Readers Theater: A Key to Fluency Development

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READERS THEATER: A KEY TO FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT

By

Rachel Clark

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Brigham Young University
June 2006
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Rachel Clark in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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This study presents a multicase study that looked at the fluency development of three fourth grade readers of varying reading abilities. The participants were chosen based on two scores, their words correct per minute (WCPM) score and their Multidimensional Fluency Scale score (MFS). The three students participated in an eight-week intervention in which readers theaters were used for fluency instruction and practice. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used as the researcher observed the students during the literacy block of the day; interviewed the three participants three times; one-on-one, gathered self-report sheets that the participants filled out weekly; and recorded their WCPM and MFS scores weekly. Findings of this study suggest that students’ engagement in readers theater helped develop various aspects of fluency: expression, volume, and pace. Motivation and confidence were also found to increase through the use of readers theaters.
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1. Andy, Daniel, and Jacob’s weekly WCPM scores
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most teachers have observed a student’s jerky, stop-and-go reading (Allington, 2004). This choppy, slow, expressionless reading is often called disfluent reading. Even though there are many reading problems that lend themselves to inefficient reading, fluency is one that has hindered reading essentials, including comprehension. Comprehension is the end goal of reading, yet cannot be fully achieved when students are excessively slow at processing text (Rasinski, 2000). Through conscientious instruction, fluent reading can improve.

Fluency is an important part of the reading curriculum, but it is often neglected in reading instruction, perhaps because it is not well understood by teachers (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Many teachers do not have a clear understanding of fluency and what it encompasses, possibly because it is not a central topic on which pre- and inservice teachers are trained (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Teachers do instinctively assess fluency through running records and other oral reading assessments. However, implementing explicit fluency instruction is often ignored, maybe because of time constraints or because repeated readings and timed readings are menial tasks. Furthermore, when teachers do administer timed tests, the tests can often be discouraging for those students who are not motivated by competition (Tyler & Chard, 2000; Worthy & Prater, 2002). Although these instructional methods can be effective, motivation to engage in them is low for both students and teachers (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Fluency has been defined differently throughout the past several decades. In 1974, LaBerge and Samuels published an article emphasizing the automaticity of the word recognizing process. In 1995, Harris and Hodges, also defined fluency as the “freedom from word
identification problems” (p. 85). Zutell and Rasinski (1991) stated that fluency is effortless or automatic reading in which readers group words into meaningful phrases, while using the correct pitch and intonation. In more recent years the definition for fluency has been expanded beyond word recognition, to include comprehension processes (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). For the purpose of this study, the term fluency will be defined as an accurate, automatic reading rate, with correct phrasing, expression and volume, smoothness, and pace, and where attention can be allocated to comprehension (Dowhower, 1991; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Fluency is a very complex component of reading. Numerous factors can influence one’s reading fluency. Text difficulty is a common factor that can affect students’ reading fluency as well as the readers’ background knowledge of passage content. For example, if students know a lot about spiders, their fluency reading a passage about spiders can increase. Yet, those same students, if given an unfamiliar passage on Native Americans, can experience a decrease of fluency on that passage. The physical and emotional state of readers, among other things, can also have an influence on reading fluency.

Research indicates that an effective approach toward teaching fluency is repeated readings (Rasinski, 2000; Samuels 1997, 2002). One method of repeated readings consists of rereading a short meaningful passage several times until a desired level of fluency is achieved. This process is repeated over and over with various texts over an extended period (Samuels, 1997). While repeated readings are effective, some students find repeated readings lacking in meaningful purpose, and thus perceive it as a monotonous task. Teachers may also lack motivation to carry out this process of fluency instruction as they are already burdened with a full literacy curriculum.
A more desirable solution for fluency instruction may be a readers theater, wherein students are given a script and a specific part, as if they were in a play (Rasinski, 2003b). Students create the drama through their voices as they expressively read their parts instead of acting and using props. The students are given the script several days in advance and provided time to read and reread their assigned parts prior to a final performance. This, in essence, is a form of repeated reading, but one with greater purpose and motivation for both students and teacher (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998).

Often disfluent readers disengage during reading instruction because they become frustrated with the text (Rasinski, 2003a). However, during a readers theater, many readers eagerly practice their assigned parts until they can read them fluently. Struggling readers and proficient readers are able to participate in this activity, and through such experiences, build positive social interactions focused on reading (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Research

Considerable research has been done on reading fluency and instructional methods that are effective in increasing reading fluency (Rasinski, 2003b; Samuels, 2002). In one study, Rasinski, Padak, Linek, and Sturtevant (1994) examined the pre and post-tests of second grade readers. The participants were assigned to either an intervention group in which they were taught daily fluency lessons, or a control group in which direct fluency lessons were not present. Similarly, Rasinski (1990) studied the results of pre and post-tests of third graders that underwent two separate treatments of practicing oral reading and listening to correct oral reading. In both of these studies, the end product was positive gains in fluency.

Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers (1999) designed a program to increase reading fluency called Read Naturally. They studied the effects that repeated readings and modeled reading
fluency had on the reading fluency students in a Title I remedial and special education program, grades K-3. The following researchers, Rasinski, Padak, Linek, and Sturtevant (1994), and Rasinski (1990), looked at mean performance gains of oral reading fluency for each student in the program. Habrouck, et al. (1999) concluded that their reading program had positive effects on the readers’ fluency.

Another study that likewise examined reading fluency was conducted by Millin and Rinehart (1999). Through the use of pre and post-tests they studied the effects a readers theater had on the accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of 28 second-grade participants. Millin and Rinehart (1999) concluded that the students’ involvement in the readers theater appeared to benefit several aspects of reading. First, reading aloud enhanced their expression and rate. Second, a positive effect on reading comprehension was found. Third, the students’ motivation to read increased.

In summary, these research studies have each used various methods of oral fluency instruction including different forms of repeated readings. Each study reported positive effects and/or gains in fluency for the students that participated.

Statement of the Problem

Although many studies have been conducted on fluency and fluency instruction, very little has been done to look at the process of developing fluency. Most research conducted on reading fluency focuses on product, using pre and post-tests as the main data source. Further research looking at fluency instruction, including readers theater, has used children that typically fall into one or more of three categories: children in grades K-3 (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993), children in remedial reading programs (Dowhower, 1987; Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999;
Herman, 1985), or children in a Title I school (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999; Millin & Rinehart, 1999). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the process of developing fluency in three fourth-grade students over an eight-week period, while using readers theater as the chosen method of fluency instruction. The questions guiding this research include:

1. How do different aspects of oral reading fluency (rate, expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace) change for students with varying fluency abilities as they engage in readers theater?

2. What similarities and differences are observed among the developing fluency of students with varying fluency abilities?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fluency is a key skill to effective reading. When readers struggle with reading fluency, comprehension and motivation to read can be negatively impacted (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999). Because of the negative effects of disfluent reading, fluency deserves extensive attention, yet it is one area of reading that is too often ignored in the classroom (Lipson & Lang, 1991; Rasinski, 2000). Thus, in looking at the process of changing reading fluency as students engage in readers theater, this review will consider five areas: reading fluency, fluency research, reading comprehension research, fluency instruction, and readers theater research.

Reading Fluency

In the past a general definition of reading fluency was the ability to read quickly and automatically (Harris & Hodges, 1995; Logan, 1997). However, today the definition is broadened beyond word calling or just stating the words, to include comprehension as an essential part of fluency (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). The National Reading Panel (2000) defines fluency as the ability to read automatically with proper accuracy, speed, and expression, thus freeing the reader’s cognitive abilities so meaning of the text can be made. Likewise, Nathan and Stanovich (1991) and Kuhn and Stahl (2003) state that fluency is the ability to rapidly recognize words while speaking with correct prosody, thus allocating the attention toward cognitive processing.

Zutell and Rasinski (1991) define fluency as proficient oral reading that includes reading that is effortless or automatic, correct phrasing, and the use of pitch, stress, and intonation. Unlike the other researchers, Zutell and Rasinski (1991) do not include word recognition and
comprehension in their definition. They do this for the purpose of focusing educators’ attention “on the extent to which reading ‘sounds’ like speaking, that is, how much it conforms to the rhythms, cadences, and flow of oral language” (p. 212).

Due to the many different definitions of reading fluency, Wolf and Katzir-Cohen (2001) conducted a literature review and reported that researchers generally view fluency through one of three theories: the informational-processing theory, the connectionist theory, and the rauding theory. The informational-processing theory proposes that fluency is acquired through automaticity. This means that a reader receives visual stimuli, such as the letters in a word, and with practice and exposure, the features (letters) in the stimuli become a unit. “As these units accumulate and letter perception becomes increasingly automatic, attention to early visual coding process decreases” (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001, p. 214). Once the units are automatic, a reader can rapidly retrieve them and therefore read fluently.

In contrast to the informational-process theory, the connectionist theory emphasizes “continuous, distributed interaction of phonological, orthographic, syntactic, and semantic processing codes during word recognition” (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001, p. 217). Unlike the informational-processing theory, the connectionist theory does not view retrieval mechanisms as the source for coding but acknowledges the importance of other linguistic features, such as prosody. Prosody, or intonation and inflection used by readers, is one of the key links to becoming a fluent reader, yet it has become the “unattended bedfellow,” in that researchers and educators pay little attention to it (Dowhower, 1991; Rasinski, n.d.).

The rauding theory is the third theory of fluency (Carver, 1984). This theory’s central focus is on the link between fluency and comprehension. Carver (1984) articulated this theory
through three laws. Law I holds that readers attempt to understand a passage at a constant, fluent reading rate, called the *rauding rate*. Law II holds that efficiency of passage comprehension depends on the accuracy and rauding rate. Law III holds that the most efficient rate of comprehending is the rauding rate. In other words, the rauding theory defines fluency as the fastest rate at which a reader can efficiently understand complete thoughts in each sentence (Carver, 1984). Researchers (e.g. Dowhower, 1991; Nathan & Stanovich, 1991) concur with the rauding theory in that automaticity and rate alone do not define fluency. A level of comprehension must also be included for more complete fluency.

All three of these theories agree that fluency is a desirable, even necessary skill, but they describe different processes for obtaining it. Through these three theories and continued research, Wolf and Katzir-Cohen (2001) have put together a working definition of fluency:

In its beginnings, reading fluency is the product of the initial development of automaticity in underlying sublexical processes, lexical processes, and their integration in single-word reading and connected text. These include perceptual, phonological, orthographic, and morphological processes at the letter, letter pattern, and word levels, as well as semantic and syntactic processes at the word level and connected-text level. After it is fully developed, reading fluency refers to a level of accuracy and rate where decoding is relatively effortless; where oral reading is smooth and accurate with correct prosody; and where attention can be allocated to comprehension. (p. 219)

In summary, a number of researchers agree that fluency is much more than rapid decoding of words. It encompasses word recognition, which when completely developed, is an
accurate, automatic reading rate, with correct phrasing, expression and volume, smoothness, and pace, and where attention can be allocated to comprehension.

