

Readers' Theater: "Hold On, Let's Read It Again."

Tracy D. Garrett

Dava O'Connor

"Melissa, I'm having a hard time coming up with ways to get all of my kids rereading texts to become more fluent," said Tyra. "Do you have any resources or creative ideas you could share?" Melissa and Tyra both teach in elementary special education classrooms serving students with a variety of learning disabilities from multiple grades.

"I pair my kids up and have them read aloud to each other for 3 to 5 minutes every day," responded Melissa. "It's not very exciting, but the drill and practice helps." Melissa has been teaching at this school for 5 years.

"You know this is my first year here," said Tyra, "I guess I can try that. I do remember from my Reading Methods class something about a 'readers' theater.' Have you ever tried that?"

Roberta, an inclusive kindergarten teacher, and Rajan, an intermediate self-contained classroom teacher, were having a similar conversation with the reading coach who serves their schools. "One research-based strategy for engaging your students in meaningful rereading of texts is readers' theater," said the literacy coach. "Not only do the students enjoy doing readers' the-



ater, but research suggests it can have a significant impact on their fluency rate, word recognition ability, and comprehension." Roberta and Rajan both seemed a bit skeptical.

"I don't really have a lot of reading resources," said Roberta. "And with the budget cuts, there aren't any funds left for buying more books."

"The time factor is most important to me," added Rajan. "I have kids in and out all day. I need something that can engage a few students for shorter periods of time. I'm also already spend-

ing a lot of time planning for my guided reading groups."

"Readers' theater is a relatively simple strategy to implement and doesn't have to take a lot of time or a special curriculum," responded the literacy coach. "It's perfect for small group instruction for shorter periods of time and there are free scripts available from a number of web sites. If you want to try it, I can model it for you and you can take it from there. I know I have a couple of collections of scripts in the resource lab as well."

These teachers working with students with learning disabilities in kindergarten through fifth grade face multiple challenges in their classrooms. As inclusive, self-contained, and extended resource special educators they (for the most part) have children with reading-based disabilities, a wide variety of ages and reading ability levels, and very busy classrooms with children being pulled out and returning constantly throughout the day. All of these teachers decided to implement readers' theater as a means for improving their students' reading ability as well as to impact attitudes about reading.

Where can teachers obtain ideas and resources associated with implementing readers' theater? Is there any data on how it's impacted student performance data? What are the opinions of teachers who have implemented this method? And, more importantly, how do young readers feel about the practice?

Research on Readers' Theater and Reading Fluency

Special education teachers today have the responsibility of developing competent, productive, self-directed students. A critical feature of this outcome is for students to become efficient and engaged readers. Many students referred to special education have problems in the area of reading, which affects other content areas; special education teachers, in particular, must be prepared to address a variety of diverse learning needs (Smith, 2004). One approach that can impact these desired outcomes is to use engaging teaching practices such as readers' theater (Rasinski, 2003; see box, "What Is Readers' Theater?").

There are few studies involving readers' theater specific to students in special education, and in most of these studies readers' theater was either part of a pull-out tutorial or a specific intervention and researchers did not include the teachers' views of the practice or associated challenges and benefits. However, the research conducted thus far (Prescott, 2003; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Worthy & Broaddus,

What Is Readers' Theater?

Readers' theater is an instructional method that connects quality literature, oral reading, drama, and several research-based practices (Worthy & Prater, 2002). Allington (2001) described readers' theater as an instructional strategy that utilizes students' thoughts and actions fully in selecting the text as well as in developing and performing the script. This method is different from traditional theater in that it requires no costumes, props, or actions other than facial expressions or gestures by the performers (Moran, 2006). Readers' theater provides students with an authentic reason for rereading texts (Stayter & Allington, 1991; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Worthy & Broaddus, 2002). It also exposes students to basic sight words to build recognition, allows for multiple reading opportunities to build fluency, and ultimately can affect comprehension through the actions and gestures developed to carry out the performance (Corcoran & Davis, 2003).

Readers' theater can be used in any content area (Flynn, 2005; Hoyt, 1992; Rasinski, 2003; Young & Vardell, 1993) and scripts are readily available (see Table 1; Figure 1 provides a sample first-grade script). They can be purchased, downloaded, or developed—oftentimes in conjunction with the students. Teachers can use different genres, such as poetry, plays, and fiction and nonfiction books, as well as texts with a thematic focus. Allington (2001) indicated that students can be further engaged by providing opportunities for students to assist in selecting texts of interest to them, allowing them to see how authors embed dialogue in the text, and assisting in the actual writing of the script.

