Readers Theater

The Effects on Reading Achievement and Reading Attitude

In Second Graders

A Paper

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by

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Approved – Instructor

Date
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Year after year the second graders begin the school year with excitement and wonder. But as the first few weeks pass, the motivation and wonder fades for some students. When students are asked to read with the teacher or have a conversation about reading, the discussion, is revealing. With second grade honesty, students declare that they don’t like reading. Why is this statement their truth at such a young age?

Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) reported for the National Reading Panel [NRP] (2000), that reading is critical to future success. Children who learn to read proficiently by third grade are more successful in later years than those who are behind. “Early reading failure is an experience that, in many cases, proves devastating to a child’s academic career.” (Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005 p. 233). They are more likely to drop out of school and face limited job choices (Snow et al. 1998).

The NRP, Frequently Asked Questions, (2000) reported, “… comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text …” (p. 6), and that reading comprehension can be improved when teachers use a combination of techniques. Providing literacy experiences for children must be meaningful to motivate and increase confidence in these readers. Readers Theater is a literacy activity that gives readers a purpose for reading and rereading. It keeps them engaged while “…effectively addressing the areas of reading fluency, comprehension and motivation.” (Worthy & Prater, 2002 p. 294).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students.
**Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students.

**Research Question**

What were the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students?

**Sub Questions**

To what extent did Readers Theater affect reading achievement as it is related to fluency and comprehension?

To what extent did Readers Theater affect student attitude toward reading?

**Research Hypothesis**

Readers Theater will improve reading achievement and attitude to read.

**Null Hypothesis**

Readers Theater will not improve reading achievement or attitude to read.

**Definition of Terms**

*Readers Theater:* An interpretive activity in which children practice and perform a scripted reading for an audience.
*Reading Achievement:* Reading comprehension based on performance outcomes of the Assessment Record (Adaptation of Assessment Record Rigby PM Benchmark, 2002) used by the Appleton Area School District.

*Reading Benchmarks:* Students who are reading at an indicated level by a given period of time: First grade benchmark expectations: A-I (monthly); Second grade benchmark expectations: J=first quarter, K= second quarter, L= third quarter, M= fourth quarter.

*Fluency:* Fluency consists of reading text with accuracy, speed, and proper expression, and it is a preliminary and imperative step in the process of reading comprehension (NRP, 2000).

*Reading Fluency:* Reading fluency refers to efficient, effective word recognition skills that permit a reader to read fluently and with expression.

*Motivation:* A feeling of enthusiasm, interest, or commitment that makes somebody want to do something; incentive to do something.

*Attitude:* A personal view of something; an opinion or general feeling about something.

*Second graders:* Students ages 7-8 in a mixed-gender public classroom comprised of an ethnically diverse population of children.

*Flexible Groups:* Small reading groups comprised of 4-8 students based upon the reading levels or interests of students; fluid movement between groups

*Readers Theater Groups:* Groups of students who perform together in flexible groupings.
Limitations

1. The sample of this study was not randomly selected. As a result the findings might not have been generalized.

2. Truthfulness of the students on the surveys may have been questionable.

3. Students’ perceptions of themselves on the surveys may not have been the same in actuality.

4. The subjects of this study were the students of the researcher and therefore researcher bias may be a factor affecting the results of the study.

5. Other factors could have influenced the results of the academic achievement in reading or attitude toward reading.

6. The length of the survey was limited and may have affected the results.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and motivation to read in low-achieving second grade students. There have been numerous studies conducted on the impact of Readers Theater. This chapter is topical in format. First, this review will examine literacy strategies for student reading achievement and the significance of fluency and comprehension. Secondly, the focus will be the impact on student attitude and motivation to read that contribute to achievement. The third part of the review defines Readers Theater as a literacy strategy when used in the second grade classroom will impact student reading achievement and motivation to read. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

The following is a summary of the related professional literature and a synthesis of its pertinence to this research.

Literacy Strategies for Student Achievement

“Reading is a complex, interactive process that continues to be a primary means of acquiring and using information” and “because reading is fundamental to the mastery of other school subjects, students at all levels must learn to understand what they read.” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Content Standard English Language Arts Standard A, ¶2, 2008) Since the children in our classrooms come with variety of background experiences, the teacher plays a key role in understanding each child’s needs and providing opportunities in which to build upon reading skills. The National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000, recognizes that
because children do not learn the same way, and because learning to read is complex, different strategies and techniques must be used with children to teach fluency and comprehension.

The NRP, 2000, reports that “…text comprehension is improved when teachers use a combination of reading comprehension techniques…” (p. 6). The finding reported by Stahl and Kuhn (2002) in a study for the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), was that there are many effective strategies for supporting readers. Scaffolding reading experiences where, students are monitored and assisted along with explicit teacher modeling can lead to improved comprehension. Pairing students with more skilled readers, reading along with a taped story are effective strategies to support readers in developing fluency and comprehension. Flexible grouping allows for text and skills to be implemented to meet the varying needs of students (Kuhn, 2004; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). Flexible groupings are beneficial for students who are moving from decoding while reading toward becoming fluent readers. Differentiation allows students opportunities to read text with expression while being personally accountable for their reading. Educators must be cognizant of a variety of effective instructional methods.

