punctuation found throughout the reading passage pausing only when they need to take a breath. Their reading rate was extremely slow and laborious and their words sounded very choppy, unlike a normal conversation. During the Readers' Theater performance, I expected to hear more animated or dramatic readings as this is what I had modeled and the type of reading they had practiced and rehearsed. Surprisingly, I observed expressive readings not only during the actual performance, but when students were actively reading other text during guided reading lessons and in buddy groups. All students seem to demonstrate a better understanding of how to use pausing, rate, intonation, phrasing, and stress to enhance their expressive oral reading. Also encouraging, were the positive remarks many parents made regarding Readers' Theater during

parent/teacher conferences. Several parents commented on the “expressive reading” they had observed at home while listening to their child read different reading passages.

The findings indicate that implementing Readers’ Theater within an elementary classroom on a regular basis can improve all aspects of fluency with students who have varying reading levels and abilities. Every student who participated in this study showed a gain in his/her reading rate, multidimensional score and became a more expressive reader. My students found this to be an extremely fun activity and were many times seen reading their reading scripts without encouragement from myself. Undoubtedly, performance day was the highlight of the student’s week!

Implications

Overall, I am extremely pleased with the outcome of this study. The data results, along with personal observations, confirm my belief that implementing Readers’ Theater can result in many positive outcomes for all readers regardless of their reading abilities. I have found it to be a valid approach to teach oral fluency instruction. Readers’ Theater would be easy to implement in other classrooms besides second grade. It is extremely cost effective as scripts are easily assessable on the Internet.

Action Plan

In the past, I sporadically used Readers’ Theater with second grade students. I truly never looked at it as a means to increase reading fluency, but rather as a “fun” activity for my students. This study has made me realize the positive effects Readers’ Theater can have on reading fluency. For this reason, I will continue to use Readers’ Theater within my current students and make it a part of my reading curriculum for years to come.

Additionally, I will continue to search for scripts that can be utilized cross-curricular. There are many scripts that teach about different areas of social studies and various science concepts. Having taught for 14 years, I know how difficult it can be to incorporate these two subjects within the elementary curriculum. Time restraints, state testing, and the emphasis schools must place on reading and math instruction makes it difficult for all subjects to be taught adequately. Readers' Theater scripts can be utilized to teach social studies and science concepts within the reading curriculum.

Throughout this project, I have been sharing my observations and findings with the other second grade teachers. I have shared the Readers' Theater scripts with them along with the tools I have used to assess fluency growth with my students. They too have started to implement Readers' Theater within their reading curriculum and have seen the benefits and enjoyment that comes from this type of fluency instruction. I will continue to share Readers' Theater scripts and work with them sharing thoughts and ideas on how to effectively teach reading fluency.

Getting students excited about learning can be a challenging task as an elementary teacher. It is exciting to have found a teaching tool that my students find enjoyable and are more than willing to cooperate in doing. They wanted to practice and rehearse their lines, and didn't even realize they were actually "learning". Using the reading of the scripts to practice oral reading fluency was very beneficial to all of the students and a fun way for them to learn about the key elements of expressive reading. Readers' Theater gives students the opportunity to have fun playing the part of a character while becoming more fluent and expressive readers. I have observed and listened to many students read over my teaching career. I have never witnessed the type of expressive reading that I hear with my current students. I attribute this to the mini-lessons that were taught and the opportunity they have had through implementing Readers'

Theater. I truly believe my students have learned the importance of expressive reading and will continue to incorporate it in years to come.

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