


2016

The Effects of Reader's Theater on Reading Comprehension and Fluency of Fifth-Grade Students

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Ashley Black

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

The Effects of Reader's Theater on Reading Comprehension and Fluency of Fifth-Grade

Students

by

Ashley Black

EdS, Lincoln Memorial University, 2008

MA, Piedmont College, 2002

BS, Valdosta State University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2016

Abstract

According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, an estimated 75% of students who are poor readers in 3rd grade continue to be poor readers in 9th grade. Although much research has been conducted on this topic, engaging and successful reading programs that put theory into practice are scarce. Reader's theater is a strategy students use to collaborate, rehearse, and critique one another while the teacher offers support and modeling. The research questions addressed the effectiveness of using Reader's Theater to improve scores in reading fluency and comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels' automaticity theory was used as the theoretical foundation for the study. A quasi-experimental control group design was used with a convenience sample of 50 students from 2 fifth-grade classrooms. Preexisting pre- and posttest scores of fluency and comprehension were analyzed using a *t* test. The results showed no significant differences among groups in their gain scores; however, in regards to comprehension, there was 0.40 point gain among students with disabilities. Findings were presented to stakeholders through a program evaluation report, which recommended the continuation of Reader's Theater during the 2015-2016 school year. While findings were not significant, they do support social change by giving teachers a valid reason to engage readers in meaningful, repeated readings that can increase reading comprehension and enable both struggling and thriving students to better comprehend text and become higher achieving readers.

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Dedication

To my husband, James, I dedicate this paper to you. Thank you for being supportive of me during the past few years. Thank you for being both parents at times so I could work on my paper. Thanks for the late-night runs for Diet Coke and Skittles. Thank you for your encouragement to complete this dream. I love you! To my two boys, Sam and Luke, too many times I missed important events with our family. I thank you for understanding and look forward to family movie nights, tucking you into bed, and giving you my attention without using the word “homework”! I love you to the moon and back, to infinity and beyond, forever and ever!

To my parents, Bruce and Gayle Carithers, thank you for being wonderful and supportive parents. Thank you also for watching the boys when I needed some time to work. Thanks for believing in me. There will be no more asking me if I had homework or if I have submitted a draft! I did it! To my brother, Rich, no, I still don't know what I want to do with this degree!

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, James Clyde Nevils (1926-2006). From driving a school bus, then becoming a teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools, to finally owning your own business, you showed me that with determination anything is possible. Thank you for giving me the motivation to make this journey. To my grandmother, Nannie Mae Nevils (1924-2003), while you were not here to see me begin and end this journey, I know you were my guardian angel cheering me on. Now I can get back to doing something we both love, baking! I love you both and miss you dearly!

Acknowledgments

First, I must give thanks to my Lord, God for whom all things are possible. Thank you for giving me the strength to keep going.

To Dr. Jennifer Brown, thank you for supporting me through this long and tedious process and your encouragement throughout the years we have been together. You exemplify the qualities of a scholarly mentor and I will always be grateful that I was one of your mentees.

To Dr. Wendy LaRue, thank you for your attentiveness to my paper and your advice and expertise in helping me complete a paper worthy of publishing.

To Dr. Jody Reid, thank you for the many phone calls and texts to help me with my paper.

To my bestie, Wendy Nash, thanks for all of the encouraging notes when I needed them most and for your friendship!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

According to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 38% of fourth graders in the United States cannot read at the basic level (NCES, 2011). Reading difficulties not only affect later academic performance, but may also limit success outside the classroom (Fitzhugh, 2011). Falling below the basic reading level creates a serious problem for students at the elementary level and one that seems to be increasing (McCray, 2001).

Although the key purpose of reading is to gain meaning (Pikulski, 2006; Rasinski, 2004; Wise et al., 2010), students who struggle comprehending text often have issues with more than one set of reading behaviors (Ehri, Satlow, & Gaskins, 2009). Central among the foundational reading skills is the ability to read fluently (Flynn, 2004), as numerous studies have identified reading fluency as a predictor of reading comprehension (Bursuck & Damer, 2007; Cooper & Kiger, 2006; Kuhn et al., 2006; Mathes et al., 2005). A fluent reader can accurately and effortlessly recognize words and read with expression (Wise et al., 2010). Unfortunately, many underachieving readers struggle with reading fluency (Woodward & Johnson, 2009).

Allington (1983) identified reading fluency as a neglected part of reading instruction, yet more recently reading fluency has been advocated as a necessary component of high-quality reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). I examined an instructional strategy that uses repeated readings of the same text to improve reading fluency among developing and struggling readers (Garret & O'Conner, 2010;

Rasinski, 2004; Samuels, 1997; Slavin et al., 2009; Therrien & Hughes, 2008). The Reader's Theater strategy involves repeated reading through playacting (Cooper & Kiger, 2009). The students use expression in their voices and physical gestures as they read from scripts (Cooper & Kiger, 2009). Rereading text is expected to build automaticity and accuracy in reading words (Clementi, 2010). Reader's Theater may provide a positive impact on reading fluency and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to determine if weekly use of Reader's Theater would lead to significant increases in reading fluency and comprehension among proficient and below-proficient fifth-grade students in a small metro community in the Southeastern United States. The project site is 1 of 76 elementary schools within an urban district in Northeast Georgia. The site houses more than 1,200 students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Definition of the Problem

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five reading components that are fundamental for literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, vocabulary instruction, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies. Reading fluency is "the ability to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly, and with appropriate expression and meaning" (Rasinski, 2003, p. 26). Due to research findings on the important contribution of fluency on reading comprehension, the panel recommended that fluency instruction become a significant focus in literacy. A successful reader is a fluid reader, one who not only correctly decodes words, but also does so automatically. If a student

reads fluently, higher levels of comprehension and meaning are achieved (Nichols, Rupley, & Rasinski, 2009).

Oral-reading fluency is often considered a precursor to silent-reading fluency. According to Moats (2005), “Fluent readers make their message understood. They read in phrases, respect the intonation patterns in syntax, and communicate with the listener” (p. 14). A listener is easily able to construct meaning if the reader is fluent. In contrast, a listener has difficulty understanding if the reader hesitates by sounding out words. Tankersley (2005) advised, “It is essential that the thread of fluency be deliberately focused and strengthened as readers grow and develop” (p. 89).

The best pedagogy to develop reading fluency has been a subject of debate. Goodman (1997) described whole language as a pedagogy that is used to teach children to read by acknowledging words as whole pieces of language. Whole language is based on the constructivist theory that proposes students develop meaning from prior experience or prior knowledge (Foorman, 1995). Whole language presumes readers do not analyze words in phonemic chunks but instead recognize words from sight or from context (Gregory, McLaughlin, Stokey, & Weber, 2005) with less emphasis on phonics (Foorman, 1995).

Whole language instruction may not benefit students who have disabilities in reading (Moats, 2007). Specifically, when a reader does not immediately recognize a word from sight, word recognition must come from either contextual cues or phonographic cues (Houchins, Sartor, Shippen, & Steventon, 2005). Whole-language instruction does little to develop phono-graphemic cuing. Many students, including those

who experience dyslexia or language processing disorders, may need direct reading instruction to improve phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding (Moats, 2007). In contrast to whole language, phonics-based reading instruction teaches students to rely upon phono-graphemic cues rather than context when sight recognition is absent (Blair, Nicholas, & Rupley, 2009; Coyne, Zipoli, & Ruby, 2006). Although whole language depends upon using context to provide word recognition, direct instruction in phonics provides rules or guidelines to help students use phono-graphemic cues to recognize words (Camilli, Wolfe, & Smith, 2006).

There has been a debate among educators as to the best approach to teach reading fluency. It is rare to find the whole language approach being used exclusively. Many teachers combine direct instruction of phonics and some elements of whole language, especially those teachers who stress reading comprehension (Jones, Yseel, & Grant, 2012). This combination approach teaches students the letter-sound connection along with sight words.

At the project site, there was a growing concern among teachers, administrators, and parents that not all fifth graders were achieving competence in comprehending text as indicated by the state-mandated Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT scores and local benchmark testing. The local benchmark testing showed 21% of the student population were not meeting competence, which correlated to 3% of students not passing the CRCT and 18% of students scoring on the low end of meeting standards (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013). Thus, promotion of reading fluency needed to be reviewed to improve reading achievement among struggling students. The lack of

fluency development needed to be reviewed to close the reading achievement gap for struggling students. Fifth-grade students are required to master the Georgia Public Schools English language arts elements in the area of reading as mandated by the state of Georgia. Norm-referenced tests are required by the state and determine whether a school meets Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status. Students need to achieve reading fluency skills and strengthen reading comprehension in order to meet the goals set by the Georgia Department of Education in regard to the framework set up through Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) in the area of English/Language Arts (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013).

At the project site, students who struggle in reading were in the early intervention program (EIP) for extra reading instruction. Some of these students were pulled out for EIP, while others were served in the mainstream classroom. Though the EIP program focused on getting students reading on grade level, struggling students who were below-level readers were not making adequate gains (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013). Although the project site used the reading series that was adopted by the district, teachers did not have reading fluency materials and guided reading resources to use during reader's workshop (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013). Reader's workshop is an instructional model for reading that gives students specific instruction in reading strategies, along with opportunities for independent or small-group practice of each reading strategy independently.

According to L. Moore (personal communication, June 27, 2013), some classrooms did not conduct any type of reader's workshop. Reading materials, other than

the reading series, were shared among the grade level. The school was not a Title I school and did not qualify for additional funding or resources unless offered through grants. This limited access may have hindered the reading achievement of the fifth-grade students represented in the school of the present study.

Deficient decoding skills and lack of reading practice results in “unrewarding early reading experiences that lead to less involvement in reading related activities” (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001, p. 137). The lack of reading practice delays the development of automaticity in reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Not only was this lack of reading practice a hindrance at the project site, it was found to be an issue at the state level. The expectation was every child would meet or exceed standards by 2014; however, more than 5% of fifth-grade students were not meeting standards (The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2014). Additionally, the trend for fourth-grade students statewide showed only a slight increase of students meeting or exceeding standards. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) there was a group of students who were not meeting the expectation of Race to The Top (RTT) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

With the enactment of No Child Left Behind, two issues arose at the local school. The first was that by 2014, the school was expected to have 100% proficiency for all students in math and English. The second was that with AYP, the research site was expected to improve scores for all students (Shirvani, 2009). With NCLB), Race to the

Top (RTTT), and district standards, the research site was expected to increase the number of students who exceeded standards, while having no students fall in the “does not meet standard” category.

The purpose of the NCLB Act of 2001 was to make certain all children received a high quality education, thereby “closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (Public Law, 2002). NCLB created single performance goals for minority and nonminority children with the expectation of meeting those goals. It required schools make AYP on state reading and mathematics tests. By not meeting the performance standards given by NCLB, the school was labeled a failing school. The consequence for these failing schools was the loss of federal funds (Fusarelli, 2004). The 2002 law required that all students be proficient on state math and reading assessments by 2014.

RTTT was introduced as a federal grant program by the Obama administration as a carryover from NCLB. The purpose was to improve educational reforms by rewarding high-achieving schools financially to help children become prepared for success and competition in society (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). States voluntarily vied for federal funding, and successful states demonstrated improvements in four educational areas. States had to prove they were enhancing standards and assessments, developing effective use of data systems, retaining and increasing teacher effectiveness (teacher evaluation system), and transforming low-performing schools. The RTTT policy was designed to decrease achievement gaps among student subgroups, especially between

minority and White students, in reading/language arts and mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a).

Out of the 76 elementary schools within the local school district, only three did not meet AYP during the 2011-2012 school year. Out of the 73 remaining schools, 37 of were Title I schools, which means the schools received federal funds to support students who were failing or at risk of failing to meet state standards by ensuring high standards for all students through quality instruction (The School District, 2013). The remaining 36 schools, including the local school, were meeting AYP but failed to meet the 2014 requirement of having all students meet or exceed standards in the area of reading (The School District, 2013).

When I took a closer look at these 36 schools, the data showed a majority of students were meeting or exceeding standards. However, there were students not meeting standards, which hindered the schools from making the RTTT goal of 2014 in which all students met all standards. The data showed third- through fifth-grade students were unable to pass the reading portion of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). When the scores for these schools were averaged, the percentage of students who did not meet the standards for third grade ranged from 1% to 6%. The mean percentage was 1.8%. The range of third-grade students with disabilities was 1% to 20% with the mean percentage of 3.6%. The percentage of students who did not meet the standards for fourth grade ranged from 1% to 10%, with a mean percentage of 3.7%. The range of fourth-grade students with disabilities was 2% to 39% with a mean percentage of 13.1%. The percentage of students

who did not meet the standards in fifth grade ranged from 1% to 5%, with a mean percentage of 2.0%. Finally, the range of fifth-grade students with disabilities was 1% to 37% with a mean percentage of 8.6% (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

According to data for the local school, 3% of students did not meet standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). In addition, local classroom teachers gave the DIBELS test. This data also showed that these specific students were not fluent when reading (L. Moore, personal communication, November 4, 2013). Students were not meeting expectations and were scoring below grade level. These benchmark assessments were given frequently throughout the year. When I examined the subgroups of students who did not meet standards, 16% were students with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). This subgroup included students with a specific learning disability in reading. Within the local school, students with specific learning disabilities continued to score below appropriate-grade reading levels on the local benchmark assessments and the CRCT. The increase of students who did not meet standards affected at-risk fifth-graders in this district because students were not learning to read on a proficient level and were unable to achieve academically. For fifth-graders to be promoted, students needed to pass the reading section of the CRCT. Though the project site was successful in that a majority of its students met or exceeded the reading standards, it fell short of meeting the criteria for NCLB 2014 of having all students meet or exceed standards.

