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        This report describes a program for improving literacy skills, such as
expression, fluency, and comprehension through the use of drama in the reading
curriculum. The targeted population consisted of kindergarten and first grade
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the teachers in these targeted schools grades kindergarten through fifth. Analysis of
probable cause literature revealed that students lack essential reading skills
necessary to achieve academic success. Students are not reading with appropriate
fluency to comprehend even simple text. With an influx in cultural diversity, an
increasing number of students lack the background knowledge, language base, and the
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instruction do not always offer struggling readers adequate opportunities for reading
success. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined
with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection in one major
intervention: the incorporation of drama-based activities into the reading curriculum.
These dramatic activities will offer students experiences with various meaningful text
and oral language. Results indicated that (1) students' reading skills improved
(including expressive voice, fluency, comprehension, summarization, and sequencing);
(2) the social skills developed through cooperative learning lessons benefited the
students, when working together on dramatic activities; and (3) students' enthusiasm
towards acting out a story increased. Appendixes contain the teacher and parent
surveys, an observation checklist, student interview questions, and teacher survey
results. (Contains 29 references, 3 tables, and 7 figures.) (Author/RS)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE DRAMATIC!
THE EFFECTS OF DRAMA ON READING ABILITY

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/SkyLight

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 2003

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SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

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Advisor

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Advisor

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Dean, School of Education

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

"Reading comprehension is a basic skill that is one of the critical elements of any primary level education" (Rose, Parks, Androes, 2000). The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of drama incorporated into the curriculum on students' reading ability. The students in the targeted kindergtarten and first grade classrooms are beginning readers who face difficulty with basic reading skills. Evidence for the existence of these problems includes teacher observations, formal academic assessments, review of daily work, student conferences, and behavior problems during reading time.

Immediate Problem Context

The two sites involved in this action research were very similar types of settings. The general site information for Sites A & B can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Project School Site Demographics

GENERAL INFORMATION	SITE A	SITE B
Students/School		
Location	Northwest suburbs	Northwest suburbs
District Type	Public Elementary	Public Elementary
Grades Enrolled	K-5	K-8
Enrollment	569	544
Mobility	15.7%	13.0%
Attendance	96.3%	96.4%
Low Income	7.2%	20.6%
Limited English Proficient	13.4%	9.6%
Chronic Truancy	0.0%	0.0%
Racial-Ethnic Background		
White Non-Mexican American	73.5%	67.1%
Hispanic	5.6%	5.9%
African American	1.9%	1.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	19.0%	25.4%
Native American	0.0%	0.4%
Instructional Setting		
Average Class Size	22.2	19.8
Daily Instructional Minutes		
Mathematics	62	60
Science	20	36
English	180	149
Social Science	20	38
Special Services		
Gifted Program	Yes	Yes
Special Education Program	Yes	Yes
English as a Second Language Program	Yes	Yes
Staff/School		
Principal	1	1
Other Administrators	1	0
Teachers	46	45
Counselors	0	0
Speech Pathologists	1	1
Psychologists	1	1
Social Workers	1.5	1
Nurses	2	1
Aides	10	5

(Source: School Report Card, 2001)

Site A was located in a northwest suburb of a major metropolitan area. The structure was a one-story building with two large playgrounds. The building consisted of one gymnasium, one student cafeteria, a library/computer lab with thirty 38 computers, 31 classrooms, nine offices used by miscellaneous staff, one faculty lounge, and a front office used by the principal, assistant principal, and their secretaries.

Most of the students who attended Site A were from the surrounding neighborhood. Buses were available for students who lived across railroad tracks or on the other side of major streets. Some students walked to Site A or were transported by a car. Student and parent patrols surrounded the immediate area to assist walkers safely to school.

Students at Site A were offered all core courses plus art, music, physical education, and computer education. Tutoring programs, as well as an academic recovery computer program, were offered before and after school for all grades for those students who were having difficulty in their studies. After school sports, chorus, orchestra, art club, and computer club were offered to students in grades 3-6. Site A also offered a before and after school day care facilities for parents who worked past school hours. Site A maintained a school patrol which assisted students entering and leaving the playground or for those walking home through the neighborhood.

Site A also offered many opportunities for faculty. All new teachers were involved in a mentoring program where an experienced, tenured teacher guided them through their first two years. Teachers were encouraged to continue their education, and partial district reimbursement was given to teachers wishing to attain their graduate degrees. All teachers were encouraged to attend at least one conference per school year.

Teachers could also earn extra income by sponsoring clubs, activities, and other extra school duties. Site A also had a Sunshine Club that used a pool of the staff's monetary contributions to pay for faculty parties and gifts for special events throughout the year.

Site A used the same reading series for the language arts curriculum for the past five years. Students remained in their homerooms for the 90 minute language arts block, except for self-contained special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. These students went to their reading teacher during this time. A reading specialist was also available for the lowest scoring readers from each grade.

Site A had a large parent volunteer population. The Organization of Parents & Teachers (OPT) organized many in and out of school events and fundraisers, including a roller skating party and a Fun Fair. Approximately 60% of parents attend the monthly OPT meetings. The principal also held a monthly forum called the "principal's coffee," meeting with parents to answer any concerns. Parents volunteered in the classrooms to help teachers, read stories to children, and to run the classroom holiday parties.

Site B was located in a northwest suburb of a major metropolitan area. The structure was a two-story building with a large playground and field. It was a recently rehabbed building that changed from a junior high school to a kindergarten through eighth grade school. The building had a large gymnasium with a stage, cafeteria, kitchen, media center, computer lab, band and orchestra rooms, 35 classrooms, Board of Education room, and a large office occupied by the superintendent, principal, building manager, cafeteria manager, and four secretaries.

The students who attended Site B came from one suburb. The school was located next to a busy, four-lane street. An outside bus company bused most of the children to

school. Some of the students walked to school and the remainder of the students were driven to school by parents. Site B was the only school in its district. The school had many programs for the students, including student council, band, orchestra, computer club, Battle of the Books club, English as a Second Language, male athletic teams, female athletic teams, after school assistance program, yearbook committee, service club, and after school supervision for students with working parents.

The faculty at Site B was encouraged to develop professionally and continue their education. The school would pay for teachers to attend one teaching conference per year. The school would assist teachers taking graduate level courses by paying a percentage of the tuition per year. It organized and hosted an institute day once a year to encourage professional growth. There was also an organization composed of teachers called the Kitty Fund, which would collect money from each teacher at the beginning of the year and use the money throughout the year for staff parties and gifts on special occasions. There were extracurricular opportunities for the faculty to gain professional knowledge and additional income. These opportunities included coaching a sport, sponsoring a club, and directing the school play.

Site B had recently adopted a new reading series. This was the first year that the kindergarten classes were expected to use the school's reading series. First through fifth graders had a one hour block for reading every day. Most first graders remained with their classroom teacher during reading time. A small percentage of children left their classrooms during reading time to work in small groups with a reading or ESL specialist. Second through fifth graders were grouped by ability and joined their appropriate teacher and reading group during the reading block.

