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Increasing fluency instruction with struggling readers

Taurie Decker

St. John Fisher College, tdeck0891@gmail.com

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to examine if/how fluency impacts struggling readers. The participants were two fourth-grade teachers. Data were collected through teacher interviews, observations, field notes, and reflective notes. Findings indicated that fluency can impact other components of reading among struggling readers, and teachers facilitate fluency instruction in a variety of ways. Three major themes emerged from the findings: struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent readers, fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers, and struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies. This information is critical for educators when providing fluency instruction to struggling readers.

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By:

Taurie Decker

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to examine if/how fluency impacts struggling readers. The participants were two fourth-grade teachers. Data were collected through teacher interviews, observations, field notes, and reflective notes. Findings indicated that fluency can impact other components of reading among struggling readers, and teachers facilitate fluency instruction in a variety of ways. Three major themes emerged from the findings: struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent readers, fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers, and struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies. This information is critical for educators when providing fluency instruction to struggling readers.

Increasing fluency instruction with struggling readers

Reading is the most fundamental skill students must learn while in school, and fluency is an aspect of reading instruction (Keyes, Jacobs, Bornhorst, Gibson, & Vostal, 2017). Paige and Magpuri-Lavell (2014) define reading fluency through the major “indicators” of word identification: accuracy, pacing, and prosody that interact to encourage comprehension. For readers to become fluent, they are not just reading for accuracy but are reading for meaning with accurate pacing and expression. . Research indicates that fluency is one of the building blocks to good and effective reading comprehension. This is because it serves as a bridge between reading comprehension and word recognition (automaticity of reading) (Rasinski, 2012). Reading comprehension is the essence of reading, and in order for students to have good comprehension skills, they need to be proficient in fluency. Struggling readers and learners with special needs tend to have problems with decoding, automatic word recognition and fluency. Examining how teachers teach fluency instruction involving struggling readers is necessary because such research will help to unravel the reasons why struggling readers or even average students tend to struggle with flue

The best way to provide fluency instruction to struggling readers is by using and implementing specific fluency strategies in the classroom and in small group settings (DiSalle & Rasinski, 2017; Young & Rasinski, 2009). It is important that the fluency strategies that are in use are research-based strategies that actually improve students’ reading fluency. Over the years, more focus has been put on reading fluency and the need to raise the reading proficiency of students (Keyes et al., 2017; Morris & Gaffney, 2011; Swain, Leader-Janssen, & Conley, 2017). When you think about reading fluency, you may just think that it’s about reading fast, but that is a major misconception associated with reading fluency. It is not just about reading fast but reading with expression, prosody, and pacing, as well as reading for meaning. The purpose of

this action research is to examine how fluency/ lack of it impacts struggling readers, and how teachers teach fluency instruction. Given that fluency is a key component that students need to master to improve their reading, this action research project asks two questions: (1) how does fluency/lack of it impact learners? (2) In what ways do teachers facilitate fluency instruction among/with struggling readers?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that relates to and will be driving my action research is constructivism (Hein, 1991; Mraz, Nichols, Caldwell, Beisley, Sargent, & Rupley, 2013; Phillips, 2008; Stanovich, 1994). Constructivism is a theory about how people learn and construct meaning and understanding. People construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Constructivism refers to “the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves---each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning---as he or she learns” (Hein, 1991, p.1). Schema or background knowledge is critical in constructivism. In the constructivist learning theory, “learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it” (Hein, 1991, p. 4).

In order for students to improve in their fluency, they need to be given models of what fluent reading looks and sounds like. In order for students to learn how to construct meaning from text, “teachers must apply instructional strategies that will help readers transition from simple decoding of word to fluency word identification” (Mraz et al., 2013, p. 163). Students learn from experiencing as well as using their background knowledge. This is part of the demonstration phase of the constructivist teaching according to Cambourne (1988) (Phillips, 2008). The demonstration phase provides students with an expert model on how something is done, which enhances student learning. As stated by Phillips (2008), the ultimate goal of reading

is the construction of meaning from text. It is a cognitive and affective process where readers “actively engage with the text and build their own understanding.” Fluency is a constructive process because learners have to actively decode words, attend to the various semantic, syntactic, and visual cues and attend to prosody while reading. As students learn to read in a meaningful and expressive fashion, they are also learning to construct meaning from text and actively decode and read with prosody and expression (Mraz et al., 2013).

The constructivist theory focuses on how people learn and construct meaning. Stanovich (1994) stated that self-discovery is the most effective type of learning, most learning can be characterized as “natural”, and that cognitive components should never be isolated during the learning process. Students learn through both explicit instruction as well as what they already know, their background knowledge. It is these two components that the constructivist view looks at.

This theory is what will be guiding my action research project because students are active learners when they are reading. Fluency is taught to students in a variety of ways using many different strategies. The more students are exposed to fluency instruction the more they begin to construct the meaning from text.

Research Question

Reading is the most fundamental skill students must learn while in school. Given that fluency is a key component that students need to master and understand in their reading, this action research project asks two questions: (1) how does fluency/lack of it impact learners? (2) In what ways, if any, do teachers facilitate fluency instruction among struggling readers?

Literature Review

Prior to conducting action research, it is essential that existing literature on the research topic is reviewed and acknowledged. Gaining a deep understanding for varying perspectives, practices, and implications is necessary in order to conduct effective action research. In this literature review, three themes will guide the discussion on increasing fluency instruction among struggling readers. The first theme focuses on struggling readers, why they struggle, and how fluency impacts them. It is important to look at the factors that affect struggling readers and the importance of fluency to struggling readers' word recognition and comprehension. The factors that will be identified in this theme that can affect a student's fluency are phonics, word recognition, and decoding. The second theme looks at Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) in struggling readers and its impact and importance. Oral reading fluency is one of the five big ideas in reading instruction and is a great tool to use when working with struggling readers. The third theme discusses specific instructional strategies to increase struggling readers' fluency.

Struggling Readers and Reading Instruction

Phonemic awareness and word recognition skills impact a struggling reader's fluency greatly. Fluency is a key component to students' success in reading development. There are many reasons why struggling readers struggle with reading and these have an impact on struggling readers' fluency and reading success (Rasinski, 2012; Rasinski, 2017; Rasinski, Paige, Rains, Stewart, Julovich, Prenkert, Rupley, & Nichols, 2017; Staudt, 2009; Wagner & Espin, 2015; Yildeirim, Rasinski, & Kaya, 2017). There are many reasons why students struggle with reading and some of them can be controlled while others are beyond control. As discussed in Rasinski (2017) poverty, family and community dynamics, motivation, and reading competencies have been identified as factors that impact struggling readers' ability to read

fluently (National Reading Panel (NRP), 2002). Poverty has been shown to have the most powerful correlation to reading difficulty in struggling readers. The NRP identified phonemic awareness, phonics, or word decoding, reading fluency (automaticity in word recognition and expressive reading), and text and word comprehension as essential to student success in learning how to read (Rasinski, 2017). Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, and Heim (2005) and Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston (2009) noted that one of the major contributors to early reading difficulty is lack of foundational competencies (word recognition and fluency) and that if students do not develop early mastery of these foundational reading competencies, it is likely that these concerns will continue into the later grades and will have a profound effect on their comprehension and overall reading achievement. When students are struggling with phonics and word recognition at an early age and they are not given the proper instruction and practice with these skills, they will likely continue to struggle as they move into higher grades. In order for students to become more fluent readers, they need to have these foundational competencies. Staudt (2009) stated that for students to develop automaticity in reading they need to have decoding instruction time as well as time to practice their decoding skills which timed repeated readings provide. Decoding is a foundational skill that struggling readers need to begin to master so they can move to becoming fluent automatic readers. If students aren't given instruction and practice with decoding they will struggle with reading fluency.

