

“DON’T THINK FOR A MINUTE THAT I’M GETTING UP THERE”: OPPORTUNITIES FOR READERS’ THEATER IN A TUTORIAL FOR CHILDREN WITH READING PROBLEMS

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Readers’ theater activities may help children with reading problems gain oral reading fluency and confidence. In the present study, the author describes how readers’ theater opportunities were included in a tutorial for elementary students facing serious reading problems. Results demonstrate that readers’ theater can be successfully integrated into a broader, multi-faceted tutorial. Positive benefits of readers’ theater preparation and practice were seen on readers’ theater performance and, especially, on reading affect. Classroom implications concerning using readers’ theater in other instructional contexts are also presented.

Introduction

It was the end of the third session and children in the summer reading tutorial began to recognize the pattern. Following an hour of individual instruction (and possibly a small group activity), all 22 elementary students came together with their tutors at the end of the morning for “group.” It was to be a daily event, hopefully filled soon with opportunities for children and tutors to read aloud with success to the rest of the group. The time basically was open to three kinds of read alouds: Planned read alouds by the tutors; read alouds spontaneously volunteered by students; and planned student/tutor readers’ theater presentations. All three took place, but readers’ theater took on a life and importance of its own and is the focus of this report.

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Most of the children were first or second graders. (Names of children and tutors have been changed.) All had serious reading problems. Karl, at eleven years old, the oldest child in the summer program, may have recognized the pattern first—and the potential threat of reading aloud to the others probably led him to his protected spot in the back corner. My intent was to let Karl find his niche during whole group time. He would *not* be required to share a reading in group. On that particular day, he patiently listened from a spot in the back as a tutor read aloud *Thomas' Snowsuit* by Robert Munsch. Next, Roberta, a second grader, read to the group a story she had written through language-experience methods. She had practiced reading the story several times and completed a confident and expressive reading, with few errors. Listeners clapped for both presentations. Karl quietly turned to this tutor and, in an aside, offered up a clue about his feelings. "Don't think for a minute that I'm getting up there," he said. But over the course of the next several weeks, Karl did get up there. He became much more involved in the group time and by his own choice. It became his favorite time, just as it quickly became the favorite instructional time of most of the children. What went on in group time that helped him move from the back to the front of the room?

Rationale for the Study

It makes theoretical sense that repeated reading of familiar material might result in fluency gains (Dowhower, 1987; Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994) and that being able to read something successfully in front of a group of peers would probably benefit attitude and interest for students otherwise lacking such opportunities. Over time, I have seen these effects confirmed informally and I felt that readers' theater was worthy of further consideration, if not as a principal method for fluency and sight word instruction, then certainly as a literacy activity within an integrated approach aiming to increase real reading opportunities for children at risk and also to enhance these children's interest and confidence. Could we do more of this?, I asked. And what would be the benefits?

The present study describes an attempt to answer these questions through action research. The basic premise was to continue to explore the usefulness of including readers' theater in a multifaceted reading tutorial intended for children with serious reading problems. As tutorial director and course instructor, I was a participant observer. An ongoing and inductive analysis followed a constant comparative approach (Patton, 1990) and provided me with the continuing opportunity to observe and reflect on all of the activities and to frame related questions from initial attempts. I was able to gather data, from the sources identified later in the description of methodology and to identify pertinent thematic areas.

Several questions that arose from previous efforts with readers' theater guided this analysis: (a) Would it be possible to successfully include readers' theater activities within a broader instructional context?; (b) Would we meet the instructional criteria associated with readers' theater guidelines?; and (c) What instructional links, benefits, and concerns might arise from these efforts?

Methodology

An Instructional Context

Graduate students at West Virginia University seeking the M.A. in Reading and K-12 Reading Specialist certification complete an integrated 6-semester-hour course that comes toward the end of their program of study. Combined into this course are what used to be two separate courses: (a) an advanced course on methods of assessment and instruction appropriate for working with children with reading problems, and (b) a practicum in which the graduate students complete supervised tutoring in a university setting. I have taught the course and directed the intervention practicum several times, continually rethinking the experience and how it is organized. I have come to value and emphasize the importance of real and sustained reading opportunities (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Holdaway, 1979; Johnston & Allington, 1991); instruction that offers both success and challenge (McCorrick, 1994); assessment that is constructive and tied to instruction (Johnston, 1992; Clay, 1993); the potential that comes with

