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Once More With Feeling: Elementary Classroom Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Reader's Theater

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ONCE MORE WITH FEELING: ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TEACHERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READER'S THEATER

By
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in partial fulfillment
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the most hardworking, loving, and supportive man I know. Dad, watching you teach first gave me my passion to be in the classroom. Thank you for always answering my questions and encouraging my love of learning. I love you!

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ABSTRACT

Due to the No Child Left Behind policy of 2001, school systems are held to a higher standard with more advanced curricular aims. The resulting intense focus on content leaves little time for extracurricular activities such as the arts. Yet, educators may still include the arts in their classrooms by integrating the arts into curricular content. For example, the use of an arts integrated reader's theater gives teachers the opportunity to integrate all four strands of the arts and teach oral reading fluency.

This study was guided by the enquiry of how reader's theater integrates the arts and influences student oral reading fluency. Literature was collected and analyzed with three overall guiding sections: the arts, oral reading fluency, and student skill development. Furthermore, two third grade educators were interviewed on their use of reader's theater and its perceived effects on their students' oral reading fluency.

Interview data showed that reader's theater does integrate the arts; however, drama and the visual arts were used much more commonly than music and dance. Interview data also showed that students did improve their oral reading fluency with the use of reader's theater. Because students had a reason to reread the text, they practiced more frequently with more motivation. Furthermore, reader's theater allowed students the opportunity to build confidence, creativity, critical thinking, comprehension, and collaboration. In summary, an arts integrated reader's theater brought creativity to the classroom and taught oral reading fluency in an effective and engaging manner.

Key words: Reader's Theater, Arts Integrated, Fluency, Read Aloud, Comprehension, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Drama, Prosody, Rate, Automaticity, Accuracy

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INTRODUCTION

The much-read author, C.S. Lewis, once stated, “The literary man re-reads, other men simply read” (Lewis, 2002). With each read-through, a story seems to change. A new and deeper understanding, or different idea, is reached, and the reader is left with knowledge that captures both the mind and imagination. To reach this realm of re-reading for understanding, one first must be able to read fluently and comprehendingly.

Oral reading fluency, a student’s ability to read with prosody, automaticity, accuracy, and rate, is a much-researched topic (Richardson, Morgan, & Fleener, 2011). Students are struggling in the current schools’ systems. In a study conducted by the NAEP (2002), only 55 percent of 1,136 fourth graders could read fluently (“NAEP - Percentage of Students, by NAEP Oral Reading Fluency Scale Level,” 2002).

Because it is important that a student read well, a strong emphasis is placed on discovering the most effective method of improving reading education (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009). For example, the repeated reading is a strategy wherein the student re-reads the text multiple times in order to become more fluent and familiar (Chard, 2000). However, there is an additional strategy that is worth the effort. Reader’s theater is a researched method that both improves student literacy and engages all students to participate (Beers, 2002).

It is a well-known fact that students learn in different ways and through varying means (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). However, there are some methods that engage all learning modalities. The involvement of creativity, for example, allows students engage their imaginations and assimilate information. This mental acuity and flexibility leads to a higher form of critical thinking (“Bloom’s Taxonomy | Center for Teaching | Vanderbilt

University,” n.d.). Therefore, students who participate in reader’s theater may be able to think more deeply and with greater understanding about the text they are reading and performing. This quest to effectively engage students in the arts and teach students to read fluently begets a series of questions that guided this study (Appendix A).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the importance of oral reading fluency, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on varying ways to teach students. Rasinski (2006) suggests that the repeated reading strategy is the preferred method for fluency instruction. However, much research also exists on the benefits of reader's theater (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010). The main difference between the two strategies is in the incorporation of the arts.

Fluency

To read with fluency, a student must read with prosody, automaticity, accuracy, and rate (Beers, 2002). To teach students to read, teachers are utilizing the repeated reading strategy (RR). The RR strategy, as defined by Young and Nageldinger (2014), is a reading activity whereby students are given a text and asked to re-read it multiple times. With each read-through, the student hopefully improves in the four areas of fluency.

However, the RR strategy is lacking in one important area. Per research completed by Chard and Tyler (2000), struggling readers quickly become bored with re-reading the same text. They lack a motivation and a purpose. There is no excitement in simply repeating the same text over and over, and students quickly become discouraged.

Moran (2006) noted that drama is the key to harnessing a student's imagination and enhancing it for learning. As students re-read the text, they read with their impending performance in mind. Therefore, students are almost unconscious in their learning (Clementi, 2010). As students rehearse their lines, they develop the four tenets of fluency: prosody, automaticity, accuracy, and rate.

Prosody. Prosody is defined as the intonation and emphasis the reader utilizes while reading aloud (Beers, 2002). For fluent readers, reading with prosody is almost

second nature. However, per Brooks and Nahamias (2009), struggling readers must be consistently exposed to examples of prosody to effectively practice and build upon their own skills. In reader's theater, students must both listen to skillful read-alouds and practice their tones and rhythms. In a successful oral fluency lesson, first, the teacher will model the correct reading of the scripts. Students will be able to hear the prosodic reading by the teacher and will model their reading after it. Second, the students will participate in choral reading. As the students read together, one reader's intonation and rhythm feeds into another's. Third, students are given their individual parts. Students soon begin to understand their characters as they read and re-read the text. The readers are exposed to a new world of varying thoughts, motivations, feelings, and actions. Students are told to read with feeling, and to express certain emotions such as anger, happiness, sadness, joy, fear, frustration. Brinda (2008) discovered in a study with her own class that as students uncovered the emotions and thoughts of their characters, they naturally began to read with the expressions of their characters.

Finally, the performance aspect of reader's theater ensures that students desire to read with correct intonation and rhythm. In reader's theater, students cannot afford to read robotically because they are performing. They must embody their characters and read with feeling. As Clementi (2012) observed, for reader's theater to be effective, the emphasis must be placed, not on memorization of lines, but on the text and the students' portrayal of its meaning. Unlike a play, there is no vibrant set to convey meaning. Students must truly understand the text and read well to capture the meaning of the text.

Automaticity. Automaticity is defined as the skill by which students recognize words without conscious thought (Beers, 2002). If a student is a fluent reader, he can

recognize words instantly without needing to stop to decode them, thereby losing comprehension. There are two elements that comprise automaticity: new vocabulary and sight words (Manning & Manning, 1995). Sight words are high frequency words that students will see often in their studies (Beers, 2002). Keehn, Harmon, and Shoho (2008) suggest previewing new vocabulary words with students to build their sight word lists. However, it is the repeated reading that will help students achieve automaticity. As students read the text multiple times, they become more familiar with the vocabulary until their reading becomes automatic.

The goal of reader's theater is to help the student reach automaticity in as many texts as possible. Reader's theater gives the student a reason to read a text enough times for that text to become automatic. With the repeated reading, a student becomes so familiar with the text that he no longer actively thinks about each individual word. The student will read smoothly and effortlessly. Indeed, not only will the student become more fluent, but he will be able to recognize words without decoding and focus more mental energy comprehending the text (Beers, 2002).

In a study completed by Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox (2009), a reader's theater intervention program was implemented with struggling third grade students. Each week, the students were given a new reader's theater script and told to work on their roles for thirty minutes. Students worked individually, in partners, or with a group. Even though whole classes participated in the study, three students were chosen for analysis. These students were Daniel, Andy, and Jacob. By the end of the eight-week study, Daniel, whose automaticity was already high, remained high. Andy, who received the lowest

accuracy score before the study, showed no overall growth in accuracy. Jacob, however, progressed from reading at a fourth grade level to a fifth grade level (Clark et al., 2009).

Accuracy. Accuracy is defined as the ability for a student to correctly decode and identify words (Beers, 2002). As the student reads the text multiple times, he will become more familiar with the sounds and meanings of the words. Unfamiliar vocabulary becomes familiar, and the student reads with greater accuracy. With practice, the student will be able to read each word and phrase as they are meant to be read. It is not enough for the student to read with automaticity, prosody, and rate if the student is reading words incorrectly and inaccurately. Instead, a student must read words with accuracy for the text to make sense. Without accuracy, the student's comprehension will suffer (Beers, 2002).

Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox (2009) studied three 4th graders at varying levels of reading fluency. In this study, a reader's theater intervention program was implemented. Students would warm up with a five-minute reader's theater, sit through a mini lesson, and conclude with independent reading. Each Monday, students were given a new reader's theater script with parts chosen already per their various reading levels. Over the course of the week, students worked on their reader's theater parts consistently for thirty minutes a day in multiple ways: individual, partner, group practice. Three students were chosen to participate in an individualized version of the study. At the end of the eight weeks, wherein students covered eight reader's theaters, results showed that Andy who read with the lowest documented accuracy, could read with more accuracy and progressed from a second to third grade reading level. However, Andy's true growth was evident in his prosody and expression. As the study progressed, Andy demonstrated

more confidence in his ability and became more aware of his reading phrasing. Andy also learned to notice when he struggled to decode words. However, Andy did not improve in overall accuracy because he did not want to practice his script outside of the allotted class time. Daniel scored an average of 125 WCPM. This is a typical score for an on target fourth grade student. However, Daniel's prosody and volume were lacking. By the end of the study, Daniel improved his prosody, rate, volume, and confidence. Jacob originally read slowly and meticulously without a controlled rate or tone. However, at the conclusion of the eight week program, Jacob read with a balance of accuracy and prosody (Clark et al., 2009).

Rate. Rate is defined as pace at which the student reads (Richardson et al., 2011). In the RR strategy, a student rereads a text multiple times to increase rate. Students also re-read in reader's theater. However, with reader's theater, the students are overall more motivated to reread the text. As the student rereads and rehearses his lines for the performance, he will become more comfortable and familiar with the text. The student will begin to read more quickly and easily. In a study of second graders' use of reader's theater, Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (2006) found that the students' rate gain doubled that of students in a comparison group, even though the study focused on prosody and comprehension and not on rate.

The study by Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox (2009) supports the reader's theater strategy regarding rate. Daniel found that reader's theater was fun and exciting. As he grew to enjoy his part and understand his character, Daniel's reading rate increased. This increase was due to natural excitement and zeal for the activity. Daniel began to read with more prosody and a more appropriate rate. This natural rhythm of reading helped

Daniel to read with an appropriate rate. The concept that rate is influenced by a student's excitement and confidence is equally supported by research submitted by Chard and Tyler (2000). They reported that students are enthused to tangibly see their own progress via performance. As students note their improvement, they tend to enjoy their activities more. This enjoyment leads to more improvement.

Reader's Theater and Fluency

Reader's theater helps students to develop prosody, rate, accuracy, and automaticity in students (Clark et al., 2009). Because students have a reason to reread their texts, they can improve both their rate and word recognition. Because students must portray their characters in a performance setting, students are encouraged to read with emotion and appropriate rhythm. However, there is yet another aspect of reader's theater that separates it from other fluency strategies. Reader's theater integrates the arts.

The Arts

The arts are vital not only to student learning and engagement, but also to the students' development of creativity, flexibility, and problem solving. Currently, school systems are removing the arts, including band, drama, art, and choir, from their schools to save time and resources ("The Consequences of Curtailing Music Education Reports | PBS," 2014.).

Moreover, because of the goals set by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, core curriculum has become much more intense the advanced curricular goals mean that students are encouraged to achieve higher aims, teachers must also work more vigorously to ensure that the students are succeeding, and thus have little time for the arts (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). It is not that school boards and county governments

believe the arts to be unimportant, they simply desire to focus the efforts of education on language arts, math, science, and social studies. However, students thrive when their minds and imaginations are both engaged (Chard, 2000).

In fact, according to research by Lin (2005) there is an overlap between children's television watching prior to reading and their ability to comprehend aural book knowledge. Students who watched the Public Broadcasting Service show "Between the Lions" significantly outperformed their non-viewing classmates in areas of phonemic awareness, word knowledge, concepts of print, and letter-sound knowledge. Visual arts, such as television, not only engage students, but encourage the learning of language arts and fluency.

