

# “LIKE THE WHOLE CLASS HAS READING PROBLEMS”: A STUDY OF ORAL READING FLUENCY ACTIVITIES IN A HIGH INTERVENTION SETTING.

## AUTHORS

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## ABSTRACT

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*In this empirical study which used a mixed-method approach, researchers sought to understand how participation in dramatic oral reading interventions affects both reading fluency and comprehension. The study also investigated how that participation is ultimately limited or promoted by the social context of high schools. Qualitative data are supported by significant quantitative results to identify the many factors at play when adolescents who were identified as struggling with literacy performed oral readings in front of their peers.*

What goes through the minds of adolescents when they are asked to read aloud in secondary school settings? What pressures do they feel from their peers and teachers? Many students in American high schools are competent oral readers, but most teachers have experienced awkward moments as red-faced, sweating students stutter and stammer their way through a passage as their sympathetic peers look away, and their not-so-sympathetic peers sneer. At the heart of these struggles is often a deficiency in oral reading fluency,

a construct that plays a shrinking role in the school curriculum at each instructional level past fourth grade (Pinnell & Jaggar, 2002).

Reading fluency was defined by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) as "the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression," (pp. 3-5). Rasinski (2006) offered a clear definition of oral reading fluency: "It deals with reading words accurately and with appropriate speed, and it deals with embedding in one's voice elements of expression and phrasing while reading" (p. 18).

LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) Theory of Automaticity explains fluency based on the assumption that the brain can only handle so many stimuli at once. The simple and overused idiom, "practice makes perfect" best describes automaticity. A guitarist, for example, cannot think about every single finger or hand movement to play single chords or notes in a song while onstage performing it. Extensive practice has allowed those movements to come without attention, to be automatic. In much the same way, the parts of the complex act of reading (decoding, metacognition, comprehension) must occur simultaneously and without individual attention before automaticity is reached, and a "behavior is executed with little effort or attention" (National Reading Panel Report, 2000, pp. 3-7).

Researchers who followed LaBerge and Samuels (Ackerman, 1987; Anderson, 1985; Perfetti, 1985; Posner & Snyder, 1975; Schneider & Shiffrin 1977; Venezky, 2002) have extended the understanding of the theory. Venezky (2002), for instance, found that adult learners still struggling to read needed more focus on automaticity to become successful readers, so it stands to reason that adolescents should require more practice as well.

The second major construct explaining oral reading fluency is the Theory of Prosody, attributed to Schreiber (1991), which describes fluent oral reading as "smooth and expressive" (p. 161). This side of oral reading consists of observable features—stress, intonation, duration—that are discernable when listening to someone read. Prosody is also described as the "rhythmic and tonal features of speech," (p. 166). Six markers can be directly linked to expressive, or prosodic reading: pausal intrusions, length of phrases, appropriateness of phrases, phrase-final lengthening, terminal intonation contours, and stress (Dowhower, 1991).

Historically, oral literacy was the core of the American curriculum from colonial times until English became a school subject in the late nineteenth century (Applebee, 1974; Hyatt, 1943; Smith, 2002). Oral reading was spurred on by the lack of printed materials. Typically, each household would have one designated oral reader (Hyatt, 1943). Philosopher William James (1892) stated "the teacher's success or failure in teaching reading is

based, so far as the public estimate is concerned, upon the oral reading method" (p. 422). As books became common in homes, oral reading became unpopular and even decried by educational theorists for most of the 20th century (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003, p. 511).

By the end of the last century, researchers and theorists had identified five abilities as necessary for successful reading: vocabulary acquisition, phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and reading fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Most of the impetus for developing these abilities occurs in grades 1-4 where the majority of students reach an acceptable foundational level of literacy. As students progress through junior high and high school, however, the curriculum focus shifts from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," Teaching reading fundamentals is replaced by expecting students to read silently for information. What happens to students who do not reach a competent level by the end of grade four? Often, they never reach full proficiency. The U.S. Census Bureau stated that there were 3.9 million 8th graders in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), and the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress results estimated that 2.7 million of those 8th graders could not read at proficient levels (NAEP, 2008).

## FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT

Our focus on oral reading fluency in a secondary setting stemmed, in part, from research by Rasinski (2005) which found that ninth-grade students still lacked fluency in their reading. By combining oral reading accuracy with the expressive traits of oral language and measuring students' growth in fluency, we sought to provide more information about the effectiveness of using oral reading fluency activities at the high school level as a means to increase reading fluency and reading comprehension.