The project site, which was not a Title I school, was limited in resources to help students succeed in increasing their reading fluency and comprehension. The only resource available was the basal reader. Not only was the project site not meeting the

RTTT criteria of having all students pass the CRCT, it was struggling with meeting standards on local school assessments (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013). The goal was to increase scores on these assessments each time they were given. However, some students were not able to make the gains needed on the DIBELS assessments to be on grade level.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Being a successful reader is fundamental to becoming a successful student in all other subject areas (Char et al., 2008; Shaprio, Solari, & Petscher, 2008). When children develop poor reading skills, the likelihood of special education placement increases and often becomes a permanent placement throughout the rest of a student's years in school (Voices for Virginia's Children, 2010). According to Rasinski (2003, 2006), children who struggle with basic reading skills, such as decoding and proper reading rate, have poor comprehension, which leads to poor overall reading performance. A student's reading rate may be an indication of being a fluent or nonfluent reader. If ignored, a student may show results in slow processing of text (Rasinski, 2003). Being a nonfluent reader is a concern for teachers given that these students exhaust greater amounts of time decoding words at the expense of deeper levels of reading such as comprehension.

Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborne (2001, 2006) reported fluency is a significant element in reading that should not be neglected, (2000, 2006). Kuhn and Stahl (2000), Rasinski and Hoffman (2003), and Stahl and Heubach (2005) reported reading fluency has surfaced as an effective component of reading because it increases students' overall reading achievement. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) and Biancarosa and Snow (2006)

argued that teachers should focus on and assess reading fluency because the ability to gain meaning from text depends on the development of word recognition, accuracy, and fluency. By measuring students' reading progress, teachers can decide the best course of action to take regarding reading practice. Reader's Theater is often used for the student performing below grade level. Fluency in reading combined with intonation and attention to punctuation deepens comprehension for readers no matter what level they are reading (Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, & Martin, 2007; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Millin & Rinehart, 1999).

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) noted that despite the evidence that fluency instruction improves skills such as reading comprehension, there continues to be a lack of evidence that instruction is regularly taking place in the classroom. According to Rasinski (2003, 2006), children who struggle with issues that delay fluency, such as slow reading rate, have poor comprehension skills. These poor comprehension skills lead to poor overall reading performance. Reading rates may be an indicator of struggling readers and, if ignored, may result in slow processing of text (Rasinski, 2003). Struggling readers are a concern for teachers since these students have to dedicate more time and attention to decoding rather than comprehending the text. The purpose of this study was to test Reader's Theater in a local setting to determine whether students' fluency and comprehension would increase.

Definitions

Reader's Theater: a performance of literature as a story, play, or poetry. It includes reading aloud text by one or more students while using expressive voice, rather

than acting or memorizing text (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Reader's Theater requires interpretation of text with the human voice. The drama is "communicated by the children through phrasing, pausing, and expressive reading of text" (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004, p. 3).

Reading comprehension: "the act or result of applying comprehension processes to attain the meaning of a graphic communication" (Rasinski, 2010). There are several levels of comprehension: (a) getting the literal meaning, (b) getting the interpretive or suggested meaning in reading, and (c) evaluating what is read in a critical way (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Reading fluency: "efficient word-recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text" (Rasinski, 2010). Fluency is observable in accurate, rapid, expressive oral reading and makes silent reading comprehension achievable ((National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Repeated readings: reading and rereading of a passage until a level of fluency is reached (Stoddard, Valcante, Sindelar, O'Shea, & Algozzine, 1993).

Significance

The significance of this study is improving reading fluency of both underachieving and competent students at the site school. Repeated reading as practiced during Reader's Theater is useful with many different types of students with various reading abilities (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Samuel, 1997; Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, & Evan, 2006). Attention to underachieving students is vital, as these students are in jeopardy of remaining limited in their reading comprehension, and thus facing future

academic and workplace failure. Many researchers emphasized that Reader's Theater had a positive impact in raising students' fluency rates as well as reading comprehension (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Sindelar, Monda, O'Shea, 1990). Other researchers (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) established that reading fluency is a critical component of learning to read and that an effective reading program needs to include instruction in fluency. If Reader's Theater can improve reading fluency at the project site, perhaps Reader's Theater can be used other schools.

Further, this study may also be significant in modifying teacher practice.

Instructional strategies to improve reading fluency include providing models of fluent reading, conducting practiced reading or rereads, and assisted reading or reading while listening to a fluent reader (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006). Additionally, other strategies that have shown success with increasing fluency are partner reading (Koskinen & Blum, 1984), word reading efficacy (Torgenson et al., 1999), and silent sustained reading, a strategy that focuses on reading for enjoyment (Gardiner, 2005). A potentially effective reading program may include the classroom activity known as Reader's Theater. Studies have shown a relationship between reading fluency rate and the method of repeated reading within Reader's Theater (Corcoran, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, 2004; Martinez et al., 1999; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Sinderlar et al., 1990).

Guiding/Research Question

Solid reading instruction is one of the most important aspects of a child's education. Improving students' reading skills is necessary to promote students' success in middle and high school. Concepts in content areas will be easier for students to learn once fluency and comprehension are mastered (Literacy First, 2001). Educators must find the most appropriate reading strategy that ensures students are getting the most beneficial reading instruction. Therefore, the following research questions were explored:

Research Question 1

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students?

H_{o1}: There is no significant difference between reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

H_{a1}: There is a significant difference between reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Research Question 2

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

H_{o2}: There is no significant difference between reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students with disabilities who participate weekly in Reader's Theater

and fifth-grade students with disabilities who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Ha2: There is a significant difference between reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Research Question 3

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth-grade students?

Ho3: There is no significant difference between fluency rates of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Ha3: There is a significant difference between fluency levels of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Research Question 4

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

Ho4: There is no significant difference between fluency rates of fifth-grade students with disabilities who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students with disabilities who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Ha4: There is a significant difference between fluency rates of fifth-grade students who participate weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who do not participate in weekly Reader's Theater.

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the automaticity theory developed by LaBerge and Samuels (1974). This theory describes a fluent reader decoding text automatically (Samuels, 1997). Accuracy and automaticity are two components for competence in reading, according to LaBerge and Samuels. When reading with accuracy, a student reads words correctly, but with some hesitation. Automaticity is the ability to read with little attention to the words. When shifting from accuracy to automaticity, a reader becomes fluent as reading becomes automatic. According to LaBerge and Samuels (1974), the repeated-reading process within Reader's Theater provided the opportunity for students to achieve automaticity.

Although comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, students must become fluent readers (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Students who lack fluency while reading tend to have poor comprehension (Rasinski, 2000). The automaticity theory model implies fluent readers decode text automatically without direct attention and focus on sounding out letters and words. Because a reader is able to attend actively to only one skill, it is important that reading is automatic (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Automaticity allows the reader to focus on comprehending the text being read, which explains why beginning readers and struggling readers are nonautomatic in their decoding skills. All of their

attention is given to decoding rather than comprehending the material being read (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Beginning readers and struggling readers read word by word, making certain to decode each word, thereby perfecting the accuracy stage of reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

The theory further suggests that reading is a multifaceted process that allows for higher-order thinking. Automaticity includes subskills that must be performed with ease and accuracy. As one subskill becomes automatic, the reader's focus is directed to the next subskill. For example, a student will learn the letters of the alphabet with accuracy. After this transpires, the reader moves to phonemes, then spelling patterns, words, phrases, and sentences. Once the student has moved through each of these subskills, comprehension of the written word follows. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) contended that repeated practice leads to automaticity. Essentially, a fluent reader must grasp each subskill on the accuracy level and then move to the automatic level. In LaBerge and Samuels's model, readers work through each subskill, although at different rates.

Repeated Reading

The following review of related literature highlights recent research on the use of repeated reading as a generalized strategy and Reader's Theater as a specific example of the repeated reading strategy. To complete this review, I searched the ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, and Sage databases. Key words entered were *repeated reading*, *Reader's Theater*, *fluency*, and *comprehension*. Although I looked for current peer-reviewed articles published between 2009 and 2014, I included several references that were older. A total of 72 peer-reviewed articles were initially

identified. After eliminating duplicates and articles that were not relevant, 50 articles were included in the review.

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) contended that repeated reading is a proven active, constructive learning strategy to improve fluency. The McCray (2000) indicated the use of repeated reading, over a short period of time has proven to be an effective method for increasing fluency. Researchers explored the impact of repeated reading and found it increased not only the rate but also the accuracy of students' oral reading. Begeny, Krouse, Ross, and Mitchell (2009) and Hapstack and Tracey (2007) found increasing time spent participating in repeated reading strategies positively influenced students' rate and accuracy during oral reading.

Gorsuch and Taguchi (2010) regarded fluency as an excellent benefit and outcome of repeated readings. No matter the strategy used to teach fluency, the goal of the instruction is to improve students' reading comprehension (Rasinski, 2004). If a reader struggles while decoding or dividing sentences into meaningful phrases, then the ability to comprehend becomes a struggle (Therrien, 2004). Energy is spent figuring out the word and not understanding the text (Nation, 2009). Fluency is not a stage of development at which readers can read all words quickly and easily. Fluency is contextual because fluency can change as readers read different materials.

Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008) compared the use of silent reading and repeated reading. Students rotated through each of the strategies over the course of a year. Reutzel et al. found that students had a reduction in errors, an increase in words per minute, a greater expression while reading, and an increase in comprehension of text.

This study contributed to the work of other researchers (Hudson, Isakson, Richman, Lane & Arriaza-Allen; 2011; LeVasseur, Macaruso, & Shankweiler, 2008; Therrien & Hughes, 2008).

Griffith and Rasinski (2004) investigated the impact that repeated reading has on fluency and comprehension. Five at-risk, Title I, fourth-grade students were involved in a yearlong intervention program using repeated readings. Results revealed that students were able to increase fluency rates. These results doubled the typical expectations during the fourth-grade year. Additionally, reading comprehension increased by 3.2 years.

A repeated reading study conducted by Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, and Evans (2006) focused on underachieving students in third, fourth, and fifth grade in an urban setting. The students read in pairs, alternating reading material for 10 minutes. Additionally, the students were involved in 1-minute timed exercises that looked for number of words read and number of errors. The ultimate goal for students was to read a minimum of 180 words with 10 or fewer errors. Students were expected to answer all of a series of comprehension questions. The outcome of this study was consistent with the work of Eckert, Ardoin, Daley, and Martens (2002), which indicated that repeated reading might improve fluency and comprehension in students who demonstrate a lack of skills in reading.

Ates (2013) conducted a repeated reading study focused on a student who had reading difficulties. This student was given 38 hours of a repeated reading intervention with a performance-based assessment. The purpose of the repeated reading intervention was to increase the student's fluency. Once the student's reading level was determined,

repeated reading activities began. A considerable decrease was observed in the student's error rates, while a considerable increase was observed in the number of words accurately read per minute. The student progressed from a frustration to instruction level with word recognition. Frustrational reading is when a student reads with many mistakes and often time word calls. Students are reading on an instructional level when reading is becoming fluent and need little support.

Daly and Kupzyk (2012) tested reading fluency interventions on a group of third-grade students, Daly and Kupzyk found positive outcomes for all students involved. The interventions were repeated readings, error correction, modeling, and flashcard instruction. The students were allowed to choose which combination of interventions they wanted their parents to use at home for the duration of the study. Parents were trained to deliver these interventions at home and data was collected after 4 weeks. An increase in oral reading fluency was found in all students.

Foster, Ardoin, and Binder (2013) explored changes in elementary students' reading behavior as a function of repeated readings. Though a decrease in reading times occurred between the first and second readings, a significant increase in reading rates occurred between the second and third readings. According to Foster et al., repeated readings have an immediate effect on reading rates, although three readings may be required to achieve optimal results.

Lo, Cooke, and Starling (2011) examined the effects of a repeated reading intervention that utilized "integrated isolated word reading practice, unison reading, error correction, and performance cueing and feedback procedures" (p. 34). The purpose of the

study was to investigate students' oral reading fluency and transfer ability. The outcome showed improved oral reading rates with the ability to transfer to grade level reading passages, which supported findings from other studies on repeated reading (Ates, 2013; Kostewicz & Kubina, 2010; Therrien, 2004; Rasinski, 2004).

Swain, Leader-Janssen, and Conley (2013) examined the repeated reading intervention and its outcome on oral reading fluency. After 7 weeks of the intervention, Swain et al. found that repeated reading was an effective method to increase oral fluency. The fifth-grade students in this study were also involved in a 5-month, follow-up assessment, which showed although the growth gained during the intervention was not maintained; student's reading fluency was still above the baseline data. Swain et al. (2013) suggested fluency interventions should be a part of a reading program to promote continued growth.

Turner (2013) examined repeated reading as an effective means of improving reading fluency among a group of second graders. Although the students did not have the working memory for some of the words encountered, the use of repeated reading allowed students to become familiar with these words, thereby increasing oral reading fluency. Turner contended that using repeated reading would increase oral reading fluency more efficiently.

Therrien (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of repeated reading studies to examine the effects of repeated reading and the ability to increase reading fluency and comprehension. Therrien also looked at the benefits of repeated reading for students who had a learning disability. The results indicated that repeated reading was an effective

strategy for improving reading fluency and comprehension. When students reread a passage, they read it more fluently and comprehended it better. The results also indicated that students were able to fluently read and comprehend new material after rereading other material.

Chard, Vaughn, and Tyler (2002) synthesized studies of reading interventions used to increase fluency among students with a learning disability. Twenty-four articles, published and unpublished, were examined to evaluate the impact of repeated reading as an intervention to increase fluency. Chard et al. found that repeated reading along with an appropriate model of fluent reading was needed for students with disabilities.

Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Baker, Dosbler, and Apichatabutra (2009) also analyzed research studies that addressed the influence of repeated reading. Chard et al. wanted to determine whether repeated reading could be acknowledged as an evidence-based strategy for students with disabilities. Chard et al. examined studies based on the standards for rigorous research established by Horner et al. (2005) and Gersten et al. (2005, p. 76). Chard et al.'s findings differed from Therrien's (2004) and Chard, Vaughn, and Tyler's (2002). Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Baker, Dosbler, and Apichatabutra (2009) found that repeated reading did not qualify as an evidence-based practice for students with disabilities according to the requirements set by Gersten et al. (2005).

