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Not in the Script: The Unseen Benefits of Theatre on Struggling Readers

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Abstract

Twenty-nine theatre majors were surveyed about their experiences regarding reading acquisition and affect with selected follow-up interviews. Results indicated that a high percentage of the participants had experienced early reading difficulties and that participation in theatre programs had positively impacted their reading ability. In particular, participants reported that reading scripts that lead to a performance resulted in higher level thinking as a result of necessary verbalization of text, in addition to increased engagement, inference, and the transfer of reading competence to other non-theatre texts.

Keywords: Theatre, repeated reading, prosody, struggling readers

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Not in the Script: The Unseen Benefits of Theatre on Struggling Readers

It is a Thursday afternoon in late autumn. A colleague and I are in the Performing Arts Center of a large university in the Midwest. As we make our way through the building, we find ourselves surrounded by a rich cacophony spilling out into the hallway. In some rooms musicians are working on pieces of music, in others actors are rehearsing lines, and around the corner we can hear singers preparing for choral, ensemble or solo recitals. From a bench we overhear a discussion between two poets making arrangements to read their poems for each other before a poetry slam later that evening. What do all these burgeoning artists have in common? They are engaging in an authentic form of repeated reading. They are reading musical notes, theatre scripts, and poetry over and over again so that they will sound their best in an upcoming performance.

Hollywood is filled with actors who have experienced difficulty in learning to read. Henry Winkler, Tom Cruise, Whoopi Goldberg and Jay Leno, to name a few, all admit to having been struggling readers. Similarly, dyslexia challenged the ability to learn to read of such other notable actors as Anthony Perkins, Harry Belafonte, George Burns, Tracey Gold, Edward James Olmos, Loretta Young, Fred Astaire, Harry Anderson, Danny Glover, Cher, Tom Smothers, Lindsay Wagner, Orlando Bloom, as well as world famous tenor, Enrico Caruso ("Famous People who are Dyslexic or had Dyslexia," 2008).

Is there a connection between their choice of professions and overcoming their reading problems? This is an intriguing question for which the author thinks the answer may be "yes!" And if so, a new set of instructional possibilities for helping struggling readers in our schools becomes apparent. Consciously or not, these struggling readers found themselves in a discipline

which, by its nature, employed one of the most powerful strategies for developing fluency and comprehension: repeated reading.

Struggling readers in school, unfortunately, often only get a chance to perform when they are asked to read aloud for a teacher holding a stopwatch, and usually without the benefit of rehearsal (i.e. “cold reads”). To the performing artists heard on that November afternoon, the thought of speed and accuracy being the primary measure of a good recital would seem ludicrous. Yet, this is what happens in many current reading fluency programs and assessments. Students have come to believe that their “performance” is judged on how many words they can read correctly in a minute on a grade level passage (Samuels, 2007). While speed and accuracy are important, if a musician were to hit every note at breakneck speed ignoring rests, crescendos, and, ritardandandi, or gradual decreases of tempo, we would say that they did not understand the piece they were playing. But too often this is the very thing we reward our students for when using traditional measures of reading fluency.

Once considered the neglected reading goal (Allington, 1983) fluency has come into the forefront of reading education in the last two decades. But of its three recognized components: rate, accuracy, and expressive reading or prosody, (National Reading Panel, 2000), prosody still suffers neglect. Ever since early studies of reading rate (e.g. Deno, Mirkin, & Chiang, 1982; (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001) demonstrated a significant correlation between correct words read per minute aloud and comprehension, oral reading fluency has been measured (and defined) primarily by speed and accuracy. Teachers have found the one-minute measures of oral reading fluency time efficient and informative. Students, however, have discovered something else: reading fast is what matters. Consequently, our classrooms are producing oral speed-readers often oblivious to punctuation, who skip unknown words in order to satisfy a rate criterion

(Rasinski, 2009). Going back to our musical analogy, fluency to a musician is not playing a composition quickly, but interpreting the piece in a way that an audience would find satisfying – s/he pauses at appropriate places, speeds up here, slows down there, emphasizing some notes over others. Imagine if we gave an award to the pianist who could get through the piece the fastest with the fewest number of mistakes. We could not deny that they had read the music, but one could argue whether or not they had understood it.

