THE EFFECTS OF READERS THEATER ON FLUENCY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

By

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Abstract

Readers Theater is a reading strategy where two or more participants perform while reading from a script. This strategy has become a hot topic in reading. There are many articles tying Readers Theater to increases in student fluency.

This study investigated the benefits of Readers Theater on fluency and reading engagement in students that were reading below grade level. The students that were reading below grade level in the classroom were divided into two groups. One group spent 15 minutes of their reading time doing Readers Theater, the other group did not. The motivation for investigating the benefits of Readers Theater is that it was something that the students had enjoyed the previous year. There is also not a set curriculum in the school where this study took place, so there was a need to look for possible strategies that could be adopted by all of the classrooms within the school.

The results showed that there was a significant difference in the fluency of students that participated in Readers Theater to the ones who did not. There was a significant difference found in the growth of engagement of students who participated in Readers Theater to those that did not. Overall, the students that participated in Readers Theater a higher growth in fluency and engagement than the other students that did not participate in Readers Theater.
Introduction

*Background, Issues and Concerns*

This research took place in a fourth grade classroom at a small elementary school in northwestern Missouri. The school is a private school that serves a dual purpose. It is an elementary school where undergraduate students work with children towards the earning of their bachelor’s degree in education.

The school does not have a set school curriculum for reading. The classrooms have curriculums that are teacher created and classroom specific. The language arts block is designed around the needs of the classroom and the students. Currently, they spend the time in small reading groups led by practicum students. The lessons are based on the use of literature sets and mini lessons based around the common core state standards. The groups are usually spent on a mixture of reading, mini lessons, responding to the reading, group discussions, and project based culminating activities. The language arts block is two hours in length and most of that is spent in small group instruction.

The concerns for this project are that practicum students are in charge of implementing the reading curriculum with the students. Differences in the ways that practicum students implement the lessons in the classroom could affect the outcomes of this study. The lack of diversity in the classroom is another concern that could skew the data.
Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation will be the effectiveness of Readers Theater on student achievement and engagement.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

The school does not have a consistent reading curriculum; each teacher institutes their own curriculum in their classroom. This study will review the effectiveness of Readers Theater in the classroom. The results of this study will determine whether Readers Theater is implemented as part of the everyday curriculum.

Conceptual Underpinning

In theory, Readers Theater will increase student achievement. Readers Theater incorporates many different aspects of reading instruction, such as modeling, echo reading, buddy reading, choral reading, and repeated reading, into one reading strategy.

Statement of the Problem

There is no set curriculum at the school used for the study, so teachers decide their own classroom reading curriculum. This school is looking for a more effective way to teach the students that are struggling in reading.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to see if the fluency of students that are reading below grade level is improved by using Readers Theater each day for 15 minutes. This study will compare a group of students using the everyday classroom instruction with a group that uses the regular instruction but has Readers Theater as 15 minutes of the instruction.

Research Questions

Is there a significant difference in student achievement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater?

Is there a significant difference in student engagement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater?

Null Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in student achievement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater.

There is no significant difference in student engagement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater.
Anticipated Benefits of the Study

This study will help provide evidence of Readers Theater’s ability to improve reading fluency with below level readers. This will be shared with below and above grade level teachers to help improve reading fluency in all classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Readers Theater – a presentation by two or more participants that read a script.

Academic Improvement Measurement System based on the web (AIMSWeb) – an assessment system that provides the framework for RTI implementations and tiered instruction.

Response to Intervention (RTI) - multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

Summary

This study will look at the effectiveness of Readers Theater on student achievement and engagement in reading. This study will inform instruction in reading within a small school in northwestern Missouri. This study will be done in a fourth grade classroom during small group instruction. The results will be
compared between two separate small groups, one that utilizes Readers Theater on a daily basis and one that does not utilize this strategy. These results will be shared among classroom teachers at the school to create a more consistent classroom curriculum throughout the school.
Review of Literature

Fluency and Readers Theater are both hot topics in the area of reading research. There are many articles that discuss the relationship between the two. “Fluency is an important part of reading that correlates with vocabulary development and comprehension” (Clementi, 2010, p. 85). Readers Theater is one means to improve fluency. Readers Theater is a way to incorporate repeated reading in a fun and motivating way. Readers Theater can help students achieve improvements in their fluency and their engagement in reading.

Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is considered to have an extremely important role in the development of students’ reading ability. Students need to become fluent in their reading to get the most from the text that they are engaging with. Fluency helps students with comprehension of a text. “Conversely, students who read with little or inappropriate expression during oral reading are more likely to have poor comprehension when reading silently” (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 4). Students are able to take more from the text and are able to read to learn.

