WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT READERS’ THEATER AND THE IMPACT
ON FIRST THROUGH EIGHTH GRADERS’ ORAL READING FLUENCY

by

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled *What Research Says About Readers’ Theater and the Impact on First Through Eighth Graders’ Oral Reading Fluency* by Kaleigh L. Vogan, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Literacy: Birth to Grade 6, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

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Abstract

This Master’s thesis project intends to examine Readers’ Theater and its impact on the oral reading fluency growth of first through eighth graders, as well as how it can be used as a motivational literacy tool. In addition, with increasing demands and tight time constraints, this project also attempts to reveal ways in which teachers can implement Readers’ Theater activities into existing literacy curriculums. A literature review is conducted in order to answer the project’s guiding questions. The findings reveal Readers’ Theater as an authentic and motivating literacy tool that can provide oral reading fluency growth in students with all reading abilities. This project also provides information on how Readers’ Theater can be adapted and fit into existing curriculums and other content areas. A professional development workshop is developed based on the characteristics and formats of successful professional development workshops identified in literature.
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Chapter One Introduction

Statement of the Problem or Issue

“Yes! I read that even faster than last time!” A young boy proclaimed his excitement to his reading teacher. After brief congratulations, the reading teacher quickly ruined his happiness by revealing that he needed to read the passage two more times. “Why? This is boring. I read it fast. Isn’t that what I was supposed to do?” The activity the boy was involved in was a repeated reading, which Young and Rasinski (2009) define as a reading of a text until a level of oral fluency is achieved in the reading. However, this particular student was not enthused or motivated to continue participating in the repeated reading activity. Corcoran (2003) explains though repeated reading can be effective in improving word recognition, speed, accuracy, and comprehension, this method may not increase student motivation or interest in reading. Students may view repeated readings as menial tasks and teachers may be discouraged by their time constraints. In addition, though a fast reading rate may be viewed as a motivator for some students, others may not be motivated by competition.

The student also exposed his assumption that reading fast is what he is “supposed” to do as a reader. This is because reading rate is the component most often assessed during repeated readings. Young and Rasinski (2006) point out that an “unfortunate consequence” of using reading rate as a fluency measure leads to the “assumed goal of fluency instruction is to increase reading rate” (p.5). Therefore, many students come to identify fast reading as proficient reading. Several researchers have recently started conducting action research in fluency and how it can be taught in
engaging ways. Readers’ Theater is an authentic approach to fluency instruction that demands repeated and assisted reading and is focused on delivering meaning to an audience. This project is a review of literature on the effects of Readers’ Theater on first through eighth-grade students’ oral reading fluency as well as its impact on motivation and attitude towards reading. The specific research questions addressed are:

1. How does Readers’ Theater impact oral reading fluency in first through eighth graders?

2. How is Readers’ Theater used as a motivational literacy tool for first through eighth graders?

3. How can teachers integrate Readers’ Theater into an already existing literacy program?

This study will involve two parts, an extensive literature review and a professional development workshop. To answer these questions, the researcher will conduct a literature review to synthesize and categorize common themes among findings in the empirical studies. The researcher will then disseminate findings from the literature review in the form of a professional development workshop.

**Background**

Readers’ Theater is a fairly new topic of interest for me; however, student oral fluency success is an area I have been interested in for a few years now. During my undergraduate studies, I worked in several classrooms where fluency rate was one of the main concerns of the classroom and of the Academic Intervention Services (AIS)
teachers. I remember one particular scenario where six fifth-grade students would time themselves doing three “cold reads” of their reading level text. This consisted of the students’ whisper reading the text aloud for one minute and then marking the final word said aloud. I observed the students reading as fast as possible, trying to surpass previous stopping points, with very little attention to their expression, phrasing, or smoothness. Punctuation was ignored, words were mispronounced, and every voice was monotone.

During the “hot reads” with the teacher, the students read their text in the same fashion, the teacher marked the words pronounced incorrectly and noted their final words correct per minute (WCPM) score. That score was used as a motivational tool and students were encouraged to try and have a higher number during the next “hot read” of a new text. Not once did the teacher comment on the students’ lack of expression, their inappropriate phrasing, or their ignorance of punctuation. In addition, the students had very little comprehension of what they had read. The only concern was the students’ oral reading rate. If the students did not see a high number after their “hot read,” they would associate the process with failure. In their eyes, a good reader meant a fast reader.

As a graduate student, I worked with a second grade male who displayed very poor oral reading fluency. He read aloud with little expression, at a low volume, and with a very slow and labored pace. Furthermore, his reading had poor and choppy phrasing indicated by many pauses, false starts, and an ignorance of punctuation.

After doing some research, I had discovered that using Readers’ Theater as a fluency
instructional method can have many positive effects on remedial readers’ oral reading fluency. In addition, it may improve this student’s motivation and enthusiasm towards reading, which may help him achieve success. Therefore, half way through my time working with him and another student, I incorporated a Readers’ Theater activity into my literacy instruction. For four weeks, the other student and I modeled proper fluency by rehearsing the scripts with appropriate volume, expression, and smoothness. In addition, mini-lessons on fluency skills and conversations about performance and the importance of fluency were included. After only five weeks, assessment data revealed that his reading rate, expression, volume, and smoothness improved. In addition, he opened up, enjoyed the reading activities, and had a better understanding of what proper fluency should sound like. An unexpected success was an overall improvement in his comprehension of the text used for the Readers’ Theater activity.

**What is Reading?**

Reading is a transactional process, which means a reader constructs personal meaning using the text as a guide. Meaning is personal because the reader brings his or her own unique background experiences to the text and reads for his or her own purpose. Therefore, the main goal of reading a text is to create meaning and establish comprehension. However, the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2010) highlights the importance of five areas for comprehensive reading instruction: Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. There have been debates among
researchers on how these five components work together to help readers reach the ultimate goal of comprehension.

Some researchers consider oral reading fluency to be an outcome of decoding and comprehension (Gough, 1972) while others assert that fluent oral reading is a contributor to both decoding and comprehension (Breznitz, 1987). In addition, many claim fluency can contribute to improvement in word recognition and comprehension (e.g., Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). Furthermore, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) explain that without the attainment of fluency, there is an inability to master vocabulary and to focus on comprehending texts. The NRP (2010) coined fluency as one of the most neglected components in literacy instruction; however, it is clear that fluency plays a major role in the success and attainment of the other four literacy areas, especially comprehension.

Overall, reading requires two critical tasks: Decoding the words and comprehending the text. The theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) provides a theoretical explanation for the importance of fluency. Readers have a limited amount of attention that they can devote to cognitive tasks such as reading. Since readers have a limited amount of resources, the attention that is given to the decoding requirement cannot be used for comprehension. Thus, a reader who devotes considerable cognitive effort to decode words may compromise his or her comprehension of the text. Therefore, Griffith and Rasinski (2004) reveal one goal of fluency is to develop decoding skills to the point where it becomes automatic. When a
reader’s decoding skills becomes automatized, the reader can then devote maximal effort to the deeper levels of reading such as comprehension.

The role of prosodic, or expressive, reading also supports the importance of fluency instruction and its connection to comprehension (Schreiber, 1980; Schreiber, 1991). When readers are fluent and read with good phrasing and expression, they are able to express meaning of a text through their oral interpretation of the passage. Therefore, if students learn to read in an expressive and meaningful matter, they are also learning to construct meaning and comprehend the text. Overall, the relationship between comprehension and fluency skills is reciprocal; the two areas rely on one another in order for a reader to become successful.

Fluency is “the ability to read the words in a text with sufficient accuracy, automaticity, and prosody to lead to good comprehension” (Rasinski, 2006, p. 704). The NRP (2010) defines fluency as reading text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Researchers who have looked closely at oral reading fluency cannot seem to agree on an exact definition of fluency. Some have a narrow understanding while others consider phrasing or the use of prosodic features such as pitch, stress, pauses, and expressiveness. Overall, fluency is a multidimensional construct and after considering different perspectives, in this project fluency is defined as students reading with appropriate volume and expression, phrasing, smoothness, and reading rate and accuracy in order to construct comprehension.

More specifically, expression and volume incorporate prosody, or the ability to read with appropriate expression, intonation, and pitch, and at a level that is
appropriate for the listening audience. Phrasing is the ability for a reader to render a text to reflect the semantic and syntactic content of the passage. In other words, it is the grouping and chunking of words. Smoothness sounds like natural speech and includes automaticity, the ability to read the words in a text correctly and effortlessly. Lastly, reading rate and accuracy is the ability to read a text at the rate necessary to establish comprehension and to read the individual words in the text without error in pronunciation.

Readers’ Theater is defined by Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) as:

An interpretive reading activity in which readers use their voices to bring characters to life. Unlike conventional theater…there are no sets, costumes, props, or memorized lines. Rather, the performer’s goal is to read a script aloud effectively, enabling the audience to visualize the action. (p. 326)

In this project, Readers’ Theater will be defined as an interpretive and integrated, voice-only performance where volume, intonation, and timing are critical to supporting the listener’s enjoyment, visualization, and understanding of a text. The researcher will examine empirical studies from various locations; therefore there are different spellings for Readers’ Theater. The spelling of “Readers’ Theater” will be consistently used throughout this thesis except chapter two, where the researcher will maintain the spelling of the original author in the literature review.

Rationale and Theoretical Stance

The NRP appoints fluency as a necessary part of reading. The main goal for reading is to develop comprehension of the text. Research studies have shown
substantial and significant correlations between fluency and reading comprehension (e.g., Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009). In addition, within the LaBerge and Samuels’s (1974) theory of automaticity in reading, a reader may compromise his or her comprehension because he or she is devoting a sufficient amount of attention on decoding words. This theory reinforces the idea that by improving a reader’s fluency skills, readers will be able to devote more of their cognitive resources on comprehending the text.

Even though fluency has been coined as having a vital role in reading proficiency, it is often neglected in regular classroom reading instruction. One reason for the lack of fluency instruction is because many teachers have conflicting views over the role of fluency in skilled reading (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Keehn, 2003). Griffith and Rasinski (2004) reveal that current teachers lack familiarity with the concept of fluency and how to best teach it. Therefore, several teachers may succumb to choosing repeated readings as their only form of fluency instruction. However, though Corcoran (2003) displays the many successes with using repeated readings, she also points out this method may not increase student motivation and interest in reading due to a lack of authenticity. Peebles (2007) expands upon this by mentioning that even with an interesting text and good modeling, it can be difficult to convince a disinclined reader that the best way to improve reading is by reading the same passage over and over again. Investigating the empirical research studies on this topic can provide direction for future research. It may also help classroom teachers
expand their understanding of fluency and could influence the fluency skills of their readers.

The project will be predominately framed in the different social learning perspectives, which incorporates several different theories that emphasize social interaction as the central role in the development of knowledge and learning. First, in the sociolinguistic theory, reading is “used to establish, structure, and maintain a social relationship…and as a linguistic process, reading is used to communicate intentions and meanings…between the author and the reader…and between people involved in the reading event” (Bloom & Green, 1984, p. 395). Lev Vygotsky’s (2004) social constructivism theory focuses on the point that children learn as a result of social interactions with others. Vygotsky (2004) also explains that “children’s dramatization efforts are very close to their literary creative activity” (p. 69). Both of Vygotsky’s points coincide with aspects of Readers’ Theater. Within this instructional tool, students are rehearsing, interacting, and working alongside others in order to put together a successful performance. In addition, Readers’ Theater reinforces the importance of certain drama and fluency skills such as voice, intonation, expression, and phrasing in order to bring a text to life for a listening audience.

Albert Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory adds that people learn from observing others. This theory proposes that people learn more from observing others than they do from the consequences of experiencing things themselves. The people whom are observed are called “models” and the actions they perform are referred to as “modeling.” Grusec (1992) further summarizes Bandura’s theory and mentions
there are four components to the process of modeling and each component has a role
to play in the acquisition of information. Simply, an observer must pay attention to the
model, the information must be retained, actions similar to the model must be
performed, and lastly, there must be an incentive to motivate the viewer to perform
the modeled actions.