*Fluency Research*

Fluency research has been going on for decades, yet it has not received adequate attention until recently. The National Reading Panel (2000) as well as other researchers (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993) state that little research has been done on fluency, even though it is an essential component of efficient reading. However, in more recent years, researchers have “turned increasing attention toward unraveling the complexities of how reading fluency is developed and how it can be properly assessed” (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993, p. 325).

In order to study the development of fluency, several researchers have conducted studies using various instructional methods that intended to increase reading fluency. Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers (1999) studied the effects that repeated readings and modeled reading fluency have on the reading fluency students in a Title I remedial and special education program, grades K-3. They used a program developed by Ihnot, called *Read Naturally*, a method of fluency instruction that included three techniques: reading from a model, repeated readings, and progress-monitoring (metacognition). These researchers found that their *Read Naturally* program had positive effects on the readers’ reading fluency and comprehension, as well as student motivation.

A similar study on reading fluency was conducted by Rasinski, Padak, Linek, and Sturtevant (1994). Like Hasbrouck, et al., (1999), these researchers also examined oral reading fluency, but through a different instructional model. Rasinski, et al., created their own instructional model for oral reading fluency, which they called Fluency Development Lessons
(FDL). Over the course of a year each student in the intervention classrooms participated in a FDL, which was a 10-15 minute instructional activity that included the following seven steps: a) teacher introduced text and invited prediction; b) teacher modeled fluent reading of the text; c) teacher led class discussion on the content of text; d) teacher led whole class in several choral readings of text; e) teacher divided students into pairs to read text three times; f) teacher invited students to read text in small groups to class; and g) students put away text, but were encouraged to read text on their own. Rasinski, et al., found that, aside from the second graders’ increased oral reading rate, no significant effects of the Fluency Development Lessons were found. Although changes were limited, their work does suggest that instructional approaches, such as the FDL, may have potential for improving oral reading fluency of second grade students.

Several other researchers have also designed instructional methods to help students with slow, disfluent reading (e.g., Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski, 1990). While different fluency instructional methods were used and tested, research indicates that students’ reading rate is increased through instructional programs that incorporate various repeated readings (e.g., Dowhower, 1987; Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999; Herman, 1985; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994).

In 2000, the National Reading Panel reviewed research-based studies on various aspects of reading, including fluency. They looked for generalizations on fluency that would help answer questions directed toward what fluency is and how it is increased. The NRP conducted a meta-analysis on 16 studies, with 752 subjects ranging from first grade to college. From their analysis, the NRP concluded that fluency is an essential component of reading, yet fluency instruction is missing in many classrooms. They recommended the use of guided oral repeated readings and
increased independent reading as part of effective fluency instruction. Even with these findings, reading fluency has continued and will continue to be an ongoing area of reading research.

*Reading Comprehension*

Comprehension is the end goal of reading, yet it cannot be fully acquired when students are excessively slow at processing text (Rasinski, 2000). More than 20 years ago, comprehension was generally perceived as the ability to understand and construct meaning as the result of “decoding oral language” (Fielding & Pearson, 1994, p. 62). Now researchers state that the ability to understand and make meaning from what is read comes from using the “clues from the text and their [the readers’] background knowledge to make sense of text” (Almasi, 2003, p. 74). Pressley (2002) supports this concept by saying if students understand the text and can interpret it, they have achieved comprehension. However, if children cannot readily decode words their comprehension will be impaired.

The ability to comprehend comes through the use of different cognitive resources. These abilities are any of those that distinguish a poor reader from a good reader (Stanovich, 1980). Readers who lack strong word recognition skills tend to use any informational source available to aid them in word identification. Poor readers rely on the use of pictures, phonics, and contextual clues for understanding, when they do not have sufficient word recognition skills to keep the reading. Stanovich (1980) states that when this word recognition is slow:

The conscious-attention expectancy process has time to operate and provides another source of contextual facilitation. Thus, the reader with poor context-free recognition skills has an additional contextual expectancy process acting to aid his identification of a word. However, this additional contextual facilitation is
purchased at a cost. The conscious-expectancy process uses attentional capacity and thus leaves fewer cognitive resources left over for comprehension operations that work on integrating larger text units. (p. 64)

In other words, poor readers’ understanding suffers because of the lack of attentional capacity that is “left over for integrative comprehension processes” (Stanovich, 1980, p. 64) because they use most of their cognitive resources to identify word units.

Word recognition is one skill that distinguishes good readers from poor readers (Stanovich, 1980). Good readers have a larger vocabulary and sight word bank, which facilitates context-free word recognition. Good readers are able to identify words “automatically and rapidly, whether by direct visual recognition or phonological recoding” (p. 64), which allows them to use context to build textual understanding. In contrast, poor readers use contextual cues for the purpose of identifying individual words, not for making meaning of the text as a whole.

So how do good readers gain a sufficient vocabulary and an enlarged word-recognition capacity? One answer is through reading (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Stanovich, 1986). The amount of reading one does increases and improves one’s accurate vocabulary. Children with larger vocabularies are better readers, and children who have limited vocabularies are poorer readers (Stanovich, 1986). The more children read, the more they come in contact with words and thus they build a more proficient word-recognition capacity.

Fluency Instruction

Fluency instruction is an important component of any reading program, yet it is often ignored (Lipson & Lang, 1991; Rasinski, 2000). Although reading comprehension is the overall desired outcome of reading, Rasinski (2000) states that inefficient, slow, choppy reading needs to
be taken seriously. There may be differing causes for disfluent reading, but these obstacles can be addressed through engaging and authentic instructional methods and activities that are integrated into the regular reading curriculum.

The method of repeated readings is one research-based strategy that has been effectively shown to increase students’ fluency in oral reading (NRP, 2000; Samuels, 1997; Tyler & Chard, 2000). This is a technique in which a child is given a specific independent or instructional level text to read and reread several times to improve accuracy, speed, and expression. Samuels (1997) defines repeated reading as the method of reading and “rereading a short meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. Then the procedure is repeated with a new passage” (p. 377). Tyler and Chard (2000) illustrate three specific positive results on fluency that occur from repeated readings. First, through repeating the same passage numerous times, reading rate and accuracy increase. Second, rereading a passage increases comprehension considerably. Third, acquired skills appear to be carried over to “unpracticed tests” (p. 165).

Researchers have named several fluency instruction methods, which relieve some of the “drill and practice” approach from the original usage of repeated reading (Rasinski, 2000). Poetry, when used as a simple yet intriguing text, can promote reading fluency through its expression and repetition. Paired reading, buddy reading, echo reading, choral reading, reading with books on tape, and readers theater are also ways to provide support for reading fluency. These oral reading methods give authentic opportunities for students to engage in reading.

Although many researchers agree with the success of repeated readings, there is a debate as to whether or not students are motivated to learn from repeated readings (Tyler & Chard, 2000). Students who are not competitive by nature may have little interest in trying to get a better
time on their timed readings. Also, some students get bored with reading the same text over and over again.

A readers theater, on the other hand, is a type of repeated reading that can engage and motivate students to participate (Millin & Rinehart, 1999). A readers theater is defined as the presentation of a short drama or interpretive reading that has been selected and rehearsed without the pressure of memorizing lines or the trouble of props (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Rinehart (1999) supports this by stating, “A readers theater is an interpretive activity in which children practice and perform for others a scripted reading” (p. 75). Most readers theater scripts are created from simple fairy tales, short stories, or fables (Worthy & Prater, 2002). Non-fiction and informational texts can also be used as a valuable source for scripts (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998).

Readers theater can be incorporated into fluency instruction in various ways. Rinehart (1999) outlines some specific guidelines for the context of a research study. On day one, the teacher selects what to read. On day two, the teacher and student read and reread text and discuss the story. On day three, parts are either assigned by the teacher or chosen by the students. On day four, students prepare, practice, and rehearse. On day five, students perform in front of a class or group. At the close of the week, teachers assess through discussion of what was accomplished and how/what the students felt about it.

While many students enjoy being a part of a readers theater, some students may not like to perform in front of their peers. This can be an intimidating experience for those who are shy or feel less confident in their reading abilities. Although some students may feel this way, readers theater can provide opportunities for many readers to be a part of a successful reading activity.
Readers Theater Research

Worthy and Prater (2002) suggest that the goal of a readers theater is to give students motivation to read and reread scripts, thus improving fluency and therefore reading comprehension. Readers theater is, in essence, a repeated reading; nevertheless it gives the reader an “authentic reason to engage” in reading (p. 295). Children engage in this form of reading because they begin to identify themselves as successful readers as they complete their parts of the script. Through success, students’ attitudes about reading improve and students become more motivated to continue reading (Rinehart, 1999).

A readers theater also gives students the opportunity to read large quantities of material, in hopes of becoming better readers (Millin & Rinehart, 1999). Through the use of a readers theater, students are engaged in a large amount of reading daily as they practice their scripts over and over again. Many researchers believe that reading progress, overall, comes through the amount of reading done (Rasinski, 2000; Stanovich, 1986). The more practice students have in reading, the better word recognition they will acquire, thus resulting in increased comprehension (Millin & Rhinehart, 1999).

One study that examined reading fluency through the use of a readers theater was conducted by Millin and Rinehart (1999). They studied the effects a readers theater had on the accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of 28 second-grade participants. This study lasted nine weeks in which the first and last weeks were used for pre/post testing, and the intervention was conducted in the intervening weeks. The intervention consisted of using a readers theater for a series of activities, on a daily basis. On day one, the teacher read the story, each student was assigned a part, and they practiced with the teacher. On day two, the students practiced their
parts and recorded their readings onto a cassette tape. On day three, the students practiced their script as a whole group read-through. On day four, the class had a “dress rehearsal” of their script. On day five, they performed their readers theater to an audience. Millin and Rinehart (1999) concluded that the students’ involvement in the readers theater appeared to benefit several aspects of reading. First, reading aloud enhanced their expression and rate. Second, a positive effect on reading comprehension was found. Third, the students’ motivation to read increased.

Readers theater is one of several effective methods of fluency instruction. Although many studies have been conducted on the development of programs for fluency instruction and their effectiveness, very little has been done to look at the process of developing fluency. This study is designed to examine the process of developing fluency of three fourth grade students through the use of readers theater as a method of fluency instruction.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study is a multi-case study that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures. The purpose of this study was to examine the process of developing fluency in three fourth grade students. The questions guiding this study were the following:

1. How do different aspects of oral reading fluency (rate, expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace) change for students with varying fluency abilities as they engage in readers theater?

2. What similarities and differences are observed among the developing fluency of students with varying fluency abilities?

Classroom Context

I am a European American and my teaching and research was done in my fourth grade classroom, as this is the grade in which I have the most experience. I am in my fifth year of teaching at this school, all of which have been in fourth grade.

My school is located in Utah County in an area of mostly middle-class families. English is the primary language spoken in about 90-95 percent of the students’ homes. The school runs on a modified-extended day schedule, which consists of two tracks. The first track begins at 8:00 am, when 15 of the students in my class receive literacy instruction for one hour and 5 minutes. Then the second track (17 students) arrives at 9:15 am. All students are instructed together in other subjects such as science, social studies, and math, by the same teacher from 9:25 am to 2:15 pm. Following this block of instruction, the first track students go home and the second
track students receive literacy instruction from 2:25 pm to 3:30 pm. Students are enrolled in specific tracks based on parental requests and on their address in order to accommodate bus schedules.