Beyond the ability to read quickly and accurately is the ability to read with expression, what is called prosody. Prosody refers to the interpretative part of oral reading. Fluent readers use their voices to help construct and carry meaning. Lack of prosody in reading is often indicative of poor comprehension of texts (Dowhower, 1991). Studies linking comprehension to prosody suggest that students who read aloud with good expression also better understand what they read when reading silently (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006; Rasinski, 1994), a relationship that has been shown to extend beyond elementary into middle and high school (Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009).

How Do Theatre Experiences Impact Reading?

Can one see evidence of authentic prosodic reading in the real world? What about those famous people we mentioned at the beginning of this paper? According to Alice Spivak (2008), a New York-based actor, teacher, and coach, “There's an old adage: ‘I don't know what I mean until I hear what I'm saying’ ...” Actors experiment with the words in a script. They play with the sounds and explore the full range of possible meanings during rehearsal.

Getting inside rehearsal. Rehearsal is a form of repeated readings. However, rather than practicing a text for the purpose of reading it quickly, the readers practice the text to find an appropriate meaning intended by the author. There are several approaches actors take to

interpreting a script. First, like all good readers, they utilize background knowledge. It may be as simple as having already seen or heard the part performed. When this is not the case, the actors seek to gain meaning in other ways. The general context to a play offers information about the meaning of the text. Whether or not the play is a comedy or drama, where the play is set, the time frame, and the circumstances the characters find themselves in— these are all investigations that help the actor understand the script. The actor begins reading and rehearsing the script. He consciously reads, thinking, “What is this character saying, and why?” This is part of the magic of theatre—the making of meaning. Famed writer and stage and screen director Mike Nichols, during the first cast read-through for the filming of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is said to have remarked once everyone was settled with scripts in hand, “Ok...let’s see what this play is all about.” Through successive readings, an interpretation evolved. While we are not privy to all that transpired during the rehearsal process, we understand that in order for the actors to be effective, they had to understand what the characters are saying and why.

Struggling readers often read word for word, oblivious of punctuation. However language is a thing of music. Pitch modulation and cadence, or prosody, give the spoken word its expressive nature. Without expressive implementation, speech loses the listener’s interest (think of those boring monotonic lectures we’ve all endured) and, at worst, distorts the meaning. For example, the simple sentence, *the old dog the footsteps of the young* could easily be misread even by more experienced readers who mistake *dog* for the subject rather than the verb. Who dog the footsteps of the young? The *old* dog the footsteps of the young. Without our inner voices, or audio imagery helping making sense of the words, we are likely to miss the meaning.

Readers benefit from the exercise of reading scripts and working towards performance in two ways: first, they reap the research-proven advantages of repeated reading (Dowhower,

1987; Faver, 2008; Herman, 1985; LeVasseur, Macaruso, & Shankweiler, 2008; Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley, 2009; Rasinski, 1990; Samuels, 1979) that correlate to and increase comprehension; and secondly, they employ auditory imagery through prosody to make sense of what they read. Cognitive psychologists suggest that the construction of both visual and auditory meaning-based mental imagery is critical to successful reading comprehension (Kintsch, 1998; Van den Broek, 2010).

When students develop the understanding that all expression comes from an attitude or point of view, they learn how to discern that point of view and fashion their oral speaking to reflect the author's intent. Author Eudora Welty (1983) confessed that when she wrote, she heard an inner voice. Playwrights, by necessity, hear many voices in the characters they create. Occasionally, in the theatrical rehearsal process, the playwright may be present to help interpret the script, but for the better part of the time, the actors and directors are on their own to make sense of what is written. When children are made aware of how many ways there are to say a sentence by simply changing the emphasis of a word, and how that connects with varying intent and emotion, the palette of inner voices is multiplied and meaning is more easily made.

