Building Fluency through Reader's Theater Pilot

Report for a Research Pilot Conducted in the Houston Independent School District

Building Fluency through Reader's Theater:
A Study of a Commercial Product's Effectiveness

Introduction

The report by the National Reading Panel (2001), *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications,* raised awareness of fluency when it outlined the five essential elements that must be part of all reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. As stated in the report, "On the basis of a detailed analysis of the available research that met NRP methodological criteria, the panel concluded that guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels."

According to *Put Reading First*, "Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly." Fluency is an important component of reading instruction because it has a direct relationship with a student's ability to comprehend text. "Fluency is evidence that the reader is accessing the deeper meaning of the text. It is associated with rate, accuracy, and scores on comprehension tests." (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Because of the key role fluency plays in developing strong readers and the renewed emphasis on fluency in reading instruction, Teacher Created Materials (TCM) has taken on the mission of creating products that integrate methods for teaching and developing reading fluency, while supporting the other four elements of reading instruction.

Across the country the use of reader's theater has emerged as a method that increases reading fluency while fully engaging students in text. In the *Put Reading First* publication (2001), the U.S. Department of Education asserts, "Reader's theater provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Reader's theater also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing." Martinez, Roser, and Stecker (1999) conducted a 10-week study of second graders using reader's theater in 1999. The results of the study showed a gain of 17 words per minute over the 10-week period while the control group, who did not use reader's theater, made only half that gain. Informal reading inventories were then given to determine progress in overall reading and progress in comprehension. The reader's theater students demonstrated gains more than double that of the control group. Of the 28 students in the reader's theater group, nine tested two grade levels higher and 14 moved up one grade level. Reader's theater also has the power to improve student's comprehension, further reflecting the causal relationship between fluency and comprehension. As Tim Rasinski states in his book *The Fluent Reader* (2003), "We are gaining evidence from classroom research that reader's theater yields improvements in students' word recognition, fluency, and comprehension." English language learners also benefit from participating in reader's theater. Ratliff, in his work teaching adolescents who were English language learners, found reader's theater provides "…an oral stimulus for those unaccustomed to using imagination to experience literary works." (Ratliff, 1985)

Building Fluency through Reader's Theater

TCM's program *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* is designed to engage students with high-interest scripts and support teachers by providing a fluency objective and lesson for each script. The *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* series is composed of three kits in levels 1–2, 3–4, and 5–8, and two social studies-themed kits *My Country* and *Early America*. Each kit includes six copies each of eight reader's theater scripts. These full-color, bound scripts are designed for student use. Each script is modeled after a popular children's book, and the script themes coincide with core reading program themes. The scripts are also tied to content-area instruction for integration across the curriculum. Furthermore, the roles in each script are written at multiple reading levels, so teachers can differentiate instruction for students. The scripts are also designed to include all students equally regardless of reading level. Therefore, the main character is sometimes written for the lower reading level.

A *Teacher's Resource Guide* is also provided in each kit. The *Teacher Resource Guide* serves as a road map for implementing the program and it includes professional development support for teaching fluency and implementing reader's theater. Lesson plans for each script are also provided. The lesson plans give teacher's guidance for using the scripts and include a section entitled "Meeting the Fluency Objective." The lessons include ideas for integrating reader's theater into content areas, and teaching the children's books on which the scripts were based. A professionally recorded audio CD with songs, poems, and script texts supports the lessons. Each script has one song and one poem performed on the CD. The CD also includes a recording of the eight scripts as a model for second language learners or non-fluent readers. Full-color overhead transparencies of song lyrics and poems from each script are included and serve as great resources for whole-group choral reading. A Teacher Resource CD with copies of the scripts for a home-school connection and other teacher resources are included with the kit.

Purpose of the Research

TCM and the Houston Independent School District (HISD) partnered to conduct a research pilot of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* in six fifth-grade classrooms during the 2007–2008 school years. The teachers in the experimental group were to use the program a minimum of three days a week, 45 minutes a day. The primary purpose of the pilot was to measure the effectiveness of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* in improving the reading fluency of targeted Grade 5 HISD students. Through the implementation of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater*, TCM and HISD investigated the research question, "How will the program *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* affect HISD fifth-grade students' reading fluency?" Both parties hypothesized that the targeted fifth-grade HISD students in the experimental group would demonstrate a greater increase in reading fluency (words per minute) after participating in the program than fifth-grade HISD students in the control group. They also hypothesized that targeted fifth-grade HISD students in the experimental group will show growth between their 2007 and 2008 TAKS scores after participating in the program.

