

Implementing Reader's Theatre as an Intervention to Improve Prosody

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Reader's Theatre as a Title I classroom intervention for fourth and fifth graders to improve prosody, and ultimately fluency, as measured by AIMSweb benchmark assessment (aimsweb.pearson.com) and weekly progress monitoring. Reader's Theatre is a pedagogical strategy in which students present a piece of literature to an audience, which increases motivation for using the strategy of repeated reading. The strategy of Reader's Theatre was utilized with fourth and fifth grade Title I students for a period of ten weeks. This study was precipitated by the recent implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) in the school district, and examines students who were categorized as "below" grade level achievement on an RtI benchmark assessment. Results of the study indicate that this intervention did have a positive effect on the fluency rates, the progress monitoring scores, and the benchmark scores achieved by the students.

keywords: remedial reading instruction, fluency, prosody, Reader's Theatre, elementary

The school district I have worked for during the past thirty years as a Title I reading specialist, is in its second year of Response to Intervention (RtI) implementation. The purposes of RtI are to provide early intervention for students who are at risk for school failure and to develop valid procedures for identifying students with reading disabilities (Gersten and Dimino, 2006). The RtI process is more direct and logical than relying on discrepancies between IQ scores and reading achievement scores for special education placement (Hoppey, 2013). RtI, as outlined in federal legislation (NCLB, 2002; IDEA, 2004), is an approach designed to examine the way students are taught, tested, and diagnosed for inclusion in special education programs.

RtI uses a tiered instructional model and specific types of assessments. Benchmark assessments are required to identify at-risk students and document their progress throughout the school year. Frequent progress monitoring using curriculum-based measurements is also required to determine the effectiveness of the supplemental intervention and document student growth (Hoppey, 2013). My school district currently uses AIMSweb (<https://aimsweb.pearson.com/>) to fulfill RtI assessment requirements.

RtI requires the use of evidence-based interventions in the Title I classroom and documentation of student progress after six to eight weeks of using at least two different interventions in each area of specific learning disabilities (SLD) concern. Interventions must be scientific research-based or evidence-based; used with individual or small groups; focused on a single or small number of discrete skills closely aligned to individual learning needs (consistent with the area of SLD concern); culturally appropriate; been implemented a substantial number of instructional minutes beyond what is provided to all students; implemented with adequate fidelity; applied in a manner highly consistent with its design; and been implemented for at least 80% of the recommended number of weeks, sessions, or minutes. (Wis. Admin. §§ PI 11.02 (1),

(4e), (6m), (12) and PI 11.36 (6) (f) 4.) Before the decision is made to refer a child for SLD testing, I have to prove that research-based interventions have not been successful. Determining student progress, or lack thereof, requires data-based decision making derived from measurable outcomes (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006). In my school, the Student Support Team makes these decisions. This team consists of the principal, guidance counselor, school psychologist, teacher of learning disabled students, speech and language pathologist, classroom teacher, and myself.

Throughout the past two years, I have had to categorize the materials at my disposal as either an example of best practices in reading or a research-based intervention. Examples of research-based programs that I currently use are Leveled Literacy Instruction (www.heinemann.com/fountasandpinnell/lli), Early Intervention in Reading (www.eduplace.com/intervention/readintervention/pdfs/eir), and Read Naturally (<https://www.readnaturally.com>). I also use materials and teaching strategies that are considered best practices, but are not necessarily research-based. Examples of best practices would be using authentic literature to teach vocabulary and comprehension, or using phrase reading to teach fluency. The Wisconsin RtI Center (<http://www.wisconsinrticenter.org/>) lists acceptable research-based intervention programs as well as a few strategies that fall under the category of classroom practices. Basal reading series, drill/flash cards, guided reading, individualized tutoring, and Reader's Theatre are the only classroom practices that are listed as acceptable Tier Two interventions. The list of evidenced-based interventions that we have to choose from is more extensive, but limited by budget.

Read Naturally (<http://www.readnaturally.com/>) is a program I have had in place for 20 years that fulfills the RtI requirements as an approved research-based fluency intervention. Read Naturally uses three research-proven strategies for improving reading fluency:

- **Teacher modeling.** The students read along with a model or listen to demonstrated fluent reading.
- **Repeated reading.** Students practice reading the same text passage until they have mastered all the words.
- **Student monitoring.** The teacher monitors the students' progress and provides feedback to them (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999).

I have had success raising the rate and accuracy of my students' oral reading using the Read Naturally program. I have regularly observed another positive, but unmeasured, outcome of Read Naturally instruction -- a noticeable increase in students' self-esteem and confidence. The students recognize the value of immediate and positive feedback on their performance, provided by their individual graphs. The student reads each passage twice and records the number of words read correctly per minute both times on a bar graph. The first reading is cold, the student has not heard or read the story before. The second reading occurs after the student has listened to the story at least three times and has practiced reading it aloud several times. The second reading score is always higher than the first. The student uses two different colors to mark their bar graph and that gives them concrete visual evidence of the beneficial results of dedicated practice. In their action research, Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers (1999) noted the same increase in student self-esteem after receiving feedback.

The Read Naturally process requires students to read a text repeatedly until they can read it at a certain rate. After years of use in our district, students and teachers alike have come to

equate fast reading as proficient reading. Rasinski (2012) explained that reading rate had become the ultimate measure of reading fluency because many correlational studies had linked reading rate with reading comprehension. As a result, the current implementation of fluency instruction in many classrooms is driven by assessments that focus only on reading speed (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel & Meisinger, 2010). Rasinski (2006) also expresses concern about instructional programs that aim to increase reading rate through repeated reading of nonfiction material. He believes that students in such programs focus on reading faster for the sake of reading faster, without giving equal attention to comprehension. The result of such a focus is faster reading with little improvement in comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading. Using Read Naturally has presented that very challenge in my classroom. Although students were reading at a faster and more accurate rate, they were not reading for meaning. Their oral reading was robotic and artificial. The students felt their only goal was to increase the number of words read per minute, regardless of anything else.

In 2012, the Read Naturally program was revised and more emphasis was placed on comprehension. The foundation for Read Naturally Encore was the research-based Read Naturally strategy. Read Naturally Encore added many features to the basic Read Naturally design. The audio-supported key words provide definitions for vocabulary words that are important to a student's understanding of the story, and help the student write a prediction about the story. Bold-faced words in the story indicate additional vocabulary terms that are defined in a corresponding audio-supported glossary. Each story has five to nine different types of questions, depending on the level. The questions included determining main idea, recalling story details, defining vocabulary words, drawing a conclusion given story facts, writing a short answer using the information provided as well as the student's own ideas, selecting definitions,

synonyms, or antonyms for vocabulary words from the story, recalling details from the story by putting events in sequence or filling in the blanks of a summary, and retelling or summarizing the story in writing. Because students must answer these questions, they are accountable for reading for meaning, not only speed. The addition of higher level questions was a great improvement over the original Read Naturally program that only asked simple questions of detail recall and main idea. I began using the Read Naturally Encore program this fall with my third, fourth and fifth grade students.

I have been impressed with the more challenging stories and the added emphasis on higher level comprehension skills. Yet, even with improved materials, my students still were not reading for meaning. Their oral reading was still robotic, monotone and lacking intonation. My challenge was to improve my fluency instruction so that my students could achieve success in meeting their fluency reading goals, as set by their fall AIMS benchmark score, but more importantly, so that they were reading for meaning, not speed.

Fluency instruction must be a part of the curriculum, but the challenge for me was how to make it meaningful for my students. Rasinski, (2006) states that instruction on accuracy, automaticity, and prosodic reading can and should occur in union. He goes on to endorse repeated reading as a proven strategy used to increase fluency. I had been using the repeated reading strategy with the Read Naturally program, but decided an improvement would be the addition of Reader's Theater as a more motivating form of the strategy.

The RtI process requires systematic measurement of the success of an intervention. This conception of RtI fits naturally within the action research framework that provides teachers with an opportunity to examine, reflect upon, and improve their own practice through studying students' learning (Hoppey, 2013). My action research project is a systematic measurement of

the repeated reading strategy delivered through Reader's Theater. For this study, I asked the following questions:

- How can I improve my fluency instruction?
- Will the use of Reader's Theatre increase motivation and engagement of my students?
- How will direct instruction in prosodic elements affect progress monitoring and benchmark fluency scores of my students?

