

Executive Summary

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I. Research Question/ Definition of Problem

How can I effectively utilize readers theater to improve the fluency and reading comprehension skills of my students?

- What does readers theater look like in my classroom?
- What is the impact of readers theater on my students' levels of fluency?
- What is the impact of readers theater on my students' levels of comprehension?
- What changes in students' level of interest in reading and reading behaviors are noted following the use of readers theater?

II. Rationale

The National Reading Panel in 2000 identified fluency as a key ingredient to successful reading instruction due to its effect on students' reading efficiency and comprehension. Identifying the impact of readers theater on my students' fluency levels and comprehension is important because third grade is considered a benchmark grade in my district, and promotional criteria is based on reading at or above a designated reading percentile as measured by our annual standardized testing. Evaluating the impact of readers theater and noting the patterns I discover in my students' performance will help me effectively implement an instructional program to meet their individual needs.

III. Data Collection Process/ Tools

The methods I used to collect data included surveys, observations, and student fluency assessments. These were accumulated over a three month period: January to March.

Fluency assessments from an informal reading inventory (level three) were administered at the start, fourth week, eighth week and conclusion of the study to assess and monitor overall improvement of reading fluency skills including word recognition accuracy, reading rate, reading expression and comprehension.

Two surveys were administered at the start and conclusion of the study to assess changes in the reading habits and interests of the students.

Student performances of readers theater scripts were taped and analyzed weekly to monitor improvements in fluency. A rubric was utilized for the students to self-assess their own progress during the study.

IV. Data Analysis & Findings

The results of my project affirmed that utilizing readers theater does lead to improved levels of fluency and reading comprehension. However, while all my students benefited, my results did not show equal gains for all students.

I broke the data down into the four major groups - academically talented, general education, bilingual and special needs - represented in my classroom and learned that the academically talented group showed no gain because they were already fluent readers with great comprehension. I saw roughly the same percentage of gains in word recognition for the remaining groups. Overall

comprehension was greater for the general education and special needs students than the bilingual students, possibly because although those students were more fluent they still needed to develop their understanding of the vocabulary to improve comprehension.

Readers theater improved my students' reading rate, word recognition accuracy and use of expression while reading as well as their attitude. As they thought they were better readers they demonstrated greater fluency and comprehension. Periodic assessment was critical to my discovery of how to make readers theater a successful experience for my students. The students who experienced a change in attitude towards reading likewise showed the greatest gains in fluency, but it is not clear if the attitude changed as a result of improved performance or vice versa since the attitude survey was only administered at the start and end of the study.

V. Barriers/ Limitations

One limitation of my study is that there is no data as to whether readers theater will continue to serve as a motivational tool to improve fluency and the use of on-task behaviors over time. There is no data on the long term effects of readers theater on fluency and comprehension and how it continues to affect independent reading activities.

VI. Policy Implications/ Recommendations

At the school level, teachers of struggling students need to recognize that readers theater provides their children with an enjoyable opportunity to engage in rereading texts. Thus they benefit both from the multiple interactions with the text and with their peers, resulting in improved fluency and comprehension levels.

Incorporating fluency instruction is integral to the creation of an effective comprehension program because if fluency is not developed, the act of decoding drains some of the students' available resources from constructing meaning of the text resulting in lower comprehension.

Readers theater scripts can easily be created either by the teacher or the students to review concepts from any curriculum materials, providing the students with multiple interactions with the subject matter promoting greater retention and understanding.

At the district level, administrators need to encourage teachers to incorporate motivational reading activities into the curriculum. Research supports that students do better if they feel more confident in themselves as readers and engage in independent reading more often, which readers theater accomplishes.

Fluency assessments that measure reading rate, word recognition accuracy and fluency through expression needs to be administered at quarterly intervals. Built into the reading program, they will help teachers identify where their students are and where they need to improve. Since fluency is an essential skill that all good readers demonstrate, it is important that teachers be encouraged to address its development and assessment in their lesson plans.

VII. Next Steps

I will present my findings to my colleagues in school and encourage them to incorporate fluency assessments and readers theater in their curriculum.