

Effects of Using Readers' Theater to Differentiate Instruction
On Reading Fluency in Second Grade

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design study analyzed the impact of differentiating instruction through Readers' Theater on the reading fluency progression of second graders. Readers' Theater was used as an engaging and motivating instructional strategy to improve the fluency for the treatment group of five students. A control group of six second grade students did not participate in the Readers' Theater intervention. Both groups received daily, guided reading instruction. Students in the treatment group made a mean gain in their fluency of 21.6 words read per minute compared to a mean gain of 9.5 words read per minute for the control group, suggesting the Readers' Theater intervention made a statistically significant impact on fluency. The researcher also noted that the students who participated in Readers' Theater reported noticeable changes in perceptions of themselves as readers. Future research is suggested to further determine the utility of Readers' Theater for differentiating instruction and improving reading skills and attitudes about reading.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Children need to acquire strategies and skills to become proficient readers. However, not all students progress at the same rate in terms of developing reading-related skills. Additionally, teaching these skills and strategies does not guarantee they will be retained. Differentiated instruction is an approach that modifies instruction to reach all learners and ensure that essential skills and strategies are modeled and practiced. Differentiation can be especially beneficial for struggling readers. A study based in Fresno, California, revealed that due to differentiated instruction in reading, achievement results have improved, Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets have been met, discipline referrals have declined, and noticeable improvements have been made in cross-curricular performance levels (Cusumano & Mueller, 2007). While studies have shown that differentiated instruction has a positive effect on student achievement in fluency and comprehension (Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2010), some findings indicate that differentiation has little or no effect on decoding and comprehension strategies (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007).

Given the importance of basic skills for reading and the need to clarify what interventions help learners with different reading skill levels, this study will evaluate the impact of differentiated instruction as a tool for supporting second grade students who are struggling in reading. Fluency will be the targeted skill, as reading fluency is a crucial skill for young readers to acquire and fluency is a prerequisite to proficient reading comprehension. Mastering letter-sound correspondence, as well as being able to read at an appropriate rate and with expression, combine to help struggling readers understand what they read.

This researcher became interested in improving reading fluency in her role as second grade teacher. She hoped to improve her students' reading fluency by implementing effective differentiated instruction. According to researchers Trainin and Andrzejcack (2006), studies have shown three potential benefits of implementing Readers' Theater as an intervention for students struggling with reading fluency. Besides offering a motivating and engaging approach to improving reading fluency, the repeated readings offer ample opportunities to support and build intonation, phrasing, and automaticity. Collaboration between peers and teachers creates opportunities for students to build meaning in the Readers' Theater texts.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an instructional method, Readers' Theater, using differentiated instruction on the reading fluency of on-level second grade readers.

Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference between the reading fluency gains of students identified as reading on grade level who participate in small-group differentiated instruction focused on improving reading fluency and the reading fluency gains of a control group of students who do not receive the differentiated intervention explicitly targeting reading fluency.

Operational Definitions

Differentiated instruction is defined as a method by which the process, product, or content of a reading lesson can be changed to meet the needs of many different types of students.

Fluency describes how quickly, accurately, automatically and expressively someone reads. For the purposes of this study, it indicates only the rate of reading, expressed as the number of words students were able to read correctly per minute.

Readers' Theater is an engaging oral reading activity that helps students improve in the areas of reading fluency, word recognition and comprehension. Unlike play scripts, Readers' Theater scripts do not require any prop, costumes, or scenery. The main focus is on repeatedly reading the text, so that students may improve their automaticity, prosody and intonation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review explores the effects of differentiated instruction on the reading achievement of struggling primary grade readers. Section one defines differentiated instruction and explains its purpose. The second section of the review describes several methods of implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom. Section three provides support for the concept that all students can learn as long as instruction is differentiated or tiered to meet their needs. The final section showcases how differentiated instruction can be used with struggling readers.