Kostewicz and Kubina (2010) conducted a study using reading sprinting as an intervention to increase oral reading fluency. Sprinting involved dividing a reading passage into parts that a student read within a given period. The passage remained in context, which was an important aspect of repeated reading (Therrien & Kubina, 2007)

and allowed students to practice rereading the given text within the given period.

Kostewicz and Kubina (2010) found that sprinting allowed students with disabilities to attain oral fluency.

Lewis-Lancaster and Reisner (2013) studied a self-contained student using several different reading interventions. Baseline data was collected, and repeated readings, listening passage preview, and immediate corrective feedback were the interventions used. After several weeks of the different interventions, repeated reading with immediate feedback proved the most effective intervention to increase the student's fluency.

Chang and Millett (2013) examined the use of repeated reading among students who were English language learners. After receiving the repeated reading intervention, students demonstrated an increase in fluency and comprehension. This increase confirmed that carryover was present from rehearsed passages to unfamiliar passages.

Basaran (2013) tested recorded reading of a narrative passage with more than 400 words with a group of fourth-grade students. The students' words per minute and mistakes were analyzed, and a noteworthy relationship was found between prosody (rhythm) and comprehension. If a student was able to read with smooth voice and had prosody, the comprehension level will be higher than those students who are word callers. Basaran noted that prosody was an excellent indicator of positive reading comprehension.

The significance of repeated reading was revealed when students moved on to a new passage. Rasinski (2012) found that what students learned during the repeated reading of a passage was transferred to the new passage. Several studies (Ates, 2013; Daly & Kupzyk, 2012; Foster, Ardoin, & Binder, 2012; Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010;

Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008; Swain, Leader-Jannsen, & Conley, 2013; Therrien, 2004; Yurick et al., 2006) provided support for the automaticity theory that rereading a given text improves fluency and comprehension. Overall, transfer of fluency skills to new, previously unread passages was observed (Lewis-Lancaster & Reisner, 2013; Rasinski, 2012). These studies also support the contention by LeBarge and Samuels (1974) that students can gain automaticity in reading through repeated practice.

Reader's Theater

Reader's Theater provides students the comfort and ease of practicing text by rereading and rehearsing parts of text, which helps the readers correct mistakes through day-to-day practice. Rereading the text orally provides additional support for students that promotes fluency and accuracy (Samuels, 1997, 2007). Martinez et al. (1999) conducted a study in which second-grade students experienced significant increases in reading levels during a 10-week period using Reader's Theater. The students were given scripts to perform but not memorize. Students performed these scripts several times, increasing fluency each time. Students also showed an increase in comprehension, motivation, and confidence. Wilkinson and Son (2011) argued that comprehension is most effective when students are engaged in instruction that integrates curriculum and allows teachers to have flexibility instead of moving through a basal reader. Wilkinson and Son also asserted that teaching comprehension strategies is effective when teachers have students incorporate reading and thinking strategies covering an array of texts through a challenging, engaging curriculum.

In a quasi-experimental study, Millin and Rienhart (1999) collected qualitative and quantitative data from a small group of second graders in a Title I school. The treatment group of students spent 7 weeks practicing Reader's Theater scripts for 40 minutes per day. The qualitative data revealed that with Reader's Theater, oral reading and attitudes toward reading improved. Quantitative data showed that students who participated in Reader's Theater had higher reading accuracy and comprehension scores on the posttest. Millin and Rienhart concluded that struggling readers might benefit from Reader's Theater; however, Millin and Rinehart reported that they did not find any significant difference in the reading rates of the two groups involved in this study.

In a 10-week time period, a group of second-graders participated in activities that were related to Reader's Theater. The students were compared to students who did not participate in Reader's Theater. They rehearsed scripts and then performed in front of classmates. The results of the pre- and posttest showed improved fluency and an increase in comprehension (Martinez et al., 1998). Overall, there was a 17-word-per-minute increase for those students who participated in Reader's Theater. For those students who did not participate in Reader's Theater, there was an average of only 6.9-words-per-minute. Martinez et.al (1998) said that using Reader's Theater is an excellent way to incorporate repeated readings within a meaning and purposeful context.

Reader's Theater improves more than a student's reading ability. Trainin and Andrzejczak (2006) conducted three separate studies that focused on areas in reading that would positively benefit from the use of Reader's Theater. The first study was the effects of Reader's Theater motivational among students who were poor readers, followed by a

study centering on creating meaningful context for rereading, and finally, a study that looked at the use of Reader's Theater and its overall effects on student achievement.

The first study was a quasi-experimental study that looked at student achievement using three measurements. The conclusion was that the use of Reader's Theater, even for a limited time, produced moderate effects in reading recognition and comprehension. The Reader's Theater group has considerably higher scores in all areas of student achievement. The second study focused on the effects of creating context based Reader's Theater and the outcome it has on student achievement. Students of teachers who were taught to create Reader's Theater scripts using context within the classroom showed higher scores on an oral fluency test and unit test. Finally, the third study focused on how well teachers implemented Reader's Theater and how the students performed on comprehension test. The results showed the students that were taught through the Reader's Theater strategy had improved scores on the many testing instruments that were given through the experiment (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006).

These studies have shown when Reader's Theater is used in the classroom; it can increase student performance in both fluency and comprehension. The evidence also shows not only is Reader's Theater a valuable strategy when used by experts, but that it can be incorporated with ease into the classroom (Chase & Rasinski, 2009).

Garrett and O'Connor (2010) wanted to determine if Reader's Theater improved reading comprehension. The study focused on three elementary schools in the in a rural southeastern school district. The students ranged from kindergarten to fifth grade. Once the study was complete, Garrett and O'Connor found that reading comprehension

increased. Additionally, teachers also reported that by using Reader's Theater, student fluency increased. Reader's Theater positively affected reading comprehension (Garrett & O'Connor).

Reader's Theater has been suggested as a reading strategy for students with reading disabilities. It has been recommended for struggling readers (Crisco & Lanasa, 1995), readers with disabilities (Braun & Braun, 1996), and low achieving students (Bushing, 1981; Wolf, 1992). A study conducted by Corcoran (2005) looked at the effects of Reader's Theater on low-achieving students. Twelve special education students were given a survey that measured attitudes toward reading both before and after the use of Reader's Theater. The students' fluency rate, the words read per minute, were also scored during these same times.

Finally, field notes were used to observe students when working in groups to record conversations and observations. Students were asked whether or not they liked to read aloud and if they enjoyed the Reader's Theater strategy. When students were asked about whether they liked the Reader's Theater strategy and if they liked to read, a 14% and 16% increase respectively, was made. The fluency scores were analyzed and found to have increased in the number of words read per minute.

Similar to Millin and Rienhart (1999), Millin (1996) conducted research on second-graders who were served under Title 1. These students were exposed to Reader's Theater in a pullout setting daily for 40 minutes. While the sample size was somewhat small, 27 students, Millin discovered that these students were reading more fluently and

faster with more accuracy. Millin also found the attitude toward reading had changed from a negative outlook to a positive one.

A third-grade classroom in a large urban school in the south was the setting for a study in which Reader's Theater was used to investigate the impact it had on a group of students in which none were on grade level academically when the study started (Mraz, et al., 2013). The students spent 6 weeks using the Reader's Theater strategy. At the end of this intervention, students pre- and posttest were compared and the researcher found a positive relationship between Reader's Theater and increasing the students' fluency and comprehension. The comprehension level for the class increased from 49% to 86% and went from performing on a frustrational to independent level on a grade level reading passage.

In a study by Kariuki and Rhymer (2012), Reader's Theater was shown to have a connection for students to strengthen their reading skills. This study compared Reader's Theater and traditional based instruction. After the intervention was given and data collected, the results showed significantly higher comprehension scores. These findings suggested that the use of Reader's Theater, when used as instruction, could increase students' comprehension scores.

Research regarding Reader's Theater reflects contradicting findings. For instance, Millin and Rinehart's (1999) findings did not show that Reader's Theater made a significant difference in rate between treatment and control groups of second-graders, whereas, Carrick (2000) found significantly better reading rates for fifth-graders. Additionally, Moats (2005) argued that Reader's Theater was not meant for building

reading fluency. He argued Reader's Theater encouraged students to learn their roles; however, "Children may memorize their parts without reading, may not actually receive much reading practice, or may not get the benefit of direct feedback about their own reading rate" (p. 34). Millin and Rinehart found that reading comprehension was significantly better with Reader's Theater, while Carrick failed to find a significant difference. Given these discrepancies about Reader's Theater, generalizations may be drawn in few studies. The remaining Reader's Theater research was strictly qualitative in nature (Rinehart, 1999; Worthy & Prater, 2002); consequently, statistical analyses of quantitative data were not given in order for the researchers to validate their findings (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez et al., 1999).

Reader's Theater helps to develop fluency through repeated exposure to text. As established from the research, Reader's Theater can increase comprehension, while integrating reading, writing, and speaking within an authentic context. It engages students, increases reading motivation, and provides an authentic purpose for reading. Additionally, Reader's Theater is an instructional strategy that is engaging to students (Borgia & Owles, 2010) because it allows them to feel competent due to repeated readings (Borgia & Owles).

Implications

Possible implications for project directions based on anticipated findings of the data collection and analysis may include presenting the results to the stakeholders, which includes local school administration, local school teachers and staff, and possibly the district language arts department. The hope is for these stakeholders to understand and

use the findings to develop a plan for teachers to incorporate Reader's Theater into their teaching (Creswell, 2012). The results of the study may be generalizable to the school district, helping schools increase reading scores on local and state test, thus meeting AYP, and producing students who are able to read fluently and comprehend all text. Though the results will not be generalizable to other districts in the state of Georgia, schools may use the Reader's Theater strategy to increase their local and state testing scores.

The potential social significance of this research is the benefit the lowest-level reader could achieve from Reader's Theater fluency instruction. It may help teachers to aid students in becoming successful readers inside and outside of the classroom. Ensuring students are reading fluently and comprehending allows students who are at-risk readers an opportunity to succeed academically. These students will have the chance to become productive members of society by participating in the work force, which requires reading skills. Additionally, it could supply administrators with statistical data to determine if Reader's Theater should be implemented throughout the school. Finally, it will provide research-based information to teachers who are seeking ways of improving students' reading fluency and/or comprehension skills.

Summary

The ultimate goal of reading instruction is comprehension; however, readers must move beyond word-by-word reading to automatized reading in order to derive meaning from text. Instructional strategies that improve reading fluency allow students to become successful readers by increasing automaticity. Oral repeated reading is one such strategy.

The National Reading Panel (National Institute, 2000b) has reported a connection between repeated reading, fluency, and comprehension.

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to determine if weekly use of Reader's Theater would lead to significant increases in reading fluency and comprehension among both proficient and below-proficient fifth-grade students at the ABC Elementary School. Section 1 has provided a definition of the problem, rationale, definitions, significance, guiding/research question, review of the literature, and implications. When using the key words of repeated reading, Reader's Theater, fluency, and comprehension, I reached saturation of resources. I also experienced a plethora of dated sources that has limited my ability to use a majority of sources written within the past 5 years. Next, Section 2 will convey the details surrounding how the research study will be conducted. The aspects that will be discussed are research design and approach, setting and sample, instrumentation and materials, data collection and analysis, assumptions, scope, limitations and delimitations, and ethical considerations.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this quasi-experimental quantitative study was to test the Reader's Theater strategy of reading instruction (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005) to establish whether knowledge and application of systematic reading strategies through Reader's Theater increases students' fluency and comprehension. Not all students at the project site were meeting the current federal guidelines of meeting or exceeding reading standards by 2014 (L. Moore, personal communication, June 27, 2013). The project site was in need of a resource to improve reading skills for not only the poor readers, but for all readers. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Reader's Theater strategy of reading instruction (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005) to determine whether students' fluency and comprehension increase in a fifth-grade classroom at a suburban public elementary school in Georgia. In this section, a brief overview of the quasi-experimental quantitative study and the specific methodology that was used is given. Presentation of the methodology includes a description of the sample, population, instrumentation, and materials. In addition, descriptions of the independent and dependent variables are included along with a detailed account of the data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, threats to the validity of the study are recognized. The overall viability of the study and ethical issues are also addressed.

Research Design and Approach

This quasi-experimental study included a pretest-posttest comparison group design (Thyer, 2012) comparing students' fluency and comprehension across two regular

education classes and one special education pullout class before and after delivery of a 9-week intervention. Using the pretest-posttest comparison to analyze data allowed me to measure change and compare participant groups. The International Reading Association (Samuels & Farstrup, 2002) promoted the use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs performed in natural contexts to enhance the body of research on evidence-based instructional practices. The study was conducted to determine whether the weekly use of Reader's Theater led to significant increases in fifth-grade students' reading fluency and comprehension levels when compared to fifth-grade students who did not participate in Reader's Theater.

This design is represented in Figure 1. The experimental group was Group A, and the control group was Group B. Both groups were given pre- and posttests of the DIBELS, measuring students' reading fluency, and the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), measuring students' reading comprehension.

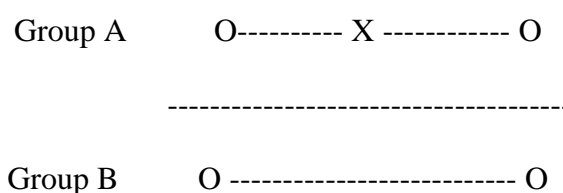


Figure 1. Quasi-experimental, nonequivalent (pretest and posttest) control-group design. O represents the pre- and posttests and X represents the treatment (Reader's Theater).