intervention that is early, exact, and intense (Hiebert & Taylor, 1994; Lee & Neal, 1993; McCarthy, Newby, & Recht, 1995; Pinnell, Fried, & Estice, 1990; Taylor, Short, Frye, & Shearer, 1992; Wasik & Slavin, 1993); and relationships between reading achievement, attitude, and motivation (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996; Johnston, 1985; Juel, 1994; Wixon & Lipson, 1991). The instructional approach that has emerged is eclectic in terms of assessment and instruction, tied to the perspective that the reading process involves dynamic reader and text interactions, and based on a holistic orientation seeking ways to integrate language and reading experiences while providing greater reading opportunities for children with serious reading problems.

The Tutorial

In the summer session, the course and practicum take place during six weeks in July and August. Children who participate in the tutorial arrive after the fifth or sixth day of class. This allows for some orientation to the practicum to take place and for the graduate students to begin their exploration of principles and methods of intervention prior to the arrival of the children. Children and tutors work together for 16–20 sessions during the remainder of the practicum.

Most of the participating children have just completed first or second grade and have reading problems that range from moderate to profound. Frequently they have remained at a beginning level of reading and have faced persistent problems with academic and recreational reading. These children often lack basic print ability and exhibit problems with phonemic awareness, sight word knowledge, and phonetic skills. Sometimes they lack other conceptual prerequisites and appropriate literacy experiences. Almost always they lack confidence. The particular methods used in the tutorial with each child vary but frequently entail support reading. Both direct and indirect instruction commonly focus on areas such as phonemic awareness, sight words, fluency, and reading strategies. Instruction is geared to individual needs, starting with what a child knows. Care is taken to extend guided or support reading through application opportunities, sequence familiar and new material, recycle materials through meaningful

activities, integrate activities and materials, ensure chances for reading success every day, provide ample opportunities to pursue real reading with children's literature, and to encourage children's choices and affective responses to what is read. While some formal assessment takes place, the emphasis is placed on ongoing informal measures that provide both tutor and student with indications of progress and clues for continued help. An observer would see action that is concerted but not stressful and lots of activities that involve children's books.

The graduate students in this course make many of the teaching decisions about what methods to use, what activities to include, and how to orchestrate a plan tailored for specific children. I help inform these decisions, sometimes suggesting and sometimes demanding or challenging. Lectures, discussion, textbooks, and the experiences and advice of other students all serve as resources for the questions and answers that drive the tutorial. As one might expect, I also present and model to the students a number of methods pertinent to various aspects of reading assessment and instruction.

By necessity, many of the instructional and assessment methods that are covered occur while tutors are involved *in* the tutorial. That is, the intent is not to cover all possible methods before children arrive and then implement those selected. Instead, tutors work with the children for the duration of the practicum, refining an emerging plan for each respective child. This brief description will give a sense of the practicum and why readers' theater might be of interest in the first place.

Why Readers' Theater?

Many methods are covered in the course. Readers' theater found a stable presence over time as a holistic method suitable for building fluency, sight word knowledge, and interest. Simply stated, readers' theater is an interpretive activity in which children practice and perform for others a scripted reading. The performance has the potential for readers "to bring characters to life through their voices and gestures . . ." (Sloyer, 1982, p. 3). I share it with the students as an example of a method that is holistic in nature, that potentially integrates language experiences of reading,

speaking, listening, and thinking. It also potentially integrates components of the reading process.

Because of its inclusion, tutors frequently have involved their students in a readers' theater event but it has been difficult to obtain adequate time for practice and performance, two of the essential features of this method. However, students generally have responded with brief but positive feedback about its potential.

A Chance For More Readers' Theater

Because it becomes difficult to have both individualized tutoring and whole-group activities squeezed into one hour of instruction, I added another 30 minutes of contact time with the children. The goals for this additional group time were simple. Tutors and children were to experience success and enjoyment with oral reading. For this occasion, students and tutors would come to the main seminar room, where table and chairs could be pushed aside and carpeting, racks of books, posters, and other accoutrements might offer a literacy environment both friendly and informal. I emphasized the possibility of readers' theater performances occurring during this time.

Participants

Twenty-two graduate students participated in a recent summer practicum. All of the students except one were in the M.A. program in Reading. Sixteen of the graduate students were currently teaching at the elementary level. The others were teaching at the secondary or middle school level in a content specialization, usually language arts.