Struggling readers have difficulty decoding words which leads to dysfluent reading and not reading for meaning (Wagner & Espin, 2015). Dysfluent readers also read less often which limits their exposure to text structure, vocabulary, and general knowledge (Wagner & Espin, 2015). Struggling readers don't have the same motivation as fluent readers do because it is difficult for them. In order to make students want to read more, we need to develop their

decoding competencies to an automatic and effortless level. That way they can read with good expression and focus their attention on reading for meaning (Rasinski, 2017). Paige and Magpuri-Lavell (2014) discussed the importance of fluency instruction by stating that fluent reading is critical because it allows the reader to “pivot their attention from decoding processes to understanding” (p. 91). Fluency instruction is vital for struggling readers. Wagner and Espin (2015) found in their study that word-oriented approach, that it automatic word recognition, is a necessary prerequisite to reading fluency (p. 547). When readers are lacking in their automatic word recognition, they are not able to read with automaticity and meaning. Many struggling readers read word by word and not in long phrases, which impact their comprehension of the text because they are focused so much on the decoding of the words.

Word recognition, accuracy, and automaticity are considered foundational skills in the Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts, and this suggests that word recognition and automaticity are the foundation for more advanced levels of literacy processing (Rasinski et al., 2017). Students begin to read more fluently once they have mastered these skills, and they also begin to improve their reading comprehension. Raskinski et al. (2017) found that an analysis of word recognition automaticity indicates that automaticity may be a major impediment to students’ progress in reading. Students that don’t have automaticity in their reading are more at risk for struggling with their reading. Stuard (2009) emphasized intensive word study with repeated reading because research indicated that the more a child knows about a word, the easier and faster that word can be read. A greater emphasis needs to be put on reading fluency in the primary and intermediate grades because it will lay a more solid foundation in reading and lead to higher levels of overall reading achievement and success for elementary students.

Fluency is important because it is a prerequisite to more sophisticated levels of reading and that is reading comprehension (Rasinski, 2012). Reading for meaning is the ultimate goal for reading and when struggling readers are not able to read with accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, they cannot read for meaning. Struggling readers are not able to use their cognitive resources on making meaning because they are using them on basic and fundamental competency in reading, word recognition. Paige and Magpuri-Lavell (2014) stated that many children struggle with reading because they lack the necessary phonological awareness skills. Phonemic and fluency instruction are seen to be paired in many of the studies discussed and this is because word recognition and fluency go hand in hand with one another, struggling readers that have low word recognition are identified most of the time as dysfluent readers. Yildeirim, Rasinski, and Kaya (2017) also noted that reading fluency is made up of two components- word recognition and expression, with word recognition being a large predictor to other aspects of reading, fluency and comprehension.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) in struggling readers and its impact and importance

Oral reading fluency (ORF) is one of the five big ideas in reading instruction and is shown to have a positive impact on struggling readers' fluency (Algozzine, Marr, Kavel, & Dugan, 2009; Grima-Farrell, 2014; Keyes et al., 2017; Malouf, Reisener, Gadke, Wimbish, & Frankel, 2014; Marr, Algozzine, Kavel, & Dugan, 2010; Swain, Leader-Janssen, & Conley, 2017; Sukhram & Monda-Amaya, 2017). Keyes et al. (2017), defined ORF as being made up of three components; accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. Dysfluent reading can impact both ORF and comprehension. According to Keyes et al. (2017), one way to increase ORF is by using a computer-based program or computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The use of CAI is not in place of daily instruction in the classroom, but is to be used as a supplemental tool to teacher-led

instruction. The fluency intervention that was used in this study through CAI was repeated reading (RR). Marr et al. (2010) support fluency intervention programs when they stated that teachers of struggling readers in particular must recognize the importance of incorporating explicit fluency-based instruction into their reading programs. In the study that they conducted, students used peer-mediated learning groups. A student coach (stronger reader) was partnered with a struggling reader and they would read identified passages from the teacher chorally. When teachers are identifying the “coach” they need to be using existing oral reading fluency data so that the struggling reader is paired with someone who will help them increase/improve him/her reading fluency. This intervention incorporates many elements of effective instruction such as modeling fluent reading, providing feedback, support with difficult words, opportunities for struggling readers to read a text more than once to build their confidence, and charting student progress.

According to Grima-Farrell (2014) choral reading or reading out loud in small groups, and as a class group were presented as beneficial in the modeling of effective reading strategies and enhancing the confidence of some students. One of the best ways to improve a student's fluency and oral reading fluency is through modeling fluent reading. When the students were able to work with one of their peers, they built much confidence in their oral reading fluency as well as charted their progress, which motivated students to practice and meet the goals they had set.

Goal setting as discussed in Keyes et al. (2017) study is one important aspect of the intervention. Through goal setting, students' oral reading fluency increased on intervention passages and untrained probes. The passages that were used with the students were consistent with the probes that were used previously with the students. Students monitored their progress to

achieving their set goals. Although many of the students that were a part of the study were still behind grade level the brief intervention they did receive allowed them to make substantial gains towards meeting they grade level standards. The students were able to see the progress they had made on their ORF over the course of the intervention, which was encouraging to them as many urban schools are often at a disadvantage and perform worse than more affluent schools. Marr et al. (2010) noted that the intervention used was easy to implement because students learn to monitor and document their own progress and improvements. Students take on the ownership of their own learning and can chart their progress, which encourages them to continue to practice and improve. The passages that were used increased gradually in difficulty to support a student in reaching his/her fluency benchmark and this progress is charted by the student. Malouf et al. (2014) stated that goal setting and graphing are both effective interventions to increase fluency. Setting a goal of fluency gives the students something to work towards. Setting goals gives the student a purpose to repeatedly read a passage. Students need to know the purpose of repeatedly reading a given passage. Having them set a goal and graph their progress gives them ownership of their learning. Charting allows students to see their oral reading fluency improvement over time, and it is why ORF measures and interventions are crucial in improving struggling readers' success.

Algozzine et al. (2009) focused their study on the effects of explicit and systematic oral reading fluency (ORF) practice on second grade students at risk for reading failure. The study resulted in the increase of students ORF scores through the use of peer-directed learning and repeated reading. Swain, Leader-Janssen, and Conley (2017) had similar results in their study that implemented three fluency interventions; repeated reading, audio listening passage preview (Audio LPP), and listening passage preview (LPP). The study found that the implementation of

repeated reading and listening passage preview are effective methods of increasing struggling readers ORF. Algozzine et al. (2009) discussed that the intervention used included; modeling, feedback, repeated reading, and charting progress. Modeling fluent reading for struggling readers is a key component in increasing students ORF. In order for students to increase their own ORF, they need to be able to hear what fluent reading sounds like. This can be done by the teacher or peer reading a passage or by having students listen to an audio recording of fluent reading. Both of these studies focus on the improvement of students ORF skills by using many interventions that were discussed earlier (ex. modeling and repeated readings).

Sukhram and Monda-Amaya (2017) found that the group that received corrective feedback benefited significantly while doing an oral repeated reading. This group as well demonstrated statistically significant differences in their comprehension on the expository passages they read from pre- to post-test. When students were given immediate corrective feedback, they were able to make corrections in the moment and not make the same mistakes on the second and third reading of the passage. Malouf et al. (2014) defines immediate corrective feedback as “correcting a student for an error immediately after the error occurs” (p. 270). This allows the reader to practice his/her reading with no errors, and it is the most beneficial type of feedback for improving oral reading performance. In Sukhram and Monda-Amaya (2017) study, it is discussed that oral repeated reading with corrective feedback is a relatively simple strategy that can be implemented by classroom teachers as well as other adults that are working with struggling readers’ When struggling readers are reading aloud with a teacher, it is important that they receive corrective feedback so that they don’t continue to make the same mistakes during each reading. All oral reading fluency intervention programs have a feedback component to

them, but the best type of feedback for struggling readers' is immediate corrective feedback while reading.

ORF (oral reading fluency) is best improved by modeling fluent reading. This was seen across all of the studies, and it was seen in a variety of ways. Charting allows students to see their oral reading fluency improvement over time, and it is why ORF measures and interventions are crucial in improving struggling readers' success. When struggling readers have low oral reading fluency, they are usually behind grade level in reading. This becomes a concern because when fluency is lacking, so is comprehension. Students are reading to decode words and aren't reading for meaning and understating. Not only did struggling readers' ORF increase but they were more motivated and engaged in reading.