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Purpose of the Research *(cont.)*

Although the research pilot was originally intended for fifth-grade students, a fourth grade teachers from School A participated in the pilot because she was interested in increasing her students' fluency and monitoring that growth over time. The Case Study highlighting her implementation of the program follows this report.

Methods

Three elementary schools of similar demographics were selected for the pilot. Six fifth-grade classes from two elementary schools were selected as the experimental group. Four fifth-grade classes were selected from a third elementary school as the control group. The selection of the subset of Grade 5 HISD students as a control group was based on their demographical match to those experimental students who are underperforming on the TAKS. Additionally, a fourth grade class at School A piloted the program during the course of the school year. The results of the fourth grade class are described in the Case Study following this report.

Student Population

The HISD has a student population of approximate 202,000 students within the greater Houston metropolitan area. There are 183 elementary schools serving 107,404 students. Of those elementary schools, only three did not make annual yearly progress (AYP).

The diverse student population in HISD is 58 percent Hispanic, 30 percent African-American, 9 percent White, and 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 78 percent of HISD students participate in free or reduced-price meal programs. HISD also serves more than 55,000 limited-English-proficient students who, combined, speak more than 90 different native languages.

The following is specific student population information for each school participating in the pilot. For purposes of anonymity, the experimental schools are given pseudonyms of School A and School B, and the control school will be referred to as School C. All information provided reflects the 2006–2007 data from the HISD School Profiles.

	School A	School B	School C
Total Enrollment	750	767	783
Free/Reduced Lunch	96%	95%	92%
Limited English (LEP)	62%	54%	56%
At-Risk	85%	79%	78%
Race/Ethnicity			
African American	2%	31%	1%
Asian	1%	1%	0%
Hispanic	97%	67%	96%
Native American	0%	0%	0%
White	1%	1%	3%

Teacher Training

To ensure proper implementation of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* and to prepare the experimental group teachers for the expectations and responsibilities of the pilot, a teacher training was conducted on August 14, 2007. During this training, the experimental class teachers were introduced to the product and provided strategies and methods for implementing the product. Part of the product training included an overview of methods for developing students' fluency. In addition, experimental teachers were introduced to the pilot parameters and the participation expectations. To provide further professional development in the area of fluency, experimental group teachers were invited in October 2007 to a professional development session with a fluency expert. Periodic follow-up training sessions were provided in December 2007 and January 2008. The goal of the periodic trainings were to answer questions related to the product, check lesson logs, and observe teachers using the program. Feedback was provided to experimental teachers and, if requested, the product was modeled by TCM facilitators in experimental classes.

Measures and Data Collection

A quasi-experimental design was used to carry out the research for this pilot. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools were used to measure the efficacy of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater*. To measure students' fluency, a pre- and post-fluency probe was administered to students who had a signed parental consent form. (Only students with signed parental consent forms were included in the pre- and post-testing.) The one-minute fluency probe was administered to the students in both the experimental and control groups in September 2007 and in May 2008. A reading passage at the grade level of the students being tested (Grade 5) was provided to the students. Students were instructed to read the passage aloud for one minute. The TCM proctors followed standard protocols for scoring the probe and determining the fluency of each individual student as measured by Words Correct per Minute (WCPM). WCPM are the words that the student pronounces correctly, given the reading context. Self corrections within three seconds and repetitions are considered correct.

As a second quantitative evaluation tool, students' spring 2007 and spring 2008 scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) were compared. This comparison of students' scale scores measures an increase or decrease change in students reading comprehension between 4th and 5th grade. Although the TAKS is not a measure of fluency, it was chosen as an outcome measure for this pilot because comprehension is an objective of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* and prior fluency studies have shown a correlation between fluency and comprehension.

Measures and Data Collection *(cont.)*

Three qualitative tools were also used to gather anecdotal information from teachers and students. Teachers were asked to record each usage of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* on a lesson log. At the end of pilot, teachers completed a survey that provided them an opportunity to share information about their experiences with the program. Teachers responded to questions for the following topics:
● ease of use of the program ● professional growth as a result of participating in the pilot ● student use of the program ● appropriateness of the content ● students' fluency growth.
Students also completed a survey regarding their experiences with the *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* program. The survey measures how well they liked the program and self-perceptions about their reading fluency.

