THE EFFECTS OF REPEATED READINGS ON THE FLUENCY SCORES OF LOW ABILITY THIRD GRADE READERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the effect of repeated readings (Samuels, 1997) on third grade “At Risk” readers. Three readers were selected who scored in the “At Risk” category on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) oral reading fluency test. Students read specific passages in 60 seconds periodically and the number of words read correctly were documented. This was done three times a day at nine different points throughout the testing period. When tested again, at the end of a three month intervention period, all three readers showed a gain in the number of words read correctly in 60 seconds. Two girls remained in the “At Risk” category at the end of the study and one advanced to “Some Risk” indicating that the method of repeated readings is a viable intervention as one part of reading instruction.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of fluency has been neglected over the last several decades, according to the National Reading Panel’s report entitled “Teaching Children to Read” (2000). Having looked into the teaching of reading extensively, these researchers determined that the five critical areas of instruction were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension and noted that as far back as 1983, Allington had cited fluency as the “most neglected” reading skill.

With this in mind, the National Reading Panel (2000) scientifically studied two approaches for the development of fluency in elementary school students. The first approach studied was the use of guided repeated oral reading practice, and the second was the effort to increase the amount of independent reading time for children. Extensive study showed that repeated reading with immediate feedback from parents, teachers, or peers was effective in improving a variety of skills. While encouraging students to read more had been a goal of many teachers, there was little evidence to support the idea that this lead to better fluency and higher reading achievement.

This study investigated the National Reading Panel’s (2000) first approach to fluency, the use of repeated readings, in a third grade classroom.

Statement of the Problem

In 2001 the National Reading Panel established fluency as one of five main areas of concentration when teaching reading to children. In recent years scientific research has targeted fluency in students of differing ages and abilities, from all types of neighborhoods, in many parts of the United States. It is necessary to determine how and when repeated readings could be of help so that more teachers will be able to attempt to increase their students’ fluency when
necessary. Since many teachers may be unaware of strategies that could help them in this area, determining easy to use, accessible instructional techniques would be of great benefit.

*Research Question*

This study was conducted to further investigate the use of repeated readings. The research question that guided this investigation was, “Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores?” This investigation was a single case study design of third graders who scored a 52 or lower on the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) test in the fall of 2005.

*Rationale*

“The National Assessment of Educational Progress conducted a large study of the status of fluency achievement in American education” (National Reading Panel, 2000). Fourth graders who nationally represented the United States were tested for fluency and 44% were found to be disfluent, even though they were tested with grade-level stories they had previously read under supportive testing conditions. This study brought to light the close relationship between reading comprehension and fluency. Since we read to comprehend, it makes sense that if a student’s fluency improves, his or her comprehension will also improve. Therefore, teachers need to find ways to help children read fluently.

Research and theory have begun to focus on different ways of improving fluency in the last three decades (National Reading Panel, 2000). As more research becomes available, an increasing number of teachers will find effective ways of enhancing their students’ fluency. It is necessary for teachers to utilize methods that will work with their particular students and job assignments. It is hoped that the results of this study will help determine which fluency-enhancing approaches may work with elementary students.
Definition of Terms

Some terms that will be used in this project are identified below, along with their definitions and accompanying sources:

At-risk - “a term used to describe students who demonstrate low performance in one or more areas related to reading development, such as vocabulary or phonological awareness” (Vaughn & Linan - Thompson, 2004, p.134)

Automaticity - “the ability to perform complex skills with minimal attention and conscious effort” (Samuels & Flor, 1997, p. 105)

CBM-Competency Based Measurement – a set of standardized and well-researched procedures for assessing and monitoring students’ progress (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006, p.636)

Choral reading- “the oral interpretation of poetry by two or more voices” (Trousdale & Harris, 1993, p. 198)

DIBELS - a reading screening test developed at the University of Oregon; the acronym stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (Good & Kaminski, 2002)

Fluency - “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 3-5)

Paired reading - “two students take turns reading a passage or story” (Carbo, 1996, p. 2).

Prosody- “appropriate phrasing, stress, and intonation in oral reading” (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003, p. 3)

Readers Theatre - “an interpretive reading activity in which readers use their voices to bring characters to life” (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker) 1998, p. 326).
Repeated readings- “a systematic practice of using timed oral re-readings to develop reading fluency” (Gillet & Temple, 2000, p. 249)

Limitations

Several limitations occurred with this study. It was impossible to pre-establish the number of participants and ensure equal representation of gender and minority groups since students’ scores on the DIBELS (1996) assessment determined “At Risk” status. It was also difficult to control for diversity of economic status among students.

Time factors were a limitation. In a hectic third grade classroom there were only so many minutes per week to work with individual students and, thus, develop fluency.

Only one fluency-enhancing technique was used in this study, so whether other methods (such as readers theater) would have worked is unknown.

The participants in this study were human beings who arrived at the testing setting with various levels of motivation. While motivation was able to be encouraged, it was never able to be controlled.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined the use of repeated readings with low ability third grade students in an effort to determine this technique’s viability in increasing students’ fluency scores on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test (DIBELS) (1996). The students were members of one third grade class in an upper middle class suburban public school system in the midwest.

The literature reviewed for this chapter was selected in order to set the stage and provide ample background for addressing fluency in the third grade classroom. A definition of fluency begins this chapter, followed by a review of the history of oral reading, detailing its prevalence and decline in the United States. This history brings the reader from the early 20th century into the 21st concerning Language Arts and its instruction.

A relatively in-depth review of S. Jay Samuels’ (1997) work comprises the second section of this chapter. It establishes the need for fluency in reading and proposes methods for improving fluency in the classroom. Third, a critical review of eight recent studies elucidates the importance of fluency. Chapter Two’s fourth section examines several methods of practicing fluency in the classroom, including Readers Theatre, poetry, paired readings, and using recorded materials. A summary of this chapter makes up the final and fifth section.

Fluency Defined

Fluency is an area of Language Arts instruction that is gaining more attention as the world heads into the 21st century. A report published in 2001 by the National Reading Panel divided Language Arts instruction into five areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. A collaborative effort by the National Institute for Literacy, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the U.S. Department of
Education, this document brought fluency to the attention of many teachers throughout the country. The scientifically-based research that contributed to this report was deemed significant at the time. Teachers using this report as a guideline for their classroom literacy program could now readily recognize the importance of children’s reading fluency as one of the major factors in a well-rounded program.

In order to look at fluency carefully, it is important to establish its meaning. The National Reading Panel (2000) refers to fluency as “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (p.3-5) Rasinski (2000), a noted authority on fluency in children’s reading, agrees that, “Speed does matter in reading” (p. 146). He stresses that excessively slow, disfluent reading is associated with poor comprehension and can also lead to reading frustration.

**History of Oral Reading in the United States**

According to Smith (1965), reading instruction in the United States dates back to 1620 with the Pilgrims’ landing at Plymouth Rock. It is important to note that the Puritans were seeking to break away from the church of England. The Puritans felt that in order to be responsible to God, they should not be relying on anyone else for Biblical interpretation. To take part in this developing religion, people were compelled to develop their reading skills. Religious instruction dominated schoolwork in England and the colonies at that time.

Families read the Bible together twice a day, establishing the onset of oral reading in the United States. In 1647 an act was passed requiring the establishment of a school in any community that had 50 or more households.

Before the advent of electricity, oral reading was a form of entertainment in many households. Most homes did not own many books and usually only one person could read. “Shortly after the birth of the new American republic, developing eloquent oral reading was
determined to be one of the central goals of classroom reading instruction” (Reutzel, Hollingsworth, & Eldredge, 1994, p. 41).

Oral reading and fluency have been linked since instruction in reading began in this country. “From the earliest days of the United States through the first decade of the twentieth century, oral reading dominated school instruction” (Rasinski, 2003, p. 10). Students were required to read and reread passages often until they were memorized. McGuffey Readers and the Bible were two types of reading material used for memorization. Elocution, or correct pronunciation, was stressed in oral presentations (Stayter & Allington, 1991).

One popular method of instruction in the early 1800s was developed by Joseph Lancaster, who brought his ideas to the United States from England. His monitorial system of reading made use of posters and charts on the walls, which individual groups of students read. One thousand pupils could supposedly be taught in one large room by being divided into groups of ten students of similar ability. A master teacher taught several monitors first thing in the morning and they, in turn, instructed their small group of 10 students. Oral reading was featured in this form of teaching because individual reading books were scarce and expensive.