Strategies to increase students' fluency: Emphasis on Repeated Reading

Several strategies can be used to facilitate fluency among struggling readers(Ari, 2015; DiSalle & Rasinski, 2017; Duran, 2017; Huang, Nelson, & Nelson, 2008; Morris & Gaffney, 2011; Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley, 2009; Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2017; Spencer & Manis, 2010; Staudt, 2009; Wagner & Espin, 2015; Wilfong, 2008; Young & Rasinski, 2009). The best way to provide fluency instruction to struggling readers is by using and implementing specific fluency strategies in the classroom and in small group settings (DiSalle & Rasinski, 2017; Young & Rasinski, 2009). It is important that the strategies that are used have been proven and studied to show that they improve students' reading fluency. Young and Rasinski (2009) identified modeled fluent reading, assisted reading, and repeated readings as three methods to use to promote fluency in reading. When modeling fluent reading, the student is not reading, but they are able to listen and hear what fluent oral reading should sound like. Assisted reading and repeated reading are strategies where the student is reading with a more

fluent reader and reading a text until a level of fluency is achieved. Rasinski et al. (2017) stated that the use of assisted reading is where a developing or struggling reader reads a text while simultaneously listening to a fluent oral reading of the text. When using assisted reading, the struggling reader can be listening to a teacher, peer, or tape recording of the text.

The ultimate goal of these fluency instruction strategies is to move struggling readers from just decoding word to actually getting meaning and understanding from what they are reading, comprehending the text. Repeated reading is one of the most commonly used fluency intervention strategies in the classroom and in small group settings. There is much evidence to prove that repeated reading works for improving students' fluency, but the studies have also proven that it improves students' confidence which is one major obstacle to overcome when trying to increase struggling readers' success. It was found that repeated readings can be used in a variety of ways with students. They can be differentiated to meet the needs of the student and can also be used to focus on many different components of fluency. These studies found that struggling readers benefit greatly by the use of repeated readings. Wilfong (2008) stated that the repeated reading strategy is when a piece of text is read and reread to help build fluency, confidence, and comprehension. When a teacher uses repeated readings with struggling readers, they are providing them with the opportunity to interact with the same text more than one time to build fluency skills. Musti-Rao, Hawkins, and Barkley (2009) study found that students' oral reading fluency increased with the use of repeated readings. The students showed increase in fluency rates when using the repeated reading passages, but did not meet end-of-year goal benchmark goals. One reason for this may be due to the fact that the end of year benchmark passages were read only once and the repeated reading passages were read four times and the study only focused on accuracy and speed. In Morris and Gaffney (2011) study, they used

repeated reading in order to improve a sixth grade student reading fluency, specifically his speed. The student read the text four times, and it was a text that he was previously exposed to during guided reading groups. When using repeated readings with students, it's important to remind them the purpose of reading and what component of fluency they should be focusing on. In these two studies not all three components of fluency were targeted: only speed in one and speed and accuracy in the other. Wilfong (2008) used repeated reading, listening-while-reading, assisted reading, and modeling with the use of poetry in his study. It was found that this type of intervention, using poetry, was well suited for struggling readers, reluctant readers, and enhanced reading motivation. This study provided students with focus and practice in all three of the components of fluency- prosody, accuracy, and expression.

In addition to repeated reading, another strategy is timed repeated reading (Ari, 2015; Staudt, 2009). In a study conducted by Staudt (2009), timed repeated readings were used because it was found that it was motivating for students when they recorded their gains in reading times. When students start to take ownership of their learning, they become more engaged and motivated. In Ari (2015) study, timed reading passages were used for repeated reading, and they were used to build reading speed and test comprehension. The passages that were used for the timed repeated reading were leveled based on the speed that they should be read in. Staudt (2009) found in her study that by adding timed repeated reading to instruction, it would help increase students' reading fluency. One way that timed repeated reading was found useful in these studies was it provided students with the opportunity to track and graph their progress and successes, which is found to be motivating to struggling readers. When students are given the opportunity to take control of their learning, they become more engaged and motivated.

It is important to remember that not all repeated readings should be timed as fluency isn't only about speed (prosody); it also encompasses accuracy and expression. Spencer and Manis (2010) reiterated this when they stated that "a focus on speed alone can actually inhibit reading growth in some students" (p. 85). Teachers need to be using repeated readings in other ways and not just for the speed component of fluency. Staudt (2009) stated that "combining phonics training with repeated reading would likely maximize the students' chances to become fluent readers" (p. 144). Most struggling readers are focusing so much on decoding unknown words that they are not reading for meaning and are reading at a slower pace. By combining phonics instruction and fluency instruction, students can begin to move from just decoding words to reading in short phrases and for meaning and understanding. When selecting texts to read with struggling readers' it is important to pick both narrative and expository texts and passages that are at the student's instructional level. In DiSalle and Rasinski (2017) study, a specific fluency intervention was used, The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL), with students to achieve proficiency in fluency. The FDL is a daily lesson where students are given short passages to read and the goal is mastering to the point of fluency. The lessons can be done in small groups, whole class, or one-on-one and involve modeling fluent readings, assisted reading, and word work. The main component of the FDL is the repeated reading that is used throughout the lessons as the main goal is for students to master a text with good fluency. The essential elements that the FDL must include are modeling fluent reading, assisted reading, repeated reading, and word work (Rasinski, 2017). By using this model students begin to feel a sense of achievement in their reading when they are able to master the reading of them poem. Staudt (2009) discussed the importance of using texts at students' instructional levels. When using texts and passages at

students instructional level there is more opportunity to focus on specific aspects of fluency-expression, prosody, and accuracy.

Other varieties of repeated reading have been documented (Huang, Nelson, & Nelson, 2008; Staudt, 2009; Wagner & Espin, 2015). When students are given immediate feedback on their reading, they are given a greater chance at making the appropriate changes they need to make in their reading. Two important elements of effective repeated reading were identified by Wagner and Espin (2015) these are modeling and corrective feedback. The corrective feedback that is given to students is done prior to them rereading a text or passage. When giving students corrective feedback, it needs to be immediate and in the moment so that it will have a positive effect on their reading. In Huang, Nelson, and Nelson (2008) study, it was found that repeated reading with feedback was successful in demonstrating positive results on struggling readers' fluency. The feedback that was given to students was immediate and this was reflected in their reading and WCPM (word count per-minute). Staudt (2009) used modeling and corrective feedback in her study. Both studies found that students' WCPM increased when using fluency-oriented instruction that involved corrective feedback and the only limitation that was found in Huang, Nelson, and Nelson (2008) study was the sample size. Wagner and Espin (2015) found that students need repeated practice with connected text rather than just isolated words in order to improve their fluency. Staudt (2009) study found that using poetry for intensive word study was beneficial to struggling readers. The study found that combining intensive word study with repeated readings of poetry proved to be successful for improving the reading fluency, word recognition, and comprehension skills of struggling readers.

Another fluency strategy that has been proven to be effective is choral reading (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2017). Paige and Magpuri-Lavell (2014) discussed a

strategy that can be used for assisted readings and this was whole-class choral reading. A whole-class choral reading is when all the students read aloud the same text, at the same time, and in unison with the teacher. This strategy is a great way to model fluent reading and it can be used in a one-on-one setting or small group setting as well. Rasinski et al. (2017) found that a common form of assisted reading is choral reading. Using choral reading with struggling readers can be motivating because they are able to read along with their teacher or a peer in their class. When using choral reading in the classroom, the teacher can pair up a more fluent reader with a less fluent reader and this provides the less fluent reader with a model of what the reader should look and sound like. By using this strategy, struggling readers can begin to move from the decoding process to reading for meaning and understanding (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). The great thing about assisted reading is that it can be used with both fluent and non-fluent readers, and is an easy intervention that can be implemented in an already existing reading program.