Definition and Purpose of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching and learning that enables educators to meet the needs of different types of students. Whether educators differentiate the content, process, or product of instruction, small, flexible groups should be formed to meet the needs of all learners, according to Cusumano and Mueller (2007). As it relates to improving reading achievement, differentiation should be implemented during designated reading time, not in addition to it, and the teacher should provide support for students as they read (Kosanovich, Ladinsky, Nelson, & Torgesen, 2006). Although there is no one universally accepted definition of differentiation, many researchers have similar views of what differentiation actually entails and how it can be used to help all students succeed.

According to Tomlinson and Imbeua (2010), the primary goal of differentiated instruction is to provide numerous avenues for students to absorb whatever material the teacher is responsible for covering. In support of this goal, a differentiated classroom should be

designed to allow students to reach their full potential and meet with individual success (Allan & Goddard, 2010). Although the implementation of differentiated instruction may vary from school to school, or even from classroom to classroom, the purpose of implementing it remains consistent – to improve student achievement. They also claim that if differentiation is fully implemented, student success can improve. An example of differentiated instruction is the interactive Scholastic program, *Storia*. *Storia* promotes reading fluency and comprehension through differentiated instruction (Zimmerman & Tomasello, 2013). The program is designed to link word recognition and reading comprehension. It includes strategies that provide differentiated instruction in reading fluency for various learners. For example, a strategy called “Model Fluent Reading,” Zimmerman and Tomasello suggest the following steps:

1. Project the *Storia* read-to-me e-book onto a large, visible space for all children to see.
2. Model reading a few lines of text out loud. Make sure to read with accuracy, intonation, and appropriate rate. Pay attention to pauses indicated by punctuation. You can use special features such as the *Storia* highlighter to focus students’ attention on certain parts of the text.
3. Ask students to participate in a shared reading activity by reading the text aloud with you. Your fluent reading voice should serve as a model for them.
4. Pair students to practice reading fluently together. You should monitor students as they read and provide individual instruction as needed.

Another strategy Zimmerman and Tomasello suggest is called “Listen to, Read Along With, and Read by Oneself.” The intention of this approach is to expose young readers to various models of reading fluency. The strategy can be implemented by following these simple steps:

1. Allow students the opportunity to listen to a Storia book using the read-to-me audio feature. As students listen to the story three to four times, they will notice the words are highlighted as they are read. This allows them to interact with sound symbol correlations and make meaning of words and sounds.
2. As Storia's read-to-me audio feature reads the text aloud, ask students to read along. The repetition of reading aloud with the audio feature will help to build reading fluency.
3. Students should take turns reading the text aloud to a partner. After each partner reads, the other should provide constructive feedback and suggest ways to make improvements. The students should reread the text, trying to make the improvements their partner has suggested.

Although both strategies offer ways for students to become more fluent readers, instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of the learners. Both approaches promote reading independence as struggling readers develop reading skills and strategies, as well as self-confidence.

Models of Differentiated Instruction

Kosanovich et al. (2006) has developed structures for differentiated instruction during reading. Two of these are guided reading and skills-focused lessons. Guided reading is a method in which teachers can support students' reading achievement by facilitating discussion and applying effective strategies while students are reading appropriately leveled, yet challenging, texts. Although it is not always an effective technique to use with struggling readers who may need instruction on "building specific word analysis skills" (Kosanovich et al., 2006, p. 3), it allows teachers to monitor and guide readers as they apply appropriate skills and strategies. A step-by-step example of guided reading follows.

In step one, Before Reading, the teacher introduces the book he or she has selected for the group based on the level of the students. The teacher models how to use the title and pictures in the story to make predictions and build background knowledge before reading. By asking guided questions, the teacher helps students relate to the text.

In step two, During Reading, the teacher and students interact with the text so that reading strategies can be practiced. The teacher monitors students as they read and intervenes, if and when, a problem should arise. Students are asked to read aloud, although silent, independent reading can also be practiced.

Step three, After Reading, involves encouraging students to discuss what they have read. The teacher guides the students with questions that are tailored to the story. In addition to discussing the message from the text, students are asked to share strategies that helped them when they had difficulties reading.

