

The Effects of Reader's Theater Instruction
on Oral Reading Fluency of Second Grade Students

by
Amanda M. Bagley

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education

May 2014

Goucher College
Graduate Programs in Education

Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	3
Hypothesis	4
Operational Definitions	4
II. Review of Literature	5
The Importance of Fluency	5
Fluency Development	6
Reasons for Poor Fluency	10
Strategies for Improving Reading Fluency	12
III. Methods	14
Design	14
Participants	14
Instrument	14
Procedure	15
IV. Results	17
V. Discussion	19
Implications	19
Threats to Validity	20
Connections to Existing Literature	21
Suggestions for Future Research	22
References	23

List of Tables

1. Reader's Theater Weekly Instructional Schedule
2. Oral Reading Fluency Scores for Students Receiving Instruction with Reader's Theater and
Students Not Receiving Reader's Theater

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether small group instruction using Reader's Theater would positively affect the oral reading fluency scores of second graders who were identified as at-risk readers. The measurement tool was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment. This study involved the use of a pretest/posttest design to compare students' scores on the oral reading fluency subtest (before the intervention was administered) to their scores six weeks later (after the intervention was complete). The research in this study examined whether the gap between the students receiving the intervention and the students not receiving the intervention would close. The scores of the students in the treatment group increased, but the gap did not close after the intervention took place. Continued research on the effectiveness of Reader's Theater to aid in reading fluency is needed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading fluency is one of the five areas of reading instruction that need to be mastered for a child to learn how to read. Many students struggle with reading fluency, which can produce long-term academic consequences and self-confidence issues. Students with fluency concerns in the primary grades often continue to fall further behind their peers in the intermediate grades unless an intervention is administered. This study evaluates the effectiveness of teaching Reader's Theater as a strategy to improve fluency skills of second grade students.

Overview

Learning to read is a complex task that develops over several years. There are five components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). In order for a child to become a confident and capable reader, he or she needs to receive reading instruction in all areas. When students begin developing difficulty in one area of reading, then an intervention must occur so that the students can continue to grow in their reading ability. Often, if students are struggling in one area of learning to read, then another area of reading instruction will be affected.

Reading skills are especially important in today's world of instructing students to be college and career-ready when they finish school. This readiness begins in the primary grades with developing basic reading skills and is strengthened as students enter the intermediate and middle grades. It is expected that students are able to read and comprehend grade level texts at the end of the primary grades. When students enter the intermediate grades, they are not just reading a passage and answering basic comprehension questions; they need to be able to analyze and evaluate complex text. Students who are struggling with reading will continue to fall further

and further behind as they progress through school unless they receive extra support or interventions.

Reading fluency is one of the five critical components that are essential for reading instruction and development. The four other components consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. Students must develop skills in all five areas in order to become successful readers. Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly while gaining meaning from the text. When reading fluently, students are reading with expression and do not have to concentrate on decoding as they reads. If a child is struggling with reading fluency, the reading sounds choppy and plodding. Reading fluency is important because it links word recognition and comprehension. Students who are able to read with fluency read effortlessly and automatically. If students are struggling with reading fluency, they read word by word and often stop to sound out unfamiliar words. The students use their brain power to focus on decoding and are therefore not comprehending what they are reading. Comprehension is the main purpose for reading; therefore, reading without gaining meaning is purposeless.

There are several interventions that can be used to support and improve reading fluency. Reading fluency can be improved by having a student practice reading independent level text. When the text is on an independent level, the student can focus on identifying words quickly without stopping to decode unfamiliar words. Instructing in chunking words or reading parts of words can also help students with decoding unfamiliar words they can encounter while reading. Repeated oral reading in a small group setting allows a student to receive feedback from the teacher and gives the student practice with reading the same text multiple times. Chorale reading, where students all read from the same text in unison with the teacher allows the student to hear appropriate fluency models while reading. Lastly, a book on tape is another intervention to

improve reading fluency because students can hear appropriate models of fluency being read aloud without any additional adult support.