Data Analysis Procedures

Students in each class were assigned alphanumeric designations. Data was entered into spreadsheets, organized by class, and students' alphanumeric designation. Classes were identified as part of the experimental or control groups. To measure fluency, the number of words each student read correctly in one minute and percent accuracy were calculated. For each student, the words per minute on the pre- and post-fluency probes were compared, and an overall increase or decrease was determined. The mean words per minute on the pre- and post-fluency probe were then calculated for each class, each school, and the experimental and control groups separately. A mean increase or decrease in words per minute between the pre- and post-fluency probes were also calculated for each class, each school, and the experimental and control groups.

To measure students' comprehension, the 2007 and 2008 TAKS Reading assessment scores were compared for each student, and an overall increase or decrease was determined. A mean increase or decrease between 2007 and 2008 TAKS scores was then calculated for each class, school, and the experimental and control groups. Also determined using the TAKS data was the percentage of students in each class that met standard with a scale score of 2100 on the Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 TAKS assessments. The percentages were averaged for the experimental and control groups and the percentages of students meeting standard on the TAKS Spring 2007 and 2008 reading assessments were compared.
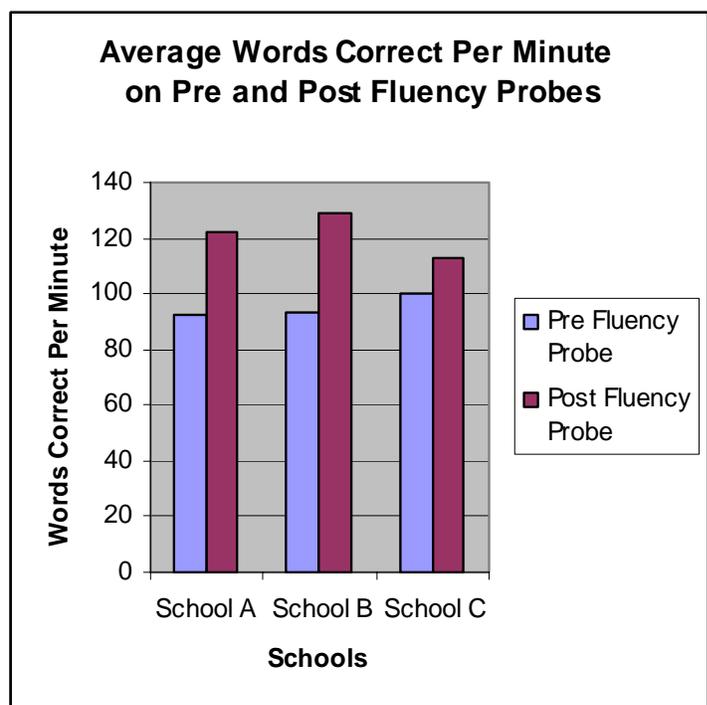
Data Analysis Procedures (cont.)

Analysis of the teachers' lesson logs and teacher surveys provided a picture of each teacher's usage of the program. The experimental teachers' lesson logs and information shared about usage on the teachers' surveys were categorized into high, medium, and low usage groups. Each class' mean increase and/or decrease on the fluency probe and TAKS assessment was aligned with each teacher's high, medium, or low usage of the program. The overall student growth in each class was compared to the category of usage by the classroom teacher to determine if a correlation exists between teacher usage of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* and students' overall growth on the fluency probe and the TAKS assessment. The teacher and student questionnaires were tallied and reviewed. Relevant anecdotal data from these questionnaires has been selected for inclusion in this report. The information will be also used to support the future development of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* products.

Result

Fluency Probe

Figure A

Over the course of the pilot, students' fluency in the experimental group (School A and School B) increased more than students' fluency in the control group (School C). The experimental group (School A and School B) had an average increase of 33.06 words correct per minute, where as the control group (School C) had an average increase of 13.28 words correct per minute. The difference between the increases of the experimental and control groups was 19.78 for words correct per minute. The graph *(Figure A)* shows the average words correct per minute on the pre- and post-fluency probes for each school. Notice that on the pre-fluency probe students in the experimental schools on average read fewer words correct per minute (WCPM) than the control school, but on the fall-fluency probe students in the experimental schools read more words correct per minute (WCPM) than the control school. This means that students in the experimental group started the year reading fewer WCPM than the control group, but by the end of the year had caught up to and surpassed the students in the control group.

