THE EFFECT OF READER’S THEATER ON THE READING COMPREHENSION, FLUENCY AND MOTIVATION OF THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STUDENT

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this review of literature was to describe the effects of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy for improving the reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation of elementary English language learning (ELL) students. The literature reviewed included studies utilizing the effects of fluency-based reading programs, Reader’s Theater, and kinesthetic learning strategies on the reading skills of elementary students, including Title 1 and ELL. Results and conclusions from the studies indicated Reader’s Theater is a motivational and effective strategy in teaching elementary ELL students to read in a second language. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy include coping with performance anxiety, increasing the quantity of fluency practice, and incorporating Reader’s Theater into different content areas.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The population of English Language Learner (ELL) students in the United States is on a steady increase and is one of the most rapidly growing populations in U.S. schools (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education requires all public schools to provide extra support for ELL students, but policies are left up to each state, with no specific policies set forth by the federal government. As a whole, ELLs in the elementary classroom struggle with literacy as they practice the skills needed for reading in a second language (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). Elementary teachers face challenges as they sift through the best reading strategies to use with elementary ELL students. In order to be effective, reading strategies used with ELL students must ensure students are extracting meaning while decoding. Many foundational reading strategies as part of a Balanced Literacy program often focus on phonics, phonemic awareness and fluency independently from comprehension. Strategies concentrating on timed fluency and the recognition of sight words are ineffective if students are not given the opportunity to explore the meaning of the words in the text (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). This review of literature will examine the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a multidimensional reading strategy with elementary ELL students in accordance with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading.

Due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, state and federal mandates have put strong emphasis on phonics instruction for students, including ELL students, qualifying to have reading support in the primary grades (Adomat, 2009). Reading programs developed for Title I schools focused on decoding and simple recall of information. Fluency, once thought of as an oral-only reading skill, became one of the most important factors to balanced literacy education as educational strategies shifted from teaching silent reading to reading aloud (Pikulski & Chard,
The rationale was fluency would promote reading comprehension. Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the impact of fluency improvement on reading comprehension. Many studies have shown a strong correlation between reading rate and reading comprehension; however, others have found fluency does not always lead to high-quality comprehension (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). Lack of thorough comprehension instruction at the elementary level has led to students who can decode but who have a difficult time making connections with text (Adomat, 2009). Students who have a good understanding of text read with good prosody. As students practice their fluency, it is important for teachers to listen for students’ use of expression and phrasing. These skills show the reader is making meaning out of what s/he is reading.

Since reading rate alone does not always translate into proficient fluency and comprehension, teachers must focus on multidimensional reading strategies. Special importance must be made for ELL students to use strategies that assist with relating to text in a second language (Liu, 1999). Through progress monitoring, teachers use assessments to determine the type of strategies needed. Assessments of ELL reading progress can be misleading to teachers, parents, and students if the assessments are only a measure of fluency (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). To get an accurate analysis of student progress, both fluency and higher order comprehension skills should be measured.

During Reader’s Theater, students read from a practiced script. Students do not memorize their lines, nor are stage sets or props used. Students make the story come alive with expressive reading known as prosody. In practicing their lines, students do a great deal of rereading. Repeated reading, as a strategy, has been proven to improve both fluency and comprehension (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011).
In this review of research, I discuss the results of several studies conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater in the elementary classroom as a tool for improving the fluency and comprehension of ELL students. The types of assessments used to measure fluency and level of comprehension are addressed. I also review studies evaluating the role Reader’s Theater plays in motivating students to participate in reading inside the classroom and for leisure outside of the classroom. Finally, I discuss research documenting the effect kinesthetic learning, in relation to Reader’s Theater, has on the learning retention of ELL students.

I have carefully documented an extensive amount of research found in peer reviewed articles, studies, and doctoral theses. The research used focuses on elementary reading practices especially pertaining to ELL students, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and Reader’s Theater. Using the ERIC database and the OneSearch database from Northern Michigan University’s online catalogue, the words and acronyms: “English language learner,” “ELL,” ESL,” “ESOL,” “reading,” “bilingual,” “Reader’s Theater,” “performance reading,” “drama,” “prosody,” “repeated reading,” “fluency,” “comprehension,” “elementary,” “kinesthetic,” “motivation,” “scripted reading programs,” “No Child Left Behind,” and “Title 1” were used in differing combinations. Documents were read and evaluated for research pertaining to the qualities of Reader’s Theater used in the reading instruction of elementary ELL students.

Background

Many changes in the philosophy of reading instruction have been made over the years. In the nineteenth century, the focus was on oral reading. In the beginning of the twentieth century, oral reading was only practiced in the primary grades. Intermediate grades focused on silent reading. At the end of the twentieth century reading philosophy shifted from the whole language
approach to a balanced reading instructional plan (Busker & Wigart, 2008). The No Child Left Behind act of 2001 led to a strong emphasis on oral fluency instruction and measurement of automaticity (how fast a student can read a passage). When assessing reading rate, students are instructed to read very quickly, but as a result, students may not comprehend or enjoy what was read. These students read with good automaticity and accuracy, but may not have good prosody (expression and attention to punctuation). More recently, there has been a shift toward progress monitoring, differentiated instruction, and Response to Intervention (RtI). Current education professionals have recognized that children learn in diverse ways and require strategies that satisfy learning differences (McInnes & Tobin, 2008) in order to stay attentive and motivated.

**Statement of the Problem**

Elementary English Language Learner (ELL) students face extra hurdles in the classrooms as they are expected to learn, read, and comprehend, at their grade level, in a second language. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) implemented reading programs emphasizing phonics and fluency as its top priority and directed teachers to deliver scripted instructional lessons as part of its Reading First initiative. These programs produced students who could decode, but could not understand the literature well enough to comprehend (Adomat, 2009). Teachers were expected to conform only to the scripted reading materials and were powerless to provide students with effective, differentiated instruction.

ELL students need reading strategies allowing them to explore the meaning of the literature they read (Liu, 1999). Reading philosophies have evolved since NCLB was first signed into law in 2002, and scripted lessons have been replaced by teacher discretion and expertise. In most states, reading instruction has changed to include new mandates required by the Response to Intervention (RtI) process as well as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Teachers are
now expected to provide all students, including ELL, with reading strategies and interventions designed to teach fluency, comprehension, and the higher level thinking skills needed to achieve literacy. The goal of this review is to detail the effectiveness of Reader’s Theater in meeting reading goals as well as Reader’s Theater’s impact on ELL student motivation in the reading classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Reading is much more than decoding. It is a process of making meaning from text. In the context of narratives, good readers place themselves into the literature and interact with the setting and the characters. Good readers analyze the characters to understand their personalities, experience their emotions, and justify their motives. According to Rosenblatt’s (2004) Transactional Theory, text is irrelevant until a reader transacts with it. Meaning does not lie within the text, nor does it lie within the reader; instead, the text and the reader must come together to construct meaning. Readers bring their own unique ideas and knowledge to a text, which allows each reader a personal interpretation. Rosenblatt believes readers value text, not because of the information they extract from it, but because of the new experiences they attain through it. In Reader’s Theater, character interpretation is unique to the reader. During the process of decoding a script, students must analyze the story and the characters to determine how a line will be read. Readers experience the role of their character as they make meaning while attaining new information. Therefore, in Reader’s Theater, fluency is dependent on the meaning discovered by the reader.
Research Questions

To be considered a successful elementary reading strategy for ELL students, Reader’s Theater should aid students in reading fluency and reading comprehension, including higher order thinking skills. Reading fluency and reading comprehension are two of the skills included in The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Adomat, 2009) and are primary standards in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). A myriad of reading strategies focus on reading fluency and reading compression, but how motivational are these strategies to encourage reading and further practice of skills? This paper will examine the motivational factor of using Reader’s Theater in the classroom. The following questions have been researched and reported in this review of literature:

How effective is Reader’s Theater as a strategy for reading comprehension and fluency when used with the elementary English language learning student?

How motivational is Reader’s Theater in improving the overall opinion of reading for the elementary English language learning student?

Definition of Terms

The terms below are common to an educator of the language arts, but may not be as familiar to teachers of other subject areas. Definitions have been provided to assist all educators, as well as other readers, in understanding the methodology of using Reader’s Theater in the elementary classroom as a strategy for teaching comprehension and fluency to English language learners.

**Reader’s Theater.** A student performance of literary work in which the text is read expressively, but not fully staged or acted out (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).
**Reading comprehension.** Meaning that is constructed during the reader’s intentional thinking of the text and the reader’s prior knowledge and experiences leading to the understanding of the text (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Fluency.** The ability to read accurately and with appropriate expression and rate (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Inference.** Judgments or conclusions readers make (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Decoding.** The process of translating letters and words into language (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Title 1.** Federal education-funding program which provides funding to high poverty schools to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**English Language Learner (ELL).** English Language Learning students who have not met proficiency in the English language, both written and verbal (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Phonics.** The study of the relationships between letters and their corresponding sounds (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Prosody.** The expression, phrasing, and attention to phrasing used in reading aloud (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).

**Direct Instruction (DI).** An instructional approach used in teaching a methodical curriculum design through the implementation of a prescribed script (Cummins, 2007).

