Implementing Readers Theatre as an Approach to Classroom Fluency Instruction

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Readers Theatre can create an academic avenue that leads to increased reading fluency, regardless of whether students are striving or thriving.

With the report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000), reading fluency has once again, after a long absence (Rasinski, 2003), become a critical goal in the elementary reading curriculum. Most literacy scholars define reading fluency as the ability to read the words in a text with sufficient accuracy, automaticity, and prosody to lead to good comprehension (Rasinski, 2006). *Accuracy* in word recognition refers to readers' ability to read the words in a text without error in pronunciation. *Automaticity* refers to the ability of proficient readers to read the words in a text correctly and effortlessly so that they may use their finite cognitive resources to attend to meaning while reading. *Prosody* refers to the ability of readers to render a text with appropriate expression and phrasing to reflect the semantic and syntactic content of the passage. Fluent oral reading should simply sound like natural speech.

Although fluency is often associated with oral reading, it is assumed that fluent oral readers are fluent in their silent reading as well (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008). Research has demonstrated a strong connection between prosodic oral reading and proficient silent reading comprehension (Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman, & Oranje, 2005; Pinnell et al., 1995). Students who read with expression when reading orally tend to have good comprehension when reading silently. Conversely, students who read with little or inappropriate expression during oral reading are more likely to have poor comprehension when reading silently.

Research and scholarly literature support several specific methods to promote fluency in reading (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NICHD, 2000; Rasinski, 1989, 2003; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Among these are modeling fluent reading for students, assisted reading, and repeated readings. Modeling fluent reading involves listening to a text read fluently by another. Although modeling fluent reading does not involve the student actually reading, it does provide the student with a clear model of what fluent oral reading sounds like. Assisted reading involves a reader reading a text while simultaneously listening to a fluent rendering of the same text. Repeated readings involve the reading of one text until a level of fluency is achieved in the reading. Research has demonstrated that assisted reading and repeated readings lead to improvements in fluency on the texts read by students that also generalizes to new texts not previously encountered by students (NICHD, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Moreover, demonstrable and significant gains in overall reading achievement have been documented through these instructional methods (NICHD, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).

Literacy scholars have also recently pointed out that fluency is an important issue for students who are English-language learners (ELLs; August & Shanahan, 2006; De la Colina, Parker, Hasbrouck, & Alecio, 2001; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Vaughn et al., 2006). Additionally, the same methods for improving fluency among non–ELL students are also recommended for ELLs.

The automaticity component of reading fluency is most often assessed through reading rate (Rasinski,

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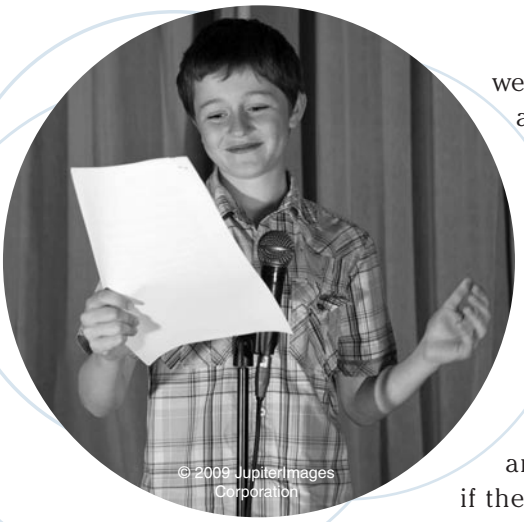
2006). Speed of reading is an indicator of students' ability to read the words in a text at an automatic level. This method of assessment has been validated through a number of studies (Rasinski, 2004) that have shown substantial and significant correlations between reading rate (automaticity) and reading comprehension as well as overall reading achievement. One unintended and unfortunate consequence of using reading rate as a measure of fluency, however, has been that instructional approaches for fluency have assumed that the goal of fluency instruction is to increase reading rate (Rasinski, 2006). Thus, in many classrooms and in several published reading fluency programs, assisted and repeated readings of texts have been employed for the primary purpose of increasing reading rate. Students are encouraged to read a text repeatedly until they can read it at a certain rate, regardless of their level of understanding. Many students come to identify fast reading as proficient reading. This, we feel, is a disturbing and unwarranted approach to fluency instruction. We feel that this approach to fluency may lead to the development of a generation of readers who may read quickly but have little understanding of what they read and get little enjoyment or satisfaction from their reading.