In a study focusing on planned enrichment strategies with direct instruction for third through sixth graders in an urban school setting, Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert and Gubbins, (2007) found that read-aloud opportunities, individualized, differentiated reading instruction, and enriched reading activities improved reading fluency and comprehension as well as fueled more positive attitudes toward reading.

Repeated oral reading or repeated practice of text is also supported in studies as an effective literacy strategy especially when looking at fluency as it is related to comprehension.
Several studies (Rasinski, 2000, 2004) found that children who can both process the text while constructing meaning will allow them to become successful readers who comprehend the text. Readers who read fluently tend to unlock the meaning and be higher achievers. “Each aspect of fluency has a clear connection to text comprehension. Without accurate word reading, the reader will have no access to the author’s intended meaning…” (Hudson, Lane, and Pullen, 2005, p. 703). The NRP (2000) found that children, who were able to read aloud with fluency and expression, were more likely to comprehend and remember what they read. The panel concluded that to meet this goal, repeated oral and silent reading approaches had a significant, positive impact on fluency in addition to comprehension for students of all ages.

In an experiment with urban learners at the third, fourth and fifth grade with underachieving students, Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, and Evans (2006) found that peer-mediated repeated reading improved students’ oral reading rate, reading accuracy, with substantial improvement in comprehension. Since comprehension is the basis for reading achievement, the study concluded that repeated reading promotes comprehension which is supported by standardized tests. Fluent readers were able to focus less attention on decoding and more attention to gaining meaning from the text. This study also found that when students are reading with partners it allows teachers more flexibility to monitor and assist students with their reading.

The importance of the teacher’s role in most teaching strategies has been reported in research studies. Rasinski (2004) found that the teacher’s role is vital in modeling and coaching readers. This modeling can be powerful for improving fluency and comprehension. “Students need to hear what fluent reading sounds like and how fluent readers interpret text with their voices” (p. 48). Keehn, Harmon, and Shoho (2008) also support the importance that teacher
modeling of expressiveness and providing students with encouragement can lead to improved oral expression. Extensive practice, teacher feedback and error correction, thus aiding students to avoid practicing errors, are other effective elements in assisting readers during instruction or intervention (Yurick et al. 2006).

Studies have demonstrated the relationship between fluency and comprehension. Fluency is an important aspect of comprehension and must be addressed in reading instruction. There are many effective literacy strategies for teaching reading, yet there is no one best method to utilize in the classroom. The teacher is a critical element in the classroom as one who assists students’ learning through reading texts and skills, modeling and encouraging students to promote improved reading achievement.

**Student Attitude, Motivation and Reading Achievement**

Investigations into the relationship between reading achievement and student attitudes have been the topic of research studies. Sainsbury (2004) reports that teaching reading has two goals. Students must be given the skills necessary to read effectively, while also developing an enjoyment for reading, “…so that they become self-motivated readers and participate in the broader and deeper experiences that reading can bring” (p.49). In her study with nine- and eleven-year old children, Sainsbury found that confident readers are more motivated to learn, possess enthusiasm to read more and thus make more gains in comprehension.

N. Flynn (2007) found that teachers who make children the central focus in teaching reading while building upon their skills help students make meaningful connections. Teachers must have a solid understanding of their students as well as the subject matter. Purposes for reading and writing through teacher pacing and support, modeling and explanations, give
students the confidence to build upon their learning with the teacher as well as independently. These teacher-pupil interactions were key features where children were the central focus and literacy activities were interesting and engaging for students. When these components of effective teaching and activities were employed, it gave children confidence to work independently and make progress. Teachers can provide opportunities for vocabulary development, fluency building skills and comprehension strategies to build learning experiences where students feel successful so that achievement can occur.

Research shows that there is an established relationship between student attitude, motivation to read and achievement. Confident readers are more motivated to read and thus make gains in comprehension. Teachers hold an important role in developing and supporting literacy opportunities and activities for students. The interactions between the teacher and students can promote positive attitudes and confidence. These components lead to higher achievement.