2002) suggests that readers' theater can provide students with diverse learning needs an opportunity for authentic participation in rereading texts—in contrast to the traditional skill and drill

learning and social needs of students in special education, in addition to their specific literacy needs.

Over the past 30 years, researchers have made advances in understanding

Readers' theater can provide students with diverse learning needs an opportunity for authentic participation in rereading texts—in contrast to the traditional skill and drill approaches of rereading texts by teacher direction.

approaches of rereading texts by teacher direction.

The National Reading Panel (2002) highlighted the importance of five areas for comprehensive reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. One area in particular, reading fluency, was noted as a neglected component. *Fluency*, or the rate at which an individual reads, requires three skills: accurate decoding, automaticity in word recognition, and prosody: the phrasing, intonation, and pitch associated with reading a passage aloud. Readers' theater enhances fluency by engaging students in repeated interactions with each other as well as with the text. Thus, readers' theater may provide an avenue for meeting the

the reading process, which has sparked a renewed focus on reading fluency (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006). Weaver (2002) discussed how teachers of students with learning disabilities need to understand the reading process, the nature of proficient reading, and what promotes effective reading strategies. Teachers must help students learn that the purpose of reading is ultimately to construct meaning or gain understanding from what they read.

Fluency can contribute to improvement in word recognition, comprehension, and improved self-esteem as a reader. (Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Dowhower, 1987; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, 2003). Students—especially those who have difficulty with

Table 1. Readers' Theater Resources and Scripts

| Resource/Script | Grade/Age Range |
|---|------------------------------|
| <i>Tacky the Penguin</i> (Lester & Munsinger, 1988) | Grades K-3, ages 5-8 |
| "The Foolish Little Hare: A Fable" and "The Statue of Liberty," <i>Readers Theater, Grade 2</i> (Hall, 2003) | Grades K-3, ages 5-8 |
| <i>Around the Water Cycle</i> (Wood, 1998) | Grades K-3, ages 5-8 |
| "A Little Hole" and "I Am Cold," <i>Readers Theatre Collection</i> (Early Literacy Project, n.d.) | Grades K-2, ages 5-7 |
| <i>Reader's Theater Scripts and Plays</i> (Teaching Heart, 2001-2008) | Grades K-6, ages 5-11 |
| <i>Reader's Theater: Bring Characters to Life in Your Classroom Through Voices and Gestures</i> (Richmond Public Schools, 2002) | Grades K-12, ages 5-18 |
| <i>Readers' Theater</i> (Literacy Connections, 2001-2010) | Grades K-adult, ages 5-adult |

reading—often need instruction in reading fluency. Prescott (2003) reported that readers' theater provides a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency; Tanner (1993) illustrated that the flexibility of readers' theater allows it to be used with a variety of learners with varying levels of reading ability.

The challenge of developing students' social, emotional, and academic growth within the public school system is a daunting task. The need to meet district, state, and federal standards for all students is coupled with the pressure of maximizing quality teaching time. Readers' theater provides educators with an opportunity to develop both reading fluency and reader dispositions or attitudes and beliefs about reading (Forsythe, 1995; Lui, 2000; Martinez et al., 1999; Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2006; Samuels & Farstrup, 2006; Worthy & Prater, 2002). Additionally, readers' theater gives teachers a method to integrate subject matter into language arts, which is sometimes neglected due to the nature of high-stakes assessments (Rasinski et al., 2006).

Implementing Readers' Theater: Four Views

We studied the implementation of readers' theater in three elementary schools in a rural southeastern school district, focusing on four special education classrooms serving kindergarten through fifth grade. The four teachers,

with between 1 and 14 years' experience, had been implementing readers' theater for approximately 1 to 3 years. The four classrooms and teachers we studied gave us feedback on how special education teachers implement and perceive readers' theater, and how students perceived their involvement (see Table 2). Their experience also provides some direction to other teachers on implementing reader's theater (see

box, "Tips for Implementing Readers' Theater").