Skills-focused lessons are intended to provide fast-paced, systematic, and intentional instruction in the areas of need for each intended group. These lessons may include instruction on phonemic awareness, identifying and defining important vocabulary, decoding strategies, and reading comprehension strategies. The purpose of skills-focused lessons is to help struggling readers explicitly improve their areas of weakness while strengthening their confidence and readiness as they become independent readers (Kosanovich et al., 2006). An example of a skills-focused lesson applying differentiation to reading involves working with a group of students who struggle to decode r-controlled vowels in words. The teacher would guide the students in making words with the spelling pattern, and would help students practice reading the words and using them correctly in context. Once the students have taken part in the hands-on learning, they should be able to apply it to whatever it is they are reading.

One research study, analyzed by Tobin and McInnes (2008), focused on two specific teachers from a larger group study of 10 teachers who were implementing differentiated instruction. These teachers were selected because their classes had been recognized as having struggling students in both reading and writing. They also were chosen because they were considered “successful differentiators” (Tobin & McInnes, 2008, p. 3). One of the highlighted teachers chose to differentiate reading instruction in her classroom by tiering activities related to a showcased piece of literature. Students were exposed to the same text, but then were able to analyze and discuss it using activities that were appropriately challenging based on their readiness level. Should students finish quickly, they chose from leveled reading bundles, journaling, and word study activities on which to work until the teacher was able to meet with them to discuss the literature they read. The other teacher structured her differentiated reading instruction by identifying several students in need of guided reading, while providing literacy centers and shared reading and writing time for the whole class. While the teacher was meeting with guided reading groups, which focused on decoding and comprehension strategies, attaining sight vocabulary, and building fluency, the other students were choosing from literacy centers that the teacher had organized for their readiness levels. In addition to small group guided reading, the whole class participated in shared reading and writing experiences after which the teacher allowed the students to choose appropriately challenging activities to support their understanding of the whole group lesson.

According to Allan and Goddard (2010), educators are experiencing an increase in differences among students’ readiness levels, and they find themselves in need of various methods to reach their diverse learners. Keeping groups small and flexible, as well as providing ample opportunities and pathways for students to learn, will help ensure success for all learners.

Reaching All Learners with Differentiated Instruction

Allan and Goddard (2010) state that it is the responsibility of all teachers to ensure the success of all students. However, this poses a great challenge because teachers must “meet each child where he or she is and move each forward in his or her learning, as far as possible” (Levy, 2008, p.161). In doing so, teachers should learn, understand, appreciate, and incorporate students’ varying levels of readiness, learning profiles, and interests into their instruction. There are several techniques for incorporating the numerous factors, posed by learners, into daily differentiated instruction. For example, some students are active learners, while others are passive: hence, they respond differently to instruction. As teachers get to know their students and how they respond in a classroom, they can elicit responses from them in ways that make each student feel comfortable. Teachers who encourage active responses, such as writing or discussing what students have read, potentially have students more engaged in their learning, while teachers who encourage passive response, such as listening, could have students that appear less engaged. However, both tactics have elicited positive outcomes in fluency and reading comprehension (Amendum et al., 2009). Another technique to use with struggling readers is incorporating movement. Peebles (2007) believes that even the most reluctant of readers can be motivated by integrating movement during reading instruction, especially while promoting fluency.

Enrichment approaches also have been used to provide differentiation, with promising results in some cases. Results from an experimental study conducted by Kaniskan et al. (2011) demonstrated that an enrichment reading approach, with differentiated instruction and less whole group instruction, was as effective as, or more effective than, a traditional whole group basal approach. The same study yielded positive results in reading fluency when students were

exposed to self-selected books above their independent reading level while differentiated instruction methods were implemented. Not only did the students' reading achievement improve, but their engagement level and desire to read increased as well.