Rasinski (2003) suggested several oral reading activities which easily apply to an elementary or middle level classroom situation: "reading stories, reciting poetry, performing scripts, giving speeches, singing songs, announcing public proclamations and pledges, offering toasts, reporting news, telling jokes, shouting cheers" (p. 22). He claimed that any reading program "worth its salt" should include oral reading and that oral reading programs should follow four guiding principles: (a) The teacher must model effective oral reading for students, (b) Students should receive support from the teacher and peers through choral reading, paired reading, and by listening to recorded materials, (c) Students will receive multiple opportunities to practice in a classroom setting, and (d) focus on appropriate phrasing is necessary to complete the process.

Is oral reading fluency, something typically addressed in elementary

school, an effective intervention with high school students identified as needing extra literacy assistance? Secondary students are acutely self-conscious, and their awareness of peers often inhibits their willingness to present, read aloud, or perform for the class. The activities that are often used in upper elementary and middle level settings, which include choral reading and reader's theater among others, are potentially more difficult to implement in a high school classroom due to the social context at play (Goering, 2007). This study sought to take into account both Rasinski's guiding principles and the attention to the social context of these activities in a classroom of struggling high school students.

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

By observing one teacher's literacy intervention classroom, this study sought answers to two questions: How does participation in dramatic oral reading interventions affect high school students' reading fluency and reading comprehension abilities, and how does the social context of a high school literacy intervention classroom act to inhibit or encourage participation in dramatic oral reading fluency activities? The objectives of the researchers were aligned to those of the classroom teacher: (a) to help these struggling adolescents improve reading comprehension through work with oral reading fluency, and (b) to understand students' progress in a given school year.

Specifically, the activities examined in the study were a practical application of Repeated Reading. According to multiple studies, (Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Chomsky, 1976; Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Neill, 1980; Samuels, 1979) this approach increases reading speed, reading comprehension, and word recognition. The strict definition of repeated reading calls for one on one individual attention, but for this study the primary instructional method used in the classroom was a variation of the approach, Cooperative Repeated Reading (Koskinen & Blum, 1984; 1986). In this variation, students practiced reading a passage with a peer during a 10-15 minute period while the peer provided structured feedback.

## METHODOLOGY

This mixed method study occurred in the context of a high school literacy intervention class on 24 days over a seven month period. In seeking answers to the quantitative question of whether participation in dramatic oral reading interventions affected reading fluency and reading comprehension levels, we set out to measure these abilities before and after the study and to apply a systematic, repeatable set of interventions between the assessments. We gathered qualitative data to answer the question of whether or not the

social context of a high school literacy intervention classroom would provide the support system necessary for adolescents who audibly and visibly struggle with oral reading in front of limited numbers of their peers.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

This study took place in a single high school, Rolling Hills High School (pseudonym), in a mid-sized town in the Mid-South. This particular classroom was selected based on the fact that the teacher was in his first year of teaching and the school was in the first year of attempting to provide literacy intervention in grade 10, a program they were seeking to understand and expand. Since the teacher, Mr. Hurd, had been trained to be an English teacher and was undergoing professional development to assume the role of 'Literacy Interventionist,' a second layer of interest to the study was added as it represented national trends of a focus on adolescent literacy from mainly people trained to be English teachers.

Of the 42 students enrolled in the five different class hours at the onset of the study, 25 students, (11 males and 14 females), returned informed consent forms agreeing to participate. Due to the transient nature of this population, 17 of the 25 students were still enrolled in the school during post-assessments, thus completing the study. Of the participants, 7 of 17 were considered English Language Learners, defined by this particular school district as a student having at least one parent in the home without literacy in English. Three students in the study were receiving special education services. Students not participating in the study were not tested or interviewed but did participate in the intervention activities, because they were natural parts of a literacy intervention class.

Participants were interviewed prior to their participation in the oral fluency activities. In their interviews, the students described some animosity about being placed in the literacy intervention class, euphemized with the name Explorations in Literacy. Because we were in the classroom alongside the teacher during the research project, participants were chosen randomly for the interview. The five students interviewed reported being surprised by the class on their schedule. Mena (all names are pseudonyms) said, "I couldn't remember signing up for the class, but figured I did when it was on my schedule," and Trevor exclaimed, "I didn't know what to think that first day of class. I was like, 'what is up with this?'" Under these somewhat precarious circumstances, all five students reported appreciating the opportunity to read, develop their literacy abilities, and work with their teacher, Mr. Hurd.