Use of the quantitative research method was the most efficient means to accomplish the goal of answering the research questions. According to Creswell (2003), the quantitative research approach is one in which the researcher uses specific variables, research questions, and the collection of data to test a theory that supports or refutes the hypotheses (p. 18). Information is collected and analyzed using appropriate measures,

and hypothesis-testing procedures are used to yield statistical data (Creswell, 2003). In the present study, data were collected on reading ability using STAR test (Renaissance Learning, 2003) and the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF). The quantitative results were used to evaluate the reading success of selected fifth-grade students at a suburban public elementary school in Georgia. One strength of using quantitative research is to provide statistical evidence that a phenomenon exists or possibly shows a correlation or causal relationship to another phenomenon (Creswell, 2003).

For this study, the quantitative research method provided the most effective means of testing the impact of a Reader's Theater instructional intervention. Relationships between the instructional intervention and students' reading fluency and comprehension skills were evaluated. Creswell (2003) stated that in a quantitative study a theory is tested by the researcher by specifying narrow hypotheses and collecting data to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses (p. 20).

A correlational design was considered for this study; however, the study is not being conducted to determine whether a relationship exists between two variables (Martin, Green, Colmar, Liam, & Marsh, 2011). The study at hand addressed the possible cause-and-effect relationship between Reader's Theater and an increase of reading fluency and comprehension. Descriptive research was also considered for this study. Descriptive research involves the use of surveys to collect data to answer questions about the given topic of study. Descriptive research is often used to answer questions related to attitudes, concerns, or preferences. Descriptive research was not used because nothing was done prior to the study to know what should be manipulated (Hale, 2011).

Setting and Sample

The students who participated in the study were from a small metro community in the Southeastern United States. The school was located in the nation's 14th largest school district, which won the Broad Prize in 2012 for showing the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income and minority students (The School District, 2014). The school population comprised more than 1200 students during the 2014-2015 school year. The majority of students were White (58%) followed by African America students (21%) and Hispanic students (1%). The staff consisted of 83 teachers, including 11 speech teachers and paraprofessionals, six specials teachers (i.e., art, PE, computer, music), five intervention teachers, three English-to-speakers-of-other-languages teachers, two counselors, and 56 classroom teachers (The School District, 2014).

The nature of the study required the use of groups of students, such as those provided by intact classes. As a result, a convenience sample of two fifth-grade regular education classes and one pullout special education class was used for this study. The purpose of convenience sampling was to save time and effort. Creswell (2007) explained that using convenience sampling can be at the "expense of information and credibility" (p. 12). A convenience sample of intact classes included given students who could not be randomly assigned to classes. Using several different criteria (e.g., race, pullout programs, gender), school administrators place students into classes at the beginning of the school year. Therefore, no significant differences between classes were anticipated. Because groups existed already, preexisting data were used. The group that received the

intervention was the experimental group, and the group that did not receive the intervention was the control group.

The school involved in the study had a maximum class size of 25-28 students in each fifth-grade regular education classroom. The pullout special education class had 12 students who received reading instruction in a small group setting rather than their regular education class. Thus, I assumed that the two classes would yield a total sample of approximately 50 students.

Measures

Reader's Theater is a strategy used to improve fluency through repeated readings of scripts (Corcoran, 2005). Reader's Theater should be implemented over the course of 3-4 days, including at least 10-15 minutes of instruction, practice, or rereading time within each mini lesson. First, teachers must select the literature (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010). The type of script depends on the reading level of the given students. This selection process allows teachers to differentiate instruction for the content. The second step of Reader's Theater involves the teacher demonstrating how the scripts should be read (Caracciolo & Wallowitz, 2009). The teacher reads through the script while students read silently. During this reading, the teacher explains that presenting a Reader's Theater play is like watching a movie and the students must add emotion and expression as if they were actors and actresses (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010). Next, the teacher shows the students how to add emotion by reading the scripts with expression, intonation, and speed. Once the teacher has read the scripts aloud to the students, he or she then guides the students through reading the scripts (Clementi, 2009). After the teacher reads the

script aloud several times, the students read independently and silently (Borgia & Owles, 2010; Clementi, 2009). Following this independent reading of the scripts, the teacher then assigns each student to a part (Cooper & Kiger, 2009). Next, students are given parts to perform. Teachers assign each part based on students' abilities. A stronger reader can take parts with more challenging vocabulary, while struggling readers can be given parts with easier text and shorter passages (Borgia & Owles, 2010). Once students have been given parts, they receive a highlighted script. As students familiarize themselves with the text, they may begin using their own gestures and expressions (Flynn, 2004). Once the practices have commenced, the students perform to an audience (Cooper Kiger, 2009) informally or formally in front of the class or other classes (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Oral Reading Fluency

Students' oral reading fluency was recorded using the Oral Reading Fluency component of DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2002b). DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) is a standardized, individually administered test of accuracy and fluency with connected text. DIBELS Test administration guidelines were followed for the DORF assessment, in which students were individually assessed while reading grade-level passages. Student performance was measured by having students read a passage aloud for 1 minute. Words omitted, words substituted, and hesitations of more than 3 seconds were scored as errors. Words self-corrected within 3 seconds were scored as correct. The number of correct words per minute from the passage was the oral reading fluency rate. Possible scores for the DORF range from 0 to 130+ words correct. A raw score of 0-104 words correct meant a student needed intensive support, a score of 105-129 words correct

meant a student needed purposeful support, and a score of 130+ words correct meant less literacy support was needed.

During the pretest, each student was randomly assigned to read one of two sets of passages, and the alternate passage was read during the posttest. The random assignment of passages strengthened the internal validity of the study by controlling for differences that might arise due to the passages read.

According to the DORF manual (Good & Kaminski, 2002a, p. 34), a word was counted as incorrect if a student failed to say it within 3 seconds, if it was skipped, if it was mispronounced (except when due to articulation, dialectical, or second language interference), or if the word order was switched. Words that were self-corrected within 3 seconds or repeated were deemed correct. For each 1-minute passage read, automaticity was calculated by determining the words called per minute (WCPM). Accuracy was calculated by dividing the number of words read correctly by the total number of words read, rounding the score to the nearest 10th. Therefore, for both the pretest and the posttest, each student had three separate reading rate scores and three accuracy scores.

Good, Gruba, and Kaminski (2001) found DIBELS to be an appropriate measure when evaluating the development of literacy skills in students. In a study of students in kindergarten through third grade, Good et al. determined that DIBELS effectively identified students in need of intervention, assisted with planning, tracked their skills, and provided appropriate results. When used in a study to measure the increase of early literacy skills among kindergarteners (Brand, 2006), DIBELS were found to be adequate and provided the necessary information to determine the students' reading abilities.

Shaw and Shaw (2002) examined DIBELS' correlation with assessments used at state levels to measure literacy skills in students. Data from DIBELS indicated similar results as the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) for third-grade students. Ninety percent of third-grade students scoring in the proficient or advanced range on the CSAP scored at least 110 on their spring DIBELS (Shaw & Shaw, 2002). Additionally, when looking at a measure that assesses reading skills, Bakerson and Gothberg (2006) found correlations between results on the DIBELS and the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP), particularly in the areas of initial sound fluency as well as phoneme segmentation fluency. The application of DIBELS in a variety of ways demonstrates its usefulness when assessing literacy skills in children. Research shows the effectiveness and varied use of DIBELS when the focus is reading fluency (Brand, 2006). DIBELS are a proper tool to use when looking at reading fluency growth over a period of time. DIBELS have been shown to be a reliable and valid measure in a study focused on increasing reading fluency in at-risk students (Good & Kaminski, 2003).

All pretest data of the DORF assessment was preexisting, taken at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. Because these data were recorded on data sheets established through the DORF program, the data sheets with pretest scores were collected and stored in the school safe located in the front office until needed. Only the administration, bookkeeper, and administrative assistants had access to the safe. Data were available upon request.

Reading Comprehension

Students' reading comprehension was measured using the STAR Reading Test, research-based reading software developed by Renaissance Learning (1986). The STAR Reading Test comprised 25 questions of two types: vocabulary-in-context and authentic-text passages. Vocabulary-in-context items required students to use background information, vocabulary knowledge, and active strategies to construct meaning from the text. Vocabulary-in-context items presented a sentence with a blank. The student answered by choosing the correct word from a multiple-choice list of three or four words. Authentic-text passage items were presented a paragraph in which a sentence contained a blank indicating a word needed to complete the paragraph. The student completed the passage by choosing the correct word from a list of words (Renaissance Learning, 1986).

The STAR Reading Test involved insertion of the correct word to measure reading comprehension. The test was intended to provide information to aid teachers in shaping instruction, tracking reading growth, and improving reading performance (Renaissance Learning, 1986). The STAR Reading Test included computer technology to create a test individually tailored to the student based on responses to previous items. As a student answered a question correctly, the level of difficulty rose. When the student responded to a question incorrectly, the level of difficulty was reduced (Renaissance Learning, 1986). Scores for the STAR Reading assessment were given as a grade equivalent. This score represented how a student did compared to other students nationally. For example, a fifth-grade student who scored a grade equivalent of a 6.5 scored as a student who was in the sixth grade and fifth month.

The STAR (Renaissance Learning, 2003, 2006) was chosen as a means to assess comprehension, due to the reliability and validity of the test. The norming method to establish the reliability and validity for the test occurred in spring 1999 (Loudon County Technology, 2013). The objective of the norming study was to find a representative sample of the U.S. school population. The selection process focused on three key variables: geographic region which included the four regions of the United States; school system and per-grade district enrollment with fewer than 200 students to 2,000 or more students; and socioeconomic status, based on students who fall below the federal poverty level within the district being studied. The final norming of the test included a nationally representative blend of approximately 30,000 students from 269 schools in 47 states within the United States (Loudon County Technology, 2013).

Because STAR (Renaissance Learning, 2003, 2006) is a computer-adaptive test, standard methods to assess reliability using internal consistency methods are not appropriate (L. Moore, personal communication, November 4, 2013). There are four direct methods used to estimate the reliability. The first is split-half method, which is a coefficient of reliability obtained by correlating scores for half of a test with scores on the other half. The Spearman-Brown formula is used to adjust for the doubled length of the total test. The reliability coefficients ranged from .89 to .93. The second method is the test-retest method. This is a type of reliability coefficient obtained by administering the same test a second time, after a short interval, and correlating the two sets of scores. Reliability estimates by grade range from 0.79 to 0.91. The third reliability method is the alternate forms linking method, which is the closeness of correlation, between results on

alternate or equivalent-parallel forms of a test. The reliability coefficient was 0.95. The final reliability method is the estimation of generic reliability. This method uses the data of the norming study as a whole ($N = 29,169$) that is derived from an Item Response Theory (IRT) which makes it a more plausible estimate of the actual reliability of the STAR Reading (London County Technology, 2013). The generic reliability estimates range from .89 to .92

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Both DIBELS and STAR tests were used as pretests and posttests. Pretest scores for both tests were derived from existing data sets, with DIBELS having been administered individually by each classroom teacher and STAR having been group administered in the computer lab at the beginning of the school year. Posttests were administered after 9 weeks of instruction using Reader's Theater. Similar to pretest administration, DIBELS was administered individually by each classroom teacher and STAR was group administered in the computer lab.

Reading comprehension scores of 5.0-5.9 were expected for students who are reading at the appropriate reading level because the study took place during the second half of the school year. For the purpose of this study, any student who was more than one full grade level (GE) below the expected range (i.e., $GE < 4.9$) was described as below level in reading. Any student who had more than one full grade level above the expected range (i.e., $GE > 6.0$) was described as above level in reading.

As with the fluency pretest data, STAR pretest data were preexisting, taken at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. The data were stored on the computer program under the researcher's names. The data were password protected and only the researcher, and local technology coordinator had access to the password. Students instructional reading level (IRL) score was obtained from the STAR reading test and used to rank students as below-level, on-level, or above-level readers. The same process was completed to collect posttest data.

The researcher contacted the local technology coordinator at the project site to request the STAR pretest and posttest data. For the DIBELS pretest and posttest data, the researcher conducted the classroom teachers to obtain data. The pre-existing data for the DIBELS was stored in classrooms and used as a tool to drive instruction. The data was given to the researcher in an Excel spreadsheet with identification codes in place of the student names and indicating if the students have a disability. The researcher subtracted the pretest score from the posttest score for the DIBELS and STAR datasets to acquire the gain scores.

Data Analysis

After posttest administration, data was analyzed to determine whether significant differences exist between experimental and control groups in both fluency rates and comprehension. Furthermore, the data analyzed determined if differential effects were present based on students' initial reading levels. Specifically, four research questions were considered.

Research Question 1. What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students? A one-way *t* test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students who participated weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade student who did not participate in Reader's Theater. The treatment group had a mean comprehension gain score of 0.2520 and a standard deviation of 0.27857. The control group had a mean comprehension gain score of 0.2080 and a standard deviation of 0.11874. Levene's Test of Equality of Variance was conducted to determine homogeneity of variance ($F=8.538$, $p=.005$). The *t* test value for equal variance was not assumed and utilized because Levene's Test was significant, meaning there was a significant difference between the groups' variance. There was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups ($t(32.443) = 0.473$; $p = .005$). Although a significant difference was not found, a gain of 0.05 was made in reading comprehension among students who participated in Reader's Theater on a weekly basis. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Research Question 2. What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth grade students with disabilities? A *t* test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students with disabilities who participated weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade student who did not participate in Reader's Theater. The treatment group had a mean comprehension gain score of 0.4000 and a standard deviation of 0.31623. The control group had a mean comprehension gain score of 0.2429 and a standard deviation of 0.11874. Levene's Test of Equality of Variance was conducted to determine

homogeneity of variance ($F=10.474, p=.010$). The t test value for equal variance was not assumed and utilized because Levene's Test was significant, meaning there was a significant difference between the groups' variance. There was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups ($t(3.330) = 0.398; p = .010$). Although a significant difference was not found in the gain scores between the two groups, a gain of nearly 0.15 was made in reading comprehension among students with disabilities who participated in Reader's Theater on a weekly basis. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Research Question 3. What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth grade students? A t test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in reading fluency levels of fifth-grade students who participated weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade student who did not participate in Reader's Theater. The treatment group had a mean fluency gain score of 5.7200 and a standard deviation of 2.95127. The control group had a mean fluency gain score of 6.2800 and a standard deviation of 3.33567. Levene's Test of Equality of Variance was conducted to determine homogeneity of variance ($F = .154, p = .697$). The test was not significant so equal variance was assumed. There was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups ($t(48) = 0.533; p = .697$). The outcome showed that the control group had a higher gain score. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Research Question 4. What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading fluency among fifth grade students with disabilities? A t test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in reading fluency levels of fifth-grade students with

disabilities who participated weekly in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade student who did not participate in Reader's Theater. The treatment group had a mean fluency gain score of 7.5000 and a standard deviation of 2.08167. The control group had a mean fluency gain score of 7.5714 and a standard deviation of 4.11733. Levene's Test of Equality of Variance was conducted to determine homogeneity of variance ($F = 1.048, p = .333$). The test was not significant so equal variance was assumed. There was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups ($t(9) = 0.975; p = .333$). Again, the outcome of this test showed the control group had a slightly higher gain score, therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis.

