English Language Learners and Fluency Strategies

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Abstract
English Language Learners and Fluency Strategies is an action research project that examines the efficacy of two reading strategies, Repeated Reading (RR) and Shared Reading (SR), for first grade English Language Learners (ELLs). The researcher tracked fluency gains of ten students in a suburban elementary school over a six week period. Findings indicated that Shared Reading was more effective than Repeated Reading for this population.

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Educational Significance of Inquiry

The United States becomes more ethnically and linguistically diverse every year. More than 90% of new residents come from non-English-speaking countries. Neither the National Reading Panel nor the resulting Reading First legislation examines or makes recommendations specific to reading instruction for ELLs, though the 2000 census identified 20 percent of school-age children as non-native English speakers (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 2001). With the expectation that teachers meet the needs of ELLs using the best literacy practices, it is important to be sure that the strategies implemented are meeting the diverse needs of these learners. This action research examines the benefits of the Shared Reading and the Repeated Reading Instructional Models for developing reading fluency in first grade ELLs.

Question

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the impact of a traditional Repeated Reading protocol versus a Shared Reading protocol on first grade English Language learners.

> *No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading.*
> *It is the gateway to all other knowledge.*
>
> American Federation of Teachers

Review of the Literature

Fluency

Reading fluency is commonly defined as reading with "speed, accuracy, and proper expression" (NICHD, 2000, p.3-1). While this definition seems straightforward, Hall (2006) suggests there is no universally accepted definition for it, in spite of the increasing recognition of the importance of fluency in reading instruction. Miller (2007) suggests that fluency is a combination of several factors: speed, prosody or phrasing, expression, intonation, pacing, and comprehension. Rasinski (2003) adds that we must also consider accuracy in word recognition (decoding), automaticity in word recognition (reading rate) and interpretive and meaningful reading (expression, intonation, phrasing, pacing, and pausing). Miller (2007) asserts that if the text is too hard for readers to decode, they then have to use too much thinking power for phonics, leaving no attentional resources for

comprehension. While there may be a lack of consensus about how to define fluency, there is general agreement that fluency is a major contributor to comprehension. Indeed, comprehension is important; it is the goal of reading. Despite variation in the exact definition of fluency, existing literature demonstrates consistent agreement that fluency contributes to comprehension; and Repeated Reading appears to be one of the most frequently cited strategies that improves fluency.

Repeated Reading

One well-documented technique used to build fluency is Repeated Reading, where the student repeatedly reads the same passage aloud often with an adult or a student partner who can provide guidance (Samuels, 1979, p. 377). There is substantial evidence that reading the same passage several times helps to build fluency, not only of the practice passage, but for other passages as well (Hall, 2006). Hall says there are two common approaches to repeated reading. The first approach is to reread the same passage orally with guidance. The second approach is to read aloud while listening to a passage on a tape. Other forms of Repeated Reading are Reader's Theatre, choral reading and echo reading. Because fluency develops gradually over time and through extensive reading practice (Biemiller, 1977-78), repeated oral reading with feedback, is one of the best approaches available to increase fluency (Hasbrouck, Ihnot and Rogers 1999; Rasinski, 1990; Smith and Elley, 1997) and is yet another valuable tool for reading instruction.

Shared Reading

One specific reading technique that has repetition as a component and is commonly implemented in early childhood classrooms is Shared Reading. Shared Reading, developed by Holdaway (1979), is exactly what the name implies; it is a time for sharing a story and reading it together. Shared Reading is an interactive reading experience that occurs when students join in or share the reading of a big book or other enlarged text, guided and supported by a teacher or another experienced reader. Students observe an expert reading the text with fluency and expression. The text must be large enough for all the students to see clearly, so they can share in the reading of the text. Shared reading can include echo reading, choral reading, or fill in the gap reading. It is through Shared Reading that the reading process and the reading strategies that proficient readers use are demonstrated. There is research evidence that a Shared Book Experience (SBE) also known as Shared Reading, results in more positive reading for young readers than

traditional code-emphasis instruction (Ribowsky, 1985) or the Oral Recitation Lesson (Reutzel, Hollingsworth, Eldredge, 1994). Linking Shared Reading to fluency development, Rasinski (2004) indicated that in his own instructional efforts to develop fluency he used both Assisted Reading and Repeated Reading methods to improve reading fluency based on research shown to improve reading fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).