An equal number of elementary children were selected for participation. They all were from the regional area. Their parents had placed their names on a list of students desiring tutorial assistance through the university program. No assessment or instruction was conducted prior to their arrival for the tutorial.

Initiating Readers' Theater

Early in the course, starting with about the third session, we began to explore methods for assessing and instructing word recognition and fluency. It was in this context that I also presented general guidelines for readers' theater. Although there is no absolute way to do readers' theater, some general guidelines are important. First, participants need to understand the goals of readers' theater and have a sense of what is expected. Teachers may also wish to share these aims with the children's parents and other teachers.

For the following procedural guidelines, I have expanded on Cooper's (1993) suggestions, which are representative of guidelines commonly found in methods texts.

- Select what to read. Teacher and student can choose literature together. Interesting literature with dialogue will be helpful.
- Students and teacher should read or reread and discuss the story.
- Develop a script for the story. Children can participate in the process.
- Choose parts.
- Discuss props and special needs. Props should enhance the reading, not detract from it or obscure it.
- Prepare, practice, and rehearse. Readers should practice over time until they are fluent. This practice also can be integrated into other activities. Students may exchange parts as part of this experience if desired. Students should help assess readiness.
- Perform in front of a class or group. Students should actually read and not recite from memory.
- Discuss how it went and what was accomplished.

I presented these guidelines, led a class discussion, and then involved tutors with a sample application using "The Crocodile's Toothache" by Shel Silverstein. I shared with the tutors why I thought readers' theater might be useful and encouraged them to include at least one opportunity for each child and see if it seemed worth continuing.

I led the whole-group time for the first few sessions, reading a story aloud and encouraging children's responses and discussion. We also had time for introductions and acquaintance activities. Group time was always left open. We confirmed the preceding day or earlier what would happen, such as someone performing a readers' theater or a tutor sharing an activity or book. I intended for the tutors and children to take this time over as soon as possible, but the way this was to happen was left open.

Analysis

As instructor and director, I was a participant-observer in this project, as previously described. I watched lessons unfold and saw all the readers' theater performances that came to be. My evaluation was ongoing during the six-week practicum. With the starting questions in mind that formed the rationale for this project, I looked for examples of how readers' theater was included in instruction, considered the characteristics of the activity, and waited for accompanying indications of instructional benefits.

The analysis was open-ended and based on a constant comparative approach (Patton, 1990) in which I attempted to identify important themes or issues from (a) what I recorded in my own instructional notes; (b) my observations of what children and tutors shared in discussion; (c) what the individual tutors entered into their daily journals and lesson plans, which they maintained throughout the tutoring; and (d) my observations of spontaneous comments and questions shared by children or tutors. I watched approximately 80 minutes of readers' theater performances during "whole-group time," as well as many of the readers' theater practice activities that occurred at various times during lessons. Approximately 950 pages of journal entries and 400 lesson plans were analyzed for feedback about all aspects of readers' theater activities.

Confirmation of results and conclusions also came from two graduate students who assisted in the supervision of the tutorial and who had substantial opportunity to observe and share the sources of information. These assistants were present in all of the course activities, including all seminar presentations and discussions. In addition, each day they had a chance to observe students as they tutored. They read the lesson plans and journals, made

suggestions, asked questions, and shared in the mentoring of instruction. I talked with these assistants several times each day. We usually met before the tutoring began to go over expectations and issues. Often this talk continued informally into the instructional day as we dealt with concerns or questions that were present or that emerged. One of the main aims of this communication was to explore both generally and specifically how things were going in the course and in the tutoring. Our attention focused on both the needs and progress of the children and also on the concerns, needs, and instructional circumstances for each of the graduate students. It was to these discussions, formal and informal, that I asked for feedback about the inclusion of readers' theater activities. The presence of these assistants in all phases of the seminar and tutorial served as an additional "reality check" for my perception of the progress of the readers' theater events.

To reiterate, initial research questions focused on (a) the feasibility of including readers' theater in a tutorial of this sort, (b) to what degree the activities met instructional guidelines, and, ultimately (c) what instructional connections emerged from these efforts. Specific influences on overall reading achievement remained beyond the focus of the study, given that the features described here occurred as part of a broader instructional approach.