The more a child reads, the more his or her reading fluency is going to improve. One strategy to improve reading fluency is Reader's Theater. Reader's Theater is reading a script adapted from literature that students practice reading repeatedly for the purpose of performing to an audience. Reader's Theater gives students the opportunity to develop fluency and comprehension through multiple readings of the text. Students are playing a character; thus, they are challenged to use expression, intonation, and inflection while reading. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively with peers through rehearsing and performing together.

As a second grade teacher in a Triple A school, the researcher has witnessed students who are still struggling with learning to read. In this study, the researcher investigated one potential strategy: using Reader's Theater to help improve students reading achievement.

Statement of Problem

Reading is a complex process that requires students to put many skills together simultaneously. Students need to be able to identify words at a rapid rate while comprehending the text at the same time. Many students struggle with reading fluency because they are reading the text word for word or stopping to decode unfamiliar words. The problem is to identify effective techniques for developing and improving these skills.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Reader's Theater on the reading fluency skills of struggling second grade students. Does instruction with Reader's Theater help students recognize words more rapidly and understand the text through repeated readings?

Hypothesis

There will be no difference in oral reading fluency of struggling second grade students receiving Reader's Theater and non-struggling second graders receiving guiding reading instruction as measured by scores on the DIBELS Progress Monitoring Oral Reading Fluency battery.

Operational Definitions

The dependent variable in this study is *reading fluency*, which can be operationally defined by the National Institute for Literacy (2006) as the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. For the purpose of this study, reading fluency will be measured by the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) Progress Monitoring System, the oral reading fluency subtest. This system provides grade-level passages for students to read during a one-minute timed period. The progress monitoring system allows teachers to monitor students between formal DIBELS administrations.

A *struggling second grade student* can be defined as a student who did not meet the DIBELS benchmark requirement for the winter DIBELS administration. Students scoring at 55 words or below per minute are labeled as intensive, and students scoring between 56 and 74 words per minute are labeled as strategic. For this study, students scoring at intensive or strategic were placed in the struggling second grader group.

A *non-struggling second grader* can be defined as a student scoring 75 or more words on the oral reading fluency DIBELS assessment subtest.

The independent variable for this study is *Reader's Theater* which can be operationally defined as students' repeated reading of a script adapted from literature. For this study, Abrams Reader's Theater Scripts will be used.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review seeks to explore the topic of reading fluency at the elementary school level. Section one defines what reading fluency is and discusses the importance of fluency and how it connects to the overall reading process. Section two discusses how fluency is developed while children are learning to read. Section three explores the reasons for poor fluency and how poor fluency may impact a struggling reader. Lastly, section four provides strategies for improving reading fluency in developing readers.

The Importance of Fluency

Fluency is one of five critical components that are necessary for reading instruction and development. According to the National Institute for Literacy (2006), it can be defined as the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. Fluent readers are able to group words or phrases together when they read, so their reading is automatic and effortless. Fluency is not just about reading speed but is also about a reader being able to gain meaning from what he or she is reading while reading. When reading orally, a fluent reader has expression and does not sound choppy and plodding. Fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding text word by word; thus they free up the brain so they are able to derive meaning from the text (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

Fluency is important because it links word recognition and comprehension (Diller, 2007). As a child is learning to read, the number of words he or she can recognize automatically increases, and the number of unfamiliar words he or she needs to decode decreases. Fluency is important because students need to be able to recognize words while also comprehending what they are reading (Rasinski, 2003). If a student is a fluent reader, he or she is able to make

connections among texts during reading and connect ideas from the text to his or her background knowledge. Without reading comprehension, the purpose for reading decreases; therefore, it's very important that a student becomes a fluent reader (Rasinski, 2003). Better reading fluency is the key to better reading comprehension.

Oral reading fluency and silent reading fluency are equally important in the reading development of children. Oral reading can simply be defined as how a child reads out loud. Fluent reading should be reading without stumbling or hesitating. It should have correct rate or speed, prosody or phrasing, expression, intonation, and pacing (Diller, 2007). The reading should flow like natural conversation. Silent reading is just as important as oral reading, although it is a little harder to assess since it is completed silently. A fluent silent reader should be able to read the text without mouthing or saying the words out loud (Paige, 2011). He or she also should be able to read without hesitation and be able to tell what the reading was about when finished.

