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CURRICULUM STUDIES

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE COLLATERAL IMPACT OF SCHOOL THEATRE  
AND DRAMA ACTIVITIES ON STRUGGLING READERS (193 pp.)

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Reading experts have long known that the process of repeated reading builds reading fluency, a critical aspect of reading comprehension. Many theatre activities by default require repeated reading. While much is known about the relationship of repeated reading, fluency, and reading comprehension, little is known about what, if any impact, theatre activities that invite repeated reading have on readers who struggle.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the perceived collateral impact of school theatre programs on overall reading performance and affect. One hundred and eighty-four theatre majors from 5 universities completed a survey on experiences with reading and school theatre activities. The survey results generated a case study sample of 5 participants for in-depth interviews to explain and expand the survey findings.

Results indicated that theatre activities have a definite perceived impact on struggling readers. Repeated reading and its impact on fluency and prosody were cited. Furthermore increased engagement, the use of visualization, and the predominance of close reading—one of the anchor standards of the Common Core State Standards—also emerged as dominant themes. In addition, students reported that the social environment of theatre provided safe conditions for the creation of meaning from text. Implications

include the reassessment of curricular priorities by curriculum stakeholders and the potential for teachers K–12 to offer alternative theatre-based approaches to students who struggle with reading.

Key Words: theatre, struggling readers, fluency, prosody, close reading, repeated reading, acting, engagement, visualization, Readers Theater, social learning