This quantitative study used a quasi-experimental nonequivalent pretest- posttest control-group design wanting to determine if a significant difference existed between reading comprehension and fluency scores of fifth grade students after using Reader's Theater and reading comprehension and fluency scores of fifth grade students instructed without Reader's Theater.

Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations for the two groups for both the fluency and comprehension measure. After examining the data, it indicates that the two groups were slightly different on the measures prior to the administration of the treatment, with the group who received Reader's Theater scoring marginally higher on reading comprehension (0.2520 versus 0.2080). In contrast, the group who did not receive Reader's Theater scored slightly higher on fluency (6.2800 versus 5.7200).

Table 1

Descriptives for Comprehension and Fluency Gains for all Fifth Grade Students by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
<u>Comprehension Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	25	0.2520	0.27857	0.05571
control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	25	0.2080	0.11874	0.02375
<u>Fluency Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	25	5.7200	2.95127	0.59025
control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	25	6.2800	3.33567	0.66713

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

A few assumptions were made during the study. First, it was assumed that all students completed the pretest and posttest assessments to the best of their abilities. In addition, it was assumed that students' performances on the pretest and posttest assessments was not altered in any way due to participation in the study. Finally, due to the teaching experience and postgraduate levels of education of all the teachers involved, it was assumed that differences in the classroom teachers did not lead to significant differences among the groups. These assumptions were essential to the meaningfulness of the study; however, the control of these variables was beyond the scope of the study.

Although there were limitations and possible limited generalizability within the proposed study, the study aimed to make a practical contribution to education. The most potential social significance of this research is the benefit that below level readers could achieve from Reader's Theater (Hiebert, 2005; Keehn, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2002).

Additionally, the findings of this study may be significant to others who are interested in the relationship between increasing fluency and comprehension and Reader's Theater. The hope was that this research would provide implementation ideas to teachers who already use Reader's Theater or are considering the use of Reader's Theater in their classrooms. Furthermore, providing research-based information to teachers who are seeking ways of improving their students' reading fluency and/comprehension skills was a desired outcome of this study. The research may help both the students who participated in Reader's Theater activities and the students whose teachers may implement instructional changes as a result of the research, increasing the students' reading fluency and comprehension levels.

The scope of the study was research regarding the possible effects that the weekly use of Reader's Theater might have on students' reading fluency and comprehension. This study was narrowed by the following delimitations:

- The study was a pretest-posttest control comparison group quasi-experimental design with classrooms randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group.
- The implementation was conducted during a 6-week period from pretest and posttest.
- Students' reading comprehension was measured using a single standardized assessment with alternate forms for the pretest and posttest.

- Students' reading fluency was measured using an assessment of oral reading rate and oral reading accuracy using three 1-minute timed readings. Alternate forms was used for the pretest and posttest.

The limitations for this study hindered the generalizability of this study. The limitations included the small sample size (four classrooms), being grade-level specific (fifth-grade students), and using only one school as the research site. The results of this study could be generalized to the research school site and possibly the cluster schools or even possibly the district schools. They cannot be generalized to schools outside the district or in other states. The assumption of homogeneity of variance is an ANOVA assumption that assumes all groups in the study have the same or similar variance. As long as both groups are equal, the ANOVA is robust to the assumption. However, during this study, the homogeneity of variance was disrupted with the small group sizes.

Protection of Participants' Rights

The foremost ethical consideration in the study was the protection of the children involved. Due to the fact the assessments that were used for data collection were components of the classroom instruction each year and considered preexisting data, parental consent was not required. Another ethical consideration in the study dealt with the fact that the research was conducted within the school in which the researcher was employed as fifth grade teacher. Finally, the last ethical consideration involved the scores of the two assessments that were given. The individual records from the DIBELS and STAR reading assessments were shared only with the teachers and parents of the students. These scores were routinely shared with parents at the present study school to

show the progress of the students. Before any data were collected and the study completed, IRB approval was gained to ensure that protection of participants rights are present. I completed the National Institute of Health web-based training course. My certification number is 878066.

Conclusion

This study employed a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design in order to determine whether the weekly use of Reader's Theater will lead to significant increases in fifth-grade students' reading fluency and comprehension levels when compared to fifth-grade students who did not participate weekly in Reader's Theater. A convenience sample of four classrooms was utilized from a single grade K-5 school located in a suburban school district in Georgia. Two classes were randomly assigned to participate weekly in Reader's Theater for 9 weeks, while two classes operated as a control group. Pretest measures provided data regarding the initial reading fluency and comprehension levels of each participant.

The teachers that used Reader's Theater in their classrooms followed a Reader's Theater routine, providing new Reader's Theater scripts to students at the beginning of each week. Posttest data was collected following the 9-week treatment period. Student's scores were calculated based on three aspects of reading: (a) oral reading rate, (b) oral reading accuracy, and (c) reading comprehension. The results of this study helped establish whether the weekly use of Reader's Theater is an effective means of increasing fifth-grade students' reading fluency and comprehension levels. Using Reader's Theater in the classroom boosts students sight word vocabulary and begin to develop the skill to

decode words quickly and accurately (Carrick 2006, 2009). Repeated readings give students the skills needed to read fluently. Reading fluently allows students to spend less time on decoding and increase comprehension (Pikulsi & Chard, 2005).

Section 3 will discuss the project's description and goals, rationale, review of the literature, implementation, evaluation, and implications including social change. Finally, section 4 will reflect on and concludes with project strengths, recommendations for remediation of limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self as scholar, self-practitioner, and project developer, the project's potential impact on social change, and implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this doctoral project study was to address a gap in practice by incorporating a Reader's Theater intervention to increase fluency and comprehension in fifth-grade students. This study was conducted to answer the following guiding questions:

Question 1: What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students?

Question 2: What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

Question 3: What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth-grade students?

Question 4: What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

I hypothesized that using Reader's Theater would have an effect on student's fluency and comprehension with both groups. A pretest-posttest group comparison was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the given variables using two test sets: STAR test (Renaissance Learning, 2003), and the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2000). The sample included 50 fifth-grade students. Results from the analysis of both test sets showed a nonsignificant relationship between the given variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis was confirmed for all research questions. These results may have occurred due to short length of time of the study. There is a possibility that a relationship between the two variables exists, but the study lacked a large enough

sample to confirm this relationship. With a larger population or longer study time, the relationship between the variables may have been shown to be statistically significant.

Furthermore, I conducted a program evaluation based on the outcomes from this doctoral project study. After quantitative data were collected and analyzed, a program evaluation report was written and will be presented to the targeted audience (see Appendix A). Recommendations for future research are discussed. Although the results from the doctoral project study did not support the alternative hypothesis, a continuation of a program evaluation for Reader's Theater was part of this project.

Description and Goals

A "program is a set of specific activities designed for an intended purpose, with quantifiable goals and objectives" (Spaulding, 2008, p. 5). A program evaluation is a process in which a particular program is evaluated and assessed; future implications of the program, modifications, and/or deletions are considered part of the evaluation process (Spaulding, 2008). A program evaluation for this doctoral project includes a study of the effectiveness of using Reader's Theater within the fifth-grade classrooms.

This study was conducted with fifth-grade students in a rural classroom in the Southeastern United States. At the participating elementary school, 25 fifth graders received 9 weeks of Reader's Theater intervention. Reader's Theater is a strategy used to improve fluency through repeated readings of scripts (Corcoran, 2005). Reader's Theater was implemented over the course of 3-4 days, with 10-15 minutes of instruction, practice, or rereading time within each mini lesson.

The goal of this evaluation project was to inform stakeholders about findings of the program evaluation performed with fifth-grade students. I examined the impact of Reader's Theater and considered how it could benefit the reading achievement of fifth-grade students in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. Since the introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2002 and Race to the Top in 2009, Reader's Theater has surfaced as a possible option to meeting increased levels of accountability. Reader's Theater was previously conducted with younger students (Carrick, 2000; Martinez et al., 1999; O'Connor, White, & Swanson 2007; Rasinski, 2000; Wolf, 1999), Title I students (Millin & Rienhart, 1999), and students who are learning disabled from a single special education classroom (Corcoran & Davis, 2005).

Rationale

According to Wholey, Hary, and Newcomer (2010), an "evaluation design identifies what questions will be answered by the evaluation, what data will be collected, how the data will be analyzed to answer the questions," and how the outcomes will direct future application of the program (p. 2). Consequently, a program evaluation addresses the given problem (Wholey et al., 2010). The participating elementary school was struggling to have all students meet or exceed minimum standards on state and local assessments. The participating elementary school also lacked an instructional strategy to help students increase fluency and comprehension. The evaluation report was used as the project to explain the results of the project study and to assist local school stakeholders in making decisions driven by data pertaining to the instructional strategy. The vision of the district that the participating school is in involves a system of world-class schools

operating through data-driven decisions; therefore, any programs that are implemented need to have a high impact on student achievement.

Review of the Literature

Theories and frameworks from new literature and previously referenced literature were used to develop the content of the program evaluation. Databases from Walden University's library were used to search for textbooks and peer-reviewed articles relevant to program evaluation. Databases included ProQuest, EBSCO, and Thoreau. Key search terms included *program evaluation*, *education*, *Reader's Theater*, *fluency*, and *comprehension*.

Reutzel, Petscher, and Spichtig (2012) explained that the current focus of education research is to provide the highest quality reading instruction to students. Program evaluations are used in educational settings to review the effectiveness of an implemented program. Salvin (2008) reported that there are over 35 various types of program evaluations conducted in research, but the most common of these are goals-based evaluations, objectives-based evaluations, and process-based evaluations. Goals-based evaluations are used to measure the degree to which a program is meeting its goals. Objectives-based evaluations are used to determine a specific target or outcome, and process-based evaluations are used to measure the way a program works or operates.

Program evaluation presented in a detailed report is vital to validating research efforts and signifies outcomes achieved were the intentions of the research (Spaulding, 2008). These detailed reports are used to provide information (results) for stakeholders and allow for validation and reflection. The theory for program evaluation includes the

purpose of the study (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). The purpose of program evaluation is different than research (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). According to Spaulding (2008), the purpose of a program evaluation is to examine whether or not a human service program is effective in meeting all defined goals and objectives. Most notably, the value of a program is determined based on how well the program solved important social problems (Langbein, 2012). The effectiveness of a program is presented in a final program evaluation report (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008).

The history of program evaluation includes theories based on experience and social psychology (Langbein, 2012) that have been used over time. The first significant study of program evaluation in education was recorded in the 1940's in *Ralph Tyler's Eight-Year Study* (Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006). Current program evaluations include two types of evaluators (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). One type of evaluator is an internal evaluator, an employee of the organization who conducts the program evaluation (Funnell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The other type of evaluator is an external evaluator, a person hired from outside the organization to conduct the program evaluation (Lodico et al., 2010). Evaluators examine programs by applying evaluation theories, clarifying program activities, assessing goals of the program, and testing proportions (Hassan, 2013).

There is a series of steps recommended for a program evaluation to be successful. These steps include defining program and evaluation goals, identifying stakeholders and their interests, identifying program and evaluation goals, identifying stakeholders and their interests, identifying program components and activities, building a program theory,

analyzing program components and activities, assessing outcomes of program activities, and measuring program effectiveness (Yong-Lyun, 2011). Waters (2011) also suggested a second series of steps to create a successful program evaluation program. Waters suggested that stakeholders should be engaged, the program be described, have a focus on the evaluation design, gather credible evidence, justify conclusions, and ensure use and share lessons learned.

A program evaluation can be used to determine the impact the program has for its stakeholders. There are four program evaluation purposes: program and organizational improvement, oversight and compliance, assessment of merit and worth, and knowledge development (Thyer & Padgett, 2010). Formative and summative data are used to scrutinize purpose, merit, and worth of the program (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). Formative data are collected by the evaluator to examine measures taken during the implementation of the program, which allows changes to be made to the program based on the findings. Summative data are collected at the end of the program by the evaluator to examine the impact of the program (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008).

Teacher Professional Development

Ongoing teacher professional development is a method used to train and instruct classroom teachers on best practices and instructional strategies. The National Education Association (2011) explained one of the most important factors to children's reading success is their teacher. To improve student achievement in reading and assist struggling readers, classroom teachers should attend professional development geared to the specific instruction of reading skills. Swerling and Cheesnab (2012) stated that teacher

effectiveness is best cultivated through professional development that involves pedagogical content for teaching reading. Through collaboration and skill development, teachers can improve their craft and acquire instructional strategies that can be used to improve the reading skills of students. “Professional development allows teachers to collaborate and develop a consistency within their teaching to enhance student learning” (Ardenne et al., 2013, p. 145). Practices of classroom teachers can be improved via professional development in order to aid in student reading achievement.