The problem remains that schools must maintain a strict budget without room to allot a portion for the arts. Therefore, the arts must be integrated into content such as math, science, language arts, and social studies. However, time is a large point of contention with many teachers. It is difficult to teach the arts as well as high level content (Sabol, 2010). However, the idea that teachers must integrate the arts into their classrooms by teaching lessons on the four strands of the arts is a common misconception. Teachers need only add elements of the four strands of the arts into their lessons, i.e. music, dance, drama, and the visual arts. Not only does the use of the arts engage students and motivate them to learn, but it also encourages use of imagination and creativity (De Backer, Lombaerts, De Mette, Buffel, & Elias, 2012).

Integrating the Arts

Rosenfield, Rufo, Makol, Greco, Flores, and Redman (2014) conducted a study whereby they observed several teachers' classrooms. In this study, the teachers allowed

their students to learn by doing and have some say in determining their educational routine. For example, in an art class, students could roam freely and create whatever they desired. The only stipulations were that students had to explain their creation, and it had to serve a practical purpose. Students began to take trash and create outfits. They performed science experiments with beakers. One student discovered how to dye cloth and made clothes. In a history class, students were tasked with creating their own artwork in the style of Chinese museum pieces. Students not only created their own art, but they explained the significance and history behind their pieces. As the students learned more about various cultures, they visualized the cultures about which they were learning. Therefore, students did not simply learn facts, they thought more deeply and applied their knowledge (“Bloom’s Taxonomy | Center for Teaching | Vanderbilt University,” n.d.). In both examples, students took ownership of their learning and applied their passions to educational pursuits.

Drama

Vygotsky, a well-known educational psychologist, said that learning occurs through dialogue and social interaction (as cited in Frambaugh-Kritzer, Buelow, & Simpson Steele, 2015). In reader’s theater, the dialogue occurs through drama. As students explore their roles, they can help each other and learn from each other. As students scaffold their learning, they learn new ideas and skills. It is through drama that students learn to embrace their characters and delve more deeply into their thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Vasinda and McLeod (2011) conducted a 10-week study with three second grade classes and three third grade classes. Of the approximately 100 participants, 35 were

labelled as struggling readers, scoring at least a year below current grade level. Each classroom teacher was encouraged to choose interesting texts relating to content area without considering text reading Lexile. A Lexile is a measured reading level given to individual texts based on the student reading proficiency required to successfully comprehend and read the text. The 35 struggling readers were assessed both pre- and post-study. All students participated in creating a reader's theater on podcast, were assessed via the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and were interviewed via student focus groups. The DRA is a standardized assessment used to measure a student's reading ability and level ("DRA- Summary," November, 8). Because of the podcast format, students could not rely on visual props or facial expressions to transmit meaning. Instead, the students were tasked with communicating the text through dramatic, prosodic reading. Students made personal improvements ranging from 1 semester to 3 years.

Wee (2009) conducted a case study concerning drama and education curriculum. A kindergarten and two first grade classrooms were observed for nine weeks wherein a drama specialist taught students core curricular subjects while utilizing dramatic and kinesthetic strategies. Teachers become actors as students watched their core subjects come alive. A social studies lesson became a dramatic retelling of the founding of their city. A math lesson included dance and hand motions. In this way, students could participate actively and take ownership of their learning. Students were more engaged as they became the teachers and experienced their learning with a hands-on approach.

In an article published by Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, and Freeman (2011), students found that they could infer motives, thoughts, and feelings of their character through revoicing. Revoicing is defined as the method whereby students switch from

voice to voice. As Wolfe (1997) so aptly stated, “In the world of drama, children may or may not identify with the character, but they come to believe in the possibility of their character. They construct a narrative world for their characters, imbuing them with intentions, motivations, and reasoning that is often not explicit on the page” (as cited in Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, & Freedman, 2011). It is through the lens of drama that students can see beyond the written text and achieve a deeper level of comprehension. The researchers found that students struggle between acting autonomously in their roles and acting as “ventriloquists” using the voices surrounding to speak (Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, & Freedman, 2011). Therefore, in reader’s theater teachers must teach voice to students in such a way that is respectful of the characters they are portraying, and representative of students’ own thoughts and feelings.

Music

Through music, emotions may be expressed and released. In the context of reader’s theater, music is a reliable form of communication. One song can set the tone for an entire scene. Music may also mimic a student’s portrayal of the nuances of character (Sobchack & Sobchack, 1987).

In a study conducted by Saarikallio, Vuoskoski, and Luck (2014), 61 fourteen-year-old students were assessed based on their levels of musical intelligence. It was found that those with higher levels of musical awareness were also more in tune with their emotions and the emotions of others. To foster more awareness, students must be taught to listen to music with emotion in mind.

Reader’s theater can help students to develop musical awareness and express emotion and meaning through music. Per Buillion-Mears, McCauley, and McWhorter

(2007), incorporating rap or a personal song into a reader's theater performance is an effective and engaging way to develop musical awareness and encourage creativity. As students choose individual sounds or musical effects to define their characters, they must think about how they wish to portray their characters. This musical expression fosters a deeper level of thinking and imagining.

Visual Arts

In reader's theater, visual arts play an important role in both the making and expressing of meaning. Specifically, visual arts may refer to several elements of this strategy, including facial expressions, props, and costumes.

According to Taylor (2014), children are constantly inferring when others speak. As with all humans, words are not the sole method of communication. Facial expressions are also read to ensure that the complete meaning is understood. As students play and talk, they are learning to read each other's emotions via facial expressions, tones, and conversation. In the context of reader's theater, students may use these skills to convey emotion to the audience and their fellow readers.

Props and costumes are also valuable components of visual arts. Research by Rosenfeld (2014) shows that students may tell entire stories with just one prop. In their study, a group of tenth grade students were each given a bamboo stick and asked to create a play. They were only allowed the one prop. Students worked together and used the versatile nature of bamboo to tell several stories. Six bamboo sticks soon became a car, a house, a few spears, a set of walking sticks, and a gate. These students visually created what they imagined. Also in this study, students created whatever they so desired with a selection of craft pieces. As students crafted, they began to design clothes and turned

their classroom into a runway. The addition of costumes, along with props, allowed students to tangibly bring their characters to life.

It is not just the typical prop that brings life to a student's reader's theater experience, but also traditional artwork. According to Eckhoff (2008), the viewing and analyzing of actual artistic pieces enhances a student's understanding of art and allows him to delve more deeply into the meaning and emotion. Students learned that each picture tells a separate story. In their study, students aged 4-5 years old were able to look at a piece of art and understand that there was a story and meaning underneath the colors. These students learned how to "read" the visual arts with a critical eye.

Dance

Taylor (2014) published research on the topic of dance, movement, and the conveyance of meaning through motion. She stated that children comprehend language and interpret meaning beyond the spoken word. In fact, much of communication is nonverbal. In a multimodal study of communication, Taylor argued that teachers must remember how students learn. They learn in linguistic, visual, aural, spatial, and haptic ways. In the context of reader's theater, students learn to interpret and present their text through body position, movement, and dance.

In a study by Rozansky and Aagesen (2010), image theater was used to provide students with a method of determining varying perspectives in a text. With image theater, students were given a prompt and then arranged the whole-body positions of their peers to tell the story. It was the hope that this method of text interpretation would allow students to both access meaning and make personal connections with the text. Students moved as their characters and conducted themselves in such a way that the audience

could determine emotions and motives. As students moved, they experienced their characters in real and tangible ways. Students were able to comprehend the text more thoroughly as they lived the content. Students were also more empathetic as to the plight of those whose images they were creating.

Dance is used to display feelings, struggles, and thoughts. In one third grade classroom, a teacher showed her students a music video of Billy Elliot to demonstrate how dance can convey both feeling and energy (Frambaugh-Kritzer et al., 2015). However, dance has a more valuable purpose in reader's theater than just energizing students. "The interconnectivity of text and the body in drama and dance emulate dynamic roles as one makes and communicates meaning" (Frambaugh-Kritzer et al., 2015, p. 75).

While studying a drama integrated curriculum for nine weeks, Wee (2009) discovered that students responded more attentively and reflectively with the inclusion of full body movement within the drama. For example, the drama specialist included a small yoga lesson. The students were actively engaged and attentive to their teacher after the lesson. The drama specialist also stressed her belief that students are free to express themselves with greater clarity without spoken words. As students moved their bodies to match their ideas, they acted with more creativity, critical thinking, and expression. "The body becomes an expressive medium for storytelling" (Wee, 2009).

Ross (2005) demonstrated that the body and mind are closely linked. Dance is an intelligent form of artistic expression and critical thought. For example, students may analyze a protagonist's moral struggle through the performance of a dance. As the actor moves with and against the music, he may begin to truly feel the character's fight. This

kind of activity adds a whole new layer to text comprehension. The students are not just reading the text; they are feeling it.

Not only dance, but movement is incredibly important for the student. While dance might not be a feasible option for every reader's theater, movement and motion are necessary. Students are energetic. Their bodies are meant to move. According to research by Mitch VanBruggen, & Kristin Ondark (2011), movement catalyzes the breakdown of a chemical called cortisol in the bloodstream. Cortisol is the cause of many negative attitudes, emotions, and actions like stress, procrastination, and a blurred mind that is unable to think and plan logically. Movement causes the blood to pump through students' veins at an increased velocity. This rush of blood breaks down the cortisol build up and allows students to think more clearly with less stress.

Skill Development

The benefits of reader's theater are multi-faceted. In addition to developing proficiency in oral reading fluency and the arts, this strategy also aids in the development of the whole student, including the mind, heart, and character (Gillespie & Brown, 1997).

Confidence

For struggling readers, re-reading a text multiple times can be daunting and discouraging, especially if there is no tangible progress (Clark et al., 2009). However, with reader's theater, students have a stronger motivation to re-read text. There is no pressure of assessment. Instead, the student is just rehearsing lines with friends. As Brinda notes, struggling students often dislike reading because of a failed past attempt. Putwain, Kearsley, and Symes (2012) noted that students who believe that they are proficient at reading, even if they are not, tend to produce higher fluency results than

those who believe they are poor readers. Confidence can truly affect a student's performance. Reader's theater allows students the freedom to immerse themselves in the content without the fear of failure because every student is performing at the same level.

Collaboration

According to Garrett and O'Connor (2010), reader's theater must be approached as a group project. The actions of one reader will affect the actions of another. Therefore, the students must be able to collaborate. This support extends beyond the performance; as one student succeeds, so does the group. A classroom teacher observed by Garrett and O'Connor stated that she taught her students to cheer when one student finished a read-through. Students also helped each other to read their lines. In this way, more fluent readers helped their struggling readers. If one reader fails to practice, he will be disappointing the team. Likewise, readers support each other and celebrate successes together (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010).

Students also collaborate on the actual performance of the text. They work together to decide when one student enters and another student exits. Students plan props, react to each other on stage, and block their stage positions (Ross, 2005).

One classroom teacher assigned roles for every student. Some students were actors, others were costume designers, set designers, stage managers, lighting and sound technicians, director and producer, and setting and props manager. The teacher then allowed the students to create a reader's theater per their roles. This activity enabled students to practice working together towards a common goal. The costume designers, for example, needed to collaborate with the actors in order to match costume ideas with

the actors' ideas of the characters (Brinda, 2008). In this way, students collaborated with each other to succeed.