Hearing what makes sense inside helps make sense of the greater whole outside. Actors are told once they understand the character they are to portray, the ascribed lines will make sense. But this is very much a two way street—actors come to understand their characters through the lines they speak and the situation or context in which their characters appear. For this reason, plays sometimes present themselves as more difficult texts for readers when they are read for the first time. The usual inner voice of first or third person that we find in traditional narrative is missing, sometimes replaced with scant stage directions, such as indication of an accompanying physical action (“...storming across the room...” or “pacing nervously”) and

sometimes not. Readers of all sorts gain from the advantage Spivak (2008) alluded to earlier of hearing either aloud or sub-vocally what is being said.

Non-actors do this as well. Many of us, when presented with a difficult academic text, slow down and sub-vocalize in an effort to put a voice to the words. It may take several iterations, depending on the complexity of the particular sentence. But once done, and the text is broken down into speakable parts, the meaning has a much better chance of emerging. Sub-vocalizing and creating audio imagery help us to hear a person behind everything we read, and people – real, ordinary, everyday people — tend to speak like — well — real people. Indeed, the people we hear speak every day provide us with a plethora of expressive oral clues. It is the expressive nature of language, or prosody, which serves as an intermediary between reading and knowing. Just as actors claim not to know what a line means until they read it aloud, we too are able to take advantage of understanding what we read when we employ the same audio imagery reading silently that actors use when reading aloud.

It stands to reason, then, that rehearsal in reading scripts bolsters the ability to make meaning of text. Writing instruction often speaks of “voice.” Reading instruction rarely does. Yet, it is this very “voice” that conveys much of the subtle or inferred meaning of the text. Practice in oral interpretations of a text, as done by actors during rehearsal, can lead to greater and deeper comprehension.

What does the literature say. There is a body of empirical evidence that supports arts-based education programs and suggests that arts-based education can have a significant positive effect on performance in the content areas (Conrad, 1998; Gardiner, Fox, Knowles, & Jeffrey, 1996; Kardash & Wright, 1987; Vitz, 1983; Wagner, 1998). And of the arts-based programs, theatre has been shown to directly relate to reading achievement. Specifically, Rose, Parks,

Androes & McMahon (2000) published the results of a study in which 94 fourth grade students who participated in a Reading Comprehension Through Drama program were compared to 87 students who received the school's standard reading curriculum which emphasized read-and-drill exercises from district-approved textbooks. At the end of the trial, the experimental group showed significantly greater gains in overall reading improvement on standardized measures. After controlling for any pretest differences between the groups, students who participated in the 10-week program improved their reading an average of three months more than students who did not participate.

While we have evidence of the efficacy of arts-based programs in general and theatre-based programs in particular (Walker, McFadden, Tabone, & Finkelstein, 2011), we know less about the specific activities that are beneficial in a theatre-based reading program. However, as stated earlier, we have reason to suspect that repeated reading and prosody might be involved.

As indicated above, a necessity in successful theatre production is the ability to read with expression. While it is well known that good actors deliver their lines with good expression, it is only in the last decade that much empirical research has been carried out exploring its relationship to silent reading comprehension. The value of reading with expression or prosody in theatre activities is bolstered by the recent studies that link it to improved silent reading comprehension (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Valencia et al., 2010; Wright, 2011; Rasinski, Rikli & Johnson 2009b). Recent investigations into silent reading processes have revealed the influence of an "inner voice." Assisted by sophisticated computerized eye-tracking equipment, Kentner (2012) found readers tend to separate sentences into meaningful phases and silently stress certain words even in the absence of punctuation,

which confirms Chafe (1988) and Rasinski's (1989) earlier work on sentence parsing, a central aspect of prosodic reading.

Given this body of work that supports the idea that components of theatre activities such as repeated reading and oral interpretation found in school theatre programs have a positive impact on overall reading achievement and affect, it would appear that theatre activities involving repeated reading and an emphasis on prosody work in tandem to provide critical support to reading development. What is missing in the research literature are studies that identify which specific activities have most impacted struggling readers and how this impact was perceived by the participants.