Martinez et al. (1999) support the importance of modeling and state “by
listening to good models of fluent reading, students can hear how a reader’s voice
makes text make sense” (p. 328). They also coin Readers’ Theater as “a vehicle
for…effective modeling” (p. 333). During Readers’ Theater, there are various
communications, interactions, and modeling between students and teachers as well as
the audience viewing the Readers’ Theater production. Therefore, while working
together, students are observing and mimicking the fluency skills of their peers. In
addition, if the audience is compiled of other students, they too are able to observe
and examine the performers’, or models’, fluency abilities. Due to the purpose of
Readers’ Theater, all participants have an incentive to reread scripts and eventually
mimic the modeled behavior of fluent reading. Overall, in regards to the social
learning theory, modeling and observation may be considered the foundations of
learning literacy.

This project will involve two parts, an extensive literature review and a
professional development workshop. The researcher will investigate empirical studies
in order to answer the questions driving this project. After an extensive literature
review, the researcher will then present the findings in the form of a professional
development workshop for first through eighth-grade elementary school teachers, reading teachers, and administrators.
Chapter Two Literature Review

This project intended to examine Readers’ Theater and its impact on the oral reading fluency growth of first through eighth graders, as well as how it could be used as a motivational literacy tool. In addition, with increasing demands on teachers and tight time constraints, this project also attempted to reveal ways in which teachers could implement Readers’ Theater activities into existing curriculums. Specifically, the three questions that guided this project were:

1. How does Readers’ Theater impact oral reading fluency in first through eighth graders?
2. How is Readers’ Theater used as a motivational literacy tool for first through eighth graders?
3. How can first through eighth grade teachers integrate Readers’ Theater into an already existing literacy program?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher conducted extensive research to synthesize empirical studies that focused on Readers’ Theater and its effects on oral fluency growth. The researcher paid particular attention to the location of the studies, the number and demographics of the participants within each study, the grouping of the students, the amount of time devoted to Readers’ Theater, the types of scripts used during the studies and how they were selected, and the overall length of each study. In addition, the researcher categorized the findings based on oral fluency growth, the effects on reading motivation, and how teachers effectively used Readers’ Theater as a tool.
This literature review examined the empirical studies in Readers’ Theater and oral fluency growth. As discussed earlier, oral fluency moves far beyond students’ reading rate and includes numerous important aspects (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998; Rasinski, 2006). Therefore the studies that were found mainly focused on these main aspects of oral fluency. This part of the chapter is divided into four main sections. The initial section is focused on fluency and is divided into four subcategories that explain Readers’ Theater effects on the growth of the four aspects of oral fluency: Rate and accuracy, expression and volume, phrasing, and smoothness. Within these subcategories, the findings will be discussed based on the factors such as types of scripts used, the demographics of the participants, and the type of instruction implemented alongside the Readers’ Theater intervention.

The second part of the chapter reviews studies on how Readers’ Theater benefits English Language Learners (ELLs), special education students, and remedial readers. An additional section mentions how Readers’ Theater affects readers’ motivation and appreciation towards reading. The literature review also includes a section exposing how teachers could successfully integrate Readers’ Theater into their literature instructional programs. Finally, this section is concluded with a literature review on adult learning theories and the characteristics of successful professional development.

**Fluency**

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2010) highlighted five areas for comprehensive reading instruction: Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary,
comprehension, and fluency. In regards to fluency instruction, repeated reading is a “tested and proven method for increasing reading fluency” (p. 295), but the activity may not hold students’ attention over long periods. However, the backbone of Readers’ Theater is repeated reading and is “an authentic approach to literacy instruction” (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 5).

Readers’ Theater performances encourage students to read at an appropriate rate, which is one aspect to proper oral fluency. However, there seems to be a growing consensus that phrasing, smoothness, and expression and volume also make a contribution to the construct of fluency (e.g., Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). The following subcategories not only reveal how Readers’ Theater helps with the growth of the four constructs of oral fluency, but also illuminate certain factors such as types of scripts used, demographics of students involved, and the different styles of instruction implemented.

**Reading rate and accuracy.** This subsection is organized based on two factors derived from the methods and findings in the empirical studies: Types of scripts used and demographics of the participants. Martinez et al. (1999) set the foundation for future research in Readers Theater and explored how the activity impacted oral reading expression, smoothness, phrasing, and most importantly, rate and accuracy. The researchers selected two second-grade classes from inner-city school districts to participate in their 10-week Readers Theatre study. To reach the wide range of reading levels, books from varying difficulty levels were selected and
transformed into Readers Theatre scripts so that each child “could meet with text within his or her instructional ranges” (p. 329). In addition, to provide additional support teachers performed read alouds of the scripts and led fluency based mini-lessons.

Over the 10-week period of Martinez et al.’s (1999) study, nearly all children posted gains in their reading rate. On average, there was an increase of 17 words read per minute. This is compared to a second-grade class who had the same series of books in their classroom, but no Readers Theatre, and gained an average of only 6.9 words per minute. Keehn (2003) also had second-grade students read texts within their instructional and reading abilities during her investigation. The findings from Keehn’s (2003) study suggest that practice with “manageable text may help struggling readers match the level of their more able peers” (p. 54). However, both studies indicated that since the scripts “fit” (Martinez et al., 1999, p. 331) the students, there was little room to show accuracy growth in these texts.

Several researchers used Martinez et al. (1999) as a guide to conducting their own research but adjusted the methodology to explore if results would be consistent (e.g., Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Young & Rasinski, 2009). In contrast to Martinez et al. (1999), the participants in these studies had alternative demographics and abilities. Studies focused on these students because those who are struggling readers should have more opportunities to read, not fewer (Millin & Rinehart, 1999). It is recommended that teachers find flexible and meaningful ways to
mentor this opportunity. Readers’ Theater activities may provide ways for struggling students to participate in authentic repeated readings.

Research investigated the effects of Readers’ Theater participation on Title 1 students (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Findings emulated the results found in Martinez et al. (1999), which showed that Readers’ Theater involvement enhanced Title 1 students’ oral reading rate. The readers theater group in Millin and Rinehart (1999) scored a mean of 61.77 on the reading rate post-test passages in contrast to the control groups mean of 38.65. In addition, at the completion of the Griffith and Rasinski’s (2004) study, the average gain in word-list recognition was 1.25 years, “substantively more than in previous years” (p. 130) when Readers Theatre was not part of the literacy curriculum. The participants in Young and Rasinski (2009) also made significant gains. At the beginning of the year, the participants read 62.7 words correctly per minute (WCPM). By the end of the school year, the average student reading rate was 127.6 WCPM. Parallel to the findings from Millin and Rinehart (1999) and Griffith and Rasinski (2004), Title 1 students improved their oral reading rate after participating in Readers’ Theater instruction.

Other studies focused on students who were identified as struggling readers (e.g., Chafouleas, Martens, Dobson, Weinstein, & Gardner, 2004; Hapstak & Tracey, 2007; Vasinda & McLeod, 2007). Specifically, two studies concentrated on repeated reading effects on a small number of struggling readers (e.g., Chafouleas et al., 2004; Hapstak & Tracey, 2007). Three second-grade students, two general-education
students and one special-education student, identified as having difficulty with reading were involved in Chafouleas et al.’s (2004) study. With three different repeated reading conditions tested, the findings showed that Repeated Reading with Performance Feedback (RR/FB) might be most helpful in improving the reading rate and accuracy of students who exhibit low fluency and high error rates. Results from this investigation supports this claim as the special education student demonstrated an average gain of 35.6 words read correctly per minute (WCPM) during Repeated Reading (RR) alone and 56.3 WCPM during RR/FB.

Hapstak and Tracey (2007) examined four first-graders with varied reading ability to determine if a repeated reading intervention was differentially effective for students of “differing academic profiles” (p. 315). The first student was classified as “learning disabled” and had difficulty with reading accuracy and decoding. The second student was an English Language Learner (ELL) and the third student was a non-classified at-risk reader, both with decoding difficulties. The final student was a general-education student who read above grade level. After an eight-week study, all students made significant gains in reading rate. However, students who had the most difficulty in decoding and accuracy, the special education student and non-classified poor reader, experienced the greatest improvements in reading rate. Hapstak and Tracey (2007) assumed this was related to the intervention. Since Readers’ Theater encompassed repeated reading with an abundance of peer and teacher feedback and modeling, this intervention technique could be appropriate for students identified with having difficulty with reading.
Vasinda and McLeod (2007) challenged the hypothesis of Readers’ Theater as an effective repeated reading strategy for struggling readers. For 10 weeks, teachers implemented a technology based Readers Theatre project into the natural flow of the classroom each day. There were no mini lessons, but similar to Chafouleas et al. (2004), there was teacher modeling and consistent feedback. Results from 35 struggling readers revealed that after 10 weeks, the students improved from a pre-mean grade-level-equivalent reading score of 1.09 (first grade level) to a post-mean grade-level-equivalent reading score of 2.22 (second grade level), for a total increase of 1.13 years, a very similar jump found in Griffith and Rasinski (2004). Despite the demographic differences, the positive results with Readers’ Theater and oral reading rate and accuracy were tied to the evidence from Martinez et al. (1999).

**Expression and volume.** Clark et al. (2009) proclaimed that “students who are able to read with appropriate volume and expression are able to portray the meaning of the script” (p. 379). In addition, Rasinski (2006) confirmed the relationship between oral reading expression and comprehension by stating that readers must put words “together into meaningful phrase with the appropriate expression to make sense of what they read” (p. 704). Specifically, Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston’s (2009) study revealed students who read with greater expression in oral reading tended to have higher levels of comprehension. The following studies illustrated the strong connection between Readers’ Theater and oral reading expression and are organized by the type of instruction that was implemented along with the Readers’ Theater activities.
A debate among these studies was if mini-lessons should be coupled with Readers’ Theater and if the incorporation of mini-lesson instruction provided positive oral reading fluency results. Three studies focused on the addition of Readers’ Theater with only some modeling and feedback (Garret & O’Connor, 2010; Rinehart, 1999; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). All three studies also introduced Readers’ Theater to elementary students facing serious reading problems. Twenty-two master level graduate students were selected to be tutors for 22 first or second graders with various reading problems for Rinehart’s (1999) investigation. In the six-week long study, Rinehart (1999) included readers’ theater within a 90-minute reading block.

Similarly, Vasinda and McLeod (2011) also embedded their Readers Theatre project within the natural rhythm of the second grade classroom for 10 weeks. Five students who were classified as self-contained and had the lowest reading abilities in a self-contained extended resource combination class participated in Garret and O’Connor’s (2010) short-term study. During the assigned Readers’ Theater time, instructors in these studies would model fluent reading and provide feedback as students practiced their scripts aloud. Notably, the teacher who worked with Garret and O’Connor (2010) modeled readings and emphasized the importance of reading with expression and reading at an appropriate rate.

Overall, results supported that Readers’ Theater activities coupled with modeling and feedback increased students’ oral reading expression and volume. Although Garret and O’Connor (2010) briefly investigated the effects of Readers’ Theater, there were improvements in fluency, with students increasing in oral reading
expression. Common findings were revealed in both Rinehart (1999) and Vasinda and McLeod (2011). One teacher from Rinehart’s (1999) study commented on the improvement of her student and claimed she finally displayed an expressive reading of dialogue and read loudly enough for the audience to hear. Results from Vasinda and McLeod’s (2011) coincide with Rinehart (1999). The visualizing medium of the podcasting system used to record the Readers Theatre performances helped students determine if their volume was loud enough. Overall, after compiling the data, Vasinda and McLeod (2011) documented that both teachers and students agreed that “reading with expression was important and necessary with Readers Theatre” and that this project “helped them to improve expressive reading” (p. 492).

