How critical is fluency for the struggling reader?

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The purpose of this qualitative research study is to look at the importance of fluency to the struggling reader. The research sets out to look for answers to the following questions: How critical is fluency for the struggling reader? What effect does fluency have on the reading experience? What strategies work to improve fluency? The research was conducted on three struggling fifth grade readers, all with different ability levels. One student is placed in a self-contained special education class, one student goes to the resource room for literacy, and one student receives help from the basic skills teacher. Students were assessed using the Critical Reading Inventory and a one minute reading probe. They then received individualized fluency instruction using modeling and repeated reading. Following fluency instruction, students were reassessed. This research supports the idea that fluency instruction may lead to an increase in reading rate and comprehension. The implications of this study relate directly to the field of education and reading instruction. Further questions suggested by this research include looking at student fluency progress over time and across different grade levels.
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Chapter 1 – Purpose Statement

Introduction

"Do away… Do away… Do away with it shrieked Femrn You mean kill it Just because it's smaller than the others Mrs. Arable put a pitcher of cream on the table Don't yell Femrn she said Your father is right The pig would probably die anyway"

What you have just read is an excerpt from chapter one of E.B. White’s popular children’s novel Charlotte’s Web from the eyes of a non fluent reader. This is a reader who ignores all punctuation. She never pauses for a comma or a period, or shows expression for an exclamation point or question mark. Sometimes she might repeat the first two or three words of a sentence three or four times. A fluent reader would see it like this:

“Do away with it?” shrieked Fern. “You mean kill it? Just because it’s smaller than the others?”

Mrs. Arable put a pitcher of cream on the table. “Don’t yell, Fern!” she said. “Your father is right. The pig would probably die anyway.”

Which reader comprehends the text?
Statement of the Problem

This teacher research study is looking at the importance of fluency to the reading experience. How critical is fluency for the struggling reader? What effect does fluency have on the reading experience? What strategies work to improve fluency? Although this is not a highly researched topic, the scholarly works and studies that have been done all point towards the importance of fluent reading in regards to comprehension. Not only does the research about fluency stress its importance to reading and comprehension, it also recognizes the lack of instruction on fluency in the classroom (Stayter, Allington 1991; Rasinski, 2004; Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003). Rasinski (2004) argues that even if fluency is being taught in the classroom, the focus and methods being used are inefficient and unsuccessful. He writes that the focus is mostly just on pace, whereas an improvement in fluency is more than just reading faster. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) state that the problem with understanding fluency lies in the lack of information about successful strategies.

Fluency is an integral part of the reading experience. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) argue that “if children fail to make the transition to fluent reading, they will encounter significant difficulties in constructing meaning from the text” (p. 1). Rasinski (2004) supports the strong link between fluency and comprehension, which is crucial to reading. If children are not reading fluently they are likely to be missing out on key concepts of the text, which may also affect comprehension. Stayter and Allington (1991) agree, saying that fluency “has the potential to help readers develop more resonant understandings of text” (p. 145). Further not only does fluency affect comprehension, but it will also affect the reader’s interest and motivation to read; a non fluent reader will be
much less motivated (Meyer and Felton, 1999). Anderson (1981) describes fluency as “the missing ingredient” (p.172) in reading programs. In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to add to the literature about the effect fluency has on the reading experience for struggling readers.

**Relevance and Importance**

Many children struggle with reading everyday. They dread being called on to read in front of the class during the school day because their classmates laugh at how long it takes them to read a simple sentence. They are not making the connections to the stories or passages that they are reading. They are losing interest in reading, because it is a struggle for them and they cannot relate to the text. Frustration with reading occurs whenever they read and these students are becoming unmotivated (Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003; Meyer, Felton, 1999).

Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003) describe the problem of fluency as a continuous cycle. The cycle begins with the struggling reader’s unwillingness to read, which leads to a decline in practicing reading. Because the student is avoiding reading, fluency does not increase (Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003). Each year the non fluent readers fall behind because they cannot remember or understand what they are reading (Allington, 2004). These readers are slipping through the cracks. They are going through the grade levels, passing through each grade without crossing the bridge to fluent reading and comprehension (Rasinski, 2004). Yet, fluency instruction in the classroom can improve the reading abilities of all students (Rasinski, 2004).

Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006) argue that “fluency plays an important role in overall reading development” (p.45). They discuss three ways that fluency is
connected to comprehension: reading rate, accuracy of reading, and phrasing. Rate, accuracy, and phrasing are widely agreed upon as the three key components of fluency (NRP, 2000; NRC, 1999; Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003; Rasinski, 2003). Finding successful strategies to improve these three components of fluency could greatly improve the reading experience and increase comprehension. The research that I am conducting is important because it looks at the connections between fluency and proficient reading and identifies one strategy that may work to improve both fluency and comprehension in struggling readers.

Limits

The limitations of this study are due in part to the small population of the study - one school, in one county, in one state. Further, the proposed study documents the learning of a small number of students of the same grade level. This research was conducted while student teaching which led to very strict time limitations. All data had to be collected after finishing the student teaching semester. This required returning to the school to collect the data for two weeks. Lots of flexibility was also necessary due to scheduling problems among the three students who participated in the study. The length of the study plays a big part in the limitations, as the selected students will only receive fluency instruction for a period of two weeks. Furthermore, the long term effects of the fluency instruction will not be known at the end of this study. This study on fluency in struggling readers is also only looking at one strategy for improving fluency. This is a limitation to the study because it only addresses the effectiveness of one specific fluency strategy for struggling readers.
Story of the Question

My interest in fluency developed in the spring of my senior year at Rowan University while I was tutoring for my Reading Certification. My tutee was a fourth grader who was struggling immensely with reading. She lacked confidence in reading and told me that she hated to read aloud. After testing her reading level using the ARI, I determined she was reading on an early third grade level. It was not just that she was reading on a third grade level; there was something more she was struggling with than just the words on the paper.

After listening to her read more and more, I began to identify some of the patterns in her reading. She would often repeat the first three words of a sentence, sometimes more than three times. She paid no attention to exclamation points or question marks, and rarely paused for commas or periods. Every sentence was a string of words, no emotion or connection from one word to the next. If I asked her comprehension questions after she read, she would usually have no idea what she had just read to me. As the weeks went on I learned that she hated reading aloud in class. Her teacher would often randomly call on students to read from their textbooks. Her classmates would laugh when she read because she would repeat the words and read slowly. She had no confidence in herself, and she hated reading.