As noted earlier, research has shown there is gap in practice regarding an intervention used to increase fluency and comprehension. Therefore, this project included a program evaluation report of using Reader’s Theater as an instructional strategy. The proposed project evaluation report included findings and recommendations to the stakeholders of this study, including classroom teachers and administration (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). Guidelines include obtaining approval to present the research, reporting results simply and clearly, focusing on the outcome of the statistical test, and submitting suggestions for implementation in a timely manner (Creswell, 2012). The results from the pre- and posttest suggested that using Reader’s Theater will help students increase fluency but not comprehension. Reading comprehension did not improve for the experimental groups. Instead, gains were made with the control group. One possible explanation is that Reader’s Theater did not affect reading comprehension due to the nature of the repeated reading process, which primarily affects fluency. Reader’s Theater performances encourage students to read at an appropriate rate, which is one aspect of proper oral fluency. Reader’s Theater is an oral

reading activity conducted in a nonthreatening environment that gives students a chance to practice reading. Students are assigned a part of a script to read repeatedly for a performance that will occur at a later time in front of an audience. The rereading of the scripts helps increase students' reading rate and automaticity while encouraging students who are reluctant to read (Moran, 2006). With the focus on fluency through repeated reading, comprehension may be neglected. It may be assumed that if a child is reading fluently, comprehension is present.

Additionally, the random assignment of students within classrooms could have led to unequal student achievement levels. For instance, the control group could have had high achieving students compared to the experimental group. When students are placed in classrooms prior to the beginning of the school year, overall student academic performance is considered. This means that one class could have had more students who were on grade level or below grade level. Considering these possibilities, I recommended that teachers use Reader's Theater to increase students' fluency, but use a separate instructional strategy to increase students' comprehension (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008).

Project Description

For educators to review and consider the findings of the present study, those findings need to be made available. Without significance in the results, I presented the study's findings and recommendations in a program evaluation report. The benefits of weekly Reader's Theater should be available for all educators and administrators. Gaining knowledge regarding possible benefits and limitations of this study will enable

educators to choose Reader's Theater or consider future research possibilities. While a significant difference was not observed between the given variables, a program evaluation report will help to determine the future of the given program by presenting findings from the study (Lodico et al., 2010). The recommendation for the project is continuing to use Reader's Theater in fifth-grade classrooms as a means of increasing students' fluency.

Findings from the study were typed using a word processing program. A final summative report included program evaluation outcomes (Hassan, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). Summative findings for the program evaluation included student scores before and after the implementation of 9 weeks of Reader's Theater. The report included a cover page, an executive summary, an introduction, methods used, and the body of the report (Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1987). The program evaluation report, in addition to a PowerPoint presentation, will be shared with the stakeholders. This report will be shared with the targeted audience through a formal program evaluation report during a specific time designated by administration of the participating school.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Potential resources and existing supports for this proposed program evaluation include all community stakeholders such as administration, staff members, parents, students, and community members. Specifically, fifth-grade teachers who are willing to implement Reader's Theater in their classroom would be an existing support for this project. Additionally, stakeholders may act as potential support resources for implementation of Reader's Theater.

Potential Barriers

The biggest potential barrier for this project may be the lack of interest from teachers. Teachers may not want another strategy to use when teaching reading comprehension and fluency. Some teachers may feel that strategies they are currently using in their classroom are working. Another barrier for sharing the program evaluation will be finding one time for all stakeholders to come together

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The evaluation report will be presented to the principal when this study is complete and approved. The principal will schedule a time for a meeting in which the researcher will present the report and the findings during the beginning of the 201-2016 school year. Once this occurs, the researcher will share the findings during a professional development day during the first 6 weeks of school. The researcher will be available for all questions and any other information that is needed. Additionally, the researcher will share the report and results with any other invested parties.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The roles and responsibilities pertaining to this program evaluation include many stakeholders within the research school. The researcher was responsible for collecting and analyzing data, creating the program evaluation report, and organizing training for teachers who want to use Reader's Theater in their classroom. Additionally, the researcher's role in this project was to prepare and deliver the evaluation report as well as answer all questions related to the project and reporting to the administrative team of the local school. Classroom teachers will become responsible for reading the report and

attending a meeting regarding the program evaluation. Administration will be responsible for sharing research results with staff, as well as ensuring that teachers are using Reader's Theater correctly in the classrooms. Should the administrative team choose to pursue the listed recommendations, the researcher would actively participate in the implementation.

Project Evaluation

Reutzel, Petscher, and Spichtig (2012) explain that the current focus of education research is to provide the highest quality reading instruction to students. The project evaluation plan was goals-based to determine the effectiveness of the program and its goal to raise student achievement in reading. The participating school lacked any current and relevant research data pertaining to Reader's Theater and its effectiveness of increasing fluency and comprehension. The administration team at the participating elementary school was given the data to make informed, data driven, and goals based decisions concerning young students and their reading achievement.

Evaluation reports exist to provide data and conclusions following a program evaluation. Giustini (2012) explains that this type of literature is not part of a traditional publishing cycle and is often used in research groups, universities, and government agencies. This project was prepared for the local school principal and administrative team. Mathews (2004) reported that evaluation reports could be utilized in an educational setting to enhance teaching and learning. This evaluation report project was utilized as a project to report the educational research findings in response to the local school reading problem and to inform school administrative leaders of the current evaluation data and present them with findings and recommendations.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

While there was not a significant increase in comprehension, there is potential social significance from this research. Low level students have the possibility to achieve from repeated reading fluency instruction, Reader's Theater (Hiebert, 2005; Keehn, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2002). Additionally, it will provide administrators with statistical data to determine if Reader's Theater should be implemented throughout the school. Finally, it will provide research-based information to teachers who are seeking ways of improving their students' reading fluency and/or comprehension skills. With the previous national educational programs (No Child Left Behind, 2002; Race to the Top, 2009), educators were encouraged to try research-based strategies that are effective in increasing student achievement. One such reading strategy researchers have identified as effective is Reader's Theater (Rasinski, 2006; Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007; Worthy & Prater, 2002). Upon completion of my study which showed an increase in comprehension for fifth grade students, changes have taken place within the school. Administration seem interested in using Reader's Theater as an instructional intervention by learning how to use the strategy and implementation in the classroom. A few of the teachers on the grade level started using Reader's Theater with students and saw positive results in reading comprehension, motivation, and overall reading achievement. Because the Reader's Theater strategy is showing positive results in reading and all students are expected to read on or above grade level by the next few years, my Administration team requested that I present using Reader's Theater as a strategy to my colleagues.

Reader's Theater encourages students to become life-long readers and enables readers to enjoy reading in a non-threatening environment. It promotes students to listen to and enjoy the written word, as well as providing an opportunity for non-proficient and proficient readers to work together.

Far-Reaching

In order to promote social change, reading interventions such as Reader's Theater lends itself to such a purpose so that reading proficiency can be accomplished. This project contributes to the existing body of knowledge concerning early reading intervention. Struggling readers is a problem that reaches across the United States and is making a large impact on the society. According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003), 34 million adults function at below basic literacy levels, meaning they are unable to complete simple literacy tasks such as filling out a job application, fill out a deposit slip or read a prescription label. National legislation has passed many regulations to facilitate movement in this academic crisis. This doctoral project is applicable at levels beyond the local research site. It provides an instructional strategy that addresses an instructional concern of increasing student achievement as initiated by NCLB (2001). Therefore, this project may lead to creating professional development for classroom teachers. Additionally, this project may spark interest in conducting further research in other grade levels in order to see if starting in earlier grades would benefit fifth-grade students with a positive outcome.

Additionally, recommendations in order to improve student learning and achievement are provided. With this information, stakeholders can make more data-

driven and informed decisions concerning the Reader's Theater strategy, possible expansion of the strategy, and increased staff development for regular classroom teachers to begin to implement the specific intervention strategies in their classroom to further each struggling readers. Gullo (2013) explains that data-driven decision making can be a powerful tool for revealing needed change, and for questioning long-held assumptions, as well as for facilitating communication with and among students, families and other colleague. If regular classroom teachers experience professional development and training concerning the intervention strategies the potential increases to each a larger number of struggling students. Classrooms teachers could be trained on the intervention and their implementation in the classrooms and could utilize this strategy.

Conclusion

This doctoral project study includes an outcome-based program evaluation based on the hypothesis that there will be a positive relationship between Reader's Theater and fluency and comprehension. A dissemination of finding and recommendations will be presented in a final program evaluation report to stakeholders. Section 3 included a description of the project, goals of the project, a rationale for the project, review of current literature, evaluation, and implication for change. Section 4 will include the project strengths, recommendation for the remediation, limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. It will also include a personal reflection, analysis of self as a scholar, self-practitioner, project developer, the project's potential impact on social change, and future implications for research pertaining to the project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This doctoral project study was designed to address a noted problem in fifth-grade classes at the research site: students not comprehending text and therefore not meeting local, state, and national standards. The study included a 9-week Reader's Theater intervention at the fifth-grade level. I hypothesized that Reader's Theater would have an effect on student academic outcomes. A quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group research design was used for this project study, and the method included a one-way *t* test. The *t* test was used to compare the means of the given variables: the effect of the Reader's Theater intervention on student reading fluency and comprehension scores. A quasi-experimental study was conducted, and findings and recommendations were presented to all stakeholders.

In reflection, this doctoral project study has taught me to recognize the significance of becoming a scholar-practitioner with a focus on research and evidence-based practices. It has helped me become a teacher leader within my school and community, while learning how to identify a local problem, conduct research, design a research study, and apply educational theories and practices to curriculum activities, projects, and assessments.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of the Project

The project included the evaluation of data from the testing of a fifth-grade reading intervention strategy. A strength of this project was identifying the local problem:

fifth-grade students not comprehending text and therefore not meeting local, state, and national standards. Cullinan (2013) reported that students who are not reading proficiently by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of school. Administrators within the school were provided with current data concerning the instructional strategy and its impact on student reading achievement from the evaluation. Data-driven decisions made by local stakeholders add strength to the project. “The participating school strives to become a more data-driven school and make all educational decisions based on current data” (L. Moore, personal communication, August 27, 2014).

Integrating research on program evaluation reports and needs assessments (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010; Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Patel, 2010) with quantitative research methods (Creswell, 2008, 2009; Lodico et al., 2006, 2010), I composed a program evaluation report. The report outlined the need for additional reading support in the fifth-grade classrooms to help the local school meet expectations set forth by local, state, and national governing bodies. The quantitative data from this report came from pre- and posttest scores in reading fluency and comprehension given to fifth-grade students at the local school. Support of the project from administration and staff at the local school was an additional strength. The administrators supported the review of the instructional strategy and intend to use the evaluation report to guide them in making the best instructional decisions.

Another strength of this project study was the recommendation of staff development in implementing the Reader’s Theater instructional strategy within the fifth

grade and possibly other grade levels. If teachers are enabled with tools that can be used in the classroom to increase reading fluency and comprehension, then more students can be positively impacted.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The program evaluation faced limitations that could be improved. One limitation was the sample size. The study was conducted in two fifth-grade classrooms in which students were randomly placed at the beginning of the year. The size, convenience, and homogeneity of the sample limited the generalizability of this study. One way to address this limitation is to complete additional studies using a larger sample size.

Another limitation was the teaching strategies and methods used by the classroom teachers. It is impossible to have each teacher teach in the same manner and with the same enthusiasm. Additionally, teachers may not have had the same amount of knowledge of the Reader's Theater strategy. These differences may have impacted the outcome of assessments given in the posttest. To promote best methods and practices, it is recommended that classroom teachers attend professional development with instructional strategy as the focus.

Another limitation was the amount of time spent on the Reader's Theater scripts outside of the classroom. The amount of time a student practiced a script outside of classroom time would affect how quickly he/she learned lines, therefore affecting fluency. This limitation was beyond my control because I was not the classroom teacher in this research project. This limitation could be remedied by ensuring that each teacher is using Reader's Theater for a specified amount of time each day.

A final limitation is with the evaluation report and the implementation section. The local school currently does not have extra financial resources to implement the recommendations within the report. This limitation could be remedied by allotting money each year specifically for implementation of the Reader's Theater in the classrooms.

Recommendations of Alternative Approaches

This study focused on using a strategy to teach fluency and comprehension. The purpose of the study was to determine whether using Reader's Theater would increase fluency and comprehension. An alternative approach to address students performing below grade level might be to use the local school language arts program that has been adopted at the county level. A component of this program is teaching comprehension through the basal reader. Additionally, a separate fluency program could be adopted to teach and assess student fluency.

As the results of this study showed, Reader's Theater may improve fluency but not comprehension. Another approach would be to continue using Reader's Theater to assess its impact on fluency alone. Additionally, local schools could seek a strategy that would focus on comprehension only.

A final recommendation for this project would be to survey the teachers and get their perspective on how reading fluency and comprehension should be taught in the classroom. Asking teachers for their input and making changes based on that input could create buy in from across the school.

Scholarship

This research project has been a complex and lengthy process. It has been an experience beyond anything that I have experienced as a classroom teacher. I have gained a profound respect for those who are involved in educational research trying to promote the academic success of children. However, this process did not come without challenges. In the beginning, I had to learn about scholarly, scientific writing while learning the methods of quality research. While spending time completing this research project, I have gained a deeper level of knowledge and moved away from the simple description and recall of information. I have used mathematical steps to present a problem, synthesize information from multiple sources, and analyze data from this study.

Finally, during this process I have learned to become a scholarly practitioner within my classroom. I have taken the information that I gained from this research project and applied it in my classroom to create a better learning environment for my students.

Project Development and Evaluation

The project development and evaluation was driven by existing literature and my passion for finding ways to involve students in their own learning. I was able to identify and apply the steps needed to design a project study that would address a local problem. I identified a need for an intervention at my local school; researched the problem at the local, state, and national levels; proposed an initial study; and then collected and analyzed data. I will present the results to the stakeholders in the form of a program evaluation report (2014-2015). I referred to the 10 steps recommended for research: select a topic, review the relevant literature, define a research question, develop a research hypothesis,

select and assign participants to groups, select measurement instruments, define and administer experimental treatments, collect and analyze data, make a decision about the hypothesis, and formulate conclusions (Lodico et al., 2010).