Teaching mini-lessons is an efficient way for teachers to explicitly teach and model a specific teaching point. Lessons can have a focus on a specific fluency skill and can lead to active engagement. Researchers investigated if including mini-lessons alongside Readers’ Theater activities could further add to the growth of students’ oral fluency (Clark et al., 2009; Keehn, 2003; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Keehn (2003) and Young and Rasinski (2009) both worked with second graders. Specifically, four second-grade classrooms, contributing a total of 66 students, in central Texas, participated in Keehn’s (2003) study. For nine weeks, the four classrooms received the intervention of Readers Theater. The first two classrooms consisted of explicit literacy instruction via mini-lessons, teacher modeling, teacher coaching, and teacher feedback. The second two classrooms were scheduled similarly to the first two, but there were no mini-lessons and teachers were told not to “coach or model; rather, they
were directed to ‘monitor’” (Keehn, 2003, p. 48). The scripts used in all classrooms were adapted from texts “chosen for their potential to promote prosodic reading” (p. 45). Therefore, like Martinez et al. (1999), the scripts were assigned to students based on their pre-determined instructional reading level.

Overall, students in both treatment groups made considerable gains in oral reading fluency. However, there was no strong evidence supporting that explicit instruction aided to students’ oral fluency growth in terms of rate, accuracy, fluidity, and expressiveness. Specifically, the mean expressiveness score of the first treatment group who received explicit instruction increased from 2.5 (out of 5) to 3.8 (out of 5) while the mean expressiveness score of the second treatment group, with no explicit instruction, jumped from 3.1 (out of 5) to 4.0 (out of 5). Though there was a larger increase for those who received the explicit instruction, both groups found success and a growth in oral reading expression through the use of Readers’ Theater. Therefore, providing explicit instruction and mini-lessons may not be critical components for oral fluency success from using Readers’ Theater.

Unlike the findings from Keehn’s (2003) study, Young and Rasinski (2009) argued that the mini-lessons and literacy work stations aided to the students’ reading expression and “repeated readings and performance through Readers Theatre clearly had an impact” (p. 11). For one school year, 29 second-grade students from a Title 1 school in Northern Dallas participated in daily Readers Theater activities that were embedded within an already established 90-minute reading block. Since Readers Theatre was incorporated within a balanced literacy program, it did not end after the
allotted rehearsal time. Readers Theatre activities and skill practice were also included within the literacy work stations and within additional mini-lessons. Similar to Keehn (2003) and Martinez et al. (1999), scripts in this study were also adaptations of reading-level texts. Overall, results illustrated a 0.8 gain in prosody which represented a 20% overall improvement in students’ ability to read with oral expression.

Positive support for the addition of mini-lessons is also found in Clark et al. (2009). This study involved three fourth-grade students with varying reading abilities. The first student read at a second-grade reading level and lacked motivation. In addition, he had the lowest accuracy and reading expression scores in the class. The second student was highly motivated and read above grade level, but had below average accuracy and reading expression scores. Lastly, the third student read on grade level and had an average expression score, but was below grade level on his reading accuracy score. For eight weeks, the students participated in readers’ theater intervention and witnessed and participated in fluency-related mini-lessons. The scripts used were commercially produced and parts were assigned to specific students based on reading level. Two of the three students that participated in this study made significant gains with oral reading expression. The first student’s expression improved in stages, eventually leading him to read with expression and volume after participating in a series of mini-lessons. Moreover, the second participant’s reading expression and volume also improved with the consistent opportunities to practice and reread scripts. Overall, all aspects of fluency were interdependent. Clark et al. (2009) noted “with increased confidence and motivation came greater volume” (p. 373). In
addition, as the first student’s “expression increased, so did his pace and smoothness”
(p. 373). Based on these findings, it is recommended and supported by Clark et al.
(2009) that teachers teach mini-lessons on expression and other fluency elements
alongside their Readers’ Theater instruction.

**Phrasing.** Two studies that were previously discussed in this literature review
also provided evidence that supported students’ phrasing growth with the use of
Readers’ Theater as an oral fluency tool (Clark et al., 2009; Keehn, 2003). In addition,
these studies shared two commonalities: The addition of fluency based mini-lessons
and how the scripts were assigned to the students. Analysis of both qualitative and
quantitative data in these studies helps coin Readers’ Theater as a beneficial and
effective authentic literacy activity for improving students’ phrasing while reading
aloud.

As previously reviewed, Keehn (2003) studied the effects of Readers Theater
on four second-grade classrooms. The four classes were split up into two separate
groups, one that strictly received Readers Theater intervention and another that
participated in a combination of Readers Theater intervention and fluency based mini-
lessons with explicit instruction. The scripts were book adaptations modified by the
classroom teachers and dispersed based on reading level. “Second grade students at
all levels of reading ability made significant gains in rate, phrasing, fluidity and
expressiveness…via the implementation of Readers Theater in their classrooms”
(Keehn, 2003, p. 52). Similar to the five-point scale used to assess student reading
expression growth during this study, a five-point scale was also used to measure
students’ oral phrasing growth. Overall, students who were part of the group with only Readers Theater made greater gains than those in the second treatment group. Though students in both groups improved, those who received the explicit literacy instruction experienced greater improvement in this specific oral reading area.

Clark et al. (2009) resembled Keehn’s (2003) study and also blended explicit instruction in with the Readers Theater activities. While the scripts in Keehn’s (2003) study were commercially produced and not adapted by the teachers, the scripts in Clark et al.’s (2009) study were assigned scripts based on reading level. The results from this study supported the claim that “reading rate is not the only element of reading fluency” (Clark et al., 2009, p. 379). Clark et al. (2009) indicated that the combination of explicit literacy instruction and Readers Theater activities helps with the improvement of fluency elements other than reading rate. Different from Keehn (2003), the participants in this study “improved on one or more of the following prosodic elements: Expression, volume, phrasing, pacing, and smoothness” (Clark et al., 2009, p. 379). Though the two studies had slightly different results with the addition of explicit instruction and fluency based mini-lessons, both studies presented evidence that Readers’ Theater along with some sort of fluency instruction may help with the growth of students’ phrasing while reading aloud. In addition, though the types of scripts used were slightly different, these studies also revealed that assigning scripts to students based on reading level can help with oral phrasing development.

**Smoothness.** Many studies showed that Readers’ Theater can help with students’ oral fluency growth, especially in areas other than reading rate. Several of
the studies provided an abundance of evidence that illustrated growth in all areas including the less-researched fluency components such as students’ reading smoothness (Clark et al., 2009; Keehn, 2003; Martinez et al., 1999). In addition, all of these studies used similar types of scripts for instruction.

The second-grade students in Martinez et al.’s (1999) study read and rehearsed Readers Theatre scripts that “fit” (p. 331) approximately 20 times before their final rehearsals. A “fit” (p. 331) script in the study means the scripts matched the students’ instructional reading levels. Text within a reader’s instructional range “reduces word recognition demands” and the reader is then able to “devote more attention to fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness” (p. 328). With an exception of four students, results documented improvement for all participants, with growth in “at least one facet of oral reading fluency, with most improving in two or even three facets” (p. 332). In contrast, 10 of the 28 students in comparison groups which received no Readers’ Theater instruction showed “no improvement in oral reading fluency” (p. 332). Therefore, Martinez et al. (1999) strengthened the argument that Readers’ Theater is a valuable fluency activity.

Furthermore, almost identical to Martinez et al. (1999), the participants in Keehn’s (2003) study read their scripts, which were also adapted to their reading level, up to 20 times during the four-day preparation for a performance. In addition to using a five-point scale to measure the students’ phrasing and expressiveness, Keehn used a five-point scale again to evaluate the students’ smoothness of oral reading. Keehn assumed that this “extensive practice may account for the students’ growth in
oral fluency skills, such as fluidity” (p. 53), or smoothness. The findings suggested that “repeated practice in appropriate text is a key factor in fluency improvement” (p. 53). Results also revealed that students within the first treatment group, which received additional explicit instruction, progressed from a mean score of 2.7 (out of 5) to a 3.2 (out of 5). The study showed that Readers’ Theater was a positive addition in terms of the readers’ oral reading smoothness.

Qualitative data on all three participants were included within Clark et al.’s (2009) study, however, data on one participant exposed smoothness growth during the readers’ theater treatment. Again, the first student in this study was chosen because he had the lowest accuracy and reading expression scores in the class. After eight weeks of reading instructional leveled texts, Clark et al. (2009) documented that as this participant’s confidence increased, his smoothness also improved revealing he benefited from the participation in readers’ theater. The findings also suggested that readers’ theater encouraged the first student to apply more focus and attention to his reading. During the beginning of the week, his reading sounded choppy. However, after continuous practice, his reading sounded fluent by the time of the final performance. Clark et al. also noted that as the student concentrated on reading the scripts, his smoothness and accuracy were “significantly better” (p. 369). These studies all required participants to read texts at their appropriate reading level and concluded that the inclusion of instructional leveled texts proved to be beneficial to growth of readers’ oral reading smoothness (Clark et al., 2009; Keehn, 2003; Martinez et al., 1999).
Readers’ Theater for English Language Learners, Special Education Students, and Remedial Readers

In today’s classrooms, there is a wide range of learners encompassing a variety of abilities. It is recommended for general and special education teachers to find ways to meet the literacy needs and diverse learning styles of all students. Garret and O’Connor (2010) claimed readers’ theater may provide “an avenue for meeting the learning and social needs of students in special education, in addition to their specific literacy needs” (p. 7). The studies in this section discuss how Readers’ Theater may be used as a tool for English Language Learners (ELLs), for special education students, and for remedial readers. Remedial readers refer to those whose reading levels are below their actual grade level.

The repeated reading technique and, more specifically, Readers’ Theater is beginning to be used in areas outside of the United States. First, in 1987, Breznitz conducted two studies and compared the phenomenon of fast-paced reading, reading accuracy, and comprehension between Israeli first-graders and American first-graders. Ultimately, in both of Breznitz’s (1987) studies, those who read at a fast-paced condition made fewer oral reading errors than those who read at a slower pace. Explicitly, the American participants who read at a fast pace averaged 17.06 oral reading errors and those who read at a slower, “self-pace” (p. 241) averaged 23.25 oral reading errors. The studies provided evidence that helping the students increase their oral reading rate can help with overall oral reading accuracy and comprehension of a text.
More recently, Tsou (2011) investigated the effectiveness of a six-week Readers Theater (RT) program in promoting fifth-grade English as a foreign language (EFL) children’s reading and writing proficiency in Taiwan. Like Breznitz (1987), this study concluded that RT had significant effects on EFL children’s reading proficiency and learning motivation. The RT group appeared to have made more improvement in reading accuracy over time, which Tsou (2011) assumed was “a result of the RT treatment” (p. 737).

Corcoran and Davis (2003) assessed the effectiveness of a readers’ theater fluency program on second and third-grade special education students’ fluency growth. Participants included 12 students from a self-contained combination second and third-grade Learning Disabled and Emotionally Handicapped classroom in Central Florida. Three were considered Emotionally Handicapped, one was diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome, and eight were classified as Learning Disabled with some students also having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The students were placed into three groups of four based on their reading abilities. Scripts were chosen and assigned to groups based on their instructional levels.

During the eight-week period, each play was practiced for two weeks which allowed for three readers’ theater performances. The first week was dedicated to mini-lessons, modeling, coaching, and rule making. Each week that followed consisted of students reading their scripts silently, researchers modeling and reading scripts aloud for student observation, and group rehearsal with researchers providing feedback. After the eight-week study, the number of words read correctly per minute increased
overall as a class by 17 additional words read correctly. Individual increases ranged from the lowest of three more words per minute to a high of 41 additional words read correctly per minute.

In 2003, Keehn also recognized how low-ability students made significant gains in oral reading fluency when compared to their average and high-ability after partaking in a Readers’ Theater intervention. After students worked with instructional level scripts and participated in mini-lessons, data revealed their mean reading rate grew from 75 words per minute (WPM) to 104 WPM. Readers with average ability grew in rate from 82 to 86 WPM and the high ability readers grew from 98 WPM to 100 WPM. The low ability readers also made gains in expressiveness. Their mean pre-intervention score was 2.1 (out of 5) and their mean post-intervention score for expressiveness improved to a 3.9 (out of 5). Keehn (2003) argued this may be because the students of the lowest ability had the “most room to grow” (p. 53). Keehn also noted that at week seven, of the nine week Readers’ Theater intervention study, students’ ability to read unrehearsed text with expressiveness improved. Anecdotal data exposed how a low-ability student who “had previously been a robot” (p. 53) read a word problem in math with expressiveness.