The results are organized around the following themes: (a) Numerous readers' theater activities were included during the tutorial, with their preparation and performance successfully meeting instructional guidelines; (b) Readers' theater activities provided these less-skilled readers with additional opportunities for sustained and fluent reading; (c) Teachers were able to orchestrate an integration of readers' theater within broader instructional intents; (d) Opportunities for multiple exposure and practice played a vital role in the accomplishments; and (e) An important part of the value of readers' theater appeared to be integrally linked to affect and social dimensions.

Results

Successfully Including Readers' Theater

I had intended to see if more readers' theater events could be included in this tutorial. These tutors did successfully include

preparation for a variety of readers' theater activities in their instructional plans and successfully met the instructional guidelines. The results support the potential benefits of this method for readers facing problems with reading and affirm general recommendations commonly found in methods texts (e.g., Gillet & Temple, 1990).

The extra 30 minutes for group time made it possible for many readers' theater performances to take place, without supplanting other instructional opportunities. Children practiced the scripts and when ready had the opportunity to read successfully before their peers. The performances generally were well done. While readers' theater took place within an integrated tutorial, the contributions were substantial and in some respects unique. Many of the children and tutors also recognized the success of their efforts, came to value the opportunities, and planned or requested more.

All in all, children and tutors participated in eighteen separate readers' theater events, with all of the children except Max participating directly in at least one performance. Max was burdened by the idea of any likelihood of reading in front of the group. However, he did enjoy listening to others perform readers' theater readings and, during one of the last sessions, spontaneously asked to read a few jokes from a favorite joke book. The performances of the other 21 children ranged from one to four, with an average of two performances each. Seven of the readings were completed by individual children reading alone or with their tutor. The rest of the performances involved more than one child. For example, a big production involved a reading of *Meanies* by Joy Cowley, with three children and three tutors reading the various parts. This was a relatively grand production: two weeks in the works and arriving with plumes, a garbage can, a disguise, and a surprise ending. Most performances lasted about five minutes and were fairly simple.

Two of the readings came from child-written material through language experience, while the others involved children's literature adapted for readers' theater presentations. Tutors and children consistently selected material that could be prepared for readers' theater. Choices included *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*; *The Big Boasting Battle Book*; *Five Silly Fishermen*; *There Was an Old Lady*

Who Swallowed a Fly; *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*; and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Several children read poems by Shel Silverstein, including "Warning" and "Boa Constrictor." Other common choices included various titles from The Wright Group, such as *Yes, Ma'am*, *Mrs. Wishy-Washy*, *Meanies*, and *The Monsters' Party*. Most selections were cooperatively chosen by tutors and children.

More time was spent preparing for a readers' theater performance than in actually performing the reading before the group. Most of the "final" reading performances took no longer than four or five minutes. Of course the preparation time depended on the length of the selection, its familiarity, and how many readers were involved. The average preparation time was approximately five days of practice, with an allocation of approximately 10–15 minutes of guided practice taking place each day. Children also completed some of their practice time at home. Group practice time called for a greater allocation of lesson time, usually 20 minutes.

For the most part, students had practiced until they could read their parts fluently and accurately. Teachers and students soon recognized the importance of adequate practice, a theme to be discussed shortly. Teachers also met the other basic guidelines. They were able to include material appropriate for scripting. Children actually read their parts and did not deliver them from memory as in a play. When props or other dramatic devices were used, they did not obscure the reading. Children also read their parts loudly enough that others in the room could hear. All of the children had parts that were within their instructional capacity if given support and practice. Children who were listening to the performance generally remained attentive and enjoyed the performance. The graduate assistants and I consistently reached agreement on how well the various performances fared against these criteria as we observed and discussed the success of the performances.

Tutors also were able to draw from these attributes as they evaluated student progress. This was clear from our seminar discussions and also from the journal entries. For example, Catherine reflected on how Nadia read to the group and concluded in

her journal that she “read very well and loud enough for everyone to hear her.” Linda wrote about Clarke’s performance and shared that it “went very well. The selection was short but included words which [had been previously] unfamiliar to Clarke.” In other words, this beginning reader was able to read accurately text that he was unable to read before practicing.

Sharon shared in her journal, “I was surprised at how well Erica did—in particular the expression she used in reading.” Sharon’s response is important. Erica produced more than just an accurate reading. She displayed an expressive reading of dialogue not characteristic of her ordinary oral reading.