The program development for this project study was a complex process. I had to revisit, reevaluate, research, and rewrite many parts of the study before my project study reflected scholarly writing. First, when reviewing relevant literature, I found that research involving Reader's Theater was outdated and was limited to the time period around the implementation of NCLB (2001). This proved to be a challenge because the criteria for a doctoral study include reference to studies published within the past 5 years. Second, the process of gaining approval from the URR was challenging. After many months of working with my committee to rework and rewrite many parts of my study, I received word that I had a new committee member. I then had to go back and rework and rewrite sections. In spite of the many months of developing my project study, this process has taught me patience, perseverance, and application of scholarly writing.

Leadership and Change

Throughout this process, I realized how this doctoral project study might be used to implement change in my local school and district. With this insight, I learned that change would need to be a team effort and involve more than just administration. School improvement can no longer be achieved by the principal alone (Adams, Morehead, & Sledge, 2009). Providing all stakeholders with a safe and nonthreatening environment to share ideas and suggestions is important in creating change.

Leadership within schools exists at all levels. Leadership should follow the following steps: think long term; relate current programs and events to global trends; reach and influence constituents all over the world; put heavy emphasis on visions, values, and motivation; and possess political skills to cope with conflict (Jossey-Bass, 2007). A program evaluation report incorporated many of these leadership characteristics by using the program evaluation design to implement a strategy that will contribute to social change at the local level. Allowing everyone to be involved in decision making may create more effective teaching and in turn better readers.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer

The process of becoming a scholar-practitioner involves learning and applying new skills to practice (Coleman & Alford, 2007; Walden University). This doctoral project study was developed using acquired and applied practices pertinent to good scholarship.. Walden University has enabled me to develop skills for effective scholarship through practiced writings and projects (Walden University, n.d.). Through my time spent on my research project, I developed on the scholarly level by learning how to conduct purposeful and meaningful research. My knowledge expanded through the use of the Walden library by having access to scholarly studies and literature pertaining to my topic. Through the process of research, I was able to answer my research questions. Finally, I have learned that I can use scholarly methods to collect data to drive my instructional practices. By using data-driven instruction, I can positively impact my students' learning.

As a practitioner, my ultimate goal is to improve and add to my educational practices. I am encouraged to investigate important problems and disseminate research results to stakeholders. Additionally, I am challenged to work with others to take research findings and implement them within my educational setting. From this research, I must take the outcomes and use them to support my students as they become better readers. Throughout my doctoral studies, I have incorporated scholarly learning, practice, and leadership to understand my students' needs and make a positive impact in their lives.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This doctoral project study was designed to address a problem regarding low levels of reading fluency and comprehension among fifth-grade students. The data was collected with the intention of having a positive impact on student reading achievement and future academic success. Through evaluation of data, an evaluation report was created that will allow the school administration team to become informed decision makers.

Through the evolving educational policies at the local, state, and national level, reading remains as an important priority. The National Assessments of Adult Literacy (2012) explained that 22% of citizens lack basic fundamental reading skills. Low literacy students can often fall into a cycle of becoming illiterate family members. According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009), fourth graders who were not on grade level in reading had parents who were also behind in reading achievement. The lack of basic reading skills is not only a local problem, but a global one as well.

Positive social change implications from this project included creating awareness of the fact that not all students are successful readers when leaving elementary school. The long-term effects from this project may include knowledge and data that will be useful for reaching students who are unable to read on grade level and improve their reading ability. The implications for social change may begin at the local level and continue into helping students become lifelong learners and powerful contributors to their future.

Social change can occur when individuals work together to make an impact in any given arena. Educators along with administrators may strive to work toward creating lifelong learners and contributing members of society. Through Walden University's doctoral teacher leadership program, I have gained a deeper understanding of social change through my scholarly practice and research. Throughout the process of this doctoral project study, I have learned how to design a project study that will help to drive social change within my career, my community, and myself.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Struggling readers will continue to require best practices to improve their skills. Creating students who are successful and productive members of society is a goal of all educational stakeholders. From NCLB (2002), RTTT (2010), to the most current legislation, Common Core (2013), the goal has been to educate students who are college and career ready. In order for this to occur, students must demonstrate a strong foundation of literacy skills.

Implications, applications, and directions for future research include the dissemination of findings from the program evaluation to the targeted audience (Lodico et al., 2010; Spaulding, 2008). From the findings of this study, recommendations will be presented to all stakeholders in the form of a final program evaluation report. After examination of the evaluation, future recommendations for research will be considered and may include future program evaluation studies. Possible effects from the program evaluation could include the continuation of the Reader's Theater strategy in not only fifth-grade, but also fourth grade. Additionally, teacher training might be a possible effect from the program evaluation. Teacher training would include professional development opportunities for using Reader's Theater effectively. Future implications may include studies that focus on the effectiveness of other research-based practices whereas; the findings may include practices and activities that could be added to strategies that increase reading ability among students.

Conclusion

This doctoral project study was designed to examine the effects of Reader's Theater on reading fluency and comprehension of fifth grade students. Teachers need to be knowledgeable about current research that supports best practices. With the newest educational legislation (Common Core, 2013), reading standards have become more rigorous; therefore, can lead to additional students not being proficient readers. The local school implements strategies that deem to provide positive results among students. This project study and program evaluation report stemmed from finding a strategy that would allow students to become proficient readers.

Reader's Theater did not have a positive effect on student outcomes as hypothesized. In this particular study, Reader's Theater did not prove to be an effective strategy to increase comprehension. The control group showed a higher gain in fluency than those that received the Reader's Theater treatment. However, it is hypothesized that with the implementation of possible recommended strategy modifications, Reader's Theater may have a significant effect on student academic outcomes. In order for stakeholders to become effective leaders and classroom supporters, evaluation of the intervention is necessary for decisions to be made based on current and relevant data.

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Appendix A: Summative Evaluation Report

**Readers' Theater as a Strategy to Increase Reading Comprehension and Fluency in
Fifth Grade Students**

**Project Summary Report
Ashley Black**

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Introduction

Why is reading important? Reading is essential to function in society. For adults, being able to read is crucial in finding a good job, filling out forms, reading road signs, and being effective in everyday life. For children, learning to read helps spelling, develops imagination, creates good self-image, and produces productive adults in society (Hagman, Luschen, & Reid, 2010). Allington and Gabriel (2012) stated that creating every child to be a reader is a goal of classroom instruction, educational research, and educational governmental reforms. When children do not become a reader, they often are placed in special education classes and remain there through high school and perhaps not graduate (Voices for Virginia's Children, 2010). Attention to underachieving students is paramount, as these students are in jeopardy of remaining limited in their reading comprehension, thus facing future academic and workplace failures. Many studies emphasize Reader's Theater as a strategy that has a positive impact in raising student's reading fluency rates and comprehension levels (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, 2004; Martines et al., 1999; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Sindelar et., 1990).

Evidence of the Local Problem

There were two concerns at the local that guided this research. The first being that by the end of the 2013-2014 school year, all students would be proficient in math and English. The second concern was in order to be in good standing with AYP, the local school must improve all student test scores. Accordingly, with the two government educational initiatives, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) and

the high district standards, the local school had to increase the number of students who exceeded standards, while having not students in the “does not meet” category.

While the data for the local school does not seem to show many failing students, the fact remains that 3% of the student population did not meet standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Additionally, the local classroom data shows students are not fluent (L. Moore, personal communication, November 4, 213). When disaggregating the data, 16% of students with disabilities did not meeting expectations, thus not meeting standards. This subgroup of students include those with a specific learning disability in reading. While the local school had majority of its students meet or exceed reading standards, it fell short of meeting the criteria set forth by NCLB 2014, of having *all* students meet or exceed standards.

Research Questions

In order for students to have and maintain a successful school career, it is important that reading skills are achieved beginning in elementary school. Concepts within content areas will be easier to master if fluency and comprehension are mastered (Literacy First, 2001). It is with this knowledge that that the following research questions were explored:

Research Question 1

What are the effects of Reader’s Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students?

Research Question 2

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on reading comprehension among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

Research Question 3

What are the effects of Reader's Theater on fluency rates among fifth-grade students?

Research Question 4

What are the effects of Reader's Theater of fluency among fifth-grade students with disabilities?

Repeated Reading

Repeated reading is a strategy designed to increase reading fluency and comprehension while reading. This strategy was created to help students are unable to read fluently gain the confidence and be able to process what is being read. There are many techniques used in repeated readings, but all focus on building fluency.

During repeated reading, students read and re-read a passage. This method was designed to help students who have little to no experience with reading fluently to gain confidence, speed and process words automatically (Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates some of the significant outcomes of using repeated reading according to Dowhower (as cited in Rasinski, 2003).

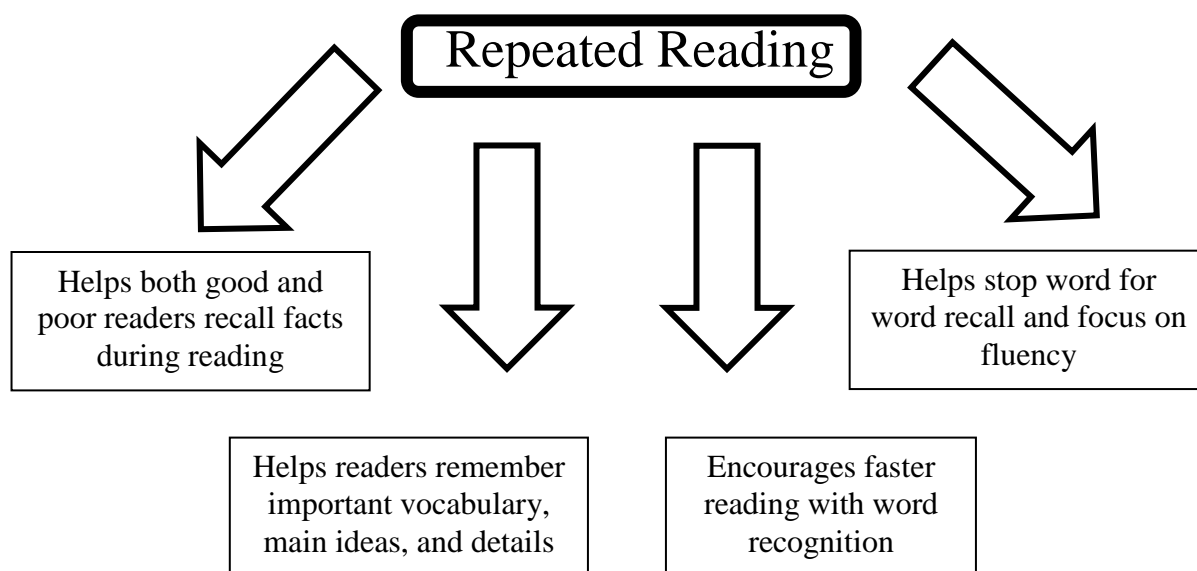


Figure 1. Illustration of some significant outcomes of using repeated reading according to Dowhower (as cited in Rasinski, 2003).

Additionally, there are a couple of other key details that if done in conjunction with repeated readings, will help increase students fluency. Teachers need to increase student's site word vocabulary, and ensure that students are reading with appropriate grade level and reading level text (Swain, Leader-Janssen, & Conley, 2013). The significance of repeated reading reveals its self when a student moves on to a new (not previously read) passage. The hope is that what students learn in the time spent during repeated readings, will carry over to new passages in both academic and pleasure reading.

Reader's Theater

Reader's Theater helps to develop fluency through repeated exposure to text. Reader's Theater engages students and increases reading motivation while students perform a given text (Kellen, 2014). Scripts can be student generated,

found within other text, found in poetry, or nonfiction text. Reader's Theater provides students a risk free environment to practice text by rereading and rehearsing particular sections of the text. This repeated practice and reading helps students' correct mistakes and provides support while increasing fluency and accuracy (Samuels, 1997, 2007). Students practice scripts then perform in front of an audience while reading from the script. Students do not memorize text and use very little props (Mraz, et. al, 2013).

There are several suggestions for teachers in order to incorporate Reader's Theater successfully in the classroom. The first suggestion is to choose scripts that are fun and have lots of dialogue between students. Next is to ensure students have enough time to practice and feel comfortable performing for others. Reader's Theater is not a strategy that should be implemented in just a couple of days. Support should be given to students in small groups or on an individual basis for new vocabulary and checking for understanding of text. Finally, teachers should model each role as it should be read in order for students to hear it correctly (Young & Nageldiner, 2014).

Data Collection

Both DIBELS and STAR tests were used as pretests and posttests. With the use of existing data, pretest scores for both tests were produced. The DIBELS test was administered to students individually by each classroom teacher, while the STAR test was given in a group setting using the computer lab at the beginning of the school year. After 9 weeks of instructions using Reader's Theater for the experimental group,

posttests were administered. The posttest was administered under the same conditions as the pretest.

Since this study took place during the second half of the school year, students reading comprehension score must fall between 5.0-5.9 in order to be reading at the appropriate reading level. For the purpose of this study, if a student fell more than one full grade level (GE) below the expected range (i.e., $GE < 4.9$) this student was described as below level in reading. Consequently, any student who was more than one full grade level above the expected range (i.e., $GE > 6.0$) was described as above level in reading. Just as preexisting fluency data was used with the pretest, STAR pretest data was preexisting also, taken at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. The instructional reading level (IRL) score for each student was derived from the STAR reading test and used to rank students as below-level, on-level, or above-level readers.