Reader's theatre is a fluency instruction strategy that is used to improve prosody and meaning when reading, and it is a type of repeated reading and assisted reading (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Guerin & Murphy, 2015; Mraz et al., 2013; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Reader's theatre is when students are given a script and assigned a specific part like they would be if they were performing in a play. Mraz et. al (2013) stated that reader's theatre provides teachers with a meaningful and purposeful way for incorporating repeated reading in the classroom. Reader's theatre is a more enjoyable way to engage struggling readers' in repeated reading. Many dysfluent readers are reluctant to participate in repeated reading because they are not engaged or motivated by reading the same passage or text over and over. Reader's theatre has a performance aspect to it that engages struggling readers. Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox (2009) found that students with varying oral reading abilities are motivated by

reader's theatre. Struggling readers tend to have little motivation and engagement when it comes to reading and this strategy has shown to increase that among struggling readers. Students are reading and rereading for a purpose, and they know this from the moment they receive their parts and scripts. When struggling readers are practicing their scripts and do their repeated reading, they keep in mind that they need to be reading with expression. In reader's theatre, the performance is through a student's expression while reading. The difference between reader's theatre and a play is that in reader's theatre, students have to "create the drama through their voices as they expressively read their parts without acting, changing positions on a stage, or using props" (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009, p. 360). Students have to reread their scripts several times to prepare for their final performance which makes reader's theatre another form of repeated reading. Reader's theatre focuses on intonation and phrasing aspect of prosody. When students are reading, they are delivering the performance through their expression. Young and Rasinski (2009) stated that this fluency instruction is aimed at improving prosody and meaning through performance. As struggling readers are practicing their scripts, they are improving their accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox (2009) study found that reader's theatre increased students' phrasing and expression over the eight weeks of fluency practice. This is a small sample size as only three students participated, so a larger sample size study would show a greater correlation of using reader's theater to increase students' fluency, specifically their expression and phrasing. Young and Rasinski (2009) found in their study that the students overall had an increase in their prosody and expression while reading and that was partially attributed to the emphasis on reading fluency through reader's theatre. It can be determined by these two studies that reader's theatre can be used to increase students' prosody

and expression while reading, but it does not show conclusive evidence that using it as the sole fluency strategy will make significant impact on a struggling reader's prosody and expression.

Young and Rasinski (2009) defined assisted and repeated oral readings as “two of the best ways to target fluency instruction” (p. 6). The instructional strategy that was used in this study is reader's theatre and how implementing it into a classroom would help improve a reader's fluency. The results showed that there was a significant gain in the students words read correctly per minute (WCPM) score. The students began the school year reading at 62.7 WCPM and ended the school year at an average of 127.6 WCPM (Young & Rasinski, 2009). The significant increase in the students WCPM was a direct result of implementing and using reader's theater in the classroom alongside the already implemented balanced literacy program. Similarly in Guerin and Murphy (2015) study, they found that repeated reading can be used in the classroom through activities such as choral reading and reader's theatre. The study showed that “fluency instruction is a vital aspect of reading instruction for adolescents” (p. 558). In order to improve struggling readers' success they need to be provided with fluency instruction. Young and Rasinski (2009) support using fluency instruction when they stated how the use of reader's theatre helped struggling readers, “being able to witness the unmotivated become motivated and the strugglers thrive was incredible” (p. 12). The use of this strategy proved to help struggling readers become motivated readers, it also is a fun and creative way to promote repeated reading which fosters reading fluency, build confidence, and make meaning when reading.

Implementing reader's theatre into the classroom can be done in a variety of ways but the ultimate goal and purpose of it is the performance at the end and the focus on intonation and phrasing while reading. In Young and Rasinski (2009) study, the participants would practice with their peers and the goal was for the less proficient readers to mimic the more proficient

reader, the more proficient reader was modeling fluent pace and prosodic features. Each day the students were participating in a different activity that revolved around the strategy of reader's theater. Each of the activities that they were participating in each day was providing them with the opportunity to reread their script and practice. Mraz et al. (2013) also found that the use of paired/partner reading was a necessary step in implementing reader's theatre into the classroom. When students are able to practice their scripts in a variety of ways they stay engaged with the text.

Conclusion

Reading can be hard for many students who are dysfluent readers. When struggling readers spend all their time decoding words, they are able to read for meaning and understanding. Yildeirim, Rasinski, and Kaya (2017) stated that reading fluency is a foundational skill that should be mastered in the elementary grades. If students are not given explicit fluency instruction at the elementary level, they will continue to struggle in reading as they get older. There are many different types of fluency instruction that can be used, but it was seen throughout this review that repeated reading is the most widely used. When discussing how teachers facilitate fluency instruction among struggling readers, it was seen that repeated readings, assisted readings, and modeling were used across most of the studies. It is important to remember that fluency instruction can easily be differentiated based on the specific needs of the struggling reader. When facilitating fluency instruction with struggling readers' all three components of fluency need to be focused on individually as well as together.

Some of the strengths evident from these studies and articles were the concrete examples that indicated the need for fluency instruction in the classroom and in small-group settings to improve struggling readers' fluency. In order for fluency instruction to be beneficial to struggling

readers, teachers need to understand what reading fluency is. For a reader to become fluent, he/she is not just reading for accuracy but is reading for meaning with accurate pacing and expression. By being aware of the impact that fluency instruction can have on struggling readers' success, teachers can begin to use fluency instructional strategies in the classroom and in small groups to increase students' fluency in reading. In every article, authors mentioned that studies and research needs to be continually done on the different types of fluency interventions and programs in order to know what specifically works and does not work for students. Many of the studies were conducted with small sample sizes which may not give the same result with large sample size. Further studies are needed with a variety of student population and sample sizes to better understand the issue at stake.

Method

Context

The research for this study took place in a suburban middle school located in Upstate New York. This middle school has grades fourth through sixth grade. According to the 2016-2017 New York State Report Card, the school in which the research was conducted has a total of 441 students. Two hundred and eight (47.2%) of these students are female and 233 (52.8%) are male. This school has a predominately white population, with 64.6% of its students being white. The remaining demographic breakdown in the school is; 15.6% Hispanic or Latino, 10.9% Black or African American, 5% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 3.9% multiracial. Five percent of the students are classified as English Language Learners, 10% of the students enrolled are had some learning disability, and 40% of the student population is economically disadvantaged. Of those students, 29% are eligible for free lunch, 7% are eligible for reduced-price lunch, and 64% do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

This school is one of ten schools in the district. The district has six elementary schools, two middle schools, one junior high school, and one high school. The district in total has 3,554 students, 1,723 (48.5%) of the students are female and 1,831 (51.5%) are male. The demographic make-up of the district is; 72.1% are white, 11.4% are Hispanic or Latino, 9.9% are black or African American, 3.2% are multiracial, 3.1% are Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. Of these students, 21% are eligible for free lunch, 5% are eligible for a reduced-price lunch, and 74% are not eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

The classrooms in which this research was conducted were a fourth general education classroom (pull-out group), with a student to teacher ratio of 4:1, and a RTI (Response to Intervention) classroom with a student to teacher ratio of 6:1:1. The study took place during the RTI block, and there was a teacher assistant (TA) with the teacher.

Participants

The participants in this study were two teachers. One was a fourth grade general education teacher and the other was an ELA RTI teacher who works with tier two and tier three students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade.

The ELA RTI teacher Bethany (pseudonym) has been teaching at this school for two months but had a total of 10 years of teaching experience. Bethany holds her certifications in childhood (1-6), special education (1-6), literacy (B-6 and 7-12), and Educational leadership (school building leader and school district leader). Before coming to this school in Upstate New York, she taught for 10 years at a rural school in Upstate New York. Bethany has taught first grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and was a literacy coach (K-5) at her old school. At this suburban school, she was the ELA RTI (Response to Intervention) teacher and worked with students who were receiving tier two and tier three support in ELA. She worked with students in

small groups and one-on-one, depending on what tier the students were in. Bethany had an Intervention Teachers' Assistant (TA) in her tier two groups which consisted of four to six students.

The fourth grade general education teacher Monica (pseudonym) has been teaching in this position for four months, but she had a total of six months of teaching experience. Monica had her certifications in childhood (1-6) and special education (1-6). She worked with small groups from all six of the fourth grade classrooms. The method of teaching that she was using was the pull-out method because she worked with small groups of no more than six or seven at a given time. She had two fluency groups that she worked with. Each of her groups met three times in a six day cycle for 30 minutes.