Young and Rasinski (2009) provided mini-lessons and scripts that were at the students’ reading-levels. Despite the fact that the scripts were at the students’ appropriate reading-levels, it was revealed that students, who were identified as struggling readers, chose the “longest and most difficult parts” and nevertheless, “loved the task of rehearsal and the performance” (p. 11). Even though classroom
teachers may fear that slower readers will read less and their growth in reading rate may be restricted, findings from this study supported Readers’ Theatre as a way to doubling student reading rate. Doherty and Coggeshall (2005) combined Reader’s Theatre with storyboarding in a mixed-ability seventh-grade classroom and found that it was a combination of these activities that was something “kids both liked and kids could do naturally on their own” (p. 42). Lower-ability students did not get lost in the mix of children or fall behind while participating and reading during Reader’s Theatre. Therefore, Readers’ Theatre is an “advantageous opportunity” (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 12) to read more and succeed.

In addition to a variety of reading abilities within one classroom, there are also diverse learning styles. Like Doherty and Coggeshall (2005), Peck and Virkler (2006) also adapted the traditional Readers’ Theater in order to reach the learning styles of their participants. They showed that incorporating puppetry can help meet the many diverse learning styles and needs within a general classroom. It “moves the focus from merely the culminating act of performance to encompass more broadly the cognitive, kinesthetic, aesthetic, and communicative processes that students exercise during performance study” (p. 791).

Overall, the available studies exposed information which supported Readers’ Theater as an effective literacy tool for students of all abilities, learning styles, and languages. Specifically, some research confirmed that providing students with scripts at their instructional reading level, grouping students together by ability level, and providing mini-lessons had potential to make lower-ability students successful (e.g.,
Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Keehn, 2003; Young & Rasinski, 2009). However, other studies explained how adapting the fluency tool to incorporate the learning styles and interests of the participating students can also deem helpful with improving overall oral reading fluency (Doherty & Coggeshall, 2005; Peck & Virkler, 2006).

**Readers’ Theater and Student Reading Motivation**

Research (e.g., Breznitz, 1987; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003) supports several specific methods to promote fluency in reading, including assisted and repeated readings. However, students who struggle with reading may find reading to be a tedious and unrewarding task. According to Tyler and Chard (2011), these students may also not be motivated by the laborious process of rereading the same text. Rasinski and Young (2009), however, reveal that students are more likely to practice and rehearse assisted and repeated readings if they know they will be performing a reading in front of an audience. Readers’ Theater creates an academic avenue to proper oral reading fluency because it provides motivation and confidence for readers to “practice, refine, and perform texts” (Rasinski & Young, 2009, p. 12).

Readers’ Theater provides a motive for the countless number of times a text must be reread. The mundane act of repeated reading is masked by the opportunity to practice with classmates and perform in front of an audience. The following studies provide information and illustrate how participants felt about participating in Readers’ Theater activities.

Though time was allotted during the reading block for script rehearsal in Young and Rasinski’s (2009) study, Readers Theatre was so motivating that the
second-grade students “found themselves practicing at other times through the day” (p. 6). In addition, the results revealed the students’ love for practicing and performing scripts. Similarly, Martinez et al. (1999) mentioned that preparing a reading for an audience was a powerful incentive for reading practice and many second-grade students were caught asking: “Is it time for Readers Theatre?” (p.333). Keehn (2003), similar to Young and Rasinski (2009) and Martinez et al. (1999), supported the claim that Readers’ Theater had motivational potential. Records exposed how students “maintained enthusiasm for the stories and scripts” and viewed “practice sessions as rehearsal sessions for eagerly anticipated performances” (Keehn, 2003, p. 54). In addition, seventh-grade students from Doherty and Coggeshall’s (2005) study were heard begging: “Please, can I read today?” (p. 38). The results from Corcoran and Davis’s (2003) study revealed that all 12 second and third-grade students with learning disabilities chose getting to perform in front of their peers as one of the most rewarding benefits of readers’ theater. Based on these studies, Readers’ Theater appeared to serve as a motivational tool for fluency practice and repeated readings.

Students’ love for reading multiple genres carried over to unpracticed texts outside of Readers’ Theater performances. For example, Clark et al. (2009) had participants volunteer to read for the class outside of Readers Theater and they were “more motivated to learn throughout the school day” (p. 375). In addition, Griffith and Rasinski (2004) commented that during a guided reading activity, one student exclaimed: “Let’s read that again, only this time like Readers Theatre” (p. 130).
Griffith and Rasinski (2004) recalled in all of their years of teaching, they had never heard children “come up with the idea to reread a passage simply for the pleasure of reading it” (p. 130). Tsou (2011) even exclaimed how one English as a foreign language student admitted: “when I go home, I will practice the script since it gives me a sense of achievement” (p. 743). Therefore, Readers’ Theater provided a pleasure for reading that carried over into other reading and learning opportunities.

Several Readers’ Theater studies observed a change in levels of confidence among participants as well (e.g., Clark et al., 2009; Martinez et al., 1999; Peck & Virkler, 2006). One student who participated in Martinez et al.’s (1999) study proclaimed: “I never thought I could be a star, but I was the BEST reader today” (p. 333). In addition, Peck and Virkler (2006) explained that “those who experienced difficulty during rehearsal really rose to the occasion during the performance” (p. 792). This result reinforced the value of having a “meaningful and motivating culminating experience of performing” (p. 792) in front of an audience. Comparably, Clark et al. (2009) unveiled support that students, despite their reading ability, were motivated by Readers’ Theater “because they experience successful reading” (p. 380). They also noted that “practice was another confidence builder” (p.371) for all three participants in their study.

Similarly, the teachers of the students from the experimental group in Millin and Rinehart’s (1999) study announced the children became “much more enthusiastic about reading” (p. 78) and that “confidence was clearly tied to the experience of success” (p. 78) from Readers’ Theater. Likewise, after adding drama to reading,
Uthman (2002), who worked with at-risk third-graders, couldn’t believe the amount of enthusiasm for reading the children displayed. In addition, a student from Corcoran and Davis’s (2003) study commented: “I like readers’ theater because it is helping me be better at reading and teaching me new words” (p. 110). The findings highlighted the increase in student excitement and comfort with reading in school and reading out loud in front of others.

Rinehart’s (1999) findings were slightly unique to the previously discussed findings. He mentioned how “children looked forward to group time readers’ theater in particular, regardless of whether they were reading or listening” (p. 84). In sum, whether students were rehearsing, performing, or listening, all were actively engaged and benefiting from the integration of readers’ theater. He explained “one of the unique contributions of readers’ theater…is that it offers an integrated language event with an authentic communication purpose” (p. 87). Quite simply, the students were excited about reading their scripts “because they could and because someone wanted to listen” (p. 87).

**Implementing Readers’ Theater**

Rasinski (2006) recommends that when teaching fluency, teachers should not divide instruction into teaching the components separately for it “requires extra time to each component” and that “time is precious in any instruction setting” (p. 704). Since time is valuable and it is recommended that fluency components be taught in unison, Readers’ Theater is a tool that can be embedded within an already established literacy curriculum and can teach all facets of fluent reading while saving teachers’
time and energy. The studies reviewed in this section provide examples, support, and evidence that Readers’ Theater is an authentic tool that can be easily adapted and included into a variety of educational settings.

Several studies (e.g., Clark et al., 2009; Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Keehn, 2003; Martinez et al., 1999) incorporated mini-lessons or explicit literacy instruction alongside the use of Readers’ Theater. There was not a consensus as to whether the addition of fluency mini-lessons or explicit fluency instruction, in addition to the participation of Readers’ Theater, was beneficial. For example, Keehn (2003) exposed the “addition of explicit instruction in fluency did not add to students’ growth in oral fluency” (p. 52).

Opposite to the findings in Keehn (2003), Clark et al. (2009) suggested that providing mini-lessons with explicit instruction on expression, volume, pacing, phrasing, and smoothness should be taught. This was because “students need to hear fluent reading modeled by the teacher as often as possible” (p. 50). In addition, Martinez et al. (1999) explained that “immature readers sometimes describe good reading as ‘knowing every word’ or ‘reading fast’ but with guidance they come to understand that good oral reading also involves bringing life to text by producing a defensible interpretation” (p. 328). Though there is a need for more research in this area, individual teachers can determine, based on their students’ needs and the amount of time available for fluency instruction, if explicit instruction and mini-lessons should be an addition to Readers’ Theater activities.
In addition, Clark et al. (2009) explained that readers’ theater can be “easily integrated into any reading program; is adaptable for all levels of readers; is an appealing alternative to repeated readings; allows for individual, partner, and group work; and gives students the opportunity for reading success” (p. 383). Therefore, Readers’ Theater can be easily adapted to fit various curriculum plans and is flexible with helping teachers meet students’ individual needs.

For example, many studies discussed the benefits to providing students with scripts, or grouping them, within their instructional level (e.g., Corcoran & Davis, 2003; Keehn, 2003; Martinez et al., 1999; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rinehart, 1999). Other studies assigned scripts to students at random (e.g., Griffith & Rasinski, 2004) and some allowed students to choose scripts that they were interested in (e.g., Clark et al., 2009; Vasinda & McLeod, 2007; Young & Rasinski, 2009). The groupings within Clark et al. (2009) allowed “struggling readers to participate in a group with some of the most proficient readers in the class” (p. 380), therefore, providing support for heterogeneous grouping of reading abilities. Clark et al. (2009) voiced that “readers’ theater is an excellent activity for grouping students by interest rather than reading level” (p. 380). These findings demonstrate how teachers can group their students in a variety of ways in order to implement Readers’ Theater easily and successfully. Overall, teachers can keep their students’ personal needs in mind and group students in a way which they feel would benefit the students best because research revealed Readers’ Theater can be completed and help children reach oral reading fluency success in both homogenous and heterogeneous groupings.
Other studies (e.g., Garret & O’Connor, 2010; Kinniburg & Shaw, 2007; Peck & Virkler) intertwined Readers’ Theater activities with content area studies and projects. In Peck and Virkler (2006), puppetry was coupled with Readers Theatre and successfully incorporated into a social studies unit. Once familiar with Readers’ Theatre scripts, students conducted research on a social studies topic and wrote their own scripts to perform. In Garret and O’Connor (2010), readers’ theater was used to connect genres in literature with a content area study of the Statue of Liberty. At the completion of the studies, the learning objectives of the social studies unit were met and students “were able to define and give examples to demonstrate their comprehension of the area of study” (p. 792). Kinniburgh and Shaw (2007) sought how Readers’ Theatre could be successfully incorporated into elementary science curriculums. Therefore, there is positive evidence supporting the idea of incorporating Readers’ Theatre as fluency tool across the curriculum. Peck and Virkler (2006) clearly stated that “this activity provides a manageable, meaningful, and fun way of integrating curriculum, which is a must for teachers who seem to have too much to do and too little time” (p. 794).

Vasinda and McLeod (2011) took a different approach to the standard Readers’ Theater performance. Instead of performing in front of an audience, the students who participated in this study recorded their performances on a computer podcasting program. Their performances were then available as podcasts on the school district’s website for an audience to enjoy. Vasinda and McLeod mentioned how the teachers appreciated the way that Readers Theatre texts can connect to
content standards and “fit into the rhythm of the classroom” (p. 492). Readers’
Theater can be presented in a multitude of ways and still maintain the important
benefits of traditional Readers’ Theater (e.g., Peck & Virkler, 2006; Vasinda &
McLeod, 2011).

**Professional Development and Adult Learning Theories**

Part of this project includes providing a professional development workshop
for appropriate professionals. In order to present an effective and helpful workshop
for those involved, the researcher conducted an additional literature review in order to
identify the most effective way to carry out a professional development workshop.
The section below reveals studies with supporting evidence for research development,
effective forms of professional development, and the best practices for adult learners.
By running a strong professional development workshop, there is hope that teachers
and administrators will grow as professionals as well as learn how to help their
students grow academically.