**Readers Theater as a Literacy Strategy**

Williams and Rask (2003) found in their study of preschool children, that imaginative play is a means for learning. Play gives our young children meaningful contexts in which they have a sense of audience and purpose. During these earliest years, listening to stories and poetry, acting out literature, or using puppets for a puppet show help these young children gain awareness of the magic and enjoyment and the importance of becoming literate. These children were experiencing literacy through play. “Such play enables young children to experience the power and purposes of literacy in meaningful contexts and helps to build up a secure foundation for their future learning” (p. 532). It is plausible that some students’ families are not able or
willing to provide these experiences at home or in a preschool setting for their children. Are these children entering school with a secure foundation for learning? Williams and Rask (2000) affirm that those who are responsible for the education of young children must recognize the importance of learning literacy through play. With this in mind, it makes sense that educators must offer students more opportunities to connect with and experience literacy in an active and playful manner that mirror earlier magical connections with literature. Readers Theater is a strategy that can provide these experiences for learners. Students can work and perform in flexible groups to perform which offer opportunities for repeated readings that are essential for fluency and interpretation (Higgins, 2008). Worthy and Prater (2002) found that Readers Theater gives students an authentic purpose because of the performance after much practice and repeated readings. Increased engagement with literacy through practice or repeated reading along with support and teacher feedback is an effective method for increasing fluency and comprehension. Similarly, as play is relevant to a preschooler in literacy awareness and development, Ortlieb, Cramer and Cheek (2007) found that comprehension becomes relevant to the students when oral interpretation is implemented. Reading becomes a creative experience rather than a subject. It promotes personal interest by allowing the child to become involved in the story. Keehn et al, (2008) used Readers Theater in a six week study to motivate struggling readers in eighth grade and found that it was a promising tool. This format fostered feelings of success for the student readers and participants showed increased overall growth in reading. With teacher modeling of expressiveness and encouragement, students’ motivation was nurtured to practice reading. Rinehart (1999) reported that Readers Theater activities provided students with reading materials for sustained reading opportunities. Students were interested in listening to their peers perform and were learning from each other. His observations were of students becoming self aware and
reflective which promoted personal accountability for their practice and performance. Students showed more positive attitudes about Readers Theater. Confidence, attitudes and fluency were all positively impacted by a Readers Theater study done by Corcoran and Davis (2005) with second and third grade special education students to improve fluency. Kuhn (2004) points out that “… fluency plays an important role in terms of a reader’s ability to construct meaning from text, the ultimate goal of reading instruction” (p. 338). The small group structure and flexible grouping would be beneficial for students who are struggling in the transition from decoding while reading toward becoming fluent readers. Where often struggling readers have less self confidence in reading and seem keenly aware of their abilities, Rinehart (2000) found that Readers Theater put lower-leveled readers on an even playing field with better readers due to more practice and preparation. The less able readers also became role models for other lower readers in performance.

Readers Theater strategy not only has benefits with fiction stories, but can also be utilized in other content areas such as math or science to promote understanding of vocabulary, concepts and overall achievement while having fun. Kinniburgh and Shaw (2007) found that using Readers Theater in science utilizing scripts was more motivating for students than reading the text. Students were developing their reading skills and learning science concepts. The repetition or repeated readings enhances students’ retention of important concepts. R. Flynn (2004) supports these findings while adding that performing Readers Theater scripts can inform, entertain and meet standards of learning.
Summary

The review of related literature indicates that there are numerous effective strategies for teaching reading and improving literacy. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between reading fluency and comprehension. Students who read with fluency achieve at higher reading levels. The teacher must be knowledgeable about teaching methods and apply them in the classroom while supporting and encouraging readers. Educators need to make connections with their students so as to utilize these strategies effectively. Children who are motivated and confident about their reading skills are likely to read more often. Readers Theater is an instructional tool that supports literacy instruction and it is effective in improving reading achievement, attitude, and motivation to read in second grade students. It allows readers, even resistant readers, to become more engaged with literacy. There is need for ongoing research on the impact Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude with all students.
CHAPTER 3: PROCEDURES

**Design**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students. The design of the study was quasi-experimental, action research that produced both qualitative and quantitative data. The treatment variable employed was the implementation of Readers Theater which has been previously defined and discussed. The special curriculum materials used in this study were The Assessment Records (Adaptation of Assessment Record Rigby PM Benchmark, 2002) adopted by the Appleton Area School District. These Records were used to assess student achievement in reading by identifying individual reading levels.

The “Elementary Reading Attitude Survey” (McKenna and Kear, 1990) was administered to collect data regarding preliminary reading attitudes. Data on students’ reading achievement levels were assessed using the Assessment Record. Both were administered at the beginning of this study.

Using flexible grouping, students practiced and performed Readers Theater scripts. These groups were based upon students’ reading level or interests. Teacher coaching and modeling of performance techniques such as suggestions for gestures and expression along with motivational support occurred in whole group, small groups and individually throughout the study. Each group met with the teacher regularly throughout the study. Repeated practice of scripts continued for approximately two weeks before performing for an audience of peers in our school. The Readers Theater treatment was applied for the months of January and February. Approximately two to three times a week, students filled out an “Exit Ticket” for the day and answered three
questions about reading. One question surveyed student feelings about the Readers Theater time block of Communicative Arts. The other two questions addressed feelings about oral reading and the kind of reader they were for the day. The researcher looked for trends or patterns in student responses in relation to the Readers Theater activities, personal reflection and motivation to read.