Average Words Correct Per Minute on Pre and Post Fluency Probes

Legend: Pre Fluency Probe; Post Fluency Probe

Fluency Probe *(cont.)*

Tables 1–3 below show the average words correct per minute on the pre- and post-fluency assessment for each teacher in the experimental and control groups. The second column indicates each teacher's usage of the program. Teacher usage was categorized into high, medium, and low groups. Teachers who used the program three times per week or more are considered to be in the high usage category. Teachers who used the program once a week to twice a month are considered in the medium usage category. Teachers who used the program once a month to once per quarter are considered to be in the low usage category. The last column shows the average increase in WCPM for each class. All six experimental teachers had greater average increases than the four control teachers.

Average Words Correct Per Minute on Pre- and Post-Fluency Probe

Table 1

	Class	Usage Category	Fall 2007 WCPM Average	Spring 2008 WCPM Average	Fluency Probe Average Difference
School A Experimental Group	Teacher 1E	low	113	150	37
	Teacher 2E	medium	77.3	116.1	35.89
	Teacher 3E	low	77.33	96.93	19.2
	Teacher 4E	low	100.93	127.2	26.27
Averages			**92.14**	**122.56**	**29.59**

Table 2

	Class	Usage Category	Fall 2007 WCPM Average	Spring 2008 WCPM Average	Fluency Probe Average Difference
School B Experimental Group	Teacher 5E	low	93.63	130.93	39.29
	Teacher 6E	high	93.6	126.89	33.78
Averages			**93.61**	**128.91**	**36.53**

Table 3

	Class	Usage Category	Fall 2007 WCPM Avg.	Spring 2008 WCPM Avg.	Fluency Probe Avg. Difference
School C Control group	Teacher 1C	N/A	102	122.6	20.6
	Teacher 2C	N/A	85.2	94.8	9.6
	Teacher 3C	N/A	99.21	106.24	8.41
	Teacher 4C	N/A	112.9	127.4	14.5
Averages			**99.83**	**112.76**	**13.28**

Table 4 and *Figure B* reflect the differences in average words correct per minute between the experimental and control groups in the fall and spring. Once again it is evident that in the fall fluency probe the control group on average read more words correct per minute than the experimental group, but in the spring fluency probe the experimental group surpassed the control group.

Table 4

	Fall 2007 WCPM Avg.	Spring 2008 WCPM Avg.	Fluency Probe Avg. Difference
Experimental Fifth-Grade Averages	92.88	125.73	33.06
Control Fifth-Grade Averages	99.83	112.76	13.28
Differences between groups	-6.95	12.97	19.78

Figure B

Average WCPM for Experimental and Control Groups

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Fluency Probe *(cont.)*

Percent accuracy was also calculated on both the pre- and post-fluency probes for each student in the experimental and control groups. The percent accuracy is calculated by dividing the number of words correctly read per minute by the number words read per minute. This data reflects students' ability to accurately read the grade level text. If students score 95%–100% accuracy on passage, the passage is considered to be at students' independent reading level. If students score 90%–94% accuracy on reading passage, the passage is considered to be at students' instructional level. If students score less than 90% accuracy, the passage is considered to be at students' frustration reading level.

