

Reader's Theater: An All-Encompassing Strategy

Abstract

Links have been established between reading problems and students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD; Pruitt & Cooper, 2008). Reader's Theater has prompted improvements in both reading and social skills. This research will study the effect of Reader's Theater on the fluency and reading comprehension of first grade students with EBD.

Statement of Problem

Students with EBD have erratic outcomes in reading achievement due to behavior and learning processes that oftentimes originate from a lack of motivation or reading skills (Ramsey, Jolivette, & Patton, 2007). Oral reading fluency is considered an effective predictor of students who may need additional support or remediation in reading (Pruitt & Cooper, 2008). In 2000, the National Reading Panel reported reading fluency was being neglected in classrooms, and thus, it regained attention (Pilonieta, 2012). Consequently, reading rates became the focal point, and "instruction has become in many classrooms a quest for speed" (Rasinski, 2012, p. 516). Rather than increasing, the reading achievement remained at a standstill (Rasinski, 2012). The stagnancy of reading achievement occurred due to fluency's quantifiable features, specifically rate and accuracy, usurping prosody and comprehension (Marcell, 2011). Prosody reflects an individual's reading comprehension because fluent readers have sufficient self-awareness to adapt how fast or slow they read to what they are reading (Pilonieta, 2012). Reader's Theater, a technique in which students work in a small group to read and act out a passage, has prompted significant improvement in rate and accuracy, as well as prosody and motivation (Marcell, 2011). It gives students with EBD the opportunity to improve both peer relations and academic skills

(Ramsey et al., 2007). Therefore, Reader's Theater could be a means of addressing the needs of a student with EBD, with both social and reading difficulties.

Purpose and/or Research Question(s)

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the use of Reader's Theater will improve the reading fluency and socialization skills of students with EBD.

1. Will repeated readings of Reader's Theater passages result in more words read correctly per minute (WCPM) by first grade students at-risk of EBD who are struggling readers in a resource room within an urban elementary school?
2. Will the intervention method of Reader's Theater improve interpersonal skills by students at-risk of EBD who are struggling readers in a resource room within an urban elementary school?
3. Will Reader's Theater used as an intervention method result in a higher number of literal comprehension questions answered correctly by students at-risk of EBD who are struggling readers in a resource room within an urban elementary school?
4. Will Reader's Theater used as a reading intervention method result in better prosody by students at-risk of EBD who are struggling readers in a resource room within an urban elementary school?

Literature Review

According to Wanzek, Al Otaiba, and Petscher, (2014), there is a need for research that "examines characteristics of and interventions for students who are successful readers after special education in relation to students who demonstrate insufficient growth in special education" (p. 201). A study conducted by Garrett and O'Connor, (2010), that involved

inclusive, self-contained and resource elementary classrooms concluded Reader's Theater positively impacted fluency, motivation, an interest in reading and self-esteem. Another study conducted by Kerry Moran, (2006), recommended Reader's Theater in the primary grades with emergent readers because of its motivational component and use of modeling expressive reading. However, there have been insufficient studies regarding the effect of Reader's Theater as that primary form of intervention, specifically at the first grade level of an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) resource room, with special attention being given to those students at risk of EBD. With the United States facing an annual dropout rate of approximately 1.2 million students, data have been collected to identify characteristics of at-risk students, which includes: reading deficiencies, having a disability and being in special education, multiple suspensions and expulsions, and numerous other factors (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010). Unfortunately, students with EBD meet several of those characteristics. Students with EBD not being helped effectively could become part of a statistic; thirty-percent of young people in juvenile detention centers are students with special needs (Brave, 2014). Therefore it is crucial to create interventions that help address the needs of those students early in their lives.

Research Methodology

The action research will take place in a Miami-Dade public elementary school resource room near the Little Havana area. Three first-grade students identified as students with disabilities that currently have Functional Assessments of Behavior (FAB) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), will participate in the study. For ten weeks, the ESE teacher will implement Reader's Theater twice a week, during the intervention portion of the reading block; data will be collected before, during, and after the intervention sessions. As a result of the Reader's Theater being a

research-based strategy, it is also aligned with the Miami-Dade County Public School (MDCPS) curriculum's intervention block criteria.

Findings or Results

Reader's Theater proved to be a form of intervention that was both uniquely engaging and an effective reading strategy in primary grade level resource rooms. The data collection process began January 7th, 2015, and concluded April 9th, 2015. All of the students' reading fluency and comprehension improved, although the degree of improvement varied. Although the students were enthusiastic, and looked forward to the Reader's Theater interventions, their behavior was somewhat erratic; the students' behavior varied based on the complexity of the text, and also the time an individual student would have to wait for their next turn. However, each student did become increasingly tolerant and positive towards one another, as well as increasingly helpful when another student would be unable to pronounce a given word or focus. Reading comprehension was the area that showed the greatest improvement.

Implications for the Field

This study could provide an alternate intervention avenue for other primary grade teachers who need to address reading and behavioral issues. Within the scope of ESE, because this form of intervention includes the strategy of Repeated Reading, it would be beneficial for students who have: Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Intellectual Disabilities (InD), or any other disability that includes processing or memory issues. Reader's Theater as a whole integrates different techniques that address the needs of kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learners. Specifically, however, this study demonstrates the positive impact of Reader's Theater on at-risk students in the primary grades.

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