“Near the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries, oral reading’s popularity as the primary mode of instruction began to wane” (Rasinski, 2003, p. 12). Scholars noted that students were merely reading words and not thinking about their meaning. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, researchers began noting that silent reading dominated in everyday life (Stayter & Allington, 1991). High frequency words were established and sight vocabulary was practiced. Books were written with these easily identifiable words in mind. Hyatt (as cited in Rasinski, 2003) noted that, “During this period, the number of books, magazines, newspapers,
and other materials available to adults and children began to expand at a rapid pace” (p.14). Reading aloud at home was no longer a main form of entertainment.

Silent reading became the focus of reading instruction in the 1920s. Round robin reading was implemented as a way for teachers to assess a student’s oral reading ability. This method called for the teacher to select students to read orally one-at-a-time. Teachers listened carefully and made corrections and helpful suggestions when necessary as the student read. This method enabled the teacher to maintain control of the group while she assessed their reading. It took little preparation and gave the student immediate feedback. According to Rasinski (2003), “Round robin reading is an embedded part of classroom culture in the United States” (p.17).

Round robin reading, however, is no longer endorsed by reading scholars. It was found to be inferior to the shared book experience, note Eldredge, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth (1996) because it did not promote comprehension, word recognition, accuracy, fluency, or vocabulary acquisition.

Jeanne Chall (1967) performed a set of studies regarding the teaching of reading from 1962 - 1965. The research pointed to a need for a correction in beginning reading instructional methods. Fluency and oral reading are not discussed among her five recommendations for instruction. During the 1960’s, the following five areas were mentioned as areas needing attention: making a change in teaching method, reexamining current ideas about content, reevaluating grade levels, developing new tests, and improving reading research.

As scientific studies were conducted toward the end of the 20th century, fluency in reading was gaining in importance. One of the most prominent ideas to evolve was that of automaticity, which was proposed by S. Jay Samuels (1974). A summary of Samuels’ work
follows. This section establishes the need for fluency in reading and proposes a method for improving fluency in the classroom.

Automaticity in Reading

Many articles written on fluency in the teaching of reading begin with a reference to a 1974 article written by David LaBerge and S. Jay Samuels entitled, “Toward a Theory of Automatic Information Processing in Reading.” Here, these scholars began to look at reading as a series of skills that needed to be learned and practiced until they were automatic, thus the theory of automaticity. Automaticity refers to “the ability to perform complex skills with minimal attention and conscious effort” (Samuels & Flor, 1997, p. 107). These researchers feel that some readers have difficulty comprehending because they spend too much attention and time on word identification. Recognition of the importance of automaticity increased from the time of the article’s publication. Tompkins (1997), for instance, states, “The goal of reading instruction is comprehension, and in order for students to focus on using strategies for comprehending or making meaning, they must become fluent readers, capable of identifying words automatically” (p.31).

Many higher level thinking skills depend on the ability to perform several tasks at once. Samuels and Flor (1997) use the example of a skilled basketball player to illustrate how sub-skills must be mastered before the athlete is considered to be a skilled player. Basketball players need to be proficient at dribbling, passing, and catching. When these skills are mastered they become automatic, and the player’s brain is freed up to be able to concentrate on other skills, such as a seamless transition between these lower level skills. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) state that, “It is assumed that we can only attend to one thing at a time, but we may be able to process many things at a time so long as no more than one requires attention” (p. 295). This helps explain
how reading is the product of many smaller skills taking place simultaneously. For example, immediate sight word recognition frees up the brain to concentrate on the meaning of the words being read. Thus, the connection between reading fluency and comprehension is established.

An important distinction that needs to be made is that between “automatic” performance and “accurate” performance. Teachers need to take students to the level of automaticity (recognizing sight words automatically) with their skill acquisition, not just accuracy. “Automatic skilled performance develops with extended practice after a high level of accuracy has been reached, and when one is automatic, the skill can be performed with minimum attention and effort” (Samuels & Flor, 1997, p. 109). This enables the teacher to spend less class time re-teaching previously taught material.

The second important implication of the automaticity theory is that if a child is able to perform some functions automatically, additional energy to spend on other tasks is available. With reading, this translates to the child being able to spend time thinking about what he/she is reading, which is the basis of comprehension. Because primary school teachers should be concerned with improving the fluency of their students, it is important to look at ways this could be achieved.

Automaticity is likely to occur when focused practice is attempted over an extended period of time. Three factors that result in improvement in this area are (a) opportunities to practice skills long enough; (b) motivation, which propels the student to maintain attention to the given task; and (c) instruction that helps in learning the task (Samuels & Flor, 1997). It is here that the method of repeated readings proves valuable.
**The Method of Repeated Readings**

Samuels’ seminal work, “The Method of Repeated Readings” (1979), strongly influenced the teaching of fluency in the 1980s and has remained popular into the 21st century.

This method emphasizes practice and repetition. Teachers have embraced it for its ease of use and its effectiveness with regular and special needs students, and with young children and adults (Dowhower, 1994). It must be noted that the method of repeated readings is not a method for teaching all beginning reading skills, but is meant to be a supplement to a well-designed reading program when fluency needs are evident (Allington, 1983).

The method begins with the student selecting an easy story that is of interest. A short selection is marked off by the teacher so that a certain number of words are being used. The number, usually between 50 and 200, is selected based on the student’s reading ability. The student reads the passage out loud to the teacher who records the number of word recognition errors and the reading speed. The student returns to his/her seat and practices the same passage over and over out loud while the teacher listens to another student read. The first student goes back to the teacher and reads the selection again as the teacher records speed and word recognition errors, which are again immediately plotted on a graph.

Samuels (1979) reported in an earlier study that, using this method, quite often word recognition errors decreased and reading rate increased (p. 86). While some teachers were concerned that this method would lead to student boredom, Samuels noted that the students were pleased with the gains they made in fluency (p. 87). Moreover, with each new reading of the material, it is likely that comprehension is increasing. Using the method of repeated readings encourages automaticity by giving the student ample time and motivation to practice.
Samuels points out the connection between sports, music, and reading, which all depend on practice and automaticity to achieve high performance. While sports and music are known for requiring a participant to practice the same skill over and over, reading teachers have been slower to accept that practice. “What repeated readings do is to give the student the opportunity to master the material before moving on” (Samuels, 1979, p. 89). A study by Dahl & Samuels (1975) focused on poor readers with normal intelligence. Repeated readings supplemented their regular classroom reading program. Significant gains were shown over a control group of students in comprehension and reading speed.

After 20 years this method is still very successful in enhancing fluency. Follow-up studies (Dowhower, 1987; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Stage & Jacobsen, 2001) have all confirmed the validity of repeated reading. Samuels mentions four positive points about the technique: speed and accuracy improve; there is a transfer of fluency to parts of other text (Dowhower, 1994); remedial reading students find this technique helps them gain fluency more than any other technique; and foreign language students also benefit from the use of repeated readings (Dowhower, 1994; Hintze, Callahan, Matthews, Williams, & Tobin, 2002).

There are many reasons why oral reading needs to remain a part of reading instruction in the 21st century. It is fun, it is “real reading” (singing songs, reporting news, telling jokes, etc.), it builds confidence, creates community, strengthens decoding skills, connects spoken and written language, and fosters fluency (Rasinski, 2003, p. 19). Dowhower (1994) adds that just as children and adults like to watch the same movies over and over again, a certain joy comes from reading and rereading specific passages of favorite books over and over. Such practice helps students move through increasing levels of reading proficiency. Several reading scholars have identified stages of reading development to help those learning about it better understand the
steps in the reading process (Chall, 1996b; Ehri, 1995). One such model, a broad one by Chall, will be detailed here to further the idea of diagnosing fluency problems and then addressing them with proper interventions.

*Stages of Reading Development*

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) provide an overview of the six stages of reading development based on research by Chall (1996b). These six stages encompass the entire process of learning to read and help to illuminate where fluency develops in that process.

The first stage is the early reading or emergent stage. Everything that is learned prior to formal instruction fits in this category. It is during this stage that children recognize that print represents language and that stories are told through these words. Foundations are laid in phoneme awareness, book-handling knowledge, and concepts about print. A child’s home life and socioeconomic status play a large part in the level to which these are developed.

Afterward, formal reading instruction begins. Basic sound-symbol correspondences are emphasized and opportunity is given to practice decoding. There are 26 letters and 44 sounds in the English language, with consonants being more predictable than vowels. Many children begin this stage by learning the first letter of their first name (Tompkins, 1997). Vaughn & Linan-Thompson (2004) refer to this as “letter-sound knowledge.”

Chall (1996) names the third stage “ungluing from print.” Here readers use what they already know to begin to develop fluency. Decoding skills should be in place, which frees the reader to pay attention to the prosodic features of reading such as appropriate phrasing, stress, and intonation. Once a student is no longer struggling with word identification, it is easier to construct meaning from a text. This level of reading instruction is the level at which the studies
of fluency are focused. It is important for readers at this level to have plenty of interesting, low difficulty material with which to work (Gillet & Temple, 2000).