### QUALITATIVE PROCEDURES

The classroom researcher assumed the role of participant observer (teacher) for the first three hours of the school day as the classroom teacher observed. Then, the classroom teacher used the same methods and approach to teach the next three hours of the day while the researcher observed at intervals. Together, both the researcher and the classroom teacher administered a series of six, four day, performance-based interventions. Each utilized cooperative repeated reading--peers reading to and evaluating each other--as the central teaching method and each focused on dramatic oral reading fluency.

Each four-day intervention centered on one genre of text. For example, the first cycle focused on poetry performance and concluded with the students sharing one or two poems in an oral poetry reading format. In building up to the final performance, we began the cycle by modeling both good and bad examples and guiding students in picking out poems to read. Students participated in cooperative repeated reading during the second day of the cycle with their new poems. Pairs were reorganized three times throughout the day so as to increase the level of comfort in both reading and providing feedback to as many members of the class as possible.

The third day of the cycle was spent practicing individually, with partners, and with small groups of four to five to improve social conditions for sharing the following day. During the final day, students reorganized the room into a format suitable for a poetry reading event and the teachers brought coffee to celebrate and further accentuate the atmosphere in the classroom. Students read their selected poetry in front of the class and their performances were videotaped to help with reliability measures with the research. The described four-day cycle was typical of the others which included young adult novel excerpts used as readers theater texts, a non-fiction news broadcast utilizing daily news stories from the community, an open microphone event where students could read their own writing, and a repeat of the poetry experience.

Following the completion of the six four-day cycles, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews of five individual students, reviewed performance field notes, compared fluency assessment scores, and transcribed and coded interview recordings in an effort to address the two central research questions: Is dramatic oral reading effective in improving comprehension abilities amongst tenth graders and how does the social context of the class impact those activities?

### **QUANTITATIVE PROCEDURES.**

A certified speech-language pathologist administered the Gray Oral Reading Test 4 (GORT 4; Wiederholt & Bryant, 2001) (Form A) to obtain pretreatment baseline status on both oral fluency abilities and reading comprehension skills on each participant. Following the 24 classroom days of treatment, participants were post-tested using the alternate form of the GORT 4 (Form B). Difference scores were computed by subtracting each participant's pretest score from his or her posttest scores. Standard scores were then calculated and these quantified measures obtained from administration of the GORT 4 were the dependent variables.

### **MATERIALS**

Intervention texts ranged from high-interest selections of contemporary young adult fiction to the local newspaper. One of the five intervention sequences included student writing as the reading event text as well. Each student, with aid from the teacher, picked texts that were at or above her or his tested reading level. The teacher utilized the Flesch-Kincaid readability formula available on Microsoft Word applications to check the readability level of the texts versus the reading level of each student.

The formal assessment instrument, the GORT 4, was administered as a measurement of oral reading rate, accuracy, fluency, and reading comprehension. The test yields three sets of composite scores, (a) a comprehension score which is determined by the number of comprehension questions correctly answered on each reading passage, (b) a fluency score which results from combining the students' rate and accuracy in reading the passages, and (c) an overall reading quotient derived by combining the comprehension and fluency scores. The comprehension and fluency subtests yield standard scores with a mean of 10 and a standard deviation of 3. The resultant oral reading quotient has a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15 (Wiederholt & Bryant, 2001).

### **QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

Dependent variables were the quantified measures obtained from the administration of the GORT 4. Data for dependent variables were analyzed to address the first question of this investigation. Pretest and posttest scores were compared for significant change by applying paired-samples t-test. Changes in participants' reading comprehension and reading fluency as measured by the GORT 4 are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest and Posttest GORT-4**

		MEAN	STD-DEV
Fluency	Pretest	3.70	2.41
	Posttest	4.49	2.92
Comprehension	Pretest	6.11	1.40
	Posttest	7.17	1.70
Composite	Pretest	69.47	11.03
	Posttest	76.35	13.24

For reading comprehension, measures indicated a statistically significant difference ( $t(16) = -3.646, p < .05$ ) and an effect size correlation of  $r = .67$ . Fluency measures also showed a significant difference ( $t(16) = -4.440, p < .05$ ) and an effect size correlation of  $r = .74$ . The Composite score combining reading comprehension and fluency showed a significant difference ( $t(16) = 4.474, p < .05$ ) and an effect size correlation of  $r = .75$ . All the above  $t$ -statistics are statistically significant and the effects are large and represent a substantive finding.

### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

In coding the interview transcripts and video excerpts, several factors were identified which both promoted and limited the participation in the dramatic oral reading performances. Save one, the students participated and reasonably engaged in the oral reading activities and culminating performances. These students were involuntarily placed into a literacy intervention class for one hour of each school day based on their previous state assessments scores, grades in English, or 9th grade English teacher's recommendation, not a scientific process of selection.

The participants' comments and answers to questions fell into five different axial coding categories: a. Intervention Class, b. Reading Habits and History, c. Dramatic Oral Reading Performance, d. Peer References, and e. Enjoyable Activities. These five categories combined to help explain and understand the factors at play which either promoted or inhibited engaged participation in the activities and culminating performances. In order for a code to be listed, it had to occur in three of the five interview transcripts.

### INTERVENTION CLASS

As mentioned above, students were unaware of their placement in the literacy intervention class at the onset of the semester. Of those who were interviewed, all five reported some apprehension toward the course at first,



but all reported ultimately enjoying the experience. One of the reasons cited was the small class size and the less intimidating climate fewer peers provided. Selena shared, "I don't really feel good in large groups of people, but when it's in the small class I feel good because I know the people really good and so it's not as scary." The classes were small, some having as few as two students because the district wanted the teacher to be able to focus a great deal of individual attention on each student. The fact that the students were all "in it together," surfaced repeatedly as a reason they felt positive about the situation. Emmy Lou offered the following comment:

I guess like, everybody has problems in that class so it's not like if I'm a bad reader then [I'm on a lower level than anyone in that class because everyone has their problems.] Well, it's not just me that has reading problems in that class. I mean, that's why they're [in there]. Like the whole class has reading problems and we're all improving. I'm sure we [can all see each other improving and see ourselves improving.]

Students tested all over the board at the beginning of the year, but those who were reading at the collegiate level (reportedly placed into the class stemming from an inability to get along with their previous year's English teacher) were allowed to change their schedule and were not included in the study. While at first the literacy intervention class seemed like a negative, students reported several positive aspects. Selena stated she went home and told her mother that she was put into a class to "get better at reading" and was "actually really excited" because she had struggled with literacy since elementary school and no longer "want[ed] to be all basic."

### ***READING HABITS AND HISTORY***

While students enrolled in the course had varying levels of difficulty with literacy, their reading habits and history as readers surfaced in the interviews repeatedly. Several reported difficulties with past teachers, and a common thread running through all of the interviews was the fact they had not been reading outside of school prior to this class.

Interviewer: You say the people in here have trouble reading; can you identify with them or give me examples from your experience?

Matt: Yeah, sometimes when I'm reading a book I have trouble understanding words or [understanding the chapter or what the author is meaning, stuff like that.]

- Interviewer: Have you improved as a reader?|
- Matt: Definitely, I'm reading a lot more, and I'm reading a lot better than what I was.|
- Interviewer: You say you're reading better. How do you know?|
- Matt: Just because maybe some words I didn't understand in the past, I'm actually |understanding them, and I know what stuff means. I'm inferring books a lot quicker. |Like figuring out what's going to happen in the book before I get there, predicting, I was never |doing that before.|

Matt demonstrated with his response that he was acquiring reading strategies through his work with Mr. Hurd. When asked if she had trouble reading, Juanita said, "I've had [trouble reading] mostly all of my life because I remember in grade school they tried to make me learn Spanish so I could go to English, and I remember reading that stuff since grade school."

Juanita and Matt each demonstrated that they have had difficulties with reading for several years now, felt improvement, and were becoming more confident, efficacious readers. Lucinda added a third perspective on the code of reading habits and history from her interview transcript: "Well, I never thought I needed help with reading...I don't read a lot. I don't choose to read a lot. Maybe I'll grow into it but it's just not my 'cup of tea.'"

The importance of understanding the students' reading histories and habits cannot be overstated; students today are pulled from an elective course and forced into working on their literacy skills whereas students of the past would have just migrated to the next grade.

### ***DRAMATIC ORAL READING PERFORMANCE***

The six different series of dramatic oral reading fluency activities each ended with a performance. The context that developed during the performances was complex. We adopt Heath's (1983) definition of a "Literacy Event," as an act of reading or writing when others are involved. For example, several comments noted the confusion first expressed by the students. In discussing the process of reading aloud in front of the small intervention sized classes, several students offered insight into their feelings and reactions to the experience.