Small Group Within an Inclusive Kindergarten

Roberta decided to implement readers' theater in her inclusive kindergarten as an enrichment activity primarily for students eligible for special education services. Of the 15 students in her classroom, seven were identified as having a learning disability (LD) or

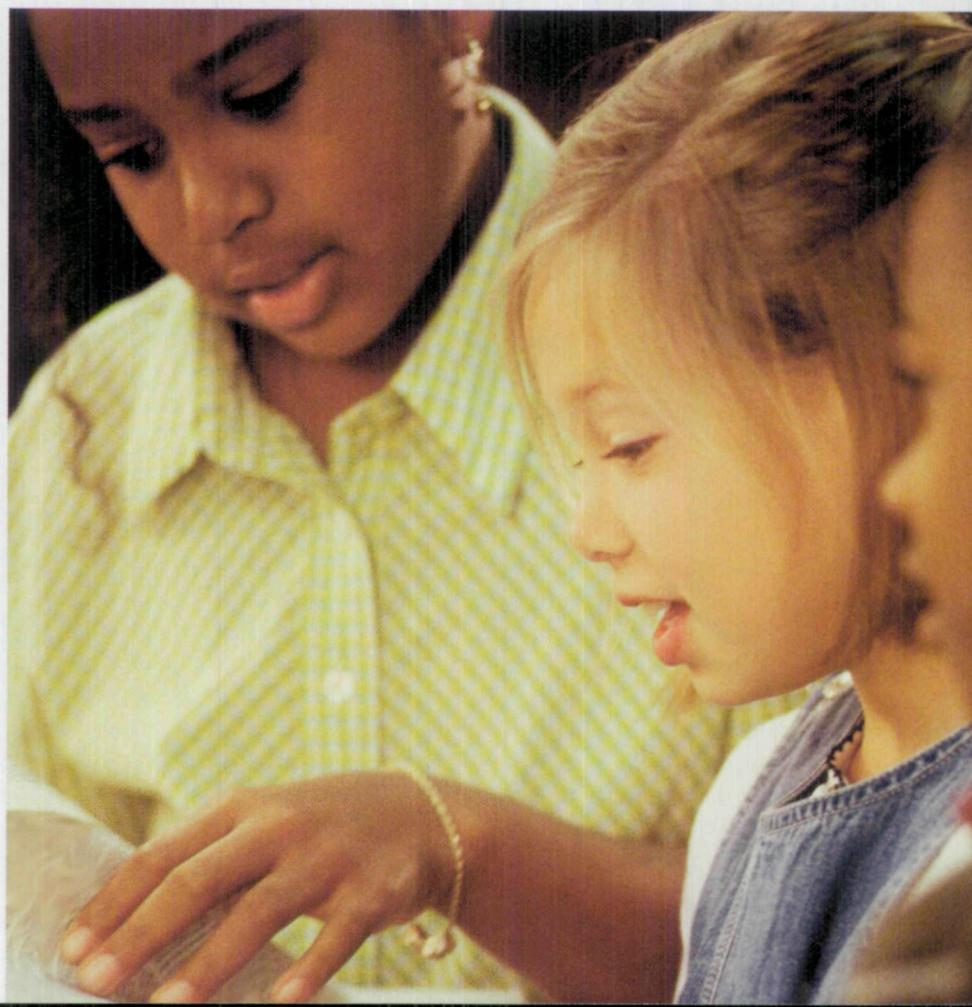


Figure 1. Sample First-Grade Readers' Theater Script

The Little Yellow Chicken

Narrator: The little yellow chicken thought he'd have a party.
He said to his friends,
The Little Yellow Chicken: "Will you help me do the shopping?"
Narrator: His friends laughed at him. *(All animals laugh)*
Frog: "Hop it!"
Narrator: ... said the frog.
Bee: "Buzz off!"
Narrator: ... said the bee. And the big brown beetle said,
Beetle: "Stop bugging me!"
Narrator: So, the little yellow chicken went shopping by himself.
When the shopping was done, the little yellow chicken said to his friends,
The Little Yellow Chicken: "Will you help me do the cooking?"
Narrator: His friends shook their heads. *(All animals shake their heads)*
Frog: "Hop it!"
Narrator: ... said the frog.
Bee: "Buzz off!"
Narrator: ... said the bee. And the big brown beetle said,
Beetle: "Stop bugging me!"
Narrator: So, the little yellow chicken did the cooking by himself. When the cooking was done, the little yellow chicken said to his friends,
The Little Yellow Chicken: "Will you help me set the table?"
Frog: "Hop it!"
Narrator: ... said the frog.
Bee: "Buzz off!"
Narrator: ... said the bee. And the big brown beetle said,
Beetle: "Stop bugging me!"
Narrator: So, the little yellow chicken set the table by himself. Everything was ready for the party. The food smelled delicious. The friends knocked on the little yellow chicken's door. *(All animals knock)*
Frog: "I'm hungry!"
Narrator: ... said the frog.
Bee: "I'm starving!"
Narrator: ... said the bee. And the big brown beetle said,
Beetle: "What about me?"
Narrator: The little yellow chicken phoned his grandmother, the little red hen.
The Little Yellow Chicken: "My friends wouldn't help me,"
Narrator: ... he said.
The Little Yellow Chicken: Now they want to come to my party. What shall I do?"
The Little Red Hen: "Don't let them in,"
Narrator: ... said the little red hen,
The Little Red Hen: "Eat all the food by yourself."
Narrator: But the little yellow chicken was a kind little chicken. He thought and thought. Then he opened the door. *(The little yellow chicken opens the door)*
The Little Yellow Chicken: "Welcome to my party!"
Narrator: ... he said to his friends.
Frog: "Fantastic"
Narrator: ... said the frog.
Bee: "Amazing"
Narrator: ... said the bee. And the big brown beetle said,
Beetle: "A scrumptious tea!"
Narrator: Then they said to the little yellow chicken
All animals: "We're sorry we were lazy. The next time you have a party, we'll do all the work."
The Little Yellow Chicken: "That's a good idea,"
Narrator: ... said the little yellow chicken.

developmental delay in the area of reading. The remaining eight students were considered typically developing kindergartners. This inclusive classroom mirrors a typical kindergarten in its physical layout, with a variety of centers and a large meeting area.