Data was collected at the end of the study using the “Elementary Reading Attitude Survey” to determine changes in reading attitude. Student achievement was assessed at the end of the study using the Assessment Records.

Sample

The sample in this research study consisted of eighteen students, nine girls and nine boys, all of whom are seven or eight years old, in a second grade Communication Arts classroom. Through flexible grouping, these students were low-achieving and low-average readers from two second grade classrooms which were placed accordingly to best meet their individual reading skill levels and literacy needs. The sample was one of four second grade classrooms at Highlands Elementary School in Appleton, Wisconsin. It is a traditional elementary school, PreK through grade 6 with a total enrollment of 590 students. The school population is diverse including American Indian, Asian, African American, and Hispanic minorities. There are 31.53% students of color attending Highlands School. Fifty-five percent of Highlands’ students met the criteria for low-income status and qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Appleton is an urban community centrally located in the Fox River Valley in the northeastern part of the state. The city has a population of 70,087. The Appleton Area School District is comprised of fifteen traditional elementary schools, four middle schools, three high
schools and thirteen charter schools with a total enrollment of 15,241. Thirty-two percent of AASD students met the criteria for low-income status and qualified for free and reduced lunch.

**Instruments**

To measure individual student’s reading achievement, the Assessment Record (Adaptation of Assessment Record Rigby PM Benchmark, 2002) adopted by the Appleton Area School District (Appendix A) was administered to each student. These Records were used as a pretest and post test. The “Elementary Reading Attitude Survey”, designed by McKenna and Kear, 1990, (Appendix B) were used to measure students’ attitude toward recreational and academic reading. This survey was administered before beginning and at the conclusion of the Readers Theater treatment. The second survey, which was designed by the researcher, was used as an “Exit Ticket” (Appendix C) at the end of the reading period approximately two times a week. The researcher was looking for patterns of student responses in relation to Readers Theater and changes in personal reflection and motivation to read over time.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher attempted to analyze and compare the growth in reading achievement by using quantitative data collected from the Assessment Record for each child. The comparison was based upon data collected before and after the Readers Theater treatment in a second grade classroom. Attitude toward reading was evaluated comparing the results of the pretest and post test using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. Data for both reading achievement and reading attitude will be presented in graph format. The researcher interpreted quantitative data concerning attitudes toward recreational and academic reading. The daily “Exit Ticket” was used
to collect qualitative data. The researcher looked for trends or patterns in student responses in relation to the Readers Theater activities, personal reflection and motivation to read.

**Calendar**

The following table outlined the timeline for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December, 2008</td>
<td>Administer Elementary Reading Attitude Survey as a pretest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2008</td>
<td>Administer Assessment Records 1:1 to determine reading level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-February, 2009</td>
<td>Readers Theater treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-February, 2009</td>
<td>Use “Exit-Tickets” approximately two times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2009</td>
<td>Administer Elementary Reading Attitude Survey as a post test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2009</td>
<td>Administer Assessment Records 1:1 to determine reading level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Budget**

The cost of conducting this study was minimal and did not exceed normal classroom operational costs.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students.

The design of the study was quasi-experimental, action research that produced both qualitative and quantitative data. The research questions under study were as follows: 1) To what extent did Readers Theater affect reading achievement as it is related to fluency and comprehension? 2) To what extent did Readers Theater affect student attitude toward reading?

Quantitative data was gathered at the beginning of the study during December, 2008, and at the conclusion of the study during March, 2009, when students’ reading achievement and attitude toward recreational and academic reading was measured. During January-February, 2009, students in the second grade treatment group participated in Readers Theater. There are many components to incorporating Readers Theater into a Communication Arts classroom. Approximately twelve steps were followed during the Readers Theater treatment timeline.

- Introductory Lesson(s)
- Create visual chart with Readers Theater performance suggestions
- Read book(s) to students from which the Readers Theater script has been adapted
- Comprehension: focus on story elements, compare and contrast, etc.
- Group reading and discussion of script as an adaptation of a published book
- Small group/partner rereading of script as a story
- Options to consider: 1) Assign script and parts to students based on individual reading level 2) Allow students to choose a Readers Theater script based on their interests and then assign parts to students based on individual reading level

- Present vocabulary lessons: whole class and in Readers Theater groups: discuss ideas for voice expression and gestures

- Use flexible grouping while practice reading scripts

- Teacher coaching as needed: whole group, small group or individually

- Continue repeated readings of entire script and individual parts

- Exit Tickets (Appendix C) used approximately two to three times a week

- Video tape performance

- View performance; encourage students to share personal observations, perceptions and set goals for future performances

- Informal follow-up conversations with students

To ensure that all of the students in the treatment group understood the concept of Readers Theater, an introductory lesson was presented. Prior knowledge indicated that while most of the students recalled being part of Readers Theater in first grade, they were not familiar with the elements of Readers Theater. The book *Hooray for Reading Day!*, by Margery Cuyler, was read aloud and discussed. The story illustrates how the main character, Jessica, works through her worries of performing in a Reading Theater in front of her class and parents. A classroom discussion followed in an effort to squelch student worries and connect other uneasy
feelings of the treatment group with this story character. Reassurance was offered by informing students that they would practice frequently and be ready to perform in front of an audience. A chart was created with suggestions for students to consider while practicing and “making their character come to life”. Figure 4.1 illustrates performance suggestions charted for this treatment.