Further discussion will include the specific elements of prosody and its relationship to comprehension. I will also discuss the strategy of repeated reading and how it is used in the highly motivational form of Reader's Theatre.

Review of the Literature

Need for Fluency Instruction

The expectation set by the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is that teachers must provide fluency instruction to their elementary students. The standards define a common core of knowledge and skills that students should develop so they graduate from high school prepared for college or careers. Under the English Language Arts Standards for third through fifth grade is the Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (K-5). This standard requires students to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support reading comprehension. The standard further explains that all students are expected to:

- Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
- Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.

- Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Struggling readers will not gain fluency incidentally or automatically. They need direct instruction in how to read fluently and sufficient opportunities for intense practice incorporated into their reading curriculum (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). Students do not become independent learners through maturation, they need to have direct instruction in reading skills. Directly teaching reading means imparting new information to students through meaningful teacher–student interactions and teacher guidance of student learning. Struggling readers need explicit instruction and guided practice as well as additional modeling and support.

Probably the most important argument for teaching fluency is the connection between fluency and comprehension. Many researchers believe that fluency is the bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; Rasinski 2012). Each aspect of fluency has a clear connection to text comprehension. Without accuracy, the reader has limited access to the author's intended meaning and inaccurate word reading can lead to misinterpretation of the text (Hudson, Lane, and Pullen, 2005). Measures of reading fluency, whether through reading speed or measures of students' prosodic oral reading, have been associated with measures of reading comprehension and other more general measures of reading achievement (Griffith and Rasinski, 2004).

Prosody and its Relationship to Fluency and Comprehension

Fluency is the effortless or automatic reading of text in which the reader is able to group words into meaningful phrases quickly and effortlessly (Corcoran, 2005; Griffith and Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, 2004). This definition was offered by Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger (2010): "Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody, which taken together,

facilitate the reader's construction of meaning. It is demonstrated through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing, and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading and can limit or support comprehension."

Accuracy, automaticity and prosody are the three elements that must be present for fluent reading and comprehension to occur (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009; Nichols, Rupley & Rasinski, 2009; Young and Rasinski, 2009). Griffith and Rasinski (2004) recognized that when decoding and other surface-level aspects of reading were automatized, the reader could devote a maximal amount of attention to the deeper levels of reading -- comprehension. Accuracy is the reader's ability to decode words with few miscues. The reader must accurately decode words and recognize sight words. The reader who struggles with accuracy may find it difficult to focus on comprehension of the text. Word recognition not only needs to be accurate, but automatic. Reading must be effortless so that the reader can focus attention on the meaning of the text. Rasinski (2012) contends that readers have a limited amount of time and attention that can be spent on cognitive energy. If students are using that cognitive energy to decode words, it makes sense that they will have little energy left for comprehension.

Prosody is the natural way readers use volume and expression, phrasing, smoothness, and pacing when reading aloud (Rasinski, 2006). If a reader is able to combine these elements of prosody, their reading will sound much like natural spoken language (Kuhn, 2004; Young and Rasinski, 2009). Readers use their voices to convey feeling, emotion and meaning through oral interpretation of the text. Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, and Meisinger (2010) define the features of prosody as pitch, duration, stress and pausing. They go on to explain how the psycholinguistic features of prosody serve the function of conveying emotion, carrying discourse information, and dictating informational focus and contrast.

The Repeated Reading Strategy

According to the National Reading Panel (2000) (www.nationalreadingpanel.org/), children gain fluency by practicing reading until the process becomes automatic, and guided oral repeated reading practice has a significant and positive influence on fluency. Students must be exposed to repeated reading which involves the student rereading a passage silently or aloud, many times. The students receive assistance with decoding and correction of miscues. Use of repeated reading needs to include instruction, appropriate guidance, and support or it can lead to diminished student engagement and may not help students recognize that increased fluency provides for more focus on meaning (Nichols, Rupley, and Rasinski 2009). Keehn (2003) concluded that instructional attention to the aspects of fluency can build students' metacognitive awareness of fluency production. While there are many different ways to incorporate repeated reading into the curriculum, Reader's Theater has been documented to be an effective way to help students become fluent readers (Corcoran, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Reader's Theatre is an inherently meaningful vehicle that gives students an authentic reason to engage in repeated reading.

Reader's Theatre and the Development of Fluency

Reader's Theatre is a staged reading of a play or dramatic piece of work designed to entertain, inform or influence. It developed from the speech and drama fields of oral interpretation and conventional theatre, but differs from traditional plays in that the readers do not memorize lines, but read directly from the script (Moran, 2006). Students are assigned a script to rehearse for a performance. The rehearsal, or rereading, of the script helps increase the student's reading rate, automaticity, and prosody. Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) found that students doing repeated readings with Reader's Theatre made twice the gains in reading rate

than a comparison group, even though the focus of the repeated reading was on expressive, meaning filled reading, and not on speed. They also found that the Reader's Theatre students made greater progress than the comparison group on an informal reading inventory, a measure of reading comprehension as well as fluency.

Effective Reader's Theater performances are built upon positive interactions focused on reading, in which modeling, instruction, and feedback are natural components of rehearsals. Even resistant readers are eager to practice for a performance. Reading performance encourages students to read as if they were conversing. This type of repeated reading gives students an opportunity for authentic participation in rereading text, in contrast to the traditional drill approach of rereading text by teacher direction. Since the lines of the script aren't memorized, the students must use oral reading expression to gain the audience's attention, create drama, and demonstrate comprehension of the written script (Keehn, 2003; Corcoran, 2005; Young and Rasinski, 2009). The process of Reader's Theatre is a jointly interpretive act for both readers and their audience. It is the combination of text, interpretation and performance that makes Reader's Theatre a valuable tool for literacy development (Moran, 2006).

Another documented benefit of using Reader's Theatre with remedial students is related to gains in confidence and self-esteem. Results from interviews and observations conducted by Millin and Rinehart (1999), indicated that reader's theatre positively influenced confidence and motivation toward reading with second grade students. Their findings demonstrate that Reader's Theatre activities may offer otherwise struggling readers the opportunity to read aloud with enhanced skills, including more accurate word recognition, better expression, and improved fluency. The students did not see themselves as poor readers who were unable to improve, rather they realized that dedicated practice would make them better readers.

Research suggests that teachers need to give students the opportunity to reread text and must give instruction and model what fluent and prosodic reading sounds like. Lessons focusing on the prosodic elements of pausing, rate, stress, phrasing, and intonation need to be taught to struggling readers (Corcoran, 2005). During small group lessons, the teacher can model how prosodic reading can express a character's feelings and emotions through inflection, while modeling good fluent reading. Students will take that acquired knowledge and apply it when reading new material. Rasinski, Homan, and Biggs (2009) noted that after using the method of repeated readings, when students moved to new passages, the initial reading of those new pieces was read with higher levels of fluency and comprehension than the initial reading of the previous passage. There is a need for fluency instruction in the elementary classroom and more specifically, in the Title I reading classroom. Without accuracy, automaticity and prosody, students will not be able to fully comprehend what they are reading. Fluency, although only one piece of the reading process, is an important one that must be mastered before full meaning can be obtained from reading. Students must be taught the components of prosody and given time to practice those elements. Practice must be engaging and motivational. Reader's Theater is a documented repeated reading strategy that increases motivation, reading rate, prosody, and ultimately comprehension.

Methods

Participants and Setting

The participants of this action research project were students at one of the four public elementary schools in a district of 3,200 students located in a small midwestern city. 18.8% of students at this school receive Free and Reduced Lunch. 1.5% of the students receive English

Language Learners (ELL) support, and 7.2% of the students receive some type of special education services.