The fourth stage Chall (1996b) calls “reading for the new.” Students begin to be exposed to an increased amount of print and are expected to continue to absorb information through reading. Gillet and Temple (2000) refer to this stage as switching from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn, and report that it usually occurs around the end of third grade or the beginning of fourth.

“Multiple viewpoints” is the fifth stage identified by Chall (1996b). Students are expected to acquire a broad base of information on a topic through different sources. Gillet and Temple (2000) endorse using a formula they call “Anticipation, Investigation, and Reflection.” When students arrive at this stage they are usually older than primary age. “Anticipation” refers to building an interest in the material before it is begun. Teachers often discuss the topic with the students first and access their prior knowledge. This entices the students to read. “Investigation” is the actual reading of the material once their curiosity has been piqued. In the “Reflection” stage students think back over what they have read.

The last stage is known as “construction and reconstruction.” It is here that individuals begin to “synthesize the myriad viewpoints presented in texts to determine their own perspectives on a given subject, a skill that is essential if learners are to develop into critical readers” (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003, p. 4).

According to this model of reading development, once young readers have established a base familiarity with sound-symbol correspondences, they need to focus on automatizing their decoding ability. They are not learning new skills, but practicing what they already know. It is at
this point that they “transition from learning to read to reading to learn” (Gillet & Temple, 2000). The sooner fluency is mastered, the sooner these later levels of development are able to occur. Proficient readers recognize words automatically. It is through practice that readers are able to achieve this. The role of prosody, mentioned in Chall’s third level of reading development, should not go unrecognized when automaticity is being studied. Seeing a word and reading it correctly do not necessarily mean that it is being read with expression. Dowhower (1987) asserts that tonal and rhythmic aspects of language are what constitute reading with expression. When teachers hear students reading expressively, it is quite often an indicator that comprehension is taking place.

**Studies Involving Fluency**

Several recent studies with participants representing a variety of cultures and ethnicities have provided further evidence of the success of repeated readings. Hintze, Callahan, Matthews, & Williams (2002) investigated 136 second through fifth graders (65 African Americans and 71 Caucasian). The purpose of the study was to examine the predictiveness of curriculum-based-management (CBM) in oral reading fluency on the comprehension ability of African American (65) and Caucasian (71) students. “CBM is a set of standardized and well-researched procedures for assessing and monitoring students’ progress in reading, math, spelling and writing. One widely used CBM procedure is the assessment of oral reading fluency” (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006, p. 636). The researchers selected three third grade reading passages for participants to read. In addition, the passage comprehension subtest of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised (WJ-R) was administered to these students. The results showed that CBM continues to be a sensitive form of direct reading assessment for both Caucasian and African American children. Multiple regression analyses were completed and
showed that CBM neither under-predicted nor over-predicted reading comprehension skills controlling for sex, age, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, the oral reading fluency metric was not a biased indicator of reading comprehension as a function of ethnicity. The authors state that more research needs to be done in this area. The value of this study to teachers is the finding that ethnicity did not prevent any particular race from succeeding at oral reading fluency.

Stage and Jacobsen (2001) conducted a growth curve analysis of 173 fourth graders when they administered curriculum-based oral reading fluency measures in September, January, and May. These scores were used to determine whether there was a relationship between their students’ oral reading fluency scores in September and their performance on a state mandated test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, administered in May. “Based on these cut-scores, the positive predictive power that September oral reading fluency scores predicted WASL failure was .41, and the negative predictive power that September oral reading fluency high scores predicted WASL success was .90” (p. 407). The benefit of this knowledge to teachers and school psychologists is that oral reading fluency scores can be indicative of students who are in need of intervention and measures can be taken to provide help immediately.

Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin and Deno (2003) measured the reading comprehension of 113 fourth grade participants. They examined the relationships among reading comprehension, contextual reading fluency, and context-free reading fluency. Fourth graders were chosen for this study because the examiners, like Stage and Jacobsen (2002), believe that it is during this grade level that normally developing readers begin to show larger individual differences in reading fluency and comprehension. The participants read a folktale aloud and then read aloud the words from the folktale presented as a list, without the benefit of context to help them decipher the word. It was determined that for more fluent readers, contextual
influences produced small improvements in word recognition and large changes in context speeds. For less fluent readers, it was determined that context-free word reading skill was the major factor limiting speed improvements. Teachers can use this information by measuring context fluency to estimate overall reading comprehension. Secondly, they can recognize that slow reading speeds are usually a result of inadequate word-identification skills. Lastly, teachers can recognize that fluent reading reflects comprehension processes as well as word identification skills. The authors point out that these findings depended on the reading level of the participating students.

Dowhower (1987) tested seventeen transitional second grade readers to see how they responded to one of two types of repeated reading training using either independent practice or a read-along procedure. Gains in repeated reading of practiced material transferred to new material as other scholars have noted (Rasinski, 2000).

In related studies, Marseglia (1997) examined the effect of repeated readings on the fluency of 20 high and low level ability readers in a first grade class. An assessment test was administered to determine reading level. Participants were nine low level and 11 high ability readers. Students were asked to read a text selection out loud with no prior knowledge discussed. No help was given on their readings. Second, the teacher read the book aloud to all participants, then read it out loud to them again and invited the students to join with her when they knew the words. Groups of six children listened to a commercially prepared audio tape of the story. The next day the students read the book with assigned peers. Finally, the students were asked to read the story aloud and were recorded as they were on the first reading. Again, the number of words read correctly per minute was used as the fluency score. This score was compared to the score from the first reading. Marseglia was surprised to find that the higher level readers made
significantly higher gains in fluency than the low ability readers. Low level readers appeared to need direct instruction in word recognition and phonics in addition to repeated readings.

Turpie (1994) tracked the fluency of four first grade children from a middle class neighborhood as they used repeated readings over the course of 14 weeks. Students read the chosen selection silently after receiving whole-group instruction on vocabulary and background knowledge. Students were assessed on oral reading fluency and retelling of the story. The students then read the story as a chorus or in a small group, and then read the story four more times with a partner. All of the participants were able to read three times as many words per minute following intervention as they did during baseline. Increases were also seen in accuracy, self-correction behaviors, and the ability to retell a story. The knowledge that repeated readings is a successful intervention with first graders could help other first grade teachers who are looking for effective interventions.

Eber and Miller (2003) studied 40 second and third graders at two different schools in a middle class neighborhood. An attitude-toward-reading survey was administered to the students before interventions took place. Initial reading rates were determined for each participant by noting the total number of words read, subtracting the total number of errors, and establishing that number as the words-per-minute reading rate. Students were instructed in a method of putting a pencil mark through any words they were unable to decode. After practicing the repeated reading method, students performed their first reading of the assigned selection. The total number of words read in one minute was graphed as well as the number of penciled out words. The students reread the passage several times during the next two reading periods, and then were timed again for graphing purposes. Each week of this 12-week study, a different reading strategy was added to the repeated readings, as well as extended silent reading time.
First, the students made posters with pictures to remind them of different reading strategies and decoding skills. They were reminded to use these posters frequently. Response journals were written in to make the students accountable for what they read. Story elements such as plot, characters, setting, events, resolution, and solution were stressed in class discussions. Decoding skills and context clues were also taught and utilized during this time. In the final two weeks of the program, the students concentrated on compound words, syllabication, and cause and effect. Results showed that second graders at Site A improved their fluency scores by 70.3% and third graders at Site B improved their scores by 55.4%. The students with the lowest initial scores improved the most, which is in direct contrast to the scores from the Marseglia study. The researchers felt that repeated readings and extended silent reading times were successful interventions.

A study by Hammer (2003) followed 13 Title 1 third graders as they read stories aloud. The passage was timed, miscues were noted, and then comprehension questions were answered orally. These scores were compared with those of the same participants reading aloud from a second passage they had pre-read three times. The researcher was attempting to determine if the number of words read correctly per minute increased and whether there was a correlation between the students’ fluency and their degree of reading comprehension. The authors found that repeated readings did increase the students’ fluency scores, but no significant correlation was noted between oral reading fluency and comprehension. Too many variables influenced the results to be able to show a correlation between the two. Hammer stated that teachers of second and third grade Title I students may utilize repeated readings if improved oral reading fluency is a goal.
Practicing Fluency in the Classroom

The need for fluency in students’ reading has been established (Hintze, Callahan, Matthews, Williams, & Tobin, 2002; Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, & Deno, 2003; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Stage & Jacobsen, 2001). Samuels’ (1979) work with automaticity confirms that automaticity is gained through extended practice (Guthrie, 1991). Samuels noted that students were so pleased when they saw their correctly-read-words-per-minute scores rising that they did not mind reading the same passage several times. It is up to elementary school teachers of reading to implement methods of repeated reading that both engage and interest the student in practicing a passage until they are proficient. Some suggested methods of repeated reading are choral reading, readers’ theatre, poetry, and paired readings.