Creativity

Creating a reader's theater production is more than just reading a text aloud in front of peers. It is an expression of creativity. For example, a reader may read with a happy tone because his character just made a friend. The reader must imagine how he will portray this happiness. He may first think of how he expresses his own happiness, then, he may project this reaction onto the character. After practicing, the reader must analyze his performance. If the reader did not accurately portray his intended emotion, he should change the portrayal until it seems correct. According to DeBacker, Lombaerts, DeMette, Buffe, and Elias (2012), this process of reflection and problem solving is quite different from the step by step, one right answer method, taught in classrooms today. Instead, the flexible and creative approach to problem solving is much preferred. In this way, students will be able to practice their creative thinking and flexible problem solving in the classroom.

Creativity is already a part of students' play at every age. According to Hammershoj (2014), the creative process is based on emotions. Even though this seems to contradict the research completed by DeBacker et al. (2012), it does not. Hammershoj is espousing that the emotional foundation is much stronger than the cognitive framework regarding creativity. In the context of reader's theater, Hammershoj's research accompanies the notion that teachers must help their students to become leaders in their educations. If a student is personally invested in reading and the reader's theater, then

that student will embrace learning with a creative and flexible mind. His imagination will be enraptured. If not, a student will be unmotivated.

Comprehension

With fluency strategies, such as RR, students are focused on correctly reading the text with prosody, automaticity, accuracy, and rate. However, students do not all learn in the same way. According to Howard Gardner (1989), there are Multiple Intelligences (MI) that account for the varying methods of how people think and learn. For example, one student may find that creating songs helps him study while another prefers to write. Yet other students may learn more effectively through movement or interaction with others. Reader's theater is a valuable literacy strategy because it allows the teacher to teach and assess in a variety of modalities and intelligences.

In research conducted by Pahl (2007), early elementary students were informally assessed based on pictures they drew and stories they created. While this study pertained to young children, it relates to students of other ages as well. The results of the study concluded that students bring their own experiences into their academic activities. These experiences provide a framework in which students build their schemata. For a successful reader's theater, students must know their characters. This means that students must think beyond their own experiences and critically analyze the text considering the entire plot and characters. They must be able to explain the character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

Critical Thinking

As students are comprehending and expressing themselves in the context of reader's theater, they are also using critical thinking skills to delve into the depths of their scripts to tell their stories.

In a study completed by Eckhoff (2008), students ages 4-5 were taught to think critically about the visual arts. Each piece was introduced as a story to uncover. Every image and brush stroke was a purposeful element. First, the students were asked to complete a gallery walk and find "families" in each piece. In other words, they were grouping and analyzing the pictures. After finding groups, the students would discuss in whole the group why the objects were included in the picture. The students were challenged to think beyond the surface value of the picture. They were challenged to critically delve deeper into the meaning and story behind the artwork. In reader's theater, students must think and choose their artwork (e.g. masks, props, sets) wisely. They must realize that art is more than just an image. Every element has a meaning. Nothing is created without a purpose (Eckhoff, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

To test the above research pertaining to reader's theater and the arts, data was obtained via educator interviews from two public elementary teachers. The researcher sent out emails to several school principals to obtain permission and names of teachers to interview. Emails were sent out with a 71 percent response and return rate. Out of that 71 percent, 60 percent of principals gave names for interviews. Three educators participated in a 30-minute interview regarding reader's theater. These interviews were held at the educator's school. However, one educator denied audio recording. Therefore, the data from that interview is unusable. The transcripts of the two full interviews can be viewed in Appendices E and F.

To obtain this research, an IRB approval form from Southeastern University, as well as permission from teachers and schools was obtained (in Appendix B). Each educator was asked to sign a consent to comply form as well as a consent to be audio recorded form (Appendix C). In this way, the interview data was recorded to create Interview Transcriptions (Appendices E, F).

The teacher interviews were all conducted in person to obtain quality of data. Teachers were selected from two third grades classes. One educator taught an on-level class, and the second educator taught a below-level third grade class. The interview questions were based on Florida State Standards assessments, teacher observation, qualitative and quantitative data concerning reader's theater.

LIMITATIONS

Due to the small size of the pool in which data was collected, it is unclear as to whether this research is far reaching or applicable to a wide variety of classrooms. Due to the lack of arts in the educational systems (ED Report on Arts Education, 2012), there were few classroom educators who applied the reader's theater strategy in their teaching ("ED Releases New Report on Arts Education in U.S. Public Schools," 2012). The collected qualitative data includes two half-hour interviews by elementary school third grade teachers. Due to the small number of responses, the data collected only represents third grade practices. Also, students were not observed during this research. Therefore, the research data is solely dependent on what the educators revealed in their interviews. The student's perspective is not studied in this research. The researcher was not able to witness the creative, critical, comprehensive, and artistic process of reader's theater.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Two third grade teachers from separate, unrelated, public schools were interviewed. Interviewee One is a female who teaches third grade students with average present level of performance (PLP). Interviewee Two is a female who teaches third grade students with a below average PLP. All questions were asked with the intent of applying the collected information to reader's theater.

As collected interview data was analyzed, the following themes became evident in both interviews: creativity, vocabulary, comprehension, teacher preparation, and reading intervention. These themes comprise the major headings and sections of the data analysis. For the comprehension and cohesion of this study, key terms are defined in their sections.

Fluency

Automaticity. In Interviewee One's classroom, students were assessed with reader's theater scripts for words on which they struggled and did not automatically respond. Interviewee One kept a record on her copy of the script indicating which students struggled and with what words. Interviewee Two noted that as the students read the script multiple times, they became more familiar with the text. As they became more familiar with the script, their reading began to flow more and became less choppy. Interviewee One said, "And every day they're rereading the scripts. And so, they get familiar, get more comfortable, they build their speed and they start realizing, if they are a slower reader, the more they say the words, the faster they're going to get and still understand."

Interviewee One also attempted to give students roles that contained familiar sight words. In this case, students worked on automaticity and rate with words they already knew but did not feel confident.

Interviewee Two believed that students who were exposed to hearing the scripts spoken in a more prosodic tone would have no choice but to read with more fluency. In other words, students focused less on decoding individual words and more on reading with smooth phrasing. Also, Interviewee Two gave her students Fry Phrases to learn and practice with. Fry Phrases are common phrases used in their third-grade leveled reading. As students practiced these phrases and became automatic with these words, they read at a faster rate and still comprehended the text. In fact, during a timed reading test of Fry Phrases, Interviewee Two's students showed a significant decrease in their reading times. Interviewee Two said, "I have children who will go down to 20 seconds where they used to take 2 minutes to read the same list of words and phrases. It really truly does work, but you have to put that extra 10 minutes or 15 minutes in daily." This automatic reading enabled students to read more fluently instead of focusing on word-by-word decoding.

Accuracy. In Interviewee One's class, accuracy was measured by pre-written fluency tests from *Reading Wonders*, the district-provided reading curriculum. In addition, Interviewee One made tally notes on her personal script of each student's reader's theater to mark missed words. Interviewee Two noted that her concern for reader's theater was the public nature of the activity. She said, "If someone really struggles, then it's public, and everybody hears it." In one case, a shy student refused to participate because she did not want to speak in front of the class. She was unwilling to decode words for fear of misreading them. Interviewee Two suggested that teachers

preview difficult words and help students read accurately when they practice. This simple act would discourage any embarrassment for the student.

Interviewee Two took record of her student's accuracy during reader's theater in several ways. First, she used an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) and Running Record. An IRI is an informal assessment in which a teacher listens to a student read and records miscues. The teacher also calculated WCPM. After reading the passage, the student summarized the passage and answered a series of comprehension questions in order to measure reading proficiency and comprehension (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). In a Running Record, the teacher listened to the student read a short passage. While the student was reading, the teacher made notes of words the student missed, self-corrected, or failed to decode properly (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). These tests are meant to measure a students' accuracy per certain number of words on a reading level. Second, Interviewee Two called students for a one-on-one assessment to read 50 words from their scripts or a predetermined reading. Interviewee Two marked words missed and judged accuracy by grade; every word counted as two points. Third, Interviewee Two assessed her students on their Fry Phrases and words. She marked time elapsed, self-corrections, and words missed. Lastly, Interviewee Two assessed the students' practice performance on their reader's theater. She looked to see if they struggled with decoding words or if students helped each other and then said the wrong word. Sometimes students just listened as the text was modeled to them. They then read with more accuracy.

While Interviewee One was concerned about the public nature of reader's theater, Interviewee Two set up her classroom to combat negative peer feedback. Students did not stay and struggle on a word. They asked their peers for assistance and moved on.

Because Interviewee Two placed so much effort into creating a safe environment by encouraging teamwork, students were not afraid to struggle over a word in public. In Interviewee Two's classroom, students were taught to emphasize their successes. Struggles were places to learn and gave students opportunities to support each other. Students helped each other instead of fearing to read aloud and struggle over decoding words.

Prosody. Prosody is defined as the expression and intonation with which a text is read (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). Interviewee One used reader's theater to teach her students to "read with expression." In reader's theater, Interviewee One wanted her students not to just read, but to read with feeling.

Interviewee Two viewed the development of prosody as one of the three major reasons to use reader's theater in the classroom. Per Interviewee Two, prosody was connected to comprehension. A student that read with emotion instead of decoding word by word would be able to understand the text more naturally. As students heard that fluid tone in reading modeled by their teacher and peers, they learned to read more fluently. When Interviewee Two read aloud to her students, she emphasized the excitement and emotion in her voice. This method was how she conveyed the meaning of the text. As struggling students heard the correctly modeled method of reading, they began to read "conversationally," by phrases and sentences instead of word by word. As students began to read more fluently, Interviewee Two recorded their progress on individualized fluency rubrics and charts. She scored her students on the criteria of appropriate emotive tone: excitement, sadness, happiness, anger. Interviewee Two suggested that students who read with prosody understood the text instead of expending brain power on

decoding. They were not only able to understand, but they also conveyed the meaning of the text to others, telling stories instead of sentences. As Interviewee Two said, “If you focus on voice and expression, that really is the point of what you’re trying to do.”

Rate. In Interviewee One’s class, the students learned to read at a faster rate so that they would not fall behind in choral reads. Choral reading is a reading method in which all students read at the same time with one voice (Beers, 2002). Interviewee One knew that students do not want to be known as the “slow” reader. Therefore, they would learn to alter their reading speed to catch up or slow down to match the rate of their classmates. Also, students moderated their rate as they became more and more comfortable with the script. Every time the students practiced their lines, they increased their rate and still understood the meaning. However, Interviewee One noted that she must be aware of students that follow along because they have memorized the script and are not actually reading. Interviewee One stated, “If people are following their script and one person is looking at the board, everyone has to wait. It teaches them teamwork, cooperation, and staying on task.” Interviewee One encouraged students by complimenting those who were following along with their peers. Those students who were not following along were redirected by a cue word or proximity control.

Interviewee One assessed students on their rate when measuring their fluency. She made notes on the quality of the student’s oral reading fluency. Interviewee One explained to her students that there were certain contingencies to follow with choral reading. Much like saying the Pledge of Allegiance chorally, students may not rush ahead or fall behind. “You can’t have everyone saying it at their own pace. Then, you can’t understand any of it. Like if it says ALL DO THIS, then everybody reads it all at

the same time. No one is trying to race ahead to show they know. If they don't know and skip a word, pick back up where everybody else is. Don't go back and fall behind." It was important to stay with the group and read together.

Interviewee Two used similar strategies to monitor and encourage rate as Interviewee One. Interviewee Two reminded her students that they were one voice as they read chorally. They read together and followed along with each other. Interviewee Two modeled reading rate for her students so that they had an idea of the speed at which they must read. To assess and monitor an individual student's rate, Interviewee Two used a Florida State Standards-based rubric that she created. On this rubric, Interviewee Two noted whether a student read a pre-determined passage, usually a reader's theater script, at an appropriate rate.