Assessments

Reading fluently means reading with no noticeable cognitive or mental effort, such that the fundamental skills are so automatic that they do not require conscious attention. To measure oral reading fluency, one minute measures have proven to be reliable and valid. This quantifiable method for assessing reading rate offers a relatively simple and direct approach (Rasinski & Padak, 2000). Fluency is represented as the number of words read correctly per minute (WPM); words pronounced incorrectly, substitutions, and omissions are considered errors. Self-corrections, repetitions and insertions are not counted as errors, but they do negatively affect the fluency score by taking time. Studies have demonstrated that measuring oral fluency can serve as a proxy for measuring overall proficiency in reading (Hall, 2006). To assess student growth in fluency in this study, two assessments were administered to students prior to and immediately following the intervention: AIMSWebb (AW) and Fountas & Pinnell (F & P).

AIMSWeb

The AIMSWeb Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (2008), and Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (2008) are two standardized tools that measure fluency using a one minute timed reading. The AIMSWeb manual states that more than 25 years of research has shown that listening to a child read graded passages aloud for one minute and calculating the number of words read correct per minute provides a highly reliable and valid measure of general reading achievement, including comprehension, for most students (AIMSWeb, 2009). Four additional AW fluency measures are Letter Naming, Letter Sound, Phoneme Segmentation and Nonsense Words. The manual also indicates that this testing practice has met the standards established by Reading First, a federal program that promotes sound reading practices.

Fountas & Pinnell

Fountas & Pinnell (F & P) assessments are based on empirical research on language development, vocabulary expansion, reading acquisition, and reading difficulties (Heineman, 2008). In particular their Assessment System measures the five elements of reading identified by the National Reading Panel: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, it addresses issues of student motivation and interest in reading. The authors indicate that their scales (developed for and published by the National Assessment of Educational Progress) found a strong relationship between fluency and reading comprehension.

These two diagnostic assessment systems provide assessment of an extensive set of reading skills and are based on a solid body of reading research. Because of their proven effectiveness and reliability, the AIMSWeb and F & P System were used to monitor students' progress over time and assess the intervention outcomes for this project.

Summary of Literature Review

The National Reading Panel (NRP) has documented clearly the importance of incorporating fluency in reading instruction. Evidence suggests that fluency should be given close attention because it is critical for reading comprehension. Yet, Allington (1983) and Anderson (1981) have both argued that fluency is a neglected goal of the reading curriculum. Without oral language skills (including oral reading fluency), students are hard pressed to learn and demonstrate their knowledge. Consequently, a study to examine the impact of Repeated Reading and Shared Reading on the grade level English Language Learner's fluency seemed relevant and important.

> *The world belongs to children who read.*
>
> *Reading is a gift that knowledgeable teachers,*
> *holding themselves to high professional expectation, can bestow*.
>
> Deborah R. Glasser, Ed. D.

Methodology

Participants

Annehurst Elementary is one of 23 schools in the Westerville City School District, a high performing public school district with an Excellent designation on the 2007-2008 State Report Card. The district is the tenth-largest in Ohio and has an ethnically diverse student body with 80% of its graduates pursuing a post-secondary education. Located in a suburban community, the student body is 70% White, 19% African American and 11% other; 20% are economically disadvantaged. There are 1,276 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, 9% of the student population. These students represent 82 native languages and 70 countries (Westerville, 2008) http://www.westerville.k12.oh.us/.

At Annehurst there are 368 students; approximately 30% (110) are English language learners (ELLs) and 43% (157) are considered economically disadvantaged. The school is in an open-concept building, with well-educated staff (82.2% M.A.) and a high student attendance rate (96.6%). The English as Second Language classrooms are well equipped

and are served by three licensed and Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)-endorsed teachers. Small group instruction occurs in either a "pull-out" or "push-in" delivery system, using content-based strategies.

The ten students in this research (six boys and four girls) were identified as Beginner and Intermediate ELLs, range in age from 6.0 to 7.0 years, and come from homes that speak six different languages and represent six different countries. They were homogeneously grouped into two intervention groups, using their Fountas & Pinnell independent reading level scores; consideration was also given to the group dynamic and student availability. Table 1 provides descriptive data on the ten students in this study. F&P pretest scores were collected in December 2008 and AIMSWeb scores were collected in January 2009. Posttest scores were collected in February 2009, following a six week intervention.