My job and goal was to help her read more fluently and with comprehension. I also wanted her to develop a love for reading, whether she was reading silently or reading aloud. I tried various strategies to help her increase her fluency; and yet she still struggled. Part of the difficulty stemmed from school texts that were at her frustrational level. If I gave her something on a third grade or early fourth grade reading level she
could read it fluently, an improvement made from our time spent working on fluency. However, she continued to read well below her grade level. Tutoring made me look more closely at the different components of reading, and I found fluency to be a very important, yet sometimes forgotten, part of reading and the reading experience. It made me ask myself questions like: How is fluency addressed in classrooms? How does fluency affect comprehension? And how can struggling readers overcome the lack of fluency and become proficient readers? All of these questions led me to my question as a teacher researcher: Is fluency the missing link for struggling readers?

Organization of Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis is comprised of a literature review. The literature review explores the past research, as well as the ongoing research on fluency that pertains to this study. The methodology of the study is described in Chapter 3. Also in Chapter 3 is the context of the study, description of the data sources used, and a description of how the data will be analyzed. The analysis of the data is written in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains the results of the data, the conclusions, and any implications.
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

“When kids read fluently, paying attention to phrasing and intonation, it’s obvious that they understand what they’re reading. But when kids read word by word, syllable by syllable, or even phrase by phrase in that familiar monotone, it’s a signal that their attention is not directed at making sense out of the text” (Allington, 2004, p.1). Fluency is a key element of the reading process. When children are not reading fluently, they have the potential to be missing out on important elements of text. In today’s classrooms and in literacy curriculums fluency often goes unnoticed. Its importance is overlooked, and children read, unconnected to the text and without comprehension (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006; Zutell, Rasinski, 1991; NRP, 2000). Yet to understand the importance of fluency and its role in supporting struggling readers, we have to consider four different aspects of fluency. The first aspect that this literature review addresses is what fluency is. How do researchers define fluency and how will fluency be defined in this study? The second section looks at why fluency is important to the reading process and to comprehension. The third section discusses how fluency can be assessed. Specific strategies used to increase fluency are described in the fourth section. This literature review first looks individually at what the research says about each of these aspects of fluency, and then makes the connections between the research and this study on fluency.

What is fluency?

In order to take a more in-depth look at fluency and to understand its effect on struggling readers, we must first understand what fluency is. Fluency has many different
meanings in various contexts. Although the meanings vary, there are several key points that are common in each of these definitions. The National Reading Panel (2000) provides a concise, three part definition for fluency. According to the NRP (2000), fluency is “the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (pps. 3-5). Similarly, the National Research Council (1999) defines fluent reading as “fast, accurate and well coordinated” (p. 6). Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003) similarly define fluency as speed and accuracy (p. 6).

As previously stated, not all definitions of fluency are the same. Furthermore, not everyone agrees with the importance of accuracy, an element found in these definitions of fluency. Rasinski (2003) writes that fluency is “the ability of good readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression” (p. 26). What is missing from Rasinski’s definition is the emphasis on correctness of reading. He argues that fluency involves “much more than mere accuracy in reading” (p. 26). Like Rasinski, the Integrated Reading Performance Record measures fluency without looking at accuracy. Instead they consider phrasing, “recognizing author’s syntax”, and expressiveness (Educational Testing Service, 1995, pps. 15-16). These researchers do not disregard accuracy altogether; it just is not included in the definitions. It is noted that although accuracy is important to consider, it should not be part of the fluency scale because “all readers – even the most fluent – make errors as they read” (Educational Testing Service, 1995, 16). It is very important to remember that all readers do make mistakes at times. Nevertheless, accuracy still has to be considered when doing assessments on all readers, even though it is not always included in the definition of fluency.
Because there are multiple definitions of fluency, it is necessary to state how it will be defined in this study when looking at fluency of struggling readers. Pulling from the NRP (2000) and Rasinski (2003), fluency will be defined as speed, expression, and phrasing. Although it is necessary to pay attention to accuracy, it will not be included in the definition. We will still look at accuracy because it is necessary for comprehension. If a student is, at times, reading the wrong words, he is often not fully comprehending the text.

What is the importance of fluency?

Although not all researchers agree on the definition of fluency, it is undisputed that fluency is a key component of reading and has an enormous impact on reading comprehension and the reading experience (Stayter, Allington, 1991; Rasinski, 2004; Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003; Meyer, Felton; 1999). Rasinski (2004) points out that each of the key elements of fluency play an important role in the reading process: "If readers read quickly and accurately but with no expression in their voices, if they place equal emphasis on every word and have no sense of phrasing, and if they ignore most punctuation, blowing through periods and other markers that indicate pauses, then it is unlikely that they will fully understand the text" (pps. 1-2). Meyer and Felton (1999) explain that when readers can read fluently, they do not have to pay attention to the sentence syntax and can pay full attention to the meaning of the text. Consequently, readers who struggle with comprehension and are disconnected from the text could benefit from increased fluency instruction.

The importance of fluency lies not only in its connection with comprehension, but also in its effect on the confidence of the reader. Meyer and Felton (1999) argue that
poor fluency can “affect the reader’s motivation to engage in reading” (p. 1). Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003) agree, even going as far as to suggest that this frustration can lead to less reading and can greatly impact a child’s learning experience. Nathan and Stanovich (1991) write that “nonfluent word recognition results in unrewarding reading experiences that lead to less involvement in reading-related activities” (p. 177). Winebrenner (1996) supports the beliefs of Nathan and Stanovich (1991), and argues that non-fluent readers also struggle to merely remember the information and words that they are reading.

Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006) provide a summary of what the NRP (2000) found to be the importance of fluency. They found that fluency follows the age old quote: practice makes perfect. Fluency increases with more time and more practice. The NRP (2000) also supports the importance of fluency to help increase comprehension and vocabulary. Finally, they note the importance of fluency instruction for all readers, not just those who are struggling with reading. Thus, their work seems to suggest that increased fluency can greatly affect a reader’s confidence and comprehension.

Because of its importance, fluency is an aspect of reading that teachers need to help students develop from day one. Fluency instruction can begin on the very first day of school, when, for example, the teacher reads the book Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten by Joseph Slate aloud to her kindergarteners using funny voices and lots of expression. Stayter and Allington (1991) note that the “importance of facilitating fluency in the initial stages of literacy acquisition, [is] primarily to assure steady progress in reading development and the creation of independent, self-monitoring readers” (p. 143). Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006) state the importance of helping students learn
to “identify words with sufficient speed”, “recognize words automatically”, “read accurately”, and “group words into phrases” (pps. 45-46). A focus on developing these four aspects can greatly impact the progression of fluency (Barone, Hardman, Taylor; 2006, Rasinski, 2004). Nathan and Stanovich (1991) agree on the significance of word recall and phrasing in developing fluency. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) have also found a link between comprehension and fluency, arguing that children need to become fluent in order to understand the text that they are reading. These findings support the importance of the development of fluency.