In the world of education, professional development refers to ongoing learning
opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel. Most states in the
United States mandate a certain number of professional development hours in order
for the renewal of one’s teaching license. These opportunities are often available
through their schools and districts, but can also be sought on a more national level.

Effective professional development workshops can help improve school
success, support the overall growth of educational professionals, and create teacher
satisfaction. Cercone (2008) expands upon the developed sense of satisfaction by
mentioning the concept of andragogy, a humanistic learning theory introduced by Malcolm Knowles in 1973. The concept of andragogy explains increased job satisfaction is an internal factor that motivates adults to learn. Adults who attend a workshop will have the opportunity to grow as a professional, which will increase their overall job satisfaction. Moreover, Pritchard and Marshall (2002) view professional development workshops as a process of continuous improvement for everyone in a school district. In fact, continuing professional development is central to creating a learning organization. However, though professional development workshops are deemed necessary and beneficial, Wilson and Berne (1999) observed that teachers disliked participating in one-day workshops offered by outside experts who knew little about the particular school. Therefore, it is crucial, as a presenter, to conduct research on the particular school district as well as how to effectively run a professional development workshop in order to determine how to establish a successful and beneficial professional development workshop.

Pritchard and Marshall (2002) examined the professional development practices and school district philosophies in 18 random school districts across the United States. They sought to explore how professional development activities in healthy and unhealthy school districts differed. The researchers defined district health as to how well a district managed its daily operations and functions. It also encompassed the quality of the school, the degree of commitment of staff to growth and change, the evidence of strategic planning, and the attitudes of the students. Overall, after conducting interviews and analyzing data qualitatively and
quantitatively, Pritchard and Marshall developed 10 professional development characteristics of healthy and unhealthy school districts. These characteristics were found within other studies and the researcher formed categories from these findings.

**Relationships among the presenter and the participants.** As mentioned by Wilson and Berne (1999), many times professional development participants dislike attending workshops presented by experts who know little about the school district, the teachers, or the students. The presenter may be an expert in his or her field, but it is important to also become highly educated on the school district’s goals, teachers, and students before passing the information on to other professionals. This may help diminish negative feelings about the professional development workshop and create a positive relationship among the presenter and the participants. In addition, the presenter can design a workshop geared directly towards the school district’s goals and needs which can ultimately help the growth of the teachers and the students.

In addition, Pritchard and Marshall (2002) found that healthy school districts provided professional development that was driven by a district and a building focus. In other words, professional development was seen as an essential process for promoting a shared vision among all educators and individual schools. When individual schools shared the same vision as the district the schools often found strong support from the administration. Pritchard and Marshall (2002) expanded upon this by explicitly mentioning that if a workshop theme was a “tight fit” (p. 130) with the focus of the district, the workshop would have more a positive impact on the attending professionals. Similarly, it was further mentioned that healthy school
districts provided professional development that involved the participation of both administrators and teachers. Overall, it is important to become knowledgeable of the participating districts goals and educational focus as well as to gain the support and participation of educational personnel at all levels.

**Format.** The actual format of the professional development workshop is crucial in gaining the support of the attending professionals and in delivering the important information. The participants of this type of workshop are adult learners and therefore learn and work differently than young students. Therefore, different set-ups of professional development workshops must be researched and considered before designing and presenting a final workshop that would best fit the presenters.

**Lecture vs. coaching.** Cercone (2008) reveals that learners need to know why they should learn something, why it will benefit them, and how it can be applicable to their own lives and classrooms. Also, goals should be outlined early and the reason for attending and learning the workshop information should be mentioned. This information should be available to the attending professionals so they develop a sense and reason for attending the professional development workshop before actually attending. In addition, while explicitly delivering the necessary data and information, the presenter can point out the connections between the information and how it benefits the attending professionals.

In addition to lecturing and explicitly delivering information, there should be opportunities for participants to actively participate during the professional development workshop. Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, and Haager (2011)
performed a study on the effectiveness of professional development workshops using the professional development (PD) model Literacy Learning Cohorts (LLC). One key component of this model is providing active teacher-centered learning opportunities. This includes opportunities for professionals to use their own students’ data, strengths, weaknesses, and interests and opportunities to participate collectively in integrating knowledge into classroom practice. In terms of adult learning, adults relate new information to past experiences and presenters should find ways for adults to make these connections. One way these connections could be made is by encouraging the adults to use their actual students when participating in the workshop activities (Cercone, 2008). Overall, the inclusion of both lecturing and coaching formats can help teachers use the new information and connect it to their own professional lives.

**Face-to-face vs. online.** Cercone (2008) points out how adult learners are different from younger students because they have busy schedules packed with outside responsibilities such as family obligations and multiple careers. Therefore, participants “should not be expected to leave their districts” (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002, p. 130) when seeking ways to improve professionally. Healthy school districts provided professional development workshops during regular work time, such as during the second half of early student release days. Developing a workshop within a familiar and close environment and at a time that will not interfere with existing schedules may ensure the participants will be enthusiastic and optimistic about attending the professional development workshop.
Moreover, Killion’s (2003) ideas are similar to LLC for she explains it is vital to allow substantial work and practice time in order for the professionals to refine new strategies and information presented in the workshop before taking them and applying them in the classroom. However, according to Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003), it is also crucial for the reading specialist or workshop presenter to work alongside the teachers. In order to do this successfully, the presenter needs to physically be with the participants and provide a face-to-face presentation. To help the teachers gain the most from the provided work and practice time, it is recommended that the workshop presenter provide professional materials, books, technology, and other materials that could help them experience a successful work period. Overall, it is mentioned that those who “work together are better able to solve problems” (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003, p. 450).

Pritchard and Marshall (2002) suggest that professional development efforts offered over time are more likely to be implemented in an actual classroom. This idea is expanded upon by mentioning effective follow-up activities that should be included within an effective professional development model, such as long-term support, coaching in classrooms, or ongoing interactions with colleagues. Killion (2003) supports this finding by explaining training is most effective if follow-up support is provided. This additional piece helps teachers implement what they learned within the training environment into their own classrooms and with their own students.

Also, adult learners are sometimes victims of memory difficulties and have different learning styles than those of children (Cercone, 2008). With this in mind,
Cercone (2008) suggests providing a way for participants to review previous learning whenever needed, a way to self-reflect on how the implementation of new material within the classroom setting is working, and a way to express how new knowledge can help participants reach future goals. Generally, providing a follow-up activity, such as an internet blog, classroom visits, or additional workshops could be beneficial. However, because of busy schedules, it may be hard to provide face-to-face follow-up activities. If so, online professional development may be the answer.

Recently, teachers have begun extending their learning by developing online professional learning networks (PLNs). Trust (2012) defines PLNs as a system of interpersonal connections and resources that support informal learning. This can include blogs, podcasts, news feeds, and other on-line sources. With PLNs, it is possible to gather information into one organized area so teachers can easily stay up to date on the latest teaching techniques. Overall, teachers are able to connect to other professionals who can offer support, advice, feedback, and collaboration opportunities by creating a personal learning network (PLN).

Specifically, the blog is a new and interactive tool that has become very popular among educational professionals. Flatley (2005) explains how blogs can promote users to collaborate and learn during interactions as well as allow individuals to share knowledge and express personal styles. In 2009, a study conducted by Hou, Chang, and Sung examined how 470 teachers from Taiwan constructed knowledge while using blogs for professional development. The study found that most teachers used the blogs to share instructional knowledge, make comparisons, negotiate
meaning, and co-construct knowledge. There was very little evidence of in-depth analysis, discussion, or initiation of different comments and creative thoughts. Overall, blogs were seen as a channel for teachers to share teaching information.

Well designed professional development workshops can act as a vehicle for helping professionals apply research-based strategies into their classrooms. Overall, professional development workshops for adult educational personnel should be presented as a coaching opportunity rather than a lecture. The participants will gain more from the experience if the workshop is designed to help them grow personally and professionally and if it meets their learning styles and needs. In addition, it is crucial that the workshop reaches individual teacher goals, school goals, and district goals. Professionals will gain more from the experience and will be more likely to apply the information in their classrooms if there is an explicit goal, if they have opportunities to use their prior knowledge, if there are opportunities to practice, and if there is a follow-up coaching activity.

Summary

Studies have illustrated that Readers’ Theater has the power to improve students’ oral reading fluency. Research has revealed that this tool can encourage students of all abilities to read at an appropriate rate, with correct phrasing, smoothness, and expression and volume. In addition, though repeated reading has been deemed successful, it can be viewed as mundane. Readers’ Theater is a way to motivate students in participating in repeated readings and to ultimately improve their oral reading fluency. Lastly, it is a very flexible tool that teachers can adjust to fit into
any existing program and to reach the needs of his or her specific students. Martinez et al. (1999) sum up that “Readers Theatre seems to offer teachers a way to incorporate repeated readings within a meaningful and purposeful context” (p. 333). Though there are numerous ways to adjust and present Readers’ Theater in a classroom setting, Keehn (2003) reveals “rereading in text is the critical factor in fluency improvement” (p. 52) and regardless of reading ability, there is evidence that “the intervention of purposeful rereading via Readers Theater” (p. 50) can lead to a development and growth in oral fluency skills.

School teachers and administrators may be unaware of how beneficial Readers’ Theater can be to their students’ oral reading fluency growth and overall reading confidence. Therefore, it is crucial to present the previous studies findings and the effective Readers’ Theater strategies to first through eighth grade teachers, reading teachers, and school administrators. In order to present an effective professional development workshop, it is important to keep in mind the characteristics of effective workshops. This includes forming a strong relationship between the presenter and the participants, using a format with a variety of groupings and interactions, and providing chances to apply and work with new information. Finally, a follow-up opportunity between the presenter and the participants should be included in order to clear up any confusion and to ensure successful application of the new material reviewed in the workshop.
Chapter Three Methodology

Data Collection

The researcher collected literature by searching through the following databases: ERIC, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, Google Scholar, ProQuest, PsycInfo, and SAGE. On these databases, a variety of search terms were used in order to find useful and substantial research. These terms included Readers’ Theater, fluency, oral reading, reading expression, reading rate, motivation, elementary education, instruction, special education, repeated reading, professional development, professional learning networks, and blogs. There were times when these search terms were used individually or grouped into phrases to gather more specific studies.

The search terms led the researcher to an abundance of suitable journals that provided relevant information tied to the research questions. The specific journals that were extensively searched through were The Reading Teacher, Reading Psychology, Literacy Research and Instruction, Journal of Educational Psychology, Reading Horizons, Teaching Exceptional Children, Foreign Language Annals, Voices from the Middle, Reading Improvement, and Journal of Behavior Education. In order to narrow down the results, the researcher checked section options in the search box based on relevancy to the project topic and specified that the studies must be peer-reviewed.

The databases and journals provided a plethora of possible studies. However, certain studies were discarded because they did not meet the criteria of this project. For example, the researcher first made sure each study used was peer-reviewed;
studies that were not peer-reviewed were only used as supporting statistical or historical data. In addition, the researcher aimed to include studies that occurred within the years of 1980 and 2012 and anything before was not deemed useful. This is because it was difficult for the researcher to find helpful studies on Readers’ Theater being used as a fluency tool before 1980. Moreover, studies that did not fall within the desired grade range of first through eighth grade were also avoided. Furthermore, the focal point of this project is Readers’ Theater effects on oral fluency growth; therefore, studies pertaining to the effects of Readers’ Theater on other areas of reading were not used.

After conducting an extensive amount of research, the researcher organized the studies electronically by placing them into two separate folders, empirical studies and supporting studies. The supporting studies offered statistics about the topic. The researcher also used the reference lists from these studies as additional resources. The studies in the first folder were read through thoroughly. While reading, the researcher created an on-going list of the common categories and reading fluency factors found throughout the studies that could help the researcher organize the literature review. Some of the key factors that had an impact on the four fluency aspects included: Types of scripts used, how scripts were assigned, the demographics of students, and the type of instruction included. Based on these categories, a color-coded highlighting system was created in order to help the researcher organize information and compare results and data between studies. In addition, notes were written in the margins in order to record thoughts. Studies that provided options to how Readers’ Theater can
be implemented also displayed common categories such as including other subject areas, implementing the strategy within an already existing reading program, adding mini-lessons, and adapting to meet specific individual student needs. Similarly, a color-coded highlighting system was also created for these studies.