The six girls and five boys in this study were students on the 2014-2015 Title I fourth and fifth grade class rosters (see table 1). The students received supplemental reading instruction in a Title I classroom. Students were assigned a pseudonym to ensure data confidentiality. The students were categorized as “below” grade level achievement on the AIMS fall benchmark R-CBM. The fall grade level R-CBM target in fourth grade is 105 words per minute. The grade level target for fifth grade is 114 words per minute. The table also gives the fall benchmark score for each participant.

Table 1

Participants

Student	Gender	Grade level	Fall benchmark score
Melissa	female	5	59
Alice	female	5	64
Morgan	female	5	86
Greg	male	5	67
Barker	male	5	70
Mae	female	4	40
Iliana	female	4	55
Kaylee	female	4	100
Bob	male	4	75
Jason	male	4	68
Hector	male	4	37

Instruction

The students receive daily instruction in my classroom for thirty minute class periods. The classes occur during a block that we call “team time.” Team time is implemented in every grade level, K-5. During team time, every child in the grade level is placed in a supplemental reading group based on their tested skills and classroom performance. All three classroom teachers, the media specialist, the guidance counselor, and paraprofessionals are assigned to teach a team time group. Students in the Title I program and the Learning Disabilities program are given their supplemental reading service during team time.

The elementary schools in the district operate on a six-day cycle. On two of the six days of Title I service, my students received their repeated reading work via Read Naturally. The other four days were previously devoted to using other materials to develop reading strategies and strengthen comprehension skills. For the ten weeks of this study, I kept the current Read Naturally schedule intact to fulfill the RtI requirement of using an evidence-based program with my students. The other four days of the six-day cycle were devoted to using Reader's Theatre as an addition to my fluency instruction.

I introduced the project by sharing with students that we would be using Reader's Theatre as a strategy to improve their reading skills. I explained that they would be practicing scripts and then reading to an audience of their choosing. I was pleasantly surprised when both groups greeted my description of the project with great enthusiasm. I had incorrectly assumed that my students would not be excited about the chance to read in front of an audience. I chose not to set a definite schedule of script work. The action research I reviewed typically introduced a new script on Monday, practiced throughout the week, and then performed on Friday. The scripts I was contemplating varied in complexity; length, reading level, interest level, and audience

appeal. I knew that some scripts would be more motivating than others to perform. I also knew that longer, more difficult scripts would take more practice.

The first scripts were met with great excitement by my students. Fourth graders were assigned parts in a script based on *Los Tres Cerdos* by Bobbi Salinas. Fifth graders began work on a script based on *The Librarian from the Black Lagoon* by Mike Thaler. Scripts came from *Reader's Theater for Building Fluency* (Worthy, 2005). Both classes spent about two weeks on the initial script. We needed to work through the logistics of assigning parts. Rock, paper, scissors was chosen by both groups as a way to assign roles. I was amazed that my most reluctant readers were vying for the longest parts. I sent the scripts with the students and the homework assignment to practice their parts. All but one script returned the next day and had obviously been practiced. I have been struggling with getting these students to read at home for four or five years, and was thrilled with the work they had done at home. We practiced for a few days during class and had many naturally occurring discussions about expressive reading and fluency. We discussed gestures and props, and spent time on Amazon shopping for pig snouts. With every practice they became more excited.

The next hurdle was to discuss their intended audience. All wanted to perform, but some were very reluctant to perform for anyone but me. Both groups finally agreed that their principal and I could be their first audience. I scheduled my required formal observation with the principal so that he could also watch both groups.

The first part of the observed lesson was the introduction of the Multidimensional Fluency Rubric (Appendix A). I began with a definition of a rubric and explained that we would be using the tool to evaluate oral reading after each Reader's Theatre performance and after each practiced reading of a Read Naturally story. I read through and explained the four aspects of

fluency that they would be evaluating with the rubric: expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace.

The second part of the observation was performance of the practiced script. After the performance I had students use the fluency rubric to self-evaluate their performance. Each child shared the score they had given themselves and the rationale behind the score. I was very impressed with their thoughtful and honest responses. For homework, I gave each student another rubric to consider. I chose the Reader's Theater Rubric (Appendix B) to help students more completely self-evaluate their performance. The Reader's Theater Rubric allows the child to critique their own delivery and cooperation with the group. Each student also gave a group score critiquing on-task participation. Use of the two rubrics covered every aspect of my fluency instruction and coaching.

Instructional Outcomes

The lesson was well received. The principal included a photo of the fourth graders in the following staff bulletin with the positive comments, "Great Things (as usual) at School: Check out the awesome cast of Mrs. Kelly's production of *Los Tres Cerdos, The Three Pigs*. Kudos to Mrs. Kelly and her kids, they did a great job." Further positive comments were shared in my post-observation conference with the principal. He wrote, "I really liked how you described the various components of the rubric as the kids reflected on their performance. Use of rubric is a great way to assess student performance but also a great way to ensure students understand expectations. This kind of road map, takes learning targets to another level. I was very impressed with the kids' self-assessment. Specifically I appreciated how much thought they put into their assessment and scoring. The performance of the reader's theatre was fantastic. The kids were fluent but also demonstrated great prosody. In addition to how they read, the use of

various gestures, costume pieces, and other props added a great deal to the engagement and excitement for the kids. It was cool to see the students so proud of their work.”

Both groups were so proud of their work that they decided to perform the scripts again, for larger audiences. I asked them to write down the names of audience members they would consider: teachers, classmates, parents, or other school personnel for whom they would perform. This alone was an interesting exercise that confirmed my belief that certain students would be very reluctant to read in front of a larger audience. Each student gave a great deal of thought to which teachers, and which classmates they would accept as audience members. The fifth graders decided to perform for the team time groups led by the fifth grade classroom teachers, our custodian, and the team time group led by the learning disabilities teacher. From the beginning, I assured the students that they would be performing only for the audience of their choosing. I didn't want stage fright to hinder their fluency work. Some of the fourth graders were still reluctant to perform for a larger audience and only allowed me to invite the team time group led by the learning disabilities teacher. All performances went well and were well received. My students received many compliments from teachers and classmates.

My principal and I discussed suggestions for improvement and extension at my post-observation conference. Using the feedback from my formal observation within the action research framework made the whole process authentic and valuable to me. I was trying a new intervention with my students, using formal and informal measures to evaluate the success of the intervention, and using feedback to further improve the project. I really liked the principal's first suggestion to invite guest readers in to read aloud to the class, and then have my students use the fluency rubric to critique the guest reader. The pressure would be off the students' own performance and allow them to focus on the expectations of the rubric.

The other suggestion that I liked was to break the rubric down into the four strands and treat each one individually as a learning target. I took that suggestion and re-focused my instruction for the next four scripts. The next script was introduced with a mini-lesson on using good expression and appropriate volume. The following lesson and script focused on phrasing. Smoothness and pace were the final two structured lessons and focus for scripts. The Reader's Theatre project lasted for ten weeks and allowed the students to perform a total of six scripts.