Roberta implemented readers' theater throughout the school year as an enrichment activity during a portion of center time. Her intent was to reinforce print concepts, letter identification, and sight-word recognition, benchmarks on her students' individualized education plans. Roberta held readers' theater in a small meeting area near her rocking chair to ensure students were not confused by the center rotation times. While Roberta engaged the seven students identified with LD, the general education teacher worked with the other children on different activities. To begin the process, Roberta used a previously read big book with a teacher-created script. The student parts of the script were color-coded and highlighted for each; boys read one color and the girls read another. To get started, the children read chorally by gender. (Over time as the students developed further as readers, Roberta assigned each student a role on the selected script.) On the first day, Roberta provided the students with the scripts and they read through it together. On Days 2 through 4, students reread the scripts independently and incorporated movements as desired to prepare for their performance. The practice sessions lasted approximately 10 minutes. As a culminating event each week, the students performed readers' theater for their entire class or other classes within the school.

Whole-Group Theater Approach With a Variety of Content Areas for Intermediate Elementary

Readers' theater has been a part of Rajan's classroom for 12 years. His class is a combination of self-contained combined with extended resource (students served part time in special education for language arts and math). During the study, Rajan's class served 10 students with learning disabilities in

Table 2. Teacher and Student Feedback About Readers' Theater

| Teacher Responses | Student Responses |
|--|---|
| <p>"Students enjoy readers' theater. It helps build fluency and encourages them to speak in front of others. Students enjoy the scripts and reading different types of poems and other sources with use in readers' theater."</p> <p>"I would say it is an excellent tool to have students practice fluency, enunciate words, and increase self-esteem. Engagement is very high in readers' theater. They can't lose their place if they have a part. They take ownership of the lesson because it is theirs. With readers' theater, you have a performance like a play in the classroom. It is exciting! It teaches the genre of drama not just going through a basal. It is an actual performance!"</p> <p>"You definitely have to have a system for choosing parts. This helps them get into it. Also, have something for every child to do, which could be an issue for larger classes. It is fun, engaging. Kids get excited about it and take ownership."</p> <p>"It is a great program to help build fluency and it can be a lot of fun for the children to show their creative sides."</p> | <p>"You get excited and you get better."</p> <p>"That is how you get better. It is fun. Rereading is good."</p> <p>"You read a lot but it helps you be a better reader."</p> <p>"It is cool!"</p> <p>"When you read and read a lot, you get to read more books."</p> <p>"You do it like theater. It is about reading scripts, and studying before going live."</p> <p>"I like doing scripts better."</p> <p>"You will get to do moves. Um, it is like the movies."</p> <p>"Rereading is fun because you gather information like fairy tales and science—you can always read about it."</p> <p>"Rereading helps you get better and know a book. You read back for information."</p> <p>"If you don't know a story, you can read it back over before taking a test."</p> <p>"Rereading is the best thing to do to get your brain to wake up."</p> |