Figure 4.1

Readers Theater

How to make a character come to life!

- **voice expression**: sound like your character; show feelings with your voice
- **hand movements** (gestures)
- **body movements** – in your own space
- **speak in a loud, clear voice**

After the chart was created, it periodically became the starting point for the Readers Theater part of the day. The students would reread the chart and were encouraged to focus on one or more points on the chart during the day’s practice.

Prior to dispersing all of the scripts to be performed in this study, the books upon which the scripts were adapted were introduced and read aloud to the class. Comprehension questions on story elements were discussed. For the last group of scripts to be performed during the
treatment period, *The Three Little Pigs* and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, students were given an opportunity to compare and contrast the two texts. Discussion revolved around the characters, setting and events of the two books. Then both scripts were given to the students to partner read as a story without focusing on individual parts. A home activity to read both scripts was assigned so that parents could become involved with reading. Students were encouraged to have a family discussion about which script to be involved in for the final performance. Students chose which script was most interesting and by the following day, were assigned individual parts to practice. They practiced the Readers Theater scripts daily in small groups, with a partner and individually. A variety of vocabulary lessons were presented to assist students in understanding word meanings and used as a starting point for ideas on expression that could be employed to help the characters “come to life”. Teacher coaching and modeling of performance techniques such as suggestions for gestures and expression along with motivational support occurred in whole group and small groups as well as individually throughout the study. Repeated reading of scripts continued for approximately two weeks before performing for an audience of peers in our school. Qualitative data was collected approximately two to three times a week using a three question survey designed by this researcher. Students filled out an Exit Ticket (Appendix C) for the day to provide personal reflection and motivation to read in relation to the Readers Theater activities. The researcher looked for trends or patterns in student responses.

**Findings**

*To what extent did Readers Theater affect reading achievement as it is related to fluency and comprehension?*
The first sub-question addressed by the researcher examined the affect of Readers Theater on second graders’ reading achievement as it is related to fluency and comprehension. This was measured by a pre- and post reading level assessment. The assessment tool used was The Assessment Records (Adaptation of Assessment Record Rigby PM Benchmark, 2002) adopted by the Appleton Area School District (Appendix A). The administration of this tool required the teacher to assess each student individually. The child reads a book silently to himself and then gives an oral retelling of the story. The teacher records the child’s retelling, looking for story elements such as characters, setting and events. The teacher may ask scripted questions about particular details if the student does not recall them in the retelling. Finally, the child reads a passage of 100 words orally from the story. The teacher records words read correctly, errors and self-corrections. The accuracy rate is calculated by dividing the total number of words read correctly by 100 or the total number of words. Students receiving a percentage of 94%-96% indicate an Instructional Oral Reading level. Oral reading fluency is scored based upon the Fluency Guide in the Assessment Record: 1 - Very Little Fluency; 2- Some Fluency; 3 – More Fluency; 4 – Fluent. An analysis of reading behaviors including the retelling, comprehension, fluency and accuracy were all given consideration in determining the individual student’s reading achievement based on the Benchmark level used with the child.

Figures 4.2A and 4.2B present the Benchmark reading levels of the students in the treatment group at the beginning and end of the treatment period. All students demonstrated growth in reading achievement as indicated by the gains in reading levels. Students reading at first grade levels, A-I, reflect monthly gains, while students reading at second grade levels, J-M, reflect quarterly gains. When assessed prior to treatment eleven students were reading below grade level expectations (Levels H-J) and seven students were reading at grade level (Level K).
When assessed at the end of the treatment, six students though achieving below level, made positive achievement gains (Level J), three students were reading nearly at level (Level K) and nine students were reading at level (Level L). Nine students made a gain of one benchmark level and seven students gained two benchmark levels during the treatment period. All students improved their fluency by at least one level while one student remained at level 4 – Fluent Reader. Eighteen students were part of the treatment group in this study. However, during the treatment period, one student moved away and another student joined the classroom, thus sixteen students were part of the study from the beginning to the end.