Choral Reading

“Choral reading is the oral interpretation of poetry by two or more voices” (Trousdale & Harris, 1993, p. 198). There are many ways to use choral reading in the classroom. (Guthrie, 1991; McCauley & McCauley, 1992; Rinehart, 2001; Trousdale & Harris, 1993). The most basic approach is antiphonal or two-part arrangement. Two groups take turns reading one line at a time. “Soloist and chorus” is a technique in which one voice reads particular stanzas and the rest of the group joins in on the other lines. Line-a-child has one child speak a line or a couplet, then the next child speaks the next line, and so on. Increasing or decreasing volume calls for voices to be added or subtracted when the action of the poem deems it necessary. Increasing or decreasing tempo calls for the rate to change as the poem is recited. Unison has the whole group reciting the poem together. Accompaniment by music, movement, or sound effects utilizes musical instruments, movement, or any sound effects that are appropriate. A goal when working with choral reading should be enjoyment for those involved in the interpretation. A plus for using this
type of repeated reading is that it involves the students with each other and therefore promotes socialization at the same time (Tousdale & Harris, 1993). Choral reading has also proven helpful for working with foreign language speaking students (McCauley & McCauley, 1992). Students using choral reading have shown more gains in overall comprehension and vocabulary than students who participated in an equal amount of free reading (Dowhower, 1994).

Readers Theatre

“Readers’ theatre is an interpretive reading activity in which readers use their voices to bring characters to life” (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998, p. 326). There are no costumes or sets, and students read directly from a script. No memorization is involved. Unlike conventional theater, the participants usually sit in chairs and read their parts, facing the audience. Folktales, poems, short works of fiction, and chapters from longer works can be converted to reader’s theatre productions. (Trousdale & Harris, 1993) Martinez, Roser, & Strecker’s study demonstrated that nearly all of the students in two second grade classes posted gains in their rates of reading after participating in a ten-week readers’ theatre project. It is a “viable and effective means of motivating children to read a text several times and thereby reap the proven benefits of the repeated reading strategy” (Tyler & Chard, 2000, p. 167). Numerous teachers have reported that readers’ theatre is the single most motivating reading activity they have used (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Poetry

“Poetry and reading fluency are an excellent match in nearly any classroom” (Rasinski, 2000, p. 148). Poetry is well suited for fluency practice because of its often short, highly predictable selections that are meant to be read aloud. Rasinski tells of teachers who hold a poetry party in which each student selects a poem and practices it for days in order to prepare for
a performance of poetry reading. Rasinski explains, “When poetry performance is fostered in the
classroom, reading fluency is also nurtured as students attempt to make their oral interpretations
just right” (2000, p. 148). Students have been known to begin by enjoying the short, silly poems
by Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein and then transfer to more thoughtful and serious poetry
(Rasinski, 2003).

*Paired Reading*

Paired reading is a procedure in which two readers sit side-by-side and read together from
a shared book. A more able reader (the tutor) is paired with a less able reader who selects the
book. They read together for 10 - 20 minutes. The tutor adjusts his/her speed to match that of the
less able reader. Paired reading can take place between a student and a parent, a student and a
teacher, or a student and a student. The key is to have one reader who is more fluent than the
other (Rasinski, 2003). Research has shown strong evidence that paired reading improves a
student’s oral reading fluency (Limbrick, McNaughton, & Cameron, 1985).

*Rereading*

Rereading differs from repeated reading when the purpose for doing so is studied. The
purpose for rereading could be to increase comprehension or become familiar with the
vocabulary. The purpose for repeated readings is to increase the number of words read in a
specified amount of time. Rereading is reading the same piece of material again, while repeated
readings involves reading a certain passage in a specific amount of time and keeping track of any
errors. Rereading can be incorporated into writing through the revision process. After the first
draft is finished, the student rereads his work to check for any editing that needs done.
Dowhower (1994) proposes the idea of an “author’s chair” as one way to get students to reread
material. A child takes a seat at the front of the classroom and reads aloud a composition he has written. Each student should get a chance to occupy the “author’s chair.”

Repeated readings, in a variety of forms, offer many benefits to those who utilize these techniques. Dowhower (1989) reports that “Rereading is a valuable study tool, is helpful for both high and low ability students, encourages more efficient processing, and is especially important for young children” (p. 502). Rereading provides an opportunity for students to interpret and respond to literature, and on a more basic level it aids in word recognition, pronunciation practice, and reading fluency (Trousdale & Harris, 1993). Choral reading, readers’ theatre, poetry, author’s chair, rewriting, and paired reading are valued interventions because they allow the student to master word identification with little of their attention so that fluency and comprehension may occur (Guthrie, 1991, p. 39).

Summary

Chapter Two has laid a scholarly foundation for this research study on third graders’ fluency. A review of the literature established that oral reading fluctuated in popularity over the years, and is now enjoying a place of importance. S.J. Samuels (1974) brought the theory of automaticity into focus and educators learned that if readers could automatically recognize words at first sight, their minds would be freed to think about what they were reading. Samuels’ method of repeated readings was developed and is still being used 25 years later. Many scientific studies have been done showing that repeated readings are an effective intervention for disfluent readers (Hintze, Callahan, Matthews, Williams, & Tobin, 2002; Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, & Deno, 2003; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Stage & Jacobsen, 2001). Teachers have multiple ways of bringing repeated readings transferred to new material as other scholars have noted (Rasinski, 2000).
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methods and procedures used to answer the research question: Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores? The hypothesis was that the third grade low readers’ fluency scores would increase when the method of repeated readings was used as one component of classroom instruction. It is, however, important to note that developing reading fluency should never be the only goal in reading instruction (Allington, 1983).

Description of Project

This investigation was a single subject design (Creswell, 2002) involving third graders who scored a 52 or lower on the DIBELS test in the fall of 2005. DIBELS is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test (1996) which is the approved fluency testing device used by the school system where the study took place. A score of 52 or lower puts the reader in the “At Risk” category for reading fluency. The purpose was to determine if the method of repeated readings was an effective method for improving the fluency of third grade students.

Description of Activities

Participants

Three students enrolled in the researcher’s third grade class participated in this study. These students, each of whom achieved a score of 52 or lower on the DIBELS test, came from an economically diverse segment of the affluent suburban community in which the school is located. None of the students received special education services at the time of the study, and all were native English speakers. All three students were females (one 8-year-old and two 9-year-
olds) who attended reading instruction with the whole class for one hour five days-a-week, and saw a reading tutor together for 30 minutes five days-per-week.

Instrumentation

The only testing material that was used in this study was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test (1996). DIBELS has proven to be an excellent tool for tracking oral reading fluency in the school where the testing took place. “Reliable, valid, efficient methods for assessing oral reading fluency already exist, and the field should systematically incorporate its assessment in its quest to understand reading development” (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001, p. 253). Designed by Roland Good and Ruth Kaminski at the University of Oregon, DIBELS is an assessment tool that has been in use since 1988. It is made up of six sections, intended to be used by teachers of Kindergarten through sixth Grade. The sections include Letter Naming Fluency, Initial Sound Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, Oral Reading Fluency, and Word Use Fluency.

The section used in this study, Oral Reading Fluency, was designed to be used with students in mid-first grade through sixth grade. Its purpose is to identify students who may need additional instructional support and to help the teacher monitor their progress as they move toward their instructional goals. According to the DIBELS Directions for Administration and Scoring (2002), “Students may need intensive instructional support if they score below 70 in the spring of Third Grade” (p.30). DIBELS has established the following levels of performance for beginning Third Grade: If a child scores a 52 or lower, he/she is “At Risk” and needs intensive intervention. If the student scores between 53 and 76 he/she is at “Some Risk” and requires additional intervention. The third category is “Low Risk,” which is achieved by scoring higher than 76 and is considered at Grade Level.” (p. 65)
The DIBELS Directions for Administration and Scoring (Good & Jefferson, 1998) had the following to say about reliability and validity:

A series of studies has confirmed the technical adequacy of curriculum-based measurement (CBM) reading procedures in general. Test-retest reliabilities for elementary students ranged from .92 to .97; alternate form reliability of different reading passages drawn from the same level ranged from .89 to .94 (Tindal, Marston, & Deno, 1983). Criterion-related validity studied in eight separate studies in the 1980s reported coefficients ranging from .52 -.91. (p. 30)

Sibley, Biwer, and Hesch (2001) point out that “DIBELS have proven to be an effective new tool in the prevention-based assessment of primary students” (p. 3). They particularly like DIBELS because it can be administered frequently and can give multiple updates on the progress of interventions taking place. It is especially good at predicting where an early deficit in reading skills lies.