Readers Theater is a presentation by two or more participants that read a script. “Readers Theatre integrates many methods used to improve oral reading fluency such as modeling, echo reading, buddy reading, choral reading, and repeated reading” (Mraz, et al., 2013, p. 175). The focus of Readers Theater is on an effective reading of the script, not memorization. There are many people that believe Readers Theater is the same as a play, but there are several differences. Plays are performances with actions and props that are meant to be memorized.
Readers Theater scripts are meant to be read as they are performed. The students read the script repeatedly to create a performance where the students read with proper speed, good expression and the reading is error-free. “When successful readers read aloud, not only do they read fluently and with adequate speed, they also use appropriate phrasing, intonation; their oral reading mirrors their spoken language” (Mraz, et al., 2013, p. 164).

Teachers use Readers Theater in a classroom in a multitude of different ways. Some teachers use it as part of a bigger unit, others as a separate activity. There are some teachers that have students write the script themselves, some have students adapt stories, and some use premade scripts. Any of these strategies can be used as part of a Readers Theater production.

The correlation between fluency and Readers Theater has been a focus of research in reading for the past 20 years. Many researchers have found a correlation between Readers Theater and fluency. “Research and practice indicate that the use of Readers Theatre has the potential to enhance both the fluency and the comprehension development of students, particularly those students who struggle to develop fluency and comprehension” (Mraz, et al., 2013, p. 176). Readers Theater has created students that are more engaged and proficient readers.

Readers Theater has also been shown to improve student motivation and engagement. Some researchers have seen this correlation happen inside of their classrooms. “As a classroom teacher, it was amazing to see the students’ desire to entertain audiences with their prosodic reading” (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 12).
This motivation gives students the drive to repeatedly practice and to happily read aloud in front of the class. Students do not feel the pressures that they feel when they need to read a passage from the textbook aloud to the class in popcorn style reading. Students are able to practice and read it aloud once they are comfortable with what they are reading. “Readers Theater is a fun, motivational way for students to improve their fluency, thereby increasing their comprehension and overall reading ability” (Clementi, 2010, p. 85).

Readers Theater has become a strategy that teachers can use to create motivation and engagement with reading while students work on reading fluency. This strategy has been found to create excited readers that make great gains in reading fluency. There are many strategies that are integrated into Readers Theater. It is a strategy that can easily be added to any teacher’s day to help improve students’ reading fluency.
Research Methods

Research Design

A quantitative study will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of Readers Theater on student achievement and engagement. The independent variable being tested will be the use of Readers Theater, while the dependent variable will be the summative assessments that will be administered to the students. If a significant difference is found in the use of Readers Theater for student achievement and engagement in reading based on the summative assessments, it will be recommended that all classrooms within the school utilize Readers Theater in their reading curriculums.

Study Group Description

This study will be completed using a fourth grade general education classroom. There are 14 students in the class. There are more boys than girls in the classroom. There are ten boys and four girls. The classroom is 100% Caucasian. There is no racial diversity in the classroom. There are no students in an ELL program. According to last year’s testing, there is a huge gap in student achievement in reading. The range of reading levels is between a student reading at a first grade level and a student reading at an eighth grade level. There is one student in the class with sensory disorder. Seven of the 14 students in the class were considered below grade level by the administration of the AIMSWeb RCBM test given in September of 2014. The students had to score below 105 words
correct per minute to be considered below grade level. The study will only use the results from these seven students.

*Data Collection and Instrumentation*

The following assessments will be tracked each quarter and then compared with data from the group not utilizing Readers Theater.

- AIMSWeb
- Engagement Survey

*Statistical Analysis Methods*

A t-test will be conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in student achievement based on the use of Readers Theater when compared to a group not utilizing Readers Theater.

A t-test will be conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in student engagement based on the use of Readers Theater when compared to a group not utilizing Readers Theater.
Findings

Research Question #1

Is there a significant difference in student achievement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Words read correctly per Minute (Sept. 2014)</th>
<th>Errors (Sept. 2014)</th>
<th>Words read correctly per Minute (Jan. 2015)</th>
<th>Errors (Jan. 2015)</th>
<th>Growth in Words Read Correctly per Minute</th>
<th>Decrease in Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>#4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readers Theater Group Growth