**Figure 4.2A**

**Reading Achievement**

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<td>I</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>K</td>
<td>L</td>
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<td>K</td>
<td>L</td>
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<td>J</td>
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<td>J</td>
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<td>J</td>
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<td>L</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>J</td>
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<td>K</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>J</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>K</td>
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<tr>
<td>S18</td>
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<td>K</td>
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<td>L</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S19**</td>
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<td>L</td>
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</table>

*Student reflected in Pretest only  **Student reflected in Post Test only

**Figure 4.2B**

**Reading Achievement**

![Bar chart](chart.png)

**Figure 4.3**

T-Test Comparison of Pretest and Post Test Reading Achievement

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<th>df</th>
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To determine the extent to which Reading Achievement was affected by the Readers Theater treatment a t-test was conducted with a critical value of 2.120 (p = .05). The resulting t-value of 9.71 was at a significant level allowing the rejection of the null hypothesis.

To what extent did Readers Theater affect student attitude toward reading?

The second sub-question addressed by the researcher examined to what extent did Readers Theater affect student attitude toward reading. The assessment tool, the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix B), was administered to the whole group of second graders in the treatment group prior to the onset and at the conclusion of the treatment program. The survey questions were read aloud. Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5 summarize the results for recreational attitudes and academic attitudes respectively. Both graphs show percentile ranks converted from students’ raw scores. Sixteen students were present from the beginning to the end of the treatment period, thus S6*, S16* and S19* were not included in the class average. The Attitude Toward Recreational Reading chart (Figure 4.4) shows that six students showed improved attitude toward recreational reading, and ten students’ attitudes showed a decline in attitude toward recreational reading.
Figure 4.4

Attitude Toward Recreational Reading

% Rank

Students

S1  S2  S3  S4  S5* S6  S7  S8  S9  S10 S11 S12 S13 S14 S15 S16* S17 S18 S19 *Class Average

Pretest Attitude Recreational  Post Test Attitude Recreational
The Attitude Toward Academic Reading chart (Figure 4.5) illustrates that eight students showed an improvement in attitude, five students showed a decline toward academic reading, while three students’ scores in academic reading attitudes remained constant.

Qualitative data was also collected during the Readers Theater treatment. Approximately two to three times a week, students completed an Exit Ticket (Appendix C) at the conclusion of the lesson or script practice. Student motivation varied from the time new scripts were introduced to performance day. Most students appeared reflective about their oral reading and kind of reader they were for the day. As students learned the vocabulary, created gestures for their characters and practiced expressive reading each day, it was apparent from the survey responses that most students’ answers consistently moved from OK or GOOD to GREAT when answering. This seemed consistent with answers about feelings about the Readers Theater time.
block. Days, in which students were in the early stages of learning their part, developing characters, and trying new gestures or voice expression, surveys revealed that GOOD or OK responses were given for the Readers Theater time. However, as student practices moved closer to performance quality, survey responses revealed an increase in GOOD or GREAT answers.

Conversations with students throughout Readers Theater and at the conclusion of the treatment period revealed powerful information. The students who were reading below level at the time the pretest was administered all made comments with a similar theme. When asked individually what they learned about reading from participating in Readers Theater, all but one of the students shared similar insights about becoming a better reader. Comments included, Readers Theater… “helped you get better at reading and to read out loud”. (I) … “learned voice acting, actions, hand motions”. Many students stated that they learned “to read louder for people.” “You get better at reading because you read it over and over”… and “practicing hard words so we would know and learn them”. One of the quietest students in the class (S7) said that she learned that, “Reading can be fun”. Although this student continues to be reading below level, she showed positive gains in both recreational and academic attitude and appears more confident. Her body language seems more relaxed; she smiles more frequently and is more talkative with both peers and the researcher. She asked for a bigger part the next time our class does Readers Theater. Three students’ comments revealed that Readers Theater was fun. Five students enjoyed making their character “come to life” and performing for others. One boy, impacted by family changes during the treatment period and often appeared sad, realized that his penguin character was funny. His favorite thing about Readers Theater was being funny and hearing the laughter that erupted each time he said one of his lines, “What’s happening?”
In addition to performance day, a few days later, students were able to watch a DVD of the performance. This was a highlight for three students. When asked to explain this in more detail, they shared that they wanted to see… “how did I read my script, my actions and be loud”. A shy girl also commented about the DVD because she wanted to “see how loud I was” and “how good I was”. When asked how she felt she did, her comment was, (I) “don’t have to be shy…be louder”. When asked about the worst things about Readers Theater, students indicated being nervous about performing in front of “tons of people”, the crowd (audience) talking during the performance, or when peers were bossy during practices. One student was very clear that her worst part was during the performance because, “some people messed up” and she “wanted it to go good”. When asked about future Readers Theater activities, all students in this treatment group stated they wanted to be part of this experience again.

**Summary**

Study results indicated that all students made gains in reading achievement between the pretest and post tests. All students made improvements in comprehension and fluency. Although some students were still reading below grade level expectations, gains were indicated in their reading achievement. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix B) results varied indicating that attitudes toward recreational and academic reading improved, remained constant or declined. However, qualitative data gathered with the Exit Tickets (Appendix C) indicated a gradual improvement in students’ attitudes toward Readers Theater, their own oral reading and perceptions of themselves as readers. This pattern was evident with each new Readers Theater script to be performed. Data collection documented that reading attitude improved throughout
the treatment timeline. Individual conversations with students in the treatment group further supported the changes in reading attitudes. Direction for future research on this topic of Readers Theater will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater on reading achievement and reading attitude in second grade students.