Creativity

Drama. Interviewee One and Interviewee Two alluded to their use of drama in their classrooms during reader's theater. In Interviewee One's classroom, the students enjoyed playing roles that were counterintuitive. For example, a male student might have a female role. Or, a female student might have a male role. Students may also play animals or inanimate objects. In these cases, students acted out their roles and helped their audiences to believe that the actors were their characters. Interviewee One occasionally even brought small props to help the students "get into character."

Interviewee One once taught a high school honors class. In her high school honors class, she asked her students to pretend to be a family. Each group had to make up their own family unit to present a role play. In this activity, students lived out their drama to create a scenario wherein to present their research in a creative way.

In Interviewee Two's classroom, the students were required to delve into the minds, thoughts, and feelings of their characters to act them out. This enabled the students to arrive at a deeper understanding of their roles. The students also enjoyed swapping genders in roles and becoming various characters. In both classes, students loved to become something entirely new and dramatize their roles. Interviewee Two noted that students even saw their roles as "presents." Students were always excited to receive their roles because, like a present, they were unaware of what they would be assigned.

In both cases, Interviewee One and Interviewee Two used drama in their classes. Reader's theater is a reading and drama incorporated strategy. While neither teacher mentioned the word *drama* specifically, it was included in each interview by implication and terminology associated with role play.

Visual arts. The visual arts are represented in both Interviewee One's and Interviewee Two's classrooms. However, Interviewee One focused on the physical arts (e.g. props) while Interviewee Two emphasized facial expressions. Interviewee One noted that she liked to include small props in her reader's theater. Props allowed students to become their characters. For example, Interviewee One once brought in cowboy boots for a student who was a cowboy. The student wore the boots and even a hat during the performance. Students also used traditional classroom items, like pens and popsicle sticks, and transformed them into props and costumes. A student played the role of a man with a mustache. That student created a mustache with a popsicle stick. Every time that student spoke, he used the popsicle stick mustache. Interviewee One also used props in her high school honors class. When setting the scene for a family dinner conversation,

Interviewee One placed a table and chairs at the front of the classroom. According to Interviewee One, props do not need to be extravagant. “Sometimes, it’s not like you have to have this full-blown skit, play, thing. Just have enough where everybody can have something to put up or do.”

Interviewee Two focused her attention more on the visual facial expressions her students made. In her opinion, students were meant to use their faces and voices to give meaning to the story. However, sometimes Interviewee Two also included simple props like paper masks, a PowerPoint background, or a carpet as a stage. The main purpose for reader’s theater in Interviewee Two’s class, was to help struggling readers read with expression and understanding. Also, due to the frequency of the reader’s theater performances, Interviewee Two did not want to make a reader’s theater into “an ordeal that takes two weeks.” Interviewee Two said, “Usually it’s very simple. I feel if you make it too fancy and too elaborate, it becomes this mammoth thing that you put off or stay on for 2 to 3 weeks because you need the time to do it.” Because Interviewee Two conducted a reader’s theater every week, she kept it simple and helped the students learn to convey meaning through their voices and expressions.

Motivation and Confidence. Motivation and confidence are important factors in both interviewees’ classrooms. Interviewee One wanted her students to see learning as an adventure. She hoped that her students learn to take ownership of their education and enjoy the journey. Per Interviewee One, part of what made the journey enjoyable is reader’s theater. Interviewee One said that reader’s theater was a fun, hands-on activity that engaged her students. She said reader’s theater was an adventure, and as long as she did not choose a boring script for the class, the students were excited to read and retained

their knowledge. Interviewee One said that students who use their creativity and saw a purpose for learning performed better than other students. Therefore, Interviewee One used reader's theater for both engaging and motivating students. As students practiced and enjoyed their learning, they saw that they read well and read faster while still maintaining comprehension. However, Interviewee One noted that reader's theater could also break down a student's confidence and motivation. While a confident student will be motivated, an unconfident student may not be motivated. If a student struggled in reading publicly, that student would not enjoy reader's theater. Interviewee One once had a student who refused to use the microphone and refused to participate. That child lacked confidence and, therefore, was unmotivated. Interviewee One noted that it was vital for the teacher to preview vocabulary and create a classroom culture of learning and encouragement. In this way, the teacher prepared students for difficult words, and students would not become discouraged by struggling in front of their peers.

Interviewee Two worked diligently to create an environment of encouragement and support for her students to learn and practice their reader's theater. She worked with struggling readers who were on the same reading levels; therefore, the students were not discouraged by hearing peers who read more proficiently. Also, Interviewee Two did not call students to read out loud, even those students who wanted to read were not acknowledged. In this way, shy students read chorally and followed along without the fear of being chosen to read aloud during their reading language arts class time.

Interviewee Two also gave her students a reason to practice and perform. Because kindergarten students came into their classroom every Friday, Interviewee Two's students were motivated to practice and work diligently. They wanted to impress

the kindergarteners. Interviewee Two also noted that she would like to connect with a teacher in Japan. Her students would then be able to perform their reader's theater to students across the world. Interviewee Two wanted to motivate her students to read and re-read their scripts. As students practiced, they became both confident and motivated. They enjoyed speaking in different voices and taking on different roles. However, Interviewee Two noted that some students memorized the script. When memorization happened, students lost their motivation to re-read. It was important to watch those children and compliment those who were looking at their scripts and following along. On the other hand, those who were following along and practicing and performing reader's theater benefited greatly. Interviewee Two said that students became discouraged by third grade if they believed they could not read. Interviewee Two considered it her job to try to reach these students and motivate them. "They [students] start to get discouraged by third grade. But, if we catch it by third grade, a lot of times we can get them to a point where they can keep up by that point." Interviewee Two used reader's theater as a piece of this motivation. Not only did the performance aspect give student a reason to re-read, but its engaging elements "tricked" students into fluency building.

Movement. Interviewee One stated that her students were usually stationary when performing reader's theater. They sat at their desks and read their scripts. However, when substitute teaching for a high school honors class, Interviewee One invited her students to the front of the room to perform their reader's theater.

Interviewee Two stated that her students used movement during reader's theater. They had a carpeted area that acted as a stage where the students moved on and off the

stage according to their scripts. When the kindergarten class came into watch their weekly reader's theater, the students moved and performed on the carpet; however, Interviewee Two wanted her students to focus on the words and their tones instead of how their characters might move.

Creativity. Interviewee One described the creativity that transpires in her classroom by detailing the various ways her students became other characters. She said they truly invested in their roles and set the scene of their drama. For example, in her high school class, Interviewee One asked her students to collaborate to form a familial unit eating dinner together. The students creatively combined their past experiences with their classmates' experiences to form dramas that all varied according to personality. One group prayed before their meal at the table. Another did not. The scenes depended on the students presenting.

In her third-grade class, Interviewee One helped her students to write their own scripts and develop their own reader's theater. In this way, the students were required to think creatively and critically. The students then performed their reader's theater. Also, Interviewee One mentioned that the students were much more engaged when their imaginations were sparked. Interviewee One expressed the view that all students can be creative. It is this creativity, when accessed, that excited students about learning. She said, "I also think it opens your mind to where you use a lot of that stuff [creativity] that everyone has and just doesn't use. Just going through the motions. If that's all you're doing, going through the motions, I think you've missed the boat. You're going to get through it, but are you going to enjoy it and want to keep doing it the rest of your life? You don't stop learning just because you're graduated. So, I think it opens that door, where they're excited

and think about what they're doing. The only thing it can do is help.” Therefore, students were more likely to engage in lessons, love learning, and “have fewer absences.” Interviewee One stated that with creativity, scores rose; without creativity, scores dropped. It was the integration of creativity that made learning worthwhile.

In Interviewee Two’s classroom, students engaged in creativity when they spoke in different voices and became different characters in their dramas. She said that they “really get a kick out of talking in the different voices.” They put themselves in the minds of their characters and accurately made their reader’s theater come to life. Interviewee Two wanted her students to use their faces and voices to portray emotion and convey meaning. Unlike Interviewee One, Interviewee Two used few props. Interviewee Two’s reasoning was that she wanted to stretch her students’ creativity by encouraging them to take a simple script and develop it with their bodies and voices.

Language

Vocabulary. A major piece of reader’s theater for both teachers was vocabulary. Both teachers believed that the more vocabulary students were exposed to meant that students read with more understanding. Interviewee One previewed her class’s vocabulary and then used the words frequently in lessons and conversations. The class reviewed difficult words and practiced saying them correctly with automaticity. Some words, she said, were unknown difficulty words. As she said, “If you know there’s going to be words in there that are going to be tough, maybe because of the way it’s written, when you say them they’re different.” For example, a student silently read *con-science* instead of *conscience*. However, when he stood up to say *con-science* in the reader’s theater, it quickly became apparent that this student was unfamiliar with the word

conscience. Reader's theater helped Interviewee One diagnose these struggles by hearing the students misread words.

Interviewee Two used vocabulary in a similar fashion as Interviewee One. In her struggling class, vocabulary played a vital role in comprehension. Interviewee Two assessed students as they read, and she marked down words students miss or do not understand. Interviewee Two assessed students with a combination of Fry Phrases, grade level words, and scripts from the weekly reader's theater. For reader's theater, Interviewee Two usually used a script slightly above or at students' reading level. She taught them new words and stretched their skills and abilities. Interviewee Two's goal was to help students learn strategies for comprehending new vocabulary words besides looking them up in a dictionary. Interviewee Two wanted her students to use context clues, tones of voice, and Fry Phrases to understand vocabulary. The more vocabulary students understand, the easier it would be for them to comprehend text and read with meaning. They made gains and read at more advanced levels.

Phonics. Phonics is defined as the study of sounds and the graphemes, written symbols, to which it correlates (Beers, 2002). Interviewee One used phonics in her reader's theater piece to assess whether "it's a certain word pattern where students are messing up." Interviewee One looked for patterns to see if students struggled with a certain word or sound. Some students "do not know the sounds for every letter." Therefore, Interviewee One used reader's theater as an assessment piece to listen to individual students and determine their reading levels and phonics proficiency. Interviewee One also guided students through the decoding of hard words and helped them to comprehend the varying vocabulary words.

Interviewee Two used reader's theater to scaffold missing knowledge in her students' skill sets. She took reader's theater scripts and used them to teach a mini phonics lesson. For example, students circled all words that contained the sound "tion:" /ʃ ʌ n/. While she noted that this lesson was not as strong as if it were taught in isolation, constant phonics reinforcement helped with instruction. Students also reinforced their lessons with each other. Interviewee Two stated, "if they [students] come to a word they do not know, they will ask their partners to tell them the word." This strategy both built a collaborative atmosphere and gave students a reason to practice decoding.

Comprehension

Critical thinking. Critical thinking is defined as the process whereby one analyzes, evaluates, and critiques an issue or object to form a judgement (Beers, 2002). Critical thinking was an important concept to both interviewed educators. Interviewee One surveyed her students' critical thinking and utilized reader's theater to assess their individual critical thinking processes. For example, when reflecting after a reader's theater, Interviewee One looked for students to give their own opinions and not simply all agree with each other. For Interviewee One, a large part of reader's theater was helping students to evaluate and think on an individual level regardless of popular peer opinions. For example, Interviewee One hoped her students would reflect on their own performances critically. One student once said that he liked how another pretended to be an old lady. This comment shows the process of thinking critically. Whereas, if a student simply agreed with the first student and neglected to add to the conversation, that student did not think critically. He just agreed without thought. Interviewee One wanted

her students to reflect on their performance and the text in such a way that they comprehended the text beyond, “I like how you ...” Interviewee One instructed her students to think for themselves by complementing students who added original ideas to the group reflection.