Because most students scored above 90% percent accuracy on the pre-fluency probe, there is only a slight increase between the pre- and post-fluency probes. The experimental group showed an increase of 1.6526219 percent and the control group showed an increase of 1.01575775 percent. The same 5th grade reading passage was also used for the pre- and post-fluency probes, causing most students to experience the same difficulties with certain words in the passage.
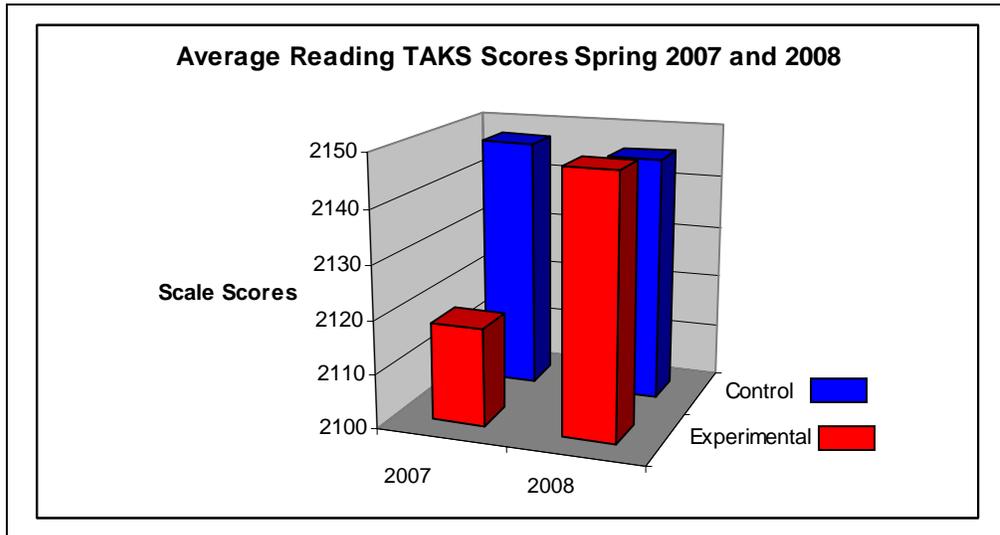
TAKS Scores

The scale scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Reading for Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 were collected and the scores were vertically compared to measure students' growth between fourth and fifth grade. The average scale scores of the experimental and control groups on the 2007 and 2008 Reading TAKS were also compared. The Spring 2007 scale scores reflect students' reading comprehension at the end of fourth grade. The scores from those students who took the fourth grade reading TAKS in Spanish were combined with those students who took the reading TAKS in English. In fifth grade, all students take the Reading TAKS in English. This may be a causal factor in the decrease of some students' scores between fourth and fifth grade and provide an explanation as to why teachers who have a significant number of students who took the TAKS in Spanish in fourth grade show an average decrease on the fifth-grade reading TAKS.

The experimental group's average fourth grade Reading TAKS score in Spring 2007 was 2118.71. The average fifth-grade reading TAKS score in Spring 2008 for the experimental group was 2141.56. The experimental group's average scale score on the reading TAKS increased by 29.96 points. The control group's average fourth grade Reading TAKS score in Spring 2007 was 2167.4 and the average fifth-grade Reading TAKS score in Spring 2008 was 2148.24. The control group showed a decrease of 1.97 points. Hence the experimental group showed a greater growth than the control group from the Spring 2007 Reading TAKS to the Spring 2008 Reading TAKS.
These results are reflected in *Figure C* on the following page.

TAKS Scores *(cont.) Figure C*

To have met standard on the Spring 2007 Reading TAKS and on the Spring 2008 Reading TAKS, students must receive a scale score of 2100 or higher. The experimental group had a greater increase in the percentage of students who met standard than the control group. The average percentage of students that met standard on the Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 Reading TAKS are shown in the table below.

Table 5

Average Percentage of Students that Met Standard on the Reading TAKS			
	Spring 2007 Reading TAKS	**Spring 2008 Reading TAKS**	**Percentage Increase**
Experimental Average	36.2%	61.7%	25.4%
Control Group Average	81.8%	84.3%	2.5%

Teacher Surveys

At the end of the research pilot, teachers in the experimental group completed a survey to share their feedback related to their usage of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater.*

Teachers responded to questions for the following topics:
● ease of use of the program ● professional growth as a result of participating in the pilot
● student use of the program ● appropriateness of the content ● students' fluency growth.

The overall response from the fifth-grade teachers in each of these areas was overwhelmingly positive. All the teachers who completed the survey enjoyed teaching with *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater.* They agreed that the program was easy to implement and that the ELL support suggestions were helpful. Most teachers felt that

the lessons in the program and the professional resources provided by TCM helped them develop an understanding of fluency and gave them strategies for increasing their students' fluency. They all agreed that the topics, content, songs, and poems presented in the scripts were engaging for their students. The components from the program that teachers used most frequently were the songs, poems, scripts, and audio CD.