Participants

I conducted a multi-case study on three different students in my class. The selection process was twofold. First, I found the words correct per minute (WCPM) reading rate for all my 32 students, using a cold reading passage, or passage they had never seen, at their independent reading level. Second, I used the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS) (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) to assess each of my 30 students’ overall reading fluency, also using a separate cold passage at their independent reading level. (See Appendix A for a copy of the MFS)

The scores of the students’ WCPM were listed in descending order on a spreadsheet. The students’ scores from the MFS were placed adjacent to the WCPM scores, also in descending order, so that I could easily view both scores. The purpose of this organization was to help me identify the specific students for my multi-case study. The first student I chose, Andy, had the class’ lowest WCPM as well as the lowest score from the MFS. Low scores on both the WCPM and the MFS are common for struggling readers, so choosing this student as a participant could provide insight to how struggling students grow and develop reading fluency through the use of readers theater. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity.

The second student selected, Daniel, had a low WCPM but a high score on the MFS. Typically, students who are overall slow readers, generally struggle with the other aspects of fluency as well, such as pace, smoothness, phrasing, expression, and volume. Therefore, I
watched to examine growth to determine if WCPM rose during the course of the readers theater intervention.

The third student chosen, Jacob, had a high WCPM, but a low score on the MFS. Often this type of reader reads quickly, but lacks the other essential components of fluent reading, such as smoothness, pace, and prosody. Once the three students had been identified, I sent home a participant consent form and a letter to the participants and their parents explaining the study and to obtain consent to be a participant in the study (see Appendix B for participant consent form and Appendix C for the letter to the participants and their parents).

Readers Theater Intervention

The eight-week intervention was conducted in the form of a reader’s workshop (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). Table 1 shows the organization of the reading workshop that I used in my class. The following is the reader’s workshop daily schedule:

1. Readers theater warm-up (5 minutes)
2. Mini lesson (15 minutes)
3. Independent reading of Book Club book (30 minutes)
4. Discussion groups and guided reading groups (10 minutes)
5. Class share (5 minutes)

During the readers theater warm-up, students read through their assigned parts individually or with a partner. Following the warm-up, I taught a mini lesson on fluency, vocabulary, or a comprehension strategy. Next, the students read their assigned book club books silently for 30-35 minutes. During this time, they accomplished their reading assignment and reading log for their book club book.
Table 1

*Weekly & Daily Schedule of the Reading Workshop*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Mini-lesson 15 min</td>
<td>Vocabulary lesson, words taken from readers theater script.</td>
<td>Reading strategy or fluency lesson</td>
<td>Reading strategy or fluency lesson</td>
<td>Reading strategy or fluency lesson</td>
<td>Reading strategy or fluency lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Class share 5 min</td>
<td>Class share from book club assignment</td>
<td>Class share from book club assignment</td>
<td>Class share from book club assignment</td>
<td>Class share from book club assignment</td>
<td>Performance of readers theater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After independent reading (Monday, Tuesday, and Friday), students got into groups according to their book club assignment for a discussion about the book. I rotated through each group, leading them through guided discussions and guided reading lessons. On Wednesday and Thursday, during group discussion, students rehearsed the readers theater script as a group. After the discussion group, students had a chance to share something they read or learned from either
their readers theater or discussion group, with the class. On Friday, during this class share time, students performed their readers theater.

   Every Monday, students were given new readers theater scripts with assigned parts, according to their reading level. I only used scripts that had leveled parts, published by the Benchmark Education Company (2003 - 2005). The genres varied to include both narrative and expository texts, and scripts paralleled the curriculum as often as possible.

   Next, during our mini lesson on Monday, the class made lists of difficult words that the students saw in their scripts and we discussed their pronunciation and meaning. Throughout the week, I taught mini lessons on fluent reading skills needed for a readers theater, such as reading with expression and correct intonation. After the mini lesson, students worked on their independent reading. When independent reading time was over, students got into discussion groups, and discussed books and assignments.

   On Tuesday during the readers theater time, students read their parts aloud in whisper voices for five minutes. I circled around the room to listen and help students with word accuracy. Once they finished, they reread their parts until the five minutes had expired. On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday students practiced with partners during the warm up time, alternating reading their parts, for five minutes. On Wednesday and Thursday, during the group discussion time, all students with the same script practiced their parts in a “dress rehearsal” fashion. Finally, on Friday, each group performed their readers theater for an audience composed of another class in the school. This process continued for the duration of eight weeks.

   Over the course of a week each student had worked with his/her assigned readers theater part for at least 30 minutes. This included individual practice, partner practice, group practice,
and performance. At least 40 minutes a week was devoted to explicit fluency instruction in both whole class (mini lessons) and small group settings (guided reading groups).

**Instruments**

Four instruments were used to collect data in this study. First, the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) was used to measure the students’ words correct per minute and to track students’ rate and accuracy.

Second, I used the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) to assess the expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace of the students’ reading. This assessment consists of a 4-point Likert Scale, that rates four specific aspects of fluency – expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. See Appendix A for a copy of the MFS rating scale.

Third, a researcher-developed self-report was used as a weekly assessment of the students’ personal reflection on their own reading behaviors. The questions on the self-report are patterned after questions that accompany some informal reading inventories. The self-report includes questions about the students’ home and school reading, their participation in their groups’ readers theater that week, how they feel about their oral and silent reading, and how they feel about themselves as readers. The three participants completed this report sheet every Friday after their readers theater performance. Refer to Appendix D for a copy of the self-report.

The last instrument that was used was an interview. Three times during the study I interviewed each of the three students, one-on-one. I chose to interview them once at the beginning of the study, once in the middle, and once at the end of the study, to gain greater insight on their fluency development, throughout the eight weeks. The open-ended interview
questions were constructed to help answer the research questions, and generally asked the students about their participation in their readers theater group, and about any reading improvement they had noticed. During part of the interview, the students listened to recordings of themselves reading, as well as recordings of their group practicing and performing their readers theater. The students were asked to talk about the recordings and what they noticed about their oral reading fluency. For a list of interview questions, see Appendix E.

**Procedures**

Data were collected in several forms, over the course of the eight-week intervention. First, every Monday the three focal students were tape recorded as they read a cold passage on their independent reading level. Passages were selected from the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The taped readings were used to assess their WCPM, as well as other elements of fluency, using the MFS (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). These readings were tape recorded just in case classroom distractions occurred during the assessment.

Second, on every other Wednesday, including the Wednesday before the interview, the readers theater groups of these three students were audio taped as they read through their script for the first time. I only audio-taped the groups every other Wednesday because after the first interview, when the participant and I had limited time to listen to the recordings, I realized that weekly recordings were not necessary. The purpose of the recordings was to allow the participants to listen to their groups readers theater and then talk about it during the interview. This was accomplished by recording every other Wednesday instead of every Wednesday. Then on Friday of the same week, during the group performance of the reader theaters, these same groups were audio taped again. These recordings were rated using the MFS, but were used as
part of the interview. Three times during the intervention I interviewed the three students: on Friday of week 1 for Daniel, and on Monday of week 2 for Andy and Jacob; on Friday of week 5 and Monday of week 6 for Andy and Jacob; and on Friday of week 8 and the following Monday for Andy and Jacob. I asked questions about the students’ reading, their group participation, and how they felt about their oral reading (see Appendix E for a list of interview questions). I also taped the readings from both their readers theater group readings, and their cold readings on Mondays, and used them for a prompted recall, in which the students talked about what they heard in the recordings, during the interviews. Third, I took notes on my daily observations of the three students during reader’s workshop and, more specifically, while they worked on their readers theater. The same day during my prep time, during lunch, or after school, I amended my field notes with more thorough details and comments. Lastly, I had the three selected students fill out self-reports at the end of each week. These reports included information about involvement with their readers theater that week, as well as their involvement with reading in general (see Appendix D for the student self-report). Table 2 provides an overview of the data collection schedule for the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed both simultaneously with data collection and after all data were collected. They were separated into qualitative and quantitative data. I analyzed the qualitative data in five stages. First, I transcribed the observational data. Second, I categorized the data into units according to individual ideas within the sentences. I used colored pencils to underline an idea and then another color to underline the next, different idea. I did this on several paragraphs of observations for each of the three students, until I started to establish specific categories for
### Table 2

*Data Collection Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of readers theater group</td>
<td>Taping of performance</td>
<td>No School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Self report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of readers theater group</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No School</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Taping of readers theater group</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No School</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Taping of readers theater group</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>WCPM/MFS</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Taping of readers theater group</td>
<td>Interview (Andy &amp; Jacob interviewed on Monday)</td>
<td>No School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

which I could look. The categories that were interpreted were a) expression and volume, b) smoothness, c) pace, d) phrasing, e) independent reading, f) general reading, g) accuracy, h) working with others, i) emotions, j) teacher help, and k) class participation. I repeated this process to analyze the transcribed interview data, as well as the self-report transcribed data.

Next, I read through my codes and collapsed the observational data into four general categories. The categories that were interpreted in my observation data were aspects of fluency (including rate, accuracy, pace, smoothness, expression, volume, phrasing, and general reading), student behavior, involvement in class activities (including silent & oral reading, book clubs, and mini-lesson participation), and teacher’s perception of students’ feelings. See Table 3 for observational data categories and descriptions. I also collapsed the interview data into six general categories – readers theater parts, emotion (including students’ feeling and perceptions of themselves as readers), tasks, performance, fluency, and comprehension. This same process was repeated with the self-report data, which produced the same six categories as the interview data. See Table 4 for interview and self-report data categories and descriptions. Once these categories were established, I re-typed the data into charts according to the categories, which made it easier
Table 3

*Observational Data Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of fluency</td>
<td>Rate, accuracy, pace, smoothness, expression, volume, phrasing, and general reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behavior</td>
<td>How the student behaved in class during the literacy block.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in class activities</td>
<td>Participating in silent and oral reading, book clubs, and mini-lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s perception of student’s feelings</td>
<td>How the teacher perceived the student felt while engaged in different reading activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to analyze. See Appendix F for an example of the observational data chart, Appendix G for an example of the interview data chart, and Appendix H for an example of the self-report data chart.

Fourth, once all the data were displayed in charts, I summarized each category for each participant. For example, I summarized what the data revealed about Andy’s aspects of fluency, such as phrasing, week by week. See Appendix I for sample summaries. This was done for each of the three data sources. Finally, when all the summaries were written, I read all of the summaries, merged the ideas until there were two to three summative findings for each of the three participants. From this, I wrote the case studies that are found in chapter four.
**Table 4**

*Interview and Self-Report Data Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readers theater parts</td>
<td>When students referred to their parts in the script.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>When students expressed their feelings about any aspect of reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>Student participation in silent and oral reading, book clubs, readers theater groups, and mini-lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>When students commented on their readers theater performances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>Rate, accuracy, pace, smoothness, expression, volume, phrasing, and general reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>When students commented on understanding what they are reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To establish inter-rater reliability, I had three professionals, three graduate students, take my codes and code a selection of my data. The level of agreeability was 83 percent. My graduate chair also reviewed my codes and categories. Also, triangulation was used to verify credibility to
the data and its analysis, through comparing the data that came from interviews, observations, and self-reports.