Results of Data

Student data from the DIBELS and Star test were analyzed in order to determine if there was an increase in fluency and comprehension between pre and posttest. Tables 1 and 2 show the results that were obtained. When looking at reading comprehension scores for fifth-grade students who participated in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students who did not participate in Reader's Theater, there was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups. Although a significant difference was not found, a gain was made in reading comprehension among students who participated in Reader's Theater on a weekly basis. Additionally, when looking at the

fluency levels of fifth-grade students who participated in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade

Table 1

Descriptives for Comprehension and Fluency Gains for All Fifth-Grade Students by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
<u>Comprehension Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	25	0.2520	0.27857	0.05571
control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	25	0.2080	0.11874	0.02375
<u>Fluency Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	25	5.7200	2.95127	0.59025
control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	25	6.2800	3.33567	0.66713

Table 2

Descriptives for Comprehension and Fluency Gains for Students with Disabilities by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
<u>Comprehension Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	4	0.4000	0.31623	0.15811
control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	7	0.2429	0.09759	0.03689
<u>Fluency Gain</u>				
treatment (received Reader's Theater)	4	7.5000	2.08167	1.04083

control group (did not receive Reader's Theater)	7	7.5714	4.11733	1.55620
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students who did not participate in Reader's Theater, there was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups, meaning the control group had a higher gain score.

When looking at reading comprehension scores for fifth-grade students with disabilities who participated in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students with disabilities who did not participate in Reader's Theater, the treatment group had a higher mean score. Although a significant difference was not found, a gain was made in reading comprehension among students with disabilities who participated in Reader's Theater on a weekly basis. Additionally, when looking at the fluency levels of fifth-grade students with disabilities who participated in Reader's Theater and fifth-grade students with disabilities who did not participate in Reader's Theater, there was not a statistically significant difference in gain score among the groups, but the control group had a slightly higher gain score.

Explanation of Results

When Reader's Theater was initially implemented in the classrooms of fifth-grade students, it was done with a teacher who already used Reader's Theater. No directions or instructions were given to the teacher as how to conduct Reader's Theater. Posttest data was collected following a 9-week treatment period. The pre and posttest for comprehension and fluency were already used in the classroom as an assessment tool. Student scores were calculated based on three aspects of reading: (a) oral reading rate, (b) oral reading accuracy, and (c) reading comprehension.

The results of this study helped establish whether the use of weekly Reader's Theater is an effective means of increasing fifth-grade students' reading fluency and comprehension levels. The results from the pre and posttest suggest that using Reader's Theater will help students increase fluency rates. Figure 2 depicts a visual representation of the potential outcomes of implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom (Lom, 2012; Roe, Smith, & Burns, 2011).

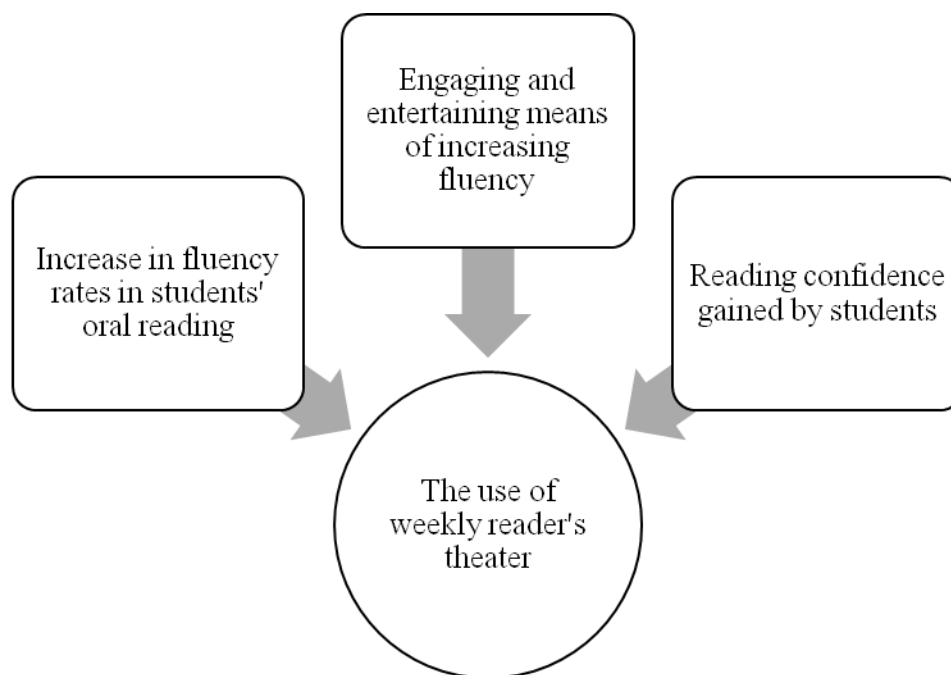


Figure 2. Visual representation of the potential outcomes of implementing Reader's Theater in the classroom.

Considerations When Interpreting Data

When reviewing the results of the data, there are several factors that should be taken in to consideration before determining if Reader's Theater should be implemented in the classrooms of all fifth-grade students. Figure 3 gives a visual representation of possible contributing factors to consider when interpreting the data. These include such

things as amount of time Reader's Theater was implemented in the classroom, attendance of students and teacher, attitude of students that participated in Reader's Theater, and reading levels for students prior to implementation.

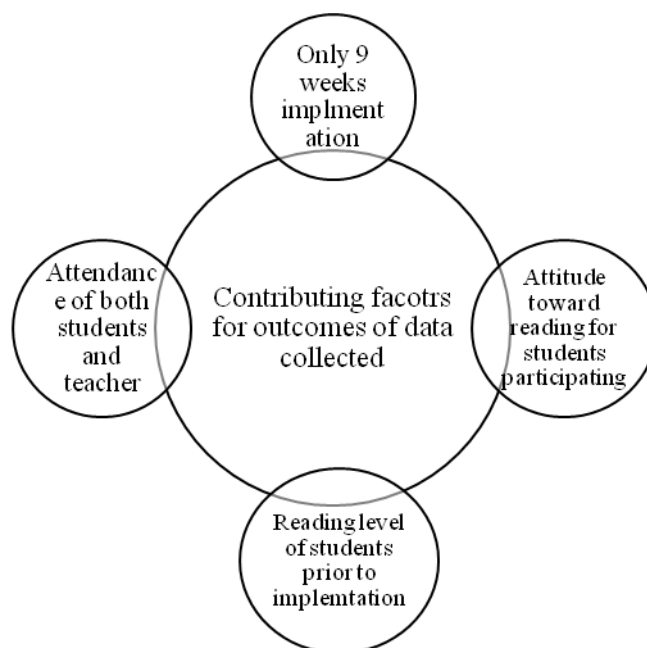


Figure 3. Visual representation of possible contributing factors to consider when interpreting the data.

This project was implemented for a 9-week time period. This is a short time period over the course of a year. Attendance of the students is another important factor since they are unable to practice and participate in Reader's Theater when they are not present in the classroom. Additionally, teacher attendance is also important since little instruction and feedback can be given by a substitute teacher. Student attitude toward reading can be a factor when taking pre and posttest data. If students feel reading is not important or are poor readers, then the outcome of the pre and posttest can show little or no growth. Prior reading levels of students is an additional factor to consider when

looking at the results. Gains made by students may depend on how well they read prior to implementation of Reader's Theater. Finally, in addition to those factors listed in Figure 3, another factor to be considered is the number of students that participated. This study was done with fifty fifth grade students, a small population of the entire grade level.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, it is recommended that classrooms use Reader's Theater as a means for students to increase fluency. It is also a recommendation that an additional instructional strategy be used to increase comprehension. It is also recommended that all fifth-grade classrooms begin using Reader's Theater during the 2015-2016 school year. It will also be beneficial if fourth-grade classrooms implement Reader's Theater as well. This would give students a foundation of Reader's Theater and allow more instructional focus, rather than procedural, using Reader's Theater during fifth-grade.

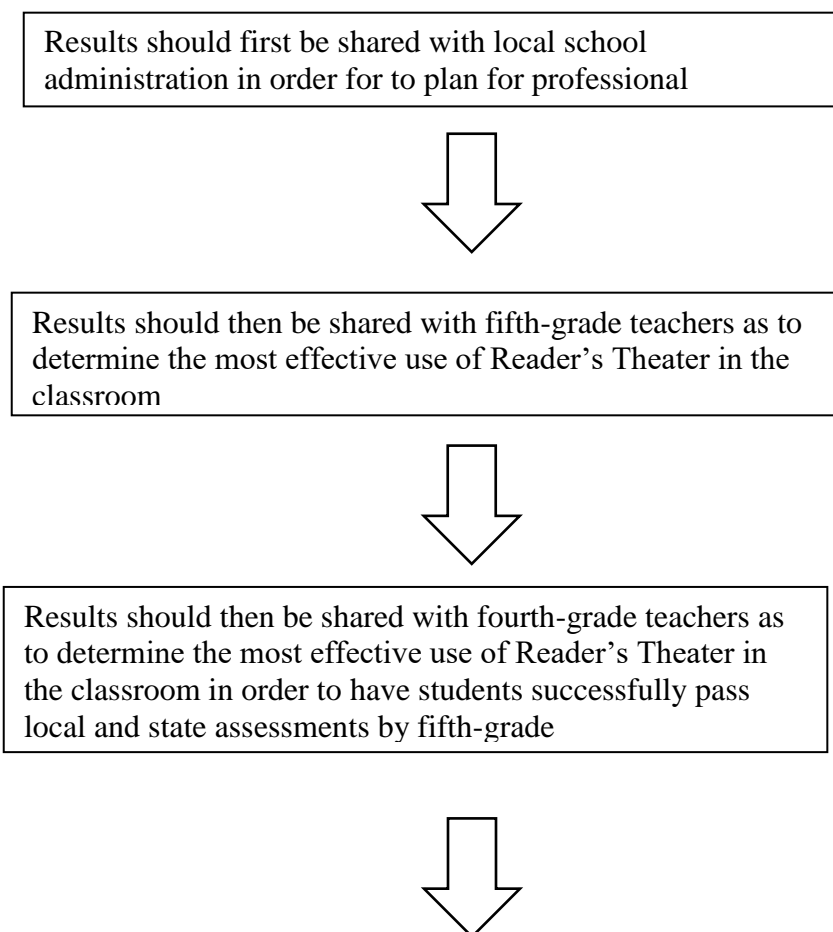
After implementation of Reader's Theater in fourth and fifth grade during the next school year, it is recommended that another round of assessments be conducted to determine the effectiveness of Reader's Theater. This assessment will allow for the stakeholder to see any additional benefits and make additional decisions. If a positive outcome is gained for the additional round of assessments, it is recommended that the findings be shared with the district office and additional training be given throughout the district.

These recommendations are being made due to the fact that after analyzing the pre and post data scores, it was found that an additional strategy is needed to increase

comprehension among students. An additional round of pre and posttest data would need to be collected. Educators are charged with the task of using strategies that are driven by data.

Sharing Data

When administration has received and reviewed the evaluation report, it is important to share this information with the entire school staff. It is recommended that these results should be disseminated in a purposeful manner as to address the greatest population of students first. Using evaluation methods to better understand the intervention strategy allows those making decisions to be well informed and make choices based on relevant data. Figure 4 displays a framework of order in which particular stakeholders should receive the results.



Results should then be shared with all staff as to determine how to use Reader's Theater in classrooms to ensure students are successful on all reading assessments.

Figure 4. Framework of order in which particular stakeholders should receive the results.

Justification for Continued Implementation

Building fluency is a major directive set forth in *Reading First*, part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). Literature published by the U.S. Department of Education entitled *Put Reading first*, (2001), states that "Readers' theatre provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. RT also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing."

In Kindergarten through fifth grade, the foundational skills set forth by Common Core, require students to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension (Common Core, 2012). Reader's Theater also involves active participation, rather than allowing a student be a passive learner. Reader's Theater lends itself to having students become a part of their learning.

One final justification for continued implementation is the fact that there is very little financial support needed to use Reader's Theater. Scripts can be found on the internet, within textbook, or written by teachers or students. This does mean that teachers will need to put forth the time in finding scripts that are on reading levels of the students and that are rich in language. Additionally, the assessment tools to collect data are already provided by the school, therefore, no additional resources will be needed in collecting data.

Conclusions

Although results of this study showed that Reader's Theater positively impacted student's reading fluency and not comprehension, the recommendation is to continue implementation of the Reader's Theater. The hope is that with time and focus on implementation, Reader's Theater will show students with a higher fluency rate and successfully pass all reading assessments. It is also anticipated that students will begin to show a more positive attitude toward reading.

Learning to read is vital for children to be successful not only in the classroom, but in life. It is my hope that this study leads to increase focus on reading comprehension and fluency strategies in order to help students improve their reading skills. I encourage teachers to find ways to increase fluency and comprehension among their students in such as the one that was described in this study.

Appendix B

Data Usage Agreement

DATA USE AGREEMENT

This Data Use Agreement ("Agreement"), effective as of 02/09/15 ("Effective Date"), is entered into by and between Ashley Black ("Data Recipient") and Dacula Elementary ("Data Provider"). The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set ("LDS") for use in research **in accord with laws and regulations of the governing bodies associated with the Data Provider, Data Recipient, and Data Recipient's educational program.** In the case of a discrepancy among laws, the agreement shall follow whichever law is more strict.

1. **Definitions.** Due to the study's affiliation with Laureate, a USA-based company, unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the USA "HIPAA Regulations" and/or "FERPA Regulations" codified in the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.
2. **Preparation of the LDS.** Data Provider shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable laws and regulations of the governing bodies associated with the Data Provider, Data Recipient, and Data Recipient's educational program.
3. **Data Fields in the LDS.** **No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS).** In preparing the LDS, Data Provider shall include the **data fields specified as follows**, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research: Reading and fluency levels of students in 5th grade (Dr. Jody Reid's team)
4. **Responsibilities of Data Recipient.** Data Recipient agrees to:
 - a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;
 - b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
 - c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
 - d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and
 - e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.

6. Term and Termination.

- a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.
- b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.
- c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.
- d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.
- e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.

7. Miscellaneous.

- a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.
- b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.
- c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

- d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.
- e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER**DATA RECIPIENT**

Signed: Mary Lou Enright
Print Name: Mary Lou Enright
Print Title: Principal

Signed: Ashley Black
Print Name: Ashley Black
Print Title: Researcher

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