Missing from using speed as a measure for fluency is an appropriate attention to the prosodic side of fluency. When a student is reading for speed, there is usually little attention given to reading with meaningful expression. As a result, the notion of fluency has been garnering a certain amount of negative attention and criticism (Rasinski, 2006; Samuels, 2007) as the concept of fluency has swung from a focus on reading for a meaningful experience with text to reading for speed.

We certainly believe that the concept of fluency encompassing accuracy, automaticity, and prosody is appropriate. We also agree with the scholarly literature that posits that modeled, assisted, and repeated readings are powerful tools for improving fluency (Chomsky, 1976; Dowhower, 1987; Farrell, 1966; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NICHD, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003; Samuels, 1979; Therrien, 2004; Vaughn, Chard, Bryant, Coleman, & Kouzekanani, 2000). However, we also believe that a more authentic approach to fluency instruction exists in the realm of performance of texts as in the performing arts (Rasinski, 2007). Students are more likely to practice or rehearse (assisted and repeated readings) if they know that they will be performing a reading for an audience. Moreover, such rehearsal is not aimed at reading speed but at reading with meaningful expression to help an audience of listeners better understand the passage.

Readers Theatre is a performance of a written script that demands repeated and assisted reading that is focused on delivering meaning to an audience. Because no acting, props, costumes, or scenery are used in Readers Theatre, readers must use their voices to carry the meaning. Thus, the goal of this fluency instruction is aimed at improving prosody and meaning. The repeated and assisted practice involved in rehearsal will improve accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. Research has demonstrated the potential of Readers Theatre to improve reading performance (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999). Moreover, Readers Theatre has been found to be an engaging and motivational activity for students.

This article reports on a classroom action research study that continues the line of authentic classroom-based research on the effects of Readers Theatre to improve fluency and overall reading achievement among primary grade students. The following section of this article, "Method," is told from the perspective of the first author, Chase Young, to personally guide teachers through the process and implementation. Chase is a second-grade classroom teacher in Texas, who made Readers Theatre an integral part of his reading curriculum for the first time in the 2007–2008 school year. Although we recognize several methodological limitations to the study, we also note the added authenticity and contextual integrity of research that comes from the realm of a regular classroom and lead by the regular classroom teacher.

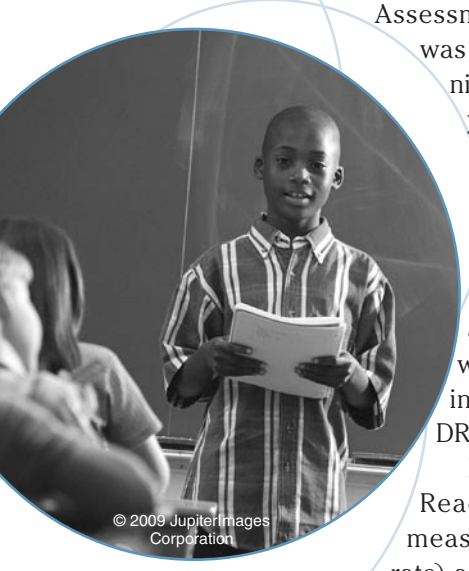
Method

Participants

Eagle Elementary (pseudonym) is a Title I school in a northern suburb of Dallas. All 29 of the monolingual second-grade students in my class were included in the present study involving daily instruction in Readers Theatre. The second grade consisted of 8 girls and 21 boys. Nine of the 29 students were ELLs. The levels of reading achievement in the class at the beginning of the study ranged from early kindergarten to midyear third grade, with the mean at approximately the end of first grade. The students were part of the general education program and, as the data suggest, represented a wide variety of reading levels.