The results presented above all indicate that it is possible to involve less-skilled readers in readers’ theater activities. The importance of particular instructional factors also emerged during the readers’ theater preparation and performances.

An Additional Means to Achieve Fluent Oral Reading

A basic instructional goal in the tutorial involved finding ways for struggling readers to have ample opportunities for real reading and to experience some success. A related expectation was that children would build a personal collection of suitable material that they can read independently. Tutors discovered that readers’ theater activities (like other support approaches) could result in sustained reading opportunities, and that with appropriate support and practice, less-skilled readers could eventually experience fluent reading. Tutors first provided support necessary to introduce an appropriate text. The introduction was then followed by a sequence of individual and group practice activities through which children attained an independent level of reading on the targeted material. Comments in their journals indicated that tutors became motivated to include more readers’ theater activities, especially after they recognized the potential end result of this sequence, namely that struggling readers would be reading something aloud fluently.

Several related instructional aspects were particularly important for this accomplishment: Tutors found ways to integrate activities and text across the tutorial, recognized the utility of

multiple exposure and practice, and valued the benefits of readers' theater to attitude and motivation.

The Importance of Integration

One important factor involved tutors' ability to orchestrate the integration of readers' theater with other reading and writing activities. For example, readers' theater text led to language experience products, and language experience text became scripts for readers' theater. Support activities such as shared book experiences, echo reading, and repeated readings all presented possible avenues for supporting and practicing readers' theater text. Recreational reading text also offered sources for readers' theater. A few times one child's readers' theater text eventually found its way into another child's plan. These children's tutors discovered ways to provide initial scaffolding and then additional ways to recycle text and to cross-link readers' theater activities with other areas of process instruction involving sight words, oral reading, comprehension, and fluency. This was an important finding, particularly because the readers' theater activities existed as one instructional possibility in a broadly defined intervention attempt and, additionally, because extended practice (and multiple exposure) was essential.

The Importance of Practice

Past findings have emphasized the essential role of practice for other methods that target oral reading accuracy and fluency, such as variations on repeated reading (Blum & Koskinen, 1991; Rasinski, 1989; Samuels, 1979). Tutors soon recognized and emphasized the essential function of practice for readers' theater, noting that substantial practice led to substantial improvement. They integrated more practice opportunities and also encouraged additional practice on the children's own time. For example, Louann noted that Annie became "much more fluent with practice." Quentin wrote in his journal how much he had noticed the improvement that Tessa could make through a little practice at home. Phoebe's comments were similar to the comments of

Quentin and other tutors. She could tell when Matt had practiced. She wrote in her journal, "It was obvious that he practiced at home—[he had] good timing and good expression." She also added that he not only read more accurately but he enjoyed it more because "he was confident and sure of himself." Tutors also recognized the value of student reflection in assessment, increasing student awareness through questions like, "Is this fluent?", "Are we ready to read this to the group?", and "Do we need to practice more?"

Benefits of Motivation and Interest

Tutor feedback in class discussions and in journal entries attributed much of the benefits of readers' theater to a positive influence on affect. Children looked forward to group time and readers' theater in particular, regardless of whether they were reading or listening. When I asked tutors what their kids enjoyed most about their sessions, almost all of them responded that group time was the high point. I asked the tutors what they, themselves, enjoyed most and the answer for many was the same. Comments from children indicated that this preference not only involved being together with the other children but also involved the fun and interest of listening to their tutors and peers read and having opportunities to perform readers' theater themselves. The most excited that children got about group time was when they themselves were involved in a presentation.

Children who sought to avoid some of the reading tasks did not try to avoid readers' theater. Nina's additional insights about Lee serve to illustrate this effect on motivation. She wrote, "He was eager to perform readers' theater [today] and wanted us to practice. He seemed confident and sure of himself. When we first went to group [during the initial sessions] he kind of hung back and didn't seem to want to practice. Now he has his hand up and ready to give a response. He seemed pleased with himself . . ."

For some, the motivation of readers' theater carried over to the other tasks. Nora, who worked with Tom, wrote in her journal that "Today was a great day for both of us. I am starting to see progress with Tom. He enjoys being with other children and since

we have [begun] the past three days with practice for readers' theater, the day seems to be set for cooperation and success."