Conclusion

Although there are many unanswered questions about how to effectively implement differentiated instruction in classrooms, many researchers have found struggling readers who receive differentiated instruction in reading have outperformed their similar counterparts who have not (Coyne et al., 2013). Questions remain about the most effective ways to identify students who would benefit most from differentiated instruction. One pair of researchers, Scholin and Burns (2012), suggests that students should be identified according to assessment data. Those data may include, but are not limited to, curriculum-based measurements for oral reading fluency, standardized measures of achievement, or informal reading inventories. Scholin and Burns report that students whose scores fall between the 10th and 25th percentile may be considered at-risk and should receive a differentiated form of reading instruction. However, once students are identified and differentiated instruction has been administered, positive growth can be seen. Given the importance of strong reading skills and the development of comprehension and fluency at an early age, more research is needed to clarify what techniques work best for what type of students.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

A quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design was used to determine if students identified as reading on-grade level but with poor fluency after receiving differentiated instruction focused on improving fluency than the impact on a comparable group of students who did not receive differentiated intervention explicitly targeting fluency. The independent variable was an application of the concept of differentiated instruction using Readers' Theater scripts. Readers' Theater scripts were reviewed over a four week period with the treatment group for the explicit purpose of helping students develop reading fluency. The intervention to promote fluency was differentiated because the experimental group practiced several Readers' Theater scripts which were leveled to meet their needs, while the control group built fluency through routine, guided reading based on their school-wide reading program, *Treasures*. The dependent variable was reading fluency, which was assessed by the number of correct words per minute (WPM) the students read fluently from an age appropriate and grade-level text as measured by the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The fluency gains of the students in the two groups were compared to determine whether or not the differentiation intervention resulted in more growth in fluency for the treatment group than the regular instruction provided for the control group.

Participants

The eleven participants in this study were purposefully selected from a class of 24 heterogeneously grouped second grade students. All students received regular reading instruction, which was based on the school-wide reading program, *Treasures*. The control group

consisted of six students, four boys and two girls. This group did not receive explicit instruction geared toward improving fluency. Rather, they received routine, guided reading instruction in a small group. Their instruction was crafted to meet their reading level and addressed fluency, but did not specifically target improving fluency/reading rate. The experimental group consisted of five students, two boys and three girls. This group received differentiated instruction intended to improve reading fluency through the use of Readers' Theater scripts.

Instrument

The researcher used Oral Reading Fluency scores from the DIBELS assessment to determine the reading achievement levels of the students in both the control and experimental groups. While DIBELS contains several subtests, the researcher used only the participants' Oral Reading Fluency scores to determine the effectiveness of their differentiated fluency instruction. This subtest was selected as the construct of fluency is an important basis of comprehension and the DIBELS assesses it reliably, and fluency was the target of the differentiated intervention. Good et al. (2003) in *Mental Measurement Yearbook* states the Oral Reading Fluency portion "showed remarkable levels of reliability" (p. 4) compared to the other sections of the DIBELS assessments, with reliability coefficients ranging from .92 to .97. The report also concluded "the average concurrent validity coefficients were .80 and predictive validity coefficients were .66 for the Oral Reading Fluency portion of the assessment" (p. 4).

Procedure

Initially, the researcher administered the DIBELS assessment to all 24 students in her classroom. The results obtained from this winter assessment allowed the researcher to identify a total of 11 on-level students who were struggling with reading fluency to participate in the study. The students were selected based on their Oral Reading Fluency scores from the winter

administration of DIBELS. Any student that received a ranking of “strategic” was selected to be a part of this study. The students were randomly separated into two sub-groups, one of which received a supplemental differentiated intervention to increase fluency using Readers’ Theater and one of which did not. The study lasted four weeks. In addition to the regular reading instruction, in which both groups participated daily, both groups met with the teacher every day for 20 minutes during which the control group received small group instruction that was not explicitly geared toward improving reading fluency and the treatment group participated in the differentiated Readers’ Theater sessions.

In the control group, each week the teacher introduced a new fictional or non-fiction story. On the first day, if the students read a fiction story, they began by looking at the pictures to make predictions. If the students were introduced to a non-fiction text, they shared any background knowledge they had about the topic. Instruction on day two consisted of a cold read, or initial reading, of the text with support from the teacher. Days three and four of instruction focused on a reading strategy or skill. Depending on the text, these strategies and skills included main idea and details, making inferences, summarizing, or cause and effect. The final day of instruction in the week consisted of a final reading and discussion about the story.