Data Collection

Readers Theatre was employed as an addition to a balanced literacy program that consisted of reading demonstrations, shared readings, guided reading, independent reading, and word study (Tompkins, 2003). All students participated in the weekly Readers Theatre program. I used district and state assessments to measure the reading growth of each student.



The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 2001) was administered at the beginning and the end of the school year. The assessment measured students' independent reading level based on word recognition accuracy and comprehension. Readers' word recognition automaticity and prosody were also measured during the administration of the DRA.

I employed the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) to measure automaticity (reading rate) and prosody. Students were given a pre- and posttest measuring automaticity and prosody on a grade-level passage. Prosody measurements were based on a rubric designed to observe and record characteristics of the fluent reader (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). The least fluent readers were assigned a one and most proficient a four on three dimensions of prosody.

The same passage was read at the end of the year, and the words read correct per minute were recorded.

The Readers Theatre Project

Assisted and repeated oral readings are two of the best ways to target fluency instruction (Samuels, 1979). Readers Theatre was selected as an authentic instructional approach to assisted and repeated readings as a consequence of a professional development session presented by the second author. The implementation of the Readers Theatre began on the second week of school and was consistently practiced until the final week of the school year. The project was unique in that Readers Theatre was a daily occurrence. It was not sporadic or for special occasions but an integral part of the reading program.

Readers Theatre in Context

Readers Theatre was nested deeply within my existing balanced literacy program. On Mondays the scripts were introduced through the daily minilesson lasting approximately 20–25 minutes. Tuesday through Thursday's minilesson lasted the same amount of time, but other texts were used. Then students read independently for 30 minutes. The remaining 30 minutes were allotted to literacy workstations. The entire reading block lasted 90 minutes. Friday's performances lasted 5–15 minutes depending on the length of the scripts. The remaining time was devoted to various types of fun or interactive reading.

On Mondays, Readers Theatre was integrated into the daily minilesson and usually took 20–25 minutes. The minilesson was used to introduce the scripts for the first time. On Tuesday through Thursday, we devoted 5–10 minutes per day to Readers Theatre rehearsal (5 minutes maximum as they became more competent with the Readers Theatre format). Readers Theatre was so motivating, however, that students found themselves practicing at other times through the day. For example, each day students arrived at school and immediately began practicing or rehearsing their scripts before the morning bell.

After Readers Theatre practice initiated the reading block, our class met for a minilesson. These varied according to our objective. Thirty minutes of

independent reading followed. This allowed students to practice the strategy from the minilesson.

Finally, students were grouped into pairs (or an occasional trio) and engaged in workstations for the remaining 30 minutes. Most of the workstations were in place to support a variety of comprehension strategies learned previously. Some, however, were directly related to Readers Theatre. The following literacy workstations were used.

Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA). Students chose a book. Before reading the students would ask questions about the book and make predictions. While students read, questions were added and predictions were confirmed, rejected, or revised. After reading, students answered the questions and confirmed or rejected remaining predictions.

Creature Feature. Students used www.thebestclass.org/creaturefeature.html to conduct research. The website links to the Smithsonian Zoo live webcams and National Geographic Creature Feature. Students use a graphic organizer to collect information on a chosen animal.

Mental Images. Students chose a book and created mental images as they read. The workstation could be completed independently or with a partner. The second option was completed by having one student read to another, who drew the images.

Word Study. Students engaged in decoding challenging words and describing strategies used to decode. They also made and spelled words using onsets and rimes.

Synthesis. Students chose a book they had never read. Students were required to synthesize the text into a main idea at four points during the story. As they read and gained more information, they synthesized the information into a new main idea.

Readers Theatre. All previously performed scripts were put into folders. Partners could choose any script to read with each other. Students were also allowed to transform old scripts into new ones. This station supported Readers Theatre directly.

Poetry. Poems were available on overhead transparencies. Partners chose a poem and completed various activities with the poem. These included circling rhyming words, choral reading, and inferring meaning. The poems were taken from various books, websites, and student poems written in creative response. The choral reading of poems was a required activity when assigned to the poetry workstation and supported the Readers Theatre project. Many times the poems chosen for the station were poems previously converted to scripts.