Data Collection

For this study, the data were collected through interviews, observations of teachers, and field notes. The first form of data collected was teacher interviews. The teacher interviews, both of which were formal, provided me with an insight into the experience of the teachers that I observed. Both interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken while conducting the interviews. The same questions were asked to both of the teachers. The interview questions focused on struggling readers and their fluency instruction (Interview Questions in Appendix A). The interview questions sought to know how the teachers provided fluency instruction to struggling readers. I wanted to find out why the teachers considered the students as struggling readers as well as how they taught fluency to struggling readers' in their classroom. Some of the questions that I asked the teachers included: (1) How important was it for their students to develop knowledge of the FAB five- phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonics, and (2) How important they thought fluency was to struggling readers

or to their reading success? I also asked them to describe the approach and strategies that they used to teach fluency and if teaching fluency to struggling readers was challenging? When discussing fluency instruction, it was important to know exactly what they were doing and why they chose specific strategies to use with their students, and if they felt they were working or not.

The second form of data collection method used was observation and field notes (Appendix B) of teaching fluency instruction in the classroom. The observation that I did was during the teachers' fluency instruction. I observed Bethany five times during 7th period, which was a forty-five minute block, while she worked with six fourth grade students. The students that she worked with during this period received both tier two and tier three RTI services. I observed Monica five times. All observations occurred during 1st period, which was a forty-five minute block, but she only worked with her groups for thirty minutes. The two groups that she worked with consisted of four to five fourth grade students who needed a focus on fluency instruction that they weren't getting from their normal classroom instruction. She met with each of her two groups three times in a cycle (the school has a six day cycle schedule). This allowed for enough data to draw conclusions that I have found through my research. The field notes allowed me to document what I saw in the classroom as well as what I did not see based on the interviews I had with both teachers prior to data collection. After the lessons, I read my notes and then wrote reflective notes, which consisted of my interpretations of the field notes based on what I observed. When I observed the lessons, I looked to see what fluency instruction and strategies the teachers were using with struggling readers. Another thing that I looked for when I observed was if the teachers were incorporating other components of the FAB five in their fluency instruction.

The third form of data collection was through the use of post-interview questions for both teachers (Appendix C). The teacher interviews, both of which were formal, provided me with an opportunity to talk about what I saw in my observations, and how it aligned with the literature. Both interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken while conducting them. The same questions were asked to both teachers. The reason for a post-interview in this study was to discuss with the teachers what I saw and how that related back to what they said in their interview prior to observation. In the post interview, I wanted to know what they would do differently if they were to repeat the lesson, the fluency strategies they thought worked well and the ones that did not. I also wanted to know the advice they would give another teacher who was planning fluency instruction for struggling readers?

Data Analysis

As I collected my data, many steps were followed in order to analyze my research. The first piece of data that I analyzed was the interviews (pre- and post-) I did with the two teachers I observed. Both of the interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken throughout as well. After conducting the interviews, I listened to both of them, and transcribed them. I paid close attention to their responses on the fluency strategies they used as well as the importance of fluency instruction for struggling readers. Many of the strategies they discussed aligned with the literature that currently exists about fluency instruction with struggling readers. Much of what they both discussed about the importance of fluency in readers aligned with the current literature on why struggling readers struggle with reading, and the impact it has on struggling readers fluency and reading success.

The next piece of data that I analyzed was the field notes taken when I observed the fluency instruction from both teachers. I typed up the field notes taken during all of the

observations of fluency instruction. My field notes were taken so that I was able to look back and remember what had been done in each of the lessons that I observed. I identified fluency strategies that were used and the type of instruction that both teachers were using with struggling readers. The strategies that I saw being used were repeated readings, reader's theatre, listening to reading, and choral reading. I found that much of what both teachers had said they did in their classrooms or strategies they used with struggling readers was seen during my observations of Bethany and Monica. I was able to code the field notes I had taken and identify themes from what I saw in both of the classrooms.

Finally the last piece of data that I analyzed alongside the field notes were reflective notes I took after each of the observations. I looked at my field notes as well as what I saw happen in each of the seven lessons that I observed. I typed my reflective notes up, and I focused on what I thought happened during the lesson and how I interpreted the events of the lesson. It was important for me to be able to sit down and really look at what I saw and how it aligned with the current literature on fluency instruction with struggling readers.

I looked for patterns among the three datasets. By carefully reading through the data, I was able to find areas that stood out and remained consistent throughout each piece of data that was collected. I was able to look at strategies that were used by both teachers and strategies that were discussed in the pre-interview aligned with what was being done in the classroom. To ensure credibility of data, I used various methods to collect my data in order to ensure triangulation. I used different forms of data to help me determine what ways teachers facilitate fluency instruction among struggling readers' and how lack of fluency impacts learners. After examining this data across multiple sources, three recurring themes emerged. The first theme was that struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent

readers. The second theme was that fluency instruction needed to meet the individual needs of struggling readers. The third theme was that struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies.

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this action research was to examine how two teachers taught fluency instruction to struggling readers in a middle school. Given that fluency is a key component that students need to facilitate their comprehension, I sought to find out how fluency/lack of it impacted struggling readers and what ways, if any that the teachers facilitated fluency instruction among struggling readers.

After analyzing all the data that was collected during the study, three distinct themes emerged from my findings. The first theme was that struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent readers. The second theme was that fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers. The third theme was that struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies.

Struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness

One of the major findings from this study was that struggling readers need phonics and phonemic awareness instruction in order to become fluent readers. This finding is in line with Staudt (2009) finding suggest that for students to develop automaticity in reading, they need decoding instruction and time to practice their decoding skills, which timed repeated readings provide. Decoding is a foundational skill that struggling readers need to begin to master so they can move to becoming fluent automatic readers. If students aren't given instruction and practice with decoding, they will struggle with reading fluency. The teachers in this study spent a large amount of time teaching decoding and phonics instruction to increase fluency of the students

they were working with. Bethany had her students split into two groups based on their needs. She then provided them with phonics instruction and fluency instruction. Much of the reason for the phonics instruction was due to the fact that this was an area of need for these students', and it was instruction that was not happening as much in the classroom anymore. Building those foundational skills of phonics and phonemic awareness was something that Bethany discussed in her pre-observation interview and practiced throughout my observations of her. I observed Bethany teaching a phonics lesson where she taught the hard and soft g sounds and soft and hard c sounds in words. She noted that there was a link between phonics and fluency and when students are still working on decoding a word, they are using more mental energy on the decoding and it hampers their fluency.

The teachers in the study identified phonics and phonological awareness as having a direct impact on reading fluency. Bethany stated in her pre-observation interview that when students are spending so much time on trying to decode a word, their reading fluency is instantly negatively impacted. I asked her in what ways she felt that vocabulary, phonics, and phonological awareness impacted the fluency of struggling readers. Below was her response:

...phonics, the same way I talked about decoding, their knowledge of syllable types and different sounds that letters can make will help them automatically recognize those unknown words. Phonological awareness, so their ability to manipulate sounds, hear different sounds, is really a foundational piece as well. When students don't have these foundational skills their fluency is going to be impacted.

Wagner and Espin (2015) found in their study that "a word-oriented approach that is automatic word recognition, a skill deficit for most struggling readers, is a necessary prerequisite to reading fluency" and that "word recognition is highly correlated with fluency" (p. 547). When

readers are lacking in their automatic word recognition they are not able to read with automaticity and meaning.

Rasinski et al. (2005) and Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston (2009) stated that difficulties in the foundational competencies (word recognition and fluency) contributed in a major way to reading difficulties early on and that if students did not develop early mastery of these foundational reading competencies, it was likely that these concerns will continue into the later grades and will have a profound, adverse effect on students' comprehension and overall reading achievement (as cited in Rasinski, 2017) Monica further asserted:

but we still do talk about what does that sound make, why does it make that sound, especially the kids who have fluency issues, because they will just read through the word and not exactly know, they will say a short a when it was supposed to be a long a and vice versa.

When observing her fluency instruction it was evident that she stopped at times and had students go back to words that were said incorrectly and had them first identify the letter sounds in the word before saying it. Decoding strategies were seen throughout my observations of both teachers when they were providing struggling readers with phonics and phonological awareness instruction. These strategies were then used and referred to when providing them with fluency instruction.