**Effective.** An effective teaching strategy will achieve its intended purpose (Harvey, 2013).

**Motivation.** An intrinsic or extrinsic reaction that influences learning and performance (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011).
Summary

Since reading rate alone does not always translate into good fluency and comprehension, teachers should implement multidimensional reading strategies to help students develop a variety of reading skills necessary for reading success. Reading programs and strategies used should motivate students to engage in reading practice. ELL (English Language Learner) students need to be able to relate to text in a second language, so may benefit from strategies that encourage them to become actively involved in their own learning (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011; Liu, 1999). Effective strategies are advantageous to student learning and should be evaluated through progress monitoring. An accurate analysis of student progress should include a measurement of both fluency and higher-order comprehension skills. This review of research will document the use of Reader’s Theater with elementary ELL students as a motivational strategy in promoting fluency and comprehension growth.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Learning how to read is a complex process. ELL beginning readers face an additional challenge as they learn to read while simultaneously learning a new language. Reading programs commonly used with ELL students, such as SRA/ McGraw-Hill’s Reading Mastery and Open Court, and the reading-intervention program Read Naturally, focus on phonics and decoding skills and brief recall of information, but do not include instruction for thorough comprehension and higher-level thinking skills. ELL students gain skills through multidimensional reading strategies that focus on reading for meaning as well as decoding (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Multidimensional reading strategies teach fluency and comprehension concurrently and help to ensure ELL students are understanding and making connections to text. Strategies involving kinesthetic learning during the reading process also help ELL students make meaning and connections to text (Demircioglu, 2010). Skills taught in a motivational way inspire ELL students to participate in the learning process and practice skills necessary for proficiency. The purpose of this review of literature is to describe the effects of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy for improving the reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation of elementary English language learning (ELL) students. The literature reviewed includes studies utilizing the effects of fluency-based reading programs, Reader’s Theater, and kinesthetic learning strategies on the fluency, comprehension, and motivation of elementary students, including Title 1 and ELL students.
Published Reading Programs Commonly Used with ELL Students

As part of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 and the Reading First initiative, the federal government awarded funding to states that used reading programs supported by scientifically based reading research. Despite opposing opinions by the National Reading Panel (NRP), Reading First established phonics instruction as the most significant reading component in teaching low-performing students to read (Cummins, 2007). Applications submitted by states wanting to use reading programs modeled after balanced literacy and whole language did not qualify as being scientifically acceptable by Reading First panels and were denied funding (Cummins, 2007). According to Cummins (2007),

Only intensive programs that taught phonics in a fixed sequential order were judged to be scientifically based; scripted programs involving predominantly whole-class instruction were viewed more favorably than non-scripted programs; and the incorporation of high-quality children’s literature was regarded as contributing little to the scientific credibility of a program. (p. 566)

As a result of Reading First, scripted, phonics-based programs were used in Title 1 schools with low achieving and ELL students.

The use of scripted and/or phonics driven programs as recommended by Reading First caused controversy as teachers became frustrated with the teaching style and flexibility of the programs and student test scores failed to improve (Dresser, 2012). The Open Court Reading program published by SRA/ McGraw-Hill was approved by Reading First and was widely used in Title 1 schools across the country through 2007. Open Court Reading is a direct instruction program and is taught through scripted lessons. Lee, Ajayi, and Richards (2007) examined the perceptions and opinions of teachers on the Open Court Reading program when used with native
English and ELL K-5th grade students. The study noted differences in opinions of the program between skilled and beginning teachers. Twenty-five schools were randomly chosen to participate in the study. One hundred surveys were sent to the twenty-five participating schools. For each school, two experienced teachers (skilled teachers who had taught five or more years) received surveys and two inexperienced teachers (with less than five years experience) received surveys. Ninety-three surveys were completed and returned to researchers. All participants taught the *Open Court* program. Participants’ experience with the Open Court program ranged from one to five years. The survey asked participants to respond on “whether the program promoted differentiated instruction, facilitated the use of a variety of instructional strategies and activities, promoted the use of appropriate materials, and suggested or provided learning activities that were related to learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds[,]… time allocation, program administration and community participation” (p. 27). Participants were also asked to respond open-endedly to questions about the most effective aspects of the program, the least effective aspects of the program, and changes that could benefit the effectiveness of the program. Researchers performed an initial $t$ test and determined a significant difference between the participants’ opinion of the *Open Court* program when used with Native English speakers (2.72) compared with ELL students (2.51). On average, teachers believed the program was more effective with native English speakers. Less experienced teachers perceived the *Open Court* program as more effective than experienced teachers. In the open-ended section of the survey, participants found phonics and instructional activities to be the most effective components of the program for ELL students. Participants found the writing component and scripted nature of the program to be least effective for both native English students and ELL students. The majority of participants listed the writing component and the need for teacher flexibility and discretion as
suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the program. Overall, less experienced teachers
had a more favorable opinion of the Open Court program due to its scripted lessons and small
amount of preparation time. More experienced teachers viewed the program less favorably and
complained they could not be creative with their lessons nor could they deviate from the scripted
lessons to provide students with the individual help students needed. Most teachers agreed the
program was more effective with native English speakers than with ELL students.

Another reading program approved by Reading First and widely used with Title 1
students was the direct instruction Reading Mastery program also published by SRA/ McGraw-
Hill. To measure the effectiveness of using the Reading Mastery (RM) program to teach reading
skills to second grade students in an urban school district, Wiltz and Wilson (2005) conducted a
mixed-method case study. Reading Mastery is a scripted program in which students are “taught
[comprehension] explicitly through repetition, direct questions for specific answers, and skill
exercises” (p. 499). The RM program instructs teachers to read directly from the script with no
deviation. Students must give answers as directed by the script. Student answers not listed in the
script are to be considered incorrect. Four questions guided the research:

1) How do children in a RM program use reading strategies?

2) How do children in a RM program comprehend as measured by retellings?

3) How do children perceive themselves as readers? What do they understand about their
reading habits?

4) How is the program viewed by teachers and the principal? (p. 497-498)

Twenty-seven second grade students from a large metropolitan school participated in the study.
Students chosen as participants had been instructed in the RM program at the school since at
least the beginning of first grade. Over 93% of students in the school received free or reduced
price lunch. All participants were fluent English speakers. As designated by their teachers, nine of the participants were identified as high readers, six were identified as average readers, and twelve were identified as low readers. Researchers had hoped to have a more even grouping of reading level, but due to the high mobility within the school, only 27 students met the time-line criteria for receiving RM instruction as presented by the study. As required by the state’s 180-minute reading mandate, participants received 75 minutes of RM instruction in the morning and an additional 45 minutes of reading instruction in the afternoon. The afternoon instruction was devoted to RM, standardized test preparation, comprehension, and writing. As part of the study, data was collected from a variety of assessments administered to measure reading ability based on students receiving RM instruction since at least the beginning of the first grade. Data sources administered to each participant included miscue analysis, retellings, metacognitive interviews to measure individual reading perceptions, attitudes, and strategies used during reading, and a phonics test. In addition to these assessments, one researcher also spent a four-month period conducting systematic observations, taking field notes, and making anecdotal records of the reading lessons taught to student participants. Researchers also conducted structured, open-ended, and flexible interviews with teachers and the principal regarding teachers’ and the principal’s understanding of the RM program, how personal and professional feelings influenced the selection and teaching of the program, and feelings about the RM program’s strengths and weaknesses. Researchers placed results from the data into two categories: 1) reading data from student participants and 2) the teachers’ and principal’s perceptions of the RM program. According to the data on student reading, phonics scores of student participants were encouraging. Mean phonics scores fell into the average range of 108 (100 +/- 15 being average). During the research assessment, most student participants read trade books at or above the
second grade level. When participants were assessed on oral reading miscues, on average, 92% of reading miscues had a graphic similarity and 82% had a sound similarity; however, 48% of mean miscues were substitutions not meaningful to the text. Many of these miscues were non-words. The low reading group had a mean score of using non-words as miscues 21% of the time, 13% for average readers, and 9% for high readers. Participants frequently continued to read without any form of self-correction even after substituting a word that did not make sense or when calling a non-word. Researchers noted the participants rarely questioned themselves if a non-word was read. When analyzing data from the retellings of trade books, researchers found participants had a mean retelling score of 55% (limited), and found students regularly included characters and setting in their retellings, but often did not make text-to-self connections, text-to-text connections, nor did they make inferences. The RM program does not instruct students to give retellings or summaries, identify story structure, or have one-on-one, group, or classroom discussions about the texts. In analyzing field notes and interviews, researchers found little time for language skills due to the format of the program (short questions and short answers with no instruction for text discussions). When participants were asked about what to do when faced with a word they did not know, 80% said they would sound it out and 56% said they would ask their teacher. Researchers noted students understood reading as decoding and not comprehending. Students were dependent on teachers when making meaning out of reading and believed their success in reading meant decoding, reading rate, and trying “hard” (p. 520). Students did not form opinions about their own reading abilities and believed it was up to the teacher to correct any mistakes made during reading. Opinions of the program were similar between teachers and the principal. Teachers and the principal believed the program was successful in teaching students to decode and remember details, but it lacked in teaching comprehension, higher-order
thinking skills, independent thinking, and writing practice. Teachers saw a need to enhance reading instruction through trade books, differentiated instruction, and comprehension strategies. Teachers also noted frustration as they were given conflicting demands by the state, the district, and the RM consultants. Researchers recognized the lack of comprehension and writing in the RM program, and noted it was unsuccessful in developing competent readers. Researchers concluded the RM program did not provide students with skills necessary for independent reading and writing nor did RM support higher level thinking skills. In future replications, researchers recommended future studies gather more participants, measure growth, and take data from more than one assessment per area of inquiry. In reviewing this data, it can be assumed ELL students would not benefit from a program in which students tend to decode without making meaning.