The ten ELLs were divided into two groups of five. The Shared Reading Group (three males, two females), began the study with a mean of 24.4 words read correctly per minute and a modal instructional reading level of D, according to F & P benchmark. The Repeated Reading Group (three males, two female) began the study with a mean of 24.0 words read correctly per minute and a modal reading instructional level of D, according to F & P benchmark. Based on these scores, students in the two groups were performing equally.

The students in this study were at-risk readers, and all but one also received reading support from a Title II Reading Specialist. The students participated in the study during their regular English as a Second Language class time; normal class protocol included ongoing measurement and assessment. Because of their age, maturity and grade level, they were not informed of their role in a research project, nor have they had an active role in its evolution.

Design

The interventions occurred daily for six weeks, in five different ESL classes with two or three English language learners (ELLs) in each class and one TESOL-certified teacher. Three of the groups engaged in daily Repeated Reading activities, while the two other groups engaged in daily Shared Reading activities. Both strategies took approximately 10 minutes of the class time per day. The teaching sequence of Repeated Reading lesson included: text selection, book introduction, teacher (aloud) text reading and numerous, individual student practice readings. The teaching sequence of a Shared
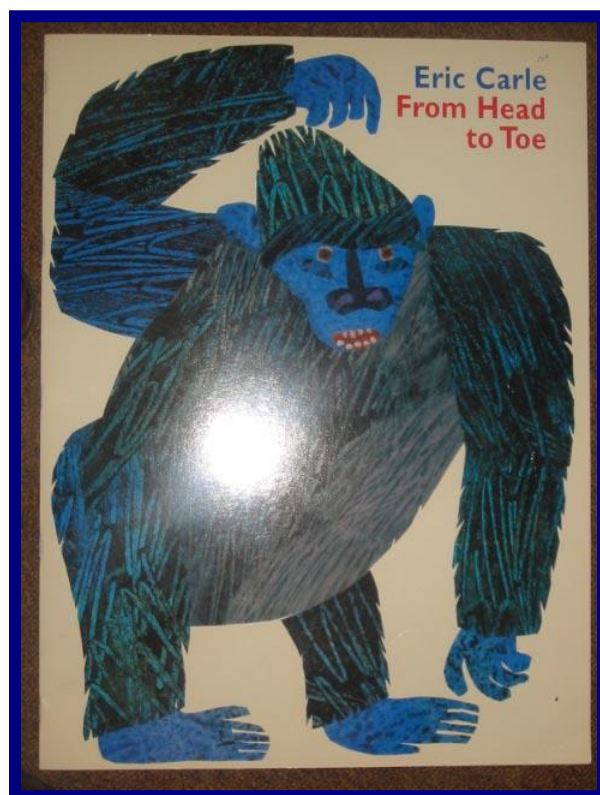
Reading lesson included: text selection, book introduction, teacher (aloud) text reading, student invitation to join in subsequent teacher-led group re-readings. All groups received the same small group instructional activities for the remaining 15 minutes of class, which included content vocabulary, comprehension, phonological a awareness, phonics, grammar and mechanics, word walls, chunk work, rhyming and decoding.

Results

What is the impact of Shared Reading and Repeated Reading on English Language Learners' reading fluency? The study included two dependent variables. The first was the gain score on the correct words read per minute from pretest to posttest on the AIMSWeb R-CBM. The second variable was the gain score from pretest to posttest for words read correctly (untimed) and comprehension of passages, and when combined yielded a text reading level, on the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (Table 1).

This research employed a static-group pretest-posttest design, permitting an analysis of "gain" or "change." For evaluative and analytical purposes the quantitative data from pre and post first grade AIMSWeb Early Literacy Measures (AW) and Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessments (F & P) were gathered before and after the six week intervention. All data collection adhered to the prescribed protocols, as indicated by the provider. The AW assessments yielded data indicating the subjects' correct words read per minute rate; the F & P assessments yielded data indicating the subjects' reading text level. The resultant individual raw gains and statistical means data and information can be examined in Tables 1-3 and Chart 4.