The treatment group received its additional small-group instruction through the use of Readers’ Theater scripts. At the beginning of the intervention, the teacher explained that the purpose of practicing Readers’ Theater scripts was to help students improve their expression and reading speed, as well as to assist them with reading accuracy. Over the course of the study, the teacher introduced four Readers’ Theater scripts. The first script was shorter than the rest and was studied for only four days. The intention of using the shorter script first was to allow the students to focus mainly on reading accurately and with appropriate speed. Regardless of the

length of the script, the first day of instruction each week consisted of a discussion about the main idea of the text. As needed, the teacher supported students in sharing background knowledge and personal connections to the text. The teacher also modeled how to read the script with appropriate speed, accuracy, and expression. On the second day of instruction, the teacher assigned parts from the Readers' Theater script. The students highlighted their individual parts and read their parts along with the teacher. The students met in a small group, but were asked to read their parts independently on day three of instruction. The teacher allowed one-on-one time for each student, to provide individual support. Once students met with the teacher, they were encouraged to practice reading their parts to another member of the group. Days four and five of instruction were reserved for practicing the script all together, as a small group. After five days of explicit small group instruction with one Readers' Theater script, the teacher introduced a new script to the group. At the end of the four week intervention, the students decided, as a group, which Readers' Theater script they would perform for their classmates.

Based on Fountas and Pinnell alphabetical leveling system, level A texts being the simplest and level Z texts being the most complex, the texts read by the control group and the treatment groups were of similar difficulty. Due to the control group students' reading levels, the selected readings were level J, on a scale from A to Z. The Readers' Theater scripts had parts varying from levels J to L to meet the reading needs of the treatment group.

At the culmination of the four week intervention period, the researcher re-administered the Oral Reading Fluency section of the DIBELS assessment to the 11 participants in both the treatment and control groups. The results from these assessments were compared to determine whether there were significant differences in gains in fluency made by the treatment and control groups.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an instructional method, Readers' Theater, using differentiated instruction on the reading fluency of on-level second grade readers.

Pre-Intervention Fluency

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the Oral Reading Fluency scores obtained for all participants before the intervention.

Table 1
Pre-intervention Descriptive Statistics for All Participants

Oral Reading Fluency/Words Per Minute (WPM)	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test Scores	11	25.00	47.00	38.636	5.767

As noted in the Procedures section of Chapter III, all of these 11 students were identified as on-level students, struggling with reading fluency based on Oral Reading Fluency scores. The 11 students were randomly assigned to one of two subgroups, one of which received a supplemental intervention to increase fluency through Readers' Theater for four weeks and one of which did not.

Descriptive statistics for each group's pre-test, post-test, and gain scores on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency test follow in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics Disaggregated by Group for
ORF Pre and Post-intervention and Gain Scores

Oral Reading Fluency/Words per Minute	Group	N	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Pre-test	Readers' Theater	5	40.6000	35-43	3.28634	1.46969
	Control	6	37.0000	25-47	7.12741	2.90975
Post-test	Readers' Theater	5	62.2000	50-70	7.82304	3.49857
	Control	6	46.5000	39-53	4.96991	2.02896
Gain Scores (Post-Pre)	Readers' Theater	5	21.6000	15-29	6.06630	2.71293
	Control	6	9.5000	6-14	2.73861	1.11803

Comparison of Fluency Gains for the Differentiation and Control Groups

The results from these assessments were compared to determine whether there were significant differences in fluency scores and gains between the treatment and control groups. Comparisons of the treatment (Readers' Theater) and control groups' mean pre-test, post-test and gain scores on the Oral Reading Fluency test were made using t-tests for independent samples, the results of which follow in Table 3. These results suggest that the mean Oral Reading Fluency scores for the two groups did not differ significantly at the start of the study (mean difference= 3.6, $t=1.035$, $p<.328$) but that the Readers' Theater (treatment) group did perform significantly better on the post test (mean difference=15.7, $t=4.053$., $p<.003$). As can be seen in Table 2, the treatment groups' Oral Reading Fluency scores increased on average by 21.6 words per minute, compared to an average increase of 9.5 words per minute for the control group, yielding a significant mean difference between the two groups' gains of 12.1 points ($t=4.411$, $p<.002$).