Fluency Development

Fluency develops over time and through extensive reading practice. When a child is beginning to learn how to read, his or her oral reading is slow and labored because he or she is just learning to “break the code” (National Institute for Literacy, 2006, p. 22). Thus, this type of reader is just learning to attach sounds to letters and blend the letters into words. As the number of words a student can read automatically increases, he or she still may not be able to read with expression. This middling reader is still reading word by word and not dividing text into meaningful chunks. As a child's fluency is developing, he or she begins to learn when to pause appropriately within the text and at the ends of sentences. He or she also learns when to change emphasis and tone when reading (National Institute for Literacy, 2006).

Fluency changes and develops over time and is not just about reading texts in the early stages of reading development. Fluency begins in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten with letter and sound recognition. It is important that students are able to fluently identify letters at this stage in their reading development (Hiebert, 2005). Once letter and sound recognition has developed, students can begin putting letters together to make words. At first students are slow and need to say each letter sound in the word, but the more they practice, the better they become at reading words automatically and with fluency (Hall, 2012). At this stage, students are also working on recognizing high frequency, or commonly used, words that cannot be decoded easily. Students then begin chunking words together into meaningful phrases during first grade. As students' reading is developing, they are able to read connected text automatically and fluently.

Students are not able to move onto the next level of fluency development until the previous level has been mastered. Therefore, if they are not able to decode words effortlessly or are not able to recognize high frequency words automatically, they are going to struggle with reading phrases and sentences with fluency. When students can perform reading and reading-related tasks quickly and accurately, then they are on the path to fluent reading (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

Fluency can be broken down into three areas of development: accuracy in word recognition, automaticity in word recognition, and interpretive and meaningful reading. Fluency is not one particular stage of development and changes depending on what readers are reading. Even readers who are typically fluent may not be able to read a technical textbook or book on a complex topic (Rasinski, Linek, & Sturtevant, 2001). According to Diller (2007), students must be able to decode accurately in order to gain fluency. Students need to be reading books at about 95 to 99 percent accuracy when helping to develop fluency. This type of text should be at the

student's independent reading level, where he or she can automatically recognize the words or effortlessly decode them. Accuracy level in word recognition can be assessed by completing a running record on a student, where that student reads a selected text and the errors are marked on a recording sheet (Hall, 2012).

Reading rate is also an important component of fluency development. Automaticity or quickness in word recognition should occur effortlessly in order to build fluency (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007). Reading rate can be assessed by timing students for one minute on a grade level passage. Correct words per minute vary by grade level and time in the school year. It is suggested that students should be reading 60 words per minute by the end of first grade, 90 words per minute by the end of second grade, and 114 words per minute by the end of third grade (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

The last component of fluency development is interpretive and meaningful reading. Students who are fluent readers read with expression, intonation, phrasing, pacing, and pausing when appropriate. Students develop these characteristics by reading orally (Diller, 2007). Models of good fluency are very important for fluency development. Students need to hear correct pacing and pausing so they know what fluent reading should sound like. Books on tape and teacher or parent read alouds provide models for fluent reading (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010).

Reading fluency is simply developed and improved by reading more text. The more words a child reads, the more fluent his or her reading is going to become. Practicing with easy texts, where students can read with 95 percent accuracy or above, will help students develop fluency (Hall, 2012).

Reasons for Poor Fluency

Students who are not able to read fluently must focus their attention primarily on decoding individual words and therefore are unable to focus on comprehending the text (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Readers who are struggling with fluency read the text word by word, thus sounding choppy. Typically, students who score lower on measures of fluency also score lower on measures of comprehension. These two skills go hand and hand and it is therefore important that they are developing at similar rates (Hiebert, 2005).