The teacher who had the highest usage of the program reported that students' fluency increased as a result of using the reader's theater scripts, and as a result of repeated readings with the poems and singing the songs. One teacher said that the thing he liked most about *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* was "the interest of the students in using reader's theater every week." Another teacher said what she liked most about the program was the interesting stories, ease of implementation, the leveled parts in the scripts so that even the weakest student can join in, and the literature connection. Through the site visits and surveys, teachers expressed issues with finding time for use of the program and specifically finding time to conduct the "Meeting the Fluency Objective" lesson. These concerns are explained in more detail in the Recommendations and Implementation Issues section of this report.

When asked how reader's theater helped meet their students' needs, one teacher responded, "I had reluctant readers and nonreaders to start with and now they ALL want to read. Another teacher felt that the program helped her build confidence in her shy, reluctant readers. One teacher's final comment was, "The students loved reader's theater time; they also really enjoyed watching performances by other classes."

Student Surveys

At the conclusion of the pilot, students completed a survey about how they liked specific components of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* and their self-perceptions as readers. Student opinion regarding reader's theater was divided. Students in classes with higher usage of the program had more positive feelings about reader's theater than students in classes with lower usage of the program. School A had lower usage of reader's theater than School B. School A also experienced outside variables including teacher turn over, which could have impacted negative students' experiences or lack of experiences with reader's theater; therefore, students' responses regarding their feelings towards reader's theater are inconclusive.

Students at School A did share some of their positive overall impressions of reader's theater. One student wrote in the margin, "It helped me say words I didn't know." Another student commented, "It very good Reader's Theater because it helps us to read better. Thank you! ☺." One student summed it by saying "Reader's theater is the best thing I've ever did. I am a better reader because of reader's theater. Thank you ☺ P.S. I hope we do it again next year. I LOVE READER'S THEATER!"

The results of student surveys from School B are more decisive. Students in School B overwhelming liked reader's theater. *Table 6* (on the following page) shows the percentage of students in School B that responded in agreement (yes), disagreement (no), or neutral (maybe) to the statements on the survey. The statements are provided in the first column.

Student Surveys

Table 6

Student Survey Results

School B			
	Percent of Responses		
Survey Items	**Yes**	**No**	**Maybe**
1. I liked the scripts in the reader's theater program.	89.74%	2.56%	7.69%
2. I learned to read with expression.	95%	2.5%	2.5%
3. I learned to control how fast to read.	51.28%	2.56%	46.15%
4. I liked singing the songs.	37.5%	20%	42.5%
5. I liked reading the poems.	92.5%	7.5%	0%
6. I liked using the masks.	4.76%	95.23%	0%
7. I liked the pictures and drawings in the reader's theater scripts.	80.49%	14.63%	4.88%
8. I liked performing the scripts.	84.62%	5.13%	10.26%
9. The audio CD helped me to read better.	18.42%	5.26%	76.32%
10. The audio CD helped me to read and say words that I did not know.	88.89%	2.78%	8.33%
11. I am a better reader because I did reader's theater.	10.26%	2.56%	87.18%
12. I am a fluent reader.	18.92%	5.41%	75.68%

Most students felt that they learned to read with expression. Some students felt that they learned to control how fast they read. This self-perception of their abilities to control rate may have had a more positive response had the teachers used and had time for "Meeting the Fluency Objective" lessons. Students would have received systematic and direct instruction for fluency objectives, such as rate. Teachers who didn't use this component are more likely to work on the fluency objective of expression, which is the objective most teachers know how to teach.

RESULTS (CONT.)

Student Surveys *(cont.)*

Some of the students in School B also wrote additional comments about reader's theater. One student wrote, "I enjoyed the reader's theater. It was great. I will read, read, another story again." Another student enthusiastically stated, "I really liked a lot the reader's theater." One student expressed their gratitude by saying, "Thanks for making reader's theater. It helped students to read better and it's really FUN!!!!" Some students just kept their final comments simple, like this one, "I like it, I like it, I like it!"

For both School A and School B, students of various reading levels and levels of English language proficiency found *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* engaging and valuable in their growth as readers.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

One of the major challenges facing program usage was time constraints the teachers faced. Teachers were not allowed to use *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* during their two hour reading block. As a result, teachers felt that they didn't have time to use the program for the prescribed three days a week, forty-five minutes a day.