Parent involvement at Site B was minimal. Many of the parents of the students at Site B did not speak English. The language barrier made it difficult for communication between the school and the parents. Many of the families of the students at Site B were two working parents who were unable to take time off from work to volunteer for school activities. Site B had a Parent/Teacher Organization, but attendance at the evening meetings was typically fewer than 20 people. Few faculty members attended these meetings. There were a handful of parents who were very active in organizing and volunteering to help at school functions.

The Surrounding Community

It is important to understand the community in which the schools reside. Table 2 provides detailed information regarding the communities.

Table 2

Project Community Demographics

COMMUNITY DATA	SITE A	SITE B
Population	53,211	30,068
Racial-Ethnic Background		
White-Non-Mexican American	86.3%	89.5%
African American	0.9%	0.2%
Hispanic	6.1%	3.1%
Other	6.7%	7.2%
Demographics		
Median Family Income	$55,619	$56,459
Education – HS or Higher	85.5%	75%
Average Age	39.1	46.8
Housing		
Median Home Value	$229,500	$164,000
Single-Family Units	69.1%	63.7%
Multi-Family Units	30.9%	24.4%
Median Gross Rent	$564-1990	$735
Number of Households	20,087	11,221

(Source: ChicagoTribune.com, 2000)

Site A had a median home value of $229,500 with 71.5% being single-family units. The unemployment rate was 3.3%. The occupations were sales (34.1%), managerial/professional (32.7%), operators/laborers (10.1%), and service occupations (9.8%).

Only a portion of one township serviced this district. This district was located in a northwest suburb, about five miles from the major city limits. This area was mostly residential surrounded by parks. The community also had assisted living and retirement apartments that housed senior citizens. The park district, with a large playground and multi-purpose room, was located directly across the street from Site A. A large shopping center, upgraded in the 1990's.

The park districts and municipalities sponsored many services such as swimming pools, summer day camps, an iceskating rink, a sled hill, a nature center, and a recreation center. This recreation center housed a large gymnasium, a dance hall, and a fitness center, along with an outside mini-golf course and driving range. It also sponsored a public library that worked closely with Site A to promote literacy. Personal visits, reading contests, and alignment of reading programs were some ways that Site A and the public library worked together.

Site B had a median home value of $164,000. About 63% of homes were single-family units. The unemployment rate was 2.0%. The occupations held by the community members of Site B were administrative support (20.9%), technician/precision craft (18.1%), managerial (14.6%), sales (14.5%), professional (11.5%), service (10.5%), and laborer/operator (9.7%).

This district serviced a portion of one community. Site A was located in a northwest suburb that bordered the major city. It was surrounded by an abundance of commercial businesses. The remaining areas were residential with small homes, parks, and mature trees. It also included a nature preserve with wetlands and a bike path through open and wooded areas. The average age of the community members was 46.8 years old. Twenty-three percent of the community members were 65 years or older. Eighty-eight percent of the households were owner-occupied. Twelve percent of the households were renter-occupied (ChicagoTribune.com, 2000).

There were many services provided by the local park district and municipalities. Within the past five years, a new public library and a community fitness/senior center were built. The fitness center housed an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, workout

facilities and multi-purpose room. The fitness center hosted parties, seminars,

performances, and sporting events for members of the community. The district also had a

public ice-skating rink, outdoor public swimming pools, and golf courses. Over the past

five years an increasing number of non-English speaking residents had moved into the

district (ChicagoTribune.com, 2000). Table 3 provides detailed information regarding the

school districts.

Table 3

Two-Site Comparison District Data

SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA	SITE A	SITE B
District Type	Public Elementary	Public Elementary
Geographic Region	Northwest Suburban	Northwest Suburban
Enrollment	1,738	544
Total Number of Teachers	123	45
Teacher Racial/Ethnic Background		
White	96.8%	94.4%
African American	0.0%	0.0%
Hispanic	3.2%	0.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	5.6%
Native American	0.0%	0.0%
Teacher Gender		
Male	17%	11.1%
Female	83%	88.9%
Teacher/Administrator Characteristics		
Ave. Teaching Experience	15.8%	14.1%
Teachers with Bachelor's Degree	35.9%	38.9%
Teachers with Master's degree +	64.1%	61.1%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	16:1	13.3:1
Pupil-Certified Staff Ratio	12.2:1	10.5:1
Pupil-Administrator Ratio	173.8:1	181.3:1
Average Teacher Salary	$52,458	$57,527
Average Administrator Salary	$100,009	$111,395
School District Finances		
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	$4,541	$6,708
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	$7,745	$11,122

(Source: School Report Card, 2001)

Regional and National Context of Problem

Presently, 38 percent of children are failing reading. Over one-third of fourth and eighth grade students do not have the reading skills needed to comprehend a simple children's story (Margolis, 2001). According to Vellutino, it has become increasingly obvious that even after students have adequate knowledge of the alphabetic principle, they continue to have reading problems. Students who struggle with reading need to

learn new skills and strategies to improve fluency and comprehension (as cited in Vaughn, 2000).

Some educators have incorporated drama into their classroom to enhance their reading program and to increase reading abilities. According to Pappas & Brown, drama is a meaningful tool to teach children to read, write, speak, and listen. Bidwell states that the use of drama is especially motivating for struggling students (as cited in Larkin, 2001). Brown describes the way that young children learn as perfectly suited for drama. Drama is multisensory and gives children visual, physical, and verbal exposure to an idea. Children retain ideas more readily when multiple senses are stimulated (as cited in George, 2000).

There are many difficulties that early readers need to overcome when learning to read. Some of these difficulties include comprehension, fluency, and interest level. Without a meaningful text, these difficulties can be even more difficult to achieve. Hendersen and Shanker conducted a study comparing interpretive drama with workbook activities used in conjunction with basal readers. This study, involving second grade students, resulted in significant comprehension improvement from the interpretive drama approach. The children favored dramatics to workbook excercises and exhibited an increased interest in reading. The students were motivated to use drama, and as a result, chose to act out stories during independent reading times. (as cited in Larkin, 2001).

Reading is the core that links all curricular subjects together. Because of the importance of reading in education, it is necessary to find an approach that meets the needs of today's students. Drama in the classroom is an approach to reading that some teachers have adopted in hopes of increasing reading abilities.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

The tools used in documenting student difficulty with basic reading skills

included teacher and parent surveys (Appendix A and B). Between 50 and 60

kindergarten through fifth grade teachers were expected to participate in the teacher

survey. Parent surveys were collected regarding reading habits at home (Appendix B).

Approximately 40 families were expected to respond to the survey. Teacher checklists

were completed to monitor specific reading skills of kindergartners and first graders

(Appendix C). Student interviews were conducted to determine their attitudes toward

reading (Appendix D). Teacher observation journals were used to monitor students'

progress on the targeted skills.

Teacher surveys regarding reading achievement were completed by kindergarten

through fifth grade teachers during September 2002. Parent surveys questioning student

reading habits at home were completed between September 9 and September 13, 2002.

Teacher observation checklists and student interviews were completed by kindergarten

and first grade teachers during September 2002. Teacher observation journals were an

ongoing assessment from September 2002 to December 2002.