Interviewee Two also encouraged her students to think critically during reader’s theater by having them brainstorm the appropriate definitions of vocabulary words by context alone. In this way, students analyzed the text and determined the meaning of the word by how it is used in the script. As Interviewee Two said, “If they don’t know what they’re reading, then I don’t think it’s a benefit.” Furthermore, Interviewee Two asked her students to write and create their own reader’s theater. In this process, the students considered the characters, plot, and meaning of the story. They then formulated and compiled all information into “script form.” After writing, students performed their reader’s theater. Students not only delved into their characters, but they also included all elements of literacy, drama, and cohesive story-telling. As students performed their theaters, whether student-written or not, they analyzed their characters’ thoughts, feelings, and actions to convey meaning. As students performed and became their characters, they concentrated on their pace in regards to their classmates’ rate. One student could not rush ahead or read too slowly. This collaborative kind of reading encouraged students to develop self-awareness and relate their reading to their peers.

Interviewee Two encouraged her students to think critically by becoming their characters during reader’s theater. As Interviewee Two said, “They are having to figure out how the person or animal is feeling and then they have to make their voice give that inflection or meaning.” Interviewee Two did not want her students to just read with

varied rate, she wanted them to understand the emotions, thoughts, and motivations of their characters. This process required a depth of thinking and empathy. Students used their voices to give meaning. Therefore, students thought about what meaning and feelings with which to read. Students also thought critically while reading their scripts. Interviewee Two did not allow her students to look up words when they became stuck. She wanted them to brainstorm word meaning and analyze the context of the word only. Like Interviewee One, Interviewee Two used the learning of new vocabulary words to develop her students' critical thought processes.

In Interviewee Two's classroom, the students not only thought about their scripts, they also considered their own performances in relation to their partners' and classmates' performances. Students were taught to listen to and analyze their partner's performance. However, students were also taught to be positive in their analyses. They encouraged each other and complimented specific victories, traits, and actions of their partners. Students evaluated how fluently and with how much emotion another student read. If one student became "too helpful" and decoded words for another student, that first student was taught to begin a sentence with "I feel...frustrated because [student name] gives me the word before I can decode it." In this way, the student must think critically about his feelings and how they related to his peer.

Lastly, Interviewee Two graded students on their critical thinking by monitoring the results of such thinking. For example, Interviewee Two used a rubric on which she recorded how many times a student self-corrected words based on the text. She also checked students for understanding by judging a student's response to the text and use of emotion while reading.

Comprehension. Comprehension as the ability for one to grasp and understand a subject on a deeper level (Beers, 2002). Interviewee One helped her students comprehend the text by asking them to visualize what they were reading. If a student was an old lady in the reader's theater, that student should act and sound like an old lady. However, Interviewee One defined comprehension as less to do with the process of acting in reader's theater and more to do with a knowledge of "vocabulary and practice." For this reason, Interviewee One chose leveled third grade texts for her class. She previewed the vocabulary and pre-taught the material by introducing new vocabulary words and outlining the moral of the story. In this way, students had the freedom to think less on vocabulary and more about the actual meaning or lesson of the reader's theater. If every student was thinking about the script and reading as they should, Interviewee One believed that the hands-on nature of reader's theater will engage both students' imagination and minds. If students' imaginations and minds were engaged and "they are excited about what they are going to learn, they will retain it and their scores will go higher." They would enjoy the process; and therefore, they would comprehend the text more clearly.

Whereas Interviewee One helped her students to comprehend text through a knowledge of vocabulary, Interviewee Two believed comprehension of the text should be found in a blend of vocabulary instruction and prosodic reading. Like Interviewee One, Interviewee Two previewed scripts for difficult vocabulary words. Because her students were below-level readers, Interviewee Two added words to the vocabulary list that her students would not normally use in their lunchtime conversations. Interviewee Two taught these words so that her students could spend more energy on understanding the

text than on decoding. This kind of vocabulary lesson involved words which the teacher might assume the students knew. However, Interviewee Two noted that some of her students read words and yet did not know their meaning. Students' lack of understanding impeded their comprehension. Therefore, Interviewee Two ensured her students understood all unfamiliar words in the reader's theater.

Interviewee Two also encouraged her students to read with feeling. They were taught to read in phrases and sentences instead of word by word. As they heard their peers and teacher model that kind of emphatic tone, reading in the same manner began to come organically. "They have to think about it, but it is happening naturally as opposed to, 'here's a story, read it, now answer the comprehension questions.' Whereas in reader's theater, they are having to figure out how the person or animal is feeling and then they must make their voice give that inflection or meaning. So, there is comprehension going on, but it is more in just the tonality and emphasis they put on the words." Interviewee Two stated that she did not like the older format for comprehension, such as read a script, answer comprehension questions, get a grade. Instead, she wanted her students to think deeply about their characters. In this way, students comprehended the text while they analyzed their characters and the story. As students read with feeling, their voices told a story that the whole class came together to create and understand. To assess her students' comprehension levels, Interviewee Two recorded student understanding via context clues using a rubric that included Florida State Standards for accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Interviewee Two also assessed her students through use of programs like Accelerated Reader, a comprehension test-based program using leveled texts, and Star Scores (Standardized Testing and Reporting).

Teacher Preparation

Because both Interviewee One and Interviewee Two used reader's theater, a timeline, Table 1, that incorporates both educator's use of reader's theater is included below. The timeline depicts the times Interviewee One and Interviewee Two started looking for resources, decided on themes, read over materials, prepared their students, choose roles with their students, practiced with their students, assessed their students, conducted the reader's theater, and reflected on their overall experience. The similarities between the two educator's practices are highlighted in yellow. The non-highlighted text signifies that there is a prominent difference in strategies. Table 2 notes the classroom goals for each educator regarding reader's theater. The highlighted sections depict a similarity. The non-highlighted text depicts a difference in goals.

Table 1

<i>Reader's Theater Preparation Timeline</i>		
<u>Time Frame:</u>	<u>Interviewee One's Classroom</u>	<u>Interviewee Two's Classroom</u>
2 Weeks Prior		Met with Kindergarten teacher and other third grade teacher to discuss the content of next reader's theater.
1 Week Prior	Found and previewed materials: either online or from a book. Previewed text for difficult vocabulary.	Found and previewed materials: either online or from a book. Previewed text for difficult vocabulary.
<u>Week of:</u>	Prepared class for reader's theater and the accompanying lesson. Stressed listening skills.	Read script aloud to students and modeled fluency.
Monday	Read chorally with students and pulled sticks for roles (unless matching specific roles to specific students).	Read chorally with students and randomly pulled sticks for roles. Stressed positive reinforcement and team building.
Tuesday-Thursday	Practiced with small groups and learned vocabulary. Made sure all students were following along. Gathered small props.	Practiced with partner reads and choral reading. 1-1 Fluency testing. Highlighted vocabulary and decoded unfamiliar words. Focused on vocal prosody and facial expression to convey meaning.
Friday	Performed reader's theater at desks. Teacher assessed fluency Reflection	Performed reader's theater for Kindergarten class on the carpeted area (use as a stage). Read with Kindergarten reading buddies.

Note: Similarities are highlighted in yellow.

Table 2

<i>Interviewee Goals for Student Achievement</i>	
<u>Interviewee One</u>	<u>Interviewee Two</u>
Fluency	Fluency and Emotive Tone
Correct Word Usage	Confidence/Teamwork
Fun/Student Engagement	Prosody
Individual Thinking	Meaning/Comprehension
Vocabulary Gains	Vocabulary Gains

Note: Similarities are highlighted in yellow.

Time to prepare. Both educators took varying approaches to prepare for their reader’s theater. Interviewee One said reader’s theater was a time-consuming process that she did not regularly have time to implement. She mentioned there is so much to accomplish through the day that reader’s theater often became overlooked. Therefore, Interviewee One only utilized reader’s theater during week six of the *Reading Wonders* curriculum when there was a reader’s theater and fluency test included in the curriculum. However, if the script did not hold her interest, Interviewee One searched online or at a teacher resource store. One week ahead of time, Interviewee One looked over and previewed the entire script. She looked for difficult vocabulary words and evaluated the morals of the lesson. After previewing the script, Interviewee One introduced the reader’s theater to her students and outlined the moral of the text. The class learned the vocabulary, the reader’s theater rules, and began to practice. Interviewee One’s process from beginning to end encompassed 1½ to 2 weeks.

Interviewee Two began her weekly reader’s theater process two weeks before the performance. She began by meeting with the other third grade teacher and the kindergarten teacher. Together, these teachers matched Kindergarten content curriculum with an appropriate reading level for the third-grade students. In this way, third graders built fluency while teaching kindergartener students. One week prior to performing,

Interviewee Two and her cooperating teacher searched for resources, either online or from a book, to build a leveled reader's theater. When asked about the time reader's theater takes to prepare and plan, Interviewee Two answered that reader's theater did not take more time than any other lesson. She took 10 to 15 minutes each day to implement the lesson. Interviewee Two noted that her school did not have a set curriculum; therefore, the teachers were used to collecting resources and creating lessons outside of a structured formula. Per Interviewee Two, "Planning-wise, it's not a substantial amount of time."

Practice. Practicing for reader's theater began the week of the performance for Interviewee One's class. The students usually practiced in centers and became more confident as they become familiar with the text. However, Interviewee One was aware that some students did not actually practice. They simply pretended to read. "And if you look at them, and their mouth isn't even moving, you know they're not saying the words." Some students would not speak at all. In this instance, Interviewee One redirected students to their lines. If one student was not attentive, everyone would wait for that student to refocus.

In Interviewee Two's classroom, students began practicing for a new reader's theater every week. They practiced every day for 10 to 15 minutes either individually, with partners, small groups, or with whole group. Practice included reading with prosody, showing emotion and meaning through facial expressions, reading scripts for fluency assessments, partner reading, and whole run-through script rehearsals. Students were ready to perform by the end of the week.

Roles. Both Interviewee One and Interviewee Two drew popsicle sticks containing student names to determine student roles. However, there were some minor differences. Interviewee One drew sticks, but the roles were predetermined. According to Interviewee One, drawing sticks avoided the tendency to “want to pick someone who is really good.” However, Interviewee One also said that she pulled sticks and then called a different name for roles depending on whom she believed should read a part. Interviewee One did this for two reasons. First, she wanted to build confidence in struggling readers. Interviewee One stated, “Even if you have to pull the stick where they don’t see the name and you call that person to build their confidence... Then they realize, ‘I can do this; I did know this part!’” Second, Interviewee One gave students she wants to observe in depth more lines to read and perform.

Interviewee Two chose random sticks for roles. Once a student had a role, that role did not change. Although, Interviewee Two admitted that allowing students to choose roles might increase student ownership of the process, she chose sticks for the sake of time and to avoid student arguments. She framed the role giving as a surprise and a “present” to her students. They were entertained when boys and girls swapped gender roles in their theater.

Collaboration. Both Interviewee One and Interviewee Two placed an emphasis on collaboration in their classroom. In Interviewee One’s classroom, students collaborated with each other to produce and perform a successful reader’s theater. As Interviewee One said, “If they are a slower reader, they’re going to work harder at building their fluency so that they can keep up with everybody and not appear to be the one that’s behind.” The group was required to read as one voice. Interviewee One also

used this practice to see which students were struggling and reading slower than others. However, these struggling readers were supported. Interviewee One encouraged her students to work together and listen when classmates are reading or speaking. Yet, Interviewee One also wanted her students to “have fun and not care about what everyone else is thinking.” Normally, Interviewee One noted that her third-grade students would often agree with each other without thinking of their own opinions. In this way, their collaboration was a detriment. However, occasionally there was one student who formulated his own opinion and shares. It is this individualized thinking that Interviewee One desired to cultivate in the classroom.

Students were also encouraged to collaborate by helping each other to read with one voice and to stay on task. Everyone had a responsibility and a part to play. Interviewee One emphasized to her class that “no one is trying to race ahead to show they know.” Reader’s theater could not be accomplished if all students were not participating. Students must read together, support each other, and work diligently.