Table 1   Strategies and Performance Data

	AW Pretest WPM	AW Posttest WPM	Difference	F & P Posttest Text Level	F & P Posttest Text Level	Difference
SR 01	30	54	+ 24	D	I	+ 5
SR 02	21	41	+ 20	E	H	+ 3
SR 03	26	44	+ 18	D	G	+ 3
SR 04	20	33	+ 13	D	H	+ 4
SR 05	25	37	+ 12	D	G	+ 3
SR 06	25	24	- 1	F	H	+ 2
SR 07	24	37	+ 13	E	H	+ 3
SR 08	41	54	+ 13	C	H	+ 5
SR 09	12	16	+ 4	D	D	0
SR 10	18	31	+ 13	D	E	+ 1

Blue - Shared Reading Intervention Students and Data
Red - Repeated Reading Intervention Students and Data

Individual Raw Gains

The individual pre and post performance data collected reflects a clear difference in the performance of the two intervention groups (Table 1). The Shared Reading group's increase range for WPM was + 12 to + 24, while the Repeated Reading group's increase range for WPM was - 1 to + 13, a far less impressive increase for those readers. The same pattern is evidenced when the text level increase for the two groups was examined. The Shared Reading group's increase range for text level was + 3 to + 5, while the Repeated Reading group's increase range for text level was only 0 to + 5. In both comparisons, the Shared Reading group's gains were greater than the Repeated Reading group's gains. Additionally, all the students in the Shared Reading group made gains in both WPM and text level, while only 3/5 of the Shared Reading group's students made gains in both WPM and text level. Examination of the individual raw data indicates that the Shared Reading strategy resulted in higher gains for both dependent variables, words read correctly in one minute and text level.

Statistical Means

The outcome measure that was used in this study was the gain score from pretest to posttest on the dependent variable measure or the number of words read correctly in one minute. The mean gain score for the students who used the Shared Reading strategy as measured with the CBM in correct words per minute reading was 17.4 *(SD =4.98)* using a 1st grade level passage. The mean gain score for the Repeated Reading group was measured with the CBM in correct words per minute reading was 11.0 (*SD- 3.94)* using a 1st grade level passage.

The mean gain score for the students that used the Shared Reading strategy as measured using the Fountas & Pinnell Independent Reading Level measure was 3.6 *(SD=8.9).* The mean gain score for the Repeated Reading groups as measured using the Fountas and Pinnell Independent Reading Level measure was *2.8 (SD=1.9).*

English Language Learners using Shared Reading strategies had higher correct words read per minute (*M = 17.4, SD = 4.98*) on the AIMSWeb posttest than did those using Repeated Reading strategies (*M = 11.0, SD = 3.94).* English Language Learners using Shared Reading strategies also had higher Instructional Reading Levels *(M= 4.20, SD= .447)* than did those using Repeated Reading strategies *(M= 4.40, SD=1.14).* Tables 2 and 3 present the findings from this analysis.

Table 2   AIMSWeb Mean Chart

	AW Pretest		AW Posttest			
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Difference**	**SD**
Shared Reading	**24.4**	**4.04**	**41.8**	**8.0**	**17.4**	**5.0**
Repeated Reading	**21.4**	**12.0**	**32.4**	**14.4**	**11.0**	**3.9**

Table 3   Fountas & Pinnell Mean Chart

	F P Pretest		F P Posttest			
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Difference**	**SD**
Shared Reading	**4.2**	**.45**	**7.8**	**8.37**	**3.6**	**8.9**
Repeated Reading	**4.4**	**1.14**	**7.2**	**1.79**	**2.8**	**1.9**

Data analysis on gain scores on tests (AW) that measured speed of reading, a variable considered a valid and reliable indicator of fluency, showed that English Language Learners using the Shared Reading Strategy outperformed students in the Repeated Reading Strategy group.