With this background in mind, we decided to find out if actors or actors-in-training were able to note the connection between their authentic form of repeated readings and the development of their own competency in reading. We were curious about the impact that often inadvertent rereading of scripts had on struggling readers who got involved in the performance situations outside of the classroom, i.e. in drama clubs or theatre groups. Specifically, we wanted to know:

1. What are the dispositions of readers who are involved in theatre?
2. How, if at all, do they believe involvement in theatre and particularly the reading of scripts has impacted their desire and ability to read?

Method

To explore responses to these questions, we administered a 23-item survey (see Appendix A) to 29 college theatre students at a medium-sized Midwestern university that asked about their current and former reading habits. Forty five percent of the participants were male and fifty five percent were female. The average age was 20 years and 7 months. The largest percentage, 59%

self-identified ethnically as Anglo-Saxon. Seven percent identified as African American, eleven percent identified as Asian-Pacific and both Hispanic and Native American ethnicities were claimed by 3 percent of the participants. Seventeen percent cited “other” as their ethnicity. Of the 29 survey respondents, 15 said they grew up in a middle class household, 7 said they grew up in a lower middle class environment, and 6 said they grew up in with privilege. One described his social economic status when growing up as poor. There were no no-native English speakers.

The last item in the survey offered a small incentive for anyone willing to participate in a follow up interview. Five participants agreed to be interviewed. Of these, three showed up at the agreed upon time and place. The other two did not respond despite multiple invitations to follow-through with their commitment.

Survey data were analyzed to discern the demographics of the sample. Short answer responses were analyzed for specific themes. For example the Survey Item 4 asked: *If you are a better reader now than you were 10 years ago, why do you think that is?* The answers were analyzed to discern emerging themes such as: “*I enjoy reading more now*” (Engagement), “*I understand more of what I read now:* (Comprehension), and “*Reading scripts helped me when I read things in other classes*” (Transfer). Themes from the short answer responses informed the questions (see Appendix B) asked during the semi-structured interviews. The interview responses were transcribed and coded for recurring themes.

Limitations

While we feel the results of this study provide new insights into the impact of theatre activities on readers, we would be remiss if we did not point out several considerations that limit the validity of our findings. First is the purposive sample of the study. Since the participants were all students in theatre programs at the university level, it may be the case that perceptions by

people who had not pursued further education in theatre would have been significantly different from the present study. Clearly, future studies should include a larger sampling of struggling readers of varying academic achievement, educational interests, and career choices. Secondly, while the number of participants in this study was sufficient for descriptive statistical analysis and selection of interview targets, it was too modest for inferential statistical analysis. It would be irresponsible to infer values for the greater population without extreme caution. Finally, asking people to remember things from their childhood can be tricky even for young adults. However, ample opportunities were provided participants to simply say, “I don’t know.” While some struggled to remember, those that did remember, provided a rich picture as told from the participant’s perspective.

We are certain there are other limitations to this study. Nevertheless, we are confident that this study can provide the impetus for additional exploration as to how using creative dramatic activities can impact struggling readers. Knowledge to this end can help us better design curricula that are more attuned to students who might otherwise disengage from reading and require later remediation.

Results and Discussion

At the time of the survey, the overwhelming majority considered themselves good readers. Still, this was not always the case. This same large majority (89%) reported that they struggled in learning to read. Fluency-related issues such as pace, expression, and word decoding accounted for nearly all their impediments to reading proficiency. Many of the students (38%) told us they neither comprehended well when they were young, nor did they read as much as their peers, nor enjoyed reading. This finding in and of itself was not surprising. It is what Keith Stanovich (1986,) at Stanford University called the “Matthew Effect,” (p. 381) after the gospel

verse that reads: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matthew 25:29, King James Version). In essence, those students who read a lot get better at reading, which makes them enjoy reading more, and, in turn, this usually leads to more reading. Those who read less, like it less, and accordingly, tend to read even less, perpetuating a dangerous downward spiral.

When we asked our respondents to compare the reading of plays to the reading of other books, 75% said they found plays easier, 15% said they were more difficult to read, and 10% said they were about the same (Figure 1).