The researchers gave a survey to parents to report on their child's reading habits

at home. The overall responses from the parents seemed to reflect few difficulties

regarding the skills listed in the questions. Figure 1 provides complete results of the data collected.

Reading Habits at Home

Figure 1: Represents the frequency of the behaviors observed and reported by parents.

The researchers gave a survey to parents to report on their child's reading habits directly related to drama. The results are as follows: Over 50 percent of the students rarely or never read with fluency. Thirty percent of the students can always or usually answer questions related to the story. Ninety percent of the students enjoy listening to a story. Figure 2 provides complete results of the data collected.
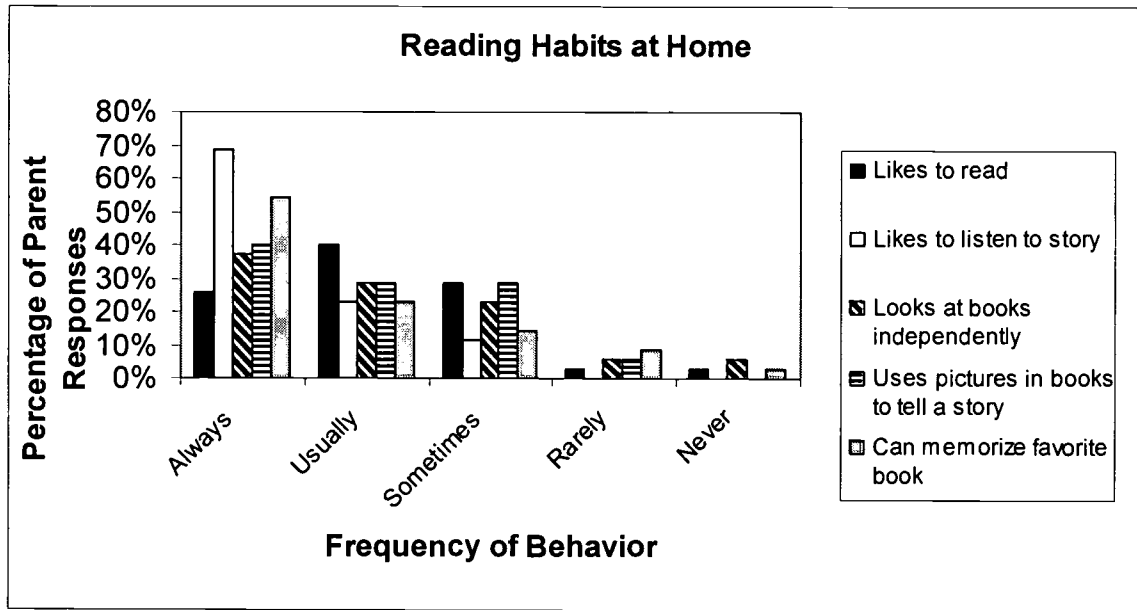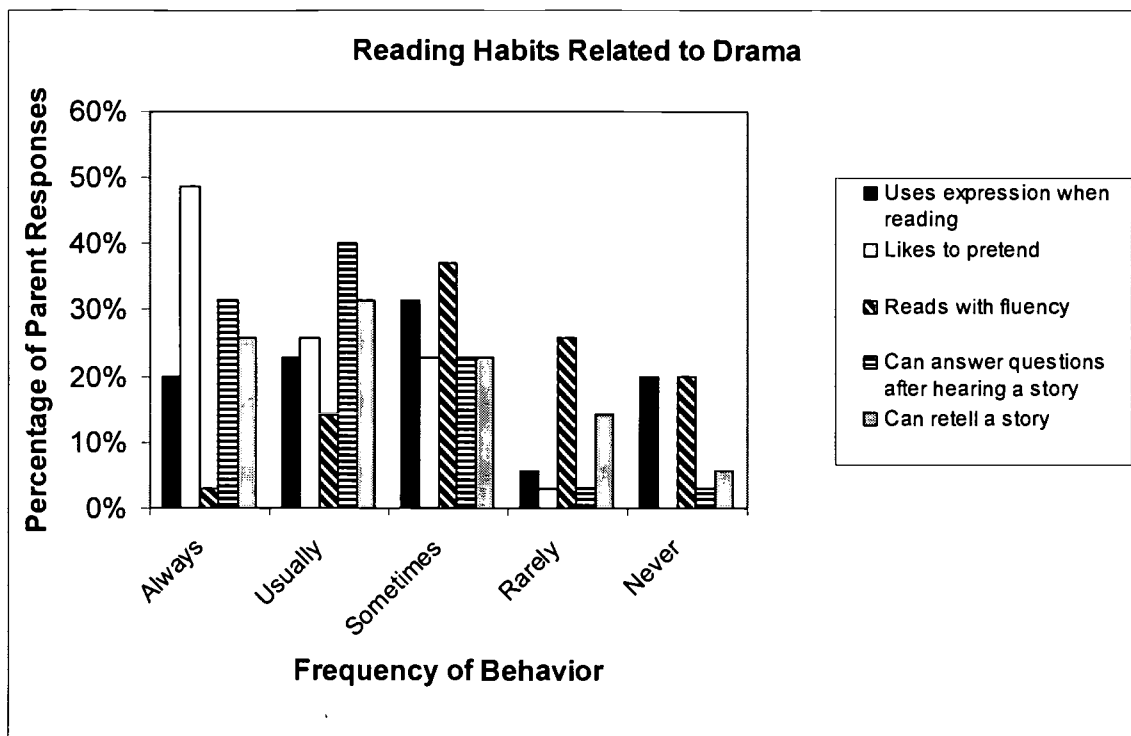
Figure 2: Represents the frequency of the behaviors observed and reported by parents.

The researchers gave a survey to teachers to report on their students' reading habits at school. Some of the questions on the survey have been eliminated from Figure 3 because the teachers did not indicate problems related to the skills or the skills did not directly relate to the intervention. The results of those questions can be viewed in Appendix E. The results indicate that, according to teachers, only 20 percent of the students always or usually read with expression, and approximately 30 percent of the students always or usually read fluently. Figure 3 provides results of the data collected.