Results

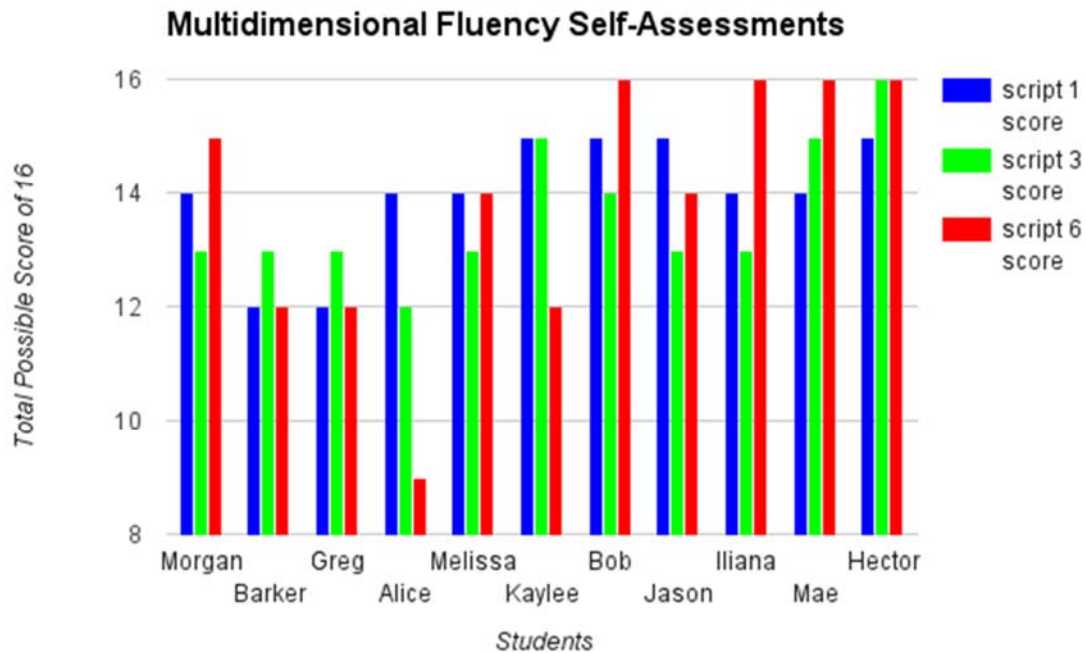
The purpose of this study was to determine if implementing Reader's Theatre would help students become more fluent readers by increasing their words read per minute, and develop into more prosodic readers. Self-assessment prosody data was collected using the Multidimensional Fluency Scale and the Reader's Theatre Rubric. AIMSweb benchmark assessments and AIMSweb progress monitoring data was collected to analyze reading speed. The results were graphed displaying student growth.

I used the fall AIMS benchmark R-CBM score as the participants' baseline oral reading fluency score, the winter benchmark score to measure gains made with the Read Naturally intervention, and the spring benchmark score to measure gains when Reader's Theatre was added as a fluency intervention. Weekly progress monitoring scores are graphed to show each individual's growth throughout the study. Participants used the Multidimensional Fluency Scale as a self-assessment of their ability to read with prosody. Each participant also used the Reader's Theatre Rubric to self-assess his or her individual delivery and cooperation with the group, and to assess the group's on-task behavior. Participants were encouraged to make comments on both rubrics.

Student Self-Assessment

The following graph (see table 2) represents the self-assessment scores on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale following the performance of the first, third, and sixth scripts. This scale focuses on oral reading fluency targeting the prosodic elements of expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. The lowest possible score to receive is four with the maximum score being sixteen. Rasinski (2006) determined that a score of ten or higher indicates that the student is making good progress in fluency. After a Reader's Theatre performance I had each participant evaluate his or her reading based on the four elements of prosody. The graphed self-assessment scores are all between twelve and sixteen. The participants assessed their reading as fluent and prosodic and used the rubric to assess areas of strength and to choose a focus for improvement. I was very impressed with the thought that went into their scores. Their reflections were honest and accurate, and were very close to the scores I would have given to them. In some cases, the students gave themselves a lower score than I thought they deserved. The high scores were an indication that they felt good about their reading. They were viewing their reading performances confidently and I was thrilled with that outcome of this assessment. The participants' comments also reflected that confidence as well as enjoyment of the Reader's Theatre work. My favorite comment came from a quiet young lady who was new to my program this year and had appeared somewhat disengaged during the beginning of the school year. After her third performance she wrote, "I don't want to do anything but this! :)" A reluctant reader who was previously self-conscious of his ability wrote, "Very nice and fun. Need more stories. Awesome teamwork and had fun." "Love it!", and "So fun!" were comments repeated many times. Our discussions and the students' responses proved to me that Reader's Theatre was certainly an engaging and motivating teaching tool.

Table 2

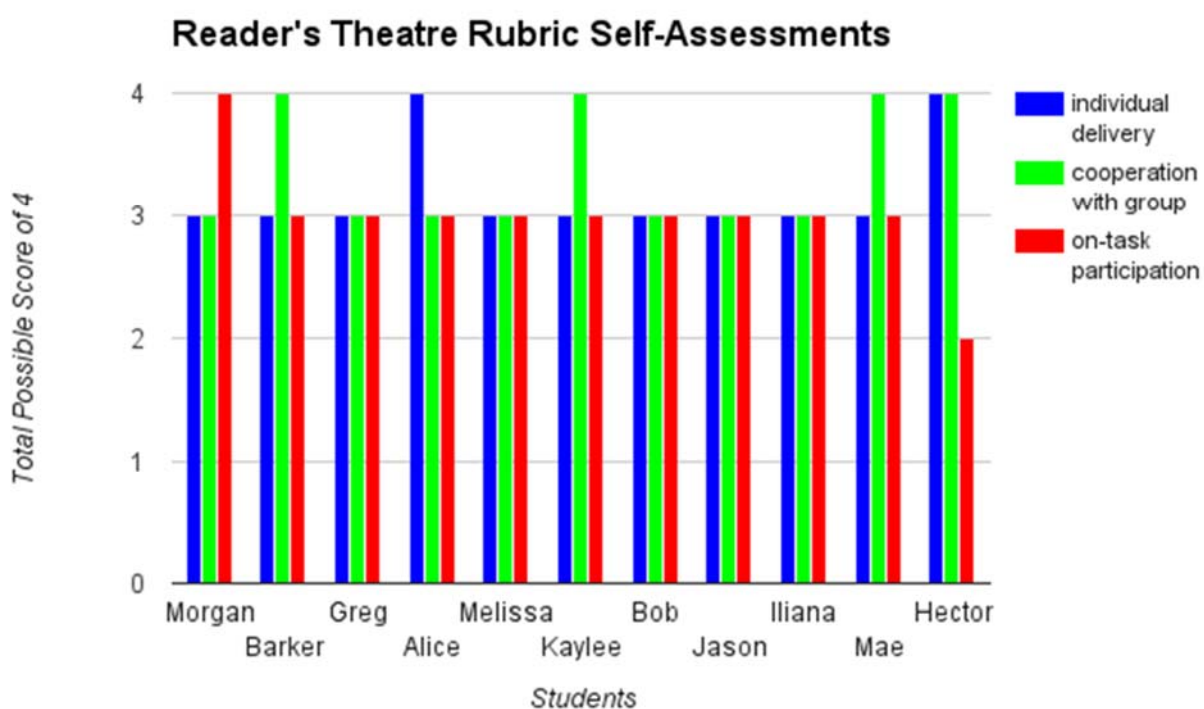
Fluency self-assessment results

The Reader's Theatre Rubric was also used as a self-assessment tool. After each performance each participant gave themselves a score on individual delivery and cooperation with the group. They also gave the group an on-task participation score. The possible score range was from one-needs improvement to four-excellent. Results after each of the six performances were discussed and the participants focused on areas to improve. The following graph (see table 3) represents the average score each participant gave themselves in the three measured areas. The use of this rubric helped the students focus on the group dynamics and the cooperation needed for successful performances. As the study progressed, I saw the students becoming more responsible for their own homework and they began holding classmates accountable as well. Producing a good performance became important to them, and they worked

together to make sure everyone had done their part and was ready to read. Again, I felt their scores were a fairly accurate reflection of their work. Using both rubrics as a self-assessment tool made them meaningful for the students. The attributes of prosodic reading and quality group work were ingrained into our daily work.

Table 3

Performance self-assessment results



Student Achievement

Completing the AIMS benchmark assessment is a requirement for all students who have been identified as having a need in the area of reading. Scores from the previous school year, placement in the Title I program, and teacher referral on the Title I needs assessment are all combined to develop an initial list of students to be tested in September. Targeted students in third through fifth grades take the AIMS R-CBM (Reading-Curriculum Based Measure) and MAZE benchmark assessments in September, January and then again in May.

The R-CBM consists of the student reading three grade level passages for one minute each. The median score of the three is the child's benchmark R-CBM score. The benchmark score is the number of words read correctly and the number of miscues in that median passage. R-CBM data was collected from all three benchmark periods for inclusion in this study.

If a student scores in the bottom twenty fifth percentile on the R-CBM benchmark assessment, he or she is given an AIMS progress monitoring schedule using curriculum-based measurement (CBM). Using CBM for reading involves five basic steps (Fuchs, 1987):

1. Identifying a student's long-range performance goal.
2. Creating sets of equivalent reading passages at the long-range goal level.
3. Regularly and frequently measuring pupil performance on these passages in one-minute timed samples.
4. Graphing the resulting wcpm (words correctly read per minute) data.
5. Analyzing results for instructional decision-making.