reading ranging from third to fifth grade and was located in a mobile unit directly behind the school. He used readers' theater primarily to enhance different content areas and frequently uses scripts for social studies content obtained from a book of readers' theater scripts. One of his favorite scripts is about the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty (Hall, 2003).

If witnessing a production in Rajan's room, you might see the students utilizing simple props. Some

scripts lend themselves to the use of costuming (hats, cloaks), tangible objects (torch, puppets), and/or scenery. Rajan's students enjoy supplementing their production with different enhancements. The content of the Statue of Liberty script lends itself to the wearing of hats made by the teaching assistant; one resembles the crown on the Statue. Another is a black top hat similar to that favored by President Grover Cleveland. Rajan follows a similar format in implementing readers'

theater with short daily lessons involving the students rereading and practicing their highlighted parts. In this production, the student portraying the Statue stands up on the chair and holds a torch. The audience is seated on the floor. Because Rajan's children have varying reading levels, he modified the parts to accommodate all students. He ensures that each student has an active role in the performance. Rajan also gives the performers the freedom to incorporate movement and to use hand motions and facial expressions. When the script takes them to the harbor for the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty, they march across the room and a student motions as if the Statue is being unveiled. Sometimes a script lends itself to choral as well as independent reading; for example, at the end of this production, "It is finally finished!" is read in unison.

Another whole-group performance in Rajan's class involved the use of a student-created backdrop covering an entire wall of the classroom to help build the setting and enhance the performance of "The Foolish Little Hare" (Hall, 2003). Rajan's anchor chart notes various genres of literature describing characteristics of each as a

Tips for Implementing Readers' Theater

- ✓ Select script or texts as part of the planning process.
- ✓ Integrate with content areas and/or use a thematic approach.
- ✓ No props, costumes, or scenery required (unless the teacher and students want to include them).
- ✓ Readers' theater can be whole-group or small-group.
- ✓ Highlight parts for students to distinguish between roles.
- ✓ Have a selected audience in mind.
- ✓ Allow 10 to 20 minutes for daily practice.
- ✓ Readers' theater scripts can go home for home reading, too.
- ✓ This is not a performance based on memorization. It is a performance using the scripts they have read all week.
- ✓ Keep it simple.
- ✓ Have fun!

review (e.g., a fable is a moral story usually with animal characters). Besides the script with highlighted parts, Curious George monkeys are used as props. If you witnessed this performance, you might see the following: Two obviously nervous students begin reading their parts. A third student misses his cue, putting everyone off track. The entire cast seems to recognize a case of nervousness and decides to start over. Rajan steps in and praises them for recognizing the need to start again. The students regroup by repositioning themselves and discussing parts briefly. "Take 2" performance sails on smoothly. During this performance, the first monkey reads enthusiastically, "I love this coconut tree." Another child reads a serious part. "What will I do if the clouds fall on me and crush me?" she says in a concerned voice with a doubtful expression. A third reader with a scowl on his face responds in a matter-of-fact manner, "Oh, why do you worry so much?" In addition, the students use movement to reflect the story line. For example, when the monkeys are supposed to be running through the jungle, the students move across the room as if they are primates in the rainforest.

Rajan uses a whole-group approach for readers' theater and it is a part of the weekly instruction with a connection to genres covered in literature or integrated with core content areas such as science and social studies. All of the students have a part based on their needs and abilities. They also use props to enhance their performance and treat the performance like a real play.

Class Within a Class: Small Group Instruction Approach for Intermediate Elementary

Melissa also had a self-contained/extended resource combination class serving a total of 15 students with learning disabilities in Grades 4 and 5, housed in a typical classroom. She used readers' theater to target five of the 15 students with lower reading ability because they were self-contained for reading and would have a

consistent timeframe to craft their theater performance. Melissa had been implementing readers' theater for only a couple of months after training provided by her literacy coach.