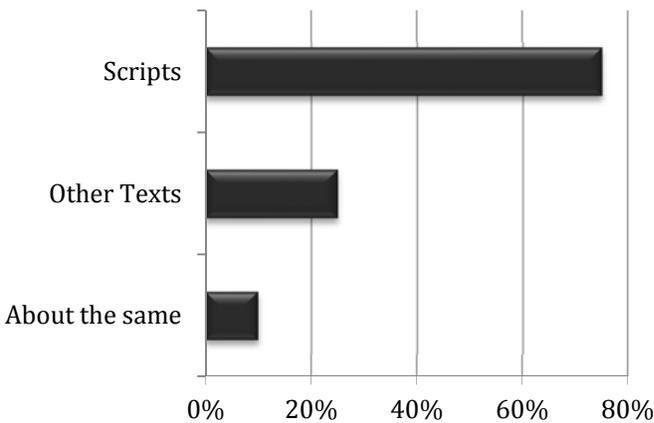


Figure 1. Comparison of perceived ease of reading of scripts relative to other texts.

Of those who found the reading of scripts easier to read than other books, the reasons by far most commonly cited were (a) the scripts were in a friendly format “put into a conversational manner” and (b) “most conversations have basic patterns, which are easy to predict or catch onto.” “Books,” one added, “are less predictable and [scripts are] more interesting than other texts.” Another student said, “They have different challenges than normal books—you have to fill in many blanks and be creative.”

Four students found reading plays more difficult than reading other texts. Three of these four listed what we categorized as greater inferential demands. One said, “Not everything about each character is written out in story form--you need to use more deductive thinking skills” and another remarked that she flat out thought “plays are boring.” It is interesting to note that no one said scripts were easier to read because the scripts used smaller words or presented less complicated ideas. The overwhelming reason these students found the reading of plays easier was because they wanted to read them.

Additionally, the concept of “theatre as a safe place” emerged. Unlike the classroom, where several of the struggling readers felt humiliated when asked to read an unrehearsed passage aloud before their peers, the theatre offered opportunities for these students—otherwise disenfranchised from the reading process—to not only practice without fear of ridicule, but to win peer approval in the process. Thus socialization seemed to have played a role in our respondents’ reading affect. Vygotsky (1978) reminds us of the importance of learning within a social context. In the theatre and drama world, we find learning in general, and reading in particular, to be an interactive process which occurs within a social construct. Play performance, by its very nature requires participation and collaboration. The necessary reading and re-reading of scripts is usually done in group settings. Meaning is derived through a collective interpretation that eventually results in performance. Not surprisingly, 96% of our respondents had been involved in a drama club of some sort in middle or high school. Of these, as shown in Figure 2, 43% cited either comprehension (24%) or vocabulary (19%) as perceived benefits in reading as a result of their drama club experiences.

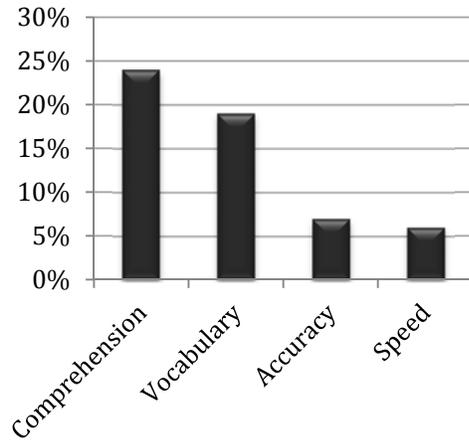


Figure 2. Percent of respondents indicating benefits to reading by category. Participants were invited to relate how, if at all, they perceived theatre activities to have benefitted their reading ability. Comprehension involved comments such as “I think it helped me understand what I was reading in other classes better.” Related, but distinguished from Comprehension, Vocabulary included typical word knowledge references such as “...learned about Latin roots from reading Shakespeare.”

Furthermore, Figure 3 reveals that 41% of the students thought that oral interpretation and character development benefited their reading. A smaller, but still important percentage of 13%, believed that repetition and eventual memorization of the script improved their reading.