For scoring purposes, third graders in this study were assessed on the following components of the oral reading fluency section as prescribed in the DIBELS Directions for Administration and Scoring manual (Good & Jefferson, 1998): “Words omitted, substituted, and hesitations of more than three seconds are counted as errors. Words self-corrected within three seconds are scored as accurate. The number of words correct per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency rate” (p.30). The DIBELS materials provided a form on which the students’ scores were recorded.

Procedures

This study began with the selection of a suitable data base to determine which students would be participants. The researcher tested twenty-one third grade students using the DIBELS
test in September of 2005. Any student who received a score of 52 or lower on the Oral Reading Fluency portion of DIBELS was recruited for this study. A score of 52 or lower puts a student in the “At Risk” category for oral reading fluency. The researcher then requested permission from the principal of the participating school to evaluate the students and track their progress. A letter requesting permission to work with students and keep track of any data gathered was sent to their parents and guardians. On the same letter, permission was also requested from the students to test them for study purposes (see Appendix A).

To begin the testing, each student was asked to read aloud from three Benchmark 3.1 passages in the DIBELS (1998) materials (see Appendix B). Both the researcher and the school’s reading specialist tested the students at the participating school, as was the protocol there. These passages were entitled “My Friend,” “Going to Family Camp,” and “Planting a Garden.” The student edition from which they read is typed in a larger, more student-friendly sized font, and the assessor followed along on a small-print version. With the assessor (the researcher) using a timer, each student was given exactly 60 seconds to read aloud. As prescribed, the researcher recorded errors including words omitted, hesitations of more than three seconds, and words that were substituted. According to the DIBELS Directions for Administration and Scoring (2002), “The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency rate” (p. 30). The researcher recorded the median score of these three tests and compared them to the students’ scores on Benchmark 3.2 taken in January of 2006. The DIBELS passages they read in January were entitled “The Field Trip,” “Keiko the Killer Whale,” and “Getting E-mail” (see Appendix C). The median score from these three passages was used to determine their oral reading fluency in January. The median September 2005 test score served as a pretest. The median January score functioned as a posttest.
All of these tests were administered by the researcher and the reading specialist at the participating school.

Between September and January, the students practiced the method of repeated readings with the researcher, who was also their classroom teacher. Each participant used this method with the researcher nine times during the intervention period. The intervention did not take place weekly, as planned, but was fit into a busy schedule when time was available. The students had been tested by the reading specialist at their school and their reading instructional level had been determined using a DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), an instructional assessment tool. The levels at which they read were 16, 20, and 28. Level 16 places the reader in the Upper Emergent level for grades 1-2. Levels 20 and 28 are in the Early Fluency category for grades 1-2. The students then chose a reading selection at their independent level from books that were pre-selected by the researcher. The material presented to them was two levels below their instructional level, which is the independent level. The student read to the researcher for 60 seconds, determined by a timer. After the reading, the researcher and the student together counted the number of words read correctly and that number was plotted on a fluency graph. The student was sent to her desk where she timed herself with the timer and recorded the number of words read correctly for the second reading on the same graph (see Appendix D for an example). Students attempted to improve speed and accuracy over previous readings. The student then went back to the researcher’s desk and the material was read and timed for the third reading. That score was graphed on the same fluency chart and, together, the participant and her teacher discussed the progress made that day. Each student was encouraged to compete against herself and watch for her score to improve.
Data Collection

In September of 2005 every member of the selected class was tested by having them read orally the three passages at level 3.1 in the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency test. For each student, the median score from the three passages was recorded. Three students scoring a 52 or lower were recruited for this study. Three girls scored in that range. The three identified females read pre-selected passages using other printed passages that were below their current reading level. These scores were graphed by the girls and the researcher together.

Throughout the study, the assessor made anecdotal observations regarding the participants’ attitudes toward reading, book selection, or other relevant behaviors. The DIBELS 3.2 benchmarks were administered in January of 2006. Three readings at the 3.2 level were administered and the median grade was recorded on the graph. A graphic analysis was completed with this data. A stable baseline was established from the information collected in September. The students’ fluency was monitored between September and January and patterns of behavior were noted, when applicable, with anecdotal notes.

Evaluation Plan

Data Analysis

The DIBELS scores were plotted on a bar graph and analyzed via visual inspection by both the student and the teacher immediately after the testing in order to determine whether the number of words read correctly per minute increased. When students saw their scores increasing, it encouraged them to keep trying to improve. The researcher made anecdotal notes about each participant, including whether the girls were healthy, what they said about the selections they were reading, or other factors that might have affected their reading that day. These notes helped
the researcher review and analyze affective factors that may have impacted the participant’s fluency development.

*Time Line*

In July of 2005, the researcher applied to her university’s Human Subjects Review Board for permission to test and instruct the members of her class. Permission was granted in August of 2005. In September of 2005 every member of the selected class was tested using the DIBELS test for reading fluency. Testing took place during the Language Arts period of the day over the course of three weeks. Three students qualified as “At Risk.”

Intervention took place in the following manner: The researcher sat with one student at a time at the researcher’s desk. A timer was set for 60 seconds. The student read as far as she could in sixty seconds. The researcher noted errors and omissions in a small notebook. Together the researcher and the student counted the number of words read correctly in 60 seconds, and this number was plotted on a graph. The researcher instructed the student to take the reading material to her seat and time herself one more time on the same reading selection. She plotted the number on the graph by herself, after thoroughly being instructed in the procedure by the researcher. The student then brought the reading material back to the researcher’s desk and read to her one more time for 60 seconds. Together, the researcher and the student counted the number of words read correctly and the third number was plotted on the graph. The student and the researcher discussed the progress made and talked about reading in general. Each of the three subjects in this study went through this process individually. In January the three participating students in the selected class were tested using the DIBELS test, Benchmark 3.2. The intervention ended in January because that was the DIBELS prescribed testing period. The researcher went on to intervene with other students during the following months.
Budget

There was no budget necessary for this study because the school system where the study took place already used the DIBELS materials and had them in place.

Support Letter

When asked in September of 2006, the principal of the participating school provided a letter showing his support for this research. This letter is included (See Appendix E).

Summary

This chapter discussed the steps taken in monitoring the fluency level of “At Risk” readers in a selected third grade classroom. All third graders in the class were tested in September, 2005, using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Three girls were determined to be “At Risk” due to their achieving a score of 52 or lower on this test. There is no set number of words for which you can attain a perfect score. A score of at least 76 words read correctly in one minute rates the level of “Low Risk.” By using the method of repeated readings several times a week and having the students visually track their progress on a graph, data was collected that answered the research question, “Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores?”
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter will describe the results of the use of repeated readings as an intervention strategy for three females in the researcher’s classroom who scored 52 or below on a DIBELS test for fluency in September 2005. The question investigated was, “Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores?” The hypothesis was that the third grade low readers’ fluency scores would increase when the method of repeated readings was used as one component of classroom instruction.

A close look at three girls with low fluency scores follows. Their scores from a fluency test in September will be presented. Observations will be made about their reading, and an analysis of the scores they received on the DIBELS test in January of 2006 will follow. A graph containing each girl’s scores on the September test, the January test, and the repeated reading practice in the interim is included in each report. A May fluency test, part of school protocol, was also administered. Those results are included to show what long-term effect, if any, this intervention had on the students’ fluency. The girls’ names have been changed to protect their identities.

Jamie

Jamie was eight years and 10 months old at the beginning of third grade. She had straight hair that hung down to her waist that she liked to flip around a lot. She was very proud of her hair, but it seemed a distraction to Jamie at times. Many things were a distraction to Jamie. When she took the DIBELS oral reading fluency test in September, Jamie scored a 27, which put her in the “At Risk” category. Twenty-seven refers to the number of words she read correctly in one minute. In the DIBELS program, scores can garner the student the label of “Some Risk,”
“Low Risk,” or “At Risk.” The mean score for all 21 students who were tested as part of this study was 86.

Jamie had many problems when it came to oral reading. First and foremost, she did not think of herself as a reader. Past grade cards showed low grades in reading. Jamie was not consistent in her reading and would sometimes omit whole lines of words. She ignored punctuation at times and often misread sight words.