- Emmy Lou: Well, first I'd probably get a little red, a little nervous, you know, and then I'd start |reading, and I'd probably, actually, go a little fast because you know, I don't want people |to think I'm a slow reader and didn't know between slow

and fast, and then I'd probably |like stumble on some of the big words and read them so fast people wouldn't |understand it, you know. And then, I'd try to probably slow down and I'd move a lot |because I move a lot, you know, moving my feet and stuff.

Interviewer: Would you be angry if asked to read aloud?|

Emmy Lou: No, I mean, if it was always, I had a teacher that always picked me out of everyone |else every day. I'd be like, "Why does he do that to me?"|

Emmy Lou expressed her consciousness of the social context in a classroom and was concerned with what others thought. She explained how that forced her to read poorly. Lucinda compared the experiences of reading aloud in front of the intervention class and in front of her larger classes:

Well, most of the time, I'd have to say I'm really nervous about reading in front of |any classes. But, these people I know, and there's not a lot, so that helps too, and I |know all of them so it doesn't really matter. But big classes where I don't really know |most of the people, that might be a little harder for me, but when I'm up there I'm |usually really nervous, and my face starts getting red. Yeah, if I mess up then I'll start, |I'll start messing up a lot. And I'll stop messing up my words, but I bet practice could |help that, not messing up my words. And I guess I could start pretending that they're |not there . . . and I'm just reading it to no one.|

Even in the intervention setting, Lucinda described the effects of the social pressure on her when she was asked to read aloud to the class and other classes. Selena appreciated the activities, "I think getting in front of the class and actually reading the skits and stuff we've done, that's really fun, one of my favorite parts." The dramatic oral readings themselves elicited complex feelings from the participants. While most participated and reported enjoying the activities, the struggling readers experienced a myriad of physical and emotional reactions to the "literacy events," part of the complexity of working with low achieving secondary readers.

## PEER REFERENCES

Whether positive or negative, few would argue that there is a more important factor in a secondary classroom than the relationships peers develop with each other, the very social fiber of the room. Dornbusch and Kaufman (2001) wrote "adolescence is viewed as a time of increasing knowledge and

developing social skills...The primary arena for the development of those social skills is the high school" (p. 63). And we add that the ultimate place for that development is the rich context of a literacy classroom.

Juanita commented about a classmate in the interview during which the following exchange occurred. The interviewer had asked each student what the best results were from participating in the class or the study.

Juanita: I consider Nora one, she's a friend and we, like never had class before this one.

Interviewer: Why do you say that about her?

Juanita: She's cool. We're probably on like the same reading level maybe. And you know, she's |probably improved a lot too. Well, she has improved a lot I can tell, and you know she's |cool. She listens, she's good.|

A sense of community is demonstrated in Juanita's comment. She is proud of Nora and what her new friend accomplished during the year as the idea that the students are "in this together" surfaced again. The two supported each other throughout the dramatic oral reading lessons and often offered encouragement and support.

While these two students developed a relationship that ultimately helped them feel comfortable and participate in the activities, the opposite had the potential of happening on any given day. Matt, who had transferred from another section at semester, didn't feel the same support evidenced by Juanita and Nora. "The class is fine but sometimes I don't get along with some of the people in there. I only |have like one friend in that class...the only one I get |along with great is Tyler, sometimes.|" Matt was a difficult student for his peers to accept, and he played the role of distracter and class clown at times. He recognized the importance of being supportive but wasn't supportive of others when they were performing or practicing oral reading but then said, "the class is not that supportive 'cause we just got done doing a book talk and every time |someone is doing a book talk there's always rude and talking, causing disruptions.|"

Selena reported that, although she felt good about her classmates, "there were some times when it was kind of hard to learn |because some of the kids weren't really respectful." She said that there were times when the class got along and was supportive, but when she was prompted to explain, her drive for self improvement was evident. At times, Matt and others stood in the way of her goal of becoming fluent and proficient with English.

Selena: Sometimes I feel like they don't really care about getting better because they would [rather just talk than actually improve and actually read so they can be better readers, and I have an opinion where I actually want to get better at reading and it's kind of hard |to get better at reading when you're put in the situation where other people don't want |to.]

For Juanita, and others, progress was hindered at times due to both troubled peer relationships and with friendly relationships that overpowered the undertakings of class.