The long-range goal is set according to the student's performance on the fall benchmark assessment. Students who score in the bottom tenth percentile and/or are placed in the Title I program undergo a weekly progress monitoring schedule for the R-CBM. The R-CBM progress monitor is a one minute reading of a grade level passage. Errors and words read correctly are recorded. The weekly progress monitors are then graphed for each child according to their initial goal and a trend line is established with each data point. I will be analyzing data from the three benchmark assessments and the progress monitoring schedule of each child for this study.

These data were also being collected to be used in my final Educator Effectiveness evaluation of how well my students achieved my Student Learning Objective (SLO). My SLO was: By May 22, 85% of my 3rd through 5th grade students will meet their

individualized fluency goal as set by the AIMS fall benchmark assessment. Weekly assessments were conducted through progress monitoring and mid-year assessment through winter benchmark. Final evaluation was made through AIMS spring benchmark assessment and completion of the progress monitoring schedule.

My mid-interval review that took place before the implementation of the Reader's Theatre project, was an opportunity to summarize the evidence of progress of my SLO. At that time, progress monitoring data indicated that out of the eleven students I was monitoring for fluency in grades four and five, only five were above their targeted goal, five were near achievement of their goal, and one was below target at mid-year. The mid-year status of my students' goals is summarized in the table below (see table 4). Only 45% of my students were on target to meet their goal by May 22. I was given the opportunity to lower my expectation so that I could easily achieve my SLO. I chose to leave the percentage at eighty-five and see what impact Reader's Theatre had on the progress monitoring scores. The second column in the table summarizes the status of the individualized fluency goals at the end of the progress monitoring schedule. By year-end, 63% of the students met their individualized fluency goal. This was an improvement from mid-year but still short of the 85% goal. 100% of the students showed growth in both benchmark testing periods. The combined data made the status of my SLO goal as partially met.

Table 4

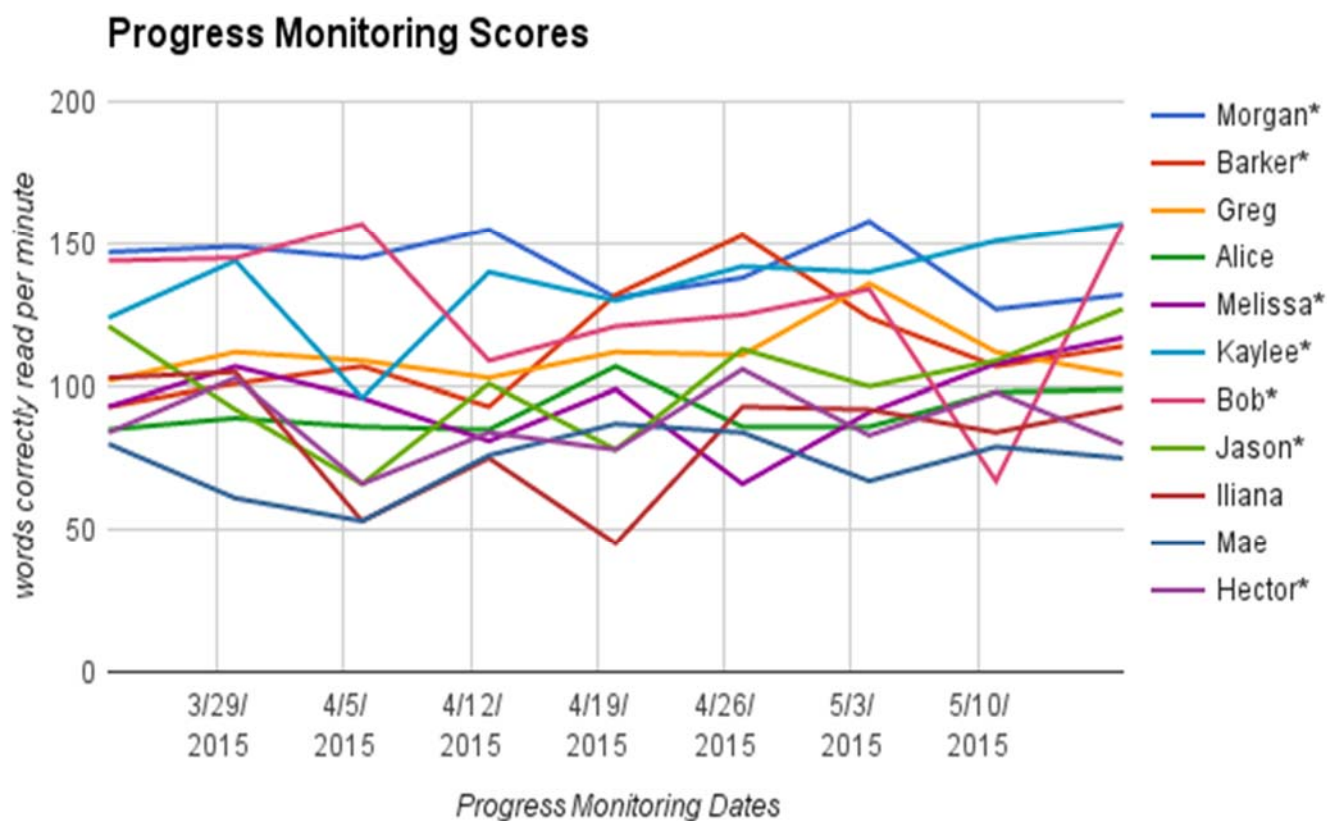
Data collected from AIMS progress monitoring

mid-year SLO status	year-end SLO status
5 students above target of goal	7 students achieved their goal
5 students near target of goal	4 students did not meet their goal
1 student below target of goal	

The following line graph (see table 5) represents each student's progress monitoring R-CBM scores. For nine weeks from March 23 to May 22, I recorded the number of words read correctly. The star behind the student's name indicates those who did meet their fluency goal. The data highlight that the performance of remedial reading students is not predictable and can be greatly affected by outside factors such as motivation, attention and anxiety.

Table 5

Progress monitoring scores



Three progress monitoring schedules highlight cases of interest: Greg, Kaylee, and Barker. Upon completion of the progress monitoring schedule, Greg's trend line was above his goal line (see figure 1). Only four out of his thirty data points were below his goal line, yet the final status of his progress monitoring schedule was "goal missed." Kaylee achieved her goal even though she had eleven out of thirty data points on or below her goal line (see figure 2). Barker also achieved his goal with twelve data points on or below his goal line (see figure 3). All three trend lines were comparable in relation to the goal lines. Greg's trend line appears to be even higher than Kaylee's and Barker's when comparing to their goal lines.