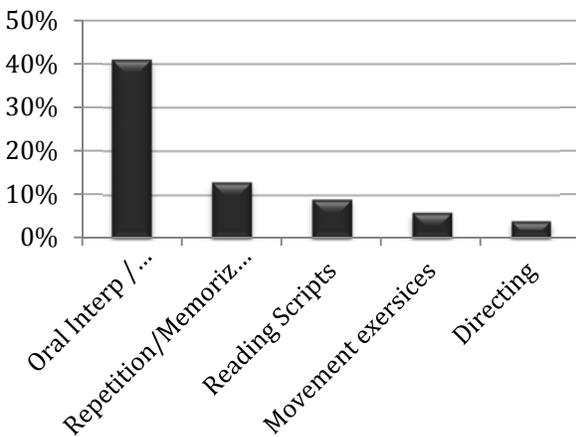


Figure 3. Aspects of theatre felt to impact reading. Vertical axis indicates the percentage of participants who identified the various aspects of theatre activities. Oral Interpretation/Characterization and Repetition/Memorization are components of the amalgam “Acting.” Reading Scripts was coded a distinct activity involving perusal as opposed to repeated reading.

Reading scripts with an eye towards performance involves multiple, deep readings. The known benefits of deep reading occur as students re-read scripts exploring nuance and entering the higher level of inference that Erikson (2010) calls “emphatic prosody.” Distinguished from syntactic prosody, which is the expression dictated by punctuation alone, emphatic prosody additionally involves exercising multiple possibilities of meaning. How it sounds is dependent on what it means. There is anecdotal evidence of this emphatic prosody at work as student actors are introduced to new texts. As one student, Juliet (all names are pseudonyms) told us, “When I started off with the script, I would only look at my character and I would just read what my character was saying. Over time, I learned to react to my characters and my dialogue—to listen to what the rest the cast was saying—letting that inform how I read out loud.” Other non-theatre texts experience a similar engagement. Sasha said when reading fiction, “I always hear voices from the characters and the narrator always has a different voice.” Daniel added, “For the most part I think I will start reading [textbooks] aloud, but, as I get more comfortable I’ll read inside my head but if I’m not taking it in the right way, then I’ll vocalize it.” And Naomi added, “When I’m reading a textbook, I try to make character voices or make a song because it’s just too much and then I get flustered.”

Oral reading and sub-vocalization of text is not a universal panacea for reading difficulty, but for many struggling readers, the opportunity to re-read text, create characters, and explore multiple meanings, benefits overall reading affect as well as creating the critical fluency/comprehension bridge. Unfortunately, for a great number of students, especially those who struggle with fluency-related issues, typical classroom environments do not provide the opportunity to re-read authentic texts and perform them with the expression that elicits higher

order thinking, a coveted skill for all readers. While the majority found reading scripts easier to read than other texts, it is interesting to note that no one said scripts were easier to read because the scripts used shorter words or presented less complicated ideas. The overwhelming stated reason for these students finding the reading of plays easier was that they enjoyed reading them.

The responses we received from our college students indicate that although they did not enter into theatre in order to improve their reading, a substantial number of the students saw that their work in theatre had a positive impact on their reading proficiency. This suggests that the dramatic arts, and in particular, reading plays, should be a more visible classroom practice for young people to improve a whole host of lifelong skills, including improving reading fluency, comprehension, and expression.

Implications for Practice

Theatre and performance reading may indeed lead to better reading. Theatre and performance reading activities involve building background knowledge, going deep into the text for meaning, and importantly, providing an authentic form of repeated reading. Students engage in repeated reading not to read fast, but to read with appropriate and meaningful expression. An unintended consequence of repeated reading, focused on prosody, appears to be improved comprehension and overall reading competency. Furthermore these “collateral advantages” include the increase of engagement among the most marginal and otherwise disenfranchised readers.