Another implementation challenge that affected usage of the program was the departmentalization of the fifth-grade classes. Not all of the teachers selected to participate in the pilot taught reading and language arts. Because of departmentalization, the content-teachers did not have many opportunities in which to use the program.

School A faced yet another challenge. Two of the fifth-grade teachers selected to participate in the pilot left the school mid year. School A had to hire substitutes for the remainder of the school year and restructure the fifth-grade classes. This effected continuity and consistency in use of the program at this school, as well as possibly affected students' achievement on the TAKS test. It also affected the number of teacher surveys and lesson logs that we were collected.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the data collected and analyzed from the *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* pilot was not fully conclusive, the evidence resulting from this research pilot illustrates the power reader's theater has to increase students' fluency and motivate students' to read, even with only periodic use of the program. Teachers and students alike expressed a desire to use the program more frequently. Teachers at both schools hoped the district will take action to implement reader's theater as a systematic part of their reading curriculum and instructional block.

One Fourth Grade Teacher's Mission to Build Fluency

What happens when one fourth grade teacher takes on the mission to systematically increase fluency among students in both sections of her departmentalized language arts class? Students' fluency growth has no boundaries. At School A in our research pilot, a fourth grade teacher, Ms. Mata, (a pseudonym for privacy purposes) embraced the challenge of increasing students' fluency following Teacher Created Material's professional development training on *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater*. Ms. Mata systematically used reader's theater to increase students' fluency and each week she monitored students' fluency growth by having students self-assess with a fluency probe.

To systematically implement reader's theater, Ms. Mata put in place classroom routines and instructional best-practices for using the program. To introduce a new script, Ms. Mata would conduct a whole-group, choral reading of the script and introduce the song for the script. After introducing the script, Ms. Mata focused on having students develop fluency for one act at a time. For each act, students would listen to the audio and practice in centers. Ms. Mata then reviewed each act with the students, integrating the fluency lesson, songs, and poems into her instruction. Initially, this process took a few weeks, but as students' fluency increased they needed less time to rehearse the scripts. As Ms. Mata stated on her teacher survey, "First we had to read an act three times at least, so they could master it. So it would take us awhile to finish a story. But now, we read it once and they are ready to do it on their own. (*Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* builds fluency little by little."

This systematic implementation of reader's theater also was reflected in the growth students demonstrated between the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 fluency probes. On average, the students' fluency increased by 41 words correct per minute. One student who was defined as a non-reader on the Fall 2007 fluency probe read 58 words correct per minute on the Spring 2008 fluency probe. *Figure D* shows the average words correct per minute that students read on each fluency probe.
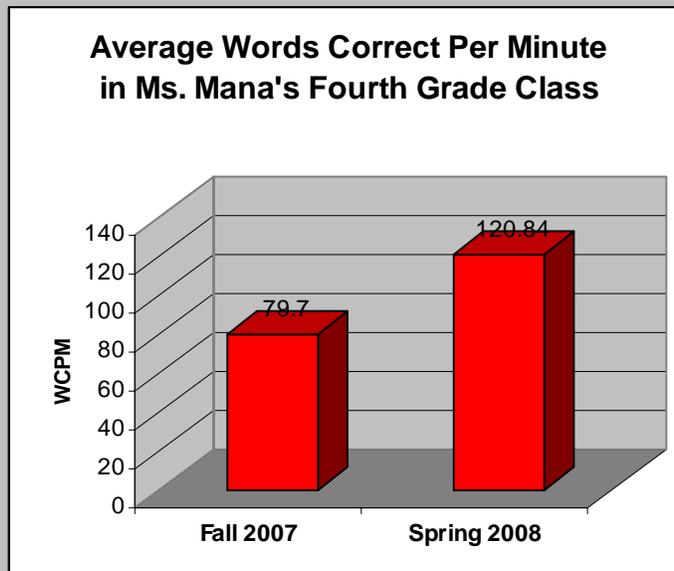

Average Words Correct Per Minute in Ms. Mana's Fourth Grade Class

Figure D

One Fourth Grade Teacher's Mission to Build Fluency

Not only did the average WCPM increase among students, but students' percent accuracy also increased by an average of 8%. *Figure E* shows the average percent accuracy on the Fall 2007 fluency probe verses the average percent accuracy on the Spring 2008 fluency probe.