Dysfluent readers also read less often which limits their exposure to text structure, vocabulary, and general knowledge (Wagner & Espin, 2015). In the pre-observation interview with the Bethany (Reading Intervention Teacher), I asked her what other things she did to help struggling readers develop fluency. Her response to the question is highlighted below;

I have worked on building-in some independent reading time. I have found that often, struggling readers, even when homework is assigned, or teachers are expecting independent reading is happening on their own, it doesn't naturally happen. So, trying to ramp up the volume of reading because that's such another indicator of reading achievement is the volume of reading they are able to do, and I think it affects their fluency too.

We can see from Bethany's response that she helps struggling readers develop fluency by increasing their opportunity for independent reading. By helping struggling readers increase their independent reading time and encouraging them to do so, she believes that their fluency will increase.

Fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers

Another major finding from this study was that fluency instruction needs to be tailored according to the needs of each student. During the post-interview, Bethany noted that every student has different needs when it comes to reading. When asked what she thought were the needs of struggling readers in the area of reading, she reiterated that the most important thing was the knowledge of the skills they have deficit in and how one can intervene to help them address those deficits. In order to set goals for students, you need to know the needs and deficits of the students. The teachers in this study emphasized throughout the interviews and observations that meeting the needs of their diverse learners was one of the most important aspects to fluency instruction and instruction in general. In order to meet the individual needs of students, the two teachers in this study differentiated their instruction. The teachers had their lessons geared toward the needs of their students and made adjustments as needed. During my observation of Bethany, I noticed that she used the interactive read aloud to help the struggling

readers check for understanding and to model good reading. She repeated this in her interview when she said that “some of the students need to have meaning and understanding checks when either reading on their own or when listening to me read a book aloud.” Meeting her students’ needs was what drove this instruction that she implemented.

When selecting texts for students to read or use for repeated readings, both teachers made selections of texts that were at the readers’ instructional level. Staudt (2009) discussed the importance of using texts at students’ instructional levels. When using texts and passages at students’ instructional level, there is more opportunity to focus on their specific needs. In my interview with Bethany, she stated that finding texts at a student’s level is a key component and having leveled reading groups or guided reading groups that allows you to really work on the skills that are necessary to continue with their learning. Bethany had two groups in her class and they were created based on students’ needs, fluency level, and their reading level. The groups were structured in this way as she was best able to provide specific instruction to meet the needs of all her students. In my post interview, she said: “it’s important that the groups I have are made up of students who have similar needs or deficits because then, I am able to reach all of them when working with them.”

In my pre-observation interview with Monica, she noted that she was striving to make progress towards each of her student’s individual goals. The kids she worked with have vastly different goals so she strives to meet the needs of all of them. When observing her lessons, I found that she used stations a lot which provided her students with different opportunities to work on their fluency and work on the different components of fluency. The first station was a fluency game, the second station was audio recording their reading, and the third station was listening to reading. Each of these stations focused on different fluency components or skills. In

my post interview, when asked how she felt the stations went she said “I think they worked well and my kiddos stayed engaged and motivated. We used a lot of repeated readings and reading aloud and this was a way to change it up and keep them engaged and motivated when working on their fluency.”

Monica uses student fluency self-evaluations. The student identifies one goal that they want to work on next time they meet. I asked her how she used those to plan her fluency instruction, and she said that she looked at what they identify they need to work on alongside what she knows their areas of needs are. Giving students’ ownership of their own learning is something that was discussed in both of my interviews with the teachers. Student ownership of their learning is an important part of both the teachers’ instruction and aligned with much of the literature out there on effective fluency instruction among struggling readers.

Struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies

The third major finding from this study is that struggling readers need to be provided with a variety of different types of fluency strategies. Young and Rasinski (2009) identified modeling fluent reading, assisted reading, and repeated readings as three methods to use to promote fluency in reading. Repeated readings were used by both of the teachers in this study and they were used in different ways. Monica discussed the types of strategies that she used with her fluency group.

One of the strategies that we are really keying in on is repeated reading. We read something once and we call it a “cold read” and we do it for a minute and then the next one we call a “warm read” so they become a little more familiar with it and it’s the second time they read it and our third time would be a “hot read” and it shows they have gotten further each and every time.

In my observations, I saw that during the “cold read,” Monica would first go over vocabulary that was in the passage and then she would read it to them out loud as they followed along. The students would then join her in reading the passage and would note how long it took them to do the first read. Bethany also had her perspective about the fluency strategies:

I think that repeated readings is another thing that’s figuring out how to make it new and different for them each time because they could easily become robots so that engagement piece, what are you adding to the mix that’s keeping them engaged the second time you read a text or a third time you read a text that will keep them motivated and with you and still feeling like they are working towards a goal.

Two important elements of effective repeated reading were identified by Wagner and Espin (2015) and they are modeling and corrective feedback. When observing Bethany, I found that when she was using repeated readings with students, she would provide the students with immediate corrective feedback. This was the opportunity for her to correct a student on an error, and have them fix it in the moment:

In the moment feedback, they are able to see the error, talk about what they didn’t get right, and then what to do in order to get the word correct the next time. If students aren’t getting that feedback, then the purpose of the repeated reading isn’t being met.

This insight into the use of corrective feedback is in line with Sukhram and Monda-Amaya (2017), who found in their study that the group that received corrective feedback benefited significantly while doing an oral repeated reading. In this study, both teachers provided struggling readers with corrective feedback when using repeated readings. In my interview with Monica, she discussed some of the other strategies that she used for fluency instruction: we do choral reading, we also do popcorn reading which isn’t always associated with fluency, but it

helps them keep track if they are reading in their head and hearing a model out loud. According to Grima-Farrell (2014), choral reading or reading out loud in small groups and as a class group were beneficial in the modeling of effective reading strategies and enhancing the confidence of some students. One of the best ways to improve a student's fluency and oral reading fluency is through modeling fluent reading. This is because many struggling readers have low confidence and motivation when it comes to reading and reading out loud.

Monica used stations in her fluency group during two of the observations that I did. There were three fluency strategies that the students participated in. The three stations were listening to reading (audio book), recording reading, and a fluency game. This was similar to Swain, Leader-Janssen, and Conley (2017) study where they implemented three fluency interventions: repeated reading, audio listening passage preview (Audio LPP), and listening passage preview (LPP). The study found that the implementation of repeated reading and listening passage preview are effective methods of increasing struggling readers ORF. When I asked Monica about the site that she used for the listening to reading, she stated that the cool thing about this site was that it knows about how long it should take them to read along, and it will tell them that they read it too fast, and they need to go back and reread it. Monica noted that she liked the site because the students can make selections on books that they are interested in reading about and she receives that information. So when she is picking books for them, she tries to pick ones that are of interest to them. Audio books are used along with recording readings in her fluency stations.

Reader's Theater is another strategy that was used by both of the teachers in this study and was found to be an effective strategy among various researchers: Mraz et al. (2013) stated that reader's theatre provides teachers with a meaningful and purposeful way for incorporating repeated reading in the classroom. Reader's theater is a more enjoyable way to engage struggling

readers' in repeated reading. Reader's theater has a performance aspect to it that engages struggling readers. In my interview with Bethany, she stated that she feels that for reader's theater to be effective with struggling readers, they need to work on it with a teacher or a TA. By working with a teacher or a TA, students have more structure, and it also provides the opportunity to give students in the moment feedback when reading their scripts. During my observations of Bethany, I saw that she used reader's theatre with her students because she had a teacher assistant (TA) in the classroom with her. Having the students work with a teacher when doing reader's theater provides the necessary scaffolding that helps to maximize the benefits of reader's theater. Students are provided with feedback in the moment. She has a poster provided in the classroom for the students to refer to when they are doing readers theater, and it has the expectations of what is done in each of the four days. In my interview with Monica, she observed that reader's theatre is a fun way to focus on expression and pace because a lot of times, characters are talking. This corroborates the findings of Young and Rasinski (2009) who stated that reader's theater can be used to increase fluency instruction by improving prosody and meaning through performance. As struggling readers practice their scripts, they improve their accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. In my observations, I found that both teachers were able to implement reader's theater into their instruction and that they provided students with the purpose of reader's theater. Both teachers spent time going over what students' voices should sound like when reading a script because their voice and expression are what make the performance. For instance when Bethany was introducing the scripts to the students, she asked them what they should do with their voice when they see an exclamation point or a question mark. Students' voices should change when they see a question mark or an exclamation point

and this is a vital thing to go over when using reader's theater. If students aren't changing their voice and expression while reading their script, then this strategy isn't being used effectively.