The overwhelming majority of college students we surveyed said that drama helped them become better readers. Comprehension topped the list of benefits with fluency (the recognized bridge between decoding and comprehension) close behind. Subsequent interviews with several of the students revealed that they routinely used their ability to analyze character motivation to

give a voice to text when reading silently. They utilized their expressive oral reading ability – their ability to read ‘with a voice in mind’ – to help recognize and comprehend difficult reading passages. Additionally, their practice with cold readings, in which they had to make decisions on how to portray a character on short notice, transferred, as well, to other content area material. Putting words into meaningful phrases exercises our higher level thought processes, most notably our ability to draw inferences – a critical trait for all good readers.

A limited, but growing, body of scholarly writing related to classroom reading instruction indicates that treating fluency as a performing art can indeed improve students’ fluency and overall proficiency in reading (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001/2002). Classroom-based research is demonstrating that when students engage in authentic rehearsal of texts meant to be performed, improvements in reading fluency and overall reading performance follows. Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998-1999) reported that 2nd grade students engaged in a weekly readers theatre instructional routine for 12 weeks made over a year’s growth in reading. Lorraine Griffith found that having her 4th grade students rehearse and perform poetry and scripts as readers theatre on a weekly basis resulted in her students making more than two years of growth in reading in the one year they were assigned to her classroom (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). More recently, Vasinda and McLeod (2011) used technology to enhance the rehearsal and performance experience. After having rehearsed their assigned scripts, students produced podcasts, oral recorded presentations of their assigned readings. The performance podcasts were then uploaded to the classroom website so that family members, friends, and classmates could listen to the performance at home. Since only the audio portion of the performances was recorded, students had to rehearse to ensure that their expressiveness carried the meaning of the text. In a ten-week implementation with 35 struggling 2nd and 3rd grade students, 76% showed a growth of one year or more, only

3% showed no change, and fully 30% gained over one year's growth. Students on the average made 1.3 year's growth in reading comprehension in two and a half months (Vasinda, McLeod, 2011). While Readers Theatre in the early grades has proven to be impacting, this fun and engaging oral speaking activity, unfortunately, is not widespread. Even simple oral reading in middle and high school classrooms is exceedingly rare despite research that has shown reading fluency to be a serious concern among adolescents (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012). Extending opportunities to participate in theatre and drama programs might be one way to help alleviate the problem. Helping middle and high school teachers to understand the impact theatre activities leading to performance can have—both in and outside the classroom—particularly on marginal readers, could be another way.

Implications for Further Research

Our study, as well as the limited research into classroom rehearsal and performance suggests that authentic repeated reading (rehearsal) holds great promise for improving students' reading affect and proficiency. We hope that our findings will lead to greater efforts to explore the role of prosody in reading, its links to reading comprehension, affect, and methods of instruction and intervention that foster prosodic reading. Whether working with elementary, middle or secondary students, the authentic rehearsal embedded in fluency as a performing art appears to hold great potential for improving students' reading fluency and comprehension skills. Moreover, the impact of fluency as a performing art seems particularly potent with students who struggle in reading and may lack a desire to engage with text.

The walk through the Fine Arts Center that brisk autumn afternoon set us off on a research path that had both predictable, and ultimately, unexpected endings. We had reason to believe that the repeated reading required by many theatre activities might impact fluency. The

way that we process text when reading silently is intimately linked to how we transform it into inner prosody through what we call the textual music of reason. Being able to parse sentences into meaningful phrases and employ appropriate expression aloud in a conversational tone transfers to a more worthwhile silent reading experience, expanding mere words on a page to a new world of understanding. It is not always in the script; for many it is between the lines, and the lips and tongue of the mind.

We were surprised that participants reported other benefits as well—increased engagement, and more deep reading. These collateral advantages were also, so to speak, not in the script. When we think back to the people we overheard and observed that day at the Performing Arts Center, we are struck by how similar the processes are between performance and reading acquisition. Reading musical notes, learning lines for a play, becoming fluent in a dance routine, all involve the ability to stretch beyond what is on the page, to gain the insight necessary for excellence. In understanding text, that means reading between the lines for what is not in the script—hearing the voice of your own reason when making meaning. For struggling readers in particular, theatre and drama activities can offer an unexpected way in to the realm of comprehension possibilities.