- Blue bars represent Words read correctly per Minute (Sept. 2014)
- Orange bars represent Words read correctly per Minute (Jan. 2015)
The data above represents the students that were part of the Readers Theater group. The data shows the differences in reading fluency from September of 2014 to January 2015. The blue represents the scores in September and the orange represents the scores in January. The graph shows that each student in this group had an increase in their reading Fluency based on the AIMSWeb RCBM test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Words read correctly per Minute (Sept. 2014)</th>
<th>Errors (Sept. 2014)</th>
<th>Words read correctly per Minute (Jan. 2015)</th>
<th>Errors (Jan. 2015)</th>
<th>Growth in Words Read Correctly per Minute</th>
<th>Decrease in Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data above represents the students that were not part of the Readers Theater group. The data shows the differences in reading fluency from September of 2014 to January 2015. The blue represents the scores in September and the orange represents the scores in January. The graph shows that two out of three students in this group had an increase in their reading fluency based on the AIMSWeb RCBM test. One student had a slight decrease in their reading fluency.

**t-Test Analysis Results for Fluency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RdrsTheatre (n=4)</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rdrs Thtr (n=3)</td>
<td>10.33</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data did not support the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in student achievement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater. The mean growth in words per minute read correctly for students that participated in
Readers Theater was 29.00 while the mean for students not in Readers Theater was 10.33. The data did show that the group that participated in Readers Theater did have a better mean growth in their reading fluency based on the AIMSWeb RCBM test. The p value was 0.08. The t test was 2.22. The degrees of freedom was 5. The null hypothesis was rejected.
Research Question #2

Is there a significant difference in student engagement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater?

Readers Theater Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rec 9/14</th>
<th>Academic 9/14</th>
<th>Total Score 9/14</th>
<th>Rec 11/14</th>
<th>Academic 11/14</th>
<th>Total Score 11/14</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readers Theater Group Reading Attitude Survey Scores
The data above represents the students that were a part of the Readers Theater group. The data shows the differences in reading attitudes from September of 2014 to November 2014. The blue represents the scores in September and the orange represents the scores in November. The graph shows that all of the students in this group had an increase in their reading attitudes based on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

Non-Readers Theater Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rec 9/14</th>
<th>Academic 9/14</th>
<th>Total Score 9/14</th>
<th>Rec 11/14</th>
<th>Academic 11/14</th>
<th>Total Score 11/14</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-Readers Theater Group Reading Attitude Survey Scores
The data above represents the students that were not a part of the Readers Theater group. The data shows the differences in reading attitudes from September of 2014 to November 2014. The blue represents the scores in September and the orange represents the scores in November. The graph shows that all of the students in this group had an increase in their reading attitudes based on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rdrs Theatre (n=4)</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rdrs Thtr (n=3)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.0071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data rejected the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in student engagement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater. The mean growth in student engagement as based on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey for students that participated in Readers Theater was 20.00 while the mean for students not in Readers Theater was 3.5. The data did show that the group that participated in Readers Theater did have a better mean growth in their engagement than the students not participating in Readers Theater. The p value was 0.01. The t test was 5.07. The degrees of freedom was 4. The null hypothesis was rejected.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes of this research had positive results. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in student achievement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater was rejected. The students all showed improvement in their reading fluency and the results were significant enough to reject the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in student engagement of below grade level readers between students in Readers Theater compared to students not in Readers Theater was rejected. This shows that student engagement in reading increased through the use of Readers Theater.

The students in the Readers Theater groups spent 15 minutes per day participating in Readers Theater. These were scripts that varied in level and subject matter. The students practiced these scripts multiple times and performed them in front of group once everyone felt comfortable. They practiced in many different ways. The students would sometimes buddy read, sometimes they echo read, and sometimes they practiced in a small group.

The study revealed that all of the students that participated in Readers Theater increased in their words read correctly per minute. The students increase compared to that of students that did not participate in Readers Theater was enough to be considered significant. Even though the null hypothesis was not rejected the students still made significant increases in their abilities. These
increases have also allowed for the students to feel more comfortable in their reading.

The most significant part of the research has been the increase in student engagement with reading. The students made huge jumps in their enjoyment of reading. The students found Readers Theater much more enjoyable than being a part of a reading group or reading a book independently. The confidence that they found in their reading helped push them towards engagement with other texts as well as the Readers Theater Scripts.

Overall, the findings showed that using Readers Workshop in the classroom will have positive effects on the classroom environment. The use of Readers Theater should be recommended as part of a well-rounded reading program. This could be used in small group or for a fun activity during a free-reading time. The classrooms at the school where this study was done should definitely use this as one of the tools for instruction.

To make this argument stronger, the sample size needs to be much larger. The sample size for this research was only seven students. The study could also be carried across to students that are reading on grade level or above grade level. This study only accounts for students that are below grade level. It would be important to see this study done with more students across different academic levels within the school to see if the results would carry over to the other grade levels.
References