One reason that students struggle with fluency is that they are unable to decode unfamiliar words very well. Some students have not mastered either letter or letter-sound identification, so when a student comes to a word he or she doesn't know when reading, he or she must stop and sound it out (Rasinski, 2003). If a student does not know all of his or her letter sounds, then he or she may then decode the word inaccurately, thus lowering accuracy rate when reading. This slows down reading and causes a student to focus on decoding and so be unable to focus on comprehension. The student lacks automatic decoding skills, which prevents him or her from reading accurately and quickly. Students who are struggling in this area need additional phonics and letter/sound instruction (National Institute for Literacy, 2006).

Another reason that a child may have poor fluency is a lack of phonemic awareness, which is the understanding that spoken words are made up of separate, small sounds. These types of students struggle with segmenting, taking words apart sound by sound, and blending, putting sounds together to make words (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010). If students do not possess phonemic awareness, then they are going to struggle with all the components of learning to read, not just fluency.

A third reason that students may have poor fluency is that, although they are able to decode, this takes place at a much slower rate. This often occurs with English language learners who are not as familiar with the language. Fluent readers focus their attention on understanding what they are reading, while readers who struggle with fluency focus their attention on decoding, leaving less attention for understanding what they read (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007). Practice with decoding nonsense words can help improve this skill. Improving a student's high frequency word bank is also important, so that there are more words that a student recognizes automatically and fewer words he or she needs to decode (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009).

The last reason that a child may struggle with reading fluency is a lack of fluency instruction. Many people think that fluency will just develop naturally as the child is instructed in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension (Rasinski et al., 2001). Most popular reading programs do not foster reading fluency development, nor do they identify fluency as a major goal. It is important that daily fluency instruction occurs in the elementary grades. Students need lots of opportunities to read orally and gain support and feedback from teachers, peers, and parents. According to Diller (2007), many teachers believe that round robin reading helps improve fluency, but this type of reading has not been proven successful in improving reading fluency in children. Students who grew up in homes where they were never or rarely read to have not heard models for fluent reading. Children of parents who are illiterate or with parents who also struggled to learn to read are also at a higher rate for developing fluency issues. Children need to hear fluent reading so they know what they should sound like when they read. Often, parents think that fluency is just about reading rate and forget to ask students comprehension questions after reading. It is important that parents are informed as well so they know what they can be doing at home to also improve fluency (Rasinski, 2003).

Strategies for Improving Reading Fluency

The main strategy for improving reading fluency is to simply read more texts. A non-fluent reader may read only 100,000 to 400,000 words a year, while a fluent reader reads closer to 4,000,000 words a year (Diller, 2007). It is important to identify areas in which students need improvement. Students may need to work on all areas or just one or two. Focus lessons can be developed to meet the needs of each learner.

If students are struggling with decoding words effortlessly and automatically, then they need instruction in chunking words or reading parts of words rather than decoding letter by letter. If students are struggling with identifying high frequency words, then explicit instruction is needed so students can start automatically reading these words and becoming more fluent readers (Hall, 2012). Frequently writing the words, spelling the words, and reading poems where these words are commonly found can help increase a student's high frequency word bank.

Some students may need instruction with punctuation. Punctuation is often taught during writing, but students need to be taught what to do when they see it while reading. Students need to learn that punctuation has purpose and that is to give meaning to the text. Students may also need instruction with reading in phrases or prosody. Prosody adds rhythm to the reading and makes it sound more interesting (Diller, 2007). Once again, poetry is a great type of text to use to help improve reading fluency for this skill.

Reading with expression is an important component of fluent reading that is often fun for students to practice. Reading books with dialogue gives students practice with changing their voices when different characters speak. Students then have to think about what each character is really like, which will also improve reading comprehension (Clark et al., 2009).

Repeated reading and guided oral reading are two forms of reading practice where increased fluency can be generated. One-on-one or small group instruction oral reading is important so that the teacher can provide immediate feedback to the child. Repeated oral reading, reading the same text several times, allows the student to become familiar with the words so he or she is not stuck on decoding (Hall, 2012). The more a student is able to practice a particular text, the more he or she is able to work on intonation, rate, and expression.