Creative Response. Students could read a book of their choice. After reading, they would write a song, poem, a new ending, or other creative reader response activities. This station also encouraged the writing of Readers Theatre scripts**.**

Connections. Partners read books of their choice while developing and writing text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections in their reading journals.

Social Studies. Students researched (using text and hypertext) good citizens in history such as Florence Nightingale, César Chávez, and Paul Revere. Students wrote cause-and-effect papers noting how these citizens influenced and changed the United States.

During independent reading and workstations, I held guided reading groups. The groups averaged four students, and I typically met with four groups per day for 15 minutes. Higher leveled groups engaged in literature circles, and therefore met less often with me.

Friday bucked the traditional routine. Each Friday began with Readers Theatre performances and ended with buddy reading. After the performances, students were released to engage in a reading experience of their choice. Groups rotated from text to hypertext for paired reading or to an exciting excursion through GigglePoetry.com. The students were given the opportunity to choose materials to read and perform from a well-stocked classroom of materials. Class members often serenaded one another with the *Silly Dilly Songs* by Alan Katz or engaged in the "Battle of the Poems" where the students and I would sit around a table picking which poem was the funniest and best performed. This, however, was just for fun and unrelated to our weekly Readers Theatre performances. The day was spent reading aloud for pure amusement in any way possible.

Materials

The district had an extensive supply of online Readers Theatre scripts adapted from favorite trade books. From *Brown Bear Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin to *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. These adapted scripts were used in conjunction with humorous poetry retrieved from Bruce Lansky's GigglePoetry.com. Lansky's child-centered humor had the second graders chuckling all year long. Once the poetry was printed, they were transformed into scripts by adding the desired number of narrators. (Additional resources for scripts can be found in Figure 1.)

Grouping

The number of students in the Readers Theatre groups varied but typically consisted of three to six students in four groups. Occasionally our entire class worked on one script over the course of a week. The students were allowed to choose the script they wished to practice and perform.

The Daily Format

The following five-day format details how Readers Theatre was implemented. Each day outlines a different Readers Theatre objective. As mentioned before, Monday's integration took approximately 20 minutes; Tuesday through Thursday lasted 5–10 minutes; finally, Friday ranged from 5–15 minutes.

Figure 1
Website Sources for Readers Theatre Scripts and Information About Readers Theatre

www.aaronshep.com/rt/
www.fictionteachers.com/classroomtheater/theater.html
www.readerstheatre.ecsd.net/collection.htm
www.readinglady.com
www.readingonline.org/electronic/elec_index.asp?HREF=carrick/index.html
www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm
www.timelessteacherstuff.com/
www.timrasinski.com
www.vtaide.com/png/theatre.htm

Monday

The goal on Monday was to familiarize the students with the script in a minilesson. The scripts served as texts for think-alouds aimed to model a particular reading comprehension strategy such as inferring word meanings, main idea, text structure, or making connections. Other times a script was the foundation for a DL-TA, which required students to generate questions and predictions about a text I would read aloud. During the reading, students confirm, reject, and revise predictions. Finally, students answered the questions after the reading. Essentially, the scripts were integrated into my existing literacy program and aligned with current grade-level objectives.

The scripts were chosen based on seasonal themes, on content area study, or for comedic value. Staff members in the school district created plenty of expository and narrative scripts from trade books and other sources and shared them with one another. Students also were a source for scripts. (See Figures 2 and 3, for example.) The entire class, for example, created an interpretation of *Skippyjon Jones* by Judy Schachner during a series of minilessons. Students involved in research projects were usually given the option to demonstrate their learning through a Readers Theatre script they wrote based on information collected.

Subsequent to the Monday minilesson, students chose their script, read it once to themselves, and took it home to read it again. At this point, they had no assigned role and read the entire script for meaning. This helped them decide which role they desired.