Quantitative measures were also used to examine the data. The students’ scores of the WCPM were graphed in relation to the week of the intervention. The students’ scores from the MFS were individually charted in tables, showing the different aspects of fluency and how they changed from week to week, across the eight-week intervention. These scores helped broaden the perspective of how fluency developed for Andy, Daniel, and Jacob.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the fact that I am both the primary researcher as well as the fourth grade teacher in the study may positively or negatively affect the study in unexpected ways. Second, the findings are specific to the three students and to the context in which the study takes place. The data that were collected and claims that are made cannot be generalized to other fourth grade students in my class or in other fourth grade classes at the same school. However, this research may inform teachers and researchers about the process of developing fluency among students with different fluency abilities. It may also promote the increased use of readers theaters as a form of fluency instruction.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore the process of developing fluency in three fourth-grade students over a period of eight weeks, while using readers theater as the chosen method of fluency instruction. The questions to be answered were:

1. How do different aspects of oral reading fluency (rate, expression & volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace) change for students with varying fluency abilities as they engage in readers theater?

2. What similarities and differences are observed among the developing fluency of students with varying fluency abilities?

This chapter is structured by first presenting the scores of the participants’ reading rates or WCPM, followed by the case studies of the three participants. Within the case studies both qualitative and quantitative data are reported. Each case study reports findings that capture the essence of the students’ fluency development. Following the individual case studies, each research question is addressed through a summary that compares and contrasts the findings of each of the three students.

The quantitative data were graphed according to the participants’ weekly WCPM. The qualitative data were analyzed in five stages. First, I transcribed all the data collected from the self-reports, interviews, and observations. Second, I coded the data and combined the specific codes into general categories (see Tables 3 & 4 in chapter 3). Next, I re-typed the data into charts, according to the categories and the students (see Appendixes F, G, & H for examples of data charts). Fourth, each category was analyzed and summarized, and finally, from the
summaries, I identified two to three summative findings for each student (see Appendix I for an example of the summaries).

Reading Rate -- WCPM

Reading rate or WCPM improved slightly for Jacob, and more considerably for Daniel (see Figure 1). However, no overall improvement for Andy’s WCPM was found over the course of the study. Daniel’s oral reading rate, or WCPM, increased through using readers theater as a method of repeated readings. His WCPM overall improved even though it dropped during week five. A possible reason for this decline is that I moved Daniel from a third grade level QRI passage up to a fourth grade level, because his reading had improved and the fourth grade passages were now his independent reading level. The fourth grade passages were narrative, but more biographical narratives than the third grade fictional narratives. On week five I also moved Jacob up to a fifth grade level QRI (he started on a fourth grade level) and Andy up to a third grade level QRI (he started on a second grade level). Thus, their rates also declined a bit as they were given more difficult texts to read.

Case Studies

Andy

Andy is a 10-year-old boy who likes dogs, skateboards, Heelys (shoes with wheels), Star Wars, and talking with his friends. As for school, Andy struggles with reading, and especially oral reading. When communicating, Andy speaks in an extremely monotonic voice, without any emotion. This contributes to his lack of fluent, oral reading because it adds to his choppy, robotic sounding reading. Andy has a very hard
time paying attention in class. He often plays with things in his desk or daydreams, which causes him to miss components of lessons and instructions for classroom tasks.

Due to his low oral reading rate (WCPM), and low score on the MFS (MFS), Andy was chosen as a participant in this study. Andy was excited about participating in the study and was eager to work with me on his reading. Once the study began, Andy often asked if he could read to or with me during reading time. Upon observing and interviewing Andy over the eight weeks of intervention, three main findings emerged from the data: (a) Andy’s expression and volume, and phrasing were the main aspects of fluency that developed through the use of a readers theater; (b) Class involvement and behavior affected Andy’s oral reading fluency; and (c) Andy initially had a lack of confidence as a reader, but through the use of readers theaters his confidence increased.

*Expression, volume, and phrasing.* At the beginning of the intervention Andy read frequently with an emotionless, monotone voice, usually reading in two and three-word phrases,
and he scored a 1 the first week on expression and volume. Table 5 shows the distribution of Andy’s MFS scores over the course of the eight weeks. I taught mini-lessons on the topic, and as a class, we talked about expression and volume. After these discussions, Andy began to implement some of my recommendations, as well as suggestions from his readers theater partners and group. His expression improved in stages. First, he improved his expression through varying his volume. Andy began to give a word some emphasis by saying it louder or softer. Second, he started to change the pitch of his voice, even through it did not sound like natural speaking.

During this time, Andy’s awareness of expression increased not only in his own reading but also in his readers theater group. In my first interview with Andy, he stated that he didn’t have much expression, but was adding more. He also articulated that his group’s readers theater performance was successful due to the amount of expression that was portrayed by his group members and by the audible volume of every reader in the group. The third stage of his expression and volume development was Andy’s observance of punctuation. It was at this point that Andy started working on his phrasing. While reading, Andy began to raise his voice at the end of a sentence if it ended with a question mark. If the sentence ended with an exclamation point, he added emphasis on the last word or two. He also started pausing more conscientiously at the commas and periods. Andy commented on his expression and volume again during my second interview with him. He stated that he talks really loud sometimes, and soft other times. He said that he is adding a lot of expression to his reading and, because of this, makes fewer mistakes.
Table 5

*Andy’s Weekly MFS Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Expression &amp; Volume</th>
<th>Phrasing</th>
<th>Smoothness</th>
<th>Pace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final stage of expression, volume, and phrasing development was Andy’s experimentation with different character voices. With increasing confidence, Andy tried to choose a different voice that would portray the character for whom he was speaking. Once he took on the identity of another character, he was able to read more freely and to incorporate more emotion into his reading. Andy was finally able to figure out the appropriate volume for his part, varying it according to what was being said. Although not perfect, Andy was able to read with
greater expression, placing emphasis on appropriate words, and reading in consistently longer phrases. His monotone voice had become much less emotionless and choppy, and more conversational and natural.

In summary, Andy’s development of expression, volume, and phrasing came in four stages: first, he started varying his volume in an attempt to improve expression. Second, he changed the pitch of his voice, in contrast to his normal monotonic voice. Third, punctuation was observed which helped him develop his two and three-word phrases into longer, consistent phrases. Finally, Andy began taking on character voices, which helped him add emotion that was missing in his reading.

*Classroom involvement and behavior.* Andy’s behavior determined his classroom involvement. When he paid attention and focused on school work, Andy was involved in the classroom activities. However, he daydreamed and played with objects at his desk most of the time. He sat on the front row, closest to my desk, where I could frequently remind him to get back to work or to participate with the class. But, the majority of the time, his lacked the needed attention and his participation lessened.

During my observations, I took notes when Andy was least engaged. I found that he was often easily distracted during the times I was instructing the whole class. Also, he lost focus when reading independently. However, he was much more on-task and engaged when he participated in a readers theater activity, such as practicing or performing. It was at these times when he was in a smaller group, that he had a responsibility that was very visible to his peers.

Andy’s attentiveness was crucial to his oral reading success. When Andy concentrated on his reading, his smoothness and accuracy were significantly better. It took all his capacities to read, and if he was not focused, his reading suffered. Andy realized that in order to be a
successful reader he needed to follow along and focus on his script. During all three interviews when I asked him what he did well as a reader, he said that he followed along in his script. This was a noteworthy comment because it showed that Andy knew he was not always on-task, and needed to focus in order to practice and improve his reading.

A few instances in which his lack of focus really hampered his reading, were noteworthy. During week five of the intervention, Andy began inserting “um, um, um” when he would pause in his reading, or he repeated a word over and over, stalling until he could get the next word. We worked on this problem over the course of the week, and if he concentrated on his reading, he would not stall or repeat at all. Yet, if his mind started to wander, he would fall back into this habit. Another instance when his lack of focus really affected his reading occurred during the same week when he found out that his birth father had been put in jail for dealing drugs. His lack of focus seemed to affect all his scores during week five.

Over the course of the study, it was practicing the readers theater script that made Andy successful. I listened to Andy read multiple times during the week, as he read both his readers theater part and his book club assignment. In the beginning his oral reading sounded slow, choppy, and expressionless. However, the more he practiced his part, the better he sounded, and by Friday when he performed, he demonstrated fluent reading.

At first, Andy told me that he read the words in his head to practice. As time went on, he reported that he read aloud more and more, including at home, to practice oral reading (not his script). While reading aloud he could hear the words he struggled with and stated that if he missed a word in the script he would read it over and over a lot of times so that he would not miss it again. As I worked with students during our guided reading time, Andy often asked if he could read with me. A few times, when I was working with other students and could not read
with him, I had him read by himself, aloud in the class library. After that he frequently asked if he could read his book club assignment aloud in the library, which he did for a good part of the eight weeks.

Andy was reluctant to practice his script at any other time than the allotted practice time. He was anxious to start reading his book of choice, which was *Star Wars* most of the time. Nevertheless, he realized that the more practice he got with the script, the better prepared he was for the performance. Several days during the intervention, Andy read through his script after his book club assignment, instead of reading a book of choice.

In summary, classroom involvement was influenced by Andy’s attentiveness. He was often distracted and off-task while I was instructing, yet he was quite focused during readers theater. His attentiveness and participation in the readers theater appeared to be key to his successful oral reading. Oral reading was uncomfortable for Andy, so he chose to read silently in his head. However, with practice Andy often preferred reading aloud, making it possible for him to hear his reading and correct his own mistakes.

*Confidence as a reader.* Andy was very hesitant and lacked the confidence to read. He needed a lot of positive feedback and assurance that his contributions to the group or class were valid. This lack of confidence was noticeable in his reading at the beginning of the intervention, but faded quite a bit throughout the eight weeks.

During the first week of the intervention, Andy read timidly and slowly, worried about making mistakes in front of me. He actually seemed more comfortable in front of his readers theater group than with me. In his self-report when asked how he felt about reading in front of others, he reported that he was “shy.” For eight straight weeks he gave the same answer, yet one
week he added that reading in front of others “gets better each week.” Even though he said he was shy, he was able to perform well, not showing his timidity.

I was interested in how Andy perceived himself as a reader, so in an interview I asked him how he felt about his oral reading and he told me that he thought it was “okay.” He had a hard time articulating what “okay” meant, but said that he was “a little bit good and a little bit bad.” A clearer picture of how he felt was presented in his self-reports where the first week he stated that he was not a good reader. Throughout the eight weeks he reported that he was improving, and that he wasn’t as bad as he used to be. Even though he was his own toughest critic, Andy was able to see his growth as a reader.

Andy’s increased confidence as a reader was supported by three elements, being a participant in the study, practicing his script, and performing with a group. When I asked Andy to be a part of this study he was excited about the extra attention. He was willing to fill out the self-reports, be interviewed, and read to me on Mondays. Since he knew I was watching him, he was a little more willing to take a risk in reading.