Paying attention in the classroom was very difficult for Jamie, although she did pay attention much better in the thirty minutes per day she spent in the reading tutor’s classroom. Three-students-to-one-teacher was a ratio that worked very well for Jamie. Fewer people and less noise seemed to present better working conditions for her.

A lack of focus caused Jamie to have several problems with her schoolwork. She found it very hard to respond to inferential questions. Additionally, she did not appear to think about what she was reading, and her writing vocabulary was limited.

On the positive side, Jamie self-corrected numerous times when reading and sometimes read with expression. Her literal recall was very good and, if she was stumped, she would often refer to a picture for a clue. Jamie had an excellent attitude toward writing and hoped to be a writer someday. At the beginning of the school year she would write squiggles on a paper and then pretend to read it out loud. As she became more proficient with cursive writing over the course of the year, she was able to write very basic but complete sentences.

Jamie had been tested by her school’s reading specialist to determine her reading level with a DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) and she was determined to be reading at level 16, which is the Upper Emergent level for grades 1-2. The third and fourth grade are aiming to read between levels 30 and 40. She practiced the method of repeated readings with books written
at level 14, which was her independent level. When retested with DIBELS (1996) in January of 2006, Jamie received a score of 71, which placed her in the “Some Risk” category. In May, having received no more repeated readings practice in the classroom, she was tested for the third time and achieved a score of 69, which placed her back in the “At Risk” category. “Students may need intensive instructional support if they score below 70 in spring of third grade,” according to the DIBELS Administration and Scoring Guide (Good & Kaminski, 2002). The DIBELS creators would like to see students reading fluently by the end of third grade. Jamie was still “At Risk” at the end of third grade.

The three students’ January scores were compared to their September scores. The researcher had regularly recorded the scores and had kept them throughout the study in a notebook stored in a specified box to keep it out of sight of wandering eyes. In Figure 1, “Teacher 1” represents the first time the student read with the teacher. “Desk” refers to the time the student read by herself at her own desk. When the student read with the researcher again, that was “Teacher 2.” See Figure 1 for the record of scores for Jamie’s three oral reading fluency tests and the scores from her repeated reading exercises, which took place between September and January.
Figure 1. Jamie's Oral Reading Fluency Scores

Jamie’s high scores from week 2 were due to the fact that she thoroughly enjoyed the selection she had chosen to read that day. Low scores in weeks 5 and 6 reflect Jamie’s easy distractibility. It is evident here that the daily lives of the students made an impact on their scores. Jamie came to school with frequent stomachaches and did not have many friends. This may have precluded her from advancing at a faster rate.

*Jen*

Jen was nine years and three months old at the beginning of third grade. She was supposed to wear glasses every day and actually had them most, but not all, of the time. Jen scored a 39 in September, 2005 on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency test. This put her in the
“At Risk” category. She read 39 words correctly in one minute, compared to the mean of 86 for the entire class of 21 students.

Jen enjoyed the time spent with the teacher on repeated readings and would be especially happy if she was reading anything related to horses. She was very accurate in her word identification at grade level, but anything above grade level was a challenge. Jen’s main problem in relation to her reading fluency was that she did not put forth a lot of effort in her schoolwork. Social relations were much more important to her than academics, so that was where her energy and focus were.

Jen had been tested by the school’s reading specialist and found to be at reading level 28, which is at the high end of Earl Fluency for grades 1-2. When she used the method of repeated readings, she used books written at level 26, her independent level.

When she was retested with DIBELS (1996) in January 2006, Jen scored a 55, still placing her in the “At Risk” category, which is any score below 67 for that time of year (see Appendix E for a complete list of DIBELS Benchmark Goals and Indicators). Rising from 39 to 55 was an improvement, but the “At Risk’rating was still a concern. In May 2006, Jen was tested again, and with no further fluency interventions, scored an 81, placing her just barely into the “Some Risk” category for that time of year. Jen had also been receiving the services of a reading tutor all year, five days per week, 30 minutes per day. It is most likely that those services benefited she and Jamie somewhat in her fluency score. See Figure 2 for the record of scores for Jen’s three oral reading fluency tests and the scores from her repeated reading exercises, which took place nine times between September and January.
Kelly

Kelly was nine years and eight months old at the beginning of third grade. She wore glasses and was very good about having them with her every day, at all times. Kelly scored 24 on the September fluency test, the lowest of the three girls being studied. Grade level equivalency? This placed her in the “At Risk” category. The mean for the class was 86.

Kelly had attended readiness kindergarten before regular kindergarten, so she was a year older than most of the other students in the class. A look at past grade cards showed that reading had always been difficult for her. She had some decoding problems at grade level, but was successful at lower levels. She had a lack of fluency as well as difficulty with vocabulary and comprehension. She had few or no inferencing skills.
A closer look at her oral reading revealed a difficulty with tracking print. She often lost her place when she was reading. When reading, she often appeared to be pausing to sound out a word, but later it became evident that she had lost her place and was trying to locate it. During timed fluency trials, this resulted in poor fluency scores.

Kelly would often rush through repeated readings. She had great difficulty with inferential questioning. Sometimes she would use her own life experiences to try to come up with an answer if she wasn’t sure. This did not usually lead her to the correct answer. Kelly often did not understand the lesson that was supposed to be learned from the story. However, Kelly had many good points that made her an interesting student. She knew most sight words, was a hard worker, friendly, kind to other children, and had a lot of common sense.

Kelly also worked with a reading tutor outside of the classroom for 30 minutes per day, five days a week. When she was retested in January, 2006, she scored a 49, placing her in the “At Risk” category. This was the lowest midyear score of the three girls in the study. She received a 46 when tested in May, 2006. This was the lowest end-of-the-year score for the three girls, again placing her in the “At Risk” category.

See Figure 3 for the record of scores from Kelly’s three oral reading fluency tests and the scores from her repeated reading exercises, which took place nine times between September and January. The unusually low score in week 7 was due to the fact that Kelly was not interested in the subject matter of the book she was reading. The lowest score in week 2 resulted from a sneeze which took time away from words being read aloud.
Summary

Jamie, Jen, and Kelly were third grade girls who tested in the “At Risk” category at the beginning of third grade. Jamie scored a 27, Jen a 39, and Kelly a 24, which indicates the number of words read correctly in one minute. Each of the girls enjoyed the attention they received from the researcher when they read to her. It was always a positive experience for them to read with her and see their scores improve every time. After intensive intervention, each girl was retested in January. The scores of all three girls rose. Jamie rose to the level of “Some Risk” with a score of 71. Jen’s score of 55 and Kelly’s score of 49 kept them in the “At Risk” level.
In May, all three girls were tested again. Jamie and Kelly remained in the “At Risk” category with scores of 69 and 46, respectively. Jen ended the year with a score of 81, which put her in the “Some Risk” category.

All three girls’ fluency scores improved over the course of the school year, but only Jen rose to the level of “Some Risk.” The problem being investigated was: Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores? The hypothesis guiding this study was that the fluency scores would increase, and they did. Therefore the research hypothesis was accepted.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The importance of fluency in children’s reading came to the forefront with the 2001 publication of the National Reading Panel’s report entitled “Teaching Children to Read.” Fluency was determined to be one of five main areas of concentration in reading, along with phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and text comprehension. This chapter will provide information from research that was undertaken to investigate the current methods of teaching fluency. It will explain the method used in this study to practice fluency with qualifying students and examine the results of those interventions.

Project Summary

The National Reading Panel scientifically studied two common approaches for improving oral reading fluency. The method of repeated readings with immediate feedback from parents, teachers, or peers was studied as well as increasing the amount of independent reading time. There was little scientific evidence to show that increased reading time was beneficial. There was scientific research that showed the benefits of repeated readings. This led to the question guiding this study: Will the use of repeated readings with low ability third graders increase students’ fluency scores? The hypothesis was that the third grade low readers’ fluency scores would increase when the method of repeated reading was used as one component of classroom instruction.

A look at current material on fluency revealed S. Jay Samuels’ “The Method of Repeated Readings” (1979) as a currently viable method of increasing fluency in less fluent readers. A literature review of fluency revealed four published and four unpublished studies using repeated readings that found intervention to be successful with primary-grade students. Marseglia (1997)
noted that low ability first graders would still benefit from direct instruction in word recognition and phonics drills in addition to repeated reading. Hammer (2003) noted that repeated readings were also effective with Title I students.