Tuesday

The goal for Tuesday was for students to choose their roles. For example, *The Hallo-wiener* by Dav Pilkey was used for the week of Halloween. On Monday evening, students read the entire script at home while thinking about a role they might like to assume. If a student chose Oscar the following day, that student would only practice the part of Oscar for the remainder of the week. With highlighters in hand and cooperative group behaviors in their minds, they worked together to decide their parts.

In the beginning, my role was quite important in the somewhat unstable process of the assignments. It declined as they fine-tuned their ability to work in groups. In the beginning, it was important to model the process of choosing roles. I resolved disputes

early on but quickly charged students with conflict resolution. The rock, paper, scissors game was often the method of choice. However, after the first month, problems rarely occurred. After highlighting parts to help track reading, they began the first read through. Once a role was chosen, students took the script home daily to practice their parts.

Wednesday

The purpose of Wednesday's class was to identify any difficulties with meaning, word recognition, and prosodic features. Students used peer-coaching strategies to work through issues. I worked with students who struggled.

The neurological-impress method (NIM) helped students master their script. In NIM a more proficient reader takes the lead in a choral reading. The proficient reader establishes a fluent pace and emphasizes prosodic features. The less proficient reader

Figure 2
The Burp Champion

Readers Theatre by Dante and Robin

PARTS:	Champ, Announcer
Announcer:	And now, the burp champ! [*clap*]
Champ:	Thanks everyone! [*bow*]
Announcer:	Let's have the biggest burp!
Champ:	Okay, are you ready? [*burp*]
Announcer:	Ewwwwwwwww!
Champ:	You're welcome.
Announcer:	Can you burp the ABC's?
Champ:	[*burp ABC's*]
Announcer:	Wow!
Champ:	I can burp loudly to lift myself up [*crashes on the floor*].
Announcer:	Well, our champ is now the ex-burp champion of the world.

Figure 3
The Squid and the Stickbug

Readers Theatre by Allie and Collin

PARTS:	Stickbug, Squid, Narrator
Narrator:	There was once a palm tree by an ocean, and in the palm tree lived a stickbug. In the nearby ocean, lived a squid.
Stickbug:	Hey Squid, what's up fish?
Squid:	What's that supposed to mean smallster?
Stickbug:	At least I don't ink everytime an animal comes near.
Squid:	At least I ain't skinny and have antennas!
Stickbug:	At least I'm not fat and wet!
Squid:	(putting hand up) Talk to inky tentacle, stickbug!
Stickbug:	At least I live up high in a tree and not low in the ocean!
Squid:	At least I can dine with you and you will be the main course!!
Stickbug:	Oh noooo, she just didn't....
Squid:	Oh yes I just did!! At least I am at the top of the food chain.
Stickbug:	At least I can run away with a squeaky voice and rap good.
Squid:	I think we should be friends.
Stickbug:	No way, I have a reputation. That would so ruin it punk!
Squid:	Please, with inky syrup on top.
Stickbug:	Fine.
Squid:	Come on, let shake hands!
Stickbug:	OOOOh you got slimey ink on me! Wait a minute...I can't swim! No, no, help....I'm drowning!!
Squid:	YUMMY!
Narrator:	Let's say the squid was satisfied. The stickbug? Not so much. The End

attempts to read along with the leader. The goal is for the less proficient reader to mimic the features of the more proficient reader. The student following may fall behind the leader, but the pace is kept to help pave their path to fluency. After the repeated assisted readings, the students should be able to read the text independently with good fluency based on the proficient model provided (Heckelman, 1969; Hollingsworth, 1978). Essentially, the students used Wednesdays to work out any individual difficulties through discussions and advice from others.

Thursday

Thursday marked the rehearsal before the performance. The students had acquired the meaning, repeated readings had created automaticity in their reading, and teacher/peer coaching had prepared them for a fluent performance. They practiced one last time before the big show as a cohesive group while reading accurately and prosodically.