Overall, the data collected throughout the study highlighted three themes: struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent readers, fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers, and struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency.

Implications

The findings of my study indicate various implications for teachers who facilitate fluency instruction with struggling readers. It is important to be aware that struggling readers have a variety of needs in reading. Struggling readers usually have needs in more than one area of reading, and this was supported by both my findings and the findings of various authors. If a student has a deficit in any one area (phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) it is going to affect all of the other components (Reading Intervention Teacher Interview, 2018). It is important that teachers are aware that struggling readers have a variety of needs and deficits that impact their reading fluency. Being aware that students have a variety of needs and deficits will better help teachers prepare and implement fluency instruction among struggling readers'.

Another implication of this study is that teachers need to use a variety of fluency strategies with struggling readers. By using a variety of strategies, students stay more engaged and motivated. The other important reason that teachers need to use a variety of fluency strategies is that each of the strategies focuses on the different components of fluency. This goes along with the importance of knowing the variety of needs and deficits of your students. Teachers need to be picking fluency strategies to use that will work on students' specific needs.

Repeated readings and reader's theater are just two examples of fluency strategies to use with struggling readers', and they both have a focus on different components of fluency. In order for any fluency instruction to be successful, students need to be given a model of what fluent reading looks like and given opportunities to practice reading aloud and on their own.

Lastly, teachers need to provide struggling readers with immediate feedback during fluency instruction for it to be effective. In order for any fluency instruction to be successful, students need to be given immediate feedback on their progress. If a student is not given immediate corrective feedback when using one of the many fluency strategies, they may continue to make the same mistake over and over again. Timely feedback is so important for students because they can immediately make a correction and correct the mistakes the next time they see it. Students need to be given feedback for the instruction to be authentic and effective. This finding is supported by findings from the literature on fluency. This provides students the opportunity to learn in the moment and also see their own progress. Having conversations about their growth over time can happen during this feedback. Each of the two teachers in this study gave students immediate feedback and immediate corrective feedback when they were working with them. The teachers were providing the students with authentic and in the moment feedback on what they were both doing well, and what they need to fix or continue working on.

Conclusion

The main questions of this study are: how does fluency/lack of it impact learners? In what ways, if any do teachers facilitate fluency instruction among struggling readers? The theoretical framework that guided this study was constructivism, which is a theory on how people learn and construct meaning and understanding. People construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.

This study is important because it allowed for an examination of the types of fluency instruction teachers are providing and using with struggling readers, and how lack of fluency impacts learners. Fluency is a vital component of reading instruction with struggling readers. This study sought to find out what types of fluency strategies teachers are using with struggling readers. The qualitative data collection tools that I used to conduct my research included teacher interviews, observations, field notes, and reflective notes. Findings from this study indicated that struggling readers need phonics instruction and phonemic awareness to become fluent readers. In addition, fluency instruction needs to meet the individual needs of struggling readers, and struggling readers need to be provided with varying types of fluency strategies.

Limitations

If I were to conduct this study again, there would be some changes that I would like to implement. First, I would have collected data over a longer period of time. More data would have been helpful in providing deeper evidence of the impact that a lack of fluency has on learners and how teachers facilitate fluency instruction among struggling readers. There was not enough time to observe the fluency lessons, so the data used for this study could have been improved through prolonged stay in the field to improve validity. This would have allowed me to see a wider variety of fluency strategies used with struggling readers. Secondly, this study was only conducted in one grade level. Using multiple grades levels would have improved the outcome of the study. Finally, having students participate in the study would have given more insight into struggling readers. This would allow me to see how the different fluency strategies help students build their fluency skills.

The length of the data collection time did not allow me to observe more than seven fluency lessons, more lessons observed would have been helpful for deeper analysis. During the

weeks designated for data collection, there were two days of New York State ELA testing and all RTI services were cancelled for both days. In addition, one of the teachers I was observing got pulled to help with math instruction, so I was only able to observe three of her lessons. Spring break also eliminated some days for data collection.

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Appendix A

Pre-Observation Interview Questions for both teachers

- 1) How long have you been teaching?
- 2) What areas do you hold certifications in?
- 3) How long have you been in this school? What grade levels have you been working with?
- 4) Can you talk about your philosophy of teaching or what is your belief about teaching?
- 5) Can you talk about your work with struggling readers? How long have you been working with them and what is your experience like?
- 6) Help me articulate what you think are the needs of struggling readers in the area of reading?
- 7) How do you facilitate motivation among struggling readers?
- 8) How important is it for them to develop knowledge of the FAB five- phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonics?
- 9) How important do you think fluency is to struggling readers or to their reading success?
- 10) As a teacher, in what ways if any do vocabulary, phonics, and phonological awareness impact fluency of struggling readers?
- 11) In my research I am trying to investigate the factors that affect fluency instruction and the strategies that teachers use to teach fluency---Can you describe the approach and strategies that you use to teach fluency?
- 12) How effective are these approaches and strategies?
- 13) Let's talk about specific strategies like repeated reading, reader's theatre etc. Can you talk more about these? How successful have you been with these strategies?
- 14) What other things do you do to help struggling readers develop fluency?
- 15) Would you describe teaching fluency to struggling readers as challenging? If so, explain what makes it challenging.
- 16) How do you collaborate with other teachers to facilitate your work with struggling readers?
- 17) Do you get parents involved in your quest to promote the students' fluency? If so, how and what benefits have you seen from this practice?

Appendix B

Reflective Notes

Monica's Lessons

Lesson 1- I think that the stations worked really well for the students. She only has four students in this group so they all had the opportunity to do each of the three stations. One thing that I thought was great was she took the time to go over all three of them before sending the kids to do one. It seemed as if she took this time because it was the first time they would be doing stations and she was able to give them her expectations when they are working at a station either independently or with a partner. When she modeled the audio recording of reading she made sure to read with expression, good pace, and accuracy as this was a model to the students of what fluent reading should sound like.

I interpreted the events as being chosen to best meet the needs of the students in this group. She made sure to choose activities for the stations that would target the areas of need in fluency for her students. In looking back at my interview with her a lot of what she said in her interview aligned with the practice that she was doing in her group. By providing the students with a variety of opportunities to practice their fluency was the driving factor in her instruction.

In my observation of what she was doing with the students I found that the students stayed engaged in the whole time. She made sure to check in with them when they were at their stations and assisted in some technical difficulties that they were experiencing. Having the opportunity to talk with her after the lesson was great because I got some more insight on the strategies she chose for the stations. The listening to reading seems to be a great tool for the students and there are many features that can be used on that site but she did say that she has to preview the texts before picking them as they are not all read fluently.

Lesson 2- The students were more independent with the stations because she repeated the same ones. This time they were able to spend more time at them and with their reading aloud and fluency practice. I noticed that Monica spent extra time with some of the students as they were doing the listening to reading station. She was listening to them read along with the audio recording of the text. She had to remind two students to slow down their reading because they were ahead of the text. This station allows them to listen to a book read fluently and read along with it.

I think the use of the stations work well with this group of students because they all target the different components of fluency. Not only is this an opportunity for practice but the stations provide a variety of different approach to fluency instruction and practice for the students. Not only did I observe that the students were engaged but Monica was recognizing that they were all on task and could hear them whisper reading aloud. This is something that she reminds the students all the time because many of them have anxiety when it comes to reading out loud. By reading aloud she is able to check in and make sure that they are reading fluently.

The students' self-evaluation is a great tool to use because the students are using self-monitoring which is a very motivating tool to use with many students. They rate themselves on their fluency and write one goal that they want to work on next time. This allows Monica to plan her instruction to meet the needs of the students. It's important to give the students ownership of their learning and using a goal that they want to work on the next time when planning her next lesson is vital. She wants to know what the students want to work on and what goals they have for themselves so she can help them achieve them.