Melissa opted to use readers' theater with only the students classified as self-contained. In her class, the extended resource students' only role is to serve as an occasional audience. Because the extended resource students "floated" in and out of the room with various schedules, they typically worked independently or with an instructional assistant during the daily 15- to 20-minute readers' theater practice time.

Melissa often had two readers' theater groups practicing simultaneously. An observer in this classroom might see two different versions of the same script simultaneously practiced, or two groups practicing totally different scripts. For example, one day you might see a scripted version of both *Tacky the Penguin* (Lester & Munsinger, 1988) and *Around the Water Cycle* (Wood, 1998), with three girls performing the penguin story and two boys presenting the water cycle. The students practice seated on the carpet with Melissa emphasizing the importance of working together and reading with expression. The *Tacky the Penguin* group is anxious to get started and begins reading immediately. One comments, "I love this." Because they are a bit nervous, they develop a cue for themselves to begin: "1, 2, 3, 4." This group decides to incorporate hand motions to go along with the script. For example, when the part calls for them to say, "Hi, hi, hi" they wave to each other and smile in greeting. When the hunters are coming, they duck down low to the floor. While reading, a student miscues and they stop to help her by saying, "Hold on, let's read it again." Next, they decide that when the script calls for a cannonball, they need to do something. One student asks, "What can we do?" another replies, "We could go, BOOM" while she slaps the floor. They all agree and go back to reread. When they finish this practice reading, one student suggests that they need to add another

part at the end of the story. Chorally they say "The end," proudly.

During this time Melissa stays with the *Around the Water Cycle* (Wood, 1998) group because one student was absent the day before and needs support. Melissa reads through the script once for them. This is followed by a discussion of possible motions, such as pointing to clouds and shrugging shoulders to show puzzlement. Melissa reminds them that this is like watching a movie: The audience wants to have their attention captured and be entertained. She encourages them to discuss how they feel while watching a movie or a play and how to relate those feelings to their actions while reading. The students read through the script once more, incorporating motions and more expression. Melissa checks in and out while they practice. Both groups practice for about 20 minutes and then are directed to transition to their seats for independent reading.

The next day, the *Tacky the Penguin* (Lester & Munsinger, 1988) group performs for the class. The performers prepare while the rest of the class is transitioning to the carpet. Melissa introduces the story and then the performers, as if in a play. At the conclusion of the performance, they proudly bow for the audience; the class discussion includes the performers sharing their experience. When Melissa asks the class to tell her what the story is about, some of the audience can answer; however, the performers are able to tell her everything about the story. They describe Tacky's adventure in great detail, including all of the characters, setting, critical details, and the conclusion.

Whole-Group Theater Approach in a Shared Environment for Intermediate Elementary

Tyra had a class of three first-graders, two second-graders, and one third-grader, all with reading-based learning disabilities. Tyra used readers' theater frequently and provided multiple opportunities for the students to rehearse. Her simultaneous small groups alternated between watching and practicing. She also provided

scripts with highlighted parts and usually used the same script with the two groups.

As an observer in this class you might see both groups practicing "A Little Hole" (Early Literacy Project, n.d.). Tyra's approach with the groups is different based on ability. The first group of four students has control over the text and can read it fairly well; they help each other with self-correcting. For example, one student miscues by saying, "A fox got my shoes," then says, "Oops!" Another student reads the line correctly and then they both go back and reread with phrasing and intonation, "A fox got my socks." The students have learned to take ownership of their reading. The other group of two students is classified as non-readers and Tyra uses *echo* or *whisper reading*, a technique that places the teacher slightly behind the reader so as to create an "echo" as they read together.

During the 20-minute readers' theater time, Tyra has the groups rotate four times. She also encourages her students to develop movements to match the script during the rotation. For example, one group uses a motion to show how to dig a little hole. The students also provide each other with suggestions for improvement. If faced with a student who is somewhat reluctant to participate, Tyra uses lots of encouragement to overcome "stage jitters" and sometimes whisper-reads to calm the nervousness.

Tyra has a designated time each day for readers' theater and multiple group configurations, although the same script is used for each group. All students are included in the activity by either performing or watching. She has a performance each day as part of the practice. Sometimes the students are grouped in dyads and at others in groups of three to four students. In performing the script, "I Am Cold" (Early Literacy Project, n.d.), Tyra reminds the students of the expectations and refers to an anchor chart listing some key behavioral elements for readers' theater (e.g., reading loudly and with lots of expression). Her students also use motions to match the

words, and Tyra allows opportunities for repeat performances. Tyra usually has her nonreaders perform last, which gives them an opportunity to hear the script repeatedly before performing. She usually uses Echo or whisper reading to assist these students in their production. At the end of their performances, they chime together, "Very good!"