Roughly five years after the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 was put into place, the negative impact scripted programs had on students led toward a move for differentiated instruction. However, not all programs supporting differentiated instruction have had positive impacts on the reading skills of ELL students. Read Naturally is a reading-intervention program currently used in schools across the country. Read Naturally, an oral fluency program, uses a repeated reading strategy, which allows students to work independently and one-on-one with teachers to improve reading skills according to the student’s individual level and pace. A quasi-experimental ten-week study reported by the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse was conducted by Denton, Anthony, Parker, and Hasbrouck (2004) to determine the effectiveness of using the Read Naturally program with ELL students. The study consisted of 60 second through fifth grade ELL elementary student participants from 5 central Texas schools. Participants were only chosen to participate in the study if participants were bilingual and if
Spanish was their native language. Participants were recommended by their teachers based on the low reading scores they received on classroom and standardized tests. Participants were divided randomly into a control (28 students) group and an experimental (32 students) group. Researchers made modifications to the Read Naturally program in order to enrich the components, but researchers did not exclude any of the components listed in the Read Naturally teacher’s manual. The modifications included extra comprehension and vocabulary instruction based on the text included in the program. The experimental group participated in the Read Naturally intervention in addition to their regular classroom instruction. The control group did not receive the Read Naturally instruction. Participants were assessed using components of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests (WRMT-R) at the beginning of and at the completion of the study. The components used from the WRMT-R assessed word identification, word attack, and comprehension. Students participated in the Read Naturally program for forty minutes, three times per week, over a ten week period. At the end of the ten-week study, researchers compared the growth of the control group and the experimental group and found no statistical significant growth for those students in the Read Naturally program in any of the components tested: word identification mean gain (E=1.12, C=1.75), word attack mean gain (E=-.22, C=.97), comprehension mean gain (E=2.13, C=.71). Although the experimental group had a greater comprehension mean gain than the control group, researchers did not believe it was significant. Researchers believed the fluency rate practice may have had a negative effect on the reading comprehension of ELL students because students were reading too quickly to make meaning of the texts. Researchers also believed ELL students need additional vocabulary instruction than the enhancements provided by the researchers, in addition to the Read Naturally program.
Popular fluency-based reading programs have fallen short in the areas of comprehension, higher-order thinking skills, and motivation when used with ELL students. Nevertheless, one of the most successful strategies for improving reading fluency in elementary students is the practice of repeated readings (Therrien, 2004). Rereading an on-level text three times or more has proven to be effective with accuracy, automaticity, word recognition, and comprehension (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). However, programs using the method of repeated readings to increase fluency do not always lend themselves to enhance student motivation (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). A disadvantage to repeated reading programs is that struggling readers may not be motivated by increasing their fluency score alone (Busker & Wigart, 2008).

Reading Fluency

The presence of successful reading instruction in the elementary grades is a determining factor in whether students become successful readers in life. Approximately three out of four students who are below average readers in third grade remain below average readers throughout their school careers and into adulthood (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). Proficient reading fluency may indicate students are mastering vocabulary and comprehending text. However, all components of fluency (automaticity, accuracy, and prosody) need to be attained for a student to be considered a fluent reader. Many students identify fluency with fast reading. Their misunderstanding may be due to timed assessments and published reading programs that engage students in monotonous readings for the purpose of increased reading rate, not level of understanding. Speed-readers usually give little attention to the meaning of a text and may be simply calling out words (Rasinski & Young, 2009). Repeated readings are important since students struggling in reading need more opportunities to read (Millin, & Rinehart, 1999), but the
quality of repeated reading programs needs to be examined for effectiveness in promoting multidimensional reading skills.

**Reader’s Theater’s Effect on Fluency Reading Skills.** A measure of the effects of Reader’s Theater on students’ reading ability and attitude in second grade Title 1 classes was reported in an influential mixed methods experimental study. Millin and Rinehart (1999) performed both quantitative and qualitative measures to answer three questions:

1) What are the effects of readers theater activities on the oral reading performance (accuracy, fluency, and comprehension) of elementary children receiving Title 1 reading services?

2) What are the effects of readers theater participation on reading attitudes of these same students?

3) How do the effects of readers theater participation compare to the effects of a more traditional remedial approach? (p. 72)

Twenty-eight students from three schools participated in the nine-week study. Students were chosen based on their Title 1 eligibility. School A served as the experimental group. In this school, the Title 1 pull-out reading class participated in Reader’s Theater. Schools B and C served as the control group and participated in the regular Title 1 pull-out reading programs, consisting of the basal reader, work sheets, and word attacks. Both groups were taught by reading specialists. All students were given a Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) before and after the nine-week study. The QRI measured reading accuracy, rate of oral reading, and reading comprehension. Students and teachers were also interviewed to give researchers a sense of their attitudes both before and after the study. At the conclusion of the study, researchers performed an experimental design using regression analysis. The experimental design calculated the effect
Reader’s Theater participation had on the QRI measurements of oral reading accuracy, oral reading rate, reading comprehension, and motivation. According to the data, the Reader’s Theater group showed greater gains in reading accuracy, $F(1,23) = 12.92, p<.01$, oral reading rate, $F(1,24) = 3.72, p<.07$, and reading comprehension, $F(1,24) = 5.62, p<.05$. Millin and Rinehart also found improved attitude about reading when they interviewed the Reader’s Theater group. The control group showed no change in attitude. In the interviews conducted with teachers, researchers were told by the end of the nine-week study, students in the Reader’s Theater group seemed to have more confidence in their reading, enjoyed reading aloud, had better comprehension skills, and had a greater interest in checking out books from the library. Teachers noticed enhanced achievement by the Reader’s Theater students on other classroom reading materials. Overall, Millin and Rinehart found second grade Title 1 students gained greater reading ability and more confidence through participating in Reader’s Theater.

The effects of Reader’s Theater on the fluency of second grade Title 1 students was also measured in a more recent study by Rasinski and Young (2009). A classroom action research study was conducted to determine the effects of Reader’s Theater on fluency and overall reading ability (Rasinski & Young, 2009). One of the researchers, Young, is a regular education classroom teacher. His Title 1 second grade students were participants in the study. There were 29 participants. Nine of the participants were ELL students. Eight of the participants were girls and 21 were boys. The reading ability of the participants ranged from kindergarten to third grade. A balanced literacy program was used as reading instruction. For the purpose of this study, the researcher/teacher also introduced a Reader’s Theater program. A Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered to measure each participant’s independent reading level in oral reading accuracy and comprehension. In addition to the DRA, a Texas Primary Reading
Inventory (TPRI) was used to measure automaticity and prosody. Both tests were given at the beginning and at the end of the study. The study began on the second week of the school year and ended on the final week of the school year. Reader’s Theater was used everyday as part of the 90 minute balanced literacy reading instruction for the duration of the study. During the 90 minute reading block, 20-25 minutes was devoted to Reader’s Theater on Monday when scripts were introduced. On Tuesday-Thursday 5-10 minutes was spent on Reader’s Theater rehearsal. Five to fifteen minutes was dedicated to Reader’s Theater on Friday when students gave their performances. The researchers noted students also used personal time to practice Reader’s Theater scripts throughout the week. Researchers credit the act of students practicing on their own time to the motivating factor behind Reader’s Theater. The goal set by the teacher/researcher was for students to orally read the Reader’s Theater scripts with expression and meaning. Reading rate was not prioritized or emphasized. Despite a lack of emphasis on reading rate, participants made significant gains in automaticity. At the beginning of the study, students had an average reading rate of 62.7 (falling between the 50th and 75th percentiles for second grade students). At the end of the study students’ average reading rate was 127.6. This increase is nearly double the growth expected by second grade students in the 50th percentile reading level. Students started the study with very good word recognition accuracy (98.9%) and ended the study with a .3% growth. Prosody scores went from 2.2 to 3.0 (a score of 4.0 being perfect) with an average growth of 20%. Students’ average DRA level increased from 19.4 to 31.2 with a growth of 11.8. The average DRA score of participants far exceeded the second grade end-of-year goal. The teacher, the participants, and their parents had very positive feelings about the Reader’s Theater program. Teachers and parents noted the motivation students had to read and reread their scripts. The assistant principal of the school noted the Reader’s Theater
program was particularly helpful to struggling readers. Students identified the Reader’s Theater program as “challenging” and “fun” (p. 11). Researchers did not report on the reading growth of struggling or ELL readers outside of the average scores for the entire class. This information could be helpful to those replicating the study in an ELL classroom.