Practice was another confidence builder. Andy was able to practice his part multiple times through out the week. He practiced for five to ten minutes Monday through Friday on just his lines, and he practiced as a group on Wednesdays and Fridays. This practice gave him the opportunity to become comfortable with the words and figure out unfamiliar words. It also gave him time for additional work on the different elements of fluency, such as expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. If he had sufficient practice, he was successful in his performance.

One particular example of the influence practice had on Andy’s success occurred when a member of his group was absent the day of the performance. Andy volunteered to read the part
of the absent student and was so adamant about reading it that I conceded. As I watched him read the two parts in the performance, I observed that he was very confident with his original part, which he had practiced all week. Yet, he read the absent student’s part quietly, and slowly. He had had only time to read this part with his group before performing and lacked the confidence to read it as he read his part.

The third element that contributed to Andy’s increased confidence was the opportunity Andy had to read in front of an audience as part of a readers theater group. Each group performed their scripts in front of different classes in the school. This was very beneficial for Andy in that he was able to have multiple experiences as a successful reader. This reading success built his confidence to do it again and again. The confidence also carried over into other reading outside of readers theaters. For example, during week seven Andy volunteered to read aloud for the class during the mini-lesson. This was a milestone for Andy’s confidence.

In summary, Andy’s confidence to read aloud increased through the intervention of a readers theater. Andy had multiple opportunities to be a successful reader as he practiced his script and performed in a readers theater group. The confidence that was built up through the readers theater slowly carried over into his other reading.

From the data collected over an eight-week intervention of using readers theater, three main discoveries about Andy’s reading emerged. First, his expression, volume, and phrasing during readers theater developed through the use of a readers theater. Second, Andy’s classroom involvement and behavior affected his oral reading fluency. Finally, Andy’s confidence as a reader appears to have increased through the use of readers theater.
Daniel

Daniel is a 10-year-old, male fourth grade student who enjoys motorcycles, *Scary Stories*, and anything that has to do with Brigham Young University. Overall, Daniel is a happy, compliant student, but often struggles paying attention and completing assignments. He has a great gift of creativity which surfaces mostly during writing, art, and music, but he frequently tunes out during math and science, probably due to his difficulties in those subjects.

Daniel was selected to be a part of this study because I was interested in his inconsistent reading patterns. His reading rate was normally on target for fourth graders (120-150 WCPM). However, when tested on the MFS he scored low in comparison to his WCPM. Therefore, I wanted to see what effects a readers theater would have on his reading. I observed Daniel as a participant in this study and interviewed him three times. As a result, two main categories of results were identified: (a) readers theater helped Daniel develop the ability to read with expression and volume, pace, and smoothness; and (b) Daniel became more engaged not only in reading, but also in class as his participation increased during and after the eight week intervention.

*Expression and volume, pace, and smoothness.* In the beginning of the intervention Daniel read fast, but he lacked emotion and volume. He would read his part without focusing, usually just scanning the words as quickly as he could so to finish the task. Daniel remarked that at first he would usually read his script while thinking about other things. Pace was also a problem of his. He would try and read quickly, yet if he came to a hard or unfamiliar word, he would slow down, thus creating an inconsistent pace. This inconsistent reading likewise made his oral reading choppy. On his MFS scores he began with an expression and volume score of 3
and ended with a 4., a smoothness score of 4, and a pace score of 3. Table 6 illustrates Daniels scores throughout the eight-week intervention.

Expression came quite quickly to Daniel. Readers theater caught Daniel’s attention right from the start, and he became engaged in practicing and performing his part of the script. Daniel worked well with different student partners, giving them feedback on how to better improve their reading. During an interview, he reported that he helps his partner come up with the correct character voice to use, a process he goes through himself. When Daniel received his part for readers theater, he would think about what the character says and who the character is, and select different voices, which he could use to read his part. Once he found a voice with which he felt comfortable, he usually stuck with it. One example of this process occurred when Daniel read the part of a judge in a script that had a trial scenario. In an interview I asked him what his readers theater part sounded like. He replied, “Have you ever watched Judge Judy?” I said I had. He said, “Have you ever seen the defense attorney? [My part] was kind of like him.” When asked how a defense attorney sounded, Daniel responded, “Kind of like he’s a smart aleck, and I’m [in his part] always talkin’ like a smart aleck.”

With increased confidence and motivation came volume. Reading a script allowed Daniel to put on another character, thus giving him increased confidence. He felt as if he was the character, rather than himself reading. At the end of the first week of the intervention Daniel reported that he was a nervous reader, but that quickly changed to an “excited, good reader.” This confidence allowed Daniel to speak loudly, instead of using his more timid voice. His volume added to his expression because he dramatically got louder when the part was intense, and then got softer at the appropriate time.
Table 6

*Daniel’s Weekly MFS Scores*

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For Daniel, all aspects of fluency were interdependent. As expression increased, so did pace and smoothness. Daniel’s expression dramatically increased as he took on the character voices. Since he was reading his part as one who performs in staged productions, he slowed down his reading so that the audience could understand each word. This slower rate actually improved his pace and smoothness. He now read with more consistency, instead of the previous irregular reading.
In summary, the use of readers theater increased Daniel’s expression and volume, pace, and smoothness. Daniel pretended he was the character whose part he was reading. Through this, his expression and volume increased. Since he was reading in front of an audience, he made sure each word was articulated properly, which improved his smoothness. Reading in front of an audience also affected his pace in that he slowed down so his part would be understood.

Engagement and participation in reading and in class. During the first half of the school year and into the beginning of the intervention, Daniel came to class tired and lacked the attention needed to participate in the tasks at hand. He was often disengaged, and I had to keep reminding him to pay attention and participate in class. Daniel’s engagement and participation dramatically increased during the intervention for two possible reasons. First, Daniel was chosen as a participant in this study, and therefore became more motivated to participate in the readers theater and in class. Second, Daniel experienced an increase of confidence both as a reader and as a participant in class. Daniel was an adequate reader at the outset of the study. He read at a good rate, but left out some of the crucial elements of oral reading, such as expression and phrasing. The readers theater not only helped him improve the elements of oral reading, but it also provided several opportunities for Daniel to be a successful reader. As he read, Daniel took on the identities of the characters in his part, which allowed him to forget his nervousness and focus on performing. Daniel reported that at first he was nervous and embarrassed to read in front of others, but after eight weeks of readers theater he stated that he felt excited and eager to perform in front of an audience. His eagerness to read in front of others also carried over into classroom reading as he began to volunteer to read selections in front of the class, such as instructions on a worksheet or a paragraph from our shared reading book or selection.
Readers theater practice also allowed Daniel to experience success as a reader. Although not initially, Daniel often re-read his script after he finished his book club assignment. He told me in an interview that when he practices by himself he first figures out what character voice he should use, then he starts to read his part, and if he messes up he does it over and over again until he has it perfected. Daniel also got practice as he worked with different partners and in a group. Daniel is a social individual, so working with a partner or in a group was comfortable for him. As he got together with his partner or his group, he was at ease practicing his part. Several times Daniel’s group told him to slow down, or to add more expression as he read. Due to the small group setting, Daniel listened to his group and made the appropriate changes. The added exposure he had with his script increased his confidence while performing, even to the point that he looked forward to performing in front of other classes on Fridays.

Readers theater provided Daniel with a purpose to participate in class. As previously stated, Daniel came in to class sleepy-eyed and disengaged. This dramatically changed after the first week of the intervention, and continued to improve throughout the eight weeks. Suddenly, Daniel had a responsibility to learn his part of the script and was expected to sound good during the performance. This positive peer pressure heightened Daniel’s awareness of being a participant in both his group as well as in class.

As Daniel accepted the feedback his group gave him on his reading, he too learned how to give constructive feedback to his partners and group members. Daniel reported a few instances in which he gave feedback to his group. He said that he would tell them “what kind of [character voices] they can use.” He stated, “Sometimes they ask me, like maybe I should use this voice, what voice should I use? And I’m like, well look at your part, your character, and listen to what he says, and then you think of what he would sound like.” He also commented on helping his
partner decode a specific word. He said, “Well [partner’s name] kept on getting a word wrong. I forgot what it was, but I told him to break it apart, and then read that part then add the other part [the other word chunk], and then say the whole word.”

Feeling a sense of purpose that came from belonging to a readers theater, Daniel’s engagement and participation in class noticeably improved. In my observations I noted that Daniel began to participate in mini-lessons. He raised his hand with questions, answers, and comments. He volunteered to read in front of the class and to model the important elements of reading, the ones that he struggled with himself at the beginning of the intervention. During our five-minute share time at the end of the reader’s workshop, he shared things that he did well as a reader, or selections of his book club assignment that interested him. Daniel no longer was disengaged, but very much a part of what we were doing in class.

In summary, the inclusion of Daniel as a participant in this study, and the extended used of readers theater, considerably improved his participation in class. Daniel no longer came into class sleepy-eyed and disengaged. He was alert, excited, and eager to participate on the individual, group, and class levels. Through this involvement, Daniel experienced a greater measure of confidence and satisfaction in his reading.

From Daniel’s participation in this study, two main findings have surfaced. First, Daniel developed the ability to include expression and volume in his oral reading, while reading at a smooth, consistent pace. Second, as a participant in both this study and in multiple readers theater groups, Daniel’s engagement and participation in class have increased.
Jacob

Jacob is a 10-year-old, fourth grade student who enjoys reading. Often he chooses to read during his free time in class and also enjoys checking out the same books as his friends from the library so that they can read them at the same time and talk about them. Jacob is a quiet and timid student in class, but friendly and fun with his friends during recess. Some of Jacob’s characteristics include being neat, orderly, and meticulous. Oftentimes, it takes Jacob a long time to complete assignments because he wants them done to perfection, and takes the time to do so.

Jacob was chosen as a participant because he had a higher score on the MFS in comparison to his lower reading rate (WCPM). Because of Jacob’s meticulous personality, he read more slowly, but displayed a fair balance of expression, smoothness, and phrasing as he read aloud. Through observing him over the eight-week intervention, the findings can be summarized into two sections: (a) through the use of a readers theater, Jacob’s pace and volume increased, and expression, phrasing, and smoothness remained relatively high; and (b) as a participant in a readers theater group, Jacob was able to demonstrate leadership skills as he helped his different groups by offering constructive feedback, keeping his group on task, and helping struggling readers in his group succeed.

Increased pace and volume. In the beginning, Jacob exhibited good control over his reading in that his reading was precise and conversational. He was a smooth reader, who read with expression and correct phrasing. However, due to his reserved and meticulous personality, his reading was more quiet and slow, scoring a 2 on pace and 3 on expression and volume, on the MFS. Table 7 shows the Jacob’s MFS score over the course of the eight weeks. Even though Jacob was timid, he was a friendly student and confident reader, which allowed him to easily
work with partners and in groups. He reported that he had “fun reading” his script and that he “is a really good reader.”

As I observed Jacob, I noted that he started off reading very deliberately and slowly, making sure he said each word correctly. This unhurried reading pace was inconsistent as he read in spurts of fast and slow. He would slow down when he came to a word that was more difficult or unfamiliar, and then speed back up for the remainder of the phrase or sentence. Jacob’s focus was primarily on accuracy and expression, not pace. In an interview he stated that when he practiced with a friend he would use “good expression” and make sure he “got all the words right.”