The design of the study was quasi-experimental, action research that produced both qualitative and quantitative data. The research questions under study were as follows: 1) To what extent did Readers Theater affect reading achievement as it is related to fluency and comprehension? 2) To what extent did Readers Theater affect student attitude toward reading?

Interpretation of Findings
Quantitative data collected indicated that all students improved in reading achievement between the pretest and post test assessments. Of the sixteen students who were present from the beginning to the end of the treatment, nine students improved one reading benchmark level during the treatment period and seven students made gains of two reading benchmark levels during the treatment period. Pretest results in reading achievement showed eleven students reading below level; however, post test results indicate that although nine students continued to be reading below level, three of these nine students were reading nearly at level. All students improved in fluency. In Chapter 2, a cited study by Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert and Gubbins, (2007) found that read-aloud opportunities, individualized/differentiated reading instruction, and enriched reading activities improved reading fluency and comprehension as well as fueled more positive attitudes toward reading. The data collected along with observations made by this researcher during the Readers Theater treatment period support these findings.

Achievement gains could also be attributed to other reading support from the Title I teacher or Reading Specialist received by nine of the students in this treatment group. Six students are English Language Learners and received reading support from another teacher. Other interventions of varying degrees for eight children in this treatment group occurred within the school setting or with outside agencies. It is the researcher’s observations that the additional reading support and other interventions also had a positive impact on these students’ focus on learning and emotional well-being and may have played a part in achievement gains.

Results from the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey varied. This was read aloud to the class as indicated in directions for administration. This researcher exercised caution when reading the survey questions so tone of voice, message and bias would not influence student answers. Six students showed improved attitude toward Recreational Reading while eight
students showed an improvement in Academic Reading attitude. Ten students’ attitudes showed a decline in attitude toward Recreational Reading while five students showed a decline toward Academic Reading. Three students’ scores in Academic Reading attitudes remained constant.

A decline in attitudes in Recreational and Academic Reading could be attributed to the lack of maturity of the students in the treatment group. Prevalent attention and or emotional issues (i.e. family change issues, behavioral/emotional issues addressed with outside counseling) for approximately one third of the students in the treatment classroom affected performance on a daily basis. Perhaps it was difficult for some students to recall the sum of their experiences during the Readers Theater treatment. Thus, the post test survey may only reflect the current day’s attitudes, feelings or perceptions for some students.

Another explanation for the results could be that the post test was administered on a Monday morning. Perhaps students’ weekend experiences were influencing their mood, attitudes or perceptions. If this research was replicated, a different day of the week could be chosen to administer the post test attitude survey. Results may have been different if the survey had been administered following a performance or viewing the DVD recording rather than with a span of time as was indicated in the timeline for this study.

The students in this treatment group appeared motivated to participate in Readers Theater. It is the researcher’s inclination to believe that the overall attitude in the classroom was positive and productive. It is worthy to mention the power of gathering qualitative data through the use of the Exit Ticket (Appendix C). Students appeared reflective about their feelings about Readers Theater and their experience for the day. When answers on the Exit Tickets were reviewed by the researcher and there was a discrepancy in answers versus observations for the
day, the researcher met individually with the student. The researcher asked these students to help her understand why the score was given. Answers revealed that students were quite honest and reflective. For example, one student was recovering from a cold virus and had a very hoarse voice. She marked her oral reading as OK for the day even though the researcher felt she performed adequately considering her level of health. When asked about the answer, she simply pointed to her throat. Another boy who’s Exit Tickets had indicated regular improvement in attitude and motivation during Readers Theater had all OK for one day. When asked why he chose these marks, he appeared frustrated with one student who did not know her words and stated that she was a “pokey reader”.

**Critique of the Study**

There are several aspects of this study that could be improved if replicated. The sample size of this study involved was one classroom setting. Drawing inferences from this treatment would be more valid with a larger, randomized student group or where a control group was established with the only instructional program variable being Readers Theater.

The timeline established for this study makes it difficult to draw inferences to a more global student population. Additionally, this study may have utilized a lengthier time period to evaluate true changes in the students’ reading achievement and attitude. Building background, developing vocabulary and assisting students in making connections while reading are important elements for readers. The lessons that were employed with each new set of Readers Theater scripts required more instructional time than was originally predicted when the timeline was
established. Additional coaching and modeling for some students seemed warranted to assist
them during practice to develop expressive reading.

Lastly, an established building schedule influenced the amount of time in which the
students in this treatment group were together in the classroom to practice the Readers Theater
scripts. This time was during the guided reading block of Communication Arts. As a result, the
focus during guided reading for the treatment was primarily Readers Theater scripts. Best
practices warrant a more balanced approach during guided reading time.