Teacher Survey

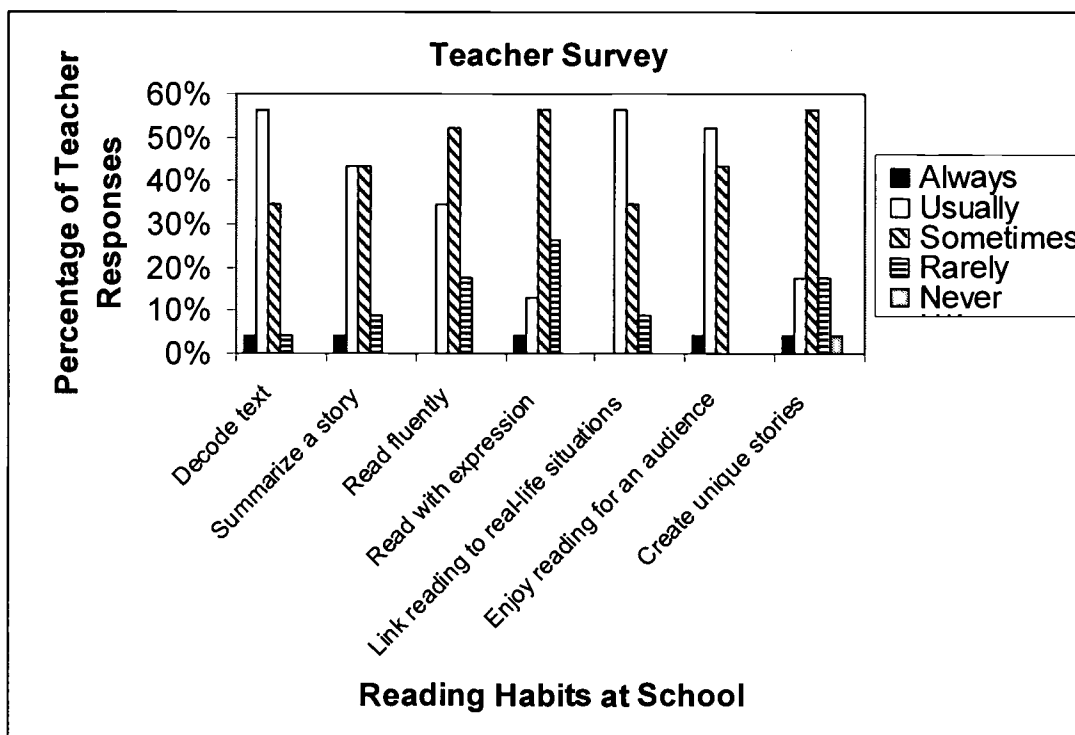Figure 3: Represents the frequency of the above behaviors observed and reported by teachers.

The researchers interviewed students to report on their attitudes toward reading. The results from the student interviews indicate that the students have an overwhelming positive attitude toward reading. Figure 4 provides complete results of the data gathered from the students.
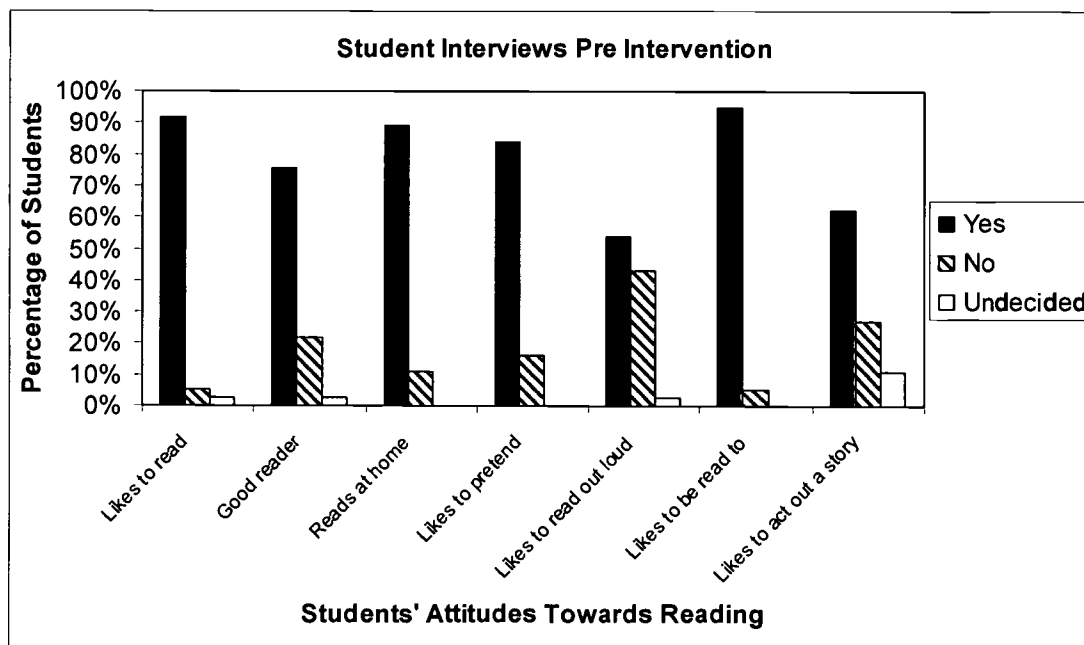
Figure 4: Represents students' attitudes towards reading.

Probable Causes

Probable causes for low reading ability may be attributed to many different factors. These factors include cultural changes in the community, socio-economic status, lack of early childhood education, inconsistencies in school theories in regards to curriculum, poorly developed oral language, and learning disabilities.

In the two targeted communities there were increasing numbers of families with no English speaking skills or English as a second language. This language barrier created challenges for students, teachers, and parents when dealing with literacy. Snow states (as cited in Mithers, 2001) that with an increase in cultural changes, children from immigrant families are expected to read in a language that is unfamiliar. Reading is not a skill that can be aquired naturally or effortlessly (Lyon as

cited in Mithers, 2001). Teaching practices should focus on what children know and have experienced, but instead practices often emphasize what children lack (Luther, 2001). Students need to be immersed in authentic reading and writing situations because it offers an effective way to develop literacy skills (Luther, 2001).

Low socio-economic status is often linked with illiteracy. A high level of reading problems are associated with children from poor homes (Mithers, 2001). A U.S. Department of Education report found that 64 percent of three to five year old children in underpriveleged families are not read to daily by a parent or other family member, compared with only 39 percent of children in more affluent families (Mithers, 2001). Children from low-income families who do find academic success come from literate families (Mithers, 2001). Both of the targeted sites have populations that include low-income families.

A third possible cause of low reading ability may be a lack of early childhood education. Early detection of reading problems are crucial for early correction (Mithers, 2001). As a result of this knowledge, many literacy programs and preschools have emerged for the very young (Mithers, 2001). Creating a high-quality preschool has become increasingly important for future academic success (Mithers, 2001).

Inconsistencies in methods of teaching literacy skills can exclude essential skills necessary to ensure successful reading. Trends regarding educational philosophies are constantly changing (Mithers, 2001). The ongoing debate between teaching reading through phonics or using a whole language approach is a current example of these inconsistencies. It is extremely important that reading skills are

linked for students, but once districts spend money on a reading program they continue with it regardless of the students' success (Lyon as cited in Mithers, 2001).

Poorly developed oral language may be a cause of reading problems that students face. In order for students to learn to read, they must have a strong oral language base. It is critical that children have opportunities to interact and improve their speaking skills (McMaster, 1998). At-risk students typically engage in significantly fewer verbal communications than other students and do not develop solid oral language (Morado, 1999).

A final cause of reading failure may be attributed to learning disabilities. Millions of middle school students in the United States cannot read above a fourth-grade level and have underdeveloped basic reading skills (McCray, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education reports that 2.8 million students are currently receiving special education services for learning disabilities. Eighty-five percent of these students have reading disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Students with learning disabilities need intensive reading interventions, but unfortunately, reading interventions for students with learning disabilities often involves reading materials aloud to students or assigning work that demands little or no reading (McCray, 2001).