These teachers utilized readers' theater in a variety of ways based on the needs of their students and the challenges associated with their classroom configurations and schedules, as well as on the amount of time and resources available to them. In each case, however, readers' theater was an integral part of the daily reading/language arts schedule. All students were able to participate in some fashion, and students were often encouraged to assist in the selection or creation of the script. In essence, a structure was in place to support the development and emphasize the importance of engaged, authentic reading activities.

Performance Data

All four teachers in the study gathered benchmark data to monitor student performance and inform their instruction. The school district had established local norms for benchmarks

including fall, winter, and spring data on emergent, transitional, and fluent reading skills. The measures and categories for each benchmark assessment period included letter recognition, initial reading level, fluency score, and comprehension score. The district used a letter recognition assessment for the younger, emergent readers, comprising 54 letters, both lower- and upper-case letters except for the letters *a* and *g*. For the transitional or older readers, leveled books in a running record format rated fluency on a scale of 1 to 4 (i.e., 1 = word by word, 2 = some phrasing with word by word, 3 = mostly phrased with some expression, 4 = phrased consistently with expression). The comprehension scale was

also a rating scale of 1 to 4 (i.e., 1 = recalled little or no information, 2 = recalled some events, may have been out of order, 3 = recalled character names and some key events in order, 4 = recalled all character names and most of the events in order with details).

All of the emergent readers made progress on letter recognition, with an average gain of 38 letters recognized over the course of the academic year. Some of these emergent readers moved to the transitional level during the year; for example, one student began the year with a letter recognition score of 9 and finished as a reader of a Level 4 text.

The average gain in level of texts was 8 levels. (For example, one student began on a Level 8 text and completed the year at a Level 18.) The average change in fluency rates was .9, or almost one rating level; another student's improvement of one fluency level (from a 2 to a 3) means that student went from reading some phrasing with word by word to a rating of 3, or able to mostly phrase with some expression. In comprehension ratings the average gain was .95 or again almost one comprehension level. For example, one student went from a comprehension level of 1 (i.e., recalled

little or no information) to a level of 2 (i.e., recalled some events which may have been out of order).

Thus, based on averages, all students improved in letter recognition, text levels, fluency, and comprehension ratings. The results of these assessments show that the students in these classrooms made progress in reading. The effect of reader's theater as an instructional strategy, however, cannot be separated from the overall English/language arts instruction utilized by these teachers. The district average performance for students without disabilities in the course of an academic year is approximately 10 to 12 text levels and at least one level change in fluency and comprehension.

The students have learned to take ownership of their reading.

It should be noted that consistent, positive progress was made by all of the students with learning disabilities in these classrooms.

Final Thoughts

Engaging students with learning disabilities to take an active and sustained role in reading experiences is an important step in the development of literate students. Teaching students who struggle with reading can be a challenging and daunting task; teachers often seek an alternative to drill and practice that does not address the affective nature of the learning process. The importance of fluency is a critical part of the reading process and it should be embedded in reading instruction for all students. Readers' theater is an instructional strategy that can be used to engage students in a meaningful activity that may simultaneously improve fluency while enhancing social development. Further, improvement in fluency has been shown to positively impact reading comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading (Allington, 2001; Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Nathan & Stanovich, 2001; Rasinski, 2003). Other positive effects associated with readers' theater include improvement in student motivation and an increased interest in reading (Carrick, 2001; Rasinski, 2003; Rasinski et al., 2006). Most important, reader's theater can give all students a chance to successfully participate in a repeatedly enjoyable literacy experience. It can lead them down the road to becoming better readers or, as one student said, "When you read and read a lot, you get to read more books." What more could teachers ask for from their students?

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Tracy D. Garrett (South Carolina CEC), Assistant Professor; and **Dava O'Connor** (South Carolina CEC), Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Teacher Education, Lander University, Greenwood, South Carolina.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tracy Garrett, Department of Teacher Education, Lander University, Campus Box 6011, Greenwood, SC 29649 (e-mail: tgarratt@lander.edu).

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