How is fluency measured?

Using the aforementioned definition of fluency (speed, expression, and phrasing), and having an understanding of the importance of fluency for struggling readers, it is necessary to then consider how fluency can be measured. How can teachers identify readers with fluency problems? Just as there are different definitions of fluency there are also different assessments to measure the fluency of a reader. The assessments also relate to the definition of fluency and how heavily teachers look at accuracy. The most common and easiest informal assessment of a student’s fluency is having the student read aloud (NRP, 2000; Rasinski, 2003; Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006). Simply listening to a child reading can inform teachers as to whether or not the child has fluency problems.

According to Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006) there are three different aspects of reading that need to be assessed: accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006, 74-76) “Accuracy is measured by the percentage of words read aloud correctly” (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006, 74). Even though the definition that is being used to explain fluency does not rely heavily on accuracy, it is nevertheless
important to measure when working with struggling readers. When assessing accuracy during fluency instruction, it is measured as a percentage of words correct.

Automaticity, however, is considered critical to most of the researchers when assessing a child’s fluency. According to Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006), automaticity is assessed by calculating the words-per-minute while a child is reading text at his or her instructional-level. Rasinski (2003) also recommends using the One-Minute Reading Probe for assessing fluency. In the One-Minute Reading Probe a student reads a passage that is on his grade level aloud for 60 seconds. During the minute that the child is reading, the teacher is taking note of the errors that the student makes. When the minute is up, the rate is found by counting the number of words read correctly. (Rasinski, 2003) Calculating words-per-minute is the most common way to assess the rate or automaticity at which a child reads (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006; Rasinski, 2004; Meyer, Felton, 1999).

Rasinski and Zutell (1991) recommend the use of a rating scale to assess fluency. The rating scale requires the same word-per-minute rate that many researchers use, but takes it one step further to include specific descriptions of the student’s reading. The scale has anywhere between seven and four levels at which the teacher places the student. Each level has a range of words-per-minute, as well as descriptions of the reading quality that correspond with each level, for example choppy, repetitious, pace, and pauses. Even though there are many different methods to use for assessing fluency, it is important to be consistent and to measure all aspects of fluency.

Although rate and accuracy are easily measured with numbers, the prosodic qualities, like expression and phrasing, are better measured using a rubric. Rasinski
(2003) believes that “listening to students read and scoring their reading on a descriptive rubric or rating scale, is another, more holistic way of assessing fluency” (p. 172).

Rasinski (2004) argues that a rubric for assessing the prosodic qualities of reading should assess four areas: expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. Like the rating scale utilized by Rasinski and Zutell (1991), this rubric lists a description of each of the four qualities, describing each level. Rasinski is not the only researcher to favor rubrics; the National Center for Educational Statistics also suggests a rubric for measuring the expressive qualities of reading (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006).

Research has found that prosodic qualities of reading are extremely important to assess when determining a child’s fluency (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006; Meyer, Felton, 1999; Rasinski, 2003, 2004).

*What are the strategies for teaching fluency?*

Once a nonfluent reader has been identified, teachers must look at what strategies can be used to increase the child’s fluency. Richards (2000) mentions four popular fluency strategies: modeling, repeated reading, paired oral reading, and choral reading. Blau (2001) also supports strategies similar to those suggested by Richards. Modeling and repeated readings are favored not only by Richards and Blau, but also by Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003). Rasinski (2004) also agrees that modeling and repeated readings can be beneficial, because hearing fluent readings of text can help students to read fluently themselves. The following pages contain detailed descriptions of three popular fluency strategies: modeling, repeated reading, and choral reading.
Modeling

Reading Comprehension and Fluency: Examining the Effects of Tutoring and Video Self-Modeling on First-Grade Students with Reading Difficulties is a study that looks at the effectiveness of video self-modeling for reading comprehension and fluency. Hitckcock, Prater, and Dowrick (2004) studied video self-modeling and found it to be a successful tool in increasing fluency. The study was conducted on four first graders during the course of an eight week period. Using this self-modeling technique the rate of reading increased greatly in these first graders; the rate doubled for three of the students and increased by four for the fourth student. These increases in both fluency and comprehension lasted for six months. Their study showed that the video self-modeling can be helpful in improving comprehension.

Allington argues that “research shows that when teachers model fluent reading, it helps children at all levels improve their fluency” (p. 1). The different ways of modeling that Allington (2004) discusses are teacher modeling for the students, children modeling for each other, and choral reading. Anderson (1981) also believes modeling can increase fluency, although she refers to it as echo reading. In this type of instruction the teacher serves as the model for the student, previewing difficult words and modeling phrasing and expression. This can also be done by having students listen to books on tape, either pre-recorded or recorded by the teacher, while following along before having to read aloud.

Repeated Reading

Another effective strategy used by teachers and researchers is repeated reading. Vacca, Vacca, and Gove (1995) define repeated readings as having a student read a text
at their independent level multiple times, each time offering a different amount of help. A study done by Therrien (2004) analyzes the successfuless of repeated readings on both reading fluency and reading comprehension. He found that using repeated reading increased fluency and comprehension for students with learning disabilities as well as the regular education students. Therrien (2004) also found that for repeated readings to work correctly there needs to be three essential components. The first component is that passages should be read aloud to an adult, the second is that corrective feedback on word errors should be given to the child, and the third requires that the passages be read until a performance criterion is reached. In addition, Chard, Vaughn, and Tyler (2002) also conducted a study on repeated readings which found that fluency and comprehension increased from repeated readings.

Nathan and Stanovich (1991) have found that books with patterns or repetitions and poetry books are helpful in developing fluency through repeated readings. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) also support the idea that students should continue repeating the texts until they can fluently read it. Richards (2000) states that the benefits in fluency and rate of reading from repeated readings will carry over when the reading new texts. She also argues that the repeated readings increase comprehension because students become familiar with the text. Richards suggests that there are three ways to successfully incorporate repeated readings into the classroom: teacher directed instruction, independent learning, and cooperative repeated readings.