S. Jay Samuels’ (1979) method of repeated readings was used as a guide for applying this practice in the classroom targeted for this study. Three students of 21 were identified as “At Risk” according to the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Test (DIBELS, 1996). The study lasted from September to January. The students read to their teacher when time allowed for a total of nine times and were timed for sixty seconds. The number of words omitted, substituted, and hesitations of more than three seconds were counted. Each student would read once to the researcher, count the number of words read correctly, and plot that number on a graph. She would then read the selection one time by herself, using the researcher’s timer. She would count the number of words read correctly in 60 seconds and report back to the researcher. Together they would plot this second score. The student would then read the selection one more time to the researcher and together they would record the third score. Students enjoyed watching their numbers. All three students increased their fluency levels using the method of repeated readings. One student progressed to the level of “Some Risk” while the other two remained “At Risk.”

Looking at Jamie’s year shows her fluency scores ranging from 27 to 71 to 69. She showed improvement, but the fact that she ended the year still in the “At Risk” category is a major concern. The regression from January to May is not surprising due to the fact that she was no longer receiving intensive intervention. The DIBELS goal for third graders is for them to read at 110 words per minute. (See Appendix E for the DIBELS Benchmark Goals and Indicators of
Risk. It is worth noting that Jamie was identified as having Attention Deficit Disorder in the spring and was put on medication to help her focus.

Jen’s fluency scores for third grade were 39 words correct per minute in September, 55 words correct per minute in January, and 81 words correct per minute in May. She was the only one of the girls to advance one category to “Some Risk” by the end of the year. It was encouraging to see her continue to grow from January to May with less intensive intervention.

At 24, Kelly’s fluency score in September was the lowest of the three girls. Her January score was the lowest at that time: 49 words correct per minute. Her May score, 46 words correct per minute, was the lowest again. Her fluency rose through the year from 24 words correct per minute in September to 46 words correct per minute in May. She remained in the “At Risk” category all year. There are emotional issues in Kelly’s life that may be a reason she is not excelling. In March she was identified with a learning disability.

There are a variety of ways repeated readings can be implemented in the classroom, such as through readers’ theatre, choral readings, poetry, plays, and songs. The creative teacher will find many areas where these strategies can be used.

Conclusions

This intervention was successful, though all three students will need further intervention in the next grade. Although applied in a third grade setting, this research agrees with the Turpie’s (1994) findings that the method of repeated readings was a successful intervention for first grade students. All of the first grade students participating in that study showed an increase in words read correctly in a specified amount of time. The three students’ scores in this study differed so much because each girl was an individual, bringing her own experiences and reading training with her. The students’ motivation to do well in reading varied depending on the day and her
mood. Each of the students had learning disabilities or emotional problems to some degree, which was discovered as the year progressed and may have impacted their ability to advance more quickly. Kelly’s personal problems at home may have distracted her and therefore precluded her from achieving higher scores.

This intervention was an enjoyable experience. Its ease of use and short duration make it adaptable to a busy classroom schedule on a moment’s notice. However, this researcher had lofty goals for her participants and they did not make the growth she had anticipated. When working with students whose ability is low for that grade level, a normal year’s growth is not likely to take place in that time. It is likely, however, that these results reflect a higher fluency score than if no intervention had taken place and that is a desired effect.

The researcher feels that this intervention would be helpful for many types of students. It is a process that is easy to use and does not require unusual equipment. An instrument for timing student’s readings and reading materials that are at the students’ independent levels are preferred. Once each student’s reading level has been identified using a DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), it is possible to find books that are two levels below the student’s instructional level. Almost any current children’s books would be acceptable. Graph paper for tracking the student’s progress is needed. Once assembled, these materials can be kept in one central location and can be conveniently accessed whenever a teacher has time available.

The time required for this intervention is definitely worth it. Students from all walks of life, social status, and with various native languages have benefited from this intervention. (Dowhower, 1987; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003: Stage & Jacobsen, 2001).

If the method of repeated readings had been able to extend over a longer period of time, Jamie’s and Jen’s scores most likely would have continued to improve. Both Kelly’s problems
with tracking and her emotional issues may have kept her fluency from improving. Other aspects of her reading, such as sightword-attack skills needed to be more fully addressed.

It is necessary to point out that fluency is just one of the five areas of concentration in the teaching of reading. Improving one area may not have an effect on the other areas that are deficient. The scholarly literature (Spear-Swerling, 2006) shows that the relationship between oral reading fluency and comprehension continues to be investigated. Spear-Swerling notes that “they draw upon many of the same underlying processes, such as oral language comprehension, word identification accuracy, and naming speed” (p. 200).

**Recommendations for Future Action**

As a reading teacher, this researcher would wholeheartedly endorse the use of repeated readings in the classroom. The ease of use, the likelihood of improving scores, and the interest shown by the students make this an intervention worth trying. In this day and age, the reading community is noting the importance of fluency; therefore, “funding sources are allocating monies for research that explicitly incorporate fluency training in the treatment component” (Meyer & Felton, 1999) Looking toward the future, Alvermann (2002) notes that “Young people’s literacy skills are not keeping pace with societal demands of living in an information age that changes rapidly and shows no sign of slowing.” Meyer and Felton (1999) add that, “Given the escalating demands for reading skills in our technological society, it is critical that researchers and practitioners focus on fluency as an important component of reading instruction” (p. 1) Fluency’s importance in future reading instruction is thus established.

The researcher’s experience with these three students showed that fluency training is effective. Repeated readings worked as an intervention for “At Risk” students. Each participant
showed improvement during each testing session, which improved their outlook on reading, as evidenced by their asking to read aloud again.

Fluency is beginning to be addressed to a greater degree by the developers of current reading series. Three publishing companies investigated in 2005 by the researcher were all giving fluency a larger component of teaching time than had been seen in the past. It is more likely that reading teachers will be including fluency in their daily lessons when the materials are readily available and they see the daily reminders in their teachers’ manuals. No prior training is required and the materials needed to practice fluency are included with convenient instructions in the teacher’s manual.

Parents

Parents should be encouraged to use the method of repeated readings at home. Its ease of use and lack of expensive materials make it an adaptable component of reading instruction at home as well as school. This could be communicated to the parents via newsletters, conferences, or when parents are present at reading programs presented by the students for their families. The researcher feels that if parents were interested in learning the method of repeated readings, a 15-minute training session by the classroom teacher would be sufficient to make them acceptable practitioners.

Classroom Teachers

For classroom teachers, the method of repeated readings could be combined with instruction in comprehension. Retelling, another component of language arts instruction, could be incorporated into these lessons as well. Teachers need to know the basic premise of repeated readings and then could be free to adapt it to their needs. This researcher found that the ease of
use, the lack of expensive materials, and the short amount of time needed made it a valuable intervention that were worth the time and effort.

There is a plethora of information on the method of repeated readings in current scholarly journals. Classroom teachers should be encouraged to keep up on the topic and track its progress as fluency becomes a major factor in reading instruction.

Teachers might be surprised to see that reading material at a student’s independent level is not in great supply in every classroom. This researcher was surprised at what a low level of books she needed to have on hand for third grade readers. Therefore, this researcher would recommend that teachers make use of grants, parent organizations, and book sales to acquire books at lower levels.

Choral reading, readers theatre, and poetry readings are such enjoyable ways to practice rereading. The nature of the rereadings is usually something that students enjoy. Teachers should try to include these enriching and enjoyable activities when planning time allows.

Researchers

Several questions come to mind regarding the study of fluency in the future. Is there an age at which it would be most effective to work on fluency training? How effective are repeated readings? How effective is this method when other reading problems are present? How long should we expect to see fluency gains last? These are intriguing questions, and with money becoming available to study fluency issues, more information should be coming our way soon.

Research in any of the above areas would prove beneficial. This study expands the knowledge for classroom elementary teachers that repeated readings are a valuable teaching tool for at-risk third graders. “The evidence strongly indicates that repeated reading works. There are many reasons why students should be rereading” (Dowhower, 1989, p. 504). Students could be
reading more fluently, reading more automatically, and therefore comprehending better as they read. The information gleaned through this research grounds the study in a substantial body of literature. Conclusions from this study have the potential to move forward our understanding of fluency in primary school children.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Permission Letter from Parents and Students
Dear Parent,

I am writing to inform you that in addition to being your child's teacher this year I am currently a graduate student at Bowling Green State University pursuing a Master's Degree in Reading. In order to complete my research on fluency in children's reading, I would like to ask your permission to allow me to test your child using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test (DIBELS). If your child attended Frank Elementary last year he/she may already be familiar with the test. The student reads aloud to me from pre-selected materials for one minute while I tabulate the number of words read correctly per minute. Then I give the student one minute to explain what he/she read about to help me determine a comprehension grade. I am planning to begin testing in September and finish in January. If your child scores a 52 or lower on the first test in September I would continue to test him/her every 2-3 weeks through January. He/she would continue to do repeated readings on his/her own. If your child receives a 53 or higher on the first test, he/she will not be one of the featured students in my research and will not do repeated readings for me as frequently. If you would like to request a record of any of this testing, please send me a request in writing and these will be provided for you.