According to Interviewee Two, her classroom was one of encouragement, community, and collaboration. Interviewee Two encouraged her students to collaborate in a variety of ways. First, her students were required to self-regulate their reading rates. When chorally reading, students followed along and read as one voice. Interviewee Two reminded them that “I’m not reading to them; we are reading together. We are all one voice at certain parts and everyone’s voice needs to be one.” They must be aware of their peers and adjust their reading accordingly. As struggling students heard the rhythm of reading modeled by both their peers and teacher, they began to respond to the difference in styles and read more easily. In this way, they were learning from each other.

Interviewee Two was intentional in her creation of an encouraging and familial feeling classroom. She said, “We are here to support each other and build each other up. We are not here to break each other down or make anybody feel bad.” Every reading activity was collaborative in the way that students encouraged and complemented each other on their accomplishments. If a student became frustrated with another student, Interviewee Two taught her class to respond with an “I feel” statement. This approach taught students appropriate responses to inter-personal conflict. The students still worked together and solved conflict in a mature way. Furthermore, students were cognizant of the victories of their peers in reading. If one student performed particularly well, another student was quick to encourage and praise that student. To foster this behavior, Interviewee Two passed out skittles or goldfish to reward to the partners who said nice things about their peers. In this case, both partners would be rewarded. Students became quick to look for the good in their neighbors. As Interviewee Two said, “We celebrate every time we read every single day.”

Interviewee Two instructed her students to work together frequently to build a community of learners. The students knew their roles and how to implement them. For example, in choral reading, no one student was to be heard above the rest. They were meant to be one voice. If one person was heard, the class lacked appropriate collaboration. The students practiced reading together and even asked each other for help when they were stuck on words. Even though students sometimes gave the wrong word, they learned the importance of working together as a team.

Reading Intervention

Reading intervention strategies are those that a teacher employs to aid a struggling student as soon as a problem is identified (Richardson et al., 2011). Strategies are usually intensive and meant to support a reader individually. While Interviewee One noted that she would use reader's theater as reading intervention, she also stated that she did not have enough time in the day to implement it. She said, "That's the fun way to do it, but there's not always time for it. I think it would be a good thing to use because of the small group aspect, but I have not done it in the past."

On the other hand, Interviewee Two used reader's theater weekly for reading intervention. In Interviewee Two's school, 35 percent of third graders were at high risk for failing to read fluently on grade level. Interviewee Two and another teacher had been given the responsibility of teaching those students within the 35 percent. Interviewee Two taught students reading on a variety of levels including Pre-Primer, mid-kindergarten, beginning first grade, second grade, and third grade. These students scored poorly on their Discovery Tests. A Discovery Test measures a student's reading proficiency based on state standards. The test is scaled on levels 1-4 with 4 being the most proficient and 1 the least proficient. The students in Interviewee Two's class scored mostly 1's and 2's. As Interviewee Two stated, "I need to have them reading on an end of third grade going into fourth grade level for sure. So, they need to get through all the first-grade level, all of the second-grade level, through third grade level, and into the beginning of the fourth-grade level to be caught up to their peers who are moving into fourth grade. So, in one school year, I need to make 2-3 years gain." To accomplish this task, Interviewee Two used reader's theater to build fluency, confidence, and vocabulary

knowledge in below-level readers. Because her students were considered high risk for reading failure, reader's theater was used weekly. In comparison, the previous year's third grade class only needed to make half a year's improvement in reading level to meet their grade expectations. Reader's theater was used much less frequently.

Interviewee Two preferred reader's theater as a reading intervention because her students did not realize they were building fluency. They believed they were just performing for kindergartners. This performance gave them a reason to practice, reread, and engage. Students who might not hear reading modeled at home were exposed to the music and rhythm of reading in class weekly. Interviewee Two noted, "My struggling readers, if you listen to them read, they're just looking at it as a task, and it's a one word at a time struggle of reading. And it's not telling a story as much as decoding. When they start using it in a way so it's almost impossible not to read it, and they start using it in that nice conversational tone or with the prosody where they are getting the meanings. They are looking at it less like decoding one word at a time."

Using reader's theater, Interviewee Two integrated phonics and vocabulary lessons. Because students needed to know the words and their sound correlations for their lines, they did not see the lessons as tedious. While students were reading, and rereading their scripts, they built automaticity, rate, accuracy, and began to understand the text on a deeper level. It was Interviewee Two's belief that students who read with prosody could not help but read in phrases with less breaks for decoding. As students "learn to read the words with meaning," they read more smoothly and their comprehension of the text increases." In this way, along with others, Interviewee Two

planned on helping her students make improvements from a Pre-Primer to a beginning fourth grade reading level.

CONCLUSION

While the RR strategy is effective in teaching students oral reading fluency, reader's theater engages the whole student. With reader's theater, the student is given a stronger motivation to re-read text, and therefore, practice and improve all areas of fluency. The student is also encouraged to think critically as he delves into the thoughts, actions, emotions, and motivations of his character. As the student considers how to express these attributes, he must utilize creativity and make artistic decisions of expression based on facial expressions and props. As students work collaboratively to perform their piece, they must encourage and help each other. Once a student takes the stage and can see his notable improvement in fluency, his confidence increases. By the end of the performance, students are excited to read and re-read once more.

Interview data has shown that reader's theater is indeed an effective method of teaching reading fluency. However, there are some obstacles that teachers face while using reader's theater. The largest issue is time. Some teachers feel the weight of the county and high curricular aims, and reader's theater takes time and effort. While students simply re-read a text for the RR strategy, reader's theater requires planning, character casting, creativity, careful explanation of vocabulary and text, time to practice, and time to perform. The result is increased fluency; however, the preparation may seem daunting for some teachers. On the other hand, the interview data also showed that with careful planning, the added time can be managed and decreased to 10-15 minutes a day depending on the available resources. The teacher must decide if the results are worth the added planning and instruction time.

Research and interview data also showed that reader's theater does integrate the arts; however, drama and the visual arts are used much more commonly than music and dance. Furthermore, students do improve their oral reading fluency with the use of reader's theater. Because students have a reason to re-read the text, they practice more frequently and are more motivated to read. Lastly, reader's theater allows students the opportunity to build confidence, creativity, critical thinking, comprehension, and collaboration as they delve into their characters, encourage each other, and hear each other's prosodic reading improve. In summary, an arts integrated reader's theater brings creativity to the classroom, teaches content and skills in an effective and engaging manner, and gives students the opportunity to focus their minds and work with their peers.

Further research may bring about varying results; however, this topic is worth more study. Students learn more thoroughly and are more engaged when they collaborate on, practice with, and analyze content. Because oral reading fluency is so vital to a student's education, it is necessary to research a teaching method that instructs the whole student. In this way, the student will engage, learn, build skills, and grow.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does reader's theater effectively teach student oral fluency?
2. How does reader's theater effectively integrate the arts?
3. How does reader's theater teach students to think creatively and critically?
4. How does reader's theater improve student comprehension, confidence, and collaboration?

APPENDIX B: EMAILS SENT TO OBTAIN DATA

Emails sent to Principals

My name is Alissa Allen, and I am an honors student at Southeastern University. I am currently majoring in Elementary Education and working on my honors undergraduate thesis. During a class concerning the arts at Southeastern, I was introduced to the reading strategy of reader's theater. It has caught my attention and I am now writing my thesis on this topic! I would like to study the effects of an art integrated reader's theater strategy and its effects on the oral fluency, creative/critical thinking, collaborative skills, and confidence of elementary students. If it is possible, would you be willing to give me a list of the teachers at your school who utilize reader's theater in their classrooms? I would like to interview these teachers with your permission.

Thank you so much, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Have a wonderful day,

Alissa Allen

Emails sent to Teachers

My name is Alissa Allen, and I am an honors student at Southeastern University. I am currently writing my undergraduate thesis on reader's theater and would love to get some first-hand knowledge. Is there a time you are free for a 15-20-minute interview? I can either come to the school or talk on the phone. I would love to do whatever is easiest for you. I look forward to hearing from you! Have a wonderful day.

Thank you,

Alissa Allen

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS

General Consent to Participate

I _____ hereby consent to participate in this study led by Alissa Allen concerning reader’s theater on _____. I am aware that this data will not be shared, published, or disseminated without my written consent. Alissa Allen is allowed to use this interview data (in audio and note form) for her honors undergraduate thesis on reader’s theater. I am aware that I may withdraw my participation and consent at any time.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Consent to Audio Recording and Interview

I _____ hereby consent to allowing Alissa Allen to audio record this interview concerning reader’s theater on _____. I am aware that this data will not be shared, published, or disseminated without my written consent. Alissa Allen is allowed to use this interview data (in audio and note form) for her honors undergraduate thesis on reader’s theater. I am aware that I may withdraw my participation and consent at any time.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Non-Consent to Audio Recording and Interview

I _____ hereby **DO NOT** consent to allowing Alissa Allen to audio record this interview concerning reader’s theater on _____. I am aware that this data will not be shared, published, or disseminated without my written consent. Alissa Allen is allowed to use this interview data (in note form only) for her honors undergraduate thesis on reader’s theater. I am aware that I may withdraw my participation and consent at any time.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why do you use reader's theater?
2. How do you assess students' oral fluency?
3. How does reader's theater help students in regards to oral fluency/prosody?
4. Would you ever use reader's theater as reading intervention? If so, how?
5. How do you select scripts?
6. How do you choose roles?
7. Is reader's theater an individual or group activity?
8. How do you integrate the arts in your reader's theater? (Visual arts, music, dance, drama).
9. How does reader's theater improve or build confidence/motivation?
10. How much time does reader's theater take you to prepare?
11. How does reader's theater build comprehension?
12. How does reader's theater help students to think critically/creatively?
13. Is there anything that you feel is important to share with me that I have not asked about?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT ONE

Researcher: *Interview one at [REDACTED]. So, when you're using reader's theater, why? Why reader's theater? What is your objective, I guess? Overall, what's the goal?*

Interviewee 1: Umm, to teach them how reading works. That it is a process, and to realize that there's a benefit even when they are just reading on a personal level, if they learn how to read with expression and, you know, really can visualize what they're doing through reading it, I think they'll read more. Because they'll realize it's an adventure instead of just, "I've got to read this book."

R: *What kind of expression?*

1: Umm, mainly that their voice, their tone, that they're just not monotone. Umm, that if they change voices, like say if they're reading more than one character that they realize that it's fun to change the voices to tell it's an old lady or it's a little girl, or little boy, or whatever.

R: *Umhmm, I agree. So, when you're doing reader's theater, how are you assessing students' oral fluency? You said that you keep a lot of, umm, records and such being third grade. So, how do you tell where they are?*

1: Umm, we do a fluency test once every couple of months to see if they're accurate, you know more accurate as they go. Umm, I think part of it with the reader's theater, they're introduced to more vocabulary. So, anytime they can get more vocabulary, I believe it's, it helps them read faster because they're reading with a group. If they are a slower reader, they're gonna work harder at building their fluency so that they can keep up with everybody and not appear to be the one that's not, that's behind.

R: *Is there a specific test you use? Or, do you count the vocabulary words they get?*

1: We do, we use Reading Wonders, which is our curriculum that we use. And there's a fluency test that's already counted out for us.

R: *Ok, why or how, or do you think reader's theater helps students in regards to prosody, automa-, basically, fluency. How does it help them?*

1: The more they practice, the better they get. When they're reading, to me, they do reader's theater, I've used it a couple different ways. I've used it with centers. And every day they're rereading the scripts. And so, they get familiar, get more comfortable, they build their speed and they start realizing, if they are a slower reader, the more they say the words, the faster they're going to get and still understand.