In the practice of Reader’s Theater, students are encouraged to read with expression. Teachers may find themselves coaching students to read a passage with good prosody. Some may wonder whether it is the Reader’s Theater contributing to fluency growth, or whether teachers’ fluency coaching as part of Reader’s Theater is responsible for fluency growth. Keehn (2003) conducted a nine-week study to measure the effects of using Reader’s Theater as an instructional intervention to support oral reading fluency in second grade students. The study also measured the effects of using Reader’s Theater with students of varying reading abilities. Keehn proposed three questions:

(1) What is the effect of rereading, modeling, and use of appropriate text via Readers Theater on second graders' oral reading fluency?
(2) Does explicit instruction in fluency add to students' growth in oral reading fluency (beyond growth accounted for by rereading, modeling, and use of appropriate texts)?
(3) Does fluency instruction increase the oral reading fluency and the reading comprehension scores of students at different levels of reading skill in different ways? (p. 43)

Participants were second grade students from four randomly chosen second grade classrooms located in a rural Texas school district. The demographic breakdown of students in the district was 50% Hispanic, 35% White, 10% African American, and 5% Asian. Sixty-five percent of students qualified for the federal free lunch program. Keehn observed the participating
classrooms for two weeks prior to the study. She found all classrooms had similar reading instruction and none had previously used Reader’s Theater in the classroom. In the first three days of the study, participants were given two reading assessments: a Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) and portions of the Gray Oral Reading Test. The two assessments established each participant’s reading level. Special attention was given to the validity of the tests by randomly assigning students to one of two forms of the Gray Oral Reading Test. In addition to the two afore mentioned tests, the Diagnostic Fluency Assessment, an additional oral reading fluency test, was used to diagnose the different components of fluency skills: rate, accuracy, fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness. Throughout the study, weekly timed oral assessments were taken. Two treatments were assigned in this study. In treatment one, two randomly chosen second grade classrooms participated in Reader’s Theater and also received additional mini-lessons and coaching explicitly relating to oral reading fluency strategies. In treatment 2, two randomly chosen second grade classrooms participated in Reader’s Theater without the additional oral reading fluency strategies. Participants in the treatment 2 group were not coached on their oral reading of the scripts. Teachers in treatment group 2 were instructed to simply monitor and discuss time-on-task with students. Students were divided into three groups per class: low ability, average ability, and high ability. All Students were given Reader’s Theater scripts adapted from on-level texts. Special measures were taken to ensure there were three different reading levels of scripts per week. All three ability groups received scripts on their reading level. At the end of the study, students were given posttests to measure reading growth. Paired t tests were used when comparing the pre and posttests. According to Keehn, students in “both treatment groups made statistically significant growth in oral reading fluency” (p.49). In examining the data, both groups had nearly identical growth in all areas of all assessments.
Addition fluency instruction and coaching did not add to students’ fluency growth. Keehn found the low ability groups made significant gains when compared to students in the average and high ability groups in the areas of retelling, expressiveness, and rate. In addition to the data, Keehn also noted students remained motivated while participating in Reader’s Theater. According to Keehn’s results, it may be the Reader’s Theater strategy promoting oral fluency growth, and not the explicit fluency instruction sometimes accompanied by Reader’s Theater.

As a fluency strategy, Reader’s Theater encourages students to slow down, self-monitor, and read with prosody while making meaning of text (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006). Reader’s Theater provides students with opportunities to interact with text rich in context. Through this interaction, students develop a better understanding of the story elements and context, which leads to fluency. Making meaning while decoding is an essential skill for ELL students.

Presuming students develop components of fluency through a rich understanding of text, it is important to explore how higher-level comprehension skills are also attained through Reader’s Theater.

**Reading Comprehension**

Conflicting research has been reported on the relationship between fluency and comprehension. Some professionals believe both fluency and comprehension are affected by the degree in which readers are motivated by the text. Other professionals believe fluency instruction must be multidimensional to also achieve comprehension. Still other experts insist fluency and comprehension have a reciprocal relationship and develop simultaneously (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). This last theory may be viable in some circumstances, but cannot describe all readers, especially ELL students. Researchers and teachers have found good oral readers do not always have a strong understanding of text (Adomat, 2009; Applegate, Applegate,
& Modla, 2009; Schwanenflugel et al., 2009). Good oral readers may be good at decoding, but may have deficient comprehension skills. Comprehension skills in the elementary classroom are commonly evaluated through multiple choice and retelling assessments. However, standards set forth by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) and established by the Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) require students to analyze, synthesize, and make connections to text during comprehension. These higher-order thinking skills cannot be measured by short answer or multiple-choice assessments.

Reading assessments that provide a clear, multidimensional analysis of skills should be used by teachers in order to gain a clear understanding of student abilities. Multiple-choice and retelling assessments do not accurately assess comprehension skills (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). In order to evaluate reading comprehension as a complex, higher level, thoughtful response to text, Applegate, Applegate, and Modla (2009) conducted a replication study. In this study, researchers set out to find support that strong fluency skills would be accompanied by strong reading comprehension skills when comprehension was assessed as thoughtful response to text. Two questions were addressed in the study:

1. Is there support in our findings for the idea that the development of a high level of fluency will be accompanied by a high degree of reading comprehension?

2. Will a high degree of fluency be accompanied by a high degree of reading comprehension when the comprehension is assessed as thoughtful response to text? (p. 514)

Students in grades 2-10 were chosen as participants in the study. Researchers gathered data from 109 public school students, 45 parochial school students, and 17 private school students, for a total of 171 participants. Participants’ teachers designated them as high performing readers.
Participants were also designated as highly fluent readers by researchers who assessed fluency using an oral reading fluency rubric. Reading skills were analyzed using the Critical Reading Inventory (CRI-2) developed by Applegate, Quinn, and Applegate. The CRI-2 assessment allowed researchers to differentiate between fluent readers who recall information from the text and fluent readers who have the ability to respond critically about the text. The CRI-2 contained three types of questions: text based (literal), inference, and critical response. The results of the study were surprising to researchers. According to the data, only thirty percent of highly fluent readers achieved high comprehension in the literal and higher order questions. Thirty-six percent showed proficient comprehension, scoring average on literal questions and below average on higher order questions. Thirty-three percent of fluent readers scored slightly below average on literal questions and extremely low on higher order thinking questions. According to the data, one third of very fluent elementary students struggle with comprehension. In analyzing the data, researchers believe assessments may be deceiving to a student’s overall reading ability unless both fluency and comprehension measurements are taken. This is likely to be the case with ELL students as well.

**Reader’s Theater’s Effect on Comprehension.** Reading materials with a personal or social connection to the reader are easier for the reader to comprehend. Students must be engaged in the text to have literary understanding (Adomat, 2009). Preadolescent readers have a difficult time analyzing the thoughts and motives of characters because preadolescent readers believe characters have the same thoughts and feelings as they do (Clyde, 2003). Vasinda and McLeod (2011) conducted a mixed-method study to determine the effects of matching Reader’s Theater with Podcasting, as a way to improve both fluency and comprehension reading scores. Researchers set out to answer two questions: “Can we replicate the reading comprehension gains
from pervious Reader’s Theater research using podcasted performances? [And] how will the experience of podcasting Reader’s Theater be qualitatively different from performances without the technology?” (p. 486). Three schools participated in the study. Two of the schools were Title 1. In each school, one second grade class and one third grade class participated, for a total of six classes. Nearly one hundred students participated; thirty-five of those students were identified as struggling readers who read one grade level or more below their current grade. Eight students were ELL. Vasinda and McLeod used data from thirty-five struggling readers to quantitatively examine reading fluency and comprehension scores. In the ten-week study, Vasinda and McLeod instructed teachers to set aside ten to fifteen minutes each day for students to work on Reader’s Theater. On Monday, students were divided into groups and were assigned dialogue for a new script. Students would read through their part on their own. Some teachers read the scripts to students to model fluency and expression. Tuesday through Thursday students practiced reading scripts in their assigned groups. On Friday students recorded their script as an mp3 file on the computer using Audacity (a free recording software program) and a computer microphone. Students were able to rerecord and edit their oral reading before submitting. The teacher would then upload the mp3 file to a podcast on the district’s website. Students labeled as struggling readers were given a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) both before and after the ten-week study. Vasinda and McLeod found that before the ten-week study, the thirty-five struggling readers had a mean score of 1.09 (as a group, they comprehended at a first grade level). After the ten-week study these struggling readers had a mean score of 2.22 (second grade level). Individual student growth ranged from one semester to three years. Vasinda and McLeod credited the gain in comprehension to repeated readings and the analysis students did of their character to provide an accurate portrayal for the audience. Researchers believe the visualization
students did internall and created outwardly helped students with making inferences.

Qualitatively, researchers met with focus groups of students consisting of one struggling reader, one on-target reader, and one advanced reader, as identified by their teacher, for each classroom. Researchers asked the focus groups open-ended questions in which students reflected on their involvement of the Reader’s Theater Podcast strategy. Researchers also had each participating teacher fill out a questionnaire at the completion of the study. In the interviews conducted with students, researchers found students felt like they needed to put more effort into their reading because of the large audience that could listen to their podcast. Students also found camaraderie in their groups. One student compared working in a Reader’s Theater podcast group to his baseball team because students had to work together to do well. Other students liked the support and compliments they received from their classmates on how well they read their part. Some students even credited their participation in Reader’s Theater to making new friends. In the teacher questionnaire, teachers discussed how the strategy was easy to incorporate into their class time. Teachers believed a third party would not be able to distinguish between the low readers and the high readers by listening to the recordings. Teachers found students were excited to read books from which a script was adapted. Teachers also incorporated Reader’s Theater into other curriculums since they were able to find scripts that met a variety of themes and benchmark skills. Overall, the researchers were pleased with the methods and findings of their study, but noted that further research on the benefit of adding podcasting should be done. Researchers did not report data of ELL participants separate from the entire group. Data on ELL participants would be helpful to future research.

In reviewing the literature, Reader’s Theater has been shown to be effective in helping students gain both fluency and comprehension skills. Reader’s Theater sets a purpose for
reading, rereading, and analyzing text to create understanding. In Reader’s Theater, students must extend literal interpretation of the text to explore deeper meaning. Scripts become part of their imagination as readers offer an expressive voice to their character and a personalized interpretation of the text through dramatic play. Students are able to better comprehend because of the personal connections made with text. In Reader’s Theater, students make strong connections to the story and the characters because readers imagine themselves in the role of the character (Kelin, 2007). Most studies also note the motivational effect Reader’s Theater has on student endurance, participation, and overall opinion of reading.