Choral Reading

Reader's Theater is another popular approach to improving fluency. Briefly described, Reader's theater is when students dramatically and expressively read text that
is typically written as a play (Barone, Hardman, Taylor, 2006). Rasinski (2004) describes the reader’s theater and believes that “passages meant to be read aloud as a performance – poetry, for example, or scripts, speeches, monologues, dialogues, jokes, and riddles – are perfect texts for developing fluency" (p. 2). Blau (2001) stresses the benefits that reader's theater can have on fluency by describing its focus on "expression and intonation" (p.2). She states that the focus must be on interpretation and not memorization. This is done by using the script and a combination of read-alouds, echo reading, and choral reading (Blau, 2001). Likewise, Keehn (2003) in her study, *The Effect of Instruction and Practice through Readers Theatre on Young Readers' Oral Reading Fluency*, found a significant growth in fluency over the nine-week study. These studies suggest the importance of reader's theatre as another effective strategy for improving fluency and comprehension in struggling readers.

**Conclusion**

This literature review provides an overview of the four main aspects of fluency that are necessary to understand fluency and its effect on struggling readers. Developing a definition of fluency greatly impacts all of the subsequent research, including its importance to reading comprehension, how it is assessed, and what strategies will work to develop fluent reading. Although each of the four questions (What is fluency? What is the importance of fluency? How is fluency measured? And what are strategies for teaching fluency?) can be looked individually, when they are looked at together it can be seen that they are all interconnected.

In researching fluency and its effect on children’s reading comprehension, it is necessary to consider all aspects of fluency. An understanding of what fluency is is
critical to recognize its importance. Equally important is knowing how to identify a nonfluent reader, and then knowing what strategies will work to help the reader make the transition to fluency. Each of these aspects is directly related to one another, and to this study on fluency.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

Research Paradigm

This is a qualitative teacher research study. Teacher research is defined as research that is “concerned with the questions that arise from the lived experiences of teachers and the everyday life of teaching expressed in a language that emanates from practice” (Lytle, Cochran-Smith, 1992, p.466). Teacher research stems from the belief that as a teacher researcher, the teacher conducts a study based on her knowledge. A qualitative approach most often collects information through field observations and interviews and searches to find reasons from the standpoint of who is being observed (Creswell, 2003). This teacher research study is doing exactly that, collecting information by working directly with those children who are struggling with fluency and trying to determine what will help them increase their fluency. The description of the study also aligns closely to that of Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) who write: “teacher research is case study – the unit of analysis is typically the individual child, the classroom, or the school” (p.266). This study, then, is an example of teacher research that considers individual struggling readers and how teachers can help them.

Data Sources

Information and data are collected from three main sources: students, teachers, and the teacher researcher. Student interviews are transcribed to determine the students’ beliefs regarding their own reading ability. Are they confident readers? Do they enjoy reading? Interviews are conducted both before and after the fluency strategy has been
taught. Students are also assessed prior to and following the fluency instruction. Assessments include a Critical Reading Inventory, a rate assessment, and a fluency rubric. Teacher interviews are a second key data source to gain background knowledge about each student and the literacy instruction they receive in the classroom. These interviews ask questions about the student’s reading ability, as well as their confidence in the classroom as a reader. The final source of data is the teacher researcher journal. This is a journal that the teacher researcher has compiled beginning at the start of the research process. This contains all of the field notes that were taken during the time spent with the students. It details the steps taken throughout the research process, as well as contains vignettes and anecdotes about the students in the individual case studies.

Data Analysis

In looking at and analyzing the data, the main question the teacher researcher poses is: What effect does modeling and repeated readings have on struggling readers? Does their fluency improve? Does their comprehension improve? Does their outlook on reading improve? Do they have more confidence? Accuracy, automaticity, and prosody are also assessed and analyzed using the rating scales and rubrics designed by Rasinski (2003, 2004). The same rating scale is used for all students included in the case studies. The Critical Reading Inventory comprehension scores taken before and after instruction will also be analyzed.

Context of the Study

Town

This study will be conducted in city in southern New Jersey. According to the US Census in 2000, this city has a population of 10,307 people. Racially, it is 72.45% White,
22.83% African American, 3.94% Hispanic or Latino. $41,827 is the median household income while the per capita income is $21,692. 13.5% of the population live below the poverty line. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodbury,_New_Jersey)

District

The school district has many different special education programs, each providing varying levels of support based on the needs of the student. The least restrictive is a placement in a regular education classroom with support and services, followed by support from the Resource Center. The second option is a special education classroom, either self-contained or inclusive. A third option occurring in less than 10% of the special education student population is outside the district at private facilities.(http://www.woodburysch.com/programs/specialservices/special_services.html)

School

The school in which this study takes place is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade public school. The total enrollment is 278 students, with an average class size of 15 students. 47% of the student population are black, 41% are white, 10% are Hispanic, and 2% are Asian. 49% of the school’s student population participates in free or reduced-price lunch program. Students with disabilities make up 13% of the population. 98% of the population speaks English at home and 2% speak Spanish. (http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/nj/other/2267)

Because this study looks at struggling readers, the students who participated were chosen from three different 5th grade classrooms. The students come from three different special education programs in the school. The research was conducted on one student in
a self-contained classroom, one student who goes to the Resource Center for literacy, and one student who receives Basic Skills services in the classroom. These students were chosen by their classroom teachers as students who struggle with reading. One of the three students is a boy, and the other two are girls. Two are African American and one is white.

The Study

The three students who participated in this study were chosen by their classroom teachers because they are considered to be struggling readers. There are many different levels and types of struggling readers, and I wanted to have a good representation of fifth grade readers for this study. They represent three levels of struggling readers: one self contained special education student, one student who goes to the resource room for reading, and one student who receives basic skills help in the classroom for reading. These students were informed about the study and a permission slip was sent home to parents. All three originally chosen students received their permission to participate in the study.

Instruction was done on a one-on-one basis with each student for approximately twenty to thirty minutes at a time. Research began by assessing each student’s comprehension and fluency using the Critical Reading Inventory and fluency rubrics. This was administered during the first meeting with each of the students. On the second meeting fluency instruction began with the students. Instruction with each of the three students followed the same basic format; however, each student worked at a different level and different pace. I began by asking the students questions about how we want our voices to sound when we are reading orally. Students were encouraged to explain and
describe their own feelings about reading and how their voice can affect their reading. This was done informally as a way to not only build an understanding of fluency in the students, but also to build a comfort level between myself and the student. It was extremely important for the students to feel comfortable with me, because often struggling readers feel shy or nervous about reading aloud. I made it clear to the students that we were working together on our reading, and it was not being graded or judged.