Friday

The last day of the week was performance day, a day our classroom community had coined "Fluency Friday." The stage varied for this day of days. If there was no grander stage, the Readers Theatre groups shared with the class. Sometimes my students performed on the stage in the cafeteria for other students. Other times we invited classes into our classroom. Once my class performed for the whole school. Parents had a longstanding invitation for "Fluency Friday" and attended occasionally. Also, the administrators often liked to take in a quick show.

Throughout the year, Readers Theatre was unscheduled for two separate weeks—the first week of school and a week in October because of my personal leave. Over the course of the year, my students performed a total of 34 Readers Theatre scripts. In the cases of short weeks, we condensed the format, usually combining the Tuesday and Wednesday goals.

Results

Quantitative

Both fall and spring testing was conducted by Chase one-on-one with the student. Prosody was measured on DRA testing dates. Fall testing of the DRA was in September. The initial TPRI reading rate was also measured in September. The DRA spring testing was conducted in April, and the final reading rate from the TPRI was recorded in May

Table 1
Measures of Student Reading Proficiency—Fall to Spring

Score	Fall	Spring	Growth
Word recognition accuracy	98.9%	99.2%	.3%
Rate/Automaticity (WCPM)	62.7	127.6	64.9
Prosody (4 = max)	2.2	3.0	.8
DRA Level	19.4	31.2	11.8

These results (see Table 1) demonstrate remarkable progress by students over the course of the school year. Students' word recognition accuracy was strong at the beginning of the school year (independent level) and remained strong throughout, with a small gain by the end of the year.

Reading rate is often used as a measure of word recognition automaticity. In Chase's class, reading rate was never an instructional goal. Rather, when doing Readers Theatre the goal was to read with expression for meaning, not speed. Nevertheless, despite the lack of emphasis on reading rate, students in Chase's class clearly made significant gains in automaticity.

The students began the school year reading at 62.7 words read correctly per minute (WCPM). According to Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006), this reading rate puts the average performance of Chase's students between the 50th and 75th percentiles for second graders. Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) noted that annual gains of 36–38 WCPM for second-grade students are expected for students in the 50th percentile or above. The average gain by Chase's students was close to double these normal gains: By the end of the school year the average student reading rate was at 127.6 WCPM (an increase of nearly 65 words), which lies between the 75th and 90th percentiles. Clearly students in Chase's class made gains in fluency that

were substantially greater than what would normally have been expected of second-grade students.

Although the average gain in prosody may seem low in absolute terms (0.8), it is important to point out that the range of scores is 3 points (1–4). Thus, a gain of 0.8 in prosody represents a 20% overall improvement in students' ability to read with expression that represents meaning. Additionally, the students were able to read with greater prosody on higher level texts.

The DRA is generally considered a good overall measure of reading achievement that includes reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading. The average DRA score for Chase's students at the beginning of the year was 19.4, which represents an end-of-first-grade level. The goal for second-grade students is to end the year at level 28. The average score for Chase's students was 31.2, well above the end of year benchmark for second grade. Clearly the students in Chase's class made significant gains in many aspects of reading achievement. And although these gains cannot be attributed solely to the emphasis on reading fluency through Readers Theatre, the use of repeated readings and performance through Readers Theatre clearly had an impact. Students in Chase's class made gains that were greater than in other classrooms where fluency and Readers Theatre were less emphasized.

The literacy instruction that Chase provided his students in the year previous to this study (2006–2007) was similar to the year of the study with the exception that fluency through Readers Theatre was not a center piece to the reading curriculum. The differential impact on reading fluency was evident. Although students made gains in fluency from the beginning of the year to the end in the 2006–2007 school year, the gains were much less substantial—29.1 WCPM gain. This gain pales in comparison to the gain of 64.9 WCPM students' made in 2007–2008, the year in which Readers Theatre was made integral to the curriculum. In the previous year, students' demonstrated, on average, a 0.4 gain in prosody. Again, this was half of the gain experienced by students engaged in the Readers Theatre curriculum.