When I write up the results of my research I will identify the participants by pseudonym only, thereby keeping their identities unknown. The potential benefit for your child is that I am hoping that I will see an increase in his/her words correct per minute score. Your child's participation in this study will not affect his/her grade in Reading. There will be no punishment of your child if you choose not to have him/her participate. Your child has the right to withdraw from this program at any time.

Please sign and return the lower portion of this paper to me as soon as possible, indicating your willingness to have your child participate. I would like to receive them by September 16, 2005. If you have any questions about the conduct of this study you may contact me at Frank Elementary School (419-874-8721, ext. 27205) or my advisor, Dr. Nancy Fordham (nfordha@bgsu.edu). If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant or about the conduct of the study you may contact the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board at (419)372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Thank you for your assistance with my thesis.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Ann Nicholson

Mrs. Ann Nicholson

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(Please sign and return this portion.)

Consent Form for Tracking Third Grade Readers' Fluency

I give permission for Ann Nicholson or any reading teacher at Frank Elementary School in Perrysburg, Ohio to administer the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test to my child __________________________. I also give Ann Nicholson permission to work individually with my child, practicing oral reading of printed matter several times, should he/she score a 52 or lower on the September test, and to use the results of these tests in her thesis at Bowling Green State University __________________________ (parent's signature) __________________________ (date)

I give permission to my teacher, Mrs. Nicholson, to test me using DIBELS, to work with me individually if I score a 52 or lower, and to use my test results in her thesis.

__________________________ (Third Grade student's signature)
Appendix B

DIBELS Benchmark 3.1 Passages
Appendix B (Centered)

My Friend

I have a new friend at school. She can't walk so she uses a wheelchair to get around. She comes to school in a special van that can transport four people who use wheelchairs. The van brings my friend and another boy to school. My friend is in third grade with me and the boy is a fourth grader.

I like to watch my friend get in and out of the van. The driver pushes a button and part of the van floor lowers to the driveway to form a ramp. My friend just wheels up the ramp and goes inside. After she is inside, the driver pushes the button and the ramp puts itself away. When it is time to get out of the van, they do the same thing again. Sometimes I help open the door so she can roll right inside.

My friend and I do everything together. Our teacher lets us sit together in the front row, and we always go to lunch together. My friend moves so fast down the hall that she always gets the best seats in the cafeteria. Sometimes we trade sandwiches. At recess, we always play on the same team. My friend sure has strong arms. She hardly ever misses a shot when we play basketball and she can throw the farthest of anyone in third grade.
Appendix B

Going to Family Camp

My favorite part of family camp is the campfire program at the lake. We wait until the stars and moon are out. We walk down to the edge of the water where a big bonfire is going. We all snuggle together watching the flames because it's cold after dark.

The camp director leads everyone in songs. He plays the banjo. We sing "You are My Sunshine," and "She'll be Coming Around the Mountain." Then he divides the group in two and we sing rounds like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Are You Sleeping?"

Then we have stories and skits. The stories are usually tales about campers at family camp in previous years, and a funny or brave thing that they did. One story was about my older brother rescuing a cat. The skits are always silly.

When the campfire burns down to coals, it's time to toast marshmallows. Some people like their marshmallows golden brown. Other people like theirs crispy. Some kids can't wait to toast them and eat their marshmallows right out of the bag. We toast marshmallows to make ‘Some Mores.’ ‘Some Mores’ are graham crackers with chocolate that is topped with a hot marshmallow. They taste so good you want some more, but they are really sticky! Everyone has to wash up before bed.

Now we are all sleepy and ready to go back to our cabin. We stand together and sing a song called "Taps." My mom and dad say they have been singing "Taps" at campfires since they were little kids like me.
Appendix B

Planting a Garden

We eat lots of fresh vegetables at our house. Mom is an excellent cook and she has lots of recipes for making them taste delicious. Sometimes they are expensive to buy at the store so Dad suggested we grow our own.

Dad asked all the members of my family what our favorite vegetables were. I said carrots, broccoli, and beans. My mother likes tomatoes the best. Dad said he wanted to grow green onions, spinach, potatoes, and corn.

We went to the hardware store and bought seeds and little broccoli and tomato plants. We all helped prepare the garden in our backyard. We turned over the dirt with shovels. Then we used a hoe to make little ditches for planting the vegetable seeds. We dug deeper holes for the broccoli and tomatoes. We watered everything and sprinkled some fertilizer around.

I checked the garden every day to see if any vegetables were coming up. After about a week I saw tiny green leaves where the carrots were planted. Then each day more seeds sprouted.

In two months we could eat the spinach, onions, and broccoli. It was almost the end of summer before we could harvest the other vegetables. Everything we grew in our garden was delicious. It was worth the wait, especially for the fresh green beans that my mother cooked with bacon and onion. My dad said the corn was the best he ever tasted.
Appendix C

DIBELS Benchmark 3.2 Passages
Appendix C

The Field Trip

Last week our teacher said we were going on a field trip to the fish hatchery. She gave us permission letters to take home to be signed by our parents before we could go. She encouraged us to ask our parents if they would like to come along. We needed some parents to help provide transportation. Everyone was supposed to bring a snack and a sack lunch.

My dad surprised me by volunteering to go. He said he could take a vacation day and that our car could hold a couple of my friends. Three cars and two vans were needed to take the whole class. Two of my friends rode in our car.

At the hatchery, we saw ponds full of fish. We learned the fish were rainbow trout. You could see the colors of the rainbow on their sides. The ranger let us take handfuls of pellets to feed the trout. When we threw the pellets into the ponds the fish got very excited. Some leaped out of the water. The fish could see the food coming from far away.

When the trout grow to about six inches long they will be scooped up and put inside a tanker truck. The truck will take the fish to nearby rivers and release them. In the river, the fish will have to learn to find their own food. When my dad goes fishing, maybe he will catch some of them and bring them home for our dinner.
Appendix C

Keiko the Killer Whale

Keiko the whale was captured near Iceland and brought to California. He became a famous performer who did tricks at a theme park. He even starred in a movie! Keiko is an Orca whale. Orcas are called killer whales because they feed on seals.

Keiko was not healthy at the theme park. He was thin and his skin was covered with sores. His body was too big for the tank he lived in. The water was not cold enough for him to be comfortable. He couldn't get enough exercise to be healthy. He was not a happy whale.

Keiko was taken to the Oregon Coast Aquarium to get healthy and eventually be released back into the wild. At the aquarium, he ate the kind of fish he would have caught himself in the ocean. He lived in a very large tank full of cool ocean water. Trainers took care of him and helped him remember what it was like to be wild again.

Keiko ate well and exercised every day. He gained about two tons and got healthy again. When he was well he was moved back to his new home in the ocean. He was so big he had to be flown in a special plane with a pool that took up the entire inside of the plane.

Keiko's new home is in a pen in the ocean, not a tank. Trainers are helping him learn to catch his own fish. Someday they hope he will be released into the wild again. Maybe he will find his original family of Orcas.
Appendix C

Getting Email

At our house, the mail carrier isn't the only one who brings us messages. Our computer also brings mail. Our family has an email address. All we have to do is turn on the computer and get on the Internet. Our computer tells us if we have new mail.

Email is much faster than regular letters. If I send a regular letter to my cousin who lives in Japan it can take weeks to get an answer. If I email to my cousin, she usually emails back the same day. She lives 4,000 miles away and across the Pacific Ocean but our email messages come and go very quickly.

My cousin is nine years old, just like me. We send email to each other almost every day. We tell each other about our schools, our friends, and our soccer teams. Sometimes we send jokes back and forth. Sometimes we ask questions about what we hear in the news about our countries. Sometimes we play chess with each other using the computer. We think of our moves on separate chess sets and then use email to send our moves back and forth.

My dad and mom send email messages back and forth to Japan as well as to Hawaii, where we have many relatives. Because our relatives live so far apart it is hard for us to get together. If it weren't for email, we wouldn't be able to stay in touch as easily. With email, we can communicate without having to wait for a letter or buy expensive stamps.
Appendix D

Fluency Graph
Appendix D

Fluency Graph
Appendix E

Principal’s Letter of Support
October 25, 2006

To Whom It May Concern,

I understand Ann Nicholson’s investigative goals for her thesis and support her research of them.

Sincerely,
Appendix F

DIBELS Benchmarks Goals and Indicators
Appendix F

DIBELS Benchmark Goals and Indicators of Risk
Three Assessment Periods Per Year

Second Grade

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Third Grade

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