Once read and highlighted, the researcher organized and separated the studies into specific folders based on a corresponding research question. Lists were then made that noted the commonalities found within those particular studies and placed in each folder. Some of the studies included information and results that overlapped into more than one oral fluency category; these studies were mentioned on a separate list. The researcher was able to refer to the information and studies in each folder in order to summarize the findings in an extensive literature review.

The researcher then made a skeletal outline of the literature review with the three guiding research questions as the main sections. Though there were several small commonalities found between a few studies, the researcher decided to focus on the larger factors because they were found throughout multiple studies and presented information that answered the research questions. These factors were the types of scripts used during the studies, the demographics of participants, and type of instruction used along with the Readers’ Theater strategy. In order to write the literature review, the researcher focused on one folder at a time and the themes found within those particular studies.

Since the organizing technique of the Readers’ Theater literature review deemed successful and helpful, the researcher used a similar approach while
organizing the professional development studies. For example, the researcher created two folders in order to sort the studies. Then, as the researcher read through the studies, a highlighting system was used and notes were made. Finally, the researcher created lists of common themes discovered throughout the different studies and used these lists to help outline and develop the final professional development literature review.
Chapter Four Professional Development

Professional Development Workshop

The findings from the literature review will be shared in the form of a professional development (PD) workshop. The researcher will use the information gathered from the PD literature review as a guide to create the format of the workshop. There was strong evidence supporting the participation of all school officials for it can “assure system excellence” (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002, p. 131), so this PD workshop will be presented to a wide range of personnel, including first through eighth grade teachers, school district reading specialists, and school administrators. This will ensure that the entire district has support and shares the same educational vision. The PD workshop will consist of two face-to-face, 90-minute workshop sessions. Ideally, the PD workshop will be held during two separate days where students have an early-dismissal so the teachers are able to attend during a regularly scheduled work time. If scheduling difficulties do arise, the PD workshop can easily be offered as two separate after-school sessions. The second session will be scheduled one-week following the first session to allow time for the participants to acquire their desired classroom materials needed to participate in a small-group collaboration activity.

The goal of this PD workshop will be to provide teachers with an alternate and engaging way to help their students improve their oral reading fluency. In addition, the researcher will aim to reveal to the professionals how this fluency tool can be easily implemented within a pre-established literacy curriculum. The PD workshop
will consist of large group modeling and instruction, encourage small group interaction, connect information to participants’ classrooms and students, and provide the opportunity to extend learning over time through a blog. The researcher attempts to frame this PD workshop around Dingle et al.’s (2011) Literacy Learning Cohorts (LLC) and include as many of the PD characteristics of healthy school districts discovered by Pritchard and Marshall (2002) as possible.

Specific learning objectives for the PD workshop are:

1. Participants will discover the importance of the four aspects of oral reading fluency and recognize the successes of the use of Readers’ Theater activities on the four aspects of oral reading fluency in first through eighth graders.

2. Participants will learn how Readers’ Theater can be implemented and connected with an already existing literacy program.

3. Participants will learn how to select a text based on its characteristics and how to convert the text into a script.

4. Participants will collaborate and use available Readers’ Theater materials in addition to classroom materials to develop a Readers’ Theater intervention program and script.

5. Participants will demonstrate their newly constructed knowledge through the use of a blog.

The aim for this PD workshop is to present some of the research findings from the literature review that highlight the successes and benefits of using Readers’
Theater as an oral reading fluency tool for first through eighth graders as well as to create a positive environment that encourages interactive small group collaboration in order for the participants to construct knowledge between the newly received researched based information with their current classroom situation.

**Design of Professional Development Project**

The PD workshop will be held in a large conference room in one of the school district’s schools. The researcher plans to hold the workshop in this location for the convenience of the participants and to respect possibly busy and conflicting outside schedules. In addition, a local and familiar site could ensure a higher attendance and positive participation.

Following the LLC PD model, the first session will have a strong content focus on Readers’ Theater research information. This session will be designed to resemble a lecture in order to deliver research findings, with the addition of whole-group interaction. The first five-minutes will be devoted to a brief “Meet and Greet” among the participants as the researcher hands out informational packets that will be referenced and an agenda outlining the entire PD workshop. The packets will consist of the workshop agenda (see Appendix A), PowerPoint slides with space for note-taking (see Appendix B), and a sample text to convert into a script (see Appendix C), a graphic organizer for planning (see Appendix D), a table to plan daily Readers’ Theater intervention (see Appendix E), and a resourceful list of Readers’ Theater scripts, books, and websites (see Appendix F).
After introductions, the researcher will quickly explain the goals of this workshop, which Cercone (2008) reveals should be outlined early so participants see the reason for learning and how it will benefit them and their school. There will be a 15-minute think-pair-share activity where the researcher will first ask the crowd to quickly and silently think and jot down any information they have on Readers’ Theater. The researcher will encourage the participants to include any personal experiences, stories about students, or research information. Afterwards, the participants can pair up with other members and share their knowledge. The researcher will then summon the group back together and lead a whole group discussion. This will give the researcher insight on the participants’ prior knowledge on the topic.

During the next 30 minutes, an interactive PowerPoint will be presented. It will first illustrate the research evidence on how Readers’ Theater is an effective instructional tool and the many positive affects it can have on students’ oral reading fluency skills. Next, the PowerPoint will expose how Readers’ Theater can be integrated into an already existing literacy program, and provide research-based strategies on how Readers’ Theater can be combined with other content areas.

Following the lecture portion of the workshop, there will be 30 minutes of whole group interaction while viewing a PowerPoint. The next set of slides will consist of points on what text features should be included while considering the conversion of a text into a script, as well as how pre-existing scripts can be chosen, adjusted, and assigned. After the discussion, the researcher will model how to convert
a short portion of a text into a Readers’ Theater script. Participants will be able to work with the researcher on their own copy available in the workshop packet. This portion will be concluded with the showing of three YouTube videos on the PowerPoint providing examples of actual Readers’ Theater performances of students in three different grade levels.

As an expert on the Readers’ Theater information and an outsider of the school district, participants may view the researcher as an outside expert who knows and cares little about their specific educational situation. The researcher wants to ensure there is a large focus on the participants’ particular and specific contexts, students, and school to demonstrate the desire to work with and help the participants grow. Therefore, the amount of time and emphasis on each slide will depend largely on the participant’s school and student information and individual participants’ prior knowledge. As Cercone (2008) suggests, the researcher will relate the participants’ experiences and current knowledge to the concepts being learned. In addition, there will be time for group discussion and questions. Furthermore, it is important to guarantee that “students can review previous learning whenever they want” (Cercone, 2008, p. 141), therefore, though the entire PowerPoint may not be discussed in detail, the participants will have all of the slides available for them in their packet which can be revisited in the future as much as necessary.

The remaining 10 minutes will be dedicated to taking questions. Participants will have an opportunity to ask questions, or make comments, regarding the Readers’ Theater information discussed throughout the workshop thus far. The questions and
comments will be used and taken into consideration before presenting the second half of the workshop. The researcher will encourage the participants to devote the next week to finding materials they would like to use while creating their own Readers’ Theater intervention plan and scripts during Session Two. This will be the conclusion of the first day of the workshop.

Session Two will also be 90 minutes long. One of the characteristics found by Pritchard and Marshall (2002) in the PD of healthy school districts is the inclusion of professional work time. Similarly, the LLC format also calls for interactive work time and collaboration. Therefore, the design of this session will be teacher-centered and include more active small-group learning and collaboration coupled with literacy coaching. With this design, Dingle et al. (2011) explains the participants will have opportunities to use data about their specific students as well as collaborate collectively “in integrating knowledge into classroom practice” (p. 88).

While gathered in the same large conference room, participants will have five minutes to ask any new questions or make comments before dividing up into work groups. In addition, the researcher will ask the participants to spend a few moments thinking and discussing if they would like to group with those who share the same grade level or group with those who have students who have similar abilities. The invited administrators will be asked to join in on a group in order to give an administrative perspective to the group discussion and planning. There can be a combination of grade-level and ability-level groups if desired.
The participants will have a chance to move around the conference room and meet with their groups. The groups will work together in developing a Readers’ Theater intervention program and creating a Readers’ Theater script for a total of 60 minutes. To help the groups remain focused, these two tasks will be chunked into two separate time frames. The first 30 minutes will be devoted to the creation of the Readers’ Theater intervention program. The program will consist of book, script, and topic ideas for the Readers’ Theater activities, at least two mini-lesson activities that focus on oral reading fluency skills the students need most, and how they will group their students. In addition, they will create a brief outline for instruction, mapping out how much time will be spent focused on the Readers’ Theater during their already scheduled literacy block and noting how each day will be spent. To help the teachers organize their plans and thoughts, they will use the graphic organizers available in their packets. The researcher will remind the participants to refer back to the PowerPoint packet to gather ideas while creating the intervention program.

The next 30 minutes will be spent on the construction of a Readers’ Theater text. Participants will have the option to look for pre-existing scripts online that can be used or adjusted or to create their own script. Each option can be successfully completed with available materials, such as laptops with internet access to Readers’ Theater websites, printed copies of Readers’ Theater scripts, teachers’ classroom books, and children’s fictional books and informational texts provided by the presenter. The groups will attempt to select, adjust, or create at least one possible Readers’ Theater script. The researcher will again encourage the participants to refer
back to their workshop PowerPoint packets for tips on how to select a text and to successfully transfer the text into a script.

While groups are working together, the researcher will circulate the room to offer input, listen to ideas, and guide thinking. Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003) discuss how when reading specialists and teachers work together, they are better able to solve problems regarding students and classroom instructional concerns. In addition, it is further mentioned how providing professional materials, children’s books, book lists, and computer software can prove to be helpful and beneficial. Including these supplies along with the participants’ personal classroom materials allows the opportunity to tie their current classroom situations with the new content. Once the groups have completed their 60-minute work session, they will have 10 minutes to briefly share what they have accomplished to the other groups.

For the remaining 15 minutes, the groups will be summoned back together in order to learn how to use the workshop blog (see Appendix G). Prior to this work session, the participants will have received an email asking to create a username and join the blog. Also, the email will contain steps on how to access the blog. In addition to written directions in the email, the researcher will demonstrate how the blog can be accessed and how it can be used as a means of continuing support and reflection between the teachers, the administrators, and the presenter. The researcher will encourage the participants to actively use the blog by mentioning how there will be frequent comments and updates on the blog with new Readers’ Theater information, strategies, and resources. Further, as an additional incentive, there will be a place for
the participants to ask direct questions related to Readers’ Theater. The researcher will check this section of the blog regularly so answers are provided as quickly as possible. One member of each group will also use this time to upload any of their Readers’ Theater documents and plans onto a workshop blog site. Therefore, if the group was unable to finish constructing their Readers’ Theater intervention plan or script, it will be readily available on the blog to work on at anytime. There were also be time for questions.

Prior to this presentation, school officials will have been notified of the blog in order to receive permission for teachers to become members. In addition, teachers will have been sent an email to join the blog and add their information. Since schedules are busy, the blog will act as coaching tool in the future and beyond the PD workshop. It will be a tool kit for all of the teachers and can be used as a follow-up technique to ensure the literacy method is being incorporated in classrooms, to read about success stories, to offer advice and answer questions, and to post future findings and information relating to Readers’ Theater. The blog will also act as support to help the participants implement what they learned within their own classrooms once they have left the training environment (Killion, 2003). To end, each participant will log into the blog and complete a poll question regarding their PD experience before exiting the workshop.