Figure 4   Pre and Post Intervention Comparisons of Means
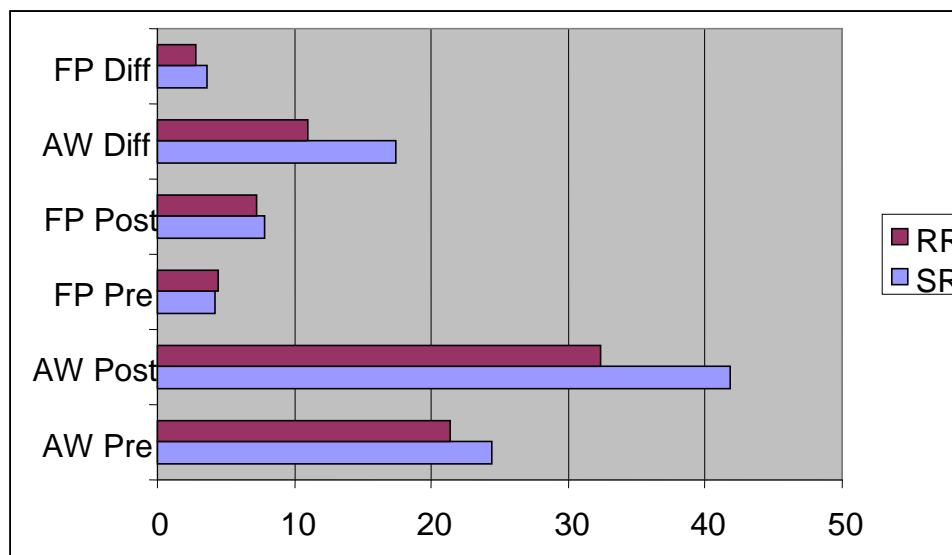
Conclusion

Overall, results from this analysis indicate that a Shared Reading experience is more effective than a Repeated Reading experience for these English Language Learners' fluency development. See Figure 4 for a comparison of pre and post Intervention scores and differences. A possible explanation for this finding is that the students were visibly excited and engaged in the Shared Reading experience, which included the use of oversized, colorfully illustrated books in a social group setting. Anecdotal notes collected during the study reflect excitement and enthusiasm from the students when engaged together with the big books. Some of the comments heard were: "I really love this book!," "Can I take this home?," "I want to read it to my Mom!," "I love this book; really love this book, can I take it home?," "This is the best class, this is so much fun!," "I love the pictures, they are beautiful!," and "I love that book!" The group dynamic was highly energized, as the illustrations were explored, predictions discussed, and characters examined. On successive days of each week, the book was read aloud once and the students continued to be eager to read along in this guided and supportive experience.

> *"I really love this book!"*
> *"Can I take this home?"*
> *"I want to read it to my Mom!"*
> *"I love this book; really love this book, can I take it home?"*
> *"This is the best class, this is so much fun!"*
> *"I love the pictures, they are beautiful!"*
> *"I love that book!"*

Contrasting the enthusiastic engagement of the students during Shared Reading, Repeated Reading lessons created less energy and excitement amongst the readers, with no anecdotal jubilance noted. Even with the inclusion of a variety of techniques and other elements, such as computers, phonic phones, dice throwing, readers' theatre and graphing, students were less enthused. Though the Repeated Reading provides the reader the opportunity to read text repeatedly and gain exposure to the language in the text, perhaps the Shared Reading contributed more to making meaning of the text, resulting in an understanding of the words and improved decoding and automaticity and resultant gains.

Lastly, the group dynamic created by the use of oversized, colorful books may be important for English Language Learners who are struggling to not only decode words, but also bring meaning to the content of the words in their new world. The choral reading component may lower the inhibitions of those uncertain of their language capability, promoting a sense of involvement and community in which to practice reading in their new language. The ability to join others' voices voluntarily as a reader in a more social setting and to have the teacher beside them to guide and support them, may be an empowering feature of Shared Reading.

Based on the results of this study, the Shared Reading strategy is believed to be a more effective method of reading fluency instruction for first grade ELLs, than is Repeated Reading. Shared Reading was effective in increasing the number of correct words read per minute by English Language Learners. In retrospect, this study's limitations could be said to be the small number of participants, the non-random selection process, and the short time of the intervention. Future studies may wish to examine interventions for longer time periods, use a larger sample of randomly selected ELLs, compare non-Ells to ELLs and lastly, include the Fountas & Pinnell timed reading component, in order to more conclusively answer the question: What is the impact of Shared Reading and Repeated Reading on English Language Learners' fluency?

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