After discussing the importance of fluency, I showed the students flashcards with different punctuation marks on them, including a period, exclamation point, question mark and comma. We reviewed the flashcards and I asked questions about how the punctuation influences our reading – or if it influences the way that we read. I then explained to the students that we would be using poetry to practice reading fluently.

Instruction began with a combination of modeling and repeated readings. The modeling was important for students to know what was expected of them when it was their turn to read. I started by reading the entire poem aloud while the student followed along silently. We would then break down the poem by each individual stanza. I would read the stanza first, and then the student would read the stanza. This was continued based on the individual needs of the student. This instruction lasted approximately two to three days, concluding with students being able to effortlessly and fluently read the poem. Throughout the entire fluency instruction, students were asked questions about the process of reading orally and its importance.

Following mastery of the first poem, students then moved on to read a second poem. I gave the students a new poem and asked them to read it aloud without giving them a chance to practice or pre-read it – much like when they are asked to read aloud in
Students were timed while they read – either to the end of the poem or for one minute. We then followed the same steps of modeling and repeated readings. After receiving fluency instruction, students reread the poem and were re-timed. We then compared the first and second times and discussed the results. On my final day meeting with the students we discussed the importance of fluency and students were reassessed using the Critical Reading Inventory and fluency rubrics. I also gave the students a chance to discuss their feelings on the research and if their opinions on reading aloud had changed at all.

Each student although labeled a struggling reader gave 100% during the time that we spent together. Chapter four discusses the case studies that detail the fluency instruction with each of the individual students. The names of the students have been changed to protect their identities.
Chapter Four: Case Studies and Analysis

Introduction to Case Studies

This chapter contains the detailed descriptions in the form of individual case studies of the three students who participated in the study. Each case study follows the same basic structure, beginning with a description of the student and a description of the assessments that occurred prior to instruction. The second section describes the one-on-one instruction that took place with the student. The final section looks at the evaluation that was done immediately following the instruction during the last meeting. This section also describes any growth or progress made by the individual students. Following the individual case studies, the chapter then looks at the data of all the students and draws conclusions about instruction effectiveness.

Tony

Before Instruction

I first met Tony when I was student teaching in his upper ungraded self-contained special education classroom. He is a quiet and shy fifth grader who tries extremely hard to succeed at everything he does. Tony is somewhat of a perfectionist, always needing additional time to get work done and is rarely happy with the work when he is finished. Tony has communication problems and is classified Specific Learning Disability. He has difficulty following oral instructions and remembering simple everyday routines in the classroom. He struggles with reading and math, and tends to shut down when things get too tough, an observation I made when I first started teaching his reading group. Tony is
not a fluent reader; his reading is extremely slow and halting. He becomes easily frustrated when reading aloud, not only because the text is often too difficult, but also because of the amount of time it takes him to read each paragraph and because classmates might laugh. I believed that Tony would benefit from individualized fluency instruction, and was very excited when his classroom teacher recommended him for my study. Tony was also happy to be working one on one, and was very receptive to the instruction.

I explained to Tony that we would begin with the Critical Reading Inventory, which would just require him to read a story and answer questions about it. Tony scored 70% of the third grade word list correct; thus he began reading a passage at a first grade level, the last level he scored 100% correct on the word lists. As soon as the text was put in front of him, I could see him shut down a bit. After a bit of encouragement, Tony began to read. He read with a Reading Accuracy Index of 94%, however his retelling was poor. Tony left out many of the key points of the story – giving him a Retelling Score of 2. His total comprehension score was 63%, and he struggled the most with the text-based questions, only getting 1 out of the 3 questions correct. Tony did not seem to make any connection with the text. He read the story as one long run-on sentence. Based on the oral reading of the first Critical Reading Inventory, Tony was at the level 1 of the reading fluency rubric, which is weak. He read without expression at a very slow rate. I explained to him that over the next two weeks we would be practicing strategies that would help his oral reading and improve his comprehension.

During Instruction

The first step in fluency instruction was getting Tony to understand just what fluency is. I showed Tony flashcards with different punctuation marks on them.
Although he could identify all of the different forms of punctuation, he did not know what to do with his voice at each of the different marks. I told Tony that when you read aloud it is very important to pay attention to the punctuation because it can help you understand what is going on in the story and make connections to the text. I asked him to ask me a question, any question. He thought for a minute, and then asked me what my favorite color was. I then repeated the question to him, without changing the tone of my voice. He laughed, seeing my point about the importance of punctuation. I explained that if we read every sentence in the same voice, with the same tone, it won’t be as easy to connect to and understand the text.

I then introduced Tony to our first poem “My Snowman” by Neal Levin. In choosing a poem for Tony, I wanted it to be a poem that would not be intimidating in length. “My Snowman” is a cute and funny poem that I thought Tony would be able to connect to. I told Tony to follow along while I read the poem aloud to him for the first time, and then I went back and just read the first stanza. After I read it, I told Tony it was his turn to read. When it was Tony’s turn to read it for the first time, his voice, although still halting, showed a little more emotion and rhythm. During our next meeting we reread the first stanza and then went onto the second. Tony would listen to me read and then try to use the same qualities in his voice when it was his turn.

The next time that we met I asked Tony to read the entire poem. He read it once, twice, and by the third time he was reading it perfectly. Do all students need this much time doing repeated readings? No, but Tony did and it was worth it to see the look on his face when he read it for the third time. I asked Tony what he was smiling about and he
shrugged his shoulders. I told him he did a great job reading the poem and he said, "Reading it together helped me read it better."

Seeing how well Tony did with the first poem, I decided to use a slightly longer poem for the second. I explained to him that we would be looking at this poem differently than the last poem. This time, when I placed the poem in front of him, I asked him to read it without my reading it first. While he was reading, I timed one minute. Tony read 40 words in that minute. After he had finished reading the entire poem, I explained to him that while he was reading, I had timed him for a minute. When I showed him how far he had gotten, he seemed unimpressed – like he didn’t really care. I asked him if he thought he could beat that time with a little practice, and he said yes. This poem, “Good Morning, Dear Students” by Kenn Nesbitt took less time than the first poem to master. I could see that Tony was trying harder to listen to me read and mimic the tone of my voice in his voice. He was even asking to practice stanzas multiple times. This made me smile, coming from a student who doesn’t like to read aloud.