Appendix A

Theatre Major Survey

Theatre Major Survey

Some initial criteria:

1. Age: _____

2. Current major, (if decided) _____

3. Do you consider yourself a good reader now? Why or why not?

4. Are you are a better reader now than you were 10 years ago?
 - a. ___yes
 - b. ___no

5. If so, why do you think that is?

6. What would you like to be able to do better as a reader?

7. Besides text books, how many books do you read for fun each month? _____

8. Are there any particular kind of books you particularly like?
 - a. ___ no
 - b. ___ yes

9. If you have had to read plays either in the past or currently, do you find them easier or harder in general to read than other books?
 - a. ___ easier
 - b. ___ harder

c. ___ about the same

10. Why? _____

11. Do you remember having any difficulties with reading?

a. ___no

b. ___yes

12. Type of early reading difficulty (check all the apply)

a. ___Stuttering when reading out loud

b. ___Read out loud slowly word out loud

c. ___Could not figure out new words

d. ___Had difficulty understanding when reading silently

e. ___I read a lot slower than most of my friends

f. ___Other (please specify _____)

13. Type of current reading difficulty

a. ___None

b. ___Have trouble understanding what I read

c. ___Read very slowly

d. ___Cannot understand many words

14. Were you in a drama club or something similar in middle or high school?

a. ___yes

b. ___no

15. What did you like best about it?

16. What did you like least?

17. Check any of the following that you believe helped you to become a better reader.

a. ___Speech

b. ___Drama

c. ___Singing

d. ___Instrumental Music

e. ___Other (please specify _____)

18. How did any of the above help you to become a better reader?

- a. Speech _____
- b. Drama _____
- c. Singing _____
- d. Instrumental Music _____
- e. Other (please specify) _____

Part II

Amount of reading in childhood home environment

19. Check the box that most accurately states how often you saw your parents reading for enjoyment

Often

Sometimes

Never

20. Check the box that most accurately state how often your parents read to you and your siblings.

Often

Sometimes

Never

21. Add any additional information you would like to add about learning to read, reading in school, reading for fun, reading scripts, reading plays, how you felt as a struggling reader, etc...

Personal information (Optional)

22. Social economic status as child (circle appropriate choice)

Privileged

Middle class

Lower middle class

Poverty level

23. Identified Ethnicity (circle appropriate choice)

Anglo-Saxon (White)

Afro American

Hispanic

Asian Pacific

Native American

Other

I would be interested in having a follow up interview that will last approximately one hour for which I given a \$10 stipend.

No

Yes

If yes to the above, pleas provide your name and email address below.

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Would you call yourself a good reader now? Why/Why not?
2. What do you remember about learning to read?
3. Were you read to as a child? By whom? What was read to you?
4. Did you experience difficulty in learning to read?
5. When did you first know you had difficulties reading?
6. Were there critical teachers who either inspired or deterred you in reading?
7. What, if anything made a difference in your attitude about reading
8. Why did you get involved in theater/drama?
9. How did getting involved in the theater/drama affect how you felt about yourself?
10. Talk about how rehearsal affected your reading and your development as a reader?
11. How did getting involved in theater/drama affect how you felt about reading?
12. How did/do you learn your lines for a given role?
13. About how many times would you guess you read a script in the process? What do you get from reading the lines over and over?
14. Do you remember learning any new words by reading lines over and over?
15. How did rehearsal affect your ability to read a script? Did it make a difference in reading other things as well?
16. What's your trick to figuring out what the playwright is trying to say? Does it work with other things you read? Tell me more about it.
17. Talk about how you think it is important to read your lines with appropriate expression. How did you learn how to do this?
18. As you learned to read a script with expression, did you find yourself reading other things to yourself with expression, such as novels, school subjects, magazines, blogs?
19. Did anyone in theater/drama in any way address your reading difficulty? How?
20. Do you hear yourself read when you read silently?
21. Did your work in oral script reading have an impact on your silent reading?
22. Did your work in theater carry over in to other areas?
23. What would you like to tell me that I haven't asked?

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