The probable causes for reading underachievement are identified and described in this chapter. The causes include: cultural changes in the community, socio-economic status, lack of early childhood education, inconsistencies in school theories, poorly developed oral language, and learning disabilities. This list is not

inclusive of all possible explanations for reading deficiencies. These are the probable

causes most prominently focused on in the research literature reviewed.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of Literature

Reading is a major skill focused on at all levels of education. For some students, reading can be the most challenging hurdle in their academic life. Some of the commonly known strategies to improve reading skills will be described. One practice used to create competent readers is guided reading. Guided reading is a reading program component that is often used instead of direct instruction. In the guided reading strategy, children learn to develop and apply learning strategies to become independent readers. Often described as the "heart of the literacy program," guided reading is essential because it creates a well-balanced reading program in the elementary classroom. When guided reading is used, students can become fluent and independent readers, that, in turn, the program prepares them for lifetime reading success (Fountas & Pinnel as cited by Antonacci, 2000).

Another approach to teaching reading incorporates students' life experiences. Constructivism is a learning approach where understanding and learning stem from a variety of influences including: formal instruction, social and cultural norms, and students' personal beliefs, and background knowledge. The two parts of constructivism are cognitive and social construction. Cognitive construction puts the focus of the learners' knowledge and how they impose their knowledge on the world. Social

construction views an individual's knowledge and social components as one entity that cannot be independent when learning (Piaget as cited by Windschitl, 1999).

When relating constructivism to reading ability, a teacher encourages students to create their own meaning to the text. The emphasis on meaning is an essential comprehension building skill (Chrenka, 2001). According to Vygotsky's "structuring consciousness," teachers enable students to respond to the texts and to each other by exploring a variety of perspectives while still thinking in a way that is complex (Chrenka, 2001).

Before children can respond to text as discussed in the constructivist theory, they need modeling of essential reading skills. Letter name knowledge is one of these necessary skills. Letter name knowledge that children posses in early grades highly corresponds to their reading achievement during further schooling (Bond & Dykstra, Chall, & Share, Jorm, MacLean, & Matthews as cited by Horner, 2001). In turn, knowing letter names assists children in building letter-sound relationships and creates a foundation for reading and writing. One way that children gain knowledge is through the observation of a model. Learning by observing is called observational learning. Children are able to create a rule or concept while observing a model and then transfer that rule to a new, but similar, situation. Modeling proved to be an effective form of instruction and allowed children to learn abstract ideas vicariously through observation (Zimmerman & Rosenthal as cited by Horner, 2001).

Another popular approach to teaching reading is the whole language movement, which was led by Goodman and began in the late 1960's. This approach became popular when teachers became frustrated and overwhelmed with endless phonics sheets and

meaningless basal readers. Whole language offers teachers an opportunity to share authentic text with students and allowed students to experience meaningful reading. The theory behind whole language instruction explains that people read by guessing upcoming words through context. Advocates insist that readers do not focus on individual letters or phonemes in words. If readers get too caught up in spelling and phonics, reading will be slow and cumbersome with no fluency. Beginning readers need to take risks when reading, experimenting with predicting and guessing. Early readers need to develop the ability to anticipate upcoming words. The whole language approach forces students to use context to guess, predict, and anticipate what the text will be (Collins, 1997). Whole language also favors authentic text, meaning real-life literature, and relies on reader interest to motivate learning (Ediger, 2001).

A debate between phonics advocates and whole language supporters has been going on for years (Collins, 1997). A theory using strategies from both the phonics and the whole language approaches creates the whole-part-whole approach to reading. The whole-part-whole approach involves exposing students to quality literature with opportunities to read, comprehend, and react to this authentic text. After the initial exposure to the text the teacher selects words to incorporate direct skill and phonics instruction. Finally, the students are given further experience with authentic text and opportunities to exercise and apply the skills they have learned (Trachtenburg & Allen as cited by Rossow, 2001).

The debate over the teaching of phonics versus other literacy techniques continues. How important is it to teach phonics? How much time should teachers spend on focusing on phonics? Can the whole language theory replace a phonics curriculum?

Adams claims, "You can teach children more efficiently and effectively if you use phonics. If you don't know how the alphabet works, you can't learn how to use an alphabetic language. There is no argument" (as cited in Palmaffy, 1997). According to Oconner, Torgesen & Vellutino, children's reading failure requires an instructional technique with phonemic awareness and phonics as its focus (as cited in Mather, 2001). When using phonics as a solution to reading failure, using phonics systematically at an early age, up to grade four, proves to be advantageous in achievement (Chall as cited in Stahl, 1996).

Despite which method of reading instruction is used in the classroom, parental involvement inspires improved reading achievement. Parental involvement in a child's education can take on many forms. Helping with homework, reading with a child, being an active participant in the school, and modeling learning through further adult education are just a few ways that a parent can become involved in the child's life. When a parent is directly involved in the child's education, that child will tend to succeed academically and this will positively affect cognitive growth (Anderson, 2000). As a parent, something as simple as reading to a child can increase reading abilities like letter and symbol recognition, comprehension, vocabulary, and verbal communication (Henry as cited in Anderson, 2000).

Family literacy programs were established to assist parents in becoming better learners and to better understand their role as active participants in their children's education (Nistler & Maiers, 2000). Parents directly affect their children's literacy growth by expressing their personal beliefs, aspirations, and their personal attitudes towards reading (Routman, 1996). According to Nistler & Maiers (2000), it is extremely

important that families know the impact they have on their children's education and how they can help foster their literacy growth. Parents lay the foundation for formal reading instruction and helping children to read (Becher as cited in Anderson, 2000).

Even with a strong reading foundation, finding an effective technique to teach reading skills, such as fluency and comprehension, to young diverse groups of children can be a difficult and complicated task. Using various aspects of drama to teach reading can be an effective solution. The use of drama can be expressed through mediums such as dramatic play, pantomime, puppet shows, improvisations, and dramatic performances. These techniques use drama in a variety of ways to create meaning for the teacher and students. Some take little to no set or script preparation and rely on students' prior knowledge and higher-order thinking skills such as improvisation. Other techniques focus on the script and the words used to form a meaningful text, as with a dramatic performance. These techniques can help educators teach reading in an efficient and engaging way.

Comprehension is a reading skill that can be developed effectively at an early age through the use of drama. Cline & Ingerson state that drama enables a child to create meaning while acting out a story (as cited in George 2000). Words become part of their real world instead of just being symbols on a piece of paper. Children can then also retain the information that is being presented through the act of doing. Drama is a multi-sensory technique that makes it easier for young children to retain information. Drama takes an idea and represents it visually, verbally, and physically (Brown as cited in George 2000.) Something as simple as a short play or dramatization performed by a teacher or students can help students visualize, experience, and understand the concept being taught.

"Creative dramatics enable students to step inside a story, or to interact with a concept, character, or idea (Johnson as cited in George, 2000).