I noted this slow deliberate reading for the first three weeks of the intervention, but by week four I started to see a change in his pace. Through practicing with his partner and group, self-evaluating, and through participating in mini-lessons on pacing and speed, his pacing began to improve. Even though he still read slower, his pace became more consistent. He did not speed up and slow down as much as he had done before. Jacob was also aware of his pacing and reported in the second interview that when he practiced by himself he usually thought “about using a little bit more expression and how to read at a good speed.”

While working on pace, Jacob was also working on volume. He was aware that both needed improvement as he commented in the first interview that he did not sound good because he was “talking soft and going slow.” Jacob’s volume came quicker than his pace. Adding expression to his oral reading was a strength in Jacob’s reading. Once he took on the character for which he read, he was able to increase his volume appropriately. Volume became a key component of Jacob’s expression in that he used different volumes for emphasis in the script.
Table 7

Jacob’s Weekly MFS Scores

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For example, if one of his parts ended with an exclamation point, he would read louder. Although his voice was never a booming, stage voice, he was able to get to the point in which his voice was loud enough to be heard at the back of the room during almost all performances.

With practice and self-evaluation Jacob was able to read at a slightly faster, consistent, conversational pace. His reading was still not fast, but he learned how to read smoothly and evenly. After listening to his group’s readers theater practice and performance, he responded that
the difference in his reading between the two was that the first one seemed slow (practice) and then at the performance he “used a lot of expression and read at a good speed.” In another interview when asked what he did well in his performance, he stated, “I was going at a good pace.”

In summary, Jacob is a strong reader who reads with a proficient balance of expression, smoothness, and phrasing. However, his pace and volume were not quite as strong. Through instruction, practice, and self-evaluation Jacob was able to increase his pace until it was consistent, and his volume in that he was more easily heard and so it could be used to add emphasis.

*Development of leadership skills.* Through the use of readers theater, Jacob developed leadership skills, which was an unexpected byproduct of the intervention. As his groups gathered each week to practice their scripts, Jacob stepped forward to direct the group and to keep his classmates focused and on-task. After teaching my class how to give constructive feedback to a partner or a group, I observed Jacob implementing this lesson with those with whom he worked. Often he would give suggestions to students on how to read a specific part or say a certain word. In one particular instance while working with his partner, Jacob was able to identify specifically that the student needed to add expression at a particular part in his script, in order for the story to make sense.

Jacob was the initiator in his group as he got them started on either their group practices or performances. He monitored the group and if students were not following along he kindly reminded them when it was their part. Also, due to his wide reading and good vocabulary, he was able to aid students who did not know certain words. As a leader, Jacob also modeled good reading for the other students. During fluency mini-lessons, I had students model examples and
non-examples of the different elements of fluency, and Jacob often volunteered to help. For example, I taught a lesson on differing intonation to increase expression, in which Jacob read a part from his script with exaggerated intonation.

In summary, Jacob’s reading not only benefited from readers theater, but also life skills. Through working with partners and groups to complete a unified task of practicing and performing readers theaters, Jacob was able to develop leadership skills. He led them as he modeled good reading, kept them on-task, gave constructive feedback, and kept the pace of the group moving along.

From this case study, two main findings surfaced. First, Jacob’s pace and volume increased as he practiced and performed readers theater scripts over an eight week period. Also his smoothness, phrasing, and expression remained proficient. Second, Jacob demonstrated leadership skills as he helped his readers theater group by modeling fluent reading and by offering constructive feedback.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer two questions on the development of oral reading fluency. Question one asks how the different aspects of oral reading fluency such as rate, expression, volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace, changed as students with varying fluency abilities, engaged in readers theater for a duration of eight weeks. The second question asks what similarities and differences were observed among the developing fluency of students with varying abilities. This section is intended to clearly answer these two research questions.
Question 1: How do different aspects of oral reading fluency change for students with varying fluency abilities as they engage in readers theater?

In answer to question one, this study shows that students’ engagement in readers theater helped develop different aspects of fluency in students with varying abilities. In designing this study, I was interested in seeing how using readers theater, as a form of repeated reading, influenced students with different reading rates or WCPM as well as different prosodic abilities. Through this study, it is seen that all three participants have developed expression, volume, and pace through using readers theater over an eight-week intervention. Other elements of oral fluency, including rate (WCPM), phrasing, and smoothness, as discussed in the individual case studies, increased for one or two of the participants, but not for all three.

Question 2: What similarities and differences are observed among the developing fluency of students with varying fluency abilities?

In answer to question two, three main similarities and differences were observed among the developing fluency of Andy, Daniel, and Jacob. First, different elements of fluency increased or remained constant for each student. All three students showed an increase in their expression and volume scores as they participated and performed in readers theater groups. Jacob and Andy showed an increase in their pace score, while Daniel stayed pretty constant. With smoothness, Daniel remained constant as Jacob increased and Andy decreased in score. Phrasing scores for all three also stayed relatively constant from week to week.

Second, Andy, Daniel, and Jacob more fully developed their weakest element of fluency. Through engaging in readers theater, Andy was able to increase his expression and volume score, which was initially his weakest area. Andy began the study reading in mostly an expressionless,
monotone voice. He scored a 1 out of 4 on the expression and volume element of the MFS at the beginning of the intervention. By week eight he had improved greatly by reading with more emotion, varied volume, and expression, and scored a 3 out of 4 on the MFS.

Daniel also improved his expression and volume as he took on the identity of the character, and read his part with great emotion and expression, varying his volume appropriately. His beginning score for expression and volume was 3 out of 4. However, through continued practice with his script, his end score was 4 out of 4 on the MFS.

Jacob, on the other hand, struggled mostly with his oral reading pace. He was very inconsistent as he read in spurts of slow and fast. His perfectionist personality slowed his pace down to ensure all the words were read correctly. At the beginning of the intervention Jacob scored 2 out of 4 on the pace element of the MFS. Yet, through practicing his readers theater script, and preparing his parts for performances, he scored 4 out of 4 the final week of the intervention.

Confidence is the third similarity/difference among the three participants. All three students experienced an increase in confidence as they participated in multiple, successful reading opportunities, yet displayed this confidence in different ways. Andy is a struggling, timid reader who is very nervous to read in front of others. Although still shy, Andy was able to put on the identity of the character for which he read, and through this and practice with the text, he was able to gain the confidence needed to read in front of an audience of peers.

Daniel was likewise nervous to read in front of an audience, but is a more proficient reader than Andy. His increased confidence also came through practicing numerous times with his script, as well as taking on the identity of his character. After the eight-week intervention, Daniel reported that he was a “skilled” reader and was “excited” to read in front of an audience.
Daniel’s confidence also extended into other class activities as he became a more engaged participant in class. He began to take part more in book club discussions, offer constructive feedback to readers theater group members, and volunteer answers during mini lessons.

An increase of confidence was also experienced by Jacob, but in a more subtle way. Although Jacob reported that he was not nervous to read in front of others, his soft volume suggested otherwise. He often read quietly in front of others, but at a normal volume when speaking with his friends. As Jacob practiced his scripts week after week, his volume increased, and so did his confidence. Jacob also gained more confidence as he took on a leadership role in his readers theater groups. He was the main student in his group who kept the pace of either the practice or performance moving. He also developed the ability to give appropriate, constructive feedback to students in his group, helping them also to become more fluent readers.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This multicase study focuses on the development of reading fluency for three fourth-grade students’ of varying reading abilities. This discussion will be separated into three sections, which includes conclusions, further research, and suggestions for classroom practices.

Conclusions

Definition of Reading Fluency

Findings of the present study support the current definition of reading fluency. Past research defines reading fluency as the ability to read smoothly and effortlessly, at a quick, automatic rate (Harris & Hodges, 1995; Logan, 1997). However, more recent research presents a definition for fluency that encompasses more than fast, automatic reading. It defines fluency as not only the ability to automatically read, with accuracy and speed, but also includes the element of prosody (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NRP, 2000). As seen through the results of this study, reading rate is not the only element of reading fluency.

Although only one of the three participants, Daniel, substantially improved in reading rate, all three students improved their reading fluency in other ways. Reading rate, or words correct per minute (WCPM) is only one element of reading fluency. It is a very important element, because if students can recognize words quickly and automatically, they are more likely spending their cognitive resources on comprehension, rather than on decoding (Stanovich, 1980). However, fluency is composed of other prosodic elements including expression, volume, phrasing, pace, and smoothness. As measured by the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell &
Rasinski, 1991), each of the participants in this study, improved in one or more of the prosodic elements.

The prosodic elements of oral reading fluency are key to fluency development (Dowhower, 1991). Students who are able to read with appropriate volume and expression are able to portray the meaning of the script. The phrase “reading with expression” often implies “reading with comprehension” (Dowhower, 1991). Rasinski (2006) confirms this relationship between prosody and comprehension by stating that fluent readers use their cognitive resources to construct meaning through expressive interpretation of the text. Although this study did not measure comprehension, it does support the importance of developing reading prosody, which is closely linked to comprehension, although relationships between the two are unclear.

The findings of this study support current research that claims phrasing, pace, and smoothness are other elements that indicate developing fluency. Disfluent students often read with inappropriate phrasing by either reading word-by-word, or by fragmenting text (Dowhower, 1991). However, when students read smoothly, at a consistent pace, and with appropriate phrasing, their reading sounds like natural language, which is how fluent reading develops (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Motivation

Repeated readings are used as a form of fluency instruction, in which students read a passage multiple times, while being timed. However, the implementation of timed readings can be menial tasks for teachers to conduct, and can be discouraging for students who are less confident in their reading (Tyler & Chart, 2000; Worthy & Prater, 2003). Readers theater is one way to engage students in authentic reading experiences, one that also includes repeated readings.
Findings of the present study support the idea that students with varying oral reading abilities are motivated by readers theater, because they experience successful reading experiences (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998). First, participants experienced success as they participated in heterogeneous readers theater groups. All of the scripts used in this study were leveled according to the different character parts. Some scripts included such broad levels that they ranged from a level N to a level U (using Fountas and Pinnell’s, 1996, book leveling system). Because of the broad range of reading levels within these scripts, the lower, struggling readers were able to be in a group with some of the most proficient readers in the class. This not only benefited the struggling readers, but it also engaged the higher leveled readers since they too had parts that were on their levels. The heterogeneous groups used in this study support Worthy and Prater’s (2002) statement that “readers theater is an excellent activity for grouping students by interest rather than reading level” (p. 294).

Readers also experienced success as they practiced and performed in front of their peers. Practice is an essential step to becoming proficient at any skill. The method of repeated readings allows students to read and reread different texts. In essence, it provides a lot of practice with one text. Students need time to practice reading aloud so they can become more fluent readers. Rasinski (2006) says that practice develops expressive reading and automaticity. He also states that students “need opportunities to try out their voices on different passages, to read passages in different ways to express the obvious as well as the more subtle meanings intended by the author. This is best developed through practice” (Rasinski, n.d., p. 9). All three of the students in this present study experimented with different character voices as they practiced their scripts. This practice gave them the confidence to perform in front of their peers. Performing in front of an audience gives students the motivation to continue to practice reading and rereading their
scripts. This, in turn increased their overall reading fluency. This study concurs with the research of Worthy and Prater (2002) who stated that students’ motivation increases through the use of readers theater due to its authentic reason to engage in repeated readings.