Qualitative

The students in Chase's class had made significant growth in one of the most enjoyable and engaging ways imaginable—Readers Theatre. In addition to growth in reading fluency, Readers Theatre had a positive and motivational effect. The students loved the opportunity to practice and perform scripts. Chase loved it. When one student was asked about Readers Theatre, he replied, "Mr. Young, Readers Theatre rules." Through e-mail correspondence, a parent (and school board member) reported a similar belief: "I thought Readers Theatre was great because it motivated Blake to read every night. He enjoyed having a different character and new story weekly to read with his classmates."

A parent commented that it was a great way to get kids to read. Readers Theatre also had a profound effect throughout the school. The school nurse was very happy to receive emphatic invitations to the performances. She attended regularly and felt more of an integral part of the school community as a result. Students requested feedback on their thespian styles, which she gladly gave. The school guidance counselor was particularly impressed by the high level of engagement of struggling readers as well as the overall enthusiasm of all Readers Theatre participants. The assistant principal viewed the project as extremely beneficial in motivating reluctant readers. Although the secretary was unable to come to our performances, we went to her, and she described performances as "absolutely wonderful to see students enjoying learning." One student commented that it was challenging because it required "more reading," but it was "fun reading." Another student agreed that it was challenging but went on to describe the educational value as it required him to read more and learn more.

Many students identified as struggling readers, reported eagerly awaiting "Fluency Friday." It seemed the struggling readers always chose the longest and most difficult parts; nevertheless, they loved the task of rehearsal and the performance. Because we were able to incorporate a wide range of genres, students were exposed to many types of texts. A student believed Readers Theatre "ruled" because of the variety of great fairy tales and funny poems that were performed. Most students mentioned the value of the humorous poetry. The benefits were summed up by one student in only a few words; she said, "It helped me in a lot of ways." These few words succinctly summarized the desired result of the Readers Theatre project: to create a fun and creative means to increase wide reading, to promote repeated readings to foster reading fluency, to build confidence,

and to make meaning. Fortunately, students will not remember how their reading rate, prosody, and word recognition increased, only the fond memories of their (our) unforgettable year. Observing the former second graders in their third-grade classrooms this past year can only be described as viewing a cohort of enthusiastic readers.

Discussion

As a classroom teacher, it was amazing to see the students' desire to entertain audiences with their prosodic reading. Because of their motivation to practice, refine, and perform texts, an academic avenue was created to increase reading fluency, read multiple text types, and include every student—striving or thriving. It was relatively easy to implement, fun, and instilled confidence in the young readers.

Readers Theatre had a profound positive effect on all readers and gave an opportunity for struggling readers to read fearlessly in the limelight. Regardless of the compensatory strategies used in practice (Stanovich, 1980), their performance reflected proficient reading that was adequately paced, prosodic, confident, accurate, and filled with meaning and enthusiasm. Every performance day, the struggling readers were in step and were virtually indiscernible from the rest of the class.

Classroom teachers should be mindful of slower readers because they will ultimately read less and their overall growth in reading will be restricted (Allington, 1983; Rasinski, 2000). However, Readers Theatre led to a doubling of the mean reading rate, thus being advantageous in that students had the ability and opportunity to read more. My fear of less reading dissipated with each week of the project. The variations of scripts necessarily encouraged wider reading. All students—high, low, or medium reading abilities—were given an opportunity to read more and across genres. In conjunction with improved prosody and increased reading rate, comprehension also improved.

Readers Theatre became a part of the first author's instructional routine. It was a novel framework with ever changing content. Scripts manifested themselves as materials for lessons. Old scripts retired to the Readers Theatre workstation. Students were always on the alert for potential scripts. (See Figures 2 and 3 for scripts written by students.) Sometimes students wrote expository scripts to demonstrate their understanding in the content areas. Essentially, Readers Theatre, although formally limited to 5–10 minutes per day, was easily integrated by the teacher and students into all that was done.

The quantitative data was impressive, yet from a classroom teacher's perspective the qualitative data presented the most convincing argument for implementing Readers Theatre. Being able to witness the unmotivated become motivated and the strugglers thrive was incredible. The flagrant enthusiasm shared by the community of readers was truly a reading teacher's dream come true.

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