**Project Connections to International Reading Association Standards**

Table 1 below illustrates the connection between this professional development project and the International Reading Association Standards (2010).
Specific standards are matched with explicit parts of this project including the theoretical stance, the research conducted and included, the explicit data from the studies mentioned, and the professional development workshop.
### Table 1

**Project Connection to International Reading Association Standards (2010)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Reading Association Standards</th>
<th>Ways in which the standards were met through this professional development project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IRA Standard 1: Foundational Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>• The researcher explores and gains an understanding of learning theories and uses them as a foundation and a support for this project. Social Learning Theories by Vygotsky and Bandura guide this project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Candidates understand the theoretical and evidence-based foundations of reading and writing processes and instruction.</em></td>
<td>• The researcher follows the constructivist theory. The researcher also acknowledges Malcolm Knowles’s (1973) concept of andragogy for the professional development (PD) workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1.1 Candidates understand major theories and empirical research that describe the cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and sociocultural foundations of reading and writing development, processes, and components, including word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading-writing connections.</td>
<td>• The researcher reads studies about the history of fluency instruction and how instruction has changed over time due to new demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1.2 Candidates understand the historically shared knowledge of the profession and the changes over time in the perceptions of reading and writing development, processes, and components.</td>
<td>• The researcher focuses on English Language Learners (ELLs) and struggling readers and how Readers’ Theater (RT) can help these students improve their oral reading fluency. Also, the researcher points out how teachers can use this tool to help students with diverse needs find success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1.3 Candidates understand the role of the professional judgment and practical knowledge for improving all students’ reading development over time.</td>
<td>• This entire project is a PD project for educational professionals. The researcher provides a PowerPoint, resource packets, examples of texts, and access to an internet blog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IRA Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction</strong></td>
<td>• The researcher explains how RT can be integrated within a teacher’s already existing literacy program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Candidates use instructional approaches, materials, and an integrated, comprehensive, balanced curriculum to support student learning in reading and writing.</em></td>
<td>• The researcher exposes how the RT scripts were used throughout the chosen studies. These include informational scripts, fictional scripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2.1 Candidates use foundational knowledge to design or implement an integrated, comprehensive, and balanced curriculum.</td>
<td>• During the workshop, the researcher provides multiple sources for participants to find or make scripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2.3 Candidates use a wide range of texts (e.g., narrative, expository, and poetry) from traditional print, digital, and online resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Reading Association Standards</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ways in which the standards were met through this professional development project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **IRA Standard 4: Diversity**  
*Candidates create and engage their students in literacy practices that develop awareness, understanding, respect, and a valuing of differences in our society.*  
- **4.1** Candidates recognize, understand, and value the forms of diversity that exist in society and their importance in learning to read and write.  
- **4.2** Candidates use a literacy curriculum and engage in instructional practices that positively impact students’ knowledge, beliefs, and engagement with the features of diversity. |  
*The researcher acknowledges the different forms of diversity by locating studies and focusing on how diverse students can partake in Readers’ Theater (RT) activities.*  
*RT can be used to support the oral fluency growth of all students including remedial readers, special education students, and English Language Learners (ELLs).*  
*The researcher reveals how RT is a flexible tool that can be differentiated to meet certain needs and to connect to students’ backgrounds.*  
*During the professional development workshop, the researcher groups the participants based on their own students and needs.* |
| **IRA Standard 6: Professional Learning and Leadership**  
*Candidates recognize the importance of, demonstrate, and facilitate professional learning and leadership as a career-long effort and responsibility.*  
- **6.1** Candidates demonstrate foundational knowledge of adult learning theories and related research about organizational change, professional development, and school culture.  
- **6.3** Candidates participate in, design, facilitate, lead, and evaluate effective and differentiated professional development programs. |  
*This project keeps the researcher up to date on current best practices in literacy education. In addition, the researcher takes the responsibility to pass knowledge on to other educators in the form of a PD workshop. Conclusively, the participants of the PD workshop will have access to a blog in order to continue communicating and growing after the workshop.*  
*The researcher demonstrates knowledge on adult learning theories and how adults learn. For example, a purpose is given and goals are outlined, new information is linked to past events, reasons are given to how this information is helpful and useful, multiple modalities of information are incorporated, and the blog and packet allow the participants to revisit information whenever needed.* |
Chapter Five Conclusion

Overview of Study and Findings

This project consists of identifying research evidence regarding the impact of Readers’ Theater on first through eighth graders’ oral reading fluency through a literature review and applying research findings in the format of a professional development workshop. First, using three guiding questions, the researcher conducted a literature review on the impact of Readers’ Theater as a fluency tool on first through eighth graders’ oral reading fluency skills. The first guiding question was: How does Readers’ Theater impact oral reading fluency in first through eighth graders? A review of the research studies indicates that Readers’ Theater can help increase the oral reading fluency skills. The studies provide evidence that Readers’ Theater is a practical vehicle for students with a range of learning abilities to enhance oral reading fluency. The repeated reading practice necessary to perform Readers’ Theater is one key factor in fluency improvement that can help students develop the skills necessary to read and comprehend at higher levels. In addition, the performance provides multiple opportunities to witness the modeling of appropriate oral reading and can be coupled with skill mini-lessons to further develop the oral fluency skills.

A second question was: How is Readers’ Theater used as a motivational literacy tool in first through eighth grade? The findings from the literature review reveal Readers’ Theater as an engaging and authentic alternative to the often used repeated reading activity. Research has pointed out the positive changes in attitudes towards reading and the act of repeated reading when an authentic purpose is given.
Specifically, Readers’ Theater requires students to reread scripts repeatedly, but the technique also provides an authentic purpose by allowing the students to perform successfully in front of a crowd. Overall, research has also recognized a strong link between motivation, practice, and confidence and coins Readers’ Theater as an authentic, engaging, and motivating fluency tool for all involved.

A third research question was: How can first through eighth grade teachers integrate Readers’ Theater into an already existing literacy instruction? The review of research studies points out how, even in hectic and demanding times, fluency can be a focus within an already existing literacy instruction and in any subject area. Readers’ Theater is a manageable tool that teachers and specialists can use with students at varying levels and can also adapt the activity to fit their specific needs as well as an existing program’s demands. Furthermore, research reveals how Readers’ Theater and oral fluency skills can be incorporated into multiple subject areas without diminishing the focus on the content material.

In order to develop a professional development workshop that disseminates research findings, the researcher conducted an additional literature review on adult learning theories and successful professional development workshop formats. The creation of a professional development workshop is in line with the humanistic learning theory, andragogy, and provides an opportunity for professionals to grow in their field and develop a stronger sense of job satisfaction. The format of the professional development workshop must also be carefully considered and designed. It is recommended that a variety of groupings, interactions, and instructional styles be
included, as well as opportunities to connect the new data to participants’ current situations. Overall, the goal of the workshop is to have the participating teachers, reading specialist, and administrators be excited and engaged while providing beneficial and useful information and strategies.

Significance of Findings

The National Reading Panel (NRP) has appointed fluency as a necessary component of reading. Though fluency has been claimed to having a vital role in reading proficiency and research has shown strong connections between fluency and reading comprehension, it is a part of reading that is often neglected in classroom reading instruction. This is often due to teachers’ narrow definitions of fluency, conflicting views on the role of fluency, and lack of efficient fluency strategies. Unfortunately, this often leads to teachers selecting mundane fluency strategies, such as repeated readings, to help increase a student’s oral reading rate only.

The findings from this project add to the definition of oral reading fluency by including four main aspects: Reading rate and accuracy, expression and volume, phrasing, and smoothness. Fluency is a multi-dimensional concept and when all aspects are mastered, not just reading rate, a reader is able to construct meaning from a text. The research highlights the importance of fluency on the overall development of reading ability. In addition, the review provides an engaging, authentic, and adaptable fluency tool which can help improve first through eighth grade students’ overall oral reading fluency.
The main goal of reading is to gain overall comprehension and research has shown strong links between these two literacy aspects. Simply, when a reader’s fluency and decoding skills become automatized, the reader can devote energy and attention to comprehending the text, instead of trying to decode it (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Due to the strong connection, it is recommended that teachers find authentic ways to improve students’ reading fluency. Specifically, Readers’ Theater is a fluency tool that can help create the skills necessary to lead to proper fluency as well as improved overall comprehension. The researcher proposes that future educators find ways to embed Readers’ Theater into their current literacy instruction because research highlights how the use of fluency-based mini-lessons, the use of instructional reading level scripts, and the act of socialization and collaboration within Readers’ Theater can help improve students’ oral reading fluency.

This fluency tool can replace the repeated reading strategy and provide students with an authentic way to reread texts. As research states, this will begin to motivate students and could potentially lead to a higher interest and desire to read and participate in educational scenarios outside of the Readers’ Theater, benefiting both students and teachers (e.g., Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Tsou, 2011). In all, the fluency skills worked on and developed during Readers’ Theater can be coined as life-long learning skills. Simply, students will carry these skills on into other areas and they will continue to develop and grow as they progress through the grade levels.
This literature review benefits the field of education and it is important to share the answers to the project’s guiding research questions in the form of a professional development workshop. The professional development workshop is a way to have educational personnel experience first-hand how Readers’ Theater is an alternative, yet beneficial, oral fluency tool which helps students increase all four aspects of oral reading fluency. Overall, the workshop benefits and enhances the participants’ knowledge on the importance of developing students’ oral reading fluency and alter their teaching practices to include authentic fluency strategies such as Readers’ Theater.

**Limitations of Findings**

A number of studies from an assortment of journals were used to conduct the literature review. Though the studies are reliable, there were a few limitations. For one, the definition of oral reading fluency used in this project focused on four aspects of fluency. The researcher identified a large body of research that centered on reading rate and accuracy, and expression and volume while very limited studies focused on two of the aspects: Smoothness and phrasing. Since there was a lack of studies focusing on smoothness and expression, it was difficult to get an accurate determination if Readers’ Theater can add to the growth of these two fluency aspects.

Another major limitation of the project was limited studies focused on the positive benefits of Readers’ Theater as an oral reading fluency tool for special education students, remedial readers, and English Language Learners (ELLs). Though many studies mentioned included special education students and remedial readers
within their studies, very few examined this group only. Also, the research focusing on the ELLs were conducted outside of the United States and on language groups that are less common in this country. Overall, these limitations influenced a portion of the researcher’s recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Overall, there is a lack of research on the effects of Readers’ Theater on students’ oral reading phrasing and oral reading smoothness. Studies that focus on these two aspects, which are often overlooked, will benefit this field greatly. Furthermore, to benefit the culturally diverse society, there is a need for studies that focus on how Readers’ Theater benefits ELLs from locations other than Taiwan and Israel.

After reviewing studies with contradictory findings regarding the use of mini-lessons, future research that explicitly focuses on the use Readers’ Theater coupled with fluency based mini-lessons is needed. It is unclear whether including mini-lessons alongside Readers’ Theater enhances, limits, or has no effect on the development of readers’ oral reading fluency skills. Though some studies have incorporated the use of mini-lessons within their research and some evidence on the overall impact of these lessons has been revealed, there are few studies that focus specifically on the growth of readers’ oral reading fluency after using fluency based mini-lessons with Readers’ Theater.

One last recommendation for future research involves the use and incorporation of technology. In today's society, there is a strong increase in the use of
technology in classrooms. In addition, students are experienced and often motivated when technology is involved. Studies on the impact of Readers’ Theater tied with technology or how Readers’ Theater can be successfully performed or adapted to include technology would be an interesting, up-to-date, and beneficial future study.

**Conclusion**

Research suggests that Readers’ Theater can be a motivating, authentic, and engaging way to improving first through eighth graders’ oral reading fluency and overall reading confidence. In addition, it is also a flexible and adaptive tool that can help meet standards and fit into already existing literacy instruction programs. Overall, Readers’ Theater alone can help students increase their oral reading fluency abilities. However, research-based evidence supports that the addition of fluency skill-based mini-lessons alongside Readers’ Theater for it has proven to be beneficial. In addition, scripts that are selected, adapted, or created to match students’ instructional reading levels can help students, especially remedial readers, improve their oral reading skills.