During our next two meetings, we finished working on “Good Morning, Dear Students”. When it was Tony’s turn to read it in its entirety, I again timed him for one minute. This time he read 67 words per minute. I first reminded Tony how he had done the first time, 40 words in one minute. Then I showed him how he had done this time: 67 words in one minute. Tony smiled widely. I asked him what had made his word rate increase so much and he credited the practice and listening to me read. The amount of confidence that Tony gained by seeing and hearing the improvement in his oral reading was substantiated and quite rewarding to observe.
After Instruction

On our last day, we reviewed what we need to think about when we are reading. Tony came up with answers he hadn’t come up with in our very first meeting. He said that we should read the way that we talk and pay attention to punctuation when we are reading. I then gave Tony the same level Critical Reading Inventory with which we had begun. Tony read the First grade passage with 96% accuracy. He received a 2.5 on the retelling portion, having provided much more detailed information, although still failing to provide the entire problem. Tony got an overall comprehension score of 75%, scoring three out of three text based questions correct. When I asked Tony if he would be able to use what he learned in his classroom, he said, "Yeah, I'll look at punctuation now."

Tony’s comprehension score the first time was 63%, which shows that Tony increased in his comprehension as well. Tony still scored 1 on the fluency rubric, which is Weak and is characterized by word by word reading, lack of enthusiasm, and very slow reading. Although Tony did not make the transition to the next level of fluency, he did make improvements in reading more expressively and with fewer pauses.

Janie

Before Instruction

The first day I met Janie I could tell she was apprehensive about reading, she did, however seem excited about the opportunity for extra help. Janie leaves her regular education fifth grade classroom to go to the resource room for math and literacy twice a day. Janie’s resource room teacher recommended her to me for this study because of her oral reading and also because of her comprehension problems. She also told me that Janie has difficulty focusing on her work. She said Janie lacks confidence in reading,
which is noticeable when she reads aloud. Although shy at first, Janie warmed up quickly as I asked her questions about reading and school. She told me that she likes math, only likes to read mystery stories, or stories that she gets to pick out herself, and hates, hates, hates reading aloud in class. When I asked her why she hates reading aloud, she said it was because she gets nervous, and when she gets nervous, she stutters. She also said that sometimes the words are hard to figure out when she has to read aloud. I told her we would try to work on some ways to help her read aloud with more confidence.

I told Janie that we would be beginning with the Critical Reading Inventory, and she would have to read some words and then read a story and answer questions about it. I could see Janie’s apprehension creep back on her face. I went on to explain that she was helping me and that this was not a test or anything she would be graded on. This seemed to relax her a little bit, so we continued on to the word lists. Janie did quite well on the word lists in the untimed portion of the Critical Reading Inventory. Very rarely did Janie get a word wrong, she often just needed more time to figure them out. She scored 70% on the timed portion of the fifth grade word list. She read the fourth grade reading passage with 96.7% accuracy, although she only scored two out of four on the retelling. Janie also scored 50% on the total comprehension, getting none of the three inference questions correct. She did, however, get all of the text based questions correct. Although she could make the direct connections to the text, she could not take what she had read any further to make inferences about what she had read. I began by showing Janie the punctuation flashcards and asking her what they are and how they influence reading. I was surprised that Janie knew exactly what each of the punctuation marks
meant, because when listening to her read, she paid no attention to punctuation. Although Janie knew what each of the punctuation marks meant, she admitted that she didn’t think about it while she was reading. I asked her the question: What do we want to sound like when we read? When she didn’t have an answer, I read her two little poems—one with emotion and fluency and then the other one in a monotone voice with a lot of pauses. Although an exaggerated example, it made Janie really think about the differences in the way we use our voice when we are reading. She even said that when I was not reading fluently it was difficult to remember and understand what she was listening to. While reading her Critical Reading Inventory, I assessed Janie's fluency using a rubric that assessed her at 1 - Weak. This is because of the pace, lack of expression, and lack of attention to punctuation in her reading.

During Instruction

I started Janie out with the rhythmic “Ickle Me, Pickle Me, Tickle Me, Too” by Shel Silverstein. I told her to listen and follow along as I read the poem the first time. We then read it stanza by stanza. This is a poem that is easy to read with emotion. I could tell that Janie was really paying attention to the words when I was reading them, because she was following along with the text with her finger. When it was her turn to read, she reread the poem with a flow and rate that I had not heard in her voice the first time she had read. The first time I read it to her, I asked her what the poem was about and she could only tell me one idea from the poem. However with each rereading, Janie could tell me more information about the poem's ideas.

The next time I gave a poem to Janie, I didn’t read it to her first. I asked her to read it—much like when she is called on to read in class. I timed a minute while she read
“My Dog Has Got No Manners” by Bruce Lansky. Janie read 77 words in one minute. After fluency instruction with modeling and rereading, Janie read the same text at a rate of 111 words per minute.

The last poem that I gave to Janie was “Good Morning, Dear Students” by Kenn Nesbitt. Before I put the poem down in front of her, I asked her what she was going to think about when she was reading, and she told me that she was going to think about her voice and that she was going to try to read “more smooth”. The first time she read “Good Morning, Dear Students” she read 85 words in one minute. This was a better rate than when she read “My Dog Has Got No Manners” for the first time, which was 77 words in one minute. With repeated readings and fluency instruction, Janie was able to bring her word per minute rate up to 115 words. With Janie, this almost became a game. She was constantly trying to “beat” her word per minute rate. I also found that she was becoming more involved in the text and reading with more emotion in her voice.

During one of our last meetings, I mentioned to Janie that she had told me on our first meeting that she hated reading aloud in class because she stutters. I told Janie that I hadn’t heard her stutter once since she had been working with me. She smiled shyly as I told her how impressed I had been with her reading. I also asked her if her feelings about reading aloud had changed at all during the time that we were working together. She told me that she had a little more confidence in reading aloud, and that now she thinks about how she wants to sound before she reads aloud.

**After Instruction**

Janie missed quite a few meetings. She was sick for several days and also had a few class trips, which caused a break in fluency instruction. On the second Critical
Reading Inventory, Janie scored a Reading Accuracy Index of 99%, an increase from 96.7% on the first CRI score. She maintained the same retelling score of two out of four. She did however increase in overall percentage of comprehension from 50% to 60%. Janie also increased in fluency. She was first assessed as 1 – Weak, paying no attention to punctuation and reading at an inappropriate pace with long pauses between words. Following fluency instruction, Janie was assessed as 2 – Inconsistent. Her pace became less sporadic and she paid much more attention to punctuation. She definitely showed growth in her attention to the way that she reads.