Another way to improve fluency is by having the student read along with the teacher or having the whole class chorale reading. Chorale reading, where all students read aloud from the same text in unison with the teacher, allows the students to hear accurate pronunciation, appropriate reading rate, and prosody (Paige, 2011). Since the whole class is reading together, chorale reading is a strategy that can be used throughout all elementary grades.

Listening to a book on tape or tape recording the student reading is another powerful tool to improve reading fluency. Books on tape provide models of fluent reading just like hearing a teacher or another fluent adult read aloud. Books on tape are also a great activity for students to complete at literacy center time because these devices can be used independently with little teacher support. Often, students do not realize that they sound like a robot when reading; tape recording them and allowing them to hear themselves can be very eye opening for students (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007). This allows students to hear their mistakes and figure out which areas of fluency they need to improve on.

Reader's Theater is another way for students to improve their fluency. Reader's Theater is when students read from a script which is adapted from literature (Clark et al., 2009). There are no backgrounds or props, and the students' goal is to read the script aloud effectively by

using voice and expression. Students are repeatedly exposed to the text, so fluency and comprehension are developed each time the students practice. Students are also excited to perform, so there is motivation and engagement among children.

Summary

One of the leading indicators of future reading success among students lies in the demonstration of fluency and early reading skills. Fluency is an important component of the learning to read process that requires explicit instruction. Fluency is developed over time and looks different at each stage of the reading process. Students who struggle with fluency also tend to struggle with reading comprehension. Students who struggle with reading fluency often spend their brain power trying to decode words and not deriving meaning from the content. There are several strategies available to improve reading fluency, but the most important one is to simply practice reading more independent level texts.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the Reader's Theater strategy in improving the reading fluency skills of struggling second grade students.

Design

This was a pretest/posttest control group quasi-experimental study. The DIBELS progress monitoring oral reading fluency subtest was given as a pretest. The posttest scores were compared for 1) the group of students who received Reader's Theater, the treatment group, and 2) a group of students achieving on level at the time of the pretest, the control group, who received regular guided reading instruction.

Participants

The students who participated in this study attend an elementary school with a population of 591 students. The demographics of student population are as follows: 5% percent Asian, 26% African American, 29% Hispanic, and 33% White. The school receives Triple A funds from the county to support the 70% of students who qualify for free and reduced meals.

The participants in this study were 23 second grade students from a suburban school in Maryland. All students are members of the researcher's second grade class. The treatment group consisted of 12 students. Five of these students scored intensive on the DIBELS assessment and seven scored strategic. There were two boys and ten girls in the treatment group.

Instrument

The DIBELS progress monitoring subtest assessment was the instrument used in this study. The assessment is given formally three times per year to students in kindergarten through second grade. The goal of DIBELS is to predict future reading successes and difficulties.

Benchmarks are set for each subtest, grade level, and time of year. Students are classified into three different results categories: at or above benchmark (core), below benchmark (strategic), or well below benchmark (intensive.)

The oral reading fluency subtest consists of ten grade level passages with roughly two hundred words each. Students are timed for one minute and told to read the passage. The test administrator can provide the student with a word if he or she is struggling for more than a few seconds. At the end of the one minute, students are asked to retell what they read. In order to get the score, the administrator subtracts the errors from the number of correctly read words per minute. The formal DIBELS administration given three times per year has the student read three passages and then takes the mean score of the three passages for students' official score. For progress monitoring purposes, only one reading passage is given for assessment.

Procedure

Students in the second grade class were assessed using the DIBELS progress monitoring oral reading fluency subtest. Results from the subtests identified twelve students as needing intensive or strategic instruction for oral reading fluency.

Students in the treatment group received daily small group instruction using Reader's Theater scripts for six weeks. The scripts used for this study were Abrams Reader's Theater scripts. The scripts are based on classic fairy tales and contain an average of six roles per story. The treatment group was divided into two groups, but each received the same instruction and Reader's Theater script. The teacher followed the schedule below for instructing students using Reader's Theater each week. The eleven students in the control group received daily guided reading instruction using a leveled text from the county reading program.