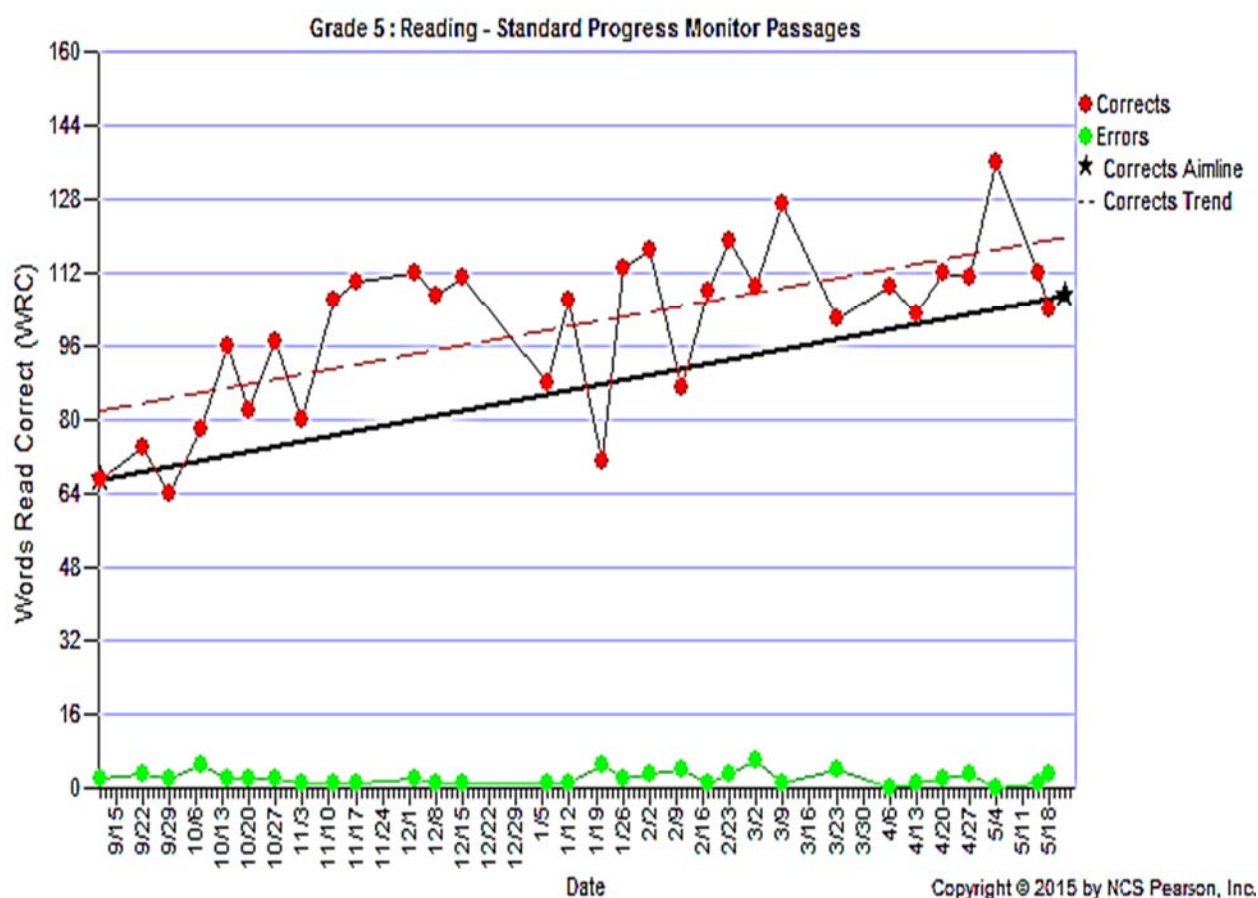


Figure 1. Greg's progress monitoring goal and trend line. His initial score was 67 with a goal of 107.

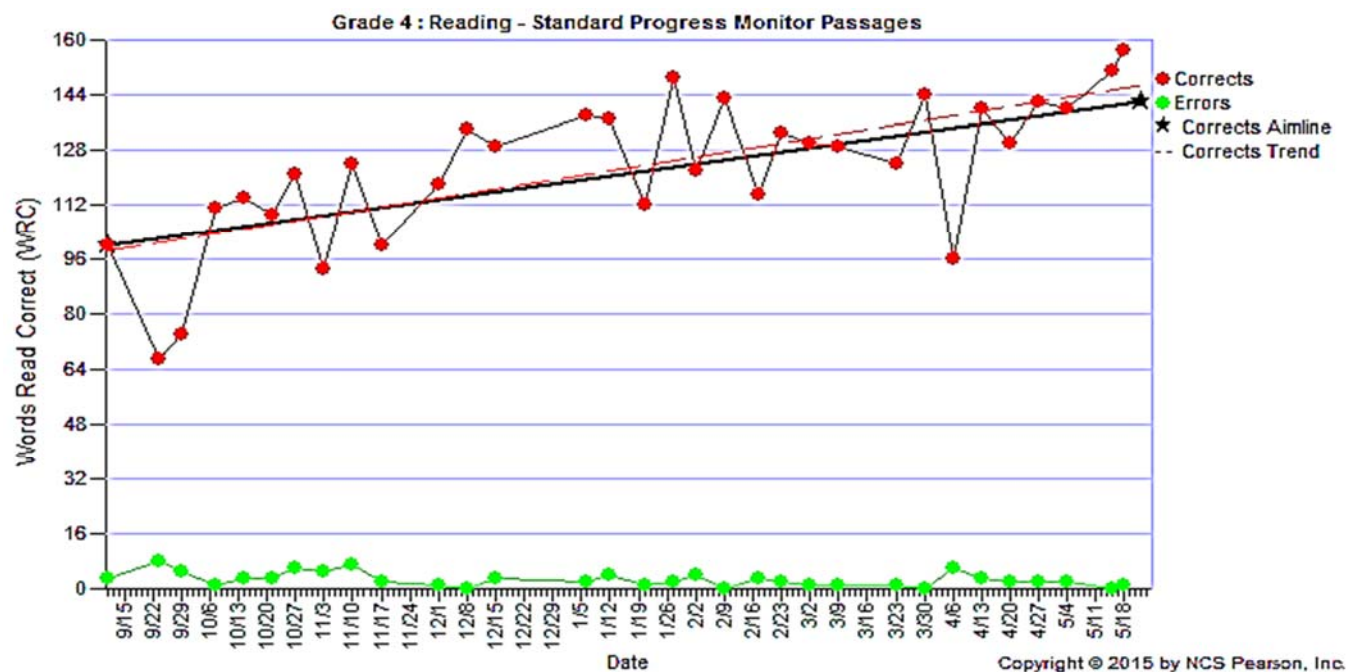


Figure 2. Kaylee's progress monitoring goal and trend line. Her initial benchmark score was 100 with a goal of 142.