**Reader’s Theater’s Effect on Motivation**

Reader’s Theater has been reported as a motivational strategy to improve the reading skills of elementary students (Millin, & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Keehn, 2003; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). Nevertheless, motivation is individual to the learner and students are motivated to learn in many different ways. One of the reasons ELL students may be motivated to learn and read English is because of their desire to interact and fit in with the culture (Protacio, 2012). ELL emergent readers require repetitive instruction in reading skills. It is important for repetitive reading strategies to be motivational in order to keep student interest and momentum (Therrien, 2004).

The majority of Reader’s Theater studies measure motivation qualitatively. Since qualitative measurements are observed, but not measured, it is beneficial to explore motivation in relation to Reader’s Theater quantitatively. Callard (2008) reported quantitative data on the effect Reader’s Theater had on the comprehension, fluency, and motivation of students. Callard conducted a quasi–experimental study to determine how the use of Reader’s Theater would influence reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation in third grade students who failed to
demonstrate reading fluency and comprehension according to standardized tests. Callard set out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does Reader’s Theater influence the reading fluency of third-grade students?
2. To what extent does Reader’s Theater influence reading comprehension in third-grade students?
3. To what extent does Reader’s Theater significantly improve motivation to read in third-grade students? (p. 33)

Participants were placed into the study based on their at-risk reading test scores. The twenty-two students with the lowest scores were selected and randomly divided into an experimental and a control group. Students were given both pretests and posttests to measure reading comprehension and fluency using the assessments: Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBLES). A 20-question interview called a Motivation to Read Profile was also conducted to measure motivation both before the study and at the conclusion of the study. Participants of the experimental group participated in an after-school Reader’s Theater program. Participants in the control group did not receive any after-school reading instruction and only received standard curriculum during the school day. On day one, the experimental group participated in pre-reading activities as students were introduced to the Readers’ Theater script. Students then listened to the script read aloud and generated a list of vocabulary words to be studied. On days two, three, and four students read through multiple parts of their script and discussed vocabulary words from the script. On day five, students practiced a few more times before performing the Reader’s Theater. This schedule was repeated each week over the course of a ten-week period. According to the results of the study, there was
a difference in the DIBLES posttest percentage results between the control group and the experimental group. The experimental group had a growth of 44.11% and the control group had a growth of 27.5%. However, when the researcher performed a \( t \) test, she found no statistically significant growth for either group. The experimental group also made greater growth in comprehension with a mean percentage increase of 23.99% compared to a mean increase of 15.79% for the control group. However, when performing a \( t \) test, the researcher once again found no statistically significant growth for either group. Lastly, the researcher found Reader’s Theater was not a motivational reading strategy to the participants. The experimental group had a decrease in the Motivation to Read Profile with a mean score change of -5.06%. The control groups motivation increased by 6.85%. The data reported on motivation contradicts other research. This study measured motivation quantitatively rather than qualitatively as past research has done. Callard took observational notes stating that students in the experimental group were “always eager and excited” (p. 69) to participate in Reader’s Theater. She also noted students “read their scripts with expression and prosody” (p. 69). This behavior had led Callard to believe students were motivated to participate in Reader’s Theater. Callard believes Reader’s Theater had a positive effect on the students participating in the study with regards to fluency and comprehension even though the growth in both areas was not statistically significant.

Though Callard (2008) found Reader’s Theater was not statistically motivational with her participants, nearly all other quality studies have found Reader’s Theater to be motivational to students who are improving their reading skills. The vast majority of published studies reported students had fun, gained confidence, and were motivated to do their best. Kinesthetic learning may have an influence on the strong motivational factor behind Reader’s Theater.
Reading Instruction and Kinesthetic Learning

An Ancient Chinese Proverb states, “Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand” (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011 p. 2084). Since ELL children do not understand everything being dictated by the teacher in a regular education English immersion classroom, ELL students need to be kept active to stay engaged. Reader’s Theater lends itself well to James Archer’s method of Total Physical Response (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011) and Howard Gardner’s theory of kinesthetic intelligence. When language is taught through lecture alone, information is processed through the left brain, kept in the short-term memory and is quickly forgotten. When language is taught in a kinesthetic way, information is processed through the right brain to be kept and retained the same way skills such as swimming and riding a bicycle are remembered (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). Through the use of gestures and facial expressions during reading, students are more likely to retain the information presented.

Research is lacking in the study of kinesthetic learning as part of Reader’s Theater. However, there is research investigating kinesthetic learning’s effect on the comprehension skills of elementary students. In an experimental study Collins Block, Parris, and Whiteley (2008) reported how the strategy of using kinesthetic motions to understand abstract words and concepts has been successful in teaching comprehension in the primary grades. Researchers examined the use of Comprehension Process Motions (CPMs) and how the motions affected the comprehension of students as young as kindergarten. Researchers also studied the best way of using CPMs when teaching comprehension in the primary reading classroom. Researchers randomly assigned kindergarten through fifth grade student participants to a control group and an experimental group using a stratified randomization procedure based on state reading assessments. The stratified assignment procedure guaranteed the two groups were equally
represented in terms of reading ability. There were 257 kindergarten through fifth grade students in the experimental group and 256 kindergarten through fifth grade students in the control group. All participants were taken from their regular classroom for 45 minutes each day to participate in small group lessons. The small group lessons were the only reading instruction either group received for the duration of the twelve-week study. The control groups were instructed using the adhered guidelines from the teacher’s manual of a popular basal reader company. Each lesson lasted 10 days. The experimental groups participated in the same instruction but were also taught how to use CPMs when discussing comprehension concepts. Both groups of participants also randomly rotated into new small groups taught by a different teacher for each new concept presented. By changing groups, researchers ensured all students were instructed by all participating teachers, which researchers believed would provide a more accurate individual student measurement. In the last ten days of the study all participants took standardized and criterion-referenced tests. Students in grades 2-5 took the tests independently while students in K-1 were read the stories and the questions aloud by a teacher. In addition to these assessments, teachers also documented the number of CPMs taught to the experimental group, the number of days it took to teach each of the CPMs, the number of minutes per day spent on CPM instruction, and the number of times a participant used a CPM autonomously during a lesson. According to the results, the experimental groups for each grade level outperformed the control group. In reviewing the comprehension sections of the standardized tests, it was discovered the mean score for the experimental groups was 77.1 and 73.6 for the control group. Researchers also documented the vocabulary sections of the standardized tests and found the experimental group had a higher mean score of 54.2 compared to the control group’s mean score of 36.3. Researchers found the experimental groups were especially better than the control group in the
areas of inference and implicit comprehension processes with a mean score of 64.4 compared to 54.4 in the control group. In kindergarten, students in the experimental group could identify twice as many implicit meanings as students in the control group (E=54.1, C=27.5). There were five areas of explicit comprehension instruction in which the experimental group’s mean score was higher than the control group’s mean score: drawing conclusions (E= 87.2, C=64.5), clarifying and identifying problems (E=80.9, C=60.3), following fictional plot (E=71.7, C=51.2), identifying nonfiction authors’ writing patterns (E=73.2, C=61.9), and finding main ideas (E=79.8, C=52). Researchers do not disclose which, if any, explicit comprehension concepts the control group out performed the experimental group. In examining the effect sizes between the experimental group and the control group, researchers found more than 70% of the differences in students’ achievement could be attributed to the presence or absence of CPM instruction.

Researchers’ second research question centered on the best way of using CPMs in comprehension instruction. In order to analyze this, researchers looked at the number of minutes and days spent on CPM instruction. The number of students who used CPMs on their own varied by grade level, but K-2 showed greater gains than the older grades. Researchers believe these results may have been the result of “fast mapping;” spending six or more days on a mental skill before moving onto the next. Researchers state the significance of this since most teachers spend fewer than 6 days on a comprehension skill before moving onto the next. Researchers conclude blending basal reading instruction with CPMs is an effective strategy in raising the abstract and metacognitive concept skills of all K-5 students, but especially in students in grades K-2.

Reader’s Theater allows students to use hand gestures, facial expressions, and dialogue with their peers. The body language used in Reader’s Theater may help to aid ELL students in a deeper understanding of the text. The sequential order of parts of speech in a sentence are better
understood when children can use body language to act out the words and sentences (Demircioglu, 2010). It can be concluded that the kinesthetic learning as part of Reader’s Theater may be beneficial to the overall learning of ELL students.