Ann

Before Instruction

When I approached the third fifth grade teacher about recommending a student for my study, she hardly had to think about it before suggesting Ann. Although not classified with a learning disability, the teacher told me that Ann struggles with reading – especially oral reading. Her teacher's biggest concern for Ann is her comprehension and inability to connect to the text. She is an incredibly personable and talkative fifth grade who seemed to feel immediately comfortable with me. Ann likes to play outside, read Juny B. Jones books, and vehemently stated that she hates science. Even though she struggles with reading, she said she enjoys it, but finds the hardest part of reading having to concentrate on the words.

I began instruction by giving Ann the Critical Reading Inventory beginning with the word lists. Ann scored 70% on the fifth grade timed word list and 85% on the untimed. Like Janie, Ann did much better on the untimed portion, often just needing extra time to sound out the words. Ann read the fifth grade text with a Reading Accuracy
Index of 95%. The story that she read was about a contest in a Chinese village that was open only to boys. A young girl wanted to win the special prize, so she dressed up like a boy and won the contest. After she won the contest, the prize was announced: the boy who wins the contest gets to marry the emperor’s daughter! Ann’s retelling of the story was: “A girl wanted to enter a contest but you had to be a boy. She dressed up and won the counting contest.” Her total comprehension score was 50%. When asked the question: “What do you think Winnie should do now that she knows what the prize is?” she answered “Take it home.” Ann made no connection to the text. The dialogue in the story was completely lost in her reading, as was the plot. In assessing Ann's fluency, using the Critical Reading Inventory rubric, she was assessed at a level 2 because of her pacing, phrasing and inattention to punctuation.

During Instruction

Like Janie, Ann knew all of the punctuation marks when I showed her the flashcards. She could tell me exactly what you were supposed to do with your voice when you got to an exclamation point, question mark, period, and comma. I asked Ann if she paid attention to the punctuation when she was reading and she told me that she was usually concentrating on the words instead. This was evident in my observations; Ann concentrated so hard on the words that she often missed the meaning of the text.

I started Ann reading “Ickle Me, Pickle Me, Tickle Me, Too” by Shel Silverstein. I read it to Ann first and then we broke the poem down by stanzas. This poem was especially good for Ann because it does have some expressive dialogue like “What fun!” that I had hoped would help Ann read with more expression. She picked up on the rhythm of the poem very quickly, and was applying exactly what we had talked about...
with punctuation and fluency to the text. Ann was able to fluently read that poem on her own very quickly, and we soon moved onto the next poem.

The next poem that I had Ann read was “My Dog Has Got No Manners” by Bruce Lansky. I had Ann read the poem without having seen it before. The first time she read it, she read 87 words per minute. Ann understood that what we were working on was the way we wanted our voice to sound. We continued working on this poem and by the end of instruction she read the entire poem at 110 words per minute. Ann showed immediate understanding of how to apply the fluency instruction in her everyday classes, by noticing that when she pays attention to the way she is reading, she understands the words better.

The last poem Ann read was “Good Morning, Dear Students” by Kenn Nesbitt. Before reading the poem, I asked Ann what she was going to think about when she read the poem aloud. She said she was going to think about rhythm and that “when you read you should pretend you’re in a play.” I thought this was a great description. It also showed me that now she was thinking about reading fluently and expressively, something that she wasn’t doing during our first meeting. The first time Ann read 99 words in one minute. We went through the poem using repeated readings and modeling. During our next meeting, Ann read 109 words in one minute. She also showed great improvement in oral expression during reading.

After Instruction

On our last meeting together, Ann read the fifth grade leveled Critical Reading Inventory passage. She did well, scoring 99% on the Reading Accuracy Index. Ann got a retelling score of four out of four – including every aspect of the story in her retelling. She also scored 80% in answering comprehension questions and answered each of the
text based questions correct. On the first CRI that I administered to Ann, she only scored 50% of the comprehension questions correct. Ann also showed great improvement in her retelling – going from a score of two out of four to a score of four out of four.

Based on the Critical Reading Inventory oral fluency rubric, which was filled out during both the first and last meetings, Ann initially scored a 2, which is defined as Inconsistent. Her reading was characterized by having frequent pauses, hesitations, and a lack of confidence, as well as not paying proper attention to punctuation. Following fluency instruction, Ann’s fluency would be described as a level 3 – Good. This is characterized by reading fluently, although sometimes with falters or hesitations. It also describes the use of punctuation and well paced readings, two qualities that Ann gained through the fluency instruction. Ann showed a clear improvement in both comprehension, fluency, and the ability to connect to the text.

Summary of Results

In looking at the individual case studies and comparing the results of the fluency instruction among the three students, it is necessary to consider two different aspects of the study. First, I will look at improvements made in the students reading fluency, including rate, expression, and attention to punctuation. Then I will look at their comprehension scores to see if there was an increase among all participants.

First, I will look at the rate at which the students first read and at the rate at which they were reading by the end of instruction. According to Rasinski (2003), in the spring of fifth grade, students should be reading approximately 128 words correct per minute. The following table shows where the three fifth graders in the study were before instruction and after instruction.
Table 1. Words Correct Per Minute Before and After Instruction: Poem #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem #1 Before Instruction</th>
<th>Poem #1 After Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>40 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janie</td>
<td>77 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>87 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>111 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>110 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, the number of words correct per minute greatly increased between the first reading of the poem and after fluency instruction. The next table shows the words correct per minute for the second poem. Remember, due to the amount of instructional time that Tony needed, we were only able to read two poems together, while the other students read three.

Table 2. Words Correct Per Minute Before and After Instruction: Poem #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem #2 Before Instruction</th>
<th>Poem #2 After Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janie</td>
<td>85 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>115 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>99 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>109 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second poem also showed an increase in rate for both Janie and Ann. The next table shows Janie and Ann's scores before instruction for both poems. The numbers show that even without the repeated readings, both of the girls' scores increased. These are the words correct per minute from their first reading of both the first and second poems.
These scores show a significant increase in reading rate, one of the key components of fluency. Although these students are not yet reading at their grade level, the rate at which they are reading shows improvement and progress.

Another assessment of fluency was done using the fluency rubrics. While all three students showed an increase in attention to pace, punctuation, and expression, only two of the three students raised their fluency to the next level of the fluency rubric. Tony, the student in the self-contained special education classroom, did show signs of improvement in fluency, but his improvements were not consistent enough to show an increase on the fluency rubric. Janie and Ann, however, made consistent progress in fluency, in the form of attention to punctuation and expression, as well as rate increase. They both increased by one point on the fluency rubric.