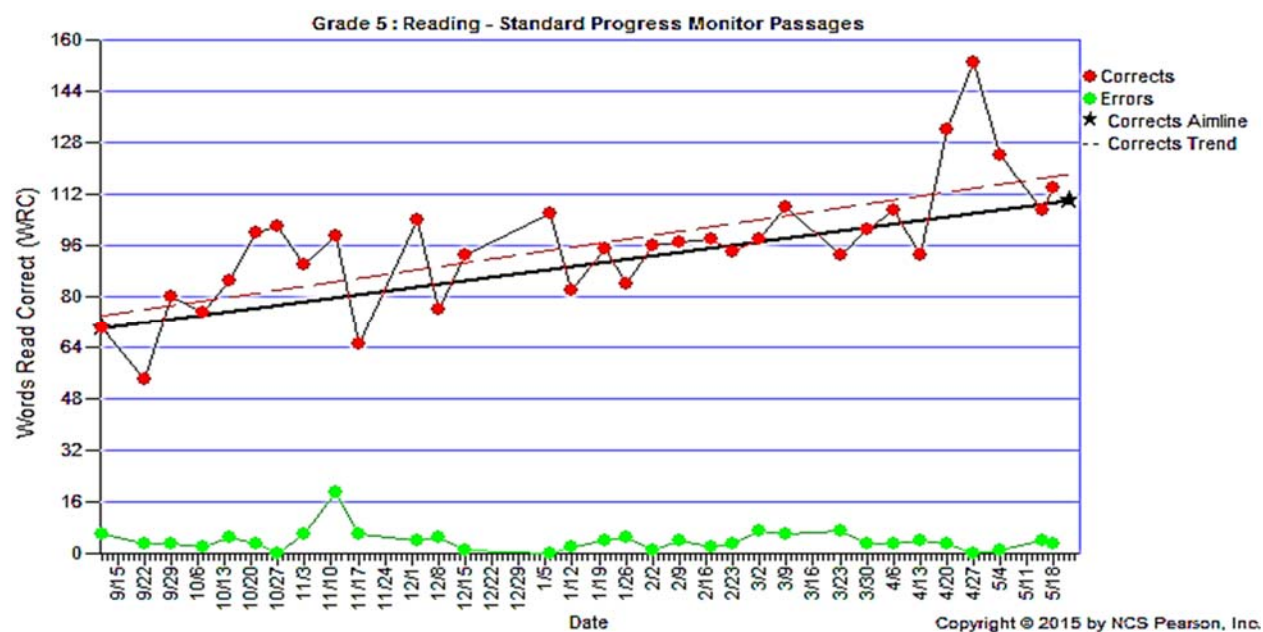
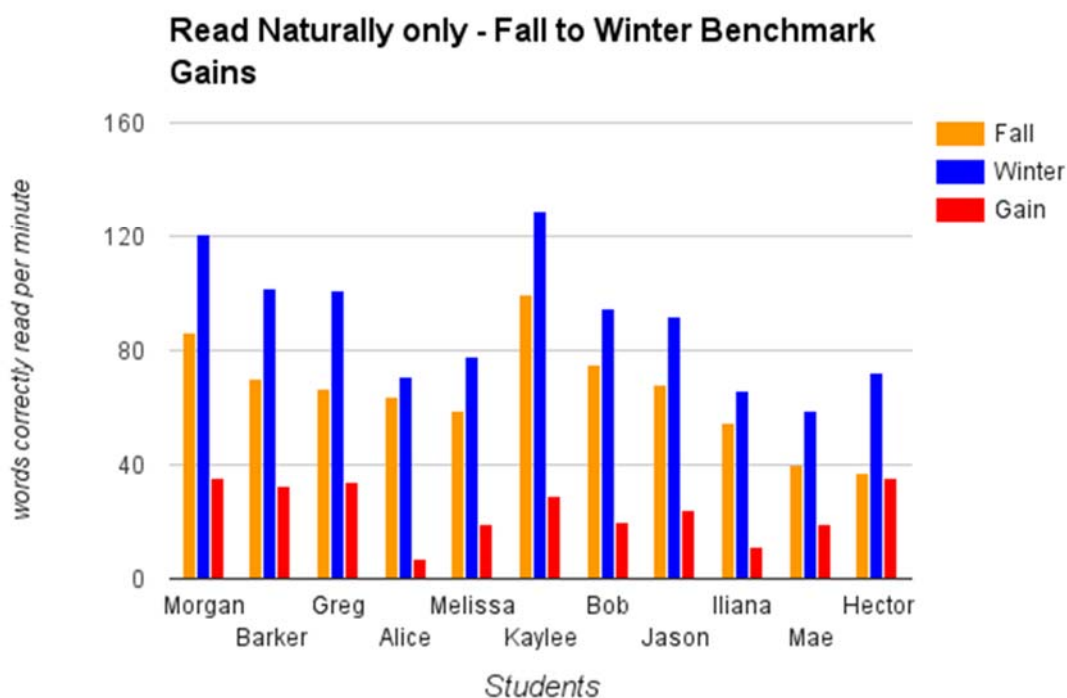


Figure 3. Barker's progress monitoring goal and trend line. His initial benchmark score was 70 with a goal of 110.

The following graph (see table 6) represents the students' fall benchmark R-CBM scores (baseline), winter benchmark R-CBM scores, (after Read Naturally intervention) and the gain in number of words read correctly. Each participant increased the number of words they were able to read from September to January with the intervention of Read Naturally. The gain in words read correctly ranged from seven to thirty-five. Seven of the participants made gains of over twenty words per minute.

Table 6

Fall to winter benchmark gains

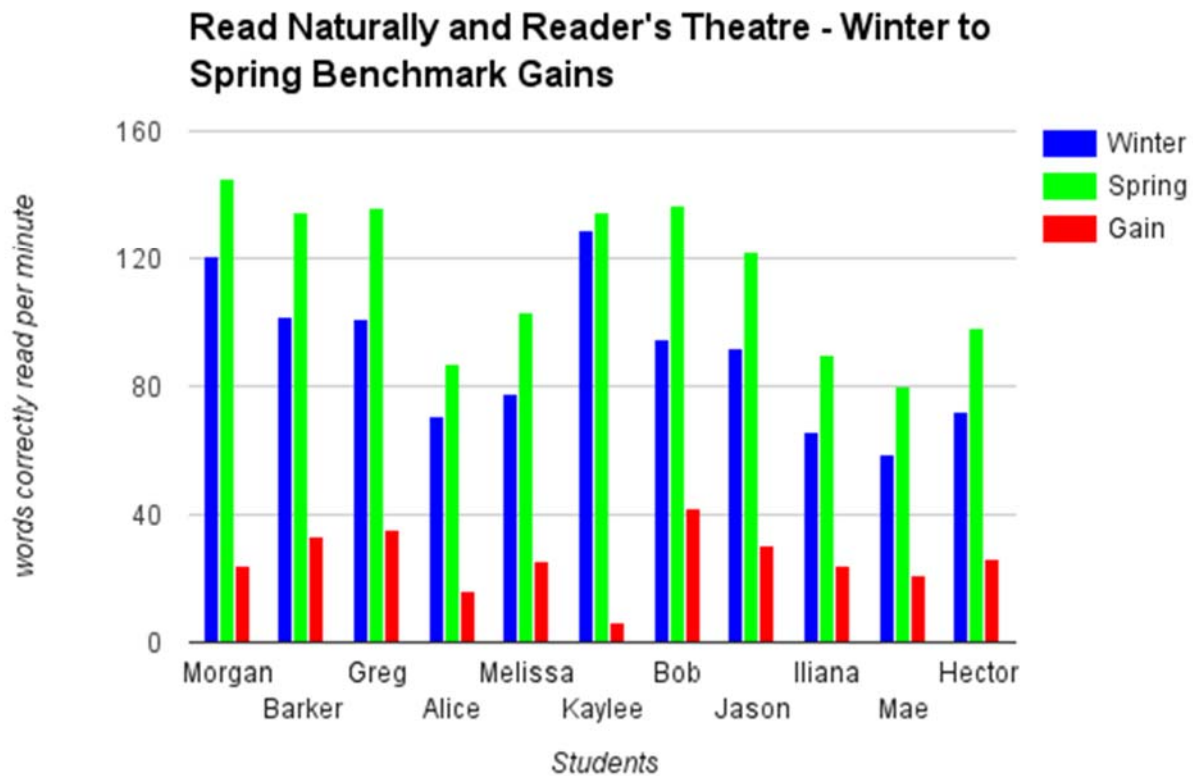


The next graph (see table 7) represents the students' winter benchmark R-CBM scores, spring benchmark R-CBM scores and the gain in number of words read correctly that each child achieved. Again, each child was able to increase the number of words they were able to read

correctly from January to May. In terms of overall achievement, the benchmark scores were positive in that one hundred percent of the students made positive gains during both testing periods.