R: *How do you check for their understanding in reader's theater?*

1: Um, a lot of it is when we do speaking and listening grades, totally separate, like when they are doing reader's theater, and they're presenting it, I will, you know make tally marks, or notes. I probably make notes more than tally marks and see. Were they able to read the words smoothly, did it flow, or did it, was it something they got hung up, and what words did they get hung up? So I can see if it's a certain words pattern where they got messed up. So I look at my notes and then I compare it to other stuff like the Bear inventory to see is it a certain word pattern that they get the word and then get hung up there, or can they just not sound out the word? Some of them even in third grade don't even know the sounds of every letter. So you can make notes, and it's easier when you pull them back to say, you know, this is specific to what they have just by listening to them and making notes while they're reading the theater.

R: *You said that there are multiple ways that you use reader's theater in your classroom like one with centers. Are there other ways?*

1: Right, well for week 6, it's research week, sometimes you can tie in, like, we were doing space, and there was a take your alien to something reader's theater I found that went with the whole space theme. We did it as a whole class. And, um, if it was people I knew to really observe, I made sure they had a part and read more. So I could put it together and make notes on the script, on my actual copy of the script so I could say, um, "really struggled," or "did really well." If it was a group thing, I could, you know watch, cause you know the ones who are gonna, kind of try to act like they're doing something when they're not. And if you look at them, and they're mouth isn't even moving, you know they're not saying the words, even if it's a whole group thing. It is, um, it's another, just more things, ways to observe them and make notes of how they do things, and um...

R: *How do you choose which students get which parts?*

1: Honestly, at the beginning, I pull sticks because you tend to want to pick someone who is really good. The problem with that is that everyone knows that and they just kind of give up. But if everyone knows that you're going to pull sticks, what they get to do is, when you say, "here's this part," and everyone wants that part, you get to put the sticks in the middle and pull it out. Whoever gets that part gets it.

R: *Have you ever used reader's theater as reading intervention?*

1: Probably not. I would, but I haven't just because of the time factor. There's so much stuff that we've got to focus on that it's hard. That's the fun way to do it, but there's not always time for it. I think it would be a good thing to use because of the small group aspect, but I have not done it in the past.

R: *In your experience, do you think reader's theater encourages students to think creatively?*

1: Absolutely

R: *How so?*

1: First off, modelling. Even times when during a read aloud, I'll do different voices and make the comment, "Did you guys really enjoy that book? What did you like?" Whatever one person says, they're all like, "Oh, I agree!" Every once in a while, you get someone to actually share what they think. [The student says] "It was really neat how you acted like an old lady." It shows them that they should have fun and not care about what everyone else is thinking. Part of learning is, I don't care if you're in third grade or college, it's about enjoying the journey. Not just, I need to do this for a grade. I think the more they can do that, the more they will enjoy school. There will be less absences, less trips to the bathroom. You can tell it encourages them to reach into something everyone has, even if they don't think they do.

R: *How about critically?*

1: I think that varies. Some of the kids that don't do well with it, or have a hard time, or talk really soft (where you have to tell them to speak up into the mic, and they don't want to use the mic) will sometimes shut down. You kind of have to reinforce, you have to make sure they have a part that has, not easier words, but words they are more familiar with. And make sure they get that part. Even if you have to pull the stick where they don't see the name and you call that person to build their confidence. I think that it's just more of a lack of confidence. Then they realize, "I can do this; I did know this part!"

R: *So, reader's theater can build confidence?*

1: Oh absolutely.

R: *But it can also destroy it?*

1: If not used carefully. Cause, I mean I've done it both ways not realizing... If someone really struggles, then it's public, and everybody hears them. If you know there's going to be words in there that are going to be tough, maybe because of the way it's written, when you say them they're different. Maybe go over those together before you start. Even for the ones who do well. Sometimes, like the word *conscience*. It becomes con science. If you can find the words in there, make sure, have them highlight them, I've had them circle them, we've brainstormed what they think the words mean. If they don't know what they're reading, then I don't think it's a benefit. They can build confidence if they're learning something. That's the only thing. If there's vocabulary in there that you go over before, that thinking helps.

R: *Could you describe the process for prepping them, for getting ready to do a reader's theater?*

1: As the teacher, just making sure you read that script all the way through. While you're reading it, if you see something, circle it or underline it or whatever. If there is a lesson, which most of them, there's some kind of, it is fun, but there's also something to be learned. Talk about that to get that in their head ahead of time. If you want to get a certain point, before even reading it, you can say, "Hey, we're going to do a really cool reader's theater," and talk about how important this is. "We need to listen when other people talk, especially when JoJo reads." That part is going to be part of what you want to hang on to. I think that if you know the vocabulary, and the lesson, if you talk about it before you even do the reader's theater. Talk about it and practice. They're not going to read it once and get it.

They need to reread even if it's silently. Everyone first, and then let them actually do their little performance. They have a ball with it. Rarely have I had anything negative, except for when I should have looked at those words ahead of time. Just because it's in third grade curriculum doesn't mean it doesn't have tough words in it. So, that whole preview thing as a teacher, there's a reason for it.

R: *How do you choose scripts for kids?*

1: That's probably not as difficult as it sounds because you can get them based on grade level, you can get them based on subject. A lot of times, if I am trying to find something that I don't already have, I can get it at the teacher store. Or, you can just google it: third grade reading scripts about space. They'll give it to you. But if you read it and you're bored, the kids will be bored. Take a few minutes, read it, and make sure it's something that will keep your interest. Go with it. Usually, that's not very difficult, because they have it already geared for your grade level. It's just finding the subject that you want and that can sometimes be, that takes more time.

R: *So, would you say that reader's theater is a group activity or an individual activity?*

1: Definitely more group. It's individual in the fact that they have to learn their lines, but I would say a group activity.

R: *What group skills, if you think at all, does reader's theater teach students?*

1: Well, one thing, like where it says a few students have to read this part, it's something at the beginning that you have to teach. Like, with saying the Pledge of Allegiance. You can't have everyone saying it at their own pace. Then, you can't understand any of it. Like if it says ALL DO THIS, then everybody reads it all at the same time. No one is trying to race ahead to show they know. If they don't know and skip a word, pick back up where

everybody else is. Don't go back and fall behind. It definitely teaches them to pay attention. If people are following their script and one person is looking at the board, everyone has to wait. It teaches them teamwork, cooperation, and staying on task.

R: *How do you integrate the arts into reader's theater? Or, do you?*

1: Not every time, but I try to have props, even if it's little things. One time, someone had to have a mustache. So, we just took a popsicle stick and make a mustache. Every time he read, he had to put the mustache up. If it's something where they're a cowboy, they can bring a cowboy hat. If it's something I can know ahead of time to bring. They love having that extra little thing and it puts them into character. Sometimes, it's not like you have to have this full blown skit, play, thing. Just have enough where everybody can have something to put up or do.

R: *Do you usually have student stand or sit?*

1: Usually sit. They have their script in front of them. Unless they have prepared a skit and it's their reader's theater. I've done it where they were given a subject and I said everyone has to be their own character and develop their character and then perform it.

R: *Did they have to write it?*

1: Yes they did. They had to learn how to write it in script form. The first time, they just had stuff written all over their paper, I was like, no. Look at this script, does it look the same?

When I did honors high school, I thought, how am I going to teach that? In an honors class, it's mostly lecture. They don't get to do a lot of hands on stuff. So, the one day, when I taught, this section was about a war, so I put a table up front with chairs. They would have ___ amount of time to come up with a script. This is their family. I don't care if it's mom,

dad, two kids, and a dog. Or it could be grandpa, etc. They had to cover everything in their section of the chapter as if they were talking at the dinner table. It was hilarious. The first group, they prayed before their meal. Because the first person did it, they all did it. The second group, the first person did not, he just went straight into what the president said that day on the news, and they stuck to exactly what their section covered. Whatever the first person did set precedence in their group even though they worked on it all separately. They all passed the test. I was doing pottery when one of the students from that class, one of the boys actually, came up to me and said that every time I taught, they got 100's on their tests. But more importantly, they enjoyed it. Cause, we can make 100. But it was like, they didn't just get a lecture with notes. They got to think about it. They're already smart. They could make it by just listening. But it showed that sometimes it's ok to have a hands on thing and really think about how to present this and not bore everybody to death. So that was cool. That's a form of reader's theater.

R: *Have you seen a difference in scores?*

1: I do think that the ones that do it, their scores go higher. If they are excited about what they are going to learn, they retain it and their scores go higher. If they are bored, they're going to retain it long enough to pass the test, or not pass the test and dump it.

R: *So, really it comes down to motivation?*

1: I think so. I think that has a lot to do with it. I also think it opens your mind to where you use a lot of that stuff [creativity] that everyone has and just doesn't use. Just going through the motions. If that's all you're doing, going through the motions, I think you've missed the boat. You're going to get through it, but are you going to enjoy it and want to keep doing it the rest of your life? You don't stop learning just because you're graduated.

So, I think it opens that door, where they're excited and think about what they're doing.
The only thing it can do is help.

R: Is there anything else that is important to share with me that I have not asked about?

1: Yeah, it has been proven in many research papers that if, um, they take out art, they take out band, they take out any of the arts out, the scores will drop, and when they're put back, it makes them go back up again. It has to have more significance than people think it does.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT TWO

Interview 2 was recorded at [REDACTED]. The researcher interviewed a female third grade teacher who has taught for 29 years and manages a lower level third grade intervention class. The researcher will be noted as “R,” and the interviewee will be noted as “2.”

R: *What do you use reader’s theater for in your classroom?*

2: I use it for confidence building, and fluency building, and vocabulary. So, what we’ll do it, it gives the kids an opportunity to read in a safe environment. They’ve had time to practice reading chorally with other students, it helps them to read fluently in a conversational tone as opposed to word by word. I have a struggling reader reading group. All of the third grades don’t do the reader’s theater on a regular basis; they might pull it in now and again. But, for my struggling readers, we use the poetry, Readers theater, and songs. We use those three mostly for building fluency and for building vocabulary. Not so much the focus on the arts. In the beginning of the year, I do a Multiple Intelligence Inventory, and I check the children’s strengths: visual spatial, bodily kinesthetic, musical rhythmic. The visual spatial is the artsy type.

Once you start to get up to third grade, children start to become aware of their peers. They start to know that they don’t sound like the other children in the class sometimes. So when you do reader’s theater, they get a chance to hear it being read, they are hearing the modelled conversational tone. They are hearing the emphasis and excitement, hearing the difference in their voices and tones. That prosody of inflecting meaning and not just word by word. That helps the comprehension as well. They have to think about it, but it is happening naturally as opposed to, “here’s a story, read it, now answer the comprehension

questions.” Whereas in reader’s theater, they are having to figure out how the person or animal is feeling and then they have to make their voice give that inflection or meaning. So there is comprehension going on, but it is more in just the tonality and emphasis they put on the words. In our third grade group, they practice for a week. So, they have a week to practice in a safe place. Then, once a week, we meet with kindergarten and find out what units they're working on. We try to find poetry or reader’s theater to match the units they're working on. Then we perform for them. They have a real audience and a reading buddy. They pair up and talk about what books the kindergarteners are reading and how they are doing that week. Just kind of encouraging the kindergarteners. They then feel like they're performing for a reason; they don’t realize that this is also helping them to build their fluency.

I have to say, over the years, there are times we’ve done it consistently, and there are times that the county changes. Sometimes we “throw the baby out with the bathwater” so to speak. They say, here’s all these things that we are doing (poetry, songs, reader’s theater), but there’s no time for that now because we have to use this new curriculum and this new focus: comprehension skills and strategies. Things change over time. The years we consistently use the reader’s theater, poetry, and songs, the children’s...

* Interviewee finds and brings a copy of running record charts of her students.

This is actually my reading group, which is children from three different classes. We’ve just started changing for groups. I’ll be listening to them read, and I’ll mark down the words they're missing, and what their scores will be.

* Describing the running record data chart

It says story and fluency here, then it says Fry phrases. Like, “Even the animals try their best.” These are like chunks, and when we use reader’s theater and poetry, these two areas significantly improve.