Drama is a technique that can apply to a multitude of student profiles. Reaching all students with diverse backgrounds or learning styles can be difficult. According to Yaffe, drama is an effective adaptable teaching tool because it applies to diverse student populations and to students with special needs (as cited in George, 2000). Researchers say that all students, especially those with disabilities, can develop reading skills and apply their acquired knowledge to real life situations and settings though the use of improvisational drama (Stanfa & O'Shea, 1998).

English as a second language students also face barriers when learning to read and comprehend in English. According to a study, "The student population served by Dallas Public Schools will increase by 20,000 in the next three years; by the year 2003, 60% of those students will enter school with English as a second language" (Dallas Morning News, 1999.) The critical need for a literature-based language and fine arts curriculum increases as a diverse student population increase. This kind of curriculum, which includes drama, helps break the barriers and boundaries of race, ethnicity, and gender differences in the classroom (O'Hara, 2001.) Through the use of drama, students are immersed in a language-rich environment and then become active participants in the use of language to create meaning and begin to understand its syntax (Davidson as cited in George, 2000). A California elementary school has included drama into their curriculum. Incorporating drama improves language skills for those who are participating. Along with students' test scores improving, the school has received many accolades for the reading achievement of their students (Elliot as cited in George, 2000.)

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

The following terminal objective reflects suggestions found in the professional literature and an analysis of the data collected regarding the target group: As a result of the use of drama in the classroom, during September 2002 to December 2002, the target group of kindergarten and first grade students will improve reading skills as measured by teacher checklists, parent surveys, and student interviews. In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Assess students through observation checklist of reading skills

2. Teach cooperative learning skills

3. Introduce and teach performance components

4. Create lessons incorporating dramatic activities

Action Plan for the Intervention

During the duration of the research intervention, one kindergarten teacher and one first grade teacher from two targeted sites participated in the following procedures:

I.   Assess students (Appendix C) (September 2002)

A. Observe students for expressive voice during informal and formal reading activities

B. Observe students for fluency during informal and formal reading activities

C. Question students to determine comprehension ability

D. Record student ability to summarize a given story

E. Record student ability to identify parts of a story

II.   Teach cooperative learning skills. (September 2002 through November 2002)

   A. Establish base groups

      1. Form groups of three or four students

      2. Select heterogeneous or teacher-selected groups

   B. Teach encouragement and support

      1. Model behavior

         a. Model unsupportive behavior

         b. Model supportive behavior

      2. Discuss importance of encouragement and support

      3. Students role-play in cooperative groups

         a. Role-play unsupportive behavior

         b. Role-play supportive behavior

      4. Discuss and reflect on encouragement and support as a class

   C. Teach listening skills

      1. Model listening skills

         a. Eyes are focused on speaker

         b. Mouth is silent

         c. Use appropriate responses i.e., gestures or facial expressions

      2. Discuss importance of good listening

      3. Students role-play listening in cooperative groups

      4. Discuss and reflect on listening skills as a class

   D. Teach speaking skills

      1. Model appropriate speaking skills

    a.   Demonstrate voice volume

    b.   Demonstrate voice expression

    c.   Demonstrate speaking tempo

  2.   Discuss importance of appropriate speaking skills

  3.   Students role-play speaking skills in cooperative groups

  4.   Discuss and reflect on speaking skills as a class

E. Teach conflict resolution

  1.   Model positive disagreement resolution

    a. Use an appropriate speaking voice

    b. Listen to others

    c. Compromise to solve conflict

    d. Respect others' opinions

  2.   Model negative disagreement resolution

    a. Use a loud, inappropriate voice

    b. Do not allow others to speak

    c. Use physical aggression

    d. Disrespect others' opinions

  3.   Discuss the importance of respect during conflict

  4.   Students role-play conflict resolution in cooperative groups

    a. Role-play positive disagreements

    b. Role-play negative disagreements

  5.   Discuss and reflect on conflict resolution as a class

III.   Introduce and teach performance components (October 2002)

A. Model how to be a performer

    1. Performers take their roles seriously

    2. Performers are prepared

    3. Performers stay in their role during performances

B. Model how to be an audience member

    1. Audience members are attentive

    2. Audience members are patient

    3. Audience members are supportive

IV. Implement intervention (October 2002 through November 2002)

A. Create lessons incorporating pantomime

    1. Communicate with facial expressions

    2. Communicate using movement without sound

B. Create lessons incorporating improvisation

    1. Foster spontaneous interactions

    2. Practice maintaining focus

C. Create lessons incorporating dramatic productions

    1. Teach awareness of audience point of view

    2. Introduce props, costumes, and set design

D. Create lessons incorporating readers' theater

    1. Introduce scripts

    2. Model character highlighting

    3. Maintain focus on script throughout dramatic reading

Methods of Assessment

The results of the intervention will be assessed using data collected from teacher observation journals, parent surveys, student interviews, and teacher checklists. Teacher observation journals will be kept daily to monitor student progress of targeted skills. Parent surveys, student interviews, and teacher checklists will be assessed pre- and post-intervention.

The two teachers involved in the action research project will meet weekly to determine the progress and success of the dramatic activities incorporated into the reading curriculum.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve reading skills through the use of drama in the classroom. The implementation of cooperative learning and various dramatic activities were selected to bring about the desired changes.

In September 2002, the researchers gave their students a self-assessment in the form of an observation checklist in order to record the number of times they demonstrated specific reading skills. The targeted skills included the use of expressive voice while reading, fluency, comprehension ability, summarization of stories, and story sequencing.

After collecting their initial data, the researchers taught the students cooperative skills in order to prepare them for the interaction involved in dramatic activities. The cooperative skills taught included encouragement and support, listening skills, speaking skills, and conflict resolution.

The researchers next introduced and taught the skills involved in performance. In addition to performance skills, the children learned appropriate audience skills. Once the children were equipped with the proper skills to be involved with all the aspects of drama, the researchers implemented the intervention. The intervention incorporated pantomime, improvisation, dramatic productions, and readers theater.

In order to assess the effects of cooperative learning and the results of dramatic activities, student interviews were administered before and after the interventions in order to determine any changes in students' attitudes towards reading activities. The results of these interviews can be viewed in Figures 5 and 6.