Lesson 3- She introduced a new passage to them that they will be doing a repeated read or as she calls it a “cold” read, “warm” read, and “hot” read with. This is a repeated reading of the same passage and each time the students are becoming more fluent when reading it aloud. One thing that I liked about what she did was with the students is she first went over the vocabulary that was in the text before reading it. She had students use context clues from the text to figure out the definition. After the students were done defining the words she went over each of the words and this provided time for them to talk about the meaning of the words and any misunderstandings.

Teacher modeled reading for the first time reading through the passage. Monica also reminded students that even when she is reading they need to be tacking with their finger and reading along with her in their head. When she was reading aloud to the students she was attending to punctuation and would stop and ask the students what do I do when I see a period and what do I do with my voice when I see a question mark. Then the students read along with her for the second read. This was their “cold” read because it was the first time they were reading the passage. When the students were reading she was giving corrective feedback in the moment so that students could make corrections then and it would prevent them from repeating errors on the second and third read.

I noticed that she still incorporated the listening to the reading in this lesson. The same website was used for the audio books as was used in the previous two lessons (epic). She reminds students to read aloud along with the audio book. The other thing that she had in this lesson that was also used in the previous two lessons was the students’ fluency self-evaluations and goal setting.

Bethany’s Lessons

Lesson 1- This is the first time that she is doing reader’s theatre with this group of students so she went over what it is and the expectations when participating in it. Bethany had made a poster with the daily reader’s theatre expectations on it so that way students could reference it. The first thing she did was go over that this is over a four day period and that it doesn't all happen on one day. The purpose of reader’s theatre is to build expression and pace when reading. When going over the expectations for each day she discussed the reasons why they were doing the specific things on specific days. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about it after going over the poster. The first day was to read the story that the script would be derived from. Bethany was going to read aloud the story to the students but they asked her if they could take turns and read aloud it to her (two students were in this group). While she was listening to the students she gave them corrective feedback on some words that they struggled to decode or said incorrectly. Another thing that I thought was great that she did was stop at certain points in the story and talk about what was happening and asked them to predict what they thought might happen. This builds the students comprehension of the text and making meaning when reading.

The second part of the period was focused on phonics and phonemic awareness with the other four students in the group. She works with this group on letter sounds and scooping their words. The focus was on the long e sound. She gave each of the students a book that had long e sounds in and had them identify the words by writing them down. When the students were independently reading she would “tap in” to them which meant she wanted them to whisper read to her so she was able to check for fluent reading and using their scooping strategy when getting

to unknown words. This part of her instruction has a strong focus on phonological awareness, phonics, as well as fluency. She is building the students phonemic awareness and phonological awareness as this is a foundational skill that needs to be mastered to read fluently.

I feel that with this group of students and their needs she needs to have phonics instruction, phonemic awareness instruction, and fluency instruction. Phonics instruction is something that they are no longer getting in seclusion in their classroom as they are in fourth grade. By building up these foundational skills the students can start to focus on building their fluency. The use of reader's theatre works well in this setting because it is a small group and the two groups have been made based on the individual student needs. When Bethany introduces reader's theatre to the students she really makes it engaging and fun for the students and that it's a fun way to practice your expression when reading as well as speed or pace. She continually provides immediate feedback to the students she is working with and allows them the chance to correct errors so that they don't continue to make the same errors repeatedly.

Lesson 2- The two students that are doing reader's theatre are given their individual parts and scripts today. She reminds them that this is the time for them to build their fluency and pacing while reading. Before having the students read on their own she reviews what you do with your voice when you see certain punctuation (question mark, exclamation point). Bethany has the two students practice their lines individually two times before they read them aloud to her. She gives them in the moment corrective feedback when they read them aloud. She reminds one student that she has to change her voice when she sees a bolded word in a sentence and has the student practice it after she models how it should sound. That in the moment feedback is so important for reader's theatre to be successful and a useful strategy for students to use to build their fluency.

The second part of the lesson is focused on phonics instruction. Bethany sings a song to the students to help them remember when a letter makes a soft sound "These three letters soft and c, e, i, e, i, y" this helps students remember that when they see a c after an e, i, or y it is going to make a soft c sound. She then gives them words to spell out on the table that have the soft c sound and they have to spell it out and then box in all the sounds in the words. By doing this she is checking that students are able to correctly spell and identify sounds within a word. She then goes over each of the words individually with the students. After this phonics instruction the students are then given books to practice what they have learned and identify words with the soft c sound. She reads the first four pages aloud and reminds students to track with their fingers and to write down words with the soft c sound as she is reading. When the students read independently she "taps in" to them and they whisper read to her and she is checking their fluency.

The phonics instruction that she is providing them is done in a way that keeps the students engaged. She has the students write the words on the table with dry erase markers. When she gives the students the words another thing that I noticed she does is she really stresses the sound the c is making in the word because she does give them a couple words that have the hard c sound. The quick check-ins she does with them when they are reading by having them read aloud allow her the opportunity to check their fluency and give them feedback on their reading.

Lesson 3- The two students that are doing reader's theatre are practicing with each other. They are reading their parts aloud with one another to practice for the performance that will be the next time they meet. Before having the students read together she reviews what you do with your

voice when you see certain punctuation (question mark, exclamation point). Bethany has the two students practice their lines together a few times before having them read aloud to her. She gives them in the moment corrective feedback when they read them aloud.. That in the moment feedback is so important for reader's theatre to be successful and a useful strategy for students to use to build their fluency.

The second part of the lesson is focused on phonics instruction. Bethany sings a song to the students to help them remember when a letter makes a soft sound "These three letters soft and c, e, i, e, i, y" this helps students remember that when they see a g after an e, i, or y it is going to make a soft g sound. She then gives them words to spell out on the table that have the soft c sound and they have to spell it out and then box in all the sounds in the words. By doing this she is checking that students are able to correctly spell and identify sounds within a word. She then goes over each of the words individually with the students. After this phonics instruction the students are then given books to practice what they have learned and identify words with the soft c sound. She reads the first four pages aloud and reminds students to track with their fingers and to write down words with the soft c sound as she is reading. When the students read independently she "taps in" to them and they whisper read to her and she is checking their fluency.

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Lesson 4- Students perform their script for the teacher and the other group. She reminds the students to read with expression and to pay attention to all the punctuation. Encourages the two students throughout the performance and at the end points out the things that they both did good and even something that they improved on, which is reading at an appropriate rate.

The students seemed to be very engaged and motivated when they were participating in their performance. I think it was great that she gave them feedback right after the performance because they did a great job. It's so important that students receive that in the moment feedback because then it makes the activity more authentic and they can learn from it.

She does review on the hard and soft g and c that was done in the previous phonics lesson. The students are then reading a new book that she uses for the students to come up with similarities and differences to the previous book they read. She has students fill out a graphic organizer on the similarities and differences for the two main characters from the two books. This is some goof comprehension practice for the students and they are also reading along with her in their head as she reads the new book out loud.

Appendix C

Post-Observation Interview Questions for teachers

Monica's Post-Interview Questions

1. After teaching these children for these past weeks, tell me how you feel about your pedagogy or if you implemented what you planned. If not, why were you not able to implement some of your original plans?
2. What did you notice in your students during this period of my observation?
3. Are there any new insights about teaching struggling readers that you got?
4. What strategies do you think worked out well and which ones did not?
5. Do you feel that the stations worked well with the students? If yes why and If no why not?
6. What can you do differently if you were to repeat these lessons?
7. Based on your teaching of fluency, how would you advise another teacher who is planning fluency instruction for struggling readers?
8. What components do you think are important for teachers to take into consideration when planning fluency instruction?

Bethany's Post-Observation Questions

1. After teaching these children for these past weeks, tell me how you feel about your pedagogy or if you implemented what you planned. If not, why were you not able to implement some of your original plans?
2. What impact do you feel that phonics and phonological instruction has on this group?
3. What fluency strategies do you think worked out well and which ones did not?
4. Why do you feel that these strategies worked well and will you continue to use them with this group?
5. What can you do differently if you were to repeat any of your lessons?
6. Based on your teaching of fluency, how would you advise another teacher who is planning fluency instruction for struggling readers?

7. What components do you think are important for teachers to take into consideration when planning fluency instruction?