In the present study readers theater also provided the motivation for students to read more. This supports Millin and Rinehart’s (1999) claim that students involved in readers theater have an increased motivation to read. As students in this study experienced success as readers, they began to explore the world of reading. Daniel and Jacob reported that they read everything they could get their hands on, and also looked for more “challenging books.” Confidence in their own reading increased, and so did their desire to read more.

*Reading Rate (WCPM)*

Reading rate is an important element of oral reading fluency. Research states that if students can read at a rapid pace, it is more likely that they are using their cognitive resources to making meaning out of the text, instead of decoding (Stanovich, 1980). Many studies have been conducted using various methods of repeated readings to increase reading rate (e.g., Dowhower, 1987; Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999; Herman, 1985; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994).

This study neither supports nor rejects this claim, but shows that reading rate did not increase while using readers theater as a method of repeated reading, over the eight-week intervention. Four possibilities are evident as to why reading rate did not improve.

First, this study was conducted over the course of eight weeks. Several of the studies that used repeated readings, were conducted over more than eight weeks and some even took months. For example, Herman’s (1985) study on the effects of repeated readings on reading rate, was conducted over a three-month period. Duration of a study can affect the results.
Second, the participants of this study practiced their scripts an average of ten minutes a day. Other research studies, using readers theater as a method of repeated readings, often worked with the chosen text for more than ten minutes a day. For example, Millin and Rhinehart’s (1999) study was designed so that students in the experimental group worked with their readers theater scripts 40 minutes a day.

The third possible explanation for little or no improvement on reading rate is related to the use of the passages from the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). Although the participants read passages on their independent reading levels, the texts were difficult. The passages were made up of narratives that were primarily biographies, and also expository texts. This nonfiction text is generally harder for students to read, especially on cold reads. This could have had an effect on reading rate, in comparison to the students narrative readers theaters.

The last possibility is that reading rate is inconsistent for students who are not proficient at decoding. Poor decoders can profit from repeated readings as shown in some studies, such as Herman’s (1985) and Millin and Rhinehart’s (1999). Yet, students who struggle with inconsistent decoding, will most likely take a longer time to become more fluent readers. In this study, Andy started off reading at a second grade level, and reading 80 WCPM (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). Although his fluency improved in the prosodic elements, his reading rate fluctuated, and after eight weeks scored lower than where he began. On the other hand, both Daniel and Jacob increased in reading rate, and both are very proficient decoders.

Implications

Further Research

This study has answered a few questions on the development of reading fluency, yet more research is warranted in this area of study. Reading rate is an important component of
fluent reading, and considerable research has been conducted on how readers achieve a specific reading rates, as well as instructional methods that facilitate increased rates. Through such research, ranges of desired reading rates (WCPM) for each elementary grade level, have been developed (see Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). However, little is known as to the minimum rate students’ need in order to employ prosodic elements. The field would benefit from future research conducted on the relationship of reading rate and prosody, specifically, whether or not there is a minimum reading rate which students must obtain in order to develop expression, volume, pace, smoothness, and phrasing.

The findings presented in this study are specific to the three participants, to the fourth grade, and to the context in which the study took place. In order to get a more complete picture of developing fluency, future studies need to be conducted using this study as a model, however, changing some of the variables – sample size, grade level, duration of study, and time spent with scripts.

First, a larger sample size would be beneficial in examining the development of expression, volume, and pace. Through a larger sample size researchers could examine whether or not these three aspects are the elements of prosody that consistently increase with students of various oral fluency abilities. Also, with this larger sample size it would be interesting to look for patterns of prosody development and whether or not there is an order to which these aspects of fluency are developed. Second, a study with students of various fluency abilities in different grade levels would be useful in studying the stages of development more closely. This would give more insight as the development of students’ fluency as they progress from emergent literacy, through proficient reading. Patterns of when and how certain aspects of fluency develop might emerge from this study. Third, the duration of this study could be lengthened to longer
than eight weeks, thus giving more insight to the development of reading rate through the use of readers theater. Also, a long-term study could be valuable in looking at the overall development of fluency for specific students as they progress through their elementary school years. The last variable that could be altered for future research is the amount of time students work with their scripts on a daily basis. In the present study, students worked with their scripts on an average of 10 minutes a day. It would be beneficial to conduct a study in which students worked with their scripts more than 10 minutes a day to see if reading rate, expression, volume, pace, smoothness, and phrasing are developed more quickly.

Another suggestion of future research would be to look at the effects a readers theater has on reading comprehension, not only of the scripts involved, but also the transfer of comprehension to other areas of reading. The relationship between fluency and comprehension remains an unclear issue among researchers. The present study did not focus on comprehension gained through the use of readers theater. Yet, two of the participants reported that through readers theater practice, they were able to better understand the script as well as better comprehend other texts they were currently reading. Millin and Rhinehart (1999) reported that through the use of readers theater in their study, participants’ comprehension benefited. More research is needed to look into the relationship of fluency and comprehension. In connection to comprehension, the field of fluency research would likewise benefit from studies on the effects readers theater has on word recognition and decoding.

**Suggestions for Classroom Practices**

Based on the results of this study, the following are suggestions for classroom practices:

1. Fluency instruction and practice are crucial components of a balanced literacy program. Readers theater is an effective instructional tool used for fluency instruction and practice.
It also is a form of repeated reading, a method proven to help students develop reading fluency.

2. Readers theater (a) is easily integrated into any reading program, (b) is adaptable for all levels of readers, (c) is an exciting alternative to repeated readings, (d) allows for individual, partner, and group work, and (e) gives students the opportunity for reading success.

3. In this study, I assigned readers theater parts to students for the purpose of making sure my participants had parts on their independent reading levels. However, another variation is to allow students the choice of which part they would prefer. This gives more ownership to the part, and students enjoy being involved in the decision.

4. While incorporating readers theater into a reading program, it is beneficial to teach mini lessons on expression, volume, pace, phrasing, and smoothness. Students need to hear fluent reading modeled as often as possible. Have students model for one another and teach them how to give constructive feedback to one another. Also, recording the readers theater groups during practices and performances served as a valuable procedure. I was able to listen to the recordings with the students in that group and analyze the different aspects of fluency as a group.

5. Assessment is one of the most challenging components of monitoring students’ reading fluency progress. The Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) is a more complete and efficient way to assess the prosodic elements of reading. Also, when assessing WCPM, be consistent in what type of passages are used. Scores are affected by different textual elements such as length and genre of passage.
REFERENCES


APPENDIXES
### APPENDIX A

### MULTIDIMENSIONAL FLUENCY SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Expression and Volume</td>
<td>Reads with little expression or enthusiasm in</td>
<td>Some expression. Begins to use voice to make</td>
<td>Sounds like natural language throughout the</td>
<td>Reads with good expression and enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voice. Reads words as if simply to get them out.</td>
<td>text sound like natural language in some areas</td>
<td>better part of the passage. Occasionally slips</td>
<td>throughout the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little sense of trying to make text sounds like</td>
<td>of the text, but not others. Focus remains</td>
<td>into expressionless reading. Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>natural language. Tends to read in a quiet</td>
<td>largely on saying the words. Still reads in a</td>
<td>volume is generally appropriate throughout the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voice.</td>
<td>quiet voice.</td>
<td>text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Phrasing</td>
<td>Monotonic with little sense of phrase</td>
<td>Frequent two-and three-word phrases giving the</td>
<td>Mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for</td>
<td>Generally well phrased, mostly in clause and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boundaries, frequent word-by-word reading.</td>
<td>impression of choppy reading; improper stress</td>
<td>breath, and possibly some choppiness;</td>
<td>sentence units, with adequate attention to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and intonation that fail to mark ends of</td>
<td>reasonable stress/intonation.</td>
<td>expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sentences and clauses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Smoothness</td>
<td>Frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false</td>
<td>Several “rough spots” in text where extended</td>
<td>Occasional breaks in smoothness caused by</td>
<td>Generally smooth reading with some breaks, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple</td>
<td>pauses, hesitations, etc., are more frequent</td>
<td>difficulties with specific words and/or</td>
<td>word and structure difficulties are resolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attempts.</td>
<td>and disruptive.</td>
<td>structures.</td>
<td>quickly, usually through self-correction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Pace (during sections of</td>
<td>Slow and laborious.</td>
<td>Moderately slow.</td>
<td>Uneven mixture of fast and slow reading.</td>
<td>Consistently conversational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimal disruption)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Research Participant Consent

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of developing fluency in three fourth grade students over a period of eight weeks, while using readers theater as the chosen method of fluency instruction. As a participant you will do almost everything with the class as normal. However, you will be interviewed three times in the eight weeks. These interviews will last no longer than 30 minutes. You will also fill out a self-report paper on every Friday.

The study will all me done within the literacy block, at school, besides the three interviews. There are no known risks for participation in this study. The benefits of this study include working one-on-one with the teacher during reading instruction and developing the skill of metacognition (i.e. thinking and talking about what you know). There will be no adverse consequences if you choose not to participate.

I guarantee that all information I receive from you will be kept confidential. Students will be given a pseudonym for the study and it will continue to be used in the reporting of the results of this study. Raw data including observations, self reports, tape recordings, interview transcriptions, and scores will remain in the possession of the primary researcher, Miss Clark.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact:
Rachel Clark
Snow Springs Elementary
1700 W. 850 S.
Lehi, UT 84043
(801) 768-7045 ext. 173
clar247@alpine.k12.ut.us

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in research projects, you may contact:
Dr. Renea Beckstrand, IRB Chair,
Brigham Young University
422 SWKT
Provo, UT 84604
(801)422-3873
renea_beckstrand@byu.edu.

_____ I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will and choice to participate in this study and accept any risks associated with this study.
_____ I do not wish to participate in this study.

Research Participant Signature

Parent or Guardian of Research Participant

Date
APPENDIX C

Letter to Participants and Parents

Dear Parents and Students,

I am currently working on a master’s degree at Brigham Young University. As part of my program I have to conduct a study for my thesis. My study is looking at the value of readers theater as fluency instruction. Current research says that fluent readers are able to comprehend what they are reading because these readers aren’t spending time decoding text, but instead are making meaning from what they are reading.

This study will last for twelve weeks in which students will be tested both at the beginning and at the end. The only part of this study that students will take part in, outside of what I would normally do with my students, is take the Readers Self Perception Scale survey.

If you would be willing to be a part of this study, please read the consent form thoroughly, sign the paper, and return it to Miss Clark.

Thanks for your help!

Sincerely,

Miss Clark
APPENDIX D

STUDENT SELF-REPORT

1. Tell me about your school reading this week. What have you read? What are you currently reading?

2. Tell me about your home reading this week. What have you read? What are you currently reading?

3. Rate your oral reading during your readers theater performance.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Explain why you gave yourself that rating.