**Percent Accuracy in
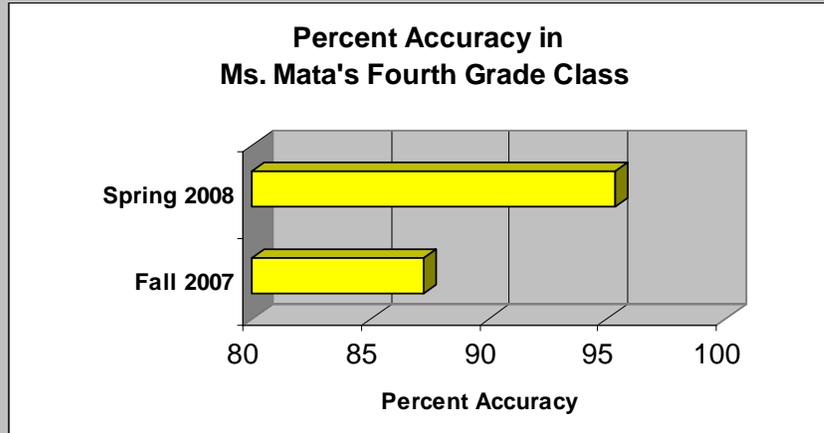Ms. Mata's Fourth Grade Class**

Figure E

As stated earlier, percent accuracy reflects students' ability to accurately read the grade level text. If students score 95%–100% accuracy on a passage, the passage is considered to be at students' independent reading level. If students score 90%–94% accuracy on reading passage, the passage is considered to be at students' instructional level. If students score less than 90% accuracy, the passage is considered to be at students' frustration reading level. On the fall 2007 fluency probe, the fourth-grade passage was at the frustration level for 33% of the students. The passage was at the instructional level for 33% of the students, as well. Hence, for the remaining 33% percent, the passage was at students' independent reading level. On the spring 2008 fluency probe, the passage was at the frustration level for only 2% of the students. It was at the instructional level for 18% of the students and at the independent reading level for 80% of the students. These gains in percent accuracy show that students' reading levels increased as a result of fluency instruction. These gains are illustrated in *Figure F* below.
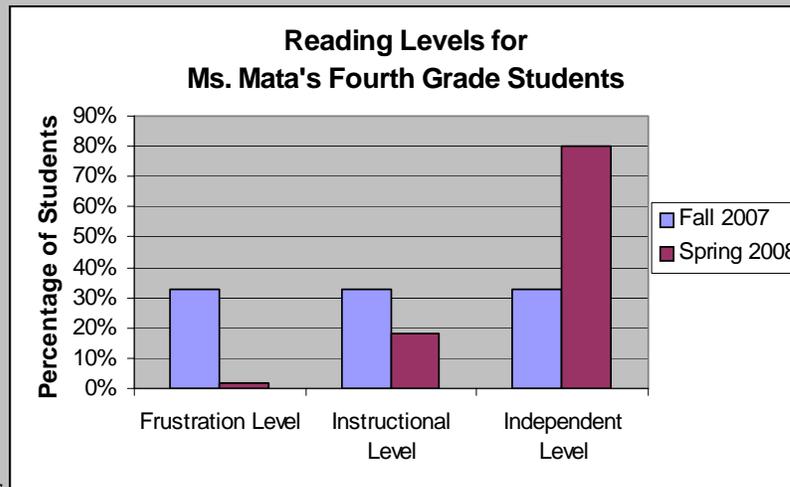
**Reading Levels for
Ms. Mata's Fourth Grade Students**

Figure F

One Fourth Grade Teacher's Mission to Build Fluency

Truly Ms. Mata's use of *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* helped students make great gains in reading. Students also had some very positive feedback to share on their perception of how the program changed their reading fluency. 73% of Ms. Mata's fourth grade students now felt that they were fluent readers. 80% felt they learned to control how fast they read and 57% stated that they learned to read with expression. In general, 86% of the students said they liked *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater*. One student summed it by writing on his or her survey, "I loved reader's theater. I think it is the best." When asked about her students' response to *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater*, Ms. Mata stated, "They loved it." Ms. Mata's mission to increase fluency using *Building Fluency through Reader's Theater* was accomplished. Students made reading gains, and were engaged in reading as a result of the program.

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