Table 4. Fluency Rubric Score Before and After Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency Before Instruction</th>
<th>Fluency After Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Level 1 - Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janie</td>
<td>Level 1 - Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Level 2 - Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In looking at both the rate and the fluency rubrics, these three students show improvements based upon the fluency instruction of modeling and repeated reading. The other area in which students were assessed was comprehension. Student comprehension was assessed prior to instruction and following instruction using the Critical Reading Inventory. Both assessments were given at the same level, before and after instruction. The results will show the retelling score and the percentage of comprehension questions correct.

*Table 5. CRI - Retelling Comprehension Score Before and After Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retelling score before instruction</th>
<th>Retelling score after instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony 2 out of 4</td>
<td>2.5 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janie 2 out of 4</td>
<td>2 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann 2 out of 4</td>
<td>4 out of 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparing the results of the retelling scores, there was only one student who showed significant improvement in the retelling. Ann's retelling after instruction was included much more detail than her retelling prior to instruction. Tony also showed slight improvement by including character names and recognizing the problem in the story. Janie's retelling remained the same.

*Table 6. CRI - Comprehension Score Before and After Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension before instruction</th>
<th>Comprehension after instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony 63% correct</td>
<td>75% correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janie 50% correct</td>
<td>60% correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann 50% correct</td>
<td>80% correct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38
Overall, each of the students showed an increase in comprehension scores following the fluency instruction. When looking at both the fluency and comprehension scores, all three students showed improvement following instruction. The results of this data suggest that the fluency instruction may cause an increase in comprehension.
Chapter 5 - Conclusions, Implications, and Questions

In chapter 4, the data collected during the course of the study was discussed using three case studies. After looking at and analyzing the individual results of each case study, the data was then analyzed as a whole to look for commonalities among the reading improvement in the three students.

Chapter 5 includes conclusions, implications, and further questions. The first section, Conclusions, takes a more in-depth look at the data analyzed in Chapter 4. Implications, the second section, contains information about the conclusions as it pertains to the field of education and future literacy instruction. The final section explores the questions that arose as a result of this study.

Conclusions

In looking at the data collected, and specifically the charts presented in chapter 4, I found that the data suggests several ideas about fluency and its importance to struggling readers. The study was looking to find relationships between fluency, comprehension, and the reading experience in struggling readers. In developing this study, I set out to answer questions like: How critical is fluency for the struggling reading? What effect does fluency have on the struggling reader? What strategies work to improve fluency? and Is there a connection between fluency and comprehension? In looking at the analyzed data, I see answers to many of these questions.

Supporting Meyer and Felton's (1999) research, I too found that nonfluent readers fail to show motivation in reading, especially oral reading. I was able to see the same
cycle that Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003) identified: Tony, Janie, and Ann all avoided reading if given the choice, which leads to less practice reading, which leads to fewer improvements. This suggests that a lack of fluency instruction can have an adverse affect on struggling readers. Because I saw an improvement in the confidence of the students while receiving instruction, this research also suggest that fluent readers may also be more confident readers.

The strategy that was used in this study to increase fluency was a combination of modeling and repeated reading. Based on the increase in fluency among the participants, as seen in the increase in rate and on the fluency rubrics, it appears that these two strategies, when combined, can be an effective instructional method.

Another question that I explored in my study looked for connections between fluency and comprehension. To research this, student comprehension was assessed both before and after instruction was provided. All three students have problems with comprehension as noted by their current teachers. In looking at the results of the comprehension assessments, each of the students showed an increase in their scores. These results support the findings of Barone, Hardman, and Taylor (2006), Zutell and Rasinski (1991), and the NRP (2000) that suggest fluency is directly correlated to comprehension. It also suggests that increased fluency can lead to increased comprehension.

In considering the big question, "How critical is fluency to the struggling reader?", it seems that there is only one answer: very. This research suggests that gaining fluency can improve the confidence of a reader, the reading experience, and reading comprehension. It also suggests that fluency can be increased using modeling and
repeated readings. These findings further support the research (Stayter, Allington 1991; Rasinski, 2004; Archer, Gleason, Vachon, 2003), implying that fluency is a key element in reading that can play an important role for struggling readers.

**Implications**

Once the data has been analyzed and the conclusions have been drawn, it is important to then think about the implications of the study. The implications of this study are related directly to the field of education and more specifically to reading instruction. Much research suggests that although a wealth of material has been written about fluency and its importance; fluency nevertheless, continues to be missing from curriculum and reading instruction in many classrooms. This research supports the idea that fluency is an integral part of the reading experience as it pertains to confidence and comprehension, and that with fluency instruction, educators may see an increase in the reading of their struggling students.

In my research, I used a combination of modeling and repeated readings. This seemed to be an effective method to help struggling readers. What I found to also be effective is to tell the students how you want them to read when they are reading aloud. A simple reminder that when we read, we want to use expression and pay attention to the pace and the punctuation, only takes a few seconds but can prompt students to read more fluently. This research was conducted during approximately twenty minute sessions for two weeks, which suggests that fluency instruction need not be a long part of the daily reading instruction.

With research pointing towards the idea that fluency is in fact critical to the reading experience, it needs to be handled as such in the classroom. This study implies
that fluency instruction can be as simple as having a teacher model what she wants the reading to sound like, as well as providing time for students to reread material and become familiar with it. These small steps in the classroom could yield big benefits for struggling readers.

Further Questions

My study began as a series of questions that I wanted to attempt to answer through teacher research. In answering those questions, I found myself faced with even more questions and the desire to conduct further research in the field of fluency and reading instruction. My research was conducted over the period of two weeks with only three students in one grade level. What will happen over time to the increases that had been made in their fluency and comprehension scores? Would I find the same results if I was instructing students across a larger selection of grade levels? What would happen if classroom teachers included 10 to 20 minutes of fluency instruction in their everyday reading program?

My questions are fueled by my research and also by the research of others that stresses the importance of fluency to struggling readers and also the lack of fluency instruction in the classroom. Why does fluency remain relatively untouched in reading instruction? The more teachers get involved in the teacher research process, the more research that shines a light on the importance of fluency for struggling readers, the more we will be able to help our struggling readers achieve not only a higher level of reading comprehension, but also a love and confidence for reading.
Reference