### ***ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES***

These particular high school students were pulled out of an elective course because the school deemed it necessary they receive extra help in reading. Many of the students, like Juanita, appreciated the extra help, but it became clear to the classroom researcher and classroom teacher that these students needed to feel good about coming to class everyday in order to participate at the highest possible level. In short, they needed to enjoy the activities in which they were asked to participate. In the interviews, each student was asked what was their favorite and least favorite aspect of class. These students unanimously reported a general distaste for the school bought computer-based reading program. Students reported a variety of other parts of the class as being enjoyable. Lucinda appreciated the community aspect of the poetry out loud performance, set up as a coffee shop atmosphere. "I thought the coffee shop thing was fun. I liked the stuff that's like the whole class. [Like we're all interacting in one thing, like the reading alone one, that's kind of boring. |But whenever we're all doing something together, it's fun."

Lucinda didn't appreciate the time she was afforded on a weekly basis to read to herself. She needed that social interaction to help her develop skills. |Conversely, Matt preferred the time to read to himself, "My favorite part was the reading because it got me to be a better reader. I |used to read a lot in elementary and middle school, and then I kind of just quit. Since |I've started going to that class I've read a lot of books. I haven't read in a long time. I |definitely like the reading part.|" A third student, Selena, reported preferring the dramatic oral reading activities too, "I think getting in front of the class and actually reading the skits and stuff we've |done. That's really fun, one of my favorite parts." |

## DISCUSSION

Did the participation in dramatic oral reading interventions affect reading fluency and reading comprehension abilities? The quantitative portion of the study demonstrates gains, but the qualitative data help to explain how those numbers were achieved. Although it is impossible to isolate qualitative data and to quantify their impact on the students' performances, they must be considered as a contributing factor for the overall positive gains listed here. The qualitative coding categories reflect the idea that the positive conditions must outweigh the negative conditions in order for the activities to have their optimal, quantitative effect.

This study showed both significant test results and supporting qualitative evidence. However, the findings are limited by the number of participants who completed the pre and post assessments. Also, it should be noted that all of the participants scored well below the average performance on the GORT 4 pre-assessment, so some regression toward the mean was expected.

Participants also appeared more comfortable with the examiner and the tasks presented during the post assessment, which may have had a positive effect on their performance. In order to minimize these and other threats to internal validity, subsequent research using the described intervention techniques should incorporate the use of a control group and be expanded to larger populations. Because this study did not use a control group, it is impossible to conclude that the intervention techniques alone produced the significant difference in the pre and post assessment results.

Does the social context of a high school literacy classroom act to inhibit or promote participation in these types of activities? That question is also not easily answered. With a variety of potential influences, answers could vary as much as the social contexts and situations in which these activities are attempted vary. To increase validity and reliability of the qualitative data, more students could be interviewed as part of the study and transcripts could be coded through a process involving inter-rater reliability. The very nature of a single school and a single classroom impose further limitations on the claims to be made as part of this study. We consider the limitations of this study as we offer implications for policy, practice, and further research.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Classroom activities for building the foundations of literacy were designed with first through fourth graders in mind. While some of the participants of this study were still reading at the third and fourth grade levels, their maturity as young people had not been stunted along with their reading

ability. Clearly, their future in this society will depend on their literacy abilities. Policy makers should continue to fight for more attention to adolescent literacy, and teacher in both intervention and classroom settings, must continue to focus on struggling readers. In doing so, careful attention should be paid to the social context, the classroom climate, and the comfort of each individual. Activities such as dramatic oral reading should play a role in secondary classrooms.

The Rasinski et al. (2005) study demonstrated that only about one quarter of 9th graders scored proficient at 8th grade oral reading fluency levels (n=1011). If students do not have fluency by ninth grade, and they do not work to develop it further in high school, is there reasonable hope that they will become fully literate in their adult lives? History suggests that will not be the case, yet students in this study participated in reading activities and even enjoyed them, while making significant gains in both fluency and reading comprehension. We wonder if other activities, although not directly related to fluency, could have had an impact on the results and whether students in other schools, states, or regions would have similar reactions to performing oral reading in front of their peers. Those will be important questions to investigate in future research.

Finally, although Mr. Hurd proved to be a credit to the education profession and a benefit to his students, his case illustrates the fundamental disconnect when secondary English teachers are asked to take over secondary reading situations. If the trend toward more secondary focus on literacy continues, English teacher preparation will need to change accordingly.

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