Table 3
t-tests for Independent Samples for Oral Reading Fluency
Pre- and Post-intervention and Gain Scores

Oral Reading Fluency/ Words per Minute	t-test for Equality of Means*						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Pre-test	1.035	9	.328	3.6	3.480	-4.272	11.472
Post-test	4.053	9	.003	15.7	3.974	6.937	24.463
Gain Scores (Post-Pre)	4.411	9	.002	12.1	2.743	5.895	18.305

**equal variances assumed*

Based on these results, the null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the reading fluency gains of students identified as reading on-grade level who participated in small-group differentiated instruction focused on improving reading fluency and those of a control group who did not receive the differentiated intervention was rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an instructional method, Readers' Theater, using differentiated instruction on the reading fluency of on-level second grade readers. Results from the study suggest that Reader's Theater can be an effective differentiated reading instruction strategy that improves students' oral reading fluency.

Implications of Readers' Theater/Differentiation for Fluency

The results from this study indicated the treatment group made significantly larger gains in fluency than the control group, presumably based on the Readers' Theater intervention. While the students in the control group only gained nine-and-a-half words per minute, the students in the treatment group gained a remarkable 21.6 words per minute. That is a difference of 12.1 words per minute. The observed level of significance in comparing the groups' Post-Oral Reading Fluency Words per Minute and the Oral Reading Fluency Gain were both less than .003 which means that in only .3 of 1,000 repeated studies would a difference in means this large happen by chance.

In addition to improving their fluency, the students who received differentiated instruction through Readers' Theater noticed some positive personal gains. At the outset of the study, one student had great expression, but labored over difficult words. After the study, she shared that she loved practicing the Readers' Theater plays. She said, "They were so fun! Now I feel like I'm a faster reader." Another student who was initially excited about reading, but did not apply letter-sound relationships correctly, showed great progress by improving from being able to read 41 words per minute to being able to read 68 words per minute. The study yielded

positive results for the researcher because of the average 21.6 words per minute gain from the students in the treatment group, as well as the student participants.

Limitations

Although the study generated positive results, it did face some internal threats to validity. A significant threat to the validity may have been the four week implementation of differentiated instruction through Readers' Theater. Four weeks may not have been enough time for the researcher to observe a maximal impact or to assess students' long-term feelings about the intervention. In addition to a short study duration, students in on-level second grade reading groups typically progress quickly throughout the year. Perhaps implementing the intervention with students of varied ages would yield different results.

The study also faced threats to its external validity because the treatment and control groups represented only a small sample of second grade students. Due to available instructional time and class assignments, the researcher was limited to selecting students whom she could easily access for inclusion in the study. If the potential sample had included all second grade students, the study would likely have been more comprehensive and its results more generalizable to broader and specific populations.

Connections to Prior Research

As noted in Chapter II, research states that differentiated instruction is a means for teachers to meet the needs of all students. It is the duty of educators to ensure that all of their students have their educational needs met, using proven and innovative strategies to do so. In this study, the researcher used Readers' Theater scripts to help students who were struggling with reading fluency. This was a successful strategy that helped participants improve their oral reading fluency. It was an example of differentiation in that it engaged the students in a new

learning experience to impact their fluency, using materials appropriate for their individual reading levels.

Reis et.al (2010) found that differentiated instruction had a positive effect on reading fluency. Results of the current study support these findings due to the progress demonstrated by the treatment group. While the Readers' Theater scripts appeared to help students improve their oral reading fluency, connections to the ultimate goal of comprehension should be investigated further.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This research raises questions for future research regarding oral reading fluency. Future research could involve a longer-lasting study or sample a larger, more diverse group. It may also be valuable to conduct a similar study focusing on what interventions work best with particular learners, including females versus males and learners of various ages, as mentioned above.