There are several characteristics and design formats to consider when creating a successful professional development workshop. One is to become educated and follow adult learning theories while developing and presenting workshop information. In addition, effective professional development workshops consist of multiple grouping and collaborating opportunities in order for participants to have a chance to relate their personal information to the workshop information. This knowledge helped create a workshop to deliver findings from the reviewed studies, to present useful
strategies, and to provide helpful materials in order for current educators to begin incorporating Readers’ Theater into their instruction.
References


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Appendices
# Appendix A Professional Development Workshop Agenda

## Professional Development Agenda

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<tr>
<th>Session 1: Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>3:30-3:35</td>
<td>Meet and Greet, Materials, and Goals of Workshop</td>
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<td>3:35-3:50</td>
<td>Think-Pair-Share</td>
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<td>3:50-4:20</td>
<td>Whole Group Interactive PowerPoint-Positives and Integration of Readers’ Theater</td>
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<td>4:20-4:50</td>
<td>Whole Group Interactive PowerPoint-Text Features, Model and Conversion of Text into Script, and Videos</td>
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<td>4:50-5:00</td>
<td>Questions and Comments</td>
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<th>Session 2: Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>3:30-3:35</td>
<td>Questions and Grouping</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:35-4:05</td>
<td>Small Group Collaboration and Readers’ Theater Intervention Planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Modeling Oral Reading Fluency</td>
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<td>- Two Mini-Lessons</td>
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<td>- Student Grouping</td>
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<td>- Daily RT Time within Literacy Block</td>
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<td>4:05-4:35</td>
<td>Small Group Collaboration and Construction of RT Script</td>
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<td>- Looking through available materials</td>
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<td>- Select, Adjust, or Create one RT script</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:35-4:45</td>
<td>Small Group Sharing Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:45-5:00</td>
<td>Whole Group-Workshop Blog, Conclusion, and Questions</td>
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Appendix B Interactive PowerPoint

Readers’ Theater - What is it?

- An interpretative and integrated, voice-only performance where volume, intonation, and timing are critical to supporting the listeners' enjoyment, visualization, and understanding of a text.

"an authentic approach to literacy instruction" (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 5)

Fluency - More than Reading Rate

- A multidimensional construct where students read with appropriate reading rate and accuracy, volume and expression, phrasing, and smoothness in order to construct comprehension.

The relationship between fluency and comprehension is reciprocal

Reading Rate & Accuracy

- The ability to read a text at an appropriate rate to establish comprehension and to read the individual words in the text without error in pronunciation.

Research
- Martinez et al. (1999) - average increase of 17 WPM for students who were involved with RT & mini-lessons, average increase of 9.9 WPM for students without RT.
- Young & Rasinski (2009) - students read 6.7 WCPM at beginning of year and 12.6 WCPM at end of the year after RT intervention with mini-lessons.
- Vakula & McLeod (2007) - students jumped from a pre-test grade-level equivalent reading score of 1.09 to a post level of 2.22 after RT without mini-lessons.

Expression and Volume

- The ability to read with appropriate expression, inflection, and pitch.

Research
- Young & Rasinski (2009) - students read at 6.0 in prose, representing a 20% improvement in expression after RT with mini-lessons.
- Kiefer (2005) - students' expression mean range jumped from 2.3 (out of 5) to 3.0 after RT with mini-lessons.
- "Increased confidence and motivation gave voice" (Clark et al., 2009, p. 179).

Phrasing

- The ability for a reader to render a text to reflect the semantic and syntactic content of the text.

Research
- "Second grade students at all levels of reading ability made significant gains in rate, phrasing, fluidity, and expression when the implementation of Readers’ Theater" (Kiefer, 2005, p. 32).
- Clark et al. (2006) - participants improved on one or more of the following prosodic elements: expression, volume, phrasing, pacing, and smoothness" (p. 379).

Smoothness

- Sounds like natural speech and includes automaticity, the ability to read the words in a text correctly and effortlessly.

Research
- Martinez et al. (1999) - students in two 2nd grade classrooms improved in at least one facet of oral reading fluency with most improving in three of these (p. 323) after RT while 10 of 25 students without RT showed no improvement.
- Kiefer (2005) - students' smoothness improved from 2.7 (out of 5) to 3.2 after RT with mini-lessons.
- Clark et al. (2004) - as student's confidence increased, his smoothness also improved. At the beginning of the week his reading was choppy, but after repeated practice it was fluent for the performance.

Workshop Goals

1. Discover the importance of the four aspects of oral reading fluency & recognize the success of using RT
2. Learn how RT can be implemented & connected into an existing program
3. Learn how to select & convert a text into a script
4. Collaborate to create a RT intervention program & script
5. Demonstrate knowledge through the workshop blog
Special Education Students, Remedial Readers, & English Language Learners

Readers’ Theater may provide “an avenue for meeting the learning and social needs of students in special education, in addition to their specific literacy needs” (Garrett & O’Connor, 2010, p. 7).

- **Research:**
  - Texs (2001)– SLP students had more improvement in reading accuracy over time with RT
  - Conover & Davis (2003)– special education students VPMI increased by 17 additional words as a class after RT
  - Keith (2003)– low ability students mean reading rate grew from 73 VPMI to 110 VPMI and mean expression score increased from 31 (out of 5) to 3.9 after RT with mini-lessons
  - RT “moves the focus from merely the mechanical act of performance to encompass more broadly the cognitive, kinesthetic, aesthetic, and communicative process that students experience during performance” (Peck & Vinkler, 2004, p. 791)

Implementing Readers’ Theater

“This activity provides a manageable, meaningful, and fun way of integrating curriculum, which is a must for teachers who seem to have too much to do and too little time” (Peck & Vinkler, 2006, p. 734).

- **Research:**
  - Grouping based on instructional level or need or student interest, adjust scripts.
  - Incorporate technology (podcasts, YouTube, Skype, etc).
  - Interact with off-site content areas
    - Garrett, O’Connor (2010)– students did research on 33 topics and wrote scripts for RT
    - Conover & Davis (2003)– instructional materials for the TORR comprehensive model concepts, how to conduct RT
  - Mini-lessons & explicit instruction
    - Miller (2001)– professional development for teachers during RT, showing how students learn from minilessons, how to model

RT can be “nearly impossible to integrate any reading program in a school for all levels of readers. It is an appealing alternative to repeated readings; intense for individual, partner, and group work; and offers the opportunity for reading success” (Clark et al., 2009, p. 365).

Converting or Creating a Script

- Reminders!
  - Read the story several times, may be helpful to do in a group to get opinions.
  - Identify all of the roles in the story first, then make adjustments (split characters, add narrators, etc.) based on number of readers
  - On own sheet, cross out the cuts, add lines, break up the context, etc.
  - Read the script aloud & make edits/helpful if a group to receive feedback.
  - Format can be adjusted based on students’ needs.
  - Bold font for emphasis, font size, color-coding, etc.

Tips: Choosing a Script

- Check the internet sites provided for you in your packets—Many you can download, adjust, print, & copy
- **Choose scripts that:**
  - Are fun, high-quality, engaging, and of interest to your students, or are based on a learning topic.
  - Are appropriate for the age, grade, & reading levels of readers AND listeners.
  - Spread the dialogue among several readers.
  - With young children—choose a script that has an easy & predictable story line, that has lots of repetition, or that has a lot of rhyme.
  - Teacher can be the narrator if necessary.

Readers’ Theater in Action

- **Readers’ Theater**
  - 1st Grade
  - RT Intermediate Grades, Bilingual Students
  - 8th Grade Poetry

Student Motivation

- RT practice sessions were viewed as “rehearsal sessions for eagerly anticipated performances” (Kiew, 2003, p. 54).
- **Research:**
  - Miller & Rinehart (1999)– children were much more enthusiastic about reading and performance was clearly tied to the experience of success (p. 75) from RT
  - Rinehart (1989)– students excited about repetition of reading script because they could and someone wanted to listen (p. 87)
  - Conover & Davis (2003)– students with learning disabilities chose getting to perform in front of peers as the most rewarding benefit of RT
  - Clark et al. (2009)– students who performed in RT volunteered to read for class outside of RT and were more motivated to learn throughout the day (p. 372)
  - “When I go home, I will practice the script because it gives me a sense of achievement” (Nuss, 2011, p. 143).
Appendix C Practice Script

The Baker’s Dozen by Aaron Shepard


In the Dutch colonial town later known as Albany, New York, there lived a baker, Van Amsterdam, who was as honest as he could be. Each morning, he checked and balanced his scales, and took great care to give his customers exactly what they paid for—not more and not less.

Van Amsterdam’s shop was always busy, because people trusted him, and because he was a good baker as well. And never was the shop busier than in the days before December 6, when the Dutch celebrate Saint Nicholas Day.

At that time of year, people flocked to the baker’s shop to buy his fine Saint Nicholas cookies. Made of gingerbread, iced in red and white, they looked just like Saint Nicholas as the Dutch know him—tall and thin, with high, red bishop’s cap, and a long, red bishop’s cloak.

One Saint Nicholas Day morning, the baker was just ready for business, when the door of his shop flew open. In walked an old woman, wrapped in a long black shawl.

“I have come for a dozen of your Saint Nicholas cookies.”

Taking a tray, Van Amsterdam counted out twelve cookies. He started to wrap them, but the woman reached out and stopped him.

“I asked for a dozen. You have given me only twelve.”

“Madam,” said the baker, “everyone knows that a dozen is twelve.”

“But I say a dozen is thirteen,” said the woman. “Give me one more.”

Van Amsterdam was not a man for bear foolishness. “Madam, my customers get exactly what they pay for—not more and not less.”

“Then you may keep the cookies,” the woman said. She turned to go, but stopped at the door.

“Van Amsterdam! However honest you may be, your heart is small and your fist is tight. Fall again, mount again, learn how to count again!”

Then she was gone.

From that day, everything went wrong in Van Amsterdam’s baker. His bread rose too high or not at all. His pies were sour or too sweet. His cakes crumbled or were chewy. His cookies were burnt or doughy. Before long, most of his customers were going to other bakers.

“That old woman has bewitched me,” said the baker to himself. “is this how my honesty is rewarded?”

Appendix D Readers’ Theater Intervention Outline

Script & Book Ideas (genres, topics, reading levels)

Fluency-based Mini-lesson Ideas

Student Groupings
Appendix E Readers’ Theater Intervention- Daily Map

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Appendix F Readers’ Theater Resources

Websites with FREE and PRINTABLE Readers’ Theater Scripts

1. www.fictionteachers.com/classroomtheater/theater.html
   - Fictional scripts adapted from books

2. www.readinglady.com
   - Several scripts adapted from popular books by authors such as Marc Brown and Arnold Lobel, scripts from classic poems and fairy tales

   - Scripts for grades K-3, middle/ upper elementary students, and middle and high school students. Adapted scripts to enhance poetry and fables

   - Several scripts adapted from nursery rhymes and stories, scripts based on seasons, legends, animals, plus scripts connecting to other subjects

5. www.aaronshep.com/rt/index.html
   - Scripts for young readers, practice scripting sheets, and tips for teachers

   - A small list of science education scripts

   - Multicultural scripts—scripts adapted from multicultural stories, fables, and riddles

   - Scripts adapted from their own downloadable leveled books

   - Website with links to several additional links to Readers’ Theater scripts, as well as books with scripts, and additional guides to implementing Readers’ Theater

    - A large collection of scripts adapted from picture books, chapter books, fables, fairy tales, and nonfiction books. Also, provides Accelerated Reader Level and Lexile Level.
Children’s Books and Picture Books Suggested for Readers’ Theater

The following children’s books and picture books are suggested by Marinez, Rosner, and Strecker (1999) and Worthy and Prater (2002)

Chapter Books Suggested for Readers’ Theater

The following chapter books, informational books, and poetry books are suggested by Worthy and Prater (2002) and Young and Vardell (1993)


Informational Books and Poetry Books Suggested for Readers’ Theater

Appendix G Readers’ Theater Blog

Readers' Theater in Your Classroom!

Hello all,

We’re all here to learn how to use the blog in a classroom setting. I hope you found the first two workshop sessions to be insightful. I would greatly appreciate your feedback on the third workshop session. If you find the time to complete the quiz, please take it. This quiz is an opportunity for you to reflect on what you’ve learned.

We discussed the concept of using a blog in the classroom, but a key element of using a blog is creating a community. In the next blog post, we’ll explore how to create a community on a blog. In addition, we’ll share examples of how other educators have used blogs to create a community.

When you complete the quiz, please fill out the form below. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. Thank you for your participation.

Katie G.