Table 7

Winter to spring benchmark gains

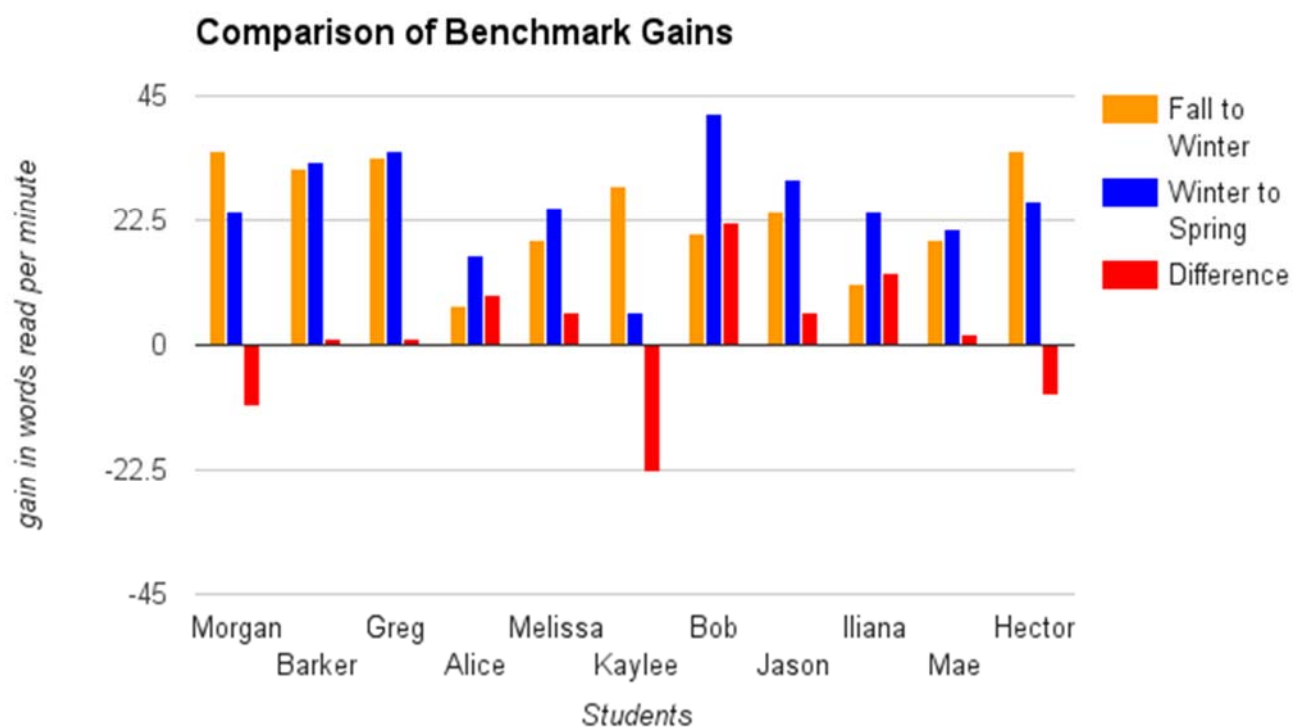


The final bar graph (see table 8) compares the gain in words read per minute from the first testing period to the second. Each child was able to increase the number of words they read correctly in both testing periods. Eight out of the eleven students made a greater increase in gains during the second testing period, after the implementation of Reader's Theatre. Bob and Iliana made a difference in gains of over ten words per minute after they received the Reader's Theatre intervention. Jason, Alice, Melissa, Barker, Greg, and Mae all made growth, but not as

great as some of their classmates. Morgan, Hector, and Kaylee did not follow that pattern and made better gains during the first testing period, before the implementation of Reader's Theatre.

Table 8

Comparison of benchmark gains



Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to improve my fluency instruction with a strategy that would not only increase my students' reading rate, but also engage and motivate them as well. The student achievement results indicate that using Reader's Theatre with Read Naturally appeared to help these students make slightly better gains in reading fluency when compared to using Read Naturally alone. These results are not entirely consistent with the research I

conducted on Reader's Theatre. Studies reported *much* higher gains in student achievement after using Reader's Theatre. However, only one study I reviewed was comparable to mine in that all participants were in a remedial reading program; all other studies used participants of varied reading ability. It makes sense that students with average to above reading skills would gain higher achievement compared to students with below average reading skills.

Age of the participants may also have been a variable affecting achievement. Most of the research studies that I reviewed, including the study done with low-achieving students, were conducted with second or third grade students. I chose to use the strategy with older students, so am curious if that was a factor that affected achievement. In my research and in my own school, it seems as if Reader's Theatre is an intervention used more often with primary age students. I plan to search for studies that may help me answer my questions about appropriate age and ability of students for Reader's Theatre.

The final results of the progress monitoring schedule were lower and more inconsistent than expected. Timed reading makes most of my students anxious to some degree which may account for the "zig-zag" nature of their performance. I didn't expect a perfect upward trend line for each child, but I also didn't expect such varied results. The correlation between the progress monitoring results and the benchmark testing results was also lower than expected. Morgan, Hector and Kaylee, the three students who made greater gains in the first benchmark period all met their progress monitoring goal. Iliana and Alice respectively made the second and third greatest gains during the second benchmark period yet did not meet their progress monitoring goals. I expected that students who made better growth in the second half of the year to be better able to meet their individualized goal.

Using AIMSweb assessments in my study was somewhat problematic in that I was not really testing the skills I had been teaching. The Reader's Theatre and Read Naturally interventions are based on using repeated reading. The AIMS benchmark and progress monitoring assessments are based on a cold read of unfamiliar material. Some students didn't appear to transfer the reading skill level they gained in repeated reading work to unfamiliar text.

For the past two years I have been using progress monitoring trend and goal lines to assess student achievement. I realize now that I need to do further work with the AIMS progress monitoring criteria to better understand how goal achievement is met, and what information can be accurately obtained from the trend lines. I also need to study the correlation between the benchmark assessment scores and the progress monitoring goal achievement.

The self-assessment data was positive; the students described themselves as expressive and prosodic readers, and their comments described Reader's Theatre as a fun experience. Those data were very important to me, as they represented improved self-esteem regarding reading. My students rarely enjoy reading so using an intervention that they liked was a great benefit of the study. Many studies I reviewed reported the same results of improved prosody and enjoyment of using the Reader's Theatre strategy. Reader's Theatre is an engaging approach to teach oral reading fluency. It is a teaching tool that I thoroughly enjoyed and my students were more than willing to use. It gave them the opportunity to have fun portraying a character while becoming more fluent and expressive readers.

The student outcomes coupled with the professional feedback that I received from my principal and colleagues led me to surmise that I have improved my fluency instruction. I plan to use Reader's Theatre again next year, but on a more limited scale. I would like to use four or five scripts for each grade level throughout the school year. I also want to add a comprehension

exercise to the scripts so that I am making the work more encompassing. I felt there was a definite lack of comprehension instruction during the ten weeks of this study. Other teachers have borrowed scripts with the intention of adding Reader's Theatre to their fluency instruction. Now that we know Reader's Theatre is an effective and enjoyable Tier two intervention, I have no doubt that as a school we will be incorporating this strategy more regularly into our reading program.

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Appendix A

NAME _____

FLUENCY RUBRIC

	1	2	3	4
Expression and Volume	Reads in a quiet voice as if to get words out. The reading does not sound natural like talking to a friend.	Reads in a quiet voice. The reading sounds natural in part of the text, but the reader does not always sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with volume and expression. However, sometimes the reader slips into expressionless reading and does not sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with varied volume and expression. The reader sounds like they are talking to a friend with their voice matching the interpretation of the passage.
Phrasing	Reads word-by-word in a monotone voice.	Reads in two or three word phrases, not adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness. There is reasonable stress and intonation.	Reads with good phrasing; adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.
Smoothness	Frequently hesitates while reading, sounds out words, and repeats words or phrases. The reader makes multiple attempts to read the same passage.	Reads with extended pauses or hesitations. The reader has many "rough spots."	Reads with occasional breaks in rhythm. The reader has difficulty with specific words and/or sentence structures.	Reads smoothly with some breaks, but self-corrects with difficult words and/ or sentence structures.
Pace	Reads slowly and laboriously.	Reads moderately slowly.	Reads fast and slow throughout reading.	Reads at a conversational pace throughout the reading.

Scores of 10 or more indicate that the student is making good progress in fluency.

Score _____

Scores below 10 indicate that the student needs additional instruction in fluency.

Rubric modified from Tim Rasinski – [Creating Fluent Readers](#)

Appendix B

Name: _____ Date: _____

Readers Theater Rubric

Name: _____

Individual Scores	4–Excellent	3–Good	2–Fair	1–Needs Improvement
Delivery	Student read the script with confidence and expression, made gestures and good eye contact, and used props to add to the performance	Student read the script with some expression, gestures, eye contact, and use of props	Student read the script but had little expression, few gestures, little eye contact, or did not use props appropriately	Student had difficulty reading the script and consistently did not use expression, eye contact, or props appropriately
Cooperation with group	Student worked cooperatively with the group in all aspects of the project and shared all responsibilities and ideas well	Student worked cooperatively with group in most aspects of the project and shared most responsibilities and ideas	Student worked cooperatively with group in some aspects of the project but sometimes could not agree on what to do and wasted time	Student did not work cooperatively together with group and could not agree on what to do. Student did not share responsibilities or ideas and wasted time
Comments				

Group Members: _____

Group Scores	4–Excellent	3–Good	2–Fair	1–Needs Improvement
On-task participation	High level of active, on-task participation from all group members	Majority of group members on-task and actively participating	Moderate level of on-task work or few of the group members actively participating	Low level of active participation from majority of group members
Comments				