Reader's Theater Weekly Instructional Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Teacher introduces script to group.2. Teacher reads script, modeling fluent reading.3. Students read whole script to themselves.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students read the script out loud, taking turns for each part.2. Teacher assigns roles for each student.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Student practices introducing himself or herself and standing up during his or her turn.2. Students independently practice reading their roles.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students practice reading their parts independently.2. Students do a practice rehearsal with standing and sitting at the right time.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students perform for the class.2. Students rate their reading and fluency.

All 23 students were posttested using the oral reading fluency subtext of the DIBELS progress monitoring system. The pretest and posttest scores for students in both experimental and control groups were compared.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a statically significant difference in oral reading fluency scores among second graders who received Reader's Theater instruction when those students were compared to second graders who only received grade level literacy instruction. The pretest and posttest oral reading fluency results for struggling students receiving instruction with Reader's Theater and students not receiving that instruction were analyzed using a t test for independent groups. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Oral Reading Fluency Scores for Students Receiving Instruction with Reader's Theater and Students Not Receiving Reader's Theater

Test	Group	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
Pretest	Reader's Theater	54.1	12	9.98	7.21	0.00*
	No Reader's Theater	110.8	11	25.22		
Posttest	Reader's Theater	61.8	12	15.61	5.36	0.00*
	No Reader's Theater	119	11	33.24		

* p < 0.00

The hypothesis that there would be no difference in oral reading fluency of struggling second grade students receiving Reader's Theater and non-struggling second graders receiving

guided reading instruction as measured by scores on the DIBELS Progress Monitoring Oral Reading Fluency battery is rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the performance of a group of second graders on the DIBELS oral reading fluency subtest after receiving a reading intervention focusing on Reader's Theater instruction. The students in the treatment group who received the Reader's Theater instruction were struggling readers, while the students in the control group were average students reading on grade level. The students in the control group had significantly higher scores before the study than students in the treatment group.

The research in this study was examining whether the gap between the two groups would close due to the use of Reader's Theater. Both the treatment group and the control group differed in their pre- and posttest scores. While the treatment and control groups' scores differed on the pretest and posttest, both groups' scores improved from pretest to posttest. The treatment group increased an average of 7.6 words per minute, while the control group increased by 8.18 words per minute. In the treatment group, ten of the twelve students showed improvement; two students decreased in their number of words per minute. One student in the treatment group made significant gains by increasing her oral reading score by 27 words per minute. In the control group, all students except one made gains.

Implications

While the struggling readers in the treatment group always scored significantly lower than the average readers who did not receive Reader's Theater, Reader's Theater may be an effective intervention to use to improve reading fluency scores of struggling readers. Although the students who received the Reader's Theater instruction did not increase their scores to the

same level as the control group, five students were able to move from the intensive score range to the strategic score range or from the strategic range to core. (Students scoring at 55 words or below per minute are labeled as intensive and students scoring between 56 and 74 words per minute are labeled as strategic. A student reading 75 words or more is labeled core.)

Another implication for this study was student engagement. Reader's Theater was very engaging for students in the treatment group. Students were highly motivated to practice reading every day. Although only oral reading fluency scores were measured, students also showed improvement with their intonation, prosody, and expression while reading. Students in the treatment group enjoyed performing their scripts every Friday, and students in the control group asked if they could participate as well.

Threats to Validity

There were several threats to validity during this study. There were only six weeks used to teach Reader's Theater and collect data for the study. In order to close the gap between the struggling students and the students reading on grade level, more time is necessary to improve reading scores. There were also several days that school was closed due to snow. Therefore, some lessons had to be combined in order to fit all lessons in one week. Students were then unable to practice for as many days as were scheduled.

Another threat to validity that may have affected the posttest scores was that two students in the treatment group also received Leveled Literacy Intervention four days per week from a reading specialist. These students received extra reading support in fluency in addition to the Reader's Theater instruction. One solution to this problem would be to exclude the data for these students in order to eliminate this threat to validity.