It would have been more appropriate to study the groups over a full academic year and
then compare students’ reading achievement.

**Directions for Future Research**

As a result of this study this researcher has learned the value of Readers Theater as part
of a reading program in a second grade classroom. Observations indicated to the researcher that
students appeared enthusiastic and the overall mood appeared to be jovial during the Readers
Theater activities. Students were afforded opportunities to be creative in “making their characters
come to life” during practices and for a performance. Observations indicated that the students
offered support and suggestions to one another while practicing in small groups. In addition all
readers performing a script were on an equal playing field. Each student’s part was important to
the success of the performance. The students in this treatment group experienced the importance
of rereading and repeated practice on reading fluency.
As mentioned earlier, some of the students involved in this treatment group also received reading support services from Title I or a Reading Specialist and/or instruction from the teacher for English Language Learners. These teachers also employed different Readers Theater scripts with their small groups during the treatment period. Continued research replicating the Readers Theater treatment might look at the reading achievement and reading attitudes of these populations receiving services compared to those students who do not receive additional services.

It would also be interesting to study the amount of parent/family involvement with at-home reading practice of Readers Theater scripts and evaluate the extent to which this affects reading achievement and reading attitudes. Similarly, utilizing the DVDs recorded after a performance could warrant another focus for a study. By sending home the classroom Readers Theater performance for family viewing, a study could be conducted on the impact of parent/student reading attitudes, motivation or changes in family dialogue about reading.

Future research implementing Readers Theater as part of a Communication Arts classroom could be incorporated throughout the entire school as part of a balanced reading program. Reading achievement and reading attitude among students could then be compared in a more long term, comprehensive manner.
APPENDIX A:

Assessment Record
**Level 19/K2: The Old Cabin in the Forest**

**Assessment Record**

Name: ___________________________ Teacher: ______________________ Date: __________

**Directions:**
Student reads the entire selection silently. Then the student retells. Follow-up with the questions that were not answered in the retelling. After the comprehension check, students will orally read 142 words to get an oral reading accuracy level. Complete the running record on the other side of this sheet. Then record Fluency Level, Oral Reading Accuracy, and Self-Correction Rate at the bottom of this page.

**Introduction:**
This story is about a bike ride to an old cabin in the forest, and the characters are Zack, his mom and dad, and his friend Mitch.

**A Retelling should include:** character names, setting, sequence, main idea or plot.

---

Questions to check for understanding -- if question is answered in retelling, do not ask again. (Check if understanding is acceptable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answered in retelling</th>
<th>Answered with teacher’s prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  1. What did Zack think might be hiding under the old cabin?  
     Response: (a wild cat)  

  2. Where did they ride before they got to the forest path?  
     Response: (on the river path)  

  3. Which forest path did Mom tell the boys to follow?  
     Response: (the path on the left)  

  4. Explain why it is important to stay on the path while in the forest.  
     Response: (Answers will vary.)  

---

Analysis of reading behaviors: Fluency ____  Oral Reading Accuracy ____ %  Self-Correction Rate ____

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<td>just right</td>
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Comments:

**Level K Teaching Points:**
- Uses text structure to predict likely events or analyze
- Sustains interest over several days
- Fluently reads longer selections
- Reads silently much of the time
- Uses multiple sources of information in an integrated way.

Zack and his friend Mitch were going riding with Zack’s parents.

“We have decided to ride up to the old cabin, in the forest by the river,” said Zack.

“Does anyone live there?” asked Mitch.


Soon they were ready. They set off along the river path.


“Keep on the path until you get to the forest,” called Mom. “Wait for us there.”

At last, Zack and Mitch reached the place where the river path ended.

Two different paths led into the forest. Zack’s parents caught up with the boys.

“Which way do we go?” asked Zack.

“Follow the path on the left,” said mom. “Go past the picnic ground.”
APPENDIX B:

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey
ELEMEENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

School  Grade  Name

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?

2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?

3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?

4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?
5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?

6. How do you feel about starting a new book?

7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?

10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?

11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?

12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?
13. How do you feel about reading in school?

14. How do you feel about reading your school books?

15. How do you feel about learning from a book?

16. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?
17. How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?

18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?

19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?

20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?
Elementary Reading Attitude Survey
Scoring sheet

Student name _______________________________
Teacher ____________________________ Administration date __________________________
Grade ___________________________

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<td>19. __________</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raw score: __________ Raw score: __________

Full scale raw score (Recreational + Academic): __________

Percentile ranks
Recreational
Academic
Full scale

Measuring attitude toward reading 635
APPENDIX C:

Readers Theater Exit Ticket
Readers Theater Exit Ticket

1. How do you feel about Readers Theater today?

2. How did you feel when you read out loud today?

3. What kind of reader are you today?

Great  Good  OK
REFERENCES