R: *Why do you think that is?*

2: Because, especially with phrases, when children aren’t exposed to reading it, a struggling reader... Children who are not struggling readers can benefit from it, sure. But they already have had that modelling at home of the music, rhythm of reading. So they’re naturally picking that up. But my struggling readers, if you listen to them read, they’re just looking at it as a task, and it’s a one word at a time struggle of reading. And it’s not telling a story as much as decoding. So when they start using it in a way so it’s almost impossible not to read it, and they start using it in that nice conversational tone or with the prosody where they are getting the meanings, it layers in so where they start to read looking at it in that way. They are looking at it less like decoding one word at a time.

Kids will start reading, and when they are reading and they’ll have Fry Phrases. It will take them 2 minutes to get through their Fry Phrases.

* Interviewee shows the researcher a list of Fry Phrases

These Fry Phrases make up a common list of phrases children at this age would see. You also see the min reader’s theater, poetry, and songs. So, they start out reading, and it takes them 2 minutes, 1 minute 55 seconds to read this and they’ll make mistakes. When you layer in the poetry, and songs, you start to get their fluency mixed up, and I have children who significantly increase their time. I have children who will go down to 20 seconds where they used to take 2 minutes to read the same list of words and phrases. It really truly does work, but you have to put that extra 10 minutes or 15 minutes in daily.

Then, the vocabulary portion of it, the context clues. We don't look up the words. We ask how that word is being used. "What can we look at as the clues?" A lot of poetry, and even some reader's theater, Readers theater can come and go because it is leveled. But typically the vocabulary that will be in those pieces will be a little bit above the level of what will be written just for a third grader to read. Maybe some things will be below level; I have a third grader reading on a 2nd grade level. I have kids, some of these children are reading on a 1st grade level and some of them are Pre-Primer. They are beginning 1st grade, end of kindergarten. And by the end of the school year, I need to have them reading on an end of third grade going into 4th grade level for sure. So, they need to get through all of the 1st grade level, all of the 2nd grade level, through third grade level, and into the beginning of the 4th grade level to be caught up to their peers who are moving into 4th grade. So, in one school year, I need to make 2-3 years gain.

This piece does help with that. It's not the only piece. That's why I have to give it a portion of time. But that's how I know that the real audience does help. I'm hoping that a teacher I used to teach with, who is now in Japan, can skype with my class. My class would have an audience in Japan! Not every week, but once every 9 weeks that they're working on where they know it's going to be viewed by someone in another country. Something that's a celebration!

R: So, I've heard some concerns from reader's theater are that students might become discouraged if they realize that their peers are reading at a higher level than them, even with the prosody and etc... So, how do you combat that? Have you seen that?

2: No, they definitely know. But the thing that happens with reader's theater in here, is that the children are already leveled. So I don't have a mixed group for reader's theater

heater. So, the children in here with me are the kindergarten, 1st grade, beginning 2nd grade readers. And, they don't hear anybody else. But in class, there's also a portion of the day where we're doing a homeroom type reading lesson. They do hear the difference. But it's not reader's theater. But, I don't ever call on someone to read out loud. I'll do choral reading where I'll read and stop at a phrase or word and they'll all kind of chime in. Calling on one child to read is very intimidating, even if they are good readers. Some children want to be the ones reading out loud; they want to be called on. But, I just don't do that. But, they know. In third grade, they know whose class is the enrichment group and whose class has the struggle. But, the thing that I can say with reader's theater that is a disadvantage, is that sometimes the children aren't looking at the words. They hear it enough times that they don't look at the words anymore. They just kind of memorize it. That is a disadvantage. I just try to remind them and encourage them. I'll compliment the children I see whose eyes are on the words. I'll go around and point to a spot if I see somebody has lost their focus. I'll remind them before we start that I'm not reading to them, we are reading together. We are all one voice at certain parts, and everyone's voice needs to be one. I just try to use those things. But even with that, it doesn't matter if I'm going around giving Goldfish, I could be standing on the ceiling, there are still some children who aren't going to look at the words. They start to get discouraged by third grade. But, if we catch it by third grade, a lot of times we can get them to a point where they can keep up by that point. But if they don't catch it by third, it becomes more and more difficult for the 4th grade teachers to catch those kids up because they become more discouraged; they get further behind. Right now, with these children, we've also done additional testing with their phonics or phonemic awareness. They have pieces missing,

and we're trying to scaffold those missing pieces in. Sometimes with even reader's theater, or songs, or poetry, I may even do a little study and say "let's highlight every word where you see the *tion* for /shon/. Or, we might pick 2 or 3 things that go along with our phonics or our phonemic awareness: which is more like rhyming and segmentation. The phonics part and the vocabulary part can work in there. The phonics is not as strong a piece. It's more as a, you can break it back down to the phonics. But, it is not as strong as teaching a lesson on phonics in isolation. It's better for reading the whole word and learning the words in phrases. They can learn to read the words with meaning. So, it's a piece, but it's not going to fix everything.

R: How do you chose both scripts and roles for the kids?

2: Different things. There are several books that I own that are differently leveled. Like I said, we look at what kindergarten is going to be learning about. Myself and another teacher (who have the groups with the biggest struggle, who have substantially deficient-level 1's and 2's on a Discovery test (1 being lowest and 4 being the highest)) look at IRI (reading inventory) and their Star Scores (which goes along with their Accelerated Reader). We will go through things together and pull from online and books. We usually work together because the other teachers don't use it that often, maybe 3-4 times a year.

R: How often would you say you use it?

2: Right now we are in the process of using it weekly. Last year we did not. It depends on the year and the need. As a whole, last year, third grade, the lowest reading level was in the 2nd grade. So they only had a 6-month difference to make up, so we did not use that piece as often. It was only for interim of the 9 weeks because that group in general didn't need it that much. When I taught 1st and 2nd, we use it all the time, because it was a perfect

fit for those guys. This year, we have 35% of third grade students who are high risk. So, we decided to use it more than in the past.

R: *Do you chose the roles or do you let the students do that?*

2: I usually assign he roles, just because it is time efficient. I will just do a random popsicle stick drawing. Sometimes girls get boy roles or different animals. They get a kick out of talking in the different voices. I probably should let them choose so they have more ownership of it, but honestly, just for them not arguing or for time management, it works. It's almost like a present! They are like, "Oh! I get to be the cat! I get to be the donkey!" I say, "Oh! You're going to be a great donkey!"

R: *The biggest thing I've heard about reader's theater that teachers just do not like is the extra work it takes. Do you have anything to say to that? Does it take extra work?*

2: I don't think so. It doesn't take much out of my day in regards to teaching time. Planning-wise, it's just like regular lesson planning. We have to look over everything anyway. Right now, there's not a set curriculum for us. We use online and different pulled resources. Planning-wise, it's not a substantial amount of time from my end of it.

I do check their fluency. I want there to be a time when I listen to them read 50 words or just a chunk. I usually try to get 50 because then it's 2 points per word. If there's not 50 words, I can adjust it. But, I'll have them read a portion of their script or poetry. Because my group is struggling, I have a para who comes during the day to help pull them and listen to them read 1-1. She scores them on a reading fluency chart.

* Interviewee goes to collect a reading fluency chart to show the researcher.

This is what the rubric looks like. It's not for reader's theater, but it is for fluency. These are the fluency standards for the Florida State Standards: Read with accuracy and fluency

to support comprehension. Rubric categories: Conversational pace, conversational pace throughout most of the passage, reads too fast or too slow, frequently hesitates, sounds out words. This category describes the student's use of context to confirm or self-check words, recognition, or understanding of reading as necessary. This category has to do with listening. Are they saying it with excitement, slow or low, are they whispering? So, I put that piece in as I listen to them read either their script or a story. So we do use this rubric for oral reading.

R: *So, is this a team builder? Do they correct each other?*

2: Well, that's part of training the kids. Before they start, when they are reading with a partner and practicing, I remind them never to pipe in and tell another child a word unless that child asks for it. They can raise their hand and I will come to them if there's a need. Most of the time, if they come to a word, they will ask their partners to tell them the word. They don't try to sound it out or struggle through it. The person might tell them the wrong word! But once you start performing too, then it becomes apparent. So, the first time it comes, I'm reading it to them so that they're hearing it modelled. Really, it is a wash on that part. They don't get mad or frustrated. But, I do think you need show them some things they can say. Like, if you [the student] were to try and take over and say what I [another student] was saying, then I [first student] would need to ask the teacher. I [the teacher] would tell the child to let the other child know how that was making her feel. She would say, "It makes me feel frustrated when he tells me the word. I need time to sound out the word." I try to make it an "I" statement. "I feel," not a "You did this ___." That takes a little time in the beginning. Soon you start hearing them say those things naturally, or somebody might say, "you're doing a great [job]."

When they are practicing with a partner, even with their Fry Phrases. They have 1 minute to practice them with a partner when they come in. A partner reads to the B partner, and B partner reads to the A partner. Partner A might be on Column C and B is on A, but if you move passed it you move passed it. It's ok to be at different places. At the end, when the timer goes off, I'll tell them to "Give your partner a high-five and tell them they're too cool for school!" Or I'll tell them to give them a "Balooga balooga!" We celebrate every time we read every single day. The other thing I'll do, and they like this a lot, when we come together as a whole, I'll say, "Put your thumb on your nose if you can tell me something you liked about the way your partner read." They all want candy! So what I do, is I give the treats out to both partners. I'll say, "I am so glad you are listening to your partner." I'll say to the partner, "I love that you were using your voice to make the feeling come alive." Now, I won't call on every single person, but they never know who's going to get called on. But they know I regularly do that. So, they compliment each other, and I'll ask them what their partner did. I keep building that idea that we are here to support each other and build each other up. We are not here to break each other down or make anybody feel bad.

R: When they are doing reader's theater, do they use props? Do they walk around, or are they seated?

2: We use different things really. Sometimes they'll have a paper mask thing. Sometimes they'll stand. We do have a set stage area. For example, they'll come on and off the carpet. The kindergarteners do come to us. So, it's nice to practice in the environment where we will perform. They come in on Friday, and they get to sit and be the audience. So, they do get to move. But, sometimes it's just their voice and expression that are supposed to

convey what it going on. Sometimes we will have a background up. When I had 1st and 2nd grade, we would change slides. Now I can use PowerPoint and set it to go to what I want. We don't often do that, even though it's nice, due to time. We don't use tons of props. Usually it's very simple. I feel if you make it too fancy and too elaborate, it becomes this mammoth thing that you put off or stay on for 2-3 weeks because you need the time to do it. Whereas if you focus on voice and expression, that really is the point of what you're trying to do. Also, kindergarten loves anything they do. The third graders have the biggest smiles. They really do get a lot out of doing it for the kindergarteners. It gives them a reason to do it. I think that's why they don't feel like they're reading something that's easier than their other peers. Even though they know they're in the struggling group, they're just performing for their kindergarteners just like in every other third grade group. They really don't think anything about that part of it.

R: *That's all I have. Is there anything you would like to add?*

2: I mean, I think you probably go further into it with the arts than we do. But that is so neat! Send me a text or email about that. Honestly, the main focus for us is words and phrases as opposed to word by word. Reading words with context clues and learning to use their voices to give meaning. Like I said, we do hit on the vocabulary, especially if there are hard words. What I do with my kids, I try to read everything 2 weeks ahead of time if possible. With struggling readers, if it's not a word that they use in their conversational language, i.e. talking with their friends at lunch, then I would select that word as a possible vocabulary word. Even your struggling readers can read words you think they know but they have no idea. They've not learned to use context clues naturally. So, you have to force that piece in and model that for them. If there are words in there, I'll

preselect and pre-teach those words ahead of time. That helps them when they get to those words in reader's theater. It helps their reader's theater to be more successful and helps them understand what is going on in the story.