Conducting a study that had an extended time frame would allow the researcher to spend ample time teaching and applying the Readers' Theater scripts with the group of student participants. This could lead to even better results in the students' gain scores in oral reading fluency and ultimately, comprehension.

Future research would benefit from selecting a larger sample group of students struggling with oral reading fluency. The sample group of students could then be divided into subgroups and alternate forms of differentiated instruction, besides or in addition to Readers' Theater, could be used to determine the most effective approach for improving oral reading fluency for particular groups of students. For example, one intervention could be Readers' Theater while another could be teaching students through repeated readings, and yet another could be instructing students to listening to repeated, oral reading.

By focusing on female versus male subgroups, future research could determine whether gender matters in terms of what differentiated instruction methods improve oral reading fluency. While this study had relatively small treatment and control groups of mixed genders, future studies with larger samples disaggregated by gender, could help clarify their needs and the effectiveness of interventions studied for boys and girls.

Conclusion

The null hypothesis for this study was rejected because the students in the treatment group which used Readers' Theater scripts demonstrated larger gains in oral reading fluency than the control group. Results suggested that differentiated instruction through the use of Readers' Theater promoted success in reading fluency. This is a promising finding as fluency is a building block of comprehension and likely builds the confidence of developing readers in classroom settings. In addition to growth in fluency, students appeared to enjoy the Readers' Theater intervention and expressed recognition of the positive changes in their reading skills.

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APPENDIX A

The Readers' Theater script below is an example of the scripts used in this study. The script is an excerpt from a play called "The Earth Day Garden" (Wall & Fuerst, 2005).

Characters

Sara *beloved elderly community member* (level K)

Brandon *ten-year-old neighborhood boy* (level L)

Mehri *Brandon's nine-year-old friend* (level J)

Wille *eight-year-old friend of Brandon and Mehri* (level J)

Narrator (level L)

Mr. Alvarado *popular neighborhood storekeeper* (level K)

Setting *Present-day urban neighborhood*

Sara: Brandon! Come here, young man!

Brandon: Hey, Sara! How's it going?

Sara: It is not going anywhere! If you mean, "How are you, Sara?" then I am fine.

Brandon: Yes ma'am. What are we doing today in the "Green Thumb Club"?

Sara: You, me, and the other kids are going to tend to the blueberries. They will be ready for picking in just a few weeks.

Brandon: That means you'll bake blueberry pies! My mouth is watering just thinking of your pies. My mom says you should sell them.

Sara: Nonsense. I make my pies for you and the people who live around here. You may not be my flesh and blood, but you are still my family. Now let's tend to those blueberry plants.

Mehri: Hi, Sara. Hi, Brandon. Blueberries? Yum. I dreamed about your pies last night, Sara.

Sara: Well, Mehri, I dreamed we had more berries than ever this year.

Mehri: I like that dream.

Willie: Hi, guys. Can I help in the garden? I'm dressed for getting dirty.

Sara: With these old hands, I can use all the help I can get, Willie dear. Today will be our last meeting for a week. Tomorrow I am going to visit my old friend Esther in Florida. She is not well.

Brandon: We will take care of the garden while you are gone.

Willie: Don't worry about anything!

Narrator: The next day, Sara flies off to Florida. Brandon, Mehri, and Willie take care of the garden just as they promised. Mr. Alvarado helps, too.

Mehri: The neighborhood is lonely without Sara.

Mr. Alvarado: She is one of a kind. She has a big heart.

Mehri: And she always speaks her mind.

Brandon: I wish we could do something special for Sara.

Willie: You know what Sara was mad about the other day? Squirrels were eating her plants. And dogs from the empty lot were digging up the flowers.

Mehri: That bummed her out. Maybe we can fix the gate so those stray dogs stay out.

Narrator: Just then, mean-looking dogs come into the empty lot.