A third threat to validity was the lack of diversity in the groups. All of the students in the treatment group qualify for free or reduced lunch while only half of the students in the control group receive free or reduced lunch. Students raised in low socioeconomic families are often at a higher risk of developing reading difficulties. There were also four English Language Learners (ELL) students in the treatment group who receive additional support from an ELL teacher. These students often struggle with reading fluency because they are reading a language that is not familiar to them.

Connections to Existing Literature

In a study by Trainin and Andrzejczak (2006), fourth and fifth grade students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds were chosen to participate and placed in a treatment or control group. Students were instructed using Reader's Theater for two one-hour sessions a week. Students were then assessed using Oral Reading Fluency measures and unit tests that measured vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. The students who were using Reader's Theater demonstrated significantly higher results than the students not receiving Reader's Theater instruction. The study also showed that Reader's Theater benefitted all students and not just those who were struggling readers. The current study's results were different from Trainin and Andrzejczak's study because all students showed gains in that study, not just the students receiving Reader's Theater instruction. Perhaps Trainin and Andrzejczak's study demonstrated different results because the treatment and control groups were composed of a variety of students and not just a high and low group like in the current study.

Egmon and Bauza (2007) examined the effects of Reader's Theater on second grade English Language Learners. This study used a three-minute reading assessment to assess word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. All students participating in that study made gains in

all areas after receiving Reader's Theater instruction for three months' time. The ELL students in the researcher's treatment group for the current study also made significant gains, possibly attributable to the Reader's Theater instruction. Out of the four students, two were able to move from the intensive range to the strategic range for oral reading fluency on the DIBELS subtest.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies on the effects of Reader's Theater should be completed with more time allotted for analyzing student growth. This study was completed over six weeks, which is a relatively small amount of time to improve reading fluency scores. Students who are struggling with reading skills need significant time and support to reach the same level as their peers. Also, Reader's Theater should not replace daily guided reading instruction but should instead be used as an intervention that can be used in addition to small group classroom reading support.

Another suggestion for future research would be to have more similar control and treatment groups. In this study, the treatment group was well below the control group in terms of oral reading fluency scores. Although both groups showed improvement, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the intervention among all different types of reading groups since only the treatment group received the instruction. Perhaps in future studies the treatment and control group could be comprised of high, middle, and low reading students in order to more accurately analyze the effectiveness of the intervention.

References

- Clark, R., Morrison, T., & Wilcox, B. (2009). Reader's Theater: A process of developing fourth-graders' reading fluency. *Reading Psychology, 30*, 359–385.
- Diller, D. (2007). *Making the most of small groups: Differentiation for all*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Egmon, B., & Bauza, D. (2007). The effects of Reader's Theater on the fluency and comprehension of English language learners. Retrieved from <http://www.fortbendis.com/docs/action-research-reports/effect-of-reader's-theater-on-the-fluency-and-comprehension-of-english-language-learners.pdf>
- Gorsuch, G. & Taguchi, E. (2010). Developing reading fluency and comprehension using repeated reading: Evidence from longitudinal student reports. *Language Teaching Research, 14*(1), 27–59.
- Hall, S. (2012). *I've DIBEL'd, now what?: Designing targeted interventions with DIBELS next data*. Longmont, CO: Cambium Learning Sopris.
- Hiebert, E. (2005). The effects of text difficulty on second graders' fluency development. *Reading Psychology, 26*, 183–209.
- Linan-Thompson, S., & Vaughn, S. (2007). *Research based methods of reading instruction for English language learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- National Institute for Literacy. (2006). *A child becomes a reader: Proven ideas from research for parents* (3rd ed.). Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs.
- Paige, D. (2011). "That sounded good!": Using whole class choral reading to improve fluency. *The Reading Teacher, 64*(6), 435–438.

- Rasinski, T. (2003). *The fluent reader: Oral reading strategies for building word recognition, fluency, and comprehension*. New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books.
- Rasinski, T., Linek, W. & Sturtevant, E. (2001). Effects of fluency development on urban second-grade readers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 87(3), 159–165.
- Trainin, G., & Andrzejczak, N. (2006). Readers' Theatre: A viable reading strategy? *American Educational Research Association*, 24(4), 10–16.