The intervention appears to have had little effect on any of the students' attitudes towards reading. The question that asked students if they liked to act out a story slightly increased positively. The number of students who like to act out a story increased by approximately 20 percent.
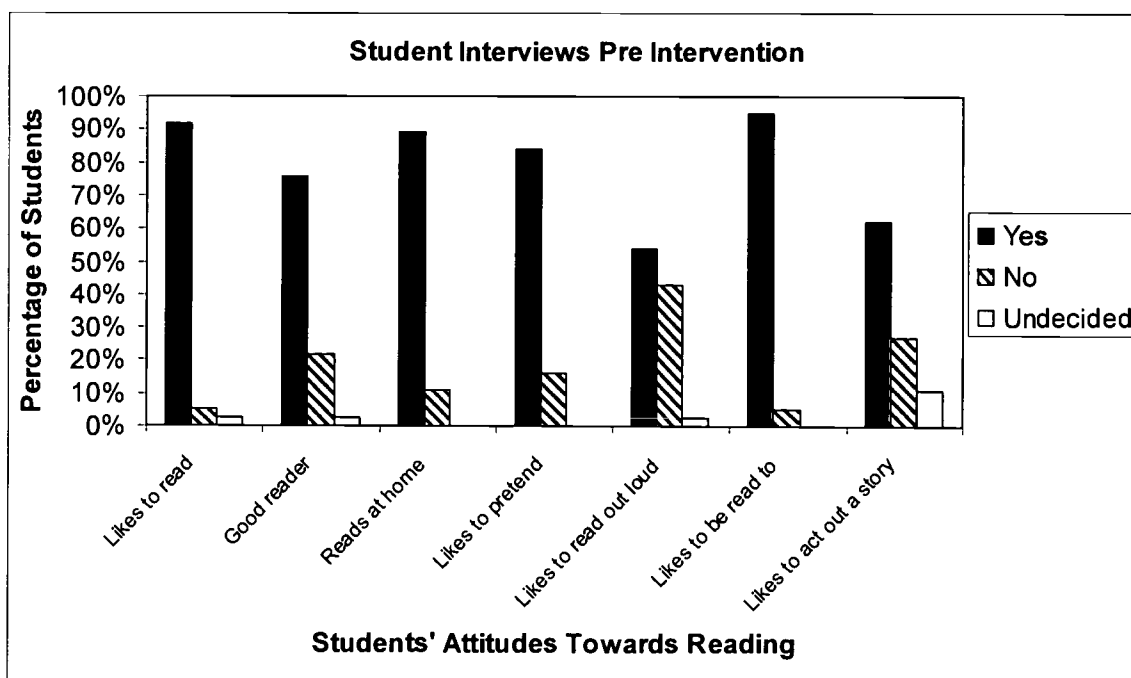

Figure 5: Represents students' attitudes towards reading.
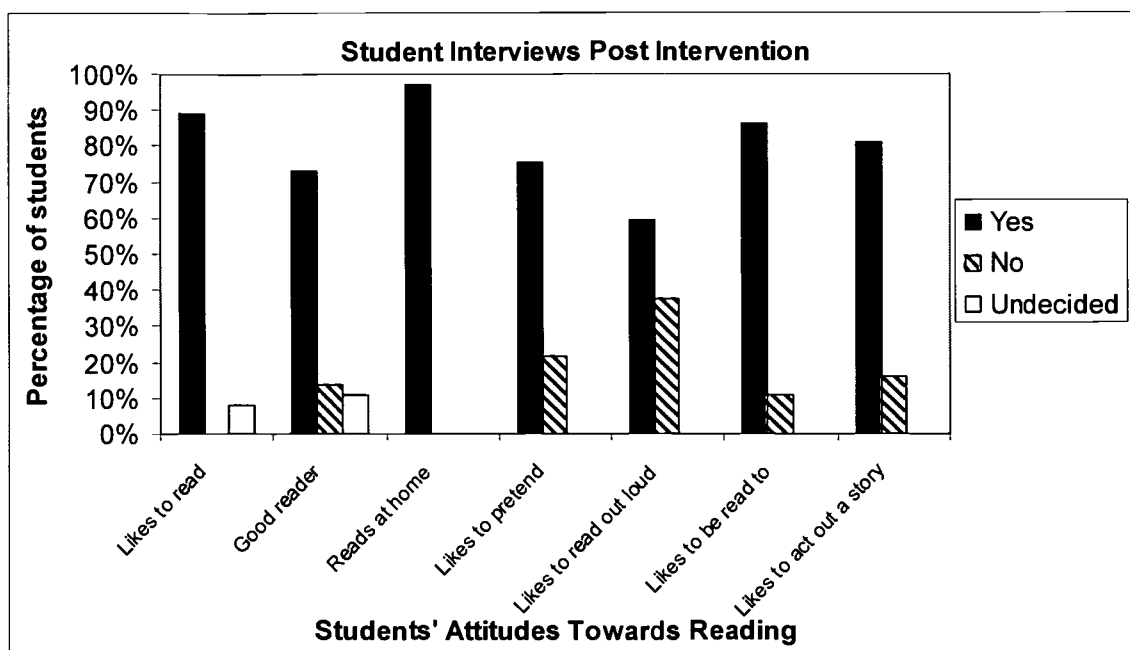
Student Interviews Post Intervention

Figure 6: Represents students' attitudes towards reading.

In order to measure the effects of cooperative learning and the results of dramatic activities, teacher observation checklists were completed before and after the intervention. The checklists recorded the number of times specific reading behaviors were observed by the teacher. The results of these checklists can be viewed in Figure 7.

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on all of the targeted reading skills. The most dramatic increase in the number of incidents observed is in the area of expressive voice. The number of incidents observed by the teacher increased by approximately 65 incidents. In the areas of fluency, comprehension, summarization, and sequencing, the number of incidents doubled.
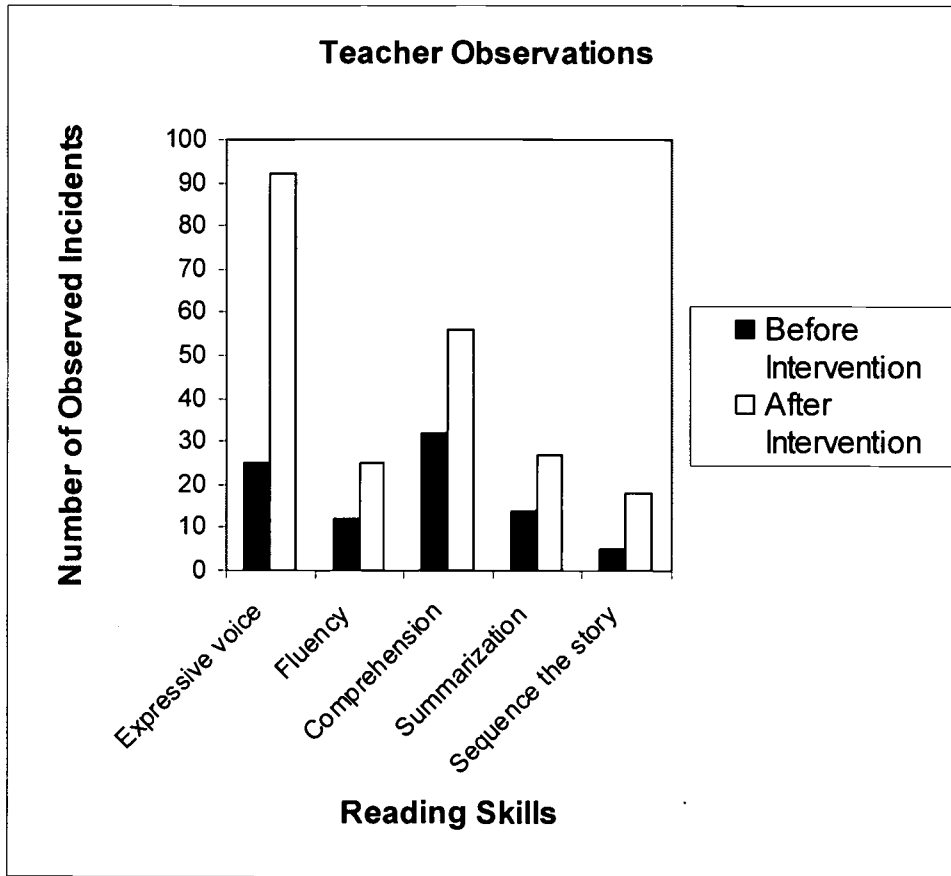
Figure 7: Bars represent the number of incidents observed by the teacher.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on reading attitudes and

behaviors, the students' reading skills improved. The social skills developed through

cooperative learning lessons appear to have benefited the students when working together

on dramatic activities. The students' enthusiasm towards acting out a story increased.