**Reader’s Theater and the ELL Student**

Reading skills strategies must be carefully evaluated for effectiveness in both fluency and comprehension when used with ELL students. Special consideration should also be made to ensure instructors are teaching and assessing a variety of fluency components as well as higher-level comprehension skills. ELL students who do not have sufficient understanding of the language cannot attain comprehension through reading alone. If the native language and the language being learned are similar phonetically (as in the case of English and Spanish), ELL students may do very well with fluency, which may lead teachers to believe students understand what is being read, but in reality, students may simply be calling out words without any attention to meaning.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 set new standards for the way learning disabled and ELL students are taught in the classroom (Stanford & Reeves, 2009). Many classrooms now follow an inclusion model where students no longer leave the classroom to receive special services. Inclusion classrooms require teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. Inclusion classrooms often mean ELL students are taught English through English-only immersion rather than bilingual education (Hamilton, 2006). The research on using Reader’s Theater explicitly with ELL students is limited. One study by Egmon, Bauza, and Moses (n.d.) compared the effect of using Reader’s Theater in a bilingual classroom to using Reader’s Theater in an English-only immersion program. Egmon, Bauza, and Moses’s (n.d.) experimental study
set out to answer the following question: “What is the effect of reader’s theater on the fluency and comprehension of English language learners?” (p. 59). Thirty-nine participants were chosen. All students were Hispanic and were part of the school’s bilingual program. Fifteen of the participants were male and twenty-four were female. Twenty-nine of the participants were on free or reduced lunch. Nineteen of the students were placed into the experimental group and twenty students were placed into the control group. Researchers do not disclose the method used to place students into groups. Researchers administered a pretest to all participants using the published assessment, 3-Minute Reading Assessment, developed by Rasinski and Padak. The 3-Minute Reading Assessment measured fluency in terms of accuracy, automaticity, expression and volume, phrasing and intonation, smoothness, and pace. The assessment also measured comprehension. Following the pre-assessment, students in the experimental group participated in six weeks of Reader’s Theater instruction in English only. The participants of the control group participated in six weeks of Reader’s Theater instruction in Spanish. A posttest of the 3-Minute Reading Assessment was given at the conclusion of the six weeks. Researchers compared the results of pretests and posttests by averaging the scores and examining the standard deviations. According to the data, the experimental group of students instructed in English made gains in all categories. The average overall fluency increase was 1.11 with an overall pretest mean score of 10.26 and an overall posttest mean score of 11.37. The average comprehension scores increased by 0.47 with a pretest mean scaled score of 3.42 and a posttest mean scaled score of 3.89. The control group instructed in Spanish made fewer gains and experienced a loss in two of the subcategories of fluency: phrasing and intonation (-0.03) and Pace (-0.2). The average fluency overall mean score in the control group increased by 0.3. The average comprehension score increased by 0.55, with a pretest mean scaled score of 3.35 and a posttest mean scaled score of
3.9. As a result of the data collected, researchers concluded Reader’s Theater made a significant impact on the reading fluency and comprehension of second grade ELL students. According to the findings, researchers suggest students instructed in Reader’s Theater in their native language will make initial improvements in comprehension faster than students instructed in Reader’s Theater in a second language, but when instructed in the second language of English, students’ scores eventually far surpass the scores of students instructed in their native language. Overall, researchers suggest ELL students will demonstrate overall greater improvement in reading fluency and comprehension if ELL students participate in Reader’s Theater instruction in the second language.

**Reader’s Theater and Spanish Language Learning Students.** Reader’s Theater has been an effective strategy for use with English learning students. Reader’s Theater has also been effective in helping native English speakers learn another language. Adams, Farris, Patterson, Santiago, and Secrist (2007) conducted a quantitative study to answer the following question: “Will Reader’s Theater effect fluency and reading comprehension in first grade Spanish language learners whose first language is English?” (p. 5). Participants were first grade students who spoke English only and were enrolled in a dual language immersion classroom. Students were given a pretest in Spanish to measure comprehension and fluency. The pretest consisted of students reading the story *Dias con Sapo y Sepo: El Sombrero* by Arnold Lobel. Students were timed for one minute to establish reading fluency. The story also served as a running record and researchers recorded and coded miscues. In order to assess comprehension, students were asked to give a retelling of the story as researchers asked five questions and scored the students’ responses on a rubric. After pretests were conducted, students were placed randomly in a quasi-scientific manner into control and experimental groups based on scores. This ensured both
groups had an equal level of ability. Students in the experimental group spent five days reading, discussing, and story mapping a selected story. Starting on day six, students wrote their own Reader’s Theater scripts based on their interpretation of their character and their comprehension of the story. Students then practiced reading the scripts. On day thirteen, students presented the Reader’s Theater. On day fourteen, students were given a post assessment that consisted of a fluency measure and comprehension measure of the story selection. The control group read the same selection, but only spent five days on the story and did not participate in Reader’s Theater. Post-tests revealed students in the experimental group outperformed students in the control group in four out of five areas: number of errors (a decrease of 5.43 in the experimental and 2.0 in the control), accuracy (increasing by 5.05% for the experimental group and 2.22% for the control group), retelling (61.43 percentage points for the experimental group and 12.86 for the control group), and comprehension (an increase of 54.29 percentage points for the experimental group and 18.57 for the control group). The control group outperformed the experimental group on fluency rate with a posttest score of 14.71 wpm for the control group and 12.43 wpm for the experimental group. Researchers conclude Reader’s Theater is an effective strategy in helping Spanish language learning students develop reading skills. Reader’s Theater was especially effective in the areas of retelling and comprehension. Researchers suggest conducting additional studies in the variables would be changed to determine a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of Readers’ Theater on the reading fluency and comprehension of students learning a second language.

Reader’s Theater’s dramatic approach to reading opens up a construction and reconstruction of literature that allows ELL students to comprehend text in a creative and meaningful way (Liu, 1999). Reader’s Theater provides ELL students with opportunities to
synthesize texts and make character analysis through a type of role-play. Reader’s Theater encourages social interaction with peers as students work in small groups to practice scripts, a motivational factor to most students including ELL students. When used correctly, Reader’s Theater is naturally fun and feels like play. When children engage in an educational play activity, children are more likely to relax and learn. In a stress free classroom, ELL students begin to use language in operation, which prepares ELL students to express themselves as competent English speakers (Demircioglu, 2010). When students are nervous or uncomfortable, students put up a mental barrier between themselves and the information being taught, but when students are in a stress-free environment, information is more easily processed (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). Reader’s Theater helps nonnative speakers build confidence and improve comprehension skills. Reader’s Theater also helps ELL students build a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Peck & Virkler, 2006).

**Summary**

The effect of using the instructional strategy Reader’s Theater to help in the reading fluency and comprehension of ELL students is lacking in research. With the growing population of ELL students in schools throughout the country, there is a demand for quality reading strategies to meet the needs of ELL students. ELL students instructed in fluency-based programs can unintentionally deceive their teachers into believing they are competent readers, when in reality, their decoding skills surpass their comprehension skills. ELL students may miss opportunities to make connections with the text in order to gain meaning. Reader’s Theater, as a reading strategy, has been shown to be effective in comprehension, higher-level thinking skills (Adomat, 2009; Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009; Clyde, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kelin, 2007; Vasinda and McLeod, 2011), and all aspects of fluency (Keehn, 2003; Millin &
Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009). The practice of Reader’s Theater can support kinesthetic learning (Collins Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008) and can be motivational to low-ability readers (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011), including ELL who must participate in repetitive instruction. As a strategy, Reader’s Theater can help students meet the standards for high-quality learning set forth by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
Chapter III: Results and Analysis Related to the Problem

Today’s teachers are flooded with an abundance of instructional strategies to use in the classroom. As reading philosophies change, so do the styles and qualities of instructional approaches. Teachers are now expected to provide all students, including English language learners (ELL), with reading strategies and interventions designed to teach fluency, comprehension, and the higher level thinking skills needed to achieve literacy. The goal of this review was to detail the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy in helping elementary ELL students achieve reading fluency and comprehension objectives, as well as Reader’s Theater’s impact on ELL student motivation in the reading classroom. According to the results and conclusions of the studies presented in this review of research, Reader’s Theater is an effective strategy for improving the reading fluency skills, comprehension skills, and motivation of elementary ELL students. As a tool for promoting better fluency skills, Reader’s Theater attends to the different areas of fluency: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody (Keehn, 2003; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009). As a repeated reading strategy, Reader’s Theater breaks away from other fluency techniques that tend to address reading rate and word calling but overlook prosody (Busker & Wigart, 2008). In the process of Reader’s Theater, students perform a critical analysis of the story and the characters. To read dialogue correctly, students must understand how the story molds the thoughts and motives of characters. Through critical analysis, students come to a complex, higher level comprehension of the text (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). The method of Reader’s Theater is a beneficial strategy to use with students of differing reading abilities, including ELL students. Through gesture, group work, and dramatic play, ELL students are able to come to a better understanding of the skills and themes
being taught (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011; Liu, 1999). Reader’s Theater engages students in meaningful reading. Students feel motivated to do their best reading because in the end, students will read practiced dialogue in front of an audience. Students also gain confidence as reading abilities improve (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). When used appropriately, Reader’s Theater teaches students the skills needed to become successful readers.

**Fluency-Based Reading Programs**

Many fluency-based programs fall short in teaching elementary students the variety of skills necessary for balanced reading growth and achievement. The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was to ensure all children would be reading on grade level by the 2013-2014 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In an attempt to meet this goal, Reading First approved funding for the use of reading programs that focused on phonics and fluency over higher-level comprehension skills. Reading First advisors believed phonics and fluency were the most critical components in teaching children to read (Cummins, 2007). Scientifically based reading programs such as *Open Court Reading* and *Reading Mastery* were approved for use with Title 1 students; however, these scientifically based programs fell short in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking, and in many cases, student reading comprehension skills did not improve (Cummins, 2007; Dresser, 2012; Lee Ajayi, & Richards, 2007; and Wiltz & Wilson, 2005). As a result, Reading First expanded its funding to include scientifically based balanced literacy programs. Reading First also awarded funds for professional development and progress monitoring assessments and supported differentiated instruction and Response to Intervention (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
In 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed to ensure all states teach the same high-quality English Language Arts skills needed to produce college-ready students. The standards build in intensity starting in kindergarten and progress through the grades to provide students with the practice to develop, improve, and maintain high-quality skills such as analyzing stories and characters, making inferences, recognizing themes, providing summaries, etc. Strategies demonstrating success in teaching high-quality reading skills are valuable to teachers and students.