5. What have you noticed about your oral reading this week?

6. What have you noticed about your silent reading this week?

7. Describe how you feel about reading in front of others.

8. Describe yourself as a reader.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe how you feel about your readers theater part this week?

2. Describe the process you go through as you practice your part individually; as a group; and during the performance.

3. How do you contribute to your group?

4. [Listen to recording] After listening to yourself read, what do you notice about your oral reading?

5. Describe how your reading has changed from the first group recording to the second recording.

6. Describe what you sound like on your first run through.

7. Describe what you sound like during the performance.

8. How has your reading improved over the week?
## APPENDIX F

### OBSERVATION CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of fluency</th>
<th>Andy</th>
<th>Daniel</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expression and Volume</strong></td>
<td>-I did notice a little inflection in his voice when he read some dialogue 1/23</td>
<td>-Daniel read through his RT script with good expression 1/24</td>
<td>-He read with great expression and inflection in his voice 1/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-reading his RT for warm up he very little expression 1/24</td>
<td>-with good inflection and expression 1/25</td>
<td>-with good expression 1/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-he added inflection while he read a loud to me 1/24</td>
<td>-his voice had inflection and his expression represented his role in the script 1/26</td>
<td>-during his partner practice he showed a lot of control over the text, in that his voice sounded conversational 1/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-his inflection wasn’t exactly natural 1/24</td>
<td>-he spoke kind of quietly, but I could understand his words, as I was at the back of the room 1/26</td>
<td>-with good expression and inflection 1/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-his voice didn’t go up in pitch where it naturally should; it seemed more forced, but at least he was attempting it 1/24</td>
<td>-his inflection helped convey the meaning. The way he said certain words and phrases showed he understood the meaning of the passage 1/30</td>
<td>-Jacob’s partner told him that his punctuation and his expression were very good 1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Alex was deliberate, but he was trying hard to put expression in his voice 1/25</td>
<td>-Daniel follows the punctuation such as on a question mark his voice went up 1/31</td>
<td>-he naturally has a softer voice but even his volume was such that I could understand every word at the back of the room 1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Alex has come a long way with inflection and expression 1/25</td>
<td>-emphasizing the words 2/2</td>
<td>-good intonation 1/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-I listened to Alex practice and I was amazed at his inflection 1/26</td>
<td>-he read in a natural voice 2/3</td>
<td>-he distinctly said each word, using his lips, and speaking loud enough for all to hear 2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-He usually is monotone, including his normal speech 1/26</td>
<td>-his performance sounded natural 2/3</td>
<td>-during his group Jacob read louder than usual and had good work pronunciation 2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Today I really heard inflection and expression 1/26</td>
<td>-he had good inflection . . . had great expression that conveyed what was happening in the story 2/3</td>
<td>-he speaks quietly and sometimes doesn’t enunciate his words because of his volume 2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-I could tell when he was reading dialogue because he used a different voice 1/26</td>
<td>-good expression 2/6</td>
<td>-was kind of quiet 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-during the cold read (WCPM) Andy seemed to revert back to his monotone reading voice 1/30</td>
<td>-during the minilesson Daniel put good emphasis on important words, showing that he understood the meaning 2/7</td>
<td>-he showed great expression especially at one point when he emphasize the word “There!” 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Andy’s 1st run through with his new part was . . . monotone 1/31</td>
<td>-Daniel experimented with different ways to emphasize certain words 2/7</td>
<td>-Jacob is quiet, but his words could be understood from the back of the room 2/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Andy</th>
<th>Daniel</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I tried following along 1/26 -I do it in my head a lot 2/24 -I read in my head, if I miss a word I say it, sometimes I say it a lot of times, other times I don’t really say it I just like. Once I know what the word is I just keep on saying it in my head and keep on reading 3/16 -Like if it was at home reading sometimes I read out loud and sometimes I read in my head 3/16 -yey sometimes I read out loud. Sometimes I read quiet 3/16 -Yea [you read your parts?] 1/26 -he helped me. We helped each other with our part 1/26 -we follow along with each others parts 2/24 -like we say that we did a good job on our part and then we did a good job for the next part 2/24 -me and my partner follow along and we like to, I don’t know how to explain it, we like to 3/16 we go and read to each other our parts and we follow along and stuff 3/16 -we follow along 2/24 -we practice in a group we all follow along and we all read out loud. 3/16 -follow along 2/24 -like I follow along and sometimes when I read out loud 3/16</td>
<td>-well, if I mess up, I do it again and I try to make, I try to put a better voice into it, so my throat is clearer and stuff 1/26 -well I first of all try to figure out which voice I should use, and then if I mess up on the part I do it over again, and if I keep on messing up then I do it over and over and over again, about three times. And if I do it perfect I’ll read it through again, and that’s how I do it 2/24 -well I read it through a couple of times and if I mess it up I start it over again and I try to find out what voice I could use and if I keep on messing up I’ll keep on doing it over and over again until I get it perfect 3/16 -well sometimes we like, tell each other if we did good on that part or not and what we should add in there 3/16 -no we just read it, and if we got, like a part that kind of sounded weird we would just tell each other 1/26 -we all stuck our mind to it, and say first of all we’ve got to think of the voice we should use. And make sure you get your part, right and sound good and use really good voice 2/24 -we remind each other how to like, use expression like what to use and stuff, how to do it and stuff like that 3/16</td>
<td>that I got to talk to somebody else on my parts 3/16 -like when I was reading my part I was saying it to another person 3/16 -I read out loud and usually I just read some parts over 3/16 -the parts that have the hardest words [he read over and over] 3/16 -I read with [student’s name] 1/26 -we usually talk about what we should do first 2/24 -usually we just read through the whole book and then talk about what we need to work on and stuff 3/16 -my partner, I told him that he needed to work on a word, that I can’t remember 3/16 -we read through it and make sure it made sense 1/26 -Everyone said the right words and followed along 1/26 -well we usually just go, just read our part and um, like if somebody needs help we just say the word and they say it over again 2/24 -we just read through the whole thing and if somebody says the wrong word we just say it again and they just say it again and keep going 3/16 -I help them like get the right words 2/24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H

SELF-REPORT CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Andy</th>
<th>Daniel</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-feelings -perception of themselves as readers</td>
<td>-it was hard 1/26</td>
<td>-that I read a lot better 1/26</td>
<td>-I don’t know what this means 1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-reading good 2/10</td>
<td>-I’m better than before 2/3</td>
<td>-I feel good 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s getting better 2/17</td>
<td>-I’ve gotten better 2/10</td>
<td>-That it has been really fun 2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-going better 2/24</td>
<td>-gotten better 2/17</td>
<td>-it has been really fun 2/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s going really good 3/3</td>
<td>-my brain wants to read it, so do I 2/24</td>
<td>-that it has been really fun 3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a little bad 3/10</td>
<td>-I get calm and better 3/3</td>
<td>-that it has been really fun reading different things 3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s been going very good 3/16</td>
<td>-nervous sometimes I mess up and I get embarrassed 1/26</td>
<td>-that I like reading about long ago 3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a little good and bad 3/16</td>
<td>-happy and funny 2/3</td>
<td>-that it is really good 2/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-I’ve noticed when I do my readers theater I do better at reading at home too 1/26</td>
<td>-I feel great 2/10</td>
<td>-that it [his reading] is getting better 3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-it’s better 2/17</td>
<td>-ok 2/17</td>
<td>-I don’t feel nervous 1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--a little better 2/24</td>
<td>-excited 2/24</td>
<td>-I don’t feel embarrassed 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a little in the middle 3/3</td>
<td>-excited 3/3</td>
<td>-I don’t feel nervous 2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-in the middle 3/10</td>
<td>-excited – funny 3/10</td>
<td>-I don’t feel nervous 2/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-improving, I don’t make too many mistakes 3/10</td>
<td>-sometimes nervous (only in front of 6th graders 3/10</td>
<td>-I don’t feel nervous 2/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-little good 3/16</td>
<td>-excited – I feel excited and want to do it 3/16</td>
<td>-I don’t feel nervous 3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-not that good 2/3</td>
<td>-kind of good cause I’ve gotten a lot better 1/26</td>
<td>-I feel good 3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-getting better 2/10</td>
<td>-pretty good 2/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-getting better 2/17</td>
<td>-I also felt like a book worm 2/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a little bad 2/24</td>
<td>-an expertise 2/10</td>
<td>-I don’t feel embarrassed 3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-getting better 2/24</td>
<td>-a very good one 2/17</td>
<td>-I like reading in front of others 3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-little both 3/3</td>
<td>-a darn good one 2/24</td>
<td>-I like reading in front of others and I don’t feel nervous 3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-in the middle 3/10</td>
<td>-a darn good looking one and an experienced one 3/3</td>
<td>-I am a really good reader 1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-bad kept making mistakes 3/16</td>
<td>-an expertise 3/10</td>
<td>-I am a really good reader 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-shy 1/26</td>
<td>-a famous one 3/16</td>
<td>-I am a good reader and a fast reader 2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-shy 2/3</td>
<td>-I do it good 3/16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

DATA SUMMARIES EXAMPLE

Observation – summaries

Expression

Andy:
Andy’s expression began monotone both in his speaking and reading voices. When we talked about expression as a class or when he worked with me he would try to add expression. His expression often came in the form of varying volume. Andy would give a word emphasis by saying it louder or softer. Yet his pitch wouldn’t change much. When he did show some inflection it wasn’t natural sounding. He would change pitch but then read on the new pitch and drop back down to the other pitch.

Week 2 – As the intervention went on Andy started to include some expression on his own. He didn’t have to wait to be prompted. He started observing punctuation and matching his voice accordingly (?!).

Week 3 – Andy is gaining confidence because he is reading at a louder volume instead of the timid quiet voice. Andy is beginning to sound less monotone and more natural.

Week 4 – Andy falls back to his monotone voice when he reads unfamiliar text such as a cold passage and the first time through his part in his script. Once he gets a chance to practice the monotone starts to leave and is replaced by more natural sounding reading. Andy gains more confidence which is shown through him trying new character voices.

Week 5 – Andy continues to improve in the following ways: less monotone, more inflection, reading at a more desirable volume and experimenting with character voices.

Week 6 – This week Andy experimented with volume but had a hard time identifying the appropriate volume.

Week 7 – Andy again experiments with different character voices. He is confident reading an absent student’s part, but doesn’t do very well because he doesn’t have practice. Less and less monotone reading. Expression is improving and he is sounding more like natural conversational speaking.

Week 8 – He is starting to detect the appropriate volume for his part in the script. He is even starting to vary his volume appropriately. Sometimes when he focuses on one element, the others fall a little. Andy is able to more appropriately place emphasis on words and observe punctuation correctly.

Daniel:

Week 1 – Daniel read with good expression with appropriate, natural inflection. He does an excellent job at using correct expression and volume to represent his role in the script.

Week 2 – Daniel continues to read in a natural conversational voice. He is full of expression and the way he reads portrays the meaning of his part in the script.

Week 3 – Daniel reads with great expression, volume, and inflection.

Week 4 – Daniel reads as if he is having a natural conversation with another character.