Teachers observed improvement in all of the targeted reading skills, including expressive

voice, fluency, comprehension, summarization, and sequencing.

A few recommendations may help future researchers investigate drama-related

reading activities. One recommendation for accumulating more thorough data is to extend

the intervention over a longer period of time. Noted benefits from drama may be more

extensive if students are given further experiences with drama. One consideration regarding assessing students' progress concerns the teacher observation checklist. It is a difficult task to teach a class and complete an observation checklist simultaneously. It may be more accurate to have an outside source record the number of incidents of targeted reading skills. The final recommendation for future studies involves a change in the student interview. Because of the age of the students involved in this study, the questions answered in the student interviews did not consistently reflect their understanding of the questions. Young children tend to respond with positive, instead of honest, answers believing that they will offer the answer that is right.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Teacher Survey

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to determine how you feel your students perform in regards to the various reading tasks. This survey will give me insight on the reading habits of the students in this school. This will aid me when I am looking at the reading habits data of my own classroom and then reporting on it in my thesis. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and the results will remain anonymous and will only be reported as group data. Please answer the following questions based on your classroom and to the best of your knowledge. You can put it in my mailbox when you are done. Thanks for your help.
☺ Amy Krueger

What grade do you teach?_____

Rate the following statements about your students on a scale from 1 to 5: 1=Always; 5=Never

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. My students comprehend a story.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My students decode text.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My students summarize a story.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My students read fluently.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My students read with expression.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My students link their reading to real-life situations.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My students enjoy reading for an audience.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My students create unique stories.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My students enjoy reading.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My students choose to read during free time.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I read to my students for enjoyment.	1	2	3	4	5

What problems do your students face when reading?

What reading strategies do you use that work for you?

Appendix B
Parent Survey

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to gain general knowledge of your child's reading habits at home. This survey allows me to evaluate how your child views reading outside the classroom setting and will aid me in my graduate thesis report. Your completion of the Parent Survey implies your consent to participate and have data from your survey included in the report. All information from the Parent Survey will remain confidential and will be reported as group data.

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5:   1=always; 5=never

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	My child likes to read.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My child likes to listen to a story.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	My child looks at books independently.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	My child uses pictures in books to tell a story.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	My child is able to memorize his/her favorite book.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My child uses expression when reading.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	My child likes to pretend.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	My child reads with fluency.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My child can answer questions after a story has been read to him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My child can retell a story.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C
Observation Checklist

√- skill is present

Student names	Uses expressive voice while reading.	Fluency- speaks clearly and smoothly while reading.	Answers comprehension questions relating to story.	Summarizes the story after reading or being read to.	Identify beginning/ middle/end of story.
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
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16.					
17.					
18.					
19.					
20.					
21.					
22.					
23.					
24.					
25.					

Appendix D
Student Interview

The purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of students' attitudes toward reading.

1.   Do you like to read?

2.   Are you a good reader?

3.   Do you read at home?

4.   What are your favorite stories about?

5.   Do you like to pretend to be someone else? Who do you pretend to be?

6.   Do you like to read out loud? Why or why not?

7.   Do you like to be read to? What's your favorite story?

8.   Do you like to act out a story?

Appendix E
Teacher Survey Results
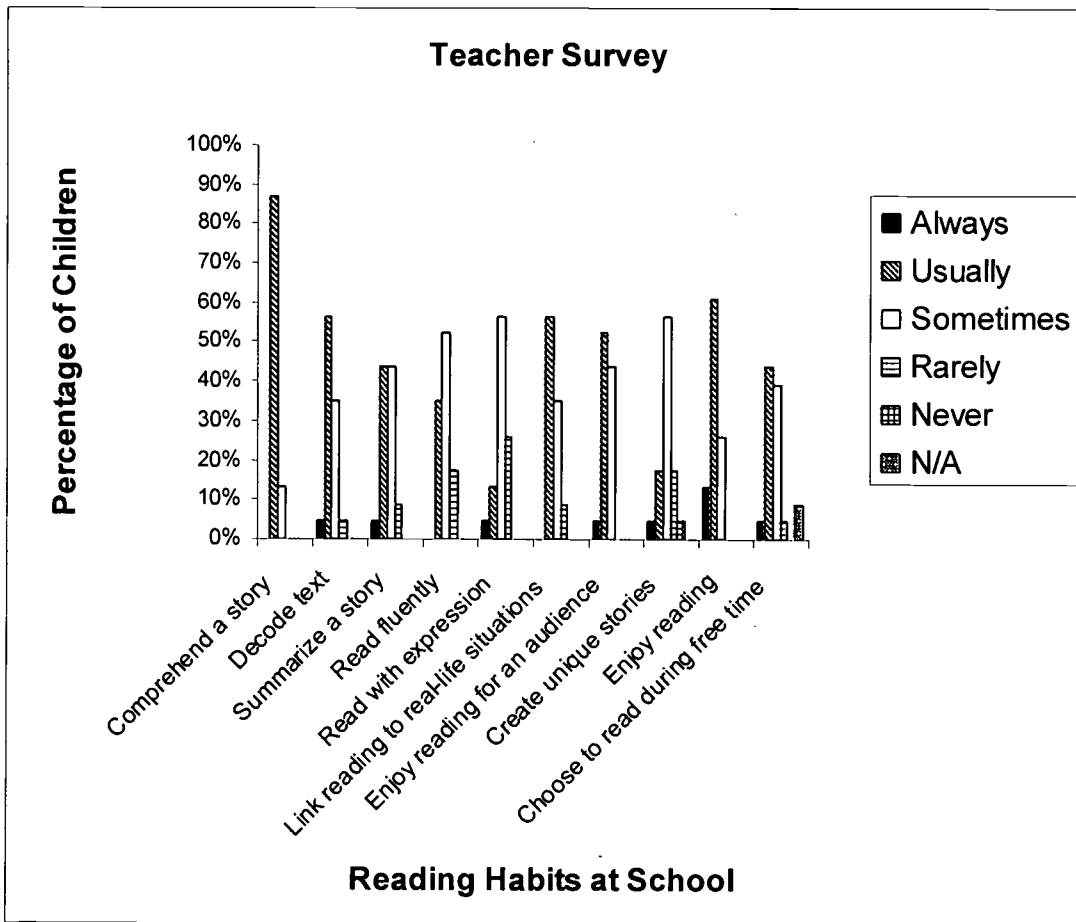
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