**Repeated Reading**

Many professionals believe rereading a text multiple times is one of the most effective reading strategies a student can participate in to strengthen word recognition, fluency and comprehension (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). However, according to Denton, Anthony, Parker, and Hasbrouk’s (2004) study of the Read Naturally program, reading growth is not always attained through repeated reading programs. Repeated reading programs can be monotonous and students may get bored and feel unmotivated to participate (Corcoran & Davis, 2005, Busker & Wigart; 2008).

Researchers have noted the repeated reading practice in Reader’s Theater as self-motivating. Students practice their scripts over and over again, not because they are instructed to do so by their teachers, but because they want to practice (Rasinski & Young, 2009; Keehn, 2003; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). One factor influencing self-motivation to practice is that students know they will be performing for others, so aspire to practice until their reading becomes flawless. In many other fluency-based and repeated reading programs, the goal is for students to increase reading rate. Students are timed and are told to read faster, so students see automaticity as the greatest importance of reading aloud. This causes students to speed read
rather than read for meaning (Rasinski & Young, 2009). In Reader’s Theater, the goal is to represent the character during reading. This goal promotes prosody, accuracy, and appropriate automaticity as students practice reading so they can sound like the character they are representing would speak. In Reader’s Theater, students are not encouraged to speed read. In some Reader’s Theater studies automaticity was not addressed at all, but participants still showed significant growth in reading rate (Rasinski & Young, 2009).

**Reader’s Theater Scripts Based on Trade Books and Content**

Many researchers found success with scripts collected from published and Internet resources (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Millin & Rinehart, 1999). Published and Internet resources provide scripts pertaining to quality literature and/or content areas. Vocabulary words, spelling words, and phonics practice can be found in Reader’s Theater scripts. Reader’s Theater can be implemented across the curriculum into social studies, math, and science (Peck & Virkler, 2006). When scripts fit content standards and benchmarks, students develop a link between subject knowledge and reading skills (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006).

Researchers also found success when teachers and/or students wrote their own scripts based on popular trade books (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Liu, 2000). Self-made scripts are beneficial because they encourage students to form a higher level of understanding. Reader’s Theater scripts based on popular literature can serve as a springboard to motivate students to read the original text on their own (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). Self-made scripts are ideal for some educators, but self-made scripts demand significant time from teachers (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006). Regardless of the method of script selection, when Reader’s Theater meets additional curriculum skills, comprehension of those skills is likely to be enhanced.
Incorporating Reader’s Theater scripts into a thematic unit places ELL students into an environment in which ELL students can learn and understand language more effectively. In a thematic unit environment, critical thinking is triggered as ELL students make connections to the skills in the unit (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). A Reader’s Theater script can take a variety of information from a theme and summarize the information into a review. Teachers can excite ELL students about a script by assigning a Reader’s Theater script that includes content on the ELL student’s native country and heritage. The ELL student can assist with pronunciation of dialogue and vocabulary. ELL students can take a starring role in the classroom, becoming the “expert” in the subject area of the script, an assignment ELL students may find motivating and confidence boosting.

**Motivation**

A positive association with reading will encourage students to read more often and improve their reading abilities. Reader’s Theater breaks away from other rote reading programs because Reader’s Theater sets an entertaining purpose for practice (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006). In some studies, students compared Reader’s Theater sessions to a rehearsal or a practice before a big game (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Keehn, 2003). In studies where performances were recorded using video or audio, students were motivated to view or listen to their dialogue and note the parts done well and the parts needing improvement (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Rasinski & Young, 2009). Teachers who have incorporated Reader’s Theater into their classrooms notice the struggling readers are the students who choose the parts with the most dialogue (Rasinski & Young, 2009). Since struggling readers need additional opportunities to read, not fewer, a motivational strategy such as Reader’s Theater can be crucial to improving reading ability (Millin & Rinehart, 1999).
According to the study by Vasinda and McLeod (2011), the presence of an audience encouraged students to put more effort into reading. Students also found camaraderie in their groups. One student in Vasinda and McLeod’s study compared working in a Reader’s Theater group to his baseball team because students had to work together to do well. Other students liked the support and compliments received from classmates. Some students even credited participation in Reader’s Theater to making new friends. In the teacher questionnaire, teachers reported that a third party would not be able to distinguish between the Reader’s Theater performances of the low readers and the high readers. Teachers also found students excited to read books in which a script was based and noted that struggling readers became enthusiastic about checking books out from the library.

**Summary**

According to the current evidence on the effects Reader’s Theater has on fluency, comprehension, motivation, and success with ELL students, elementary teachers can feel confident that students will find success when Reader’s Theater is incorporated into the classroom. Reader’s Theater breaks the monotony of seatwork and drills and prompts students to see reading in a new and exciting way. With approximately 75% of below average readers in third grade remaining below average readers throughout their school career and into adulthood (Corcoran & Davis, 2005), and the population of ELL students in the United States on a steady increase (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011), successful strategies such as Reader’s Theater are imperative to reading achievement.
Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion

In the research community there has been very little discussion concerning Reader’s Theater’s effect on the reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation of elementary English Language Learners (ELL). The majority of quality research regarding Reader’s Theater includes Title 1 and regular education students as participants (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Keehn, 2003), but does not specifically examine the impact Reader’s Theater has on the reading development of elementary ELL students. With the population of ELL students in the United States steadily increasing (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011), it is imperative for elementary teachers to gather effective and motivational reading strategies to aid ELL students in attaining the reading skills necessary for literacy development in the second language. The goal of this review was to detail the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a motivational strategy in helping the elementary ELL student achieve reading fluency and comprehension skills in the elementary English classroom. According to the results and conclusions of the quality research presented and discussed in this review, Reader’s Theater is a powerful tool in helping ELL students develop the reading skills necessary to become proficient readers of the English language. Reader’s Theater’s dramatic approach to reading opens up a construction and reconstruction of literature, which allows ELL students to comprehend text in a creative and meaningful way (Liu, 1999). Reader’s Theater provides ELL students with opportunities to practice speaking in the English language, synthesize texts, and make character analysis through role-play. Reader’s Theater encourages social interaction with peers as students work in small groups to practice scripts. Strategies that involve social interaction among classmates are motivational to most students and give ELL students an opportunity to meaningfully communicate and collaborate with their English-speaking peers. All students are individual
learners and teachers should modify Reader’s Theater to best suit the needs of their students. Recommendations for achieving the optimal outcome of Reader’s Theater are listed in the subsequent section.

Recommendations

**Quantity of Fluency Practice.** Researchers of current research have not addressed the small amount of dialogue in some Reader’s Theater scripts. Not all characters in Reader’s Theater scripts take a feature role, so not all students would be guaranteed a sizeable amount of text to read. Some dialogue may only be a few words long. Researchers did not disclose how they assigned the small parts in Reader’s Theater. One rationale would be to assign the small parts to students reading on a higher level so students reading on a lower level would have more opportunity to practice. Another rationale would be to give the small parts to struggling readers in order to build confidence. Studies also did not mention the amount of text students read on average to obtain improved reading scores. Students are often displeased when they are assigned a small amount of dialogue in a Reader’s Theater script because students feel as though very small parts are not as valuable to the story. One way to solve this problem is to have multiple small roles played by one student. Students would need to make the audience distinguish between the different characters through different voice, body language, and emotion. Playing multiple characters could be more challenging than reading lengthy dialogue and could result in a critical analysis of several characters. Reading the lines of multiple characters would also provide students with more fluency practice.

**Performance Anxiety.** Reader’s Theater can be a motivational reading strategy. Research conducted by Millin and Rinehart (1999); Rasinski and Young (2009); Keehn (2003); and Vasinda and McLeod (2011) revealed qualitative data documenting the newfound enjoyment
and confidence students felt about reading after participating in Reader’s Theater. Performance anxiety was not documented in the research; however, teachers may encounter students who have a fear of performing in front of spectators. Podcasting could be an alternative to performing in front of a live audience. The podcasting method was conducted by Vasinda and McLeod (2011) and could be a solution for students who are not comfortable reading in front of spectators. In the study, researchers instructed teachers to set aside ten to fifteen minutes each day for students to work on the Reader’s Theater strategy. On Friday, students recorded their script as an mp3 file on the computer using a free recording software program and a computer microphone. Students rerecorded and edited for mistakes. The teacher then uploaded the mp3 file to a podcast on the district’s website. In the interviews conducted with students, researchers found students felt it necessary to put more effort into recorded podcast readings because of the large perspective audience. Students also felt less pressure to read perfect dialogue on their first reading since editing and rerecording were options. Other technology such as video recording could be substituted in place of the podcast. Video recording would allow for the kinesthetic element of gestures and facial expressions to be incorporated into the performance.

**Incorporating Reader’s Theater into Content Areas.** Reader’s Theater can be used outside of the reading classroom by incorporating it across the curriculum to teach about science, math, and social studies (Peck & Virkler, 2006). There are many Internet and published Reader’s Theater scripts based on folktales, mythology, scientific inventions and achievements, mathematical concepts, influential people throughout history, and historical events. For example, students could perform a Reader’s Theater about the aqueducts of ancient Rome or Apollo Eleven’s trip to the moon. When Reader’s Theater is incorporated into a thematic unit, elementary students, including ELL, will gain a higher quality of understanding of the theme
THE EFFECT OF READER’S THEATER ON THE ELL STUDENT

(Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). Reader’s Theater can be especially motivating to ELL students when the script includes information about the ELL student’s native country or heritage.