Discussion

The present findings suggest that readers' theater potentially offers exposure, support, and practice so that even beginning readers can read at higher levels of fluency on targeted text. I found that the reading performance of several children was extended beyond their traditionally-determined instructional levels. Occasionally, their reading of targeted text was not only accurate but expressive, a characteristic indicating higher levels of oral reading (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). At times even the tutor was surprised that a child sounded so expressive. Furthermore, they became more appropriate models of fluent reading for the other less-skilled readers who were listening. For some children, a readers' theater event could provide a rare opportunity for the less-skilled reader to be on equal footing with better readers, through the advantage of preparation and additional practice time. Of added importance, children and tutors alike enjoyed the activities and were motivated to do more.

Positive changes in attitudes about readers' theater for many of the children emerged as they became successful through the readers' theater event. A number of researchers have emphasized the interactive nature of relationships between attitude and reading achievement (Wixon & Lipson, 1991). For example, Thames and Reeves (1994) found that an integrated instructional approach to literacy learning positively affected the attitudes that poor readers had about reading. McCormick (1994), Johnston (1985), and Juel (1994) all found that motivation was a key internal variable affecting gains made by a variety of individuals with serious reading problems. The present results also confirm the practical importance of boosting confidence for these less-skilled readers.

Tutors recognized the links between motivation, practice, and confidence. Nel saw that Alexandra was "proud of herself" when she could read during the readers' theater activities. Like many of the children receiving help, Alexandra often had received the message from others that she could not read. For her to read a

part in readers' theater and actually to read to other children was a strong motivator. Many of the tutors noted that students were proud of being able read in front of the group. Others also pointed out that children enjoyed the opportunity to choose parts in the script and enjoyed helping and listening to others during practice time. Jordan's conclusions also illustrate the importance of this connection. He wrote, "[Ramone's] confidence also improved greatly with the use of readers' theater." He went on to emphasize how pleased his student "was at the class response" to his reading. "He was glowing with confidence. I intend to do more [readers' theater]." Ramone also asked to do more readers' theater. In addition, he asked to be able to read to younger children during instructional time and to read to their younger siblings, as well, as they waited with parents in an adjacent lounge.

Like Ramone, a number of students appeared to be empowered by their success. Phoebe's comments also reiterate how success, motivation, and confidence are tied together. She wrote in the final entry in her journal, "Matt practiced reading the Shel Silverstein poem 'Warning' and decided to perform it for group. I [had given] Matt the Shel Silverstein book *Where the Sidewalk Ends* that contains the poem. He was really pleased with the book and kept trying to read some of the other poems when we were in group. [Then] during group Matt jumped right up to read and share the poem—such a difference from the shy little boy that came the first day!"

To sum up these benefits, I'll return to Karl, the fifth grader from the opening scenario. Several factors were crucial for the change in Karl's involvement. Risa, his tutor, might have appropriately responded to his initial resistance with, "You tell me when you are ready." What ensued were instances to help *him* find opportunities for purpose, practice, and for self-evaluation. Early on in the tutoring of Karl, Risa employed a baseball analogy to help him understand the importance of actually reading, making the point that one can get better through *doing*. It was when he was successful that Karl appeared to find meaning in the activities. Like Alexandra, Karl had been told indirectly for several years that he could not read. Being able to read and to do so in front of the others gave him motivation. As he gained confidence, he began to take some control. For example, he began to sense how

much practice was necessary to prepare for a readers' theater performance and asked for another day to practice. He also asked to prepare another reading for the group and suggested a book to use. He volunteered during group time to do related tasks, such as turning the page of a chart. And for his last group presentation, he invited his parents to come and listen not only to him but to the other children. And they did. It was clear to all of us that, for Karl, the group time became an important event. Success helped him move from the back of the room to the front. Readers' theater offered one means. What I saw for him and for several children was the inception of an upward spiral linking success, confidence, and motivation.

It makes sense that readers with less skill need more reading opportunities, not fewer (e.g., Johnston & Allington, 1991; Stanovich, 1986). Some of these children seemed stunted with the idea that they were not readers. However, they came to expect more of themselves across many of the instructional features of the tutorial. One of the unique contributions of readers' theater to this picture is that it offers an integrated language event with an authentic communication purpose. These students were excited about reading their scripts because they *could* and because someone wanted to listen.

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