Areas for Further Research

Currently there is a moderate amount of quality research evaluating the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy in promoting reading fluency and comprehension for elementary students. The majority of research focuses on Title 1 students, but research is lacking in the area of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy to help elementary ELL students attain fluency and comprehension skills in the second language. ELL students are one of the most rapidly growing populations in U.S. schools (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Elementary ELL students face literacy challenges as they attempt to navigate the English reading curriculum while simultaneously learning a new language. Teachers struggle with the best practices to use in order to help ELL students thrive in the English language classroom in order to attain the reading skills necessary to meet the requirements for on-grade-level reading. Scientifically based fluency programs approved for use by the Reading First division of No Child Left Behind (2002) have failed ELL students in achieving higher-level comprehension skills and broad fluency skills as a result of reading for meaning (Cummins, 2007; Lee, Ajayi, & Richards, 2007; Denton, Anthony, Parker, & Hasbrouck, 2004). This review of Literature synthesized studies documenting the effects of using Reader’s Theater with regular education and Title 1 students (Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Keehn, 2003; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Callard, 2008), the effect of using Reader’s Theater with English and Spanish language learners (Egmon, Bauza, & Moses, n.d.; Adams, Farris, Patterson, Santiago, & Secrist, 2007) and the effect of the kinesthetic qualities in Reader’s Theater on ELL learners (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011; Collins Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008). Future research could profit from collecting data on
the benefits of using Reader’s Theater with ELL students in the regular education classroom. Many states require ELL students to learn while immersed in a regular education classroom without any bilingual instruction (Hamilton, 2006). Below is a recommendation for an eight-month mixed-method study assessing the effectiveness of using Reader’s Theater as a strategy for enhancing the reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, motivation, and social skills of kindergarten through fifth grade ELL students in the regular education inclusion classroom. The following questions should guide future research:

1. How effective is Reader’s Theater as a strategy for reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary when used with the elementary English language learning student?

2. How motivational is Reader’s Theater in improving the overall opinion of reading for the elementary English language learning student?

3. How does Reader’s Theater help the elementary English language learning student develop social skills with English-speaking peers?

**Participants.** Participants of the study would include 72 elementary ELL students from three south Florida Title 1 elementary schools. Four students from each grade level, from each of the three schools, would be randomly selected for a total of twelve students representing each grade level at all schools. Students must be labeled ELL according to the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) and should have lived in the country for less than 30 months. The thirty-month cut-off is significant since all third grade ELL students who have lived in The United States for more than two years are required to pass, without exemption, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The unique demographics of participants may limit the sampling; however, if researchers are able to obtain a higher sampling of students meeting
the ELL requirements set forth by the study, a higher sampling should be selected. Prior to beginning the study, researchers would obtain permission from school administration, participating teachers, participating students, and students’ guardians in the form of written consent. Once consent was established, researchers would randomly place students into an experimental group and a control group. A random sample of two students for each grade level of each school would be placed into the experimental group and would participate in Reader’s Theater during the reading block. The third and fourth student at each grade level of each school would be placed into the control group and would not be enrolled in classrooms using Reader’s Theater during the reading block. This sampling method would place six students per grade into the experimental group, for a total of 36 students, and six students per grade into the control group, for a total of 36 students. Teachers in the experimental group of the study must agree to use Reader’s Theater with their entire regular education class, as a component of the Reading block, for the duration of the school year. Teachers would attend a six-hour training conducted by the researchers in order to establish the method of teaching Reader’s Theater in the reading block.

**Data Collection.** On the second week of the school year, participants would be given the Florida Assessment for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) evaluation. The FAIR test measures fluency, comprehension (listening comprehension in grades K-2, reading comprehension in grades 3-5), vocabulary, and phonemic awareness. The FAIR test is a statewide assessment and is taken by accessing the Florida Department of Education’s website. The assessment is not timed and may be broken into several sections to be completed in 20-30 minute increments over the course of 2-4 days. As a quantitative measure, participants, their guardians, and their teachers would be interviewed to determine each student’s opinion of reading in both the native and the
second language, how the student feels about school in general, and how the student feels he fits in socially with his English-speaking peers at school. Students and their guardians may be interviewed in their native language. These Assessments would provide researchers with baseline data. To establish progress monitoring and measure growth, the FAIR Assessment and the quantitative interview would be repeated in the months of November, February, and in mid May. The CELLA would also be given in March to establish English language proficiency and the continuation of participants in the schools’ ELL programs. Any participant exiting the program would be noted in the study, but would not be excluded from the research. Participants of the experimental group would participate in Reader’s Theater in their regular education classroom, with their homeroom classmates, during the reading block.

**Method of Instruction.** The instructional portion of the study would start on Monday of the third week of the school year and would end on Friday of the second week in May. Teachers would have been instructed to employ grade level ELA Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as well as standards in other content areas in order to select the Reader’s Theater scripts that would best suit the weekly curriculum. Teachers would also be instructed to use scripts appropriate to the reading ability of the students in their classrooms. Teachers would be supplied with both published and Internet resources for obtaining Reader’s Theater scripts. Teachers would also be encouraged to write their own scripts based on quality published literature. The participating teachers would provide all scripts used by the ELL participants to the researchers.

The weekly schedule would go as follows: On Monday, all students in the classroom would be grouped heterogeneously and assigned a Reader’s Theater script and lines from the script. Heterogeneous grouping allows ELL participants to work with students of differing ability levels and encourages ELL participants to interact with various peers. Teacher discretion would
be used in assigning scripts. Teachers could also allow students to decide their own parts. Student choice could be motivational to participating in the assignment. Students would highlight their parts with a highlighting marker and would read through the entire script independently. Students would note any words they could not read or did not know the meaning of. The teacher might need to read aloud and discuss the script with the ELL participant if the participant is not able to read and comprehend the script on his own. Depending on the length of the scripts, Monday’s assignment would take 15-25 minutes. On Tuesday-Thursday, students would meet for 15-20 minutes in their heterogeneous groups to orally read through their Reader’s Theater script. At this time, students would be encouraged to discuss the story, the characters, and the vocabulary in order to deliver an accurate portrayal of their scripted part. The teacher would visit each group each day in order to listen, ask fluency and comprehension questions related to the reading, and offer advice. The teacher may also need to spend small group or one-on-one time with the ELL participant in order to ensure understanding. On Friday, each group would perform their Reader’s Theater script to the class. Students would read from the script and would use gestures, but the use of props and costumes should be very limited. The limited use of props and costumes would encourage students to use only their oral reading skills and gestures to depict their character. Teachers would be encouraged to invite other classes, faculty, staff, or family members to serve as the audience.

The researchers would observe classes periodically to take field notes and ensure the experiment is being carried out correctly. During these observations, researchers may choose to also meet informally with participating teachers and ELL student participants to collect feedback on the effectiveness of the program.
Data Analysis. The study would use the data results of the four FAIR tests to quantitatively measure growth in fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary as a result of participating in Reader’s Theater. Results from the experimental group would be compared to results from the control group. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) would be used to compare the mean growth of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary between the experimental and the control groups at each grade level. An ANOVA would also be used to compare the mean growth of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary between the experimental group as a whole and the control group as a whole. Growth would be measured between each test as well as comprehensively from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. Significant growth would be determined by examining $t$ test results.

Summary and Conclusion

With current research comes a change in reading philosophies and best practice methods. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) established fluency as the most vital component of emergent reading instruction (Adomat, 2009). NCLB’s Reading First program approved grants for the use of fluency-based reading curriculum with Title 1 schools (Cummins, 2007). After five years of using the Reading First approved programs, students continued to struggle in reading, and a change in philosophy was made. NCLB adapted approved reading practices focusing on strategies that address the key reading skills of balanced fluency and higher order comprehension skills. In order to ensure student growth, progress-monitoring measures were put into place and teachers are now required to supply struggling students with small-group or one-on-one teacher/student reading interventions.

Readers Theater has been moderately studied as an effective strategy in increasing strategic reading skills. As a multidimensional reading strategy, Reader’s Theater has been
successful in promoting all aspects of reading fluency: accuracy, automaticity, and prosody
(Keehn, 2003; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Rasinski & Young, 2009). Reader’s Theater also teaches
students how to refine and enhance comprehension skills (Adomat, 2009; Applegate, Applegate,
& Modla, 2009; Clyde, 2003; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Klin, 2007; Schwanenflugel et al.,
2009; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). Through Reader’s Theater’s unique method of learning
practices, English Language Learner (ELL) students become more actively involved in their own
learning, which leads to better understanding of content and skills (Azizinezhad & Hashemi,
2011; Liu, 1999). The unique method of Reader’s Theater provides ELL students with reading
instruction to actively participate in, understand, and thrive (Liu, 1999). As a reading strategy,
Reader’s Theater is a motivational teaching tool students find meaningful, challenging,
entertaining, and creative. After participating in Reader’s Theater, teachers have noticed a
newfound confidence in their students and teachers have observed unmotivated students develop
interest in reading literature (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Rasinski & Young, 2009; Trainin &
Andrzejczak, 2006; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). Equipped with the research presented in this
paper, elementary teachers of ELL students should feel confident incorporating Reader’s Theater
into their daily reading block to help students with reading fluency, comprehension, and
motivation. Though the research documenting the value of using Reader’s Theater with ELL
students is strong, more research is needed in order to assess the overall effectiveness of using
Reader’s Theater as a strategy for assisting elementary ELL students in attaining the reading
skills needed